Graduate Outcomes Assessment
Status Report
April 2006

Charge:

What are the components of an effective outcomes assessment/program review plan that support both the regular review of academic programs by the University and Board of Regents as well as external audiences such as the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Accreditation Association and the National Research Council?

The Committee focused on outcomes assessment since the University will be undertaking a comprehensive review of the program review process.

Committee:

Barbara Romzek (cochair), Interim Dean, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences
Susan Twombly (cochair), Professor of Teaching and Leadership
Marianna Berry, Professor of Social Welfare
Helen Connors, Associate Dean and Professor of Nursing
Charly Edmonds, Associate Director of Business Administration, School of
        Business
Steve Hedden, Dean of School of Fine Arts
Caroline Jewers, Associate Professor of French and Italian
Paul Johnson, Professor of Political Science
Jim Mielke, Chairperson and Professor of Anthropology
Tom Mulinazzi, Chairperson and Professor of Civil/Environ/Arch Engineering
John Rury, Professor of Teaching and Leadership
Greg Simpson, Associate Dean of CLAS and Professor of Psychology
Lee Skinner, Associate Professor of Spanish and Portuguese
Deb Teeter, University Director of Institutional Research and Planning
Rudolfo Torres, Professor of Mathematics

Proposed Plan/Template:

See Appendix A for narrative and template (attachment 1) for Graduate Outcomes Assessment Plans.

See Appendix B for websites of plans from other research universities.

Next Steps:

- Pilot the proposed template with several departments during Spring and Summer 2006

- Modify template in Fall 2006, if needed

- Invite Barbara Walvoord to present workshop on developing outcomes assessment plans during Fall 2006. Her book, *Assessment Clear and Simple: A Practical Guide for Institutions, Departments, and General Education* was key to the development of the proposed template. She is a Notre Dame University Professor of English; Fellow, Institute for Educational Initiatives; and Coordinator, Notre Dame Self-Study for North Central Accreditation

- Finalize committee recommendations in Spring 2007

APPENDIX A

Graduate Outcomes Assessment Plans

Outcomes Assessment: Defined

"…The systematic collection of information about student learning, using the time, knowledge, expertise, and resources available, in order to inform decisions about how to improve learning" (Walvoord, 2004, p.2)

"Assessment is the systematic collection, review, and use of information about educational programs undertaken for the purpose of improving student learning and development" (Palomba and Banta, 199, p. 4).

Assessment should be linked to institution's mission and learning goals (Palomba and Banta, 1996).

The primary purpose of graduate outcomes assessment at KU is for program improvement. Results of graduate outcomes assessment should support Academic Program Review and other assessment efforts, such as accreditation. Assessment plans will be collected and approved by the Graduate School and periodic reports of outcomes will be made to the academic deans and the Graduate School.

Why Outcomes Assessment

The Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Schools and Colleges, the body that accredits KU, requires that accredited institutions of higher education engage in outcomes assessment at the program level. Done right, outcomes assessment can provide valuable feedback for program improvement.

Outcomes Assessment Plans

Each graduate program is expected to develop a plan for assessing learning outcomes at both the master's and doctoral levels. Plans will contain the following components. (See attachment 1 on page 7 for displaying the plan.)

Walvoord, B. E. *Assessment Clear and Simple: A Practical Guide for Institutions, Departments, and General Education.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2004.

Palomba, C.A. and Banta, T.W. *Assessment Essentials: Planning, Implementing, and Improving Assessment in Higher Education.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1999.

I. **Mission of the Program: a general description of the goals or mission of the program.** Example:

- *To prepare students for entry-level positions in the student affairs profession.*

II. **Context Variables: Identify relevant demographic characteristics of students or other program characteristics for a specific assessment period that may have an impact on program outcomes. Examples:**

- *Undergraduate GPA*
- *Sex, race, ethnicity*
- *Undergraduate experiences*

III. **Student Learning Goals:** What should students know and be able to do upon completion of the program? What experience would demonstrate mastery of the goal? Goals should be stated as expected outcomes using active verbs that focus on student behavior or knowledge and not on faculty behavior or subject matter coverage. Outcomes assessment focuses on what programs do to prepare students to get a job or pursue further graduate education, etc

Examples of student learning goals:
(select 3 goals as the basis for outcomes assessment; bolded for illustrative purposes)

- *Graduates should be able to:*
  - ***Place current issues and problems (e.g., student drinking, emphasis on athletics) facing higher education in historical context.***
  - ***Apply knowledge of student development theory to contemporary problems.***
  - *Demonstrate an ability to apply research on college students to contemporary problems.*
  - ***Understand the differences among institutional types and develop solutions to problems appropriate for different institutional types.***
  - *Demonstrate effective written and oral presentation skills.*
  - *Demonstrate an ability to design and implement an evaluation of a program.*
  - *Apply ethical principles to contemporary professional practice.*

