North Carolina State University

Report of the
University-wide Assessment Task Force

Spring 2004

Introduction and Executive Summary

The University-wide Assessment Task Force was formed in January 2004. It was charged by the Chancellor to recommend ways to improve efficiency and coordination among the university's assessment activities and help decision makers at all levels apply assessment results more effectively.[1]

This was a response to two events. A team representing academic and administrative units across NC State had recently reviewed assessment processes across campus for an accreditation report. The team observed that dialogue across academic and administrative areas helped develop and streamline NC State's outcomes assessment activities, and recommended a forum to continue the dialogue. At approximately the same time, the Associate Deans for Academic Affairs responded to academic department heads' concerns by formally asking the Provost to consider the costs, benefits, and impact on academic programs of administrative requests for planning processes and information. Similar requests affect support and administrative areas, and the Task Force considered the question broadly, looking at costs, benefits, and impacts across the university of routine and ad hoc administrative information requests and processes such as outcomes assessment activities, the development of Compact Plans, enrollment management and planning information, facilities management information such as the annual CAMS (Capital Assets Management System) report, and other requests for planning and management information. The responses that academic, support, and administrative departments must make to these requests are complex and interact with each other and with the units' other activities.

The Task Force examined what's involved in responding to administrative information requests, and looked at overlaps, conflicts, and confusions among these requests and at how the resulting information is used for planning and decision-making at various levels of the university. **We recommend that a broadly representative university-wide Administrative Advisory Committee be established to implement the actions described in the rest of this document.** These actions include active dialogue about assessment and data-driven decision-making, and the development of a procedure to coordinate the many requests for relevant data and to assess the processes that support data-driven decision-making.

This committee should report to the Chancellor and be charged to implement the proposals described below and to adapt those activities and develop new ones as experience suggests. It should include people who represent the various roles involved in gathering and using decision-making information, as described later in this document.

A primary task for the committee is developing processes and tools to coordinate administrative information requests. **Much of the current report is the Task Force's recommendation for**

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[1] The charge and a list of Task Force members are attached as Appendix A. They are also available, along with a copy of this report, at *http://www2.acs.ncsu.edu/UPA/assmt/atf/*.

appropriate processes and tools. We suggest an easily-accessible database of information about data-gathering requests that are made to academic, support, and administrative departments, and a process to review the interactions, costs and benefits of the requests and use the results of this review to advise appropriate administrators so that requests can be coordinated, prioritized, streamlined, or modified in ways that minimize duplication, overlap, conflicts, and unnecessary activity.

This is a large job, dealing with many aspects of each information request and with interactions across administrative levels and divisions. As a result, **we recommend phased implementation**, using a few key information requests for initial development and maintaining flexibility to accommodate changes called for by experience and later additions.

The committee will also have other tasks, to be implemented as its experience grows and as university needs require. **Its eventual responsibilities should include whatever activities are necessary to facilitate data-driven decision-making at all levels of the university.** It should expand and adapt the database as experience with it suggests. It should recommend ways to increase efficiency and effectiveness by coordinating centralized data-gathering activities and training in assessment activities and use. It should look broadly at assessment and other activities for data-driven decision-making, and the results of those activities, and advise the university's executive officers about relevant issues. And the committee should educate: it should promote campus-wide dialogue and communication about activities and issues related to assessment and other forms of data-driven decision-making.

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Topics discussed in this report

[2] The Task Force members recognize that "coordinate, prioritize, streamline, or modify" is an awkward phrase, but we do not wish to emphasize one of these activities over the others. The individual case being considered determines which actions are appropriate. To make this report easier to read we use the term "coordinate (etc.)," with a reference to this footnote, to imply all four activities.

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The University-wide Assessment Task Force and its charge

NC State's recent SACS accreditation review included a campus-wide review of outcomes assessment and related institutional effectiveness activities. In the course of summarizing these activities, the team that developed our Institutional Effectiveness report noted that "connections across academic and administrative areas have been particularly effective for developing and streamlining NC State's outcomes assessment activities."[3] The team recommended that a university-wide assessment council be established to solidify these partnerships and improve efficient use of assessment resources. At approximately the same time, the Provost was being told that the cumulative impact of institutional effectiveness activities and administrative information requests was of concern to academic departments. The Associate Deans responsible for NC State colleges' academic affairs asked the university to "step back, reflect, and evaluate the optimal strategy to pursue."[4] Responding to both requests, the Chancellor and Provost created the University-Wide Assessment Task Force in January 2004. The Task Force was charged to report by the end of June 2004 on how to improve efficiency and coordination in the university's assessment activities and data-driven decision-making. (See footnote 1.)

