



HLC Assessment Academy

Impact Report

HLC Assessment Academy Team

1. Describe your Academy project(s) as developed at the first Roundtable. Be as detailed as possible about the issues it was intended to address as well as the content and strategies of the project itself.

Projects at First Roundtable

Illinois State University attended the first HLC Assessment Academy Roundtable in spring 2011. As a result of that roundtable, the institution embarked on two projects.

1. Student learning outcome plans to improve learning in all degree programs (Program Assessment)
2. Strategic assessment of student learning in general education (General Education Assessment)

Reasons for Joining the HLC Assessment Academy

Illinois State University joined the HLC Assessment Academy for three reasons.

1. *Program Assessment.* First, it was felt that while most faculty and staff attitudes towards assessment were fairly positive, in 2011 it was realized that many academic programs do not utilize assessment plans for ongoing program improvement. While nearly all academic programs had an academic assessment plan on the University Assessment Services (UAS) website, there was wide variability in how programs used the plans. Through the annual evaluations of assessment plans by the Assessment Advisory Council, it was clear that many programs used assessment in a meaningful way, while others updated assessment plans on a more intermittent basis, usually in conjunction with the eight-year program review cycle. As a result, the goal of the program assessment project was to determine what programs and resources were needed to encourage more meaningful and sustained assessment in all degree programs.
2. *General Education Assessment.* The second reason for joining the Assessment Academy was that Illinois State University was embarking on a revision of general education, including general education assessment. The revision included the establishment of a General Education Task Force (GETF). One of the subcommittees of the GETF focused on general education assessment, with support from the Assessment Academy Team, was charged with revising or developing a new general education assessment plan.
3. *Accreditation.* The third reason for participating in the Assessment Academy was to fulfill the institutional requirement as a Pathways Pioneer institution. Specifically, participation in the HLC Assessment Academy fulfills the quality initiative component of the Open Pathway to accreditation.

Degree to Which the Reasons for Joining the Academy Have Been Dealt With

In our estimation, the reasons for joining the Academy have been addressed throughout the projects' life cycle. Illinois State University has made adjustments to processes related to program-level assessment, including a heightened focus on the professional development aspects of assessment and incorporating more systematic elements into assessment and program review, such as the annual review of assessment plans and the academic program profiles project.

The issues of general education have been addressed through the work of the GETF and continuing work of the Council on General Education (Council on General Education), and in particular the transition to a revised Institutional Artifact Portfolio (IAP) process for general education assessment.

2. Describe any changes that you made to the project(s)—or that had to be made to it—other than personnel changes. What were the reasons for these changes? Did the changes improve the project?

Program Assessment Project Changes

There were some minor changes made to the program assessment project, but they were not substantial enough to alter the general substance of the project in a significant way. A primary change was reliance on the assessment audit and survey, as opposed to conducting interviews, in order to gain feedback about program assessment at Illinois State University. There were practical considerations in regard to conducting interviews, including resources, time, and Institutional Review Board (IRB) concerns. As a result, we decided to include open-ended response options to a survey and spend extra time in terms of coding the responses and using them to develop narratives about program assessment.

General Education Project Changes

1. *Suspending the IAP process.* In spring 2011, the Council on General Education decided to suspend the IAP process. There were several reasons for this.
 1. The main reason for suspending the process had more to do with the relevancy of the results than with the process itself. UAS was responsible for collecting and analyzing data, while the Council on General Education representatives were responsible for reporting and making decisions based on the data. The problem was a lack of clarity in terms of interpreting the data and making it meaningful.
 2. Another reason for the suspension was that general education underwent substantial changes as a result of the work of the GETF in the 2011-12 academic year. It was recommended that assessment be suspended until certain structural and curricular changes were made to the general education program.
2. *New general education assessment plan.* As a result of the work of the GETF Assessment Subcommittee and the new position, Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education, a new assessment plan has been developed. The most significant change is the development of faculty panels. The panels are groups of faculty in the disciplines who will be responsible for assessing general education artifacts using LEAP or modified LEAP VALUE rubrics. The decision to create faculty panels was made for several reasons.
 1. Faculty serving on the panels bring disciplinary expertise to the assessment process and can adapt the VALUE rubrics to the specific needs of Illinois State.
 2. They teach in the general education program and know the curriculum and pedagogies of their specific category thoroughly.
 3. They can serve as “champions” within their discipline and reach out to colleagues in ways that a central administrator cannot.

