

Progressive Measures

Mission Statement

“University Assessment Services is responsible for conducting a variety of assessment activities related to student learning outcomes using qualitative and quantitative research techniques, providing support services to other units engaged in such assessment, and sharing best practices for and results of assessment activities.”

From the Director

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As we enjoy another autumn on campus, the leaves are not the only things changing around the office since our last newsletter. In July we changed our unit’s name from the University Assessment Office to University Assessment Services (UAS). This new name was intentionally selected to reflect our mission of serving the ISU campus in meeting all of its assessment needs. As the new name suggests, we are here to help with a variety of services, ranging from survey design and administration, data analysis, assistance with program review preparation, review of the General Education program, administration of student engagement and alumni surveys, and assessment consultation. However, one thing that will not change is the usefulness of our bi-annual *Progressive Measures* newsletter. It will continue to inform the campus about assessment-related activities occurring at Illinois State and beyond.

The fall semester is an exciting time of year at UAS. The General Education Institution Artifact Portfolio process is in full swing with artifact sampling underway for the Critical Inquiry and Problem Solving Shared Learning Outcome. Thank you to all of the instructors who have participated in this program! We use the anonymous sample of artifacts to gain insight into how ISU courses address the four Shared

Learning Outcomes of our General Education program. The spring semester’s artifact collection will focus on the Public Opportunity Shared Learning Outcome. We will be recruiting instructors who address this Shared Learning Outcome in their General Education courses during the first week of classes in January.

I invite you to read on to learn how one department on campus is “Transitioning” to a new assessment model. Gain “Two Perspectives on Assessment” from our interviews with two of ISU’s Assessment Advisory Council members from the College of Business and Student Affairs. Learn more about the perceptions of ISU alums in the “Highlights from the 2010 Alumni Survey” article. Finally, take a look at some of the key findings of the National Survey of Student Engagement report to learn more about the engagement levels the 2010 first-year and senior students.

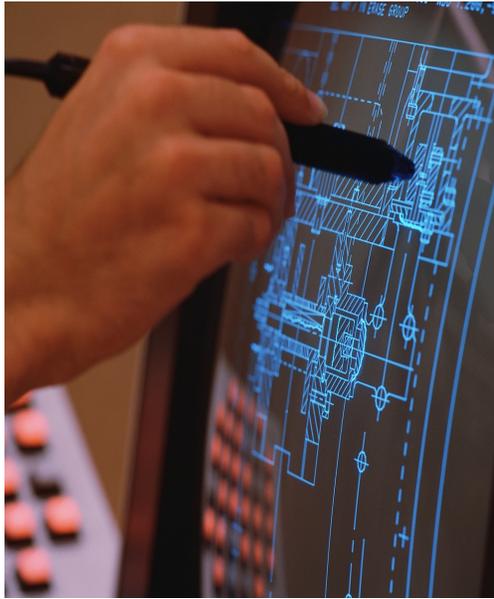
Please do not hesitate to contact us at (309) 438-2135 or at www.assessment.ilstu.edu with your questions and assessment requests. Remember that the UAS is here to serve! I look forward to working with you.




Transition to Outcomes Oriented TC2K by the Technology Accreditation Commission of ABET: An interview with Kenneth Stier

Kelly Whalen, Graduate Assistant, University Assessment Services

Assessment plays a vital role in the maintenance of any education program. As such, research into the advancement of this practice is an ongoing process, and new methods for approaching program assessment are continually reported. Despite the emphasis that assessment receives in many institutions, incorporating a new or redesigned assessment plan into an established curriculum can prove to be a challenging task.



In a presentation on June 22, 2010 (AC 2010:2068) at the conference for the American Society of Engineering Education, Ken Stier, coordinator of Engineering Technology within ISU's Department of Technology, reported on his own experiences with redesigning an assessment plan here on campus. Specifically, Dr. Stier discussed the Engineering Technology Program's current transition to outcomes-oriented TC2K criteria by the Technology Accreditation Commission of ABET (an accrediting organization for college and university programs in applied science, computing, engineering, and technology). Within this presentation, Stier identified many common difficulties that educational departments encounter during an assessment transition period, as well as how he and his colleagues are utilizing a plan which circumvents many of these obstacles. By delineating his department's experiences with the transition process, he was able to give valuable advice to others who may be contemplating a similar transition. The fol-

lowing Q and A session was designed to describe the process that the Engineering Technology Program is currently going through:

Q: Dr. Stier, what prompted your faculty to decide to change assessment models?