The Task Force quickly realized that we had to consider more than requests and activities officially labeled "assessment." There are two deeply-entangled general issues. One is how the university can make it easier for academic, support, and administrative departments to respond to administrative units' many requests for information. The other is how the university can help units at all levels, from upper administration to front-line academic, support, and administrative units, use the information effectively for formative data-guided planning. The Task Force refers to the two issues as "coordinating (etc.)[2] administrative information requests" and "facilitating data-driven decision-making."[5]

What should be coordinated (etc.)[2]?

Administrative information requests include more than what the academic departments have come to call the "big three" program assessments (Undergraduate Academic Program Review

[3] Memo from SACS Institutional Effectiveness Compliance Team to Chancellor Fox, attached as Appendix D.
[4] Memo to Provost Oblinger, vice provosts, and deans, attached as Appendix E.
[5] In one sense, the term "assessment" covers both these issues. It is often used to refer to a broad set of activities that includes setting explicit objectives, specifying relevant outcomes, collecting data, interpreting the data, and using those interpretations in planning. However, the term is used in many different ways and clear communication requires much effort to establish a definition and challenge other interpretations. The Task Force decided that it will be less confusing, for now, to talk about "administrative information requests" and "data-driven decision-making."

[UAPR], Graduate Program Review [GPR], and General Education Requirements [GER] assessment). There are also routine or ad hoc requests for the development of Compact Plans; for enrollment management and planning information as varied as long-term enrollment projections and current teaching assignments; for faculty activity reports; for information related to changes in academic policy such as updates to Reappointment, Promotion, and Tenure (RPT) guidelines; for facilities management information ranging from faculty/staff input on parking issues to the annual Capital Assets Management System (CAMS) report; and for other planning and management information.[6] The responses that academic and administrative departments must make to these requests often involve complex processes that interact with each other and with the units' other activities. For example, just for the academic "big three," faculty must sometimes deal simultaneously with Undergraduate Academic Program Review, Graduate Program Review, GER Assessment, and disciplinary accreditation reviews, as well as their teaching, research, extension, and service responsibilities.

"The left hand needs to know what the right hand is doing." A key issue is that the administrative offices making and supervising requests don't know all the other assessment and information requests that are being made or planned. This makes it difficult for them to prioritize requests and the support that units need in order to respond, and to avoid overlaps and duplications in the requests. The same thing happens when requests don't follow a "chain of command" and, for example, deans don't know about requests that have gone directly to the academic departments. The requests come from multiple sources (Chancellor's office, Provost's office, Undergraduate Affairs, Graduate School, Research Administration, Finance & Business, etc.) and at least look as though they're independent of each other. Different request formats make it unclear whether the same information can satisfy multiple requests. All of this makes it difficult for the front-line units to assign priorities and resources, and increases the likelihood that responses will be mechanical and "the least that's needed to get by." That, in turn, makes the information gathered less useful for data-driven decision-making and less likely to be used.

A process and a tool to deal with the issue: The Task Force has identified a process and a tool to help the university resolve this issue. The process involves five tasks, involving four groups of people.

(1) A database of meta-information (information about administrative information requests) should be available to the implementation committee described later in this report, to the administrative offices that make the requests, to the front-line units that respond to the requests, to people that make decisions based on the information that results from the request, and to anyone else in the "chain of command" from the request to the final use of the information. The database will help those involved consider whether and how requests and processes should be coordinated, prioritized, streamlined, or modified. It is the tool mentioned above, designed to facilitate the overall process. Its general characteristics are described later in this report.

    Having the meta-information available well in advance of assessment & data-collection deadlines will help streamline the process and prevent redundancy. It will highlight timeline issues such as overlapping schedules for major reports and the total task load on people asked to gather data or to respond to what's been gathered. It encourages multiple and sequential

[6] The full list of administrative information requests is long, constantly changing, and not fully predictable. New needs develop and even details of routine requests can change to fit current situations.

uses of information, making it easier for information gathered for one request process to be used in response to others. It will also make it easier for front-line units that receive requests to give feedback early in the process about conflicts, overlaps, resource deficits, etc. that they perceive but which may not have been apparent to those making or reviewing the requests.

(2) The implementation committee should examine the meta-information for conflicts, overlaps, timeline incompatibilities, etc. and recommend strategies and priorities to fix particular problems. In step (3), the recommendations go to the executive officers who oversee the areas responsible for the particular requests involved in each recommendation.

(3) An executive subcommittee of the implementation committee, possibly assisted by University Planning & Analysis (UPA) staff, should summarize the larger committee's deliberations and prepare reports and recommendations for the appropriate executive officers. This group will also monitor whether and how the recommendations are carried out and what their effects are.

The benefits described in (1), above, will not occur unless the implementation committee gets information about new requests regularly and quickly, so that new requests are properly included in the overview and recommendations. To accomplish this, the Task Force recommends that the executive subcommittee should regularly be involved in administrative discussions about policy and guidelines for developing administrative information requests.

(4) The executive officers whose areas are involved in a particular set of strategies and prioritizations should assign appropriate subordinates to coordinate and carry out the necessary actions and to report actions and results back to the executive officers and to the implementation committee.