4. They can help to close the assessment feedback loop with colleagues teaching courses in the specific General Education categories, a necessary step that was largely lacking in the program-level assessment conducted previously.
 5. They can assist with ongoing professional development activities and bring others “into the fold.”
3. *Attendance at Council on General Education meetings by UAS staff.* In order to enhance collaboration and communications, it we decided that UAS staff would attend all Council on General Education meetings as non-voting members, starting in the 2012-13 academic year.

3. What have you achieved as a result of your work in the Academy? Consider the range of these achievements, from the very specific (development of a rubric) to the more general (outcomes-based curriculum approval processes). To what degree have these achievements been institutionalized?

Program Assessment Project Achievements

1. *Assessment Audit.* One of the results of participation in the Assessment Academy was an assessment audit of academic programs using the Illinois State University program assessment rubric.

In 2011-12, members of the Assessment Advisory Council and Academy Team reviewed all academic program assessment plans using the program assessment rubric. Programs with assessment plans scheduled to be reviewed as part of the Process for the Review of Academic Assessment Plans (PRAAP) were reviewed by the Assessment Advisory Council, while other programs not scheduled for review were audited by the Academy Team. A total of 79 graduate and undergraduate programs were reviewed, 48 by the Assessment Advisory Council and 31 by the Academy Team. The Assessment Advisory Council annual reviews of academic assessment plans are conducted by two team members in order to ensure reliability of ratings. Academy Team members took the same approach.

In regard to the rating of all 79 academic assessment plans, the results show that the great majority of Illinois State University programs have established learning outcomes and are developing or have established systematic assessment methods (direct) and systematic feedback from stakeholders (indirect). However, it was not obvious from the assessment audit whether programs are using assessment for improvement (or “closing the loop”). These results are highlighted in Table 1.

One issue that arose during Academy Team conversations was that some programs may be using assessment results but are not making it obvious in their assessment plans. As a result, the Academy Team provided an overall evaluation of the plans based on the rubric and an evaluation of the overall level of use, with the results shown in Tables 2 and 3, respectively.

Table 1. Rating of Academic Assessment Plans Using the Illinois State University Academic Assessment Program Rubric

Plan Component	Undeveloped		Developing		Established		Exemplary	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Program goals and intended student learning outcomes	1	1.3	24	30.4	35	44.3	19	24.1
Systematic assessment of student learning	5	6.3	29	36.7	24	30.4	21	26.6
Feedback from key stakeholders	16	20.3	35	44.3	15	19.0	13	16.5
Analysis of results/feedback mechanisms and response	28	35.4	26	32.9	18	22.8	7	8.9

Note. This rating was provided by members of the Academy Team and Assessment Advisory Council (n=79).

Table 2. Overall Evaluation of Academic Assessment Plans Using the Illinois State University Academic Assessment Program Rubric

	Underdeveloped		Developed		Established	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Overall Evaluation	16	51.6	8	25.8	7	22.6

Note. This rating was provided only by the Academy Team members (n = 31).

Table 3. Evaluation of the Level of Use for Academic Assessment Plans

	Unknown		Not Used		Used	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Level of Use	13	41.9	8	25.8	10	32.3

Note. This rating was provided only by the Academy Team members (n = 31).

2. Survey of Department Chairpersons. During the summer of 2012 the Academy Team administered an online survey to all department chairpersons and the dean of the Mennonite College of Nursing to examine degree program assessment. They were asked to complete the survey and/or to solicit input from others in their unit who have responsibilities for assessment-related activities. Of the 34 individuals invited to complete the survey, 24 individuals from 19 different units responded, for a 56 percent unit response rate. The data were condensed (including the removal of all identifying information) and were coded by UAS staff individually. UAS staff then came to a consensus for each of the categories that they individually developed as well as the frequencies of those categories.

