Assessment at Indiana State University:
A Conceptual Framework

Recognizing the need for organized and ongoing assessment of student achievement and program objectives, Indiana State University (ISU) has developed and adopted the following assessment plan. The ultimate responsibility for academic assessment belongs to the faculty; the responsibility for assessment of non-academic units resides with the administrators and managers. ISU, through Board action has established a standing University committee (Assessment Council) which is charged with the responsibility of developing, monitoring and guiding the ongoing institutional assessment activities to assure a process of continuous improvement exists with the ultimate goal of improving learning and student support services.

Assessment

Assessment is defined as one or more processes that identify, collect, and prepare data to evaluate the attainment of student outcomes and program/unit objectives. Effective assessment uses relevant direct, indirect, quantitative and qualitative measures as appropriate to the objective or outcome being measured. Appropriate sampling methods may be used as part of an assessment process.

Guiding Principles

- ISU is committed to realizing a culture of assessment through the development of a unified, coherent assessment program that leads to continuous improvement.
- Assessment and continuous improvement based on data-driven feedback are as important for non-academic areas as for academic programs. While such efforts will take on a different character and employ different approaches than those used by the academic departments, non-academic offices and units are expected to participate fully in institutional assessment efforts.
- The faculty and departments of ISU, given their curricular role and responsibility, have primary responsibility for the development, implementation, and maintenance of all academic assessment activities.
- A primary purpose of assessment is the evaluation and the improvement of student learning, not the evaluation of faculty teaching or individual performance.
- Assessment requires clearly defined objectives and outcomes. Statements of desired educational objectives and learning outcomes for undergraduate, graduate, and general education programs originate with, and are approved by, the faculty.

- A systemic assessment plan will be developed to provide a framework and general guidance for the ongoing process of gathering, interpreting, and using information for quality improvement in student academic achievement and in student support services.
- Assessment efforts are expected to focus on program quality as well as related activities that contribute to the academic development of students; individual classroom assessment provides information that is useful in understanding the instructional environment and may contribute and help inform broader departmental assessment efforts.
- Assessment of programs and offices should flow from, and be consistent with, the institutional mission.
- It is the responsibility of each program or office to develop its own assessment procedures, appropriate methods of assessment, and educational intervention/alteration based on the results of its assessment of student achievement. Such efforts should be accomplished in such a way as to be consistent with, and complementary to, the broader institutional assessment efforts.
- Assessment and the use of assessment results should be attentive to cultural diversity and be conducted in a culturally sensitive manner.
- Assessment data aggregated at the program/office level will form the most basic unit used for quality assessment and improvement.

Purposes of Assessment

Indiana State University has established the following statement of purposes to support a shared understanding of student outcomes assessment. The purposes of assessment include, but are not limited to, the following:

- To increase student achievement in both curricular and cocurricular areas.
- To ensure the integrity of awarded degrees.
- To evaluate and document the competence of graduates of Indiana State University, with competence defined not only as expertise within a discipline, but also defined as the attainment of learning outcomes defined in the University's program of Foundational Studies (undergraduate) and Graduate Council Student Learning Outcomes (master's and doctoral).
- To focus the institutional mission on quality and level of student achievement.
- To improve instruction, curriculum, and other teaching-related activities.
- To improve service delivery, effectiveness, and other operational activities.
- To promote faculty and staff development and to improve programs, program planning, and development.
- To facilitate articulation of the University's core learning outcomes.

Charge to the Assessment Council

 The Assessment Council is the primary governance unit charged with guiding and overseeing institution-wide assessment activities with the goal of facilitating more consistent and effective assessment in order to improve student learning outcomes. The Council is charged with identifying assessment issues, developing policy recommendations, facilitating assessment activities and advocating/promoting the adoption of best practices in assessment.

Specifically, the Council is charged with:

- developing an institutional assessment plan that is consistent with the institutional mission
- promoting the implementation of an institutional assessment plan
- recommending institutional assessment procedures and policies that facilitate assessment activities and that encourage the development of a culture of assessment
- monitoring and promoting the use of discipline appropriate assessment principles and tools
- conducting periodic reviews of departmental assessment activities and provide formative feedback
- publishing an annual institutional update on assessment activities

The Council will conduct its activities with the recognition of the centrality of faculty responsibility for student learning and in conjunction with the principles of shared governance. The Council will also work with non-academic areas to ensure that unit assessment is performed on a periodic basis and that information derived from those efforts result in the process of continuous improvement.

