

**NORTH CAROLINA STATE UNIVERSITY**

**REPORT OF THE ACADEMIC AFFAIRS ASSESSMENT  
PLANNING TEAM**

**May 2005**

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The Academic Affairs Assessment Planning Team is grateful to Amy Caison, Margaret King, Clarence Smith and Joni Spurlin for their many contributions.

## **Executive Summary**

In Fall 2004, the Academic Affairs Assessment Planning Team (AAAPT) was charged by former Provost James Oblinger to review the three main assessment processes (undergraduate program review, graduate program review, and general education program review) and to make recommendations to increase the efficiency and value of these processes.

In order to gain information from the campus, the committee held a series of eight focus group sessions, which included the directors of undergraduate programs, the directors of graduate programs, the department heads, the associate deans, the Council on Undergraduate Education and the Committee on Undergraduate Program Review. Through these interviews, the AAAPT learned that there were valid concerns with the current processes. These included deficiencies in the following areas: coordination and integration of processes, support and resources for faculty and administrators, reporting requirements, feedback and usefulness of processes.

On the basis of this input across campus, the committee recommends modifications of all the existing processes. For undergraduate program review, the AAAPT suggests replacing the current model with one managed by the associate deans, in partnership with the Division of Undergraduate Affairs and University Planning and Analysis. For general education program review, the AAAPT has asked the GER Task Force to create a model that replaces course-based assessment with a “mixed model” that would assess different requirements in a variety of ways. The committee made the fewest recommendations with respect to the graduate program, where it recommends an extension of the pilot phase of its assessment procedures.

Though the committee found itself considering each of these processes separately because of their complexity, the group agreed unanimously that it would add value if the processes were better integrated. Each college will need to develop its own best practices; however, the committee highly recommends a model in which undergraduate and graduate review are combined, in conjunction with external review. All agreed that the assessment of programs by external reviewers has the potential to provide the colleges with invaluable information and impetus for improvement.

To achieve the proposed modifications of the current assessment models, the AAAPT requests some additional resources, though the committee tried to be circumspect in its requests, given the current budget situation. Because the group so strongly believes in external review, we ask that resources be given to support external review of both undergraduate and graduate programs. We have also asked for a fund so that programs might have the chance to enact improvements that cannot be incorporated in compact plan requests. Finally, the Graduate School needs one additional position to support its proposed plan of reviewing each graduate program every eight years.

In addition, the committee recognizes the time and effort required by the faculty and associate deans to engage in meaningful and productive assessment activities.

Accordingly, we encourage department heads and deans to recognize and reward individuals for their contributions to program improvement through assessment.

In conclusion, the AAAPT hopes that the university community will find its recommendations useful and that assessment will become a more manageable and valuable part of our work at NC State.

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**Report of the  
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## I. Overview

In October 2003, the associate deans for academic affairs sent a memorandum to the Provost and others expressing their concerns about the impact on academic programs of the expanded business practices dealing with assessment and other external and internal requirements, particularly in light of budgetary constraints. They asked that the University evaluate the best strategy to pursue. (See Appendix A.) At approximately the same time, the Institutional Effectiveness subcommittee of the university's SACS compliance team recognized the benefits of sharing ideas across units and wanted a forum in order to continue those discussions. In response to both requests, in Spring 2004 the Chancellor established the University-wide Assessment Task Force (ATF) whose main charge was to make recommendations for improving the efficiencies and coordination among the various assessment activities across the University. (See <http://www2.acs.ncsu.edu/UPA/assmt/atf/> for the charge and full committee report of the University-wide Assessment Task Force.) The ATF made numerous recommendations and the Provost decided to initially apply those recommendations to the evaluation of academic programs.

In September 2004, former Provost James Oblinger established the Academic Affairs Assessment Planning Team (AAAPT) and charged the AAAPT to undertake a review of the three main academic assessment processes: undergraduate program review, graduate program review, and general education program review. The committee was asked to ensure that assessment at NC State is efficient and adds value. Specifically, recommendations were to focus on: 1) coordinating, streamlining, and integrating assessment processes, 2) making efficient use of available staff and resources, 3) fostering meaningful and manageable faculty involvement, and 4) encouraging results that could be used internally to improve programs and enhance planning processes. (See Appendix B for the committee's charge.)

Our committee met from October to May, for a total of thirteen meetings and eight additional focus group sessions with various groups on campus. We began by establishing a set of guiding questions that focused on the value of the processes, the efficiency of the processes, support for faculty, resources for departments, and peer comparisons. (See Appendix C for guiding questions.) We then proceeded by dividing our work into three phases: a review phase, an information-gathering phase, and a recommendation phase.

In our review phase, we listened to reports from the Division of Undergraduate Affairs (soon to be renamed the Division of Undergraduate Academic Programs) and the Graduate School that summarized current assessment processes and those that have been planned for future implementation. (See [http://www.ncsu.edu/provost/academic\\_programs/uapr](http://www.ncsu.edu/provost/academic_programs/uapr) [http://www.fis.ncsu.edu/grad\\_publicns/program\\_review/](http://www.fis.ncsu.edu/grad_publicns/program_review/)

and Appendix D for a description of the current review processes for undergraduate and graduate programs.) University Planning and Analysis also provided us with a report on SACS accreditation so that we were aware of required external standards (Appendix E). This phase took more time than we had anticipated, given that these processes have been changing and it was necessary to have a sense of historical perspective.

In our information-gathering phase, we developed a list of groups who could provide us with useful feedback on current assessment practices. These included the associate deans, the department heads, the directors of undergraduate programs, the directors of graduate programs, and representatives from the Council on Undergraduate Education and the Committee on Undergraduate Program Review. We met with each of these groups separately, and each group had its own understanding of the processes. From these meetings we developed an understanding that many administrators and faculty do not find current processes manageable, though few question the value of assessment in general. Some do, however, question whether the current internal assessment procedures add value. In addition, the following concerns were expressed:

- Internal and external processes have not always been coordinated, which creates unnecessary burdens for faculty and administrators.
- Current reporting and documentation requirements are difficult for faculty and administrators to manage, given their other many responsibilities.
- Data are not centralized nor easily tailored to individual program needs.
- Feedback on recently submitted program review reports has been insufficient.
- Resources for addressing problems identified in the review processes have not been available.
- Informal and formal reward structures for faculty who are engaged in assessment activities are not in place.
- More support is needed for training and study design.
- Results have not been shared within and between academic units or used at the university or college level.