(5) The implementation committee can recommend strategies and priorities, but does not have the authority to see to it that recommendations are carried out. Since the people in step (4) are the university's executive officers, the authority must reside with the Chancellor. The implementation committee should "report" to the Chancellor rather than to the head of a particular administrative division, to the director of UPA, or to the executive officers as a whole.

In this process, the implementation committee serves as the focal point for issues, arguments, and decisions about gathering and using information in the same way that the University Standing Committee on Courses and Curricula (UCCC) and the Administrative Board of the Graduate School (GAB) are for issues, arguments, and decisions about curricula. The following sections of this report are the Task Force's recommendations for tools the committee can use and issues it will have to address.

The meta-information database should contain several types of information about *each* request. The Task Force assumes that the implementation committee will refine the categories below as needed and may add other categories. It might also be necessary to have two slightly different databases, to capture differences between administrative information requests that go to academic and to non-academic units. Whatever the final formats are, we recommend that the database include at least the following categories:

- *The request*: Where can a copy of the request be seen? What information is requested? Who must respond? What must be delivered (a filled-in form, a set of completed tables, a report on an assessment activity, etc.), to whom, and in what format? What consultations, if any, do University governance policies require?

- *Source of the request*: Who made the request? What administrative office does it come from, what administrative authority is responsible for it, and what administrator or staff person wrote the description or memo that spells out the details?
- *Purpose of the request and uses of the information*: Why was the request made? What will the information be used for? What kinds of decisions have been based on this information? What administrative office or administrator is responsible for how the information is used?
- *Timelines*: When was the request first made? When must the information be delivered? How long does the requester estimate that it will take to gather the information?
- *Data sources*: What pre-existing data can be used for this request and where are those data available? If new data must be generated, what information is available about how to generate them? Who must generate or gather the data (faculty or staff in the responding unit, staff in a statistical-reporting unit such as UPA, Registration & Records, or the Graduate School, etc.)? Where can results from previous versions of this request, and from similar requests, be found?
- *Technical support*: Where can those responding to this request get help? Who in the requesting unit can answer questions about the request? Who can answer questions about what pre-existing data are available or about how new data should be generated? Where can the responding unit get training so that it can respond to the request effectively?

We recommend a web-based database for this meta-information, rather than simple lists, so that users can easily sort the information to highlight various procedural questions. For example, sorts by timeline would highlight deadline conflicts, sorts by who's involved in gathering the information would facilitate workload comparisons, and sorts by where the data come from would indicate overlaps and potentials for multiple use. A "cascade" of menus like the "Functional Categories" list at the left side of the university Policies, Regulations, and Rules (PRRs) page *http://www.ncsu.edu/policies/homepage.php* could make it easy for users to find out about information requests associated with particular administrative issues. Etc.

Coordinating requests also means coordinating the resources needed to implement the requests. Resources that support administrative information requests include money, personnel, and time that front-line units need in order to respond to the requests. They also include the centralized data gathering performed by UPA, the Graduate School, Registration & Records, and other administrative units. Another resource is opportunities for training so that the faculty and staff in the front-line units can respond to the requests effectively. Experience with outcomes assessment in Undergraduate Academic Program Review and in Student Affairs indicates that the requests themselves often don't provide all the information that the faculty and staff in front-line units need about why the request was made and what the acceptable minimum response is. Workshops and consultations can help resolve those issues. They also help units that understand the basic issues and minimum responses but want to make more sophisticated responses for their own purposes.

The meta-information database will help coordinate some of these resources. For example, sometimes the centralized data-gathering units coordinate their activities, but sometimes more than one unit gathers and summarizes the same information. The implementation committee's review of the meta-information database can lead to recommendations that reduce duplicate efforts. In addition, the database will help responding units see when data needed for a request are already available from these centralized analyses. Similarly, the database can indicate what training is available, and the implementation committee's review can lead to recommendations about how to fill training gaps most efficiently.

Coordination across requests, across the available resources, and across the responding units' other activities that draw on those resources, implies setting priorities. Many of the recommendations, decisions, and actions in steps (2) through (5), above, will involve prioritization. The Task Force's recommendations to guide setting priorities are discussed in the next section of this report.

How should priorities be set?

