

Assessment of Student Learning

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A Perspective on ABET

By Rob Ettema, Dean, the College of Engineering

The College of Engineering and Applied Science recently submitted its most recent set of self-studies for renewal of its ABET accreditation. With the final reports submitted in late June, the College is turning its attention to the upcoming site visit this November. For those not familiar with ABET, it is the voluntary accreditation process that applies to the engineering and computer science programs within the College. Unlike the regional accreditation process that UW is currently engaged in, ABET does not accredit the institution or the college, but rather individual programs; seven of those programs are due for reaccreditation. At UW, three of our engineering programs have been accredited by ABET since 1941, with the others following later. Computer Engineering, for example, received accreditation in 2004 and Petroleum Engineering is currently seeking reaccreditation after reestablishment of the program. Similarly to regional accreditation, ABET is a rather lengthy group process that involves being able to demonstrate adherence to a set of defined criteria. As with the institutional self-study currently underway, the College's preparation process has involved many participants including faculty, advisory committees, students, and alumni.

The College has been engaged in outcomes-based assessment since 1999 in order to comply with the nine outcomes-based criteria established by ABET. Our first outcomes-based assessment review was in 2003. A decade of experience in assessment has certainly allowed for this current self-study process to unfold smoothly. The College's Academic Programs Committee has been providing oversight and guidance to each



Rob Ettema

of the academic programs within the College to be sure that the continuous improvement cycle is active and preparations are on schedule. The 2008–09 academic year was “crunch time” for the College in terms of assembling the materials required for the self-studies, though the essential processes to do this successfully have been in place for some time.

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Erika, this summer, along with her daughter Semira and a friend, enjoying a canoe ride on Jackson Lake in Grand Teton National Park.

My major priority these days is to assist with the university self-study process. As you probably know, UW has been actively engaged in self-study for nearly two years now. The HLC Self-Study Steering Committee is pleased to announce that a full draft of the university report is now available online for review by the university community. Over fall semester, please pay careful attention to the various announcements you will receive via email and hard copy. These announcements will direct you to the latest information about the self-study process and instruct you on ways to get involved and give feedback.

The self-study process will culminate in early March with a three day site visit from a team of 11 evaluators. The self-study process is time consuming especially as we get closer to finalizing the report and preparing for the site visit. However, the university is poised to benefit from the process in many ways. From its inception, UW's self-study process has been intentionally linked to the university planning process. As such, the key findings of the self-study are aligned with the future direction set by UP III. The self-study has been a truly reflective process for those involved. It has given many groups of people the chance to critically analyze UW's programs and services in the context of its mission and in accordance with the five criteria and 21 core components established by the Higher Learning Commission. We are looking forward to receiving feedback from the evaluation team this spring. See page four of the newsletter for more information about the self-study process.

The College Assessment Coordinators, in conjunction with the Ellbogen Center for Teaching and Learning, will have money available this year to grant up to 20 awards of \$750 each to support various assessment projects that advance department and program assessment efforts. A full description

of the grant program can be found on page four of the newsletter. There is an October 15 deadline for fall semester and February 19, 2010 for spring semester. Also note that the grant program is now open to those in Student Affairs. Go to the Assessment of Student Learning Web site at www.uwyo.edu/assessment for more information. If you have any questions about the grant program, please contact me.

I am patiently awaiting the results from two spring assessment projects. The first is the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and the accompanying Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE). We completed the latest administration in spring 2009. We had a great response rate and the results should be very interesting. The second university-wide assessment of student learning project is the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) study. As you may know, UW is wrapping up a four-year longitudinal study using the CLA to assess the critical thinking, problems-solving, and writing skills of our students. This past spring, 92 students from the original study group in 2005 agreed to take the CLA one final time. I am eager to get these results as well. The study was lengthy and time consuming so a cost benefit analysis is in order to determine UW's direction for future studies that involve direct measures of student learning at the university level.

Thank you for giving me this opportunity talk about student learning again. If you need help on your assessment of student learning projects or have questions about any university-wide assessment efforts, feel free to contact me at ekprager@uwyo.edu or 766-2897.

Erika K. Prager
University Assessment Specialist

IN THE Spotlight: Communication Disorders

By David Jones, Interim Associate Dean and Professor, the College of Health Sciences

The Division of Communication Disorders is one of several academic units in the College of Health Sciences that focuses on the clinical training of healthcare professionals. For a graduate-level clinical training program such as ours, the charge to assess student learning has come not only from Old Main, but also from the body that accredits our clinical training program. Although answering to both specialty accreditation overseers as well as the university can put units like ours in the position of “serving two masters,” the assessment directives provided by our accrediting body have been in sync with what is required at UW. This fortunate coincidence is one factor that has allowed our unit to be successful in the area of student learning assessment.

