

## **Highlights & Pitfalls of Student Assessment**

AICUP Regional Assessment Workshop

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Purpose: To share issues we face at Duquesne University in implementing systematic and meaningful assessment of student learning outcomes across campus. To learn from one another.

Possible discussion questions:

1. How do you make assessment meaningful and useful to all involved? (people in various roles and disciplines, a primary source of assessment principles is management literature such as Deming's continuous quality improvement, faculty choice & responsibility)
2. What role do accountability and administrative mandate play in higher education, especially on a complex and decentralized campus? (participation or compliance?)
3. Should we be focusing on assessment plans or practices? (see recent Middle States emphasis on practices through Linda Suskie's leadership)
4. What kinds of evidence count (e.g., measure, observe; direct, indirect; qualitative, quantitative; course-embedded)? What about terminology (assessment, evaluation; goals, objectives, outcomes...)?
5. To what extent should assessment practices and reporting processes be standardized?
6. What are some practical and meaningful ways to align assessment of learning across course, program and institutional levels (e.g., "Dimensions of Duquesne Education")
7. In what ways can we support faculty and administrators in conducting sound assessment? (handbooks, workshops, book studies, web pages, consultations, departmental/school meetings)
8. What are the best channels of communication? (use multiple ways to announce events, communicate survey results, interact among programs and committees, person-to-person enthusiasm, avoid hidden agendas)
9. How do we foster spirit and joy in the process? In what ways can we reward effective leadership? (committee morale & hospitality, annual luncheons, specific expression of gratitude)

## Helpful Resources

- Assessment Update: Progress, Trends, and Practices in Higher Education* edited by Trudy W. Banta. Bimonthly periodical published by Wiley.
- Bresciani, M. J. (2006). *Outcomes-based academic and co-curricular program review: A compilation of institutional good practices*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing.
- Diamond, R. M. (1998). *Designing and assessing courses and curricula: A practical guide*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Dwyer, P. M. (2006). The learning organization: Assessment as an agent of change. In P. Herson (Ed.), *Revisiting outcomes assessment in higher education*. Portsmouth, NH: Greenwood.
- \*Fink, L. D. (2003). *Creating significant learning experiences: An integrated approach to designing college courses*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- \*Huba, M. E., & Freed, J. E. (2000). *Learner-centered assessment on college campuses: Shifting the focus from teaching to learning*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Maki, P.L. (2004). *Assessing for learning: Building a sustainable commitment across the institution*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.
- Suskie, L. (2004). *Assessing student learning: A common sense guide*. Bolton, MA: Anker.
- Walvoord, B. E. (2004). *Assessment clear and simple*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- \*Walvoord, B.E., & Anderson, V. J (1998). *Effective grading: A tool for learning and assessment*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- \*Weimer, M. (2002). *Learner-centered teaching: Five key changes to practice*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Weissman, J., & Boning K. (2005). Building a bridge from mission to student outcomes. Sample papers from the 2005 Collection of Papers on Self-Study and Institutional Improvement. The Higher Learning Commission.  
<http://www.ncahigherlearningcommission.org/download/annualmeeting/06SamplePapers.pdf>
- Zubizarreta, J. (2004). *The learning portfolio: Reflective practice for improving student learning*. Bolton, MA: Anker.

\*available in Duquesne University Bookstore, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, Union

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## Duquesne Learning Outcomes Assessment Timeline

Before 2002, program assessment tied directly with accreditation visits.

### 2002-2005

- Founding of Academic Learning Outcomes Assessment Committee by Provost, August 2002
- Implementation of university-wide assessment plan, January 2003
- Workshops and book studies each semester – see list
- Ongoing consultations through Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE)
- Web and print resources through CTE
- Free-form reporting integrated into each program's report to the Provost; focus on program-level *planning*; wide variety in quality of assessment practices and reporting
- Consultation by committee with outside facilitator, October 2005
- Participated 2 years in National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)

### Spring 2006

- Revised assessment plan
- Drafting of "Dimensions of Duquesne Education" for alignment
- Implementation of mini grants (4 totaling \$10,000)
- Creation of assessment web site [www.aloa.duq.edu](http://www.aloa.duq.edu)
- Implemented annual reporting forms as appendix to annual report to Provost due September 1

### 2006-2007 Top Priorities

- Conduct Middle States accreditation self study preparation (Standard 14, student learning assessment)
- Participate in developing assessment plan for new core curriculum
- Support programs in implementing the new reporting processes; revising it as needed
- Focus on *practices and use* of assessment results for program improvement

### Other Initiatives

- Improve online resources
- Create database from annual reports
- Consider institutional level assessment (repeat NSSE?)
- Implement program assessment awards?