Summaries of the responses to some of the questions are included in Tables 4 through 6. Some of the common challenges or barriers to assessment included time, culture of assessment, lack of knowledge and/or experience with assessment, lack of models/standards/resources, and using valid and feasible assessments. Respondents also indicated that assessment needs to be part of the culture, that they would like more resources for assessment activities, and that the benefits of assessment need to be better recognized.

Table 4. What are some of the challenges or barriers to developing, maintaining, and implementing assessment plans in your department?

Category	Frequency
Collecting/organizing/maintaining data	4
Culture	7
Detracts from other responsibilities	3
Interest	4
Lack of knowledge/experience	7
Lack of models/standards/resources	5
Lack of student involvement	3
Meeting requirements	2
Time	9
Valid and feasible assessments	5

Note. n = 24.

Table 5. Do you see evidence of resistance to and/or disinterest in assessment within your department? If yes, what is that evidence?

Category	Frequency
No	8
Not resistance but disinterest	1
Not sure	4
Yes	11
• Lack of collaboration/consensus	2
• Lack of knowledge	7
• Not full participation/refusals	3

Note. n = 24; the additional information included under 'Yes' do not sum to 11 because some individuals provided more than one piece of evidence.

Table 6. Do you see evidence of support of and/or interest in assessment? If yes, what is that evidence?

Category	Frequency
No	2
Somewhat	4
Yes	18
• Meeting requirements	4
• Participating in assessment	8
• Understanding importance/value/need	7
• Using the results	2

Note. n = 24; the additional information included under 'Yes' do not sum to 18 because some individuals provided more than one piece of evidence.

3. Incorporation of professional development activities. As a result of the survey findings, UAS decided to implement a professional development series based on the rubric used in the Process for the Review of Academic Assessment Plans (PRAAP) process. The series format and presentations were uploaded to the UAS website: <http://assessment.illinoisstate.edu/about/workshops/>. In the next year UAS is planning a move to the Center for Teaching, Learning, and Technology (CTLT) building. It is hoped that this will spur increased professional development in the areas of assessment and evaluation.

Another professional development example is the Assessment Initiative Award (AIA) program. The program awards small grants to faculty and staff for assessment projects selected by the Assessment Advisory Council. In 2013-14 five programs or units were awarded grants totaling \$5,500. Examples included an evaluation of a counseling program, an electronic artifact archive for the English department, and a student professional preparation evaluation.

4. Incorporating more continuous feedback about assessment plans. Historically, academic programs only received feedback about their assessment plans as part of the PRAAP cycle, which was every eight years. The assessment survey and audit results, along with anecdotal information from faculty communicated to UAS staff, revealed that faculty wanted more continuous feedback on their annual updates. As a result, UAS and the Assessment Advisory Council decided to provide annual feedback to programs that were not going through the PRAAP process but had submitted an annual update.

The annual feedback for academic assessment plans will coincide with another project out of the Provost's office, the *Academic Program Profiles Project*. The Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) mandates that academic programs be reviewed every eight years. This has presented two problems.

1. First, eight years is a long time between reviews. While many academic programs approach assessment and review in a systematic manner (particularly those that are accredited), several others conduct reviews on a more sporadic basis due to the eight-year review cycle.
2. Second, the eight-year cycle means that only a sampling of programs are reviewed. It is difficult to view all programs as a whole, engage in institution-wide planning, and make decisions based on only a sample of programs.

Thus, the decision was made to continue with the eight-year review cycle but to also develop profiles of academic programs on an annual basis. Each profile includes academic program inputs (e.g., enrollment, ACT scores, and student and faculty characteristics), program productivity measures (e.g., student-faculty ratios, grade point averages, and persistence rates), and program outcomes (e.g., graduation rates and time-to-degree). The data is intended for use by program faculty in ongoing program assessment and improvement. The first edition of the profiles was disseminated to programs in March and April 2014.

5. Streamline annual update submissions for academic programs. Historically, academic programs have submitted annual assessment updates via an online .pdf form. This form can be cumbersome to work with and may discourage academic programs from providing annual updates to UAS. Thus, it was decided to implement a simple web form that can be completed in a web browser. Another advantage of this is that it makes it easier for UAS staff to analyze annual updates.