Together, the various administrative information requests are a heavy and growing bureaucratic load on front-line units. Each request is important in its own context, and they all appear to have equal priority, at least when they initially arrive. The result is that people and resources to handle the requests are pulled from other responsibilities and/or that requests are handled poorly. Reducing duplication and overlaps and making it easier for units to find what they need in order to respond will help, but it will also be important to prioritize across requests. Priorities must take available resources into account and include decisions about reallocating resources and about what won't get done while units respond to the requests. Task Force discussions suggest that those recommending priority decisions or setting the priorities will have to consider the following issues:

- *Flexibility*: Some administrative information requests can be eliminated, postponed, or simplified. Some cannot. For example, some administrative information requests are necessary; critical university decisions cannot be made at all if the information is not available. Other requests are for information that will help decisions be made more effectively, more efficiently, or more quickly, or they may serve university activities that are useful and important but not critical.[7]

  Flexibility is also affected by the extent to which a request serves internal and external purposes. The University of North Carolina Office of the President (UNC-OP) requests enrollment projections, information for the "Delaware" study of instructional costs, and so on. Other requests originate with the state government (e.g., CAMS), national groups (information for NCAA reports), or the federal government (e.g., data for the national Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System [IPEDS], sent via UNC-OP). Some requests serve both internal and external purposes. For example, information about teaching loads and instructional costs is both required by UNC-OP *and* influences the colleges' and Provost's budget decisions.[8]

[7] "Necessary" and "critical" are continua, not yes/no dichotomies. There will be different views about how necessary a given request is and how critical the university activities it supports are, and there will be tradeoffs among speed, effectiveness, and efficiency.
[8] We have little or no control over the timing and details of external requests, but they may interact with the timing and details of NC State requests that we can control. Requests that serve *only* external purposes should be satisfied in the simplest way possible. As long as the external demands are satisfied, requests that serve both NC State and external purposes should be handled so that they serve NC State as well as possible (see the next bullet, *Costs and benefits*).

- *Costs and benefits*: Costs include the money, personnel, and time it will take to respond to an administrative information request,[9] how that fits with other resource demands, and what may not get done while units respond to the request. Evaluating costs also includes considering whether and how effectively decisions can be made without this information. This includes examining how this information has been used for decision-making in the past, and how useful has it been.

  The implementation committee should evaluate costs in light of the benefits gained from gathering the information. Most administrative information requests are intended to help NC State make decisions about academic and support programs, budget and other resource allocations, maintenance and allocation of facilities, etc. Cost/benefit analyses should look for the best decision-making process that can be accomplished in light of the demands on available resources. The committee should consider whether a "good enough" decision could and would be made without the information from a particular request (acknowledging that "good enough" is subjective and that there will be differences of opinion).

- *Overlap*: It will sometimes be possible to simplify a request by changing it so that respondents can use information that is already available or is being gathered for other requests. Recommendations and decisions about request priorities should ask both what information is already available that could serve the request being considered and what other requests its information might serve. The implementation committee's priority recommendations might include suggestions for modifications that would make it possible for one set of information to serve multiple requests.

- *Competition*: Decisions about a request's cost, benefits, and flexibility can't be made in isolation. Evaluating them correctly requires considering the costs, benefits, and flexibility of other requests that are competing for priority.

- *Politics*: Any attempt to coordinate and prioritize administrative information requests and data-driven decision-making needs across the university will encounter conflicting agendas, competition for resources, and other management and political issues. Priority recommendations and decisions must take these into account. For example, centralized data-gathering conserves time and personnel, but effective department-level decision-making often needs locally-gathered information. Priority decisions must consider both objectives (conserving resources, facilitating data-driven decision-making). In other cases, proposed coordinations may cross current administrative lines and require sharing personnel and other resources, as when UGA, Student Affairs, and FCTL agreed to share responsibility for outcomes-assessment training.

  In order to balance requests from various administrative areas and coordinate across areas, the people who make priority decisions must know enough about the various areas' needs and operations that the decisions aren't all made from one area's point of view. This implies cross-training or at least good use of advice from a broad-based group such as the implementation committee that the Task Force has proposed and which is described in

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[9] This also includes indirect costs such as training and centralized data-gathering. The section *Coordinating requests also means coordinating the resources needed to implement the requests*, on p. 4 has a fuller discussion.

more detail later in this report. The implementation committee may not have decision-making authority, but it can advise the people who do. The committee can monitor the meta-information database, identify which administrators must make priority decisions, and provide the administrators with the necessary background for their decisions. It can also recommend priorities.

Maintaining the university commitment to data-driven decision-making

The Task Force charge includes recommending ways to help decision makers at all levels apply assessment results more effectively. This includes coordinating administrative information requests but is not limited to that. The implementation committee's ongoing review of the meta-information database will give it an overview of the information being gathered and how it is used in decision-making. As described in the next section of this report, the committee will include people from all areas of the university who are actively involved in requesting, providing, or using information for decision-making and who interact regularly with others in their units who are engaged in these activities. Some committee members will be assessment or data-collection experts who help and train front-line units. The executive subcommittee will interact fairly regularly with major decision-making groups such as executive officers, deans, and vice provosts. All of this will give the committee an excellent perspective from which to promote campus-wide dialogue and communication about activities and issues related to information-gathering, assessment, and other data-driven decision-making on campus.