Based on these concerns, the committee then set about recommending changes in our current or planned processes. We started by developing a list of Guiding Principles that we used throughout our discussions. All members of the committee agreed that the most important purpose of assessment is to improve programs systematically by monitoring student learning, that assessment must be meaningful to the faculty and must be as efficient as possible. (See Section II for Guiding Principles.)

To expedite our deliberations, we discussed each of the three review processes separately, but we also took into account how these processes might function better together, through the streamlining of individual processes, through the coordination of timelines, and through the integration of processes as appropriate. While we do not want to recommend any particular assessment model out of respect for the very real differences between colleges, many of us were impressed by the CALS model, which combines undergraduate and graduate program review and also ensures external review of all programs.

Our recommendations for undergraduate program review involve a fairly extensive change in current practices, since faculty and administrators did not find the current system to be very workable. Our model replaces a process centralized in Undergraduate Affairs with one that is more decentralized, and managed by the associate deans, though not without communication with and oversight by Undergraduate Affairs and University Planning and Analysis. In our model, each college will be assigned a university consultant whose role will be to aid faculty in the development of their assessment plans and in the collection of some university data. The consultants will also serve as a resource for the associate deans. Our rationale is that such a process better suits the traditions of NC State, gives the faculty more ownership of these processes and will make the processes more manageable and meaningful. Furthermore, by placing the management of assessment in the hands of the associate deans, the committee hopes that there will be more feedback and action taken on assessment results at the program, college and university levels. Our model also recognizes that some colleges have successful outcomes-based assessment processes in place that are regularly evaluated by outside accrediting agencies. (See Appendix G for a list of programs and external accrediting bodies.) It gives these colleges the option of using existing assessment reports with little or no revision to satisfy the university's internal assessment requirements.

With respect to general education program assessment, the committee did not recommend a new model, given that the AAAPT believes that such a decision is the domain of the GER Task Force. However, the AAAPT did strongly recommend that the GER Task Force review current plans for GER assessment, since the committee does not believe that a course-based assessment model is feasible or particularly valuable. The AAAPT would like to see the development of a model that measures the accumulation of student knowledge and experience and integrates general education program review and undergraduate program review where possible.

Our recommendations for graduate program review involve the fewest changes, given that the Graduate School benefited from developing its processes after those of undergraduate and general education program review. We have recommended that the Graduate School pilot its new assessment plans over the next year or two, develop databases for programs where possible, and streamline reporting where feasible.

We also encourage departments and colleges to consider, where appropriate, integrating undergraduate, general education, and graduate program reviews as a strategy to strengthen the department as a whole. Undergraduate Affairs and the Graduate School have expressed their willingness to work with the associate deans and deans to develop a unified review schedule and process. An integrated process might also have the advantage of making the most efficient use of faculty time and of the support staff.

The AAAPT also spent several meetings considering the resources needed for an efficient and valuable assessment process. Regarding undergraduate program review and assessment, the model that the committee has recommended, in which each college works with an assessment consultant, should be feasible with the three assessment experts

already located in either Undergraduate Affairs or University Planning and Analysis. Regarding graduate program review and assessment, the committee supports the Graduate School's request to hire a full-time Director of Graduate Program Review and Assessment. Until that position is established, we recommend the continuation of a soft-money allocation to the Graduate School to support both formal graduate program review and ongoing outcomes assessment. Finally, the committee recommends two additional new expenditures to support both undergraduate and graduate program review and assessment. The first of these addresses the often-repeated comment among the faculty that assessment turns up problems that the colleges have no resources to fix. We strongly suggest, therefore, that, along with compact planning, there be an additional financial mechanism for rectifying some of the problems identified, e.g., a competitive fund for improving programs based on assessment results. The second of these would be a fund to provide travel support and honoraria for external reviewers engaged in the formal review of graduate or undergraduate programs. Such reviewers are already required for graduate program review. The committee strongly believes that programs at all levels would benefit substantially from the perspectives of disciplinary experts who are external to the University.

The committee also recognizes that improving programs through systematic assessment of learning outcomes takes time. It can be difficult to weigh the value of more rigorous assessment against its cost, given the many other important responsibilities held by faculty and associate deans. Accordingly, the committee believes that all parties to assessment should strive toward an appropriate balance between value and cost. Furthermore, the committee encourages those responsible for rewards and recognition to honor departments, faculty, and associate deans for their contributions to program improvement through assessment and to the scholarship of teaching and learning.

Throughout this review process, the committee has been encouraged by the recognition among most faculty and administrators that assessment is a valuable activity that warrants time, energy, and thoughtfulness. Concerns have tended to center on institutional practices rather than the actual value of assessment. We see our recommendations as part of a normal process of refining procedures to adapt to faculty needs and the history of the institution. Just as programs themselves must be reviewed, so must assessment practices be periodically reviewed so that assessment becomes, and continues to be, an accepted and vital part of regular university activity.

## **II. Guiding Principles**

Our recommendations are based upon the following guiding principles:

- The most important purpose of assessment is to improve programs systematically by monitoring student learning. We must also comply with accreditation standards, but it is more important to make it useful for the faculty.
- We are committed to making assessment meaningful to the faculty first of all. We want assessment to be meaningful at the college and university levels, too, but it's more important that it be useful at the department level.
- We are also committed to making assessment as efficient as possible. Certainly, we don't want the costs of assessment to swamp its value. That means that assessment should not detract from teaching or research or other core responsibilities. It also means that the University should look for efficiency in processes and staffing for assessment.
- Assessment should be faculty driven. Only a program's faculty should decide what learning outcomes should be for that program, and they are in the best position to determine whether students have achieved those outcomes.
- Assessment is a collaborative activity among faculty, staff, and students. The most important role of faculty should be to determine outcomes, choose assessment strategies, evaluate results, and recommend actions. Wherever possible, staff should be used to carry out assessment strategies, e.g., constructing tools, collecting data, and preparing analyses for faculty consideration. If students are involved in the assessment process, they need to see that their contributions to assessment are useful and valued.
- Measurable or observable outcomes must be established for every program, and achievement of those outcomes must be assessed regularly and continuously.
- For academic programs, assessment must include student learning outcomes. Inputs (curriculum, faculty qualifications, GRE scores, etc.), process measures (graduation rates, time to degree, etc.), and outputs (number of degrees awarded, etc.) provide valuable information, but are different from learning outcomes.
- We understand that assessment of learning is inexact and difficult. That means we sometimes have to settle for proxy measures, quasi-experimental designs, and qualitative designs. The results might be a little fuzzy, but as long as we don't over-interpret them, and as long as the results are informative to the faculty, assessment can be meaningful. It also means that each department's assessment process will evolve and develop based on what the faculty learn from prior assessments.
- We want assessment to contribute substantially to evidence-based decision making. At the department level, assessment results can inform decisions about curriculum, pedagogy, support, and advising. At the college and university levels, summarized results can inform policy decisions. While the results should be considered, there should be no direct or formulaic translation of assessment results into resource allocations or personnel decisions. That is, there should be no automatic reward for good results or penalty for poor results.