A: **We felt that ABET would be a better match for our program with the emphasis being on Engineering Technology. We also felt that ABET accreditation has better recognition among our constituents such as the employers who hire our graduates.**

Q: Within your presentation, you emphasized the need for sharing trust, vision, language, and guidelines among the department faculty as the basic preconditions to transformative assessment. How would skipping this step be detrimental to an organization's goal of transitioning to a different assessment model?

A: **In my opinion, it would be very difficult to transition into a different assessment model without faculty supporting this effort. Achieving faculty support is done by gaining their trust, helping them to understand the new accreditation process, as well as its benefits, and providing a vision of what the new model will look like.**

Q: How important was collaboration when developing strategies for determining student performance?

A: **Very important. We spent hours discussing what was being done in the classes where assessment of student performance would take place. It might have been one of the first times that we discussed the content and instruction taking place in each class to this extent. I think it gave us all a better perspective of what is taking place in each class and how we could improve student learning. We were then able to collectively identify assessment methods that would help measure student**

Interview with Kenneth Stier (con't)

performance.

Q: Within your article, you argue for utilizing existing university resources as a way to make the new assessment process sustainable. How did your faculty choose to do this?

A: One approach is to use computerized exam grading for multiple choice questions which is offered through CTLT. The short form item analysis will provide a computer printout that shows the frequency and percentage of students who selected each possible answer for each exam question. In addition, the validity and level of difficulty values are also provided. The percentage for each question that addresses the class objective and performance criteria can be shown in a table or rubric format, along with the average and median scores. This is one strategy that can be used to embed the assessment in the instructor's every day workload.

A second university resource that we would like to utilize for our assessment purposes is the IDEA [Individual Development and Educational Assessment] student evaluation that is already implemented in the program. This is a nationally recognized educational assessment instrument used by the department to achieve student evaluations of all the courses. Additional questions can be added to the student evaluation survey to assess how well the students are achieving

the program outcomes. This provides the possibility of getting disciplinary norms on the group summary report that is provided for each course.

The third assessment instrument under consideration for addressing the sustainability issue is a questionnaire survey given to the graduating seniors in our capstone course. Additional questions with regard to the soft skills or professional outcomes could be added to this survey without increasing the work involved in the data collection process.

Q: Have you completed this transition? What is the time-frame for this type of change?

A: We are still in the process of making the transition. ABET requires that our program is a stand-alone major and that we graduate out some students in the new program before they will accredit us. This will take a few more years. We also need to show that a well established continuous quality improvement program is in place.

Dr. Stier's article, "Transitioning a Technology Program to Outcomes-Oriented TC2K Criteria" details his presentation. Within the article, Stier discusses the steps that his department is taking to change assessment models: identifying program objectives, identifying program outcomes, identifying performance criteria, identifying assessment methods, identifying sources of assessment, and identifying strategies. The full article is available on the American Society of Engineering Education's website, www.asee.org.

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Student Engagement on Illinois State’s Campus: A Brief Overview of the 2010 National Survey of Student Engagement

University Assessment Services Staff

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) was administered during the Spring 2010 semester by the Indiana University Center for Post-secondary Research. Illinois State University was one of the 589 institutions that participated. All first-year and senior students at participating institutions were invited to respond to questions regarding their levels of student engagement both inside and outside of the classroom at their respective institutions. Of 8,520 Illinois State University students invited to participate, 1,777 (21.5%) completed the online survey. Table 1 provides relevant demographic information for Illinois State University student respondents. To examine different aspects of student engagement in more detail, NSSE provides five Benchmarks of Effective Educational Practice based on composites of several items.

2010 NSSE Benchmark Scores

The following is a summary of the Illinois State University’s areas of strength and areas for improvement for each benchmark:

1. Level of Academic Challenge – Perception of institutional emphasis on academic effort and high expectations for student performance

Areas of excellence:

- 79% of first-year and 81% of senior students reported that they spend ‘quite a bit’ or ‘very much’ of their time studying or focusing on academic work
- 78% of first-year and 85% of senior students reported that they spend ‘quite a bit’ or ‘very much’ of their time applying theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations
- 78% of first-year students reported that they spend ‘quite a bit’ or ‘very much’ of their time analyzing the basic elements of an idea, experience, or theory, such as examining a particular case or situation in depth and considering its components

Opportunities for improvement:

- 57% of first-year and 40% of senior students reported that they ‘often’ or ‘very often’ have

