

# **University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Assessment Council**

Minutes

Wednesday, November 15, 2006

Members present:

Marija Gajdardziska-Josifovska, Barb Hiles, Kim Litwack, Robin Mello, Janice Miller, Amy Otis-Wilborn, Ron Perez, Charles Schuster, Susan Stalewski, Rodney Swain, Thomas Walker, Linda Anderson-Courtney, Anthony Ciccone, Gesele Durham, Dev Venugopalan

Guest: Kim Pietsch

Materials distributed:

- Charge of the UWM Assessment Council
- Brief Overview of Academic Assessment
- Challenges Identified by Members of UWM Assessment Council
- Executive Summary: Report on North Central Accreditation and Institutional Review of General Education: UWM
- Higher Learning Commission March 2007 Workshop Agenda

Provost Rita Cheng outlined the charge of the UWM Assessment Council. She urged the Council to read the September 2006 Spellings Commission Report: "A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of Higher Education". She also briefly discussed the role of the Council in facilitating continuous quality improvement in curricula and instruction throughout the university. Solid evidence of continuous quality improvement, using student learning outcomes as one major component, will be valuable to UWM in providing internal and external authorities (perhaps even government authorities) with a transparent outcomes-focused accountability system. How Wisconsin fits into the national agenda is an important perception to keep in mind as this process goes forward.

The role of faculty as the major players in defining, measuring, and analyzing educational objectives for students was emphasized. Challenges specific to UWM include the decentralized nature of our many assessment activities and the need to efficiently and effectively collect school/college data that can be reported externally.

It was noted that the GCC and the APCC have already incorporated assessment into the program review process. It is important that these activities be sustained over time and that future reviews and revisions and even new recommendations regarding the process are forthcoming.

A progress report to NCA, to be prepared by the staff of the Provost's Office, is due spring 2008.

Associate Vice Chancellor Dev Venugopalan and Council members then discussed a variety of issues that relate to assessment, the role of the Council, a timetable for activities, etc.

It was noted that all of the schools and colleges represented were at different stages with regard to assessment but no school or college was ideally where it should be or where it wanted to be. Many schools are driven by accrediting bodies which have differing standards. There is no requirement that all schools and colleges use the same format for assessing learning outcomes – just a requirement that all schools and colleges participate in learning outcome assessment.

The goal of the UWM Assessment Council is to make assessment as easy as possible for faculty recognizing that the ultimate goal is to improve student learning. There is a need to marry the expectations of external bodies regarding learning processes with needs of faculty in various schools and colleges.

It is also hoped that council members familiar with assessment processes will serve as mentors to members new to the assessment process. The council will also be relied upon to take relevant information back to constituent faculty, remembering that oftentimes information does not filter down quickly enough to those persons who are key to making the process work. It was suggested that a web site be developed with live blogs to make discussions easier and to serve as a repository for resource articles/documents. Later in the meeting it was suggested that a D2L site be developed to serve much the same purpose.

Challenges discussed by council members include:

How to answer the question “Do we really need to do it?”

- Faculty must know what outputs are in order to evaluate and improve.
- Some faculty think that assessment is not important, other things (like research, etc.) are more important. And there is a concern that the campus will forget about assessment once the NCA report is complete.
- Important to re-emphasize that the goal is student learning, something all faculty members want.
- Faculty are the drivers – they are the only ones who make assessment work.
- It is also important not to confuse assessment with evaluations. They are not one and the same.

What about academic freedom?

- Assessment does not tell a faculty member what to teach.

- Academic freedom is about teaching – learning is another separate issue.
- Need to measure what students can do at the end of the course and how this knowledge is given. How a course is taught is up to the faculty.
- Query: Don't corrective measures often change content of course or method of teaching? What gets taught may change but how it is taught does not have to change. It may but that is not the purpose of assessment.
- It is important to use this planning process as an opportunity to show what great things are currently being done in an individual classroom instead of viewing it as a requirement for change.
- Assessment is not learned in PhD programs. Faculty training is necessary. Think of assessment as professional development.

What should be evaluated?