The implementation committee

The implementation committee should report to the Chancellor.[10] It should be charged to (a) implement the proposals that the Task Force is making in this report and (b) adapt those activities and develop new ones as experience dictates.[11] Through its executive subcommittee, the implementation committee will interact frequently with major decision-making groups.[12] To maintain the necessary "big picture" view, the executive subcommittee should report to and hear from these groups fairly regularly even when there are no immediate coordination or priority decisions to be made.

Committee structure: The committee should include people to represent all the roles that are involved in data-driven decision-making - those (or representatives of those):

- who *request information*, such as the directors of administrative offices;
- who *gather the information* that's been requested, such as the staff of centralized data-gathering units, faculty, academic department heads, undergraduate coordinators, and directors of graduate programs, and their equivalents in non-academic departments;
- who are responsible for *reporting university information to external agencies*;
- who *use the data for research and assist others with data-driven decision-making*, such as directors of centralized data-gathering units and campus assessment experts;

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[10] See "process" step (5), on p. 3.
[11] A draft charge to the committee is included as Appendix B.
[12] See "process" steps (3) and (4) on p. 3.

- who *use the information to make data-driven decisions*, such as university executive officers, vice provosts, deans, associate deans, and directors in non-academic divisions, faculty, academic department heads, undergraduate coordinators, and directors of graduate programs, and their equivalents in non-academic departments; and
- who *are affected by data-driven decisions*, such as students, faculty, and staff.

The implementation committee should also have the administrative-unit breadth that characterized the SACS Institutional Effectiveness Compliance Team and the University-wide Assessment Task Force. It should be large enough to generate sub-committees for its work or should be able to create subcommittees easily by pulling in additional people.

Phased implementation: The Task Force members realize that what we have recommended requires resources, adds infrastructure (the committee and the database), work (getting requests and follow-up information to the committee, designing and populating the database, etc.), and assessment activities (evaluating follow-ups, recommending changes as needed, etc.). Some of this is temporary start-up activity, but some will be ongoing. The ongoing activity will be balanced in the long run by more effective and efficient information-gathering and data-driven decision-making and a process to control administrative information requests analogous to UCCC's and GAB's control of course proliferation.

This is a very big job and we strongly suggest *phased implementation*. For example, to develop the meta-information database and the process described on pp. 2-3, the implementation committee might begin with an abbreviated set of administrative information requests. The committee could identify an initial list of requests to work with by asking the major administrative divisions[13] to each suggest a few prominent information requests. The initial list should include the "big three" program assessments (UAPR, GPR, and GER assessment) and should be large enough to provide a range of examples for each database category. It should deliberately include some requests with scheduling overlaps and some that illustrate multiple uses of the same data, so that the committee can work out its process for recommending coordination (etc.)[2] and for getting those recommendations implemented.

We suggest that it will be easier to begin with recurrent requests than ad hoc ones, since recurrent requests determine the general "calendar" or timeline which ad hoc requests affect. Initial recommendations might include aligning "macro" activities such as program review, compact-planning, and accreditation schedules. After that begins to smooth out, the committee could work on more detailed alignments such as data lists and report formats.

Phased implementation will let experience with early phases inform later changes, additions, and developments. Less effort will be expended in false starts. It will give the implementation committee time to identify what works, where, and under what conditions, and to recognize what aspects of units' responses to information requests are similar enough to be blended and what are different enough that they must be kept separate. We expect that how administrative information requests are viewed and what "data-driven decision-making," "assessment," and even "coordination" and "prioritization" mean to people will change with experience.

[13] Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, Research & Graduate Studies, Engagement & Extension, Finance & Business

Clear communication: Once requests are prioritized and resources allocated, the requests must be communicated clearly to the people who will gather, interpret, and use the information. Ambiguous or apparently-conflicting statements of what's wanted and why[14] lead to inefficient response and hard feelings. The implementation committee's process can help requesting units develop instructions that are clear and are understood the same way by all participants. If information about a request is available in the meta-information database well in advance of its deadline, front-line units can give feedback early in the process about confusions and ambiguities that they perceive but which may not have been apparent to those making the request. Improved clarity will also come when implementation subcommittees dealing with particular requests include people with different roles in that request such as "requester," "information provider," and "interpreter of results."

Later tasks: As the implementation committee moves beyond its initial development phase, it is likely to add other tasks supporting data-driven decision making. We mentioned above (p. 4) that coordinating the resources needed for effective response to administrative information requests may include recommendations about centralized training and data-gathering. This, and the committee's regular interactions with executive officers and other university administrative groups (see pp. 3, 6-7) are opportunities for education about assessment and data-driven decision-making. The committee may also find that as it studies how the information gathered in response to administrative requests is used for decision-making, it is "harvesting" results which suggest issues that should be reported to these administrative groups.

Summary of the Task Force's recommendations: The University-wide Assessment Task Force was charged by the Chancellor to recommend ways to improve efficiency and coordination among the university's assessment activities and help decision makers at all levels apply assessment results more effectively. The committee examined overlaps, conflicts, and confusions among administrative information requests; how front-line units respond to these requests, and how the resulting information is used for planning and decision-making at various levels of the university.