Table 1. General Demographic Information for the 2010 NSSE Respondents

Information	First-Year	Senior	Total
Response Rate	22.0%	21.0%	21.5%
Gender			
Female	68.5%	63.2%	65.8%
Male	31.5%	36.8%	34.2%
Enrollment Status			
Part-Time	0.3%	9.0%	4.8%
Full Time	99.7%	91.0%	95.2%
Student Age			
Less than 24 years	98.8%	78.3%	88.2%
Older than 24 years	1.1%	21.8%	11.8%
International Student	0.9%	1.9%	1.4%
Transfer Student	4.4%	44.5%	25.3%
Taking courses entirely online	0.4%	1.3%	0.9%
Extra-Curricular Activities			
Social fraternity/sorority	11.6%	9.8%	10.7%
Student Athlete	7.2%	2.8%	4.9%

worked harder than they thought they could to meet an instructor’s standards or expectations

2. Active and Collaborative Learning – Working with others to solve problems or master difficult material

Areas of Excellence:

- 53% of first-year and 69% of senior students reported that they ‘often’ or ‘very often’ have asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions
- 52% of first-year reported that they ‘often’ or ‘very often’ have discussed ideas from their readings or classes with others outside of class (e.g., students, family members, co-workers)
- 68% of senior students reported that they ‘often’ or ‘very often’ have worked with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments

Opportunities for improvement:

- 11% of first-year and 17% of senior students reported that they ‘often’ or ‘very often’ have participated

Student Engagement at ISU (con't)

in a community-based project (e.g., service learning) as part of a regular course

3. Student-Faculty Interaction – Learning how experts think and solve practical problems through direct contact

Areas of excellence:

- 48% of first-year and 60% of senior students reported that they ‘often’ or ‘very often’ have discussed grades or assignments with an instructor
- 58% of first-year and 73% of senior students reported that they ‘often’ or ‘very often’ have received prompt written or oral feedback from faculty on their academic performance

Opportunities for improvement:

- 16% of first-year and 24% of senior students reported that they ‘often’ or ‘very often’ have worked with faculty members on activities other than course-work (e.g., committees, orientation, student life activities)
- 16% of first-year students reported that they ‘often’ or ‘very often’ have discussed ideas from their readings or classes with faculty member outside of class

4. Enriching Educational Experiences – Participation in complementary learning and diverse experiences

Areas of excellence:

- 87% of first-year and 85% of senior students reported that they ‘plan to do’ or ‘have done’ a practicum, internship, field experiences, co-op experiences, or clinical assignment
- 80% of first-year and 78% of senior students reported that they ‘plan to do’ or ‘have done’ community service or volunteer work

Opportunities for improvement:

- 16% of first-year students reported that they ‘plan to do’ or ‘have done’ an independent study or self-designed major
- 18% of senior students reported that they ‘plan to do’ or ‘have done’ study abroad

5. Supportive Campus Environment – Knowing that the institution is committed to student success

Areas of excellence:

- 80% of first-year students and 77% of senior students responded, ‘quite a bit’ or ‘very much’ when asked the extent to which ISU emphasizes providing

support that they need to help them succeed academically

Opportunities for improvement:

- 39% of first-year students and 28% of senior students responded, ‘quite a bit’ or ‘very much’ when asked the extent to which ISU emphasizes helping them cope with nonacademic responsibilities (e.g., work, family)

Discussion of 2010 NSSE Results

In 2006, ISU adopted a three-year administration cycle such that members of our campus community complete only one survey of student engagement in a given year. Thus, students about to enter ISU completed the BCSSE in 2009, ISU first-years and seniors completed the NSSE this year, and faculty will complete the FSSE in 2011. Efforts are also underway to examine the responses of ISU students longitudinally by linking their data from the BCSSE as incoming students and the NSSE as first-years and seniors and mapping these data onto final GPA and alumni survey responses. Although not explicitly discussed, all of the 2010 Benchmark scores for Illinois State University students have increased relative to the 2007 administration of NSSE. In the present NSSE administration, senior students provided higher scores than first-year students did on four of the five Benchmarks. An exception to this trend was found for the Supportive Campus Environment Benchmark, for which the responses from the first-year students and senior students did not significantly differ.

On three of the five Benchmark scores, there were no differences between ISU first-years and first-year stu-

Footnote

¹ In June 2010, a NSSE comparison group was constructed that included IBHE comparison institutions used in salary studies. Of the 28 institutions included by IBHE, nine participated in the NSSE administration in 2010 and ISU’s results were compared with this group.. The nine participating peer comparator institutions were Clemson University, Florida Atlantic University, Grand Valley State University, Indiana State University, Northern Arizona University, Texas State University—San Marcos, Texas Woman’s University, University of Houston, and University of Texas at San Antonio.