- Assessment does not have to occur in every course, every week. Identify key learning outcomes at certain points within the curriculum and measure them.
- Learning outcomes must be specific to discipline. Ownership of learning goals belongs to individual faculty and programs. This ownership of learning goals is something they would not want and should not give up.
- The GER, however, are campus-wide learning outcomes. This Council must take on this issue. Overall, the GER process has a good start because of activities which took place previously. Query: where is evaluation data tabulated?
- Query: Do we have a sense of how the “urban” mission concept is being evaluated at UWM? Currently the urban mission is addressed as part of the campus’ enrollment management strategies. There are specific initiatives on the academic level (e.g., the cultural diversity requirement within GER, in the School of Education, and in the Cultures & Communities curriculum).
- Academic programs may eventually be required to address the content of GER courses. UWM has not looked at content of GER courses for several years; perhaps review is needed. But this is an activity for a future committee.

What should Council be doing?

- Develop web site with resources – find good models across campus/country to share.
- Develop a D2L site with copyrighted resources for Council member use and to create a venue for discussions re chat rooms, etc.
- Create a traveling road show consisting of a small group of “experts” to help others (major fields/departments) put together and then assess assessment plans.

- Learn from other group members who are further along in the process – share best practices. Be prepared to answer questions such as: Is GPA alone okay? Is tracking career success via survey data alone okay?
- Discover how to present to faculty the fact that assessment is an add-on to what is already being done. The goal of the Council is to formalize the process.
- Revisit previously published NCA plans – many may already be outdated, e.g., capstone is gone from L&S.

#### Develop a “traveling road show”

- An expert panel will be put together and sessions with small groups of faculty will be scheduled to talk about these and other issues. Several schools/colleges are already assessing from admission to graduation. These groups can be a key resource to the committee.
- Purpose of road show would be to discuss assessment philosophy, where UWM is going with assessment, what needs to be done at the school/college level, and provide examples on how to assess, and most importantly how to integrate change into the process.
- An advantage to a UWM road show is that other schools and colleges can hook into it. It will show that the university is the driver and leader of process. The need for direction, a mechanism to collect data, and a promise of continuity was mentioned. This initiative will be highlighted at the highest level – in Chancellor’s plenary, etc.
- It is “humane” to do road shows annually to ensure that this process does not take place only when it is perceived that the “we” are in trouble and are only reacting when external agencies are around.

#### Other miscellaneous topics:

- It should be remembered that finishing the circle is often difficult and that assessment is a continuing process not just a deadline.
- Standardized testing alone doesn’t answer what issues are and were in the curriculum issues develop.
- As part of process, it is necessary to define what is to be measured and what evidence of performance is being used to measure? Direct measures include assessments embedded in curriculum; identify 2-3 places where done and measure. Indirect measures include surveys, etc.

#### Next steps:

- The Council will meet once a month for the rest of the academic year. Informal meetings and communication via the web, D2L, etc. are encouraged. Dev will send a note requesting best days/times.
- Develop general template model for all faculty and staff to use if they want. In it identify three places in curriculum where direct measures are taken. Template will be provided in early December 2006.

- Schedule individual workshops (the traveling road show) with expert panel as soon as possible. Schools and colleges were asked to email re desire to schedule workshop. Create D2L web site on assessment – materials available for dissemination to group only.
- Develop more focused agenda for next meeting

School/college timetable:

- Learning outcomes for each major/department should be developed and refined before the end of fall 2006 semester to order to appear on spring 2006 course syllabi. Reminder to use proactive (output rather than input terms) terminology – “student will be able to use [statistical methods] to ...” rather than “we will teach students to use statistical methods”. Faculty must identify what to measure and when.
- Data collection to begin in March 2007 and continue through fall 2008 semester. Some schools and colleges will be ready then; others will come on board shortly thereafter. Query: How to collect data?
- Closing loop will be a longer term goal except for those schools/colleges that are there already.

March 21-23: Higher Learning Commission workshop on “Making a Difference in Student Learning: Assessment as a Core Strategy”. A team, consisting of up to 8 persons, will be sent. This team will in turn share information with the Council. Interested persons were asked to contact Dev.