General Education Project Achievements

1. General Education Task Force Assessment Subcommittee. As part of the review of general education at Illinois State University, the Assessment Subcommittee was charged with the following questions.¹

1. Do our current assessment practices provide the information required by administrators, faculty members, and the student services staff to gauge the impact of the General Education program on students and make changes as needed?
2. If not, what additional information is needed and how might that information be collected?
3. What resources, if any, might be needed to support a revised assessment process?

In regard to question 1, the GETF Assessment Subcommittee met for approximately one hour per week throughout the 2011-2012 academic year. At these meetings, the subcommittee critically examined current General Education assessment practices at Illinois State University and alternative processes detailed as best practices in the literature. The subcommittee also consulted with key stakeholder groups on campus, including the Council on General Education, the other GETF subcommittees, the Assessment Advisory Council, the Academy Team, and attendees at the open fora and symposium presentations.

In terms of assessment methods examined, the subcommittee evaluated the relative merits various options. Based on these data sources the GETF Assessment Subcommittee concluded that the current IAP system is a good fit for Illinois State University because it provides a direct level of assessment, the campus community is familiar with the process, and it is non-intrusive and faculty-friendly.

In regard to question 2, the GETF Assessment Subcommittee recommended an assessment system that incorporates direct and indirect measures, including an IAP process, a periodic syllabus audit, and using survey data, particularly from the NSSE and Alumni Surveys. It also recommended using assessments that already exist in academic programs.

In regard to question 3, the GETF Assessment Subcommittee recommended that an administrator be tasked with responsibility for general education assessment and serve out of the Provost's office. The recommended role of this administrator is to coordinate all aspects of the program, including assessment and its interpretation, and to coordinate with other units to efficiently manage the whole system. The GETF Assessment Subcommittee also recommended that the general education goals be re-written with a focus on assessment and clarity, that increased professional development opportunities be made available, and that the general education program adopt a new name.

2. Development of faculty panels with responsibility for general education assessment.

The "Critical Inquiry" faculty advisory panel has been in place since 2006-07 and serves to coordinate the first-year curriculum in oral and written communication as well as information literacy. Communication, English, and Library faculty have successfully collaborated on curriculum, shared vocabulary, pedagogy, instructor training and development, and assessment strategies throughout this

¹ More information is included in the *GETF Final Report*: <http://gened.illinoisstate.edu/taskforce/>

time. This panel served as a model for the creation and activities of the newly-formed advisory committees organized around groups of general education categories as follows.

- Fine Arts
- Humanities (Humanities and Language in the Humanities categories)
- Mathematics (Mathematics and Quantitative Reasoning categories)
- Sciences (Natural Sciences and Science, Mathematics, and Technology categories)
- Social Science (Social Science and Individuals and Civic Life categories)
- United States Traditions

In collaboration with the Council on General Education, the Associate Provost for Undergraduate Studies sought nominations and convened panels in fall 2013 and provided the panels with an agenda and materials. In this academic year, the panels have been asked to review category learning outcomes under the Illinois State University general education structure; review LEAP VALUE rubrics mapped to their categories (with the understanding that rubrics may be added or deleted in future as we gain experience); and to “unpack” or “translate” the VALUE rubric language and adapt the rubrics as appropriate to Illinois State, its curriculum, and the general education structure. The deadline for this work is May 2014. The modified VALUE rubrics will be used to evaluate samples of student work as part of the IAP.

The panels are making good progress, and samples of adapted rubrics (reading and writing) were shared with the Council on General Education at its meeting on February 25, 2014. As of April 2014, rubrics in most disciplinary areas have been developed and are in advanced draft form.

4. What effect has your time in the Academy had on institutional commitment to the assessment of learning on campus? How broad is that commitment? How has institutional capacity for assessing student learning changed?

In terms of broad commitment, we do know that participation in the Assessment Academy has acted as an incentive to engage in activities that do lead to commitment to the assessment of student learning (like meta-assessment and increased professional development activities). We hope to periodically evaluate our assessment processes and faculty engagement with assessment by conducting another audit and survey. Hopefully, the results will show movement in a positive direction in terms of commitment to the assessment of learning on campus.