Student Engagement at ISU (con't)

dents at nine participating Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) comparator institutions¹, all of which are outside of Illinois. Specific comparisons of each Benchmark by year revealed that first-year students at ISU provided responses on the Enriching Educational Experiences Benchmark that were significantly lower than the scores obtained from first-year students at the nine comparator institutions. However, the reverse pattern was shown with the Supportive Campus Environment Benchmark, with ISU first-year students scoring higher than their peers at the nine comparator institutions. Interestingly, a different pattern emerged

when comparing ISU senior students with their peers at comparator institutions. Specifically, four of the five Benchmark scores for senior students at ISU were significantly higher than their peers at the nine participating comparator institutions. (There was no evidence of a significant difference between scores from ISU senior students and their peers at comparator institutions for the Active and Collaborative Learning Benchmark.) Although it is not possible to make causal inferences from cross-sectional data, these results suggest that there are benefits to spending more time at ISU in terms of student engagement

Highlights from the 2010 Alumni Survey

Derek Herrmann, Coordinator of Academic Services, University Assessment Services

ISU uses the Alumni Survey as a way to obtain valuable feedback from graduates. This past year, all alumni who graduated in 2009 and 2005 were invited to participate in the Alumni Survey.

Below are some of the results:

- The overall response rate was 14.28% (1,139 completed out of 7,976 invited). This is a marked increase from last year's response rate of 11.7%.
- The response rates of individual departments and schools ranged from 8.5% to 23.5%
- Respondents included 559 alumni who graduated in 2005 (49.1%) and 580 alumni whom graduated in 2009 (50.9%).
- Respondents included 965 undergraduate alumni (84.7%) and 174 graduate alumni (15.3%)
- 97.1% of alumni surveyed have a positive attitude towards ISU, and 93.9% have a positive attitude towards their degree program
- 97.9% of respondents felt that the education they received from ISU was at least average, with 76.3% indicating that the education they received was at least above average.
- 88.7% of respondents are currently employed full-time or part-time
- Of the respondents who are employed, 81.4% are employed in a job related to their degree program, and 88.2% are satisfied with their current job
- Of the respondents who are employed, 92.3% felt that their degree program at least adequately pre-

pared them for their current job, and 70.6% indicated that their degree program prepared them well or very well for their current job

- 44.8% of respondents are pursuing or have received additional post-secondary degrees
- Of the respondents who are pursuing or have received additional post-secondary degrees, 97.7% felt that their degree program at least adequately prepared them for additional degree programs, with 77.3% indicating that their degree program at ISU prepared them well or very well for additional educational training

Participants of the Alumni Survey are entered to win UAS's "Homecoming V.I.P." package. In addition to ISU t-shirts and other promotional materials provided by Alumni Relations, this package includes 2 nights' accommodation at the Marriott Hotel and tickets for two to several Homecoming events, including: The Homecoming Football Game, Homecoming Gala, the Town and Gown 5K Run, and entrance into the Homecoming Parade. This year's winner was Michelle Daly (Class of 2005).



2010 winner Michelle Daly (pictured far right) with President Bowman and her sister at the Homecoming Gala

Two Perspectives on Assessment

Kelly Whalen, Graduate Assistant

University Assessment Services

The Assessment Advisory Council (AAC) is an organization on campus that convenes throughout the academic year to review processes related to the evaluation of student learning outcomes and various reports regarding the utilization of assessment results. The twelve AAC council members represent each of the colleges on campus, as well as specific campus units. Council meetings are focused on the advancement of quality student learning through recommendations for modifying the assessment processes employed on campus. In addition, the AAC strives to ensure that the appropriate resources are available for University assessment activities. The following interview of two AAC members, S.J. Chang (Professor of Finance and Associate Dean in the College of Business) and Jill Benson (Associate Dean of Students), was developed to introduce the ideas and visions of assessment from the perspective of a faculty member and staff member on the Council:

Kelly Whalen *What is the value of assessment? What is assessment to you?*

S.J. Chang Assessment is essentially a curriculum management process that involves defining learning goals, measuring and evaluating student achievement for these goals, and utilizing what is learned through evaluation to continually improve curricular programs. It is an integral part of education as it determines whether or not the goals of education are being met.

Jill Benson To me, assessment encompasses more than just collecting and analyzing data. It is a process that begins with setting outcomes that are grounded in the context of the program, unit, etc. as it relates to student learning. If work is done on the front end in setting good outcomes, the next steps (planning, implementation and assessment) all flow nicely. On a simpler scale, any feedback from a credible or vetted source can serve as assessment data. Assessment keeps us on target. Without it, we are serving ourselves instead of serving students.