We recommend that a broadly representative university-wide Administrative Advisory Committee be established, reporting to the Chancellor. The committee should be charged with facilitating active dialogue about assessment and data-driven decision-making at the university, implementing a procedure to coordinate (etc.)[2] the many requests for relevant data, and assessing the processes that support the university's data-driven decision-making. To serve these activities, we recommend (a) an easily-accessible database of information about data-gathering requests that are made to academic, support, and administrative departments, and (b) a process to review the interactions, costs, and benefits of the requests and use the results of this review to advise appropriate administrators so that requests can be coordinated, prioritized, streamlined, or modified in ways that minimize duplication, overlap, conflicts, and unnecessary activity. The committee should implement these procedures gradually, using a few key information requests

[14] Communicating a request clearly includes accurately presenting the rationale for the request. A recent example illustrates the long-range costs of ambiguous rationales. In the run-up to the university's recent accreditation review, "we need such-and such for the SACS review" was sometimes used as a way to get data-gathering, outcomes assessment processes, planning statements, etc. accomplished more quickly than they otherwise would have been. A consequence is some people's interpretation that accommodating the accreditation review is the only or the primary reason to do some of these things and that they can be dropped now that the review is over.

for initial development and maintaining flexibility to accommodate changes called for by experience and later additions.

Appendix B is a draft charge for the proposed committee. Appendix C offers a few examples of situations the committee might encounter and the actions it might take. As its experience grows, the committee will be able to take on other tasks. Its eventual responsibilities should include whatever activities are necessary to facilitate data-driven decision-making at all levels of the university. It should expand and adapt the database as experience with it suggests. It should recommend ways to increase efficiency and effectiveness by coordinating centralized data-gathering activities and training in assessment activities and use. It should look broadly at assessment and other activities for data-driven decision-making, and the results of those activities, and advise the university's executive officers about relevant issues. And, finally, the committee should educate: it should promote campus-wide dialogue and communication about activities and issues related to assessment and other forms of data-driven decision-making.

Appendix A

Chancellor Fox's charge to the University-wide Assessment Task Force

FROM: Chancellor Marye Anne Fox
SUBJECT: University-wide Assessment Task Force
DATE: January 28, 2004

For nearly 15 years various units across NC State – academic and administrative, undergraduate and graduate – have been developing assessment processes by building on existing program review and evaluation procedures. A team representing all of these units recently reviewed all of these processes for an accreditation report.

This team observed that connections across academic and administrative areas have been particularly effective for developing and streamlining NC State's outcomes assessment activities. I ask you to serve as a member of a university-wide Assessment Task Force established to recommend ways to solidify these partnerships and improve efficient use of assessment resources. I have asked Professor Jeff Scroggs and Dr. Ephraim Schechter to co-chair this committee, with administrative support to be provided by University Planning and Analysis.

The Task Force is directed to report to me by June 30, 2004, with recommendations for improving efficiencies and coordination among the various assessment activities across the university. Furthermore, the Task Force should consider recommendations that would help us apply assessment results more effectively in university policy and planning. These recommendations might include:

- collaboration on training, facilitation, and support;
- use of existing surveys and information-gathering processes to meet more units' needs;
- complementary assessment schedules and other strategies designed to reduce burdens on individual units; and
- a permanent coordinating committee that ensures implementation of the recommendations and continuing efficiency.

Your role on the Task Force is to represent your constituency in the Task Force's deliberations. Thank you in advance for agreeing to add participation on this Task Force to the many ways you support the mission of NC State University.

Task Force Members

Co-Chairs:
Ephraim Schechter, University Director of Assessment
Representing: University assessment staff & Chancellor's Division units
Jeff Scroggs, Associate Professor & Director of Undergraduate Programs (Mathematics)
Representing: Faculty

Marilee Bresciani, Director of Assessment, Division of Undergraduate Affairs
Representing: Undergraduate assessment
Back-up: **Jo Allen**, Interim Vice Provost, Division of Undergraduate Affairs

Jo-Ann Cohen, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, College of Physical & Mathematical Sciences
Representing: Associate Deans
Back-up: **Gil Zuckerman**, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, College of Management

Denis Jackson, Assistant Vice Chancellor, McKimmon Center for Extension & Continuing Education
Representing: Extension & Engagement
Back-up: **Alice Warren**, Associate to the Assistant Vice Chancellor

Duane Larick, Associate Dean of the Graduate School
Representing: Graduate School
Back-up: **Margaret King**, Graduate Program Review consultant

Stephen Margolis, Head, Department of Economics
Representing: Academic Department Heads

Katie Perry, Senior Vice Provost
Representing: Office of the Provost
Back-up: **Judy Peel**, Associate Vice Provost for Faculty Development