## Student-Learning Outcomes Assessment Events Duquesne University 2003 – 2006

### BOOK STUDIES

- *Assessing Online Learning*  
Patricia Comeaux, Editor (Anker, 2005)
- *Learner-Centered Assessment on College Campuses:  
Shifting the Focus From Teaching to Learning*  
By Mary E. Huba & Jann E. Freed (Allyn and Bacon, 2000)
- *The Learning Portfolio: Reflective Practice for Improving Student Learning*  
By John Zubizarreta (Anker, 2004)
- *Student Learning Assessment: Options and Resources*  
(Middle States Commission on Higher Education, 2003)

### WORKSHOPS

- Developing Grading Rubrics to Guide and Assess Student Learning
- Constructing Objective Test Items and Using Item Analysis to Improve Testing  
(Guest Presenter: Carol Baker, University of Pittsburgh)
- Developing & Implementing Survey Questionnaires: A Primer for Educators
- Collecting and Presenting Evidence of Student Learning
- Multicultural Considerations in the Assessment of Student Learning (chapter study from *Multicultural Course Transformation in Higher Education*)
- The Role of Student Reflection in Learning and Assessment
- Conducting Program-Level Assessment of Student Learning (Guest Presenter: Patricia Dwyer, College of Notre Dame of Maryland)
- Developing an Assessment Plan: Duquesne Models of Good Practices
- Looking at Course-Level Learning in Program Assessment
- Personal Response Systems or Clickers in the Classroom
- Using Assessment Tools in Blackboard

### CELEBRATION OF TEACHING EXCELLENCE

- Presentation of annual faculty teaching awards based on innovations in teaching and evidence of student learning, generally at course level

### DEPARTMENTAL/SCHOOL FACULTY MEETINGS

- Presentations by committee members of findings from 2003 and 2004 National Survey of Student Engagement
- Presentation, when invited, to present assessment plan and reporting processes

*Generally co-sponsored by Center for Teaching Excellence  
and Academic Learning Outcomes Assessment Committee  
Also sometimes Learning Technology Center, Gumberg Library, and Office of Provost*

## **2006-2007 (Inaugural) Assessment Mini-Grant Recipients**

Funded through the Office of the Provost

### **School of Nursing**

Outcomes Assessment through the Use of Portfolios

Maureen Leonardo

### **School of Education**

Improvement of Assessment Processes during the Student Teaching Experience

Karen Levitt

### **Mylan School of Pharmacy**

Evaluation of a Pilot Advanced Mentorship Program for Undergraduate Pharmacy Students

Peter Wildfong

### **School of Business**

The Core Competency Proficiency Exam (CCPE) – A Post-Sophomore Exam in the School of Business Administration at Duquesne University

Amy Luginbuhl Phelps

### **Evaluation Committee**

Tammy Hughes, School of Education

Joan Kiel, Rangos School of Health Sciences

Leslie Lewis, Gumberg Library

David Seybert, Dean, Bayer School

Laurel Willingham-McLain, Nonvoting Chair

## **Academic Learning Outcomes Assessment Plan**

*Adopted March 2006*

Duquesne University's Mission states that "Duquesne serves God by serving students -- through commitment to excellence in liberal and professional education." The Strategic Plan for 2003-2008 articulates this vision: "Duquesne University will enter the first ranks of American Catholic higher education by emphasizing our Spiritan identity and mission, enhancing the quality of our students' experience, and developing our national reputation for academic excellence." The university Academic Learning Outcomes Assessment Plan follows from the mission and vision, and it provides a process by which each program can evaluate and demonstrate the degree to which its educational goals have been realized.