IV. **Evidence: Identify means of gathering evidence from students about how well they are meeting the goals and determine cycle for data collection.**

- Direct measures use student work. Examples "include exams, papers, projects, computer programs, interaction with a client, or musical performances" (Walvoord, p. 3). These methods are sometimes called embedded assessment or authentic assessment.

a. *The common masters' comprehensive exam will be used to assess attainment of the learning outcomes listed above.*

- Indirect measures ask about perceptions of learning. They include surveys of students and alumni perceptions of learning and satisfaction, tracking placement rates, surveys of employers, etc.

  b. *Placement rates will be tracked.*
  c. *An exit satisfaction survey will be administered annually.*

V. **Assessment: The assessment piece has two components: (1) evaluation of the evidence and (2) changes based on results.** *Evaluate achievement* of student learning goals by evaluating the evidence collected and reported in section IV. Additionally, provide *feedback* on how the information collected was used to improve programs to enhance achievement of the student learning goals. Who used the information and what changes resulted from the assessment?

- *Program faculty will collect data on an annual basis:*
  o *A rubric will be developed and used to assess performance of each masters' exam on each learning outcome.* **See example 1 on page 6 for possible scoring methodology.**
  o *The exit survey will be administered annually and data recorded*
  o *Placement rates will be recorded annually.*

- *Every two years, data will be summarized and analyzed. Program changes will be made accordingly. Additional studies will be done as necessary to explore specific problems identified.*

VI. **Contact Person: Identify the person responsible for assessment.**
- *The program coordinator is responsible for assessment.*

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Example 1
Potential Rubric for Assessing Comprehensive Exam

This rubric need not be used to determine if an individual student passes or fails the exam. Could be applied to some or all of the identified goals to be assessed.

Place current issues and problems (e.g., student drinking, emphasis on athletics) facing higher education in historical context.

Student is able to

Identify appropriate historical context for a given contemporary issue or problem

1 (low)	2	3	4	5
Identifies no/inappropriate historical context			Identifies appropriate context	

Demonstrates an understanding of how that historical context affects current problems.

1	2	3	4	5
No understanding			Sophisticated understanding.	

Apply knowledge of student development theory to contemporary problems.

Student correctly identifies and describes content of major developmental theorists.

1	2	3	4	5
No knowledge of theorists or theory			Correctly identifies theorists Sophisticated understanding of theory	

Student selects appropriate theories and applies them correctly to a contemporary situation.

1	2	3	4	5
Inappropriate theory Applied incorrectly or not applied			Appropriate theory Used effectively to illuminate situation	

Demonstrate an ability to apply research on college students to contemporary problems.
Understand the differences among institutional types and develop solutions to problems appropriate for different institutional types.
Demonstrate effective written and oral presentation skills.
Demonstrate an ability to design and implement an evaluation of a program.
Apply ethical principles to contemporary professional practice.

Attachment 1
Outcomes Assessment Plan Template

I. Mission of Program: VI. Contact Person:_____

II. Context Variables:

Student Learning Goals	Relevant Experiences/ Strategies/ Curriculum	Direct	Frequency of collection	Review Cycle	Indirect	Frequency of collection	Review Cycle	Evaluation of the Evidence	Changes Based on Results
III. Goals		**IV. Evidence**						**V. Assessment**	

Goals or Outcome Statements

Writing learning goals or outcome statements: a rationale. Writing program learning goals or outcomes is one of the most difficult aspects of outcomes assessment. In addition, college and university faculty tend to resent having to do this. They perceive it to be similar to the reductive behavioral objectives-oriented approach that is characteristic of K-12 schools. However, defining learning goals or expected outcomes need not be reductionistic and can be very helpful. This aspect of outcomes assessment is similar to the "backward design" teaching model that Dan Bernstein frequently discusses in CTE workshops. Backward design suggests that the professor first identify what he or she expects students to achieve as a result of taking the course and then design assignments that allow students to demonstrate those skills or knowledge. In this model, a term paper is not assigned just because it has always been done. Defining program learning goals operates on the same principle.

Characteristics of Good Goals or Outcomes Statements

Walvoord (2004) suggests that goals should be stated in the following format: "When students complete our program (e.g., major, doctorate…), they should be able to…" (p. 53).

Learning goals or outcomes are frequently divided into categories such as cognitive, affective, and skills.