Participation in the Assessment Academy has broadened institutional capacity for assessment in three ways. First, there is more emphasis being placed on assessment as a vehicle for faculty engagement. From our participation in the academy, we learned that assessment is, by its nature, a collaborative activity that is about sharing, dialogue, and ultimately use in decision-making. This is different from “traditional” notions about assessment, which are more oriented towards compliance, research design, and methodological processes.

An example of this is an institution-wide assessment workshop conducted in March 2013. The workshop included presentations by UAS staff, a panel discussion led by faculty colleagues, and interactive table activities, including review of program assessment plans using the Illinois State University PRAAP rubric. Thirty-two faculty and staff attended the half-day workshop, 13 of whom were chairs of academic departments. Between March 2013 and February 2014, UAS staff met with 24 academic and non-

academic programs and departments for consultations, presentations, and training related to assessment and evaluation. UAS also had 18 meetings with units to consult on evaluation and assessment surveys during the same time period.

Second, we learned the importance of sharing and collaboration as a result of our participation in the academy. As mentioned previously, Illinois State University has a strong tradition and history of shared governance. Coupled with the size of the University in terms of student and faculty/staff populations, this can present challenges for collaboration and information-sharing. Thus, we learned it is best to be intentional about sharing and communications and to ensure that the various governance groups that have a stake in assessment communicate with each other and have overlap in terms of membership. Although not directly related to the academy project, there has been progress in student affairs with their adoption of Campus Labs as an assessment and planning tool for the entire division.

Third, resources have been devoted towards general education assessment. The senior position of Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education was created to coordinate the general education program and to implement the revised assessment plan. Faculty panels were created. The Office of the Provost has committed significant ongoing funds, beginning with summer 2014, to provide professional development for faculty.

5. What effect has your Academy work had on student learning?

At this point we are working on developing methods for gauging the direct impact of academy work on student learning. There are two reasons for continuing work in this area. First, we are just implementing many of the projects that were a result of participating in the academy. Measuring the direct impact will take years. A second problem is developing a methodology for gauging the direct impact of academy work on student learning. We will continue to develop methods for making those linkages more explicit.

As a result of our focus on increasing faculty engagement (through professional development and faculty panels) and more systematic assessment approaches (through the academic program profiles project), we are confident that our academy work will indirectly have a positive impact on student learning. For example, it is hoped that the creation of faculty panels will enhance advocacy for general education by creating awareness and putting more control and responsibility for assessment in the hands of faculty. Additionally, the use of LEAP rubrics will make faculty and students more aware of general education outcomes and expectations, hopefully enhancing learning for students. Another opportunity for indirect assessment could be using data from the academic program profile reports and correlating or comparing that data with engagement data from NSSE.

6. What concrete evidence do you have to demonstrate the effects you described in questions 3-5?

Participation in the HLC assessment academy has had a very positive impact in terms of our institutional commitment to the assessment of learning. This is reflected by the following.

- Increased focus on faculty engagement and professional development in the area of assessment (see question 2). UAS has worked with individuals across all four divisions of the University. Between March 1, 2013 and February 28, 2014, UAS staff provided consultations for 24 units on assessment-related matters and for the program review process.
- More focus on systematic, annual approaches to assessment, as reflected in the academic program profiles project (see question 2).

- Increased attention paid towards evaluating the assessment process itself, as reflected in the assessment audit and survey. This has led to meaningful dialog about assessment, leading us to congratulate ourselves for positive work and to identify areas that need improvement.
- Increased resources, attention, and commitment to general education assessment, as demonstrated through collaborations between UAS staff and the Council on General Education, along with the hiring of an Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education with responsibility for assessment.
- More faculty input and involvement with general education assessment, as reflected in the development of faculty panels.
- Implementation of the GETF Assessment Subcommittee recommendations, as reflected in the current version of the assessment plan for general education.
- The CTLT has developed a series of outcomes for professional development and, in collaboration with the Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education, has developed summer workshops for general education faculty, with stipends for participating faculty members provided by the Provost's Office.

7. What do you see as the next logical steps for continuing the work you have begun in the Academy? In particular, what new student learning initiatives do you see developing from your Academy work, and how will you sustain the energy and momentum of your Academy work?