- Assessment plans, processes, and use of results should be written, shared, and periodically evaluated.
- Outcomes assessment should be recognized and rewarded.

### **III. Recommendations for Undergraduate Program Review**

Our proposals do not call for the creation of a new process; rather they are intended to modify the existing process in keeping with the Guiding Principles (see Section II). It is intended that the undergraduate program review process, and particularly the assessment procedures, would apply to all undergraduate programs offered for credit by NCSU regardless of method or location. However, the proposals are flexible enough to allow programs and/or colleges wide latitude in implementing the procedures, including integration of undergraduate and graduate program review where desired.

Assessment activities will continue to be centered in the department and will now be facilitated by the colleges. The associate deans for academic affairs will be central figures in managing both the ongoing assessments of student learning outcomes and the eight-year self-studies. The faculty and associate deans will be aided in their efforts by the Division of Undergraduate Academic Programs (UAP), University Planning and Analysis (UPA), the Undergraduate Program Review Steering Council (a group that will replace the Committee on Undergraduate Program Review) and assigned university consultants. Below are our specific recommendations.

#### **Additional Assumptions and Notes**

- Colleges are responsible for program quality; UAP, UPA, and the colleges are collectively responsible for process quality.
- At a minimum, engagement in assessment will be evidenced by: explicitly stated student learning outcomes, ongoing and continuous evaluation of students' achievement of those outcomes, evidence that results have been used to consider programs, and evidence that assessment is ongoing and continuous.
- The focus should be on program review and review of courses will take place within that context.
- Italicized comments marked as “RP” represent suggestions for recommended practices.

#### **Continuous and Ongoing Outcomes Assessment**

*Assessment of student learning outcomes is the core of undergraduate program review. The ongoing, continuous dimension of assessment is centered in the department, facilitated by the college, and focused on the quality of the assessment process and on the formative use of results. Following is a description of the responsibilities of each party that participates in ongoing outcomes assessment.*

#### **Program Faculty**

- Develop, maintain, and implement a process for regular and continuous assessment of student outcomes  
*RP: Assign responsibility to a faculty assessment team whose membership overlaps with the departmental curriculum team*
- Discuss and evaluate results, and decide how to use the results for program improvement (annually, or whenever each evaluation is completed)

*RP: Engage the entire program faculty, or a departmental assessment/curriculum team, in this data-driven discussion*

- Document results and use of results for inclusion in departmental portfolio (annually, or whenever each evaluation is completed)
- Contribute to college-wide discussion about cross-department issues
- Prepare report(s) as requested by associate dean, who will determine the schedule and format

#### Associate Dean

- Ensures persistence and quality of assessment processes in each department that are compliant with SACS and other accreditation requirements; oversees and monitors departmental assessment processes
- RP: Establish a college assessment team to share experiences, collaborate, discuss results, and solve shared issues*
- Provides support to departments as needed and available (through university consultant and/or through college consultant)
  - Keeps assigned university consultant involved and informed
  - Keeps department heads and college dean informed
  - With consultant, co-authors a brief annual college summary report that synthesizes issues and action items that became evident as a result of assessment, and any best practices identified by departments; sends report to college dean, Dean of Undergraduate Academic Programs, Council of Undergraduate Associate Deans and Undergraduate Program Review Steering Council
  - Encourages departments to include assessment activities in annual faculty activity reports

#### Council of Undergraduate Associate Deans

- Meet as a group with Dean of Undergraduate Academic Programs, UPA Assessment Director and UAP Assessment Director in order to review annual college summaries to identify shared concerns, recommend actions as appropriate, and consider collaboration in assessment processes
  - Council will also discuss issues concerning the efficiency and meaning of processes in place
  - Council will seek to identify data needs that can be provided to programs by the University

#### College Dean/ Dean of Undergraduate Academic Programs

- Review annual college summary and recommend action items to Provost or other authorities as appropriate

#### University Consultants: (each college will be assigned one consultant)

- Assist departments with the development of objectives, outcomes and assessment plans if requested (Note: the assigned consultant will identify other experts as needed.)
- Serve as a consultant to the associate dean concerning assessment activities, including SACS compliance issues

- Assist associate dean with annual report
- Participate in college assessment team meetings
- Contribute to the university assessment consulting team
- Aid in the development of a website of best practices (at NCSU and at other institutions)

### **Eight-Year Periodic Review**

*Periodically, the college dean and, on behalf of the Provost, the Dean of Undergraduate Academic Programs reviews each undergraduate program. Their review is focused on the quality of the program and the summative use of results. It is important that each program be given feedback from the college and UAP deans. We recommend having a post-review meeting and that an action plan be developed. (The college will have the option of working with the Dean of Undergraduate Academic Programs to develop alternate feedback mechanisms.) Following is a description of the responsibilities of each party that participates in ongoing outcomes assessment.*

#### **Program Faculty**

- Submit to the associate dean and Dean of Undergraduate Academic Programs the current program objectives/outcomes/assessment plans
- Assemble a self-study portfolio with the aid of the consultant that might include topics such as: eight years of outcomes assessment results and related information, summary of lessons learned and actions taken based on ongoing assessment, accreditation actions since last review, results of general education assessment results for their own students if appropriate, enrollment data, time to degree data, retention and graduation rates, degrees awarded and possibly other information of interest to the college dean and provost's office... capped off with a summative overview of the program
  - Note that university data (such as enrollment data, time to degree data, etc.) will be provided by the university consultant if requested by the program
  - Note that each college will have the option of working with the Dean of Undergraduate Academic Programs to determine if self studies developed for external accreditation processes or external reviews may serve as a program's university self-study portfolio