- **Cognitive goals** include knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Bloom identified application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation as higher order cognitive goals.

- **Affective goals** include attitudes and values. Examples of affective goals include "being sensitive to the values of others," "practicing ethical behavior" (Palomba and Banta, 1999, p. 29).

- **Skill goals** include psychomotor or performance skills. We expect that many of the skill outcomes at the graduate level, such as leadership or communication skills, involve a cognitive dimension as well, i.e., thinking, writing, communication.

Learning Goals vs. Program Goals

As Walvoord explains, "Statements such as 'The Department will do XYZ' or 'The student will be exposed to XYZ' are fine goals in their place, but they are not learning goals. They are goals for action the department hopes will lead to learning" (p. 53).

Programs should have both program goals and learning goals that are presumably consistent. For example, the goal "To prepare students for entry-level careers in various student affairs areas" is a program goal. This goal defines the mission of the master's program in higher education administration, but it says nothing about what we expect successful students to learn or be able to do. An appropriate learning goal might be "Students are able to effectively synthesize and evaluate research from core courses to formulate a response to a complex problem." A more specific learning goal might be that "Students are able to set current higher education problems in historical context." A skill-oriented objective might be that "Students are able to make professional presentations effectively." An affective goal is "Students are able to describe and use ethical principles in their practice."

Good learning outcome statements use active verbs such as identify, solve, construct as opposed to vague verbs like understand (Palomba and Banta, 1999). Good outcome statements should be assessable in same way.

What Outcomes Statements are Not

Outcomes statements are not statements about faculty behavior nor are they about subject matter coverage.

Gathering Evidence

After identifying learning outcomes, the next task is to identify means for learning whether and to what extent students are meeting learning goals. One of the strengths of Walvoord's definition of outcomes assessment is her acknowledgement that academic departments have limited time, technical assessment expertise, and resources to do outcomes assessment. Even within these constraints, data can inform decisions about how to improve learning. She notes that:

- Assessment does not mean using only standardized tests;
- Quantitative and qualitative information is useful;
- Assessment means using the best possible information to inform program decisions;
- Assessment can build on assessment that is already occurring.

Outcomes Measures

Direct measures use student work. The comprehensive exam is an obvious existing requirement of all doctoral programs. To use this as a direct measure of learning outcomes, a department might devise a short evaluation tool based on stated learning outcomes to be completed by the chair at the end of the exam. The tool would identify the criteria on which the student is being judged and also the degrees of accomplishment. This evaluation would be turned into the assessment coordinator who is responsible for tracking results. Periodically, the assessment coordinator would report aggregated results of student performance to program faculty. The same can be done for master's theses or projects. The individual student's name is irrelevant—although some student characteristics, such as subfield, might be important. Portfolios of student work are another form of direct assessment being used with varying degrees of success.

Indirect measures provide additional insight. Indirect measures ask students for their perceptions of learning. Surveys of employers are also considered indirect methods. Whereas direct measures use student work as the basis of assessment, indirect measures employ surveys and/or focus groups as methods of data collection. Indirect measures can also include retention and graduation statistics, placement rates, alumni career progress, student evaluations of teaching, alumni surveys, and participation in major-related student activities.

Methods for data collection must match the learning goal or outcome and should use existing assessment processes to the extent possible.

Steps for Developing A Program Assessment Plan

Task: Develop an assessment plan that will:

- Provide information for program decisions in as efficient a manner as possible
- Generate evidence about program effectiveness that will support periodic program review
- Meet Higher Learning Commission mandate that graduate programs engage in outcomes assessment

Step 1: Articulate the program's learning goals. Begin with existing goal statements that have been established for accreditation, program review, or other purposes, recruiting documents, course goals, etc. Set student learning or outcomes goals using these existing program goal statements.

Step 2: Identify measures to assess the learning goals. Determine from whom will data be collected, how, how often? Walvoord suggests conducting an audit

of existing assessment in a program and thinking about how existing assessment can additionally inform outcomes assessment.

Step 3: Identify other student and program data for a specific assessment cycle that is necessary to help interpret or understand student learning data.

Step 4: Identify how data will be used, by whom, and how frequently. It is reasonable to think that initial assessment results will prompt some programs to do more in-depth studies based on these results.

Responsibility for coordinating assessment must be determined.

APPENDIX B

Websites of Assessment Plans from Research Universities

University of Illinois

        Home page: www.oir.uiuc.edu/assessment/

        Index of example plans: www.oir.uiuc.edu/assessment/plans.html

Iowa State University

        Home page: www.academicprograms.iastate.edu/assessment/guidelines.html

        Example: http://www.ge-at.iastate.edu/academics/outcomes