### **Purpose and Principles of Assessment**

Assessment can serve many purposes. These include examining Duquesne's academic programs and the role curriculum, pedagogy, and program structure play in student learning. Assessment findings are useful to maintaining high quality programs that are consistent with the University's mission, to highlighting program and University strengths, and to identifying areas for strategic change or improvement. What we learn through assessment helps the institution determine how best to support needed changes. Assessment enables us to evaluate the competence of graduates in terms of both the program's goals and those of the core curriculum and University mission. Ultimately, the purpose of assessment is to promote student learning and development.

The process of outcomes assessment is guided by the following principles:

1. Responsibility and expertise for assessment reside with the faculty in each department or program. Faculty together determine the appropriate assessment plan, and several are involved in implementing the plan.
2. Assessment of student learning flows from the learning goals faculty establish for each program of study. These goals are written in terms of what students are expected to know, be able to do, and value.
3. These learning goals and assessment pertain to all learning environments, including classroom, distance learning, clinical, laboratory, practicum, and service-learning experiences.
4. Assessment methods (i.e., ways of gathering information about student learning) are realistic, manageable, and meaningful within the culture of the particular academic program, department or school. They are informed by the standards relevant to the discipline such as those established by national associations.
5. The usual learning activities in which students engage often provide an appropriate and feasible source of assessment information.
6. The results of assessment are interpreted, communicated, and used constructively to promote future program evaluation and continuous improvement.
7. Faculty regularly reflect upon and improve the assessment process itself.
8. Assessment at the course and program levels is aligned with institutional goals for student learning.

### **Dimensions of a Duquesne Education**

The alignment of assessment across the course, program, and institutional levels is facilitated by the articulation of Dimensions of a Duquesne Education. The Academic Learning Outcomes Assessment Committee proposes five dimensions which reflect the five pillars of Duquesne's mission as well as the comprehensive and diverse nature of educational experiences available to students:

- Understanding and Knowledge
- Intellectual Inquiry and Communication
- Ethical, Moral, and Spiritual Development
- Diversity and Global Mindedness
- Leadership and Service

These dimensions are written to serve as a bridge between the Mission and the academic program; they are intended to complement the existing efforts of Duquesne's academic programs, not to impose constraints or new mandates.

### **Assessment Processes and Reporting**

Whereas assessment activities are conducted primarily by faculty at the program level, Academic Affairs oversees the institutional implementation of an assessment plan, supports program assessment, and synthesizes the various components (e.g., core, major, certificate programs) into a comprehensive understanding of the Duquesne educational experience.

Beginning in 2006, each academic program will be asked to submit an annual report of student-learning assessment they have conducted using the [Annual Report forms available online](#). This new reporting process includes program-level learning goals, direct evidence of learning pertinent to the goals, optional indirect evidence, analysis of the findings, and ways in which the results are being used for program improvement. It is being phased in:

1. Within annual reports submitted on September 1, 2006 (AY 2005-2006), each program will report on two to three goals.
2. In subsequent years, each academic program will report on three to five goals.

Many programs have more than five overarching learning goals, but at any given time, it is appropriate to focus attention on a subset of these in order for assessment to remain manageable and meaningful.

### **Support for Assessment Initiatives**

The Academic Learning Outcomes Assessment Committee and the Center for Teaching Excellence are available to assist and support faculty, programs, and schools throughout the process of assessment. The Center for Teaching Excellence can provide resources and consultation regarding all stages of the assessment process. The Provost will accept proposals for funding specific tests, tools, or activities that will facilitate assessment initiatives. Schools and programs are also encouraged to develop support structures (e.g., designated assessment consultants, release time, awards) for assessment activities.

Several new university-wide initiatives are being implemented to support and guide programs in developing their assessment plans: reporting templates with [sample assessment plans](#); [assessment mini grants](#); and enhanced online resources including [frequently asked questions \(FAQs\)](#); and faculty development opportunities.

This is a revision of the previous Duquesne University assessment plan implemented in January 2003, and many of the changes made here are a response to the requests of deans and chairs.