The entry level degree for a certified speech-language pathologist is a Master’s degree. Consequently, most of our initial efforts in student learning assessment have been focused on our graduate program, although we track undergraduate learning outcomes as well. Our accrediting body provided a set of competency-based standards that graduate students in all accredited programs are required to meet. However, it has been the responsibility of the individual graduate programs to determine the learning outcomes that are deemed necessary for students to attain the standards.

Like most academic units at the UW (and around the country), our Division faculty was initially resistant to the notion of documenting student



David Jones demonstrates a videostroboscopic examination of the larynx in the Speech Physiology Laboratory.

learning outcomes. Indeed, during the first several meetings that were held to develop a learning assessment plan, our faculty spent the majority of the meeting time expressing objections to a process that was being imposed upon them and complaining about the anticipated inconvenience of student learning assessment. Recognizing the potential of a successful learning assessment program—and realizing that the process was unavoidable—the faculty began to identify student learning outcomes that would meet the standards of our accrediting body. Using the assessment format developed at the University of New Mexico as a model,

our Division was able to develop the *Wyoming Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (WAKS)*. The WAKS is comprised of 16 knowledge and skill standards that are assessed by a combined total of over 100 competency-based learning outcomes. Although this sounds like a daunting number of outcomes, it should be noted that most courses and clinical practica track only four to five learning outcomes each.

The most critical step to the success of our learning assessment has been linking student performance to the desired learning outcomes. During the early stages of the assessment process, the

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spotlight

Assessment Project Support Funding Available for 2009–2010 Academic Year

The College Assessment Coordinators Committee, in conjunction with the Ellbogen Center for Teaching and Learning, is pleased to announce that it is accepting applications from interested faculty, academic personnel, and student affairs personnel seeking funds to assist with department or program assessment of student learning projects.

For the 2009–2010 academic year, up to 10 projects will be funded for both fall and spring semesters. The deadline for the fall semester review of applicants is October 15, 2009. The deadline for the spring review of applicants is February 19, 2010.

Requests for up to \$750 may be made. Funds may be used for a variety of purposes including, but not limited to the following: hiring of graduate student(s), technology development (software, programming, etc.), bringing in outside speakers related to your project, and the purchase of standardized assessment instruments. The major restriction is that funds cannot be used for faculty summer salary or other direct compensation. Strong applications will include those projects that demonstrate the project outcome will advance their department/program's ongoing assessment efforts. It is highly recommended that applicants review section 10 (on assessment) of their department's annual report submitted to their dean this summer and examine the accompanying feedback provided to the department by the College Assessment Coordinators.

The application for the 2009–2010 funding cycle can be downloaded on the assessment of student learning Web page. If you have questions about your eligibility to apply, your project idea, or the application itself, please contact either Jane Nelson (766-4847) or Erika Prager (766-2897).

www.uwyo.edu/assessment

Draft Accreditation Self-Study Report Available

By Erika Prager, University Assessment Specialist

The University of Wyoming has been actively engaged in self-study for past two years as part of reaccreditation by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC). With assistance from the HLC Self-Study Steering Committee, nine subcommittees worked tirelessly to research their assigned topic areas and develop draft reports, which later formed the basis for the full draft report. The draft report was reorganized this past spring and further refined over the summer with input from members of the HLC Self-Study Steering Committee and selected members from the university community with specific subject matter expertise. In mid September, the draft report was distributed to the university Board of Trustees for its review. The draft report is also available to the entire university committee via a special Web page devoted to the accreditation process. In addition to information about the self-study process, interested people will be able to find the entire draft report, as well as a place to leave comments about the draft. There is an open comment period until September 30. A series of meetings with key university committees and groups including, but not limited to, faculty and staff senates and ASUW are scheduled to take place throughout September and early October.

Next steps in the self-study process include finalizing the university report and collecting and preparing additional documentation for the upcoming site visit. An 11 member review team will be on campus from March 1 through 3, 2010. Please refer to the Web site, email announcements from Media Relations, and print updates in your mailboxes for ongoing information about the accreditation process. In addition to the ability to leave comments on the self-study Web page, questions and suggestions for improvement can be directed to either Rollin Abernethy (766-4286) or Erika Prager (766-2897) in the Office of Academic Affairs.

www.uwyo.edu/accreditation

Assessing Service Learning Programs at UW

By *Brandon Kosine, Associate Director, Wyoming Union*

Service-learning is a method of teaching and learning that enhances learning by engaging students in meaningful, hands-on service to the community while gaining valuable knowledge and skills that tie directly to course learning outcomes. Service-learning focuses on critical reflective thinking and experiential learning that address local needs and foster civic responsibility (Schoenfeld, 2004). Many instructors at UW are already including community service as a component to their courses. Those who intentionally tie the service to course learning outcomes and the reflective practice of the service are providing a service-learning opportunity for their students.