*RP: Assign responsibility to a faculty assessment team whose membership overlaps with the departmental curriculum team*

*RP: Include an external reviewer where feasible and desirable*

- When appropriate, participate in the preparation of an action plan and in the post-review meeting with the college dean, college associate dean and Dean of Undergraduate Academic Programs
 

*RP: Engage the entire program faculty, or a departmental assessment/curriculum team, in this data-driven process*

#### **Associate Dean and Assessment Consultant**

- Associate dean will oversee formal review of each program

*Option: Integrate this review with the review of graduate programs and/or with external program accreditation review; negotiate the periodic review with the UAP dean to make the most efficient use of time and resources*

*Option: More than one program may be reviewed at any session*

- Consultant will provide relevant university data to program faculty (for example, enrollment data) if requested by the program
- Consultant will meet with each program a year before the beginning of the formal review
- Associate dean will coordinate implementation of any action items resulting from the formal review once approved by appropriate authorities

#### College Dean and Dean of Undergraduate Academic Programs

- Dean of Undergraduate Academic Program notifies each program of the scheduled review date two years before and one year before the scheduled review
- College dean and Dean of Undergraduate Academic Programs participate in formal review of each program when appropriate
- College dean and Dean of Undergraduate Academic Programs review recommendations for action; as appropriate, implement or forward acceptable action items through compact planning or other decision-making venues

#### **Overseeing the Process: Design, Support, and Evaluation**

*Assessment and program review are faculty-driven processes supported by the associate deans, UAP and UPA with assistance from assessment consultants. All parties form a partnership to develop, support, and evaluate these processes.*

#### Undergraduate Program Review (UPR) Steering Council

- Members: 2 associate deans selected by the Council of Associate Deans, UGA Assessment Director, University Assessment Director, chair of University Courses and Curricula Committee, chair of Committee on Undergraduate Education, chair of the Academic Policy Subcommittee of the Faculty Senate, faculty member at large who will be chosen by the Dean of Undergraduate Academic Programs and will serve as chair
- Develops guidelines for eight year portfolios and annual reports submitted by the associate deans
  - Those guidelines must be approved by the Council of Associate Deans and the Dean of Undergraduate Academic Programs
  - Colleges will have the option of working with the Dean of Undergraduate Academic Programs to develop program or college specific portfolio guidelines or undergraduate program review feedback mechanisms (for example, alternatives to post-review meetings, action plans)
- Establishes, maintains, and monitors the university level “rules of engagement” for both ongoing and periodic program reviews
  - Any change in rules must be approved by the Council of Associate Deans and UAP Dean

- Evaluates the undergraduate program review process against the Guiding Principles, especially with respect to meaning and efficiency
  - Considers recommendations from the Council of Associate Deans and annual college summaries
  - Seeks to identify data needs that can be provided to programs by the University

Note: the Council may initially need to meet several times to develop portfolio and annual report guidelines. Once those are established and approved, the Council should meet once or twice a year.

#### Director of Assessment, Undergraduate Academic Programs

- Coordinates assignment and support of university consultants to colleges
- Serves as consultant to colleges and program faculty
- Provides training for faculty and associate deans
- Facilitates Dean of Undergraduate Academic Programs' participation in the undergraduate program review process
- Promotes collaboration across colleges in assessment processes
- Documents persistence and quality of departmental and college processes for use by UPR Steering Council and in university compliance reviews
- Participates in Council of Associate Deans' meetings when reviewing annual college assessment reports

#### University Assessment Director, University Planning and Analysis

- Coordinates assessment activities across undergraduate, graduate, student affairs, and other administrative programs and services
- Monitors overall institutional compliance with SACS standards, including quality and persistence
- Integrates overall assessment results into a university-wide picture for use in planning and policy discussions
- Coordinates shared activities of university assessment consulting team members, e.g., assist with college and LITRE assessment as needed, collaborate on training, assist with development of shared assessment tools such as the alumni survey
- Contributes consulting services as needed and as resources permit
- Develops and maintains a website of best practices (at NCSU and other institutions)

#### **IV. Recommendations for General Education Program Review**

The members of the Academic Affairs Assessment Planning Team recognize that the General Education Requirements Review Task Force is currently reviewing the general education requirements at NCSU, including purpose, structure, and assessment. We encourage the General Education Requirements Review Task Force to consider a wide range of possibilities for the assessment of general education. In particular we recommend:

- That the current, course-based system be replaced by a “mixed” model, that is, one in which the assessment of each general education objective/outcome is assessed in a manner appropriate for that particular objective/outcome. For example, some GER objectives/outcomes might be assessed as part of the undergraduate program review process, others might be assessed at the university level by a faculty committee using surveys developed and administered by University Planning and Analysis, etc. It is important that the model also take into account efficiency concerns.
- That courses intended as general education courses have student learning outcomes that support the GER objectives.

## V. Recommendations for Graduate Program Review

Based on the recommendations of a Graduate Program Review Task Force, since 2002 the Graduate School has revised its program review process and introduced a new ongoing outcomes assessment structure. A program review website, the [NC State Graduate School Program Review Homepage](#), explains both developments and the [relationship between them](#), as well as offering extensive resources for both formal review and ongoing assessment. A [comprehensive schedule of formal reviews](#) has been published, with the interval between formal reviews reduced from 10 to 8 years. The review process now culminates in an action plan to which program faculty and college and university administrators agree, with [progress reports](#) to be submitted to the Graduate School every two years. (This schedule is subject to adjustments when an agreement is made to coordinate graduate program review with undergraduate, comprehensive, or external accreditation review.)

Outcomes assessment for graduate programs, the second thrust of graduate program review, has been introduced to faculty and administrators through the [Program Review website](#), a series of workshops, [a pilot program](#) in which Dr. Michael Carter helped graduate faculty from 5 programs develop objectives, outcomes, and assessment plans, and through individual program consultations with Dr. Carter. Finally, the Graduate School has developed a Program Review Management and Reporting System, accessible through [InfoWeb](#), that allows directors of graduate programs to upload formal review documents, to build and modify their outcomes assessment plans, and to report on both their ongoing assessments and progress toward completing their action plans.