*Revised March 7, 2006  
(Originally implemented January 2003)*

## Dimensions of a Duquesne Education

*Adopted March 2006*

<b>Dimensions of a Duquesne Education</b>	<b>Components</b>
Understanding and Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Understand the nature of the human experience through the lens of liberal arts, creative arts, and sciences</li><li>• Know essential ideas, skills, and methodologies required by specific disciplines</li></ul>
Intellectual Inquiry and Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Demonstrate effective research and communication skills</li><li>• Apply critical thinking and problem-solving skills</li><li>• Demonstrate intellectual curiosity</li><li>• Exhibit dedication to continuous growth and to excellence</li></ul>
Ethical, Moral, and Spiritual Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Recognize the importance of faith and spiritual values</li><li>• Apply ethical, moral and spiritual principles in making decisions and interacting with others</li><li>• Practice honesty and integrity in personal, academic, and professional domains</li><li>• Respect the dignity of all persons</li></ul>
Diversity and Global Mindedness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Demonstrate appreciation of diverse cultures, religions, and persons</li><li>• Learn from diverse schools of thought and be open to new ideas and perspectives</li><li>• Appreciate the importance of community in local and global contexts</li><li>• Recognize the individual's potential to effect change in organizations, environments, and society at large</li></ul>
Leadership and Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Demonstrate the academic and professional expertise needed to be leaders</li><li>• Understand the moral and ethical framework necessary to be a just leader</li><li>• Exhibit leadership and teamwork skills</li><li>• Promote social justice</li><li>• Demonstrate a spirit of service, social responsibility, and personal sense of stewardship for the community</li></ul>

### **Rationale for the Dimensions**

Beginning in Fall 2002, the Academic Learning Outcomes Assessment Committee, under the direction of Provost Ralph Pearson, introduced an outcomes assessment plan to provide a process by which each program could evaluate and demonstrate the extent to which its educational goals have been achieved. The Assessment Committee is now proposing "Dimensions of a Duquesne Education" to serve as a bridge between Duquesne's Mission and student-learning outcomes assessment efforts. The dimensions provide a framework to guide programs and schools in

developing and assessing their own educational goals within the context of the Mission. This same framework will also serve in reporting on institution-wide assessment of learning.

### **Planning Process**

The dimensions directly reflect Duquesne's mission and identity, as articulated in the Mission and Goals Statement and the 2003-2008 Strategic Plan. But, in order to operate from the broadest and most informed perspective, the Assessment Committee reviewed assessment programs and institutional learning goals in other universities, with attention focused on selected benchmarking institutions. Committee members consulted experts in the field of academic outcomes assessment, engaged in dialogue with other institutions, and reviewed scholarly literature. The Dimensions were then reviewed by the Academic Council and President's Cabinet (March, 2006). The dimensions do not add anything new to our understanding of a Duquesne education, but rather serve to articulate this understanding in a succinct way.

### **Using the Dimensions and Components**

The Assessment Committee proposes five dimensions which reflect the five pillars of Duquesne's mission as well as the comprehensive and diverse nature of educational experiences available to students:

- Understanding and Knowledge
- Intellectual Inquiry and Communication
- Ethical, Moral, and Spiritual Development
- Diversity and Global Mindedness
- Leadership and Service.

The dimensions are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, the first dimension, Understanding and Knowledge, provides a foundation for the subsequent dimensions. And Ethical, Moral and Spiritual Development guides students' Leadership and Service as well as their Diversity and Global Mindedness. The dimensions are thus five integrated facets of a Duquesne Education.

The components, in the second column, are derived from the overall dimensions, and are written to provide flexibility to individual schools, departments, and programs in the processes of curricular design, assessment planning, program review, and accreditation. Beginning in 2006, the student-learning assessment reporting process will incorporate these dimensions into the annual report to be submitted by each academic program. Schools and departments are invited to use them to the extent that they are helpful in accreditation and curriculum planning processes. The dimensions and components are written to reflect and complement the existing efforts of Duquesne's academic programs, not to impose constraints or new mandates.

The dimensions serve primarily as a guide to the assessment of undergraduate education. However, they can also apply to graduate education. The Assessment Committee encourages graduate programs to begin to use the dimensions and provide feedback on their fit to graduate education. As the committee reviews the dimensions over the next three years, it will incorporate this feedback to consider how the dimensions could be applied to graduate education.

Programs outside Academic Affairs are welcome to use the Dimensions in any way they find helpful.

### **Review Process**

The "Dimensions of a Duquesne Education" framework will be reviewed formally by the Assessment Committee three years after their adoption. We welcome your input. If you have questions about this process, please contact your representative on the Assessment Committee.