The annual review of assessment activities at Indiana State will be prepared in concert with the various departments and offices across the institution. The report will summarize appropriate data in such a way to demonstrate the progress of assessment activities as well as to document progress toward the goal of creating a culture of assessment in both the academic and non-academic areas. The Assessment Council will also include assessment information prepared by the committee charged with the oversight of the Foundational Studies program. These materials will be made available with suitable analysis or interpretation to each program, Faculty Senate and to Academic Affairs. In conjunction with this review, the Assessment Council will monitor the assessment plans of the various units and provide formative feedback as appropriate. The Assessment Council will also solicit feedback concerning the overall institutional assessment activities to ensure that the assessment guidelines, framework and processes are of the greatest use and value to the university and faculty who are engaged in program assessment. The Council will make recommendations as needed for the improvement of the assessment program.

 Assessment Council Composition

The Assessment Council will be composed of 20 members and will meet monthly during the fall and spring semesters (Sept, Oct, Nov, Feb, Mar and Apr).   An eight-member core leadership team will serve as a smaller working executive group to provide general leadership to the Council as well as support and facilitate the work of the larger Council membership. The core leadership team will meet twice a month.   The Assessment Coordinator will be an ex-officio member of the Council.

The members of the Assessment Council will be appointed as follows:

(5) - Faculty Representative (1 appointed by each College) ✳
(2) – Faculty At-Large (2 appointed by Faculty Senate)
(1) – Library ✳
(1) – Academic Affairs (Associate VP) ✳
(1) – Director of Institutional Research and Assessment ✳
(2) – Associate Deans (annual rotation – 2 year staggered terms/renewable)
(2) – Students (1 UG / 1 GR appointed by Student Government)
(2) – Student Affairs
(1) – Business Affairs
(1) – Enrollment Services
(1) – Graduate School
(1) – Assessment Coordinator (ex-officio, speaking seat)

✳ - Core Leadership Team

 Stages of Assessment

Just as assessment activities, strategies, and approaches will manifest themselves differently from one program to another, programs and offices will understandably be at different stages of development in their assessment efforts. In an effort to facilitate level of support in such things as professional development, assessment support, etc. The Assessment Council has established four categories to describe the various stages of assessment development:

1. Formative – the program/office is in the early phases of assessment: the unit may or may not have learning objectives documented; the unit has assigned assessment efforts only to an individual; assessment work has been limited to episodic activity, typically in response to external demands.
2. Emerging – the program/office is working on assessment: the unit has created learning objectives and mapped courses or activities to those objectives; the unit has identified the types of evidence to be collected and may have collected some data; assessment work involves only a couple of faculty or staff members.
3. Mature – the program/office has been working on assessment for some time: the unit has identified and is collecting evidence; there is some indication of

using findings to make changes; assessment work involves multiple faculty or staff; the program/office is moving toward a culture of assessment.

4. Exemplary – the program/office has a well established and effective assessment process: assessment data are being used to refine and improve programs and activities; assessment work includes all or most of the faculty or staff members; there is clear indication of a culture of assessment.

Common Assessment Terms

To establish an effective framework for assessment across the institution and to provide appropriate support and tools, it is necessary to establish a common language that can be used to talk about assessment. To that end, a set of common terms have been included (and defined) in Appendix A.

Assessment Goals and Instruments

Programs and offices will be responsible for the development of individual mission statements and statements of program goals and student learning objectives.

- Programs/offices should employ appropriate measures of student achievement that will yield information its faculty or staff can use to evaluate and improve its program.
- Programs/offices will be the sole arbiter of which data and/or instruments will be used to establish the quality of their respective units.
- Academic programs are encouraged to use both direct measures (performance appraisals, portfolios, exams, etc.) of student learning as well as indirect measures (student satisfaction, retention, grades, etc.). Non-academic units are encouraged to use both direct measures (e.g., usage statistics) of program effectiveness as well as indirect measures (e.g., user satisfaction surveys).