S.J. Chang, PhD, Associate Dean
College of Business



Jill Benson, Associate Dean
Division of Student Affairs

K.W. *When a faculty or staff member in your unit engages in an assessment project, what do you hope they experience or come away with from the project?*

S.J.C. Going through an assessment project, the faculty will have to address all critical elements of teaching. So, I hope that through this process the faculty will realize that teaching does not end when the final grades are given but it continues with applying the assessment results for the next cycle of the course. I hope the faculty will realize that teaching is an ongoing process which can improve only when the assessment feedback from the previous experience is continuously re-applied. I also hope that through the process the faculty will be motivated to be more effective and even pioneering in terms of designing their classes and developing pedagogies in order to better achieve their teaching goals.

J.B. I am constantly trying to mitigate the overwhelmed feeling and "glazed over" look staff display when the topic of assessment is raised. Through engaging in an assessment project, I hope staff begin to change their potentially faulty perceptions of the enormity of the process. I hope they experience a kinder, gentler assessment process than the one they might have construed. I try to break the process down into understandable terms and easy-to-use process worksheets, which I sincerely hope they utilize when they work on their next assessment project. Ultimately, I work to make assessment manageable for staff so they can commit to improving experiences and learning for students.

K.W. *How have you seen the practice of assessment change over the course of your career?*

S.J.C. Initially my feeling was that people's attitude towards assessment in general was rather unclear, uncom-

Two Perspectives on Assessment (cont'd)

fortable, or at times even unfriendly. I remember the time when many faculty raised questions like, "Why do we need assessment? Haven't we been doing that all these years by giving tests, evaluating homeworks and projects, and grading them?" "Why do we need to collect more data?" "Aren't course grades enough?" "Is this another form of teaching evaluation?" Over the recent years, however, I have noticed that such doubt and misunderstanding being gradually removed from people's minds. Thankfully more faculty, staff, and other stakeholders now seem to understand correctly what assessment really is.

J.B. In Student Affairs, there has been a major shift in how assessment is approached and valued. The links between outcomes and assessment have become pronounced over the course of my career. As a result, the collective Student Affairs sense of self-efficacy has been bolstered as Student Affairs professionals are able to define and measure the effect of the co-curricular experience rather than relying solely on anecdotal evidence.

K.W. *If you could change one thing about the assessment field, what would it be?*

S.J.C. My answer to this question is related to my response to the previous question. Although now more people seem to have a better understanding of assessment, I think there are still some doubters. Some are still saying that assessment is too time-consuming, too costly, and too big of a hassle. Well, I really want to change that kind of mindset. I want to make the doubters understand that the rewards from assessment more than justify the time, cost, hassle, etc. I want to make them willing and even enthusiastic about driving their entire assessment process and continuously motivating themselves.

J.B. I find staff are challenged by assessment jargon and rusty research skills, which then become a barrier to their willingness to engage in assessment. There certainly are times when sound research methodology is

critical in assessment work; however, I would like to see approaches to assessment made more accessible to staff who have limited research knowledge.

K.W. *Five years from now, what do you hope your unit is or is not doing in terms of assessment?*

S.J.C. I hope that five years from now or hopefully sooner, we will have a faculty-owned, faculty-driven assessment system in place and in full operation. This means that we will have not only well-defined learning goals and rubrics for each of our college programs as well as a well-functioning mechanism for data collection, but also an established process for "closing the loop" - analyzing and disseminating the data and utilizing them toward curriculum planning and revisions. The College of Business has already achieved much of this, but we will put continued and concerted effort to make our assessment model an exemplary one.

J.B. Student Affairs nationally would benefit from an outcomes-based approach to assessment. I would like to see a similar approach here in the Division of Student Affairs at Illinois State. Shared outcomes between departments could assist in creating more meaningful experiences for students. Assessment data gathered in tandem with and shared with other departments can help us improve our programs and services for students.

K.W. *Are there any other comments you'd like to include about assessment in your unit, the university, or higher education?*

S.J.C. I just want to repeat what I alluded to earlier. An effective assessment program should be a mission-driven and faculty-owned process. It has to be a dynamic and evolutionary education process that creates a virtuous circle, namely, it should lead to a continuous stream of refinement and enhancement of both curricular programs and the assessment process itself.

J.B. With shifts in the college demographic and changing needs of those students who enroll at Illinois State University, assessment becomes pivotal if we hope to connect in a meaningful way with students to facilitate learning.