Program Assessment Project Next Steps

In regard to program assessment, the next logical steps include the following.

Moving forward with increased faculty engagement activities. As a result of our participation in the academy, we have learned that faculty engagement is crucial. Moving to the same building as CTLT will provide increased opportunities for collaboration. Additionally, UAS has included this as an objective in their annual report (see: <http://assessment.illinoisstate.edu/about/>).

We intend to develop a list of faculty responsible for assessment by program. What we learned from the assessment survey is that there is variability in terms of assessment planning, coordination, and use by program. Developing a list of contacts will help UAS and CTLT with faculty engagement and professional development activities.

Continuing to provide more continuous feedback to faculty about their assessment plans. We plan on providing more continuous and systematic feedback to faculty about their assessment plans. This will be enhanced by the development of the academic program profiles project. Anecdotally, UAS staff has heard from several faculty who have expressed an interest in this. Hopefully, this will continue to change and reflect an assessment culture where faculty feel that the purpose of submitting assessment plans and updates is for development and improvement, as opposed to compliance.

General Education Project Next Steps

Faculty Panels. The panels will have completed alignment of LEAP rubrics with general education goals and outcomes. Pilot assessments will be conducted in spring 2014 in oral communication (Communication 110) and critical thinking in the sciences (Geology 102 for critical thinking in the sciences). To be established in fall 2014 is an advisory panel on the co-curriculum as it relates to general

education. Some general education goals are mapped to the co-curriculum where we will be able to build on the Campus Labs tool already implemented in Student Affairs.

Faculty panel members and other faculty in related disciplines will be involved in assessment of student work, in analysis of results of the assessment, and in providing feedback to the Council on General Education. It is expected that panel members will provide formal and informal feedback to colleagues in the disciplines.

General Education Assessment Professional Development. The Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education and the director of the CTLT have collaborated on a set of outcomes for professional development. They have also planned summer workshops for general education faculty with financial support (stipends) provided by the Provost's Office.

New Student Learning Initiatives

We see several new student learning initiatives arising from our participation in the academy.

Alumni and Senior Surveys. After our participation in the academy concludes, we would like to research the current use and applicability of our alumni survey. We have had issues with response rates and it may be time to re-examine some of the questions. We would also like to examine the possibility of an exit or senior survey.

Foundations of Excellence. Illinois State University is a participant in the Foundations of Excellence (FoE)² project through the Gardner Institute. Participation in the "refresh" concluded in spring 2013. An FoE Implementation team has been tasked with implementing many of the recommendations from the project, including developing assessment strategies for first-year and transfer students.

Sustaining Energy and Momentum

We have several ideas for sustaining the energy and momentum of our academy work.

1. Incorporating some of the academy's ideas and work into the UAS annual report and planning processes could help institutionalize some of the work of the academy.
2. Communicating ideas and results of the academy's work to the Assessment Advisory Council would help energize the primary governance entity responsible for assessment.
3. Working with CTLT in developing professional development opportunities for assessment.
4. Conducting another survey or assessment audit to evaluate the results of our efforts in making assessment more useful and focused on student learning.
5. Continuing to be more systematic with assessment, particularly in regard to annual updates and the academic program profiles project.
6. There are several important initiatives that will further focus attention on general education and its assessment.
 - The University has developed a new strategic plan for internationalization of the curriculum. Related to that will be a discussion in 2014-15 whether to retain the current non-western studies requirement for general education and graduation or whether to expand it to a more broadly-defined international requirement that could be satisfied through study

² For more information, see: <http://provost.illinoisstate.edu/faculty/foe.shtml>

- abroad, foreign language study, or other means in addition to current coursework in global studies.
- Faculty development programming beginning in summer 2014 will continue with leadership from CTLT, the Council on General Education, and faculty advisory panels.
 - The rotating assessment schedule of general education will begin in earnest in fall 2014, combining direct and indirect measures.
 - The college deans will consider implementation of an exit survey including questions on general education to be administered to seniors in their last semester. While the current alumni survey provides indirect measures, an exit survey can be expected to have a much greater response rate.