Kevin Rice, Assistant Director for Training Services, Human Resources
Representing: Finance & Business

Matt Ronning, Associate Vice Chancellor for Research Administration
Representing: Research Administration
Back-up: **Richard Best**, Associate Director, Research Administration & Sponsored Programs

Joni Spurlin, Director of Assessment, College of Engineering
Representing: University assessment staff

Rebecca Swanson, Director, Distance Education Planning & Development
Representing: Distance Education

Carrie Zelna, Director of Assessment, Student Affairs
Representing: Student Affairs
Back-up: **Lisa Zapata**, Assistant Vice Chancellor, Student Affairs

Appendix B

DRAFT charge to the proposed implementation committee

TO: [*people suggested as members of the committee*]
FROM: [*the Chancellor*]

In Spring 2004, the Chancellor and Provost established a university-wide task force to study (a) how NC State can make it easier for academic, support, and administrative departments to answer administrative units' many requests for information and (b) how the university can help units at all levels effectively use the resulting information for data-based decision-making. The task force's charge, membership, and final report are available on the Web at *http://www2.acs.ncsu.edu/UPA/assmt/atf/*.

The task force recommended that a broadly representative Administrative Advisory Committee be established to (a) provide a forum for and encourage active dialogue about assessment and data-driven decision-making, and (b) implement and further develop procedures to coordinate the many requests for relevant data and assess the processes that support the university's data-driven decision-making.

The task force recommended processes and tools for the committee to use in accomplishing this charge and a phased implementation to adapt and develop them. Other recommended tasks are to be implemented as the committee's experience grows and as university needs require. The committee's eventual responsibilities will include whatever activities are necessary to facilitate data-driven decision-making at all levels of the university.

I ask you to represent [*constituency*] as a member of this committee. The committee will report to me. I have asked [*chair or co-chairs*] to chair the committee, and administrative support will be provided by [*yet to be decided*].

The committee will:

- implement the recommended process to review administrative information requests and how the resulting information is used in data-driven decision-making;
- develop the database of meta-information about requests and uses that the task force recommends as a tool to facilitate this review;
- use the results of the review to advise appropriate administrators (a) how requests can be coordinated, prioritized, streamlined, or modified in ways that minimize duplication, conflicts, confusion, and unnecessary activity and (b) how the resulting information can be used effectively for data-driven decision-making;
- report regularly to me about the recommendations it has made and the results of the recommended actions;

As it gains experience with these activities, the committee will also:

- expand and adapt the processes and tools as its experience with them suggests;
- recommend ways to increase efficiency and effectiveness by coordinating centralized data-gathering activities and training in assessment activities and use;

- promote campus-wide dialogue and communication about activities and issues related to assessment and other forms of data-driven decision-making; and
- look broadly at assessment and other activities for data-driven decision-making, and the results of those activities, and advise me and the university's executive officers about relevant issues.

Your role is to participate in these activities and represent your constituency in the committee's deliberations. Thank you in advance for agreeing to add participation on this committee to the many ways you support the mission of NC State University.

Cc: [*supervisors of the people invited to serve on the committee*]

Appendix C

Examples of situations the committee might encounter and the actions it might take

1. **Coordinating related assessment processes**
(suggested by the Associate Deans for Academic Affairs)

In the present stage of Undergraduate Academic Program Review (UAPR), the Committee on Undergraduate Program Review asks programs to "close the loop" on at least one outcome each year. That is, each program is to assess at least one of its student learning outcomes each year, report results of the assessment, and describe actions taken on the basis of those results or why no actions were needed or were taken. On the other hand, the Graduate School has proposed a two-year "close-the-loop" cycle as part of its revised Graduate Program Review (GPR) process. Any of several models might be used to coordinate the UAPR and GPR processes. The implementation committee would consult with CUPR and those implementing GPR, as well as representatives from relevant academic departments, to explore the situation and issues. It might recommend simply that CUPR and the Graduate School get together and resolve the apparent contradiction. The committee's exploration might also lead to specific suggestions such as a different time interval that would give departments the necessary freedom and flexibility.

2. **Feedback on whether & how requested information was used in a decision**

Faculty and staff housed at the northwest end of the university's main campus have commented that recent changes in the parking facilities at that end of campus do not seem to reflect their input, which was requested several times by NC State Transportation. While this does not necessarily mean decisions did not take their input into account, it is an example of the reaction when those who respond to an information request are not told how their information is used. The implementation committee might recommend that future requests of this type include plans for such feedback, and check periodically to see whether the feedback is effective.

3. **Coordinating centralized data summaries**

Both the Graduate School and University Planning & Analysis provide summaries of institutional-records data such as admissions, enrollment, and student progress. The summaries are available on the Web for colleges and academic departments to use in, for example, their periodic program reviews. The two offices are already discussing ways to reduce overlap and duplication. The implementation committee might (a) urge these offices to continue their coordination activities, (b) urge the Provost to provide short-term resources that might be necessary, and (c) help program-review requests indicate clearly the various places where relevant summaries can be found.