Several departments and faculty across the university are starting to incorporate service-learning principles into their curriculum through participation in programs such as Connecting Campus & Community AmeriCorps. This program launched at UW in 2004 to enhance students' educational goals and also to teach our students to become more actively engaged in Wyoming communities. Academic departments are using capstone and internship courses as a means for their students to serve underrepresented populations, as well as gain practical skills in their fields before becoming certified practitioners. Example programs and departments participating in the AmeriCorps program are Nursing, undergraduate and graduate Social Work, Early Childhood Education, Family and Consumer Sciences, Secondary Education, Elementary Education, and Counselor Education (mental health track). Upon completion of service, students receive an education award that can be used for future studies or the repayment of student loans. Some members also earn a modest living stipend.

Alongside their service hours, volunteers in these programs participate in a rigorous training curriculum that addresses the following topics: effective communication, diversity appreciation, time management, financial management, public speaking, conflict resolution, team-building strategies, civic participation, political engagement, and best practices for volunteer generation. In addition to course reading and assignments, participants are given supplemental readings that address community and civic engagement. It is through the pairing of reading, discussion, and structured reflection activities that volunteers learn to connect their service to their own personal growth as well as to their community impact.

We assess volunteer learning both qualitatively and quantitatively. In the AmeriCorps program, for instance, volunteers complete written civic reflections on a monthly basis in which they describe what they have learned and how

it ties into principles of civic engagement. They also compose an essay at the end of their service term that describes a transformative moment in their service. In both programs, volunteers complete surveys that address their perception of their growth in the topic areas previously described. On average, between 75 and 85 percent of volunteers report that they have significantly improved in each of the topic areas. For the 2008–2009 academic year, volunteers were also being asked to participate in a follow-up survey six months out from their service experience to gauge whether or not they have put these skills to use in their personal and professional lives and if they have continued to stay civically involved. We are interested to see what impact the service and reflection has on the development of our students.

The staff of the Center for Volunteer Service is excited to work with faculty across campus to incorporate service-learning principles into their curriculum and develop meaningful opportunities for their students. We can assist faculty with finding service projects, developing course objectives and reflective exercises, and assessment of the learning through service. For more information about the programs described here or about other exciting service learning opportunities at UW, or for opportunities to pursue service-learning in a course, please contact Katie Kleinhesselink at kkleinhe@uwyo.edu or Brandon Kosine at bkosine@uwyo.edu.



UW student stocking shelves at local soup kitchen.

Role of Outreach School in Assessing Distance Education Courses

By Scott Seville, Associate Dean, the Outreach School, with assistance from Reed Scull, Associate Dean, and Brent Pickett, Associate Dean, the Outreach School

As noted in the University of Wyoming mission statement and the recent UP III document, as the only four-year and graduate degree granting institution in the state of Wyoming, UW takes seriously its efforts to provide quality educational opportunities to all residents of the state of Wyoming no matter where they reside. Today approximately 20 percent of all UW students are enrolled in distance programs and/or courses. Academic courses and programs are delivered outside Laramie primarily through the collaborative efforts of academic colleges and departments and the UW Outreach School (OS). In this collaboration, the academic units are responsible for the content and teaching of their courses and programs while the OS serves as the “delivery van” providing the distance technology infrastructure (online course shell, videoconference facilities, webconference software, audioteleconference equipment, etc...). The OS also provides marketing support and gives instructional design assistance to help faculty use the best technology and distance pedagogy for delivering a given course or program. In addition, the OS delivers courses and programs in a traditional, in class format in Casper through the University of Wyoming/Casper College (UW/CC) Center. Just as it is critical to conduct assessment of Laramie campus courses and programs, it is essential to extend assessment to distance programs and courses.

For assessment of distance teaching, it is important to distinguish the responsibilities of the academic departments and programs and those of the OS. As for Laramie campus



Scott Seville

courses and programs, academic units are responsible for assessing quality of instruction and student achievement of learning outcomes and educational objectives. Usually this is accomplished with the assistance of the OS Division of Outreach Credit Programs (OCP). In contrast, the OS is responsible for assessing the quality of the delivery of courses and programs. To accomplish this, the OS conducts student evaluations of distance technology and course delivery effectiveness each semester for every distance delivered course. This evaluation includes questions to assess quality of student services to off-campus students. To guide distance program and course development, the OS regularly assesses Wyoming resident needs and perceptions of statewide UW activities. Also, the OS contracts with the Wyoming Survey and Analysis Center to administer tri-annual statewide needs and resident satisfaction surveys.