As a result of the deliberations of the Academic Affairs Assessment Planning Team, the Graduate School has made or will make three changes in its administration of formal program review and outcomes assessment: (1) partnering, where possible, with Undergraduate Academic Programs in formal program review; (2) simplifying the Biennial Reporting Guidelines for the [outcomes assessment plans](#) and possibly the [self-study guidelines](#); and (3) extending the assessment pilot through one year of data collection, analysis, and reporting in selected programs. Although all graduate programs have been asked to upload their assessment plans (objectives, outcomes, data and sources, intervals of analysis, and reporting dates) by May 20, 2005, the Graduate School will ask only those programs that volunteer to be part of the next phase of the pilot to collect and analyze assessment data over the next year. At the end of that year, faculty in the pilot programs will report on their findings to the other graduate faculty in their colleges. Their reflections on lessons learned will be helpful to both faculty and the Graduate School in refining the assessment process. During the coming year, the Graduate School will also hold focus groups where faculty can discuss their data needs with the Graduate School's Information Systems staff and with staff members in University Planning and Analysis. The anticipated result of these meetings will be the ability to provide graduate programs with more and better data centrally from the administration and collection of data from exit surveys, alumni surveys, and employer surveys, as well as data from peer institutions. The goal of all three changes is to make

the graduate program review and assessment process less onerous and more valuable to graduate faculty.

## **VI. Resource Recommendations**

The Academic Affairs Assessment Planning Team believes that our recommendations will make undergraduate program review, general education program review and graduate program review more efficient and will add value to these processes. The AAAPT spent several meetings considering the resources needed to accomplish these goals. Below we summarize existing resources and make recommendations on new resources that would be helpful at this stage in the development of program review. We recognize that resource allocation will most likely need to be revisited as the review of academic programs evolves.

### **Current Resources**

#### University Planning and Analysis

The resources that UPA contributes to academic program assessment include the following:

- (1) The University Assessment Director (who has experience consulting with departments and colleges about developing assessment processes and using results) is available upon request to assist the Graduate School and Undergraduate Affairs with the task of consulting with departments. Her time is limited due to other responsibilities, including helping administrative units engage in assessment, integrating assessment results into reports that inform policy and planning discussions throughout the University, developing university-wide assessment tools, and leading assessment efforts on university-wide projects (e.g., LITRE).
- (2) The institutional research staff maintains a website of student data that is designed to support assessment at the department and college level. In addition, this staff can provide training in the use of these data.
- (3) The survey research staff manages an integrated and longitudinal system of student surveys, whose results can be used by departments and colleges for assessment. In particular, UPA works with departments to include department-specific questions in the senior and alumni surveys.
- (4) Finally, UPA maintains a national website called "Internet Resources for Higher Education Outcomes Assessment". (See <http://www2.acs.ncsu.edu/UPA/assmt/resource.htm>.)

This site could be the source for a locally tailored best practices site described in Section III.

#### The Office of Assessment in the Division of Undergraduate Affairs

Currently, the budget of the Office of Assessment in the Division of Undergraduate Affairs covers a director and assistant director of assessment, two graduate assistants, and

supplies/maintenance. In addition, the Office of Assessment currently employs a faculty member who provides assistance to departments in developing assessment plans, particularly with writing student learning outcomes.

### The Graduate School

The quality of graduate programs at NC State is currently assessed by periodic (7- to 8-year) program reviews (replacing the former 10-year reviews), the *Annual Graduate Profile*, annual aggregation of data from graduating students' exit surveys, and the UNC-Office of the President productivity review in alternate years. The Graduate School's goal is to integrate these activities with a continuous and ongoing outcomes-based assessment process. It is anticipated that the Graduate School will conduct a formal review of 12-15 programs each year as well as review and respond to the biennial assessment reports from 100+ graduate programs on a two-year cycle.

Currently the Graduate School has a half-time associate dean to assist with the development and implementation of graduate program review. In addition, the Graduate School provides funds for the 7- to 8- year periodic reviews. The cost per review ranges from \$500 (honorarium only for an external reviewer who is also part of a comprehensive review team) to \$1500 (honorarium plus travel expenses for the external reviewer in a "free-standing" review, plus one or more working meals for the review team). Note that up to this point, the costs of formal program reviews have come out of the Graduate School's operating budget, but with the accelerated pace of these reviews and recurrent budget reversions, the current operating budget cannot continue to meet these needs.

The Graduate School Information Systems staff provides graduate programs with data (such as time to degree) that is collected centrally.

### Departments/Colleges

Arguably, the greatest resources provided by the departments and colleges are faculty time and expertise. Some colleges and departments provide summer support or release time for those faculty who coordinate assessment efforts within their units. Some colleges, particularly those with external, professional program accreditation requirements in addition to the SACS requirements, have a director of assessment as well.

### **Needed Resources**

To achieve the proposed modifications of the current assessment models, the AAAPT requests some additional resources, though the committee tried to be circumspect in its requests, given the current budget situation. So, for example, although we believe it would be desirable to offer release time for faculty who coordinate assessment efforts within their units, we recognize that such a request may not be feasible at this time but should be considered as program review evolves.

Regarding undergraduate program review and assessment, the model that the committee has recommended in Section III, in which each college works with an assessment consultant, should be feasible with the three assessment experts already located in either Undergraduate Affairs or University Planning and Analysis. Regarding graduate program review and assessment, the committee supports the Graduate School's request to hire a full-time Director of Graduate Program Review and Assessment who would help program faculty identify learning outcomes and assessment tools, work with the Graduate School Information Systems staff and University Planning and Analysis to provide graduate programs with as much data as can be collected centrally, review and respond to the biennial assessment reports from 100+ graduate programs, and manage the formal graduate program review process. Until that position is established, we recommend the continuation of a soft-money allocation to the Graduate School to support the development and implementation of formal graduate program review and ongoing outcomes assessment. Finally, the committee recommends two additional new expenditures to support both undergraduate and graduate program review and assessment. The first of these addresses the often-repeated comment among the faculty that assessment turns up problems that the colleges have no resources to fix. We strongly suggest, therefore, that, along with compact planning, there be an additional financial mechanism for rectifying some of the problems identified, e.g., a competitive fund for improving programs based on assessment results. The second of these would be a fund to provide travel support and honoraria for external reviewers engaged in the formal review of graduate or undergraduate programs. Such reviewers are already required for graduate program review. The committee strongly believes that programs at all levels would benefit substantially from the perspectives of disciplinary experts who are external to the University.