4. Resolving timing conflicts and coordinating the reporting calendar

The Capital Assets Management System (CAMS) is the university process that satisfies the state legislative requirement for an annual inventory of equipment and other capital assets. According to the university policy establishing CAMS, the Capital Assets Office distributes formats and instructions to university colleges and departments in February of each year. Units can update their information in the CAMS system as changes occur, and the annual inventory reports are due back to CAMS by March 31st, which is often when units are doing other clean-up and reporting activities for the end of the academic and fiscal years. The timing lets the Capital Assets Office report to the legislature by the end of the fiscal year, but since the units' inventories are completed by March 31st, they are not "fiscal year summaries" as such. The implementation committee might look into possibilities for a more flexible reporting schedule.

5. Coordinating resources

In the course of its reviews, the implementation committee may see opportunities for units to coordinate resources and share experience and training. For example, the College of Engineering (COE) has focused on course-based outcomes assessment for its UAPR reports and ABET[15] program accreditations. Academic departments involved in the current phase of GER assessment[16] have also been asked to develop course-based outcomes assessments. The committee might suggest to the appropriate deans and department heads that COE's Director of Assessment and COE faculty with experience in course-based assessment could help the departments that are developing course-based GER assessments. For example, COE's Director of Assessment has helped the Department of Mathematics with assessment of some general education courses, which has assisted COE program assessment, Mathematics' program assessment, and Mathematics' GER assessment. The committee might also suggest to the Dean of Engineering and to the Council on Undergraduate Education[17] that CUE could review COE's UAPR and ABET reports for examples of course-based outcomes assessment.

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[15] ABET: Accrediting Board for Engineering and Technology.
[16] GER: General Education Requirements. Information about GER assessment at NC State is available at *http://www.ncsu.edu/undergrad_affairs/assessment/files/ger/assess_plan.htm*.
[17] The Council on Undergraduate Education (CUE) is the NC State faculty standing committee that advises on general education policy.

Appendix D

Memorandum:
to Chancellor Fox from the SACS Compliance Institutional Effectiveness Team

To:	Chancellor Marye Anne Fox
From:	Ephraim Schechter and Jeff Scroggs for the SACS Compliance Institutional Effectiveness Team
Date:	January 12, 2004
Subject:	Recommendation for a university-wide assessment council

In the course of developing the SACS compliance report on Institutional Effectiveness, the committee assigned this task observed that connections across academic and administrative areas have been particularly effective for developing and streamlining NC State's outcomes assessment activities. The Institutional Effectiveness Compliance Team recommends that a university-wide assessment council be established to solidify these partnerships and improve efficient use of assessment resources.

The most intense and organized developments in assessment at NC State during the past decade have been in assessing undergraduate student learning outcomes. Our success here comes from identifying programs and projects that already have effective assessment processes, connecting people with each other, and having those people teach their techniques to others. These connections expanded as a result of the Institutional Effectiveness Compliance Team's work and now extend beyond undergraduate education, most clearly so far in the Graduate School and in Student Affairs but also in other areas of the university.

The Institutional Effectiveness Compliance Team proposes that a university-wide assessment council be established to continue and expand these connections and overlaps and to represent NC State's general commitment to results-driven planning. Our experience in undergraduate education is that people, time, and other resources are used more effectively this way than with isolated and independent assessment developments. A university-wide group with this charge would include administrators and faculty members representing the university's academic and administrative areas, similar to the makeup of the SACS Institutional Effectiveness Compliance Team. The proposed assessment council would have members representing the faculty, undergraduate and graduate students, NC State assessment professionals, the Division of Undergraduate Affairs and other units involved in undergraduate assessment activities, the Graduate School, other Provost's-area activities, the Chancellors'-division units, Student Affairs, Extension & Engagement, Finance & Business, and Research Administration. It would be staffed and chaired by UPA, at least initially, and co-chaired by a full-time faculty member.

An initial version of this council might be based on the Institutional Effectiveness Compliance Team. It would be expected to meet monthly, at least at first, and its tasks would include:

- addressing trends and shared issues in assessment activity across the university;
- fostering partnerships among the academic and administrative areas' assessment processes to encourage efficient use of resources such as collaboration on training, facilitation, and support; use of existing surveys and information-gathering processes to

meet more units' needs; and complementary assessment schedules and other strategies designed to reduce burdens on individual units;

- advising the chancellor and EOM about campus assessment activities, and serving as a communication channel between EOM and the assessment leaders in each university area; and
- reporting to the chancellor and EOM at least twice a year on shared issues related to or resulting from assessment that are pertinent to university policy and planning.

Appendix E

Memorandum:
to Provost Oblinger and others from the Associate Deans for Academic Affairs

October 16, 2003

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