To further assist development of rigorous assessment plans and

instruments for distance programs and courses, the OS funds a Distance Education Research grant program that provides support for research on best practices in distance education including studies of effective assessment. Watch for the RFP for this competitive grant program during the fall semester. OS staff is available to assist academic units with development and institution of assessment plans and processes utilizing the best technology and tools available for assessing learning in distance environments. Outreach Credit Programs (OCP) conducts experiments on integrating technologies into instruction and assessing their effectiveness and disseminates research findings at professional conferences and at appropriate UW events, such as the upcoming ‘e-Volution’ education technology forum co-sponsored with the Elbogen Center for Teaching and Learning, scheduled for September 28. The OCP Technology Instructional Enhancement (TIE) program supports and encourages faculty to use new technologies to improve their courses and assess the effectiveness of those technologies on teaching and learning from both the faculty and student perspectives. Not only does this help assess distance education efforts and new technologies, it also provides useful information to help guide faculty forward.

The University of Wyoming Outreach School is available to assist departments and faculty in all aspects of distance education from course and program implementation to assessment. If you have questions or need assistance please feel free to contact the OS at (307) 766-4300 or 1 (800) 448-7801.

A Perspective on ABET Continued from page 1

Let's face it; while we have become accustomed to assessing student performance in an outcomes-based manner in the College, this does not negate the fact that considerable time is required to conduct a thorough and thoughtful accreditation process. Faculty see the critical importance of maintaining accreditation of our programs so they invest the time necessary. One helpful aspect of the ABET approach to accreditation is that it offers detailed guidelines and procedures for establishing an assessment process, yet still allows for each academic program to design the process according to its individual mission. Each program is unique and has the freedom to express that uniqueness.

This is not to say that ABET is not without its challenges. Over time, some evaluation criteria have changed, forcing curricular changes that might not be supported by the available resources. Not unlike other departments at the university, the culture of assessment within the programs must be continually fostered. A steady drumbeat is needed to assure that everyone regards assessment as a vital part of our academic mission.

While no single revelation has emerged from the accreditation process, each program has been able to identify its own set of successes and challenges. We know we have a few issues here and there, but overall, the College's programs are healthy and sound.

The evaluation team leader will provide the College with a list of shortcomings that the team identifies from the report in advance of the visit. We are then given an opportunity to respond prior to the visit. As such, the visit itself should not yield any surprises. Instead, it is a chance for the evaluation team to meet with faculty, visit with students to learn more about our programs, and confirm the elements of the self-study. It is also an opportunity to use the evaluation team as a resource to develop strategies to address any identified weaknesses. Thanks to the hard work of the faculty and staff within the College, I expect a favorable outcome for all of our programs.

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faculty in our Division reviewed each of our learning outcomes to identify courses and/or clinical practica that address each one. In nearly every instance, the individual learning outcomes could not be linked to final course grades. Rather, most of our learning outcomes are linked to material covered in specific courses. For instance, the material for a learning outcome such as, "*The student will be able to describe the anatomy and physiology of the normal swallow,*" is covered in our graduate course in Dysphagia. This course covers a wide range of material, so the student's final grade does not reveal whether the student has achieved this learning outcome. Instead, the learning outcome may be linked to an exam, a series of questions from one or more exams, and/or a student project. Each faculty member is responsible for a series of learning outcomes for each course and must determine whether each student has achieved these outcomes.

Given that we are training future speech-language pathologists, it is important that we complement knowledge outcomes with clinical skill outcomes. Most of our clinical courses have developed tasks that assess clinical skills such as rating the severity of various speech and voice disorders. Once students

demonstrate these skills in the academic setting, it is expected that the skills will carry over to their clinical practica.

Our graduate students must attain 80 percent success or better for each learning outcome, and our undergraduates must attain at least 70 percent success. In most instances, an instructor can track the learning outcomes for a course throughout the semester. If a student does not attain the threshold for a learning outcome, the student is given the opportunity to remediate in that area. Typically, this involves the student meeting with the instructor to review the material in question, followed by reassessment that can be either oral or written in nature.

The key to our Division's success with student learning assessment has been that once we identified the knowledge and skill outcomes that were deemed critical, we dissected our entire curriculum to identify the course and practicum material that could be linked to each outcome. Although this process was tedious at the outset, it resulted in a user friendly system that has allowed us to assess student learning and teaching effectiveness. Our faculty has acknowledged the benefits of learning assessment, and the process has become routine.

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We are on the Web!
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