## **Appendix A: Associate Deans Memo (October 16, 2003)**

### **MEMORANDUM**

TO: Provost Jim Oblinger  
Sr. Vice Provost Katie Perry  
Dr. Thomas Conway  
Dr. James Anderson  
Dr. Bob Sowell

FROM: Gilroy Zuckerman  
David Bristol  
Jo-Ann Cohen  
Ken Esbenshade  
Dick Keltie  
Adrianna Kirkman  
Gail O'Brien  
Bill Oxenham  
John Tector

We, the undersigned, are concerned about the negative short-run impact of the cumulative effect of expanded business practices dealing with assessment and compliance that are currently under consideration at NC State (for example: undergraduate program assessment, graduate program assessment, Progress Toward Undergraduate Degree, GER assessment and business continuity and risk assessment). Though there may be merit to any single initiative, the impact of the simultaneous implementation on academic programs is of major concern, especially given the budget environment. We request that the University put a hold on these efforts to create an opportunity to step back, reflect, and evaluate the optimal strategy to pursue.

cc: Deans

## **Appendix B: Charge to the Committee**

### **MEMORANDUM**

TO: Jo-Ann Cohen, Associate Dean, Physical and Mathematical Sciences  
Laura Severin, Associate Dean, Humanities and Social Sciences  
Sastry Pantula, Department Head, Statistics  
Sally Berenson, Director of Graduate Program, Mathematics Education  
Maury Balik, Undergraduate Program Coordinator, Materials Science  
John Ambrose, Interim Vice Provost, Undergraduate Affairs  
Duane Larick, Associate Dean, Graduate School  
Karen Helm, Director, University Planning and Analysis

FROM: Provost James L. Oblinger

SUBJECT: Academic Affairs Assessment Planning Team

DATE: September 15, 2004

The Chancellor's University-wide Assessment Task Force recommended increased coordination and organization among assessment activities. Although every unit – both academic and administrative – is responsible for assessing its effectiveness, we will first apply this recommendation to academic program evaluation.

This fall, several changes to academic assessment activities will provide a changing context within which to apply this recommendation. Vacant professional assessment positions will be filled in Undergraduate Affairs and in University Planning & Analysis. FCTL's assessment-related services may change, reflecting changes in their personnel. The Graduate School is implementing outcomes assessment as part of graduate program review. Recommendations from the task force making a comprehensive review of GERs may affect the current course-based assessment process.

Together, these changes provide Academic Affairs, with UPA, an opportunity and a challenge in the area of assessment. My first priority is to ensure that assessment is efficient and adds value. I ask you to serve as a member of an ad hoc Academic Affairs Assessment Planning Team to help me coordinate assessment in undergraduate program review, graduate program review, and the GER process, and to make the best use of Academic Affairs' assessment resources. I have asked Associate Deans Jo-Ann Cohen and Laura Severin to co-chair the Team. Specifically, the team should make recommendations that:

- where appropriate, coordinate, streamline, and integrate assessment processes.
- make the most efficient use of available staff and funds through sharing and/or collaboration.
- foster faculty-owned assessment that is both manageable and useful in improving programs.

- encourage assessment whose results add value to program planning and policy making, not just for external reporting.

The Assessment Planning Team will allow us to keep moving toward institutionalizing manageable and meaningful academic program review. This will be the beginning of a larger effort to streamline administrative processes requiring input from units across campus, as recommended by the Chancellor's Assessment Task Force.

This is an important task for Academic Affairs and its UPA partner in the new academic year. I thank you in advance for agreeing to add participation on this Planning Team to the many ways you support the mission of NC State University.

cc: Deans

## **Appendix C: Guiding Questions**

The goal of the Academic Affairs Assessment Planning Team is to support departmental processes for academic program assessment in order to help make them as meaningful and manageable as possible. We would value your input on the following questions.

1. **Value of Processes at the “Local” Level:** What are the benefits to your programs and to your students of your current assessment efforts? What is unique about those processes?
2. **Efficiency of Processes (undergraduate program review, graduate program review, general education program review):** What, if anything can be centralized, integrated, streamlined, coordinated without sacrificing the values identified in #1 above (for example, department-specific data that can be provided and analyzed centrally, streamlining of documentation required of the departments, coordination of the timelines for graduate program review and undergraduate program review if desired by individual departments, the use of external review processes to satisfy internal requirements)?
3. **Value of Processes at the “Global” Level:** If we implemented these processes in the best way, how could colleges and the university as a whole benefit from the results?
4. **Support for Faculty:** How do we encourage and support faculty working on assessment efforts at the departmental level? How do we support university committees involved in the review processes?
5. **Resources for Departments:** What resources are needed to support departments that are engaged in program review? What help can the Graduate School, the Division of Undergraduate Affairs, and University Planning and Analysis provide to departments? (For example, what additional information should the university harvest to help departments with program review? What help can “assessment professionals” provide?) What resources should be available for programmatic improvement?
6. **Communication:** We realize that part of the anxiety associated with review processes is related to communication regarding expectations, requirements, use of results, etc. What can be done to facilitate better communication between the departments/colleges and the university units charged with overseeing program reviews?
7. **Models from Other Institutions:** What universities provide useful models for us? What kinds of program evaluation are other large research universities doing and what improvements do they attribute to their evaluation efforts?

## **Appendix D: Description of the Graduate Program Review Process**

Graduate program review at NC State consists of two interrelated activities. The first is a formal program review, which occurs approximately every eight years. The second is continuous, ongoing assessment of key program outcomes, as identified by the graduate faculty of each program. Collection and analysis of data related to these outcomes, as well as resulting program changes, are reported to the Graduate School biennially. At the time of the next formal review, a summary of these biennial reports is included in the self-study.

The formal program review process comprises five major components: a self-study prepared by the graduate faculty, a two-day site visit by a review committee, the review committee's evaluative report and recommendations, the program faculty's response to that report, and an action plan resulting from a post-review meeting of the review committee chair with program, college, Graduate School, and university administrators. Every two years between formal reviews, the program reports to the Graduate School on progress toward implementing the action plan. In cases where the action plan requires additional resources, these may be addressed in the department's and college's Compact Plans.

Complementing formal program review is continuous, ongoing outcomes assessment. Outcomes assessment focuses primarily on student learning. It asks and answers the questions, "What do we want our students to know and be able to do when they graduate?" and "How well does our program promote that learning?" Its purpose is to monitor whether a program is achieving its goals so that where goals are not being met, changes and improvements can be made. This process begins when graduate faculty identify the major objectives of their program, the more specific outcomes derived from these objectives, and the data that must be collected and analyzed to determine whether those outcomes are being achieved. To the extent possible, the data are supplied by the Graduate School and other central university sources. However, some data – e.g., data aggregated about student performance on prelims, the final oral defense, etc. – must be collected program by program.

Once outcomes and relevant data sources have been identified, the next step is to develop an outcomes assessment plan, identifying which outcomes will be assessed in any given year, over the eight-year cycle between formal program reviews. Every two years, the graduate program director or another faculty member designated by the department head reports to the Graduate School as to which outcomes were assessed, what the findings were, and any resulting program improvements. A summary of these reports, as well as the assessment plan, becomes part of the self-study for the next formal review.

## **Appendix E: Principles of Accreditation**

### **Commission on Colleges, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) Accreditation Standards (2001)**

#### **Core Requirement 2.5**

The institution engages in ongoing, integrated, and institution-wide research-based planning and evaluation processes that incorporate a systematic review of programs and services that (a) results in continuing improvement, and (b) demonstrates that the institution is effectively accomplishing its mission.

#### **Comprehensive Standards 3.3.1**

The institution identifies expected outcomes for its educational programs and its administrative and educational support services; assesses whether it achieves these outcomes; and provides evidence of improvement based on analysis of those results.

#### **Comprehensive Standards 3.4.1**

The institution demonstrates that each educational program for which academic credit is awarded...establishes and evaluates program and learning outcomes.

#### **Federal Mandate 4.1**

When evaluating success with respect to student achievement in relation to the institution's mission, the institution includes, as appropriate, consideration of course completion, state licensing examinations, and job placement rates.

### **Summary of SACS' Expectations**

#### *Fundamental purpose:*

- Improve student learning, by tracking changes in cognitive and/or affective development

#### *What we are asked to do and document:*

- Establish student learning outcomes for each program
- Measure students' achievement of those outcomes
- Use assessment results to improve programs
- Provide evidence of program improvement based on assessment results
- As appropriate, include graduation rates, licensing exam results, job placement rates

#### *Desired characteristics of the process:*

- Integrated with planning
- Ongoing and continuous
- Research-based
- Institution-wide
- Systematic
- Demonstrates accomplishment of mission

## **Appendix F: Summary of Suggestions and Issues from the Focus Groups**

The AAAPT is grateful to Dr. Joni Spurlin, Director of Assessment, University Planning and Analysis, for preparing a document that summarized the information gathered at the focus group sessions. Below is a condensed version of that document.

### **Focus Group Methodology**

Focus groups included:

- 2 meetings with faculty from undergraduate education departments.
- 2 meetings with faculty from graduate education departments.
- 1 meeting with department heads.
- 2 meetings with associate deans.
- 1 meeting with chairs and representatives from Council on Undergraduate Education (CUE) and Committee on Undergraduate Program Review (CUPR).

Questions were developed by the Academic Affairs Assessment Planning Team. The focus groups were led by different team members depending on the focus group composition. All attendees of the focus groups had the questions ahead of time. Focus group discussions lasted between one and two hours. It should be noted that most focus groups did not get past the first two questions.

The statements below are representative of the input we received on each question.

**Question 1:** Value of the Processes at the “LOCAL” level: What are the benefits to your programs and to your students of your current assessment efforts? What is unique about those processes?

#### Positive Comments:

Assessment helps departments to align the core values of the faculty by coming to an agreement about these core values (e.g., defining objectives and outcomes).

The key value of assessment at the local level is improving student learning.

GER assessment workshops and pilots studies have improved approximately 50 of the GER courses. (Because the GER course-level assessment has been planned to be rolled out over the next few years, the process has not been finished and therefore cannot be judged overall, if it has been useful or not.)

External reviews are useful because they align the internal view of the program with what is expected of a good program by others external to the institution.

The graduate program review process is better understood and considered to be more useful than the undergraduate (UAPR) process.

Assessment is a process that represents a culture change on campus, per CUPR.

Some additional comments from CUPR:

- CUPR helps departments reframe their thinking on outcomes and student learning.
- Faculty members get trained in how to do assessment and its value.
- CUPR has helped CALS with their external review. CUPR has helped to bring clarity to what the University expects regarding assessment.
- CUPR would like to help the departments engage in assessment.
- CUPR can evaluate the process.
- There is value in trading ideas across colleges.
- Faculty are the center of this whole process.

Negative Comments:

Faculty are not able to verbalize or recognize the value of assessment.

The University has not demonstrated the value of the current assessment processes.

Faculty feel that assessment is a waste of their time and is an additional burden.

Programs have not gotten good feedback on their portfolios.

Many faculty see assessment as an administrative duty to satisfy external accreditation (programmatic accreditation or SACS).

Many faculty members and administrators do not understand the current undergraduate assessment (UAPR) process.

GER course-based assessment isn't giving us the kind of information that we need to determine whether graduates have achieved general education learning outcomes. The opposition to course-based assessment is very widespread.

Faculty need more information such as national benchmarks to use in their assessment processes.

**Question 2:** Efficiency of Processes (undergraduate program review, graduate program review, general education program review): What, if anything can be centralized, integrated, streamlined, coordinated without sacrificing the values identified in #1 above?

Description Of What Is Happening Now:

External reviews are useful because they align the internal view of the program with what is expected of a good program by others external to the institution.

Setting up a process can be time consuming, but once developed, it can be efficient.

What seems to work now is to have one person in each program who coordinates the assessment activities.

Having a senior capstone course or national exam makes assessment more efficient.

Use existing processes whenever possible. Many programs are doing assessment but may not realize it. Some courses may only need minor tweaks to facilitate assessment.

The good thing is that if you do a really good job on the 2-year graduate program reviews, then, while that's not enough for the comprehensive review, the comprehensive review is much easier to complete.

UAPR is a faculty-driven process, per CUPR. No one is imposing the process on faculty; the process is governed by faculty. Faculty should be the center of this whole process.

Working with assessment professionals has made the process more personalized and meaningful to the department/program.

The UAPR annual reports got in the way of doing meaningful assessment; they didn't cohere to our schedules (due in August!). The annual report had no value added from the department's perspective.

Faculty who are completing the UAPR portfolio don't feel that all parts are relevant, (e.g., it's hard to take learning outcomes and relate them to the university, college mission).

#### What is needed:

Costs versus benefits analysis of assessment processes.

Comprehensive process that does not duplicate efforts; one which is as simple as possible.

Alignment of university assessment with external professional accreditation; make use of what we already know.

Knowledge about what individual units are currently doing regarding assessment.

Consideration of a centralized university level assessment office.

Experts in assessment and university-level personnel should:

- Be a resource for those doing assessment.
- Give examples of best practices in assessment.
- Make a strong, academic, scientific argument for why assessment is useful and how it can be beneficial for faculty.

Both informal and formal reward structures for faculty and programs need to change.

More efficient documentation.

Visible support from the top administration (department heads, deans).

More resources to support the changes assessment drives.

Feedback from decision-makers.

Extraction of data for multiple uses.

Consideration of what is needed from annual reports and why they are needed; allow flexibility in reporting schedules

### **Proposals:**

Locate assessment in colleges.

Developing portfolio assessment about the trend in general education – including what problems portfolios assessment might have. The opposition to GER course-based assessment is very widespread.

Folding GER assessment into undergraduate program review.

**Question 3:** Value of Processes at the “Global” Level: If we implemented these processes in the best way, how could colleges and the University as a whole benefit from the results?

### **Value at the University Level**

Shows how we meet SACS guidelines.

Provides support to the colleges.

Applies assessment results to university level problems and/or policies.

Shares good ideas among the colleges.

Learn about things that are the university’s responsibility.

Integrates efforts across the various colleges and programs at the associate deans level, the Deans’ Council and the University Council.

### Value at College Level

College level personnel and resources help programs so that everyone doesn't have to start from scratch.

College level personnel and resources are central resources for faculty.

External reviewers are experts in the field and can engage faculty in that field in real conversations in ways faculty from other fields can not and we must also look at how our grads go to in the professional world.

### What is Needed:

Integrate assessment work into the reward structure of the University.

Show that the effort put into program review will be worth something – that we will actually use the information that we will uncover.

People from the university level to help college personnel understand what college, departments, and programs need to be doing in assessment.

University people to integrate the various college processes and determine what the University as a whole is learning from assessment.

A group that considers undergraduate, graduate and general education reviews collectively may best carry out the university level tasks.

Someone to assess the assessors.

Increase communication to decrease the fear that the data is being used inappropriately by upper administration.

Show students how data is used; make students more aware of the process.

**Question 4:** Support For Faculty. How do we encourage and support faculty working on assessment efforts at the department level? How do we support university committees involved in the review processes? (Many of the previous comments were repeated here in our focus groups.)

### What is Needed:

University must demonstrate the value of assessment.

Assessment should be structured to be done for something of value to the faculty, not just because someone says it needs to be done.

Develop more established tools to make assessment easier and keep each faculty member from having to re-invent the wheel to undertake assessment.

More information for their assessment processes.

Coordination with assessment professionals so the process is more personalized and meaningful to the department/program.

Both informal and formal reward structures for faculty and programs need to change.

More efficient documentation.

Visible support from the top administration (department heads, deans).

More resources to support the changes assessment drives.

Feedback from decision-makers.

Tools and training.

**Question 5:** Resources for Departments. What resources are needed to support departments that are engaged in program review? What help can the Graduate School, the Division of Undergraduate Affairs, and University Planning and Analysis provide to departments?

Departments would benefit from support for collecting online forms and data from different populations, especially related to graduate education.

**The following questions were not addressed in any of the focus groups:**

**Question 6:** Communication. We realize that part of the anxiety associated with review processes is related to communication regarding expectations, requirements, use of results, etc. What can be done to facilitate better communication between the departments/colleges and the university units charged with overseeing program reviews?

**Question 7:** Models from other institutions. What universities provide useful models for us? What kinds of program evaluation are other large research universities doing and what improvements do they attribute to their evaluation efforts?

## **Appendix G: External Accreditation of Programs at NCSU**

A large number of undergraduate and graduate programs at NCSU are reviewed by external agencies. Listed below are external accreditation organizations and the programs at NCSU that are accredited by those organizations. Additional information can be found at  
<http://www2.acs.ncsu.edu/UPA/accreditation/programs.htm>

Accreditation Board of Engineering and Technology

- Aerospace Engineering (BS)
- Biological Engineering (BS)
- Chemical Engineering (BS)
- Civil Engineering (BS)
- Computer Engineering (BS)
- Construction Engineering and Management (BS)
- Electrical Engineering (BS)
- Environmental Engineering (BS)
- Industrial Engineering (BS)
- Materials Science and Engineering (BS)
- Mechanical Engineering (BS)
- Nuclear Engineering (BS)
- Textile Engineering (BS)

The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB-International)  
Business (BS, MBA)  
Accounting (BS, Master of)

American Chemical Society  
Chemistry (BA, BS)

American Psychological Association  
School Psychology (MS, PhD)

American Veterinary Medical Association Council on Education  
Veterinary Medicine (DVM)

Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs  
Community Counseling (MEd/MS)  
School Counseling (MEd/MS)  
Student Affairs Practice in Higher Education - College Counseling Emphasis  
(MEd/MS)  
Counselor Education and Supervision (PhD)

Computing Sciences Accreditation Board  
Computer Science (BS)

Human Factors in Ergonomics Society  
Ergonomics and Experimental Design (MS, PhD)

Council on Social Work Education  
Social Work (BSW, MSW)

Landscape Architectural Accreditation Board  
Landscape Architecture (BLA, MLA)

National Architectural Accrediting Board  
Architecture (BA, Master of)

National Association for Schools of Art and Design  
Graphic Design (BGD, MGD)  
Industrial Design (BID, MID)

National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration  
Public Administration (MPA)

National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education; North Carolina Department of  
Public Instruction  
Teacher Education Programs

National Recreation and Park Association  
Parks, Recreation and Tourism Management Program (BS)

Society of American Foresters  
Forest Management (BS)

Society of Wood Science and Technology  
Wood Products (BS)