As a general statement such data/instruments may include, but are not limited to, the following: surveys of or interviews with employers of recent graduates; rates of admission to graduate or professional schools; student portfolios; capstones courses; senior theses or projects; and visits by external committees. Data/instruments for non-academic units may include skill development inventories; cost/benefit analyses; and external reviews.

Assessment of Foundational Studies

The assessment of Foundational Studies (general education) should be conducted in manner consistent with the same principles that guide the assessment of academic programs (see Guiding Principles above). Responsibility for assessment and improvement of Foundational Studies will rest with the committee that is charged with the guidance of that program. Within that framework, Foundational Studies should

conduct assessment with at least two purposes in mind: 1) to determine if students are achieving the education goals outlined in the Foundational Studies program; and 2) to improve instruction and to increase student academic achievement in the area of education addressed by the Foundational Studies program through a process of systematic feedback to faculty, academic programs, and the administration.

Assessment of Graduate Programs

The coordination of graduate programs involves the respective colleges and departments, the College of Graduate and Professional Studies and the Graduate Council (a standing committee of Faculty Senate). As with undergraduate programs, responsibility for assessment and student learning outcomes rests with the department and faculty.

In 2009, the College of Graduate and Professional Studies and the Graduate Council recognized a core set of five student learning outcomes that are shared across all graduate programs in a document entitled "Assurance of Student Learning – Graduate Education at Indiana State University." The stated purpose of that initiative (and related processes) "is to enable programs and the broader community of the graduate faculty to reflect on and discuss the overall quality of the student learning experience and to identify strategies (curricular or co-curricular) for program improvement." The responsibility for assessment of these shared learning outcomes remains with the College of Graduate and Professional Studies and the Graduate Council.

Assessment Coordinator

The University administration believes strongly in the need to support assessment efforts formally. In part, this support is realized through staffing of a full time Assessment Coordinator. The coordinator has responsibility to support academic (curriculum and program) and non-academic assessment as well as other activities related to continuous improvement initiatives and efforts to enhance institutional performance and student learning outcomes. Appendix B provides a detailed job description for the position of Assessment Coordinator.

Appendix A
Terms and Definitions

Recognizing the need for a common language to facilitate discussion on, and work related to, assessment, the following terms have been defined:

Program Educational Objectives – Broad statements that describe what graduates are expected to attain within a few years after graduation.

Student Outcomes – A description of what students are expected to know and able to do by the time of graduation. These relate to the knowledge, skills, and behaviors that students acquire as they progress through the program.

Performance Criteria – Specific measurable statements identifying the performance(s) required to meet the outcome; confirmable through evidence.

Evaluation – One or more processes for interpreting the data and evidence accumulated through assessment processes. Evaluation determines the extent to which student outcomes and program objectives are being attained. Evaluation results in decisions and actions regarding program improvement.

Assessment - one or more processes that identify, collect, and prepare data to evaluate the attainment of student outcomes and program objectives. Effective assessment uses relevant direct, indirect, quantitative, and qualitative measures as appropriate to the objective or outcome being measured. Appropriate sampling methods may be used as part of an assessment process.

Additional terms will be added as needed

Appendix B
Role of Assessment Coordinator

The Assessment Coordinator will report to the Director of Institutional Research and Assessment with responsibility for curriculum and program assessment, this person will support department and office activities related to continuous improvement initiatives and efforts to support and enhance institutional performance and student learning outcomes. This person will work with academic and nonacademic leadership, departments and programs to assure that ISU meets the assessment requirements of the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association and other accrediting organizations. The initial emphasis will be placed on program assessment in anticipation of a November 2010 NCA accreditation visit. The individual will also work closely with the assessment leadership team and related committees to develop a culture of assessment at Indiana State University.

Responsibilities of the Assessment Coordinator shall include the following:

- Provide technical support for faculty and staff and all matters relating to assessment. In that role, the coordinator will serve as consultant to departments/units/programs on:
    - developing measurable objectives,
    - assessing student learning outcomes and interpreting results,
    - using results of student learning outcomes to improve student learning,
    - maintaining adequate documentation of assessment efforts and results,
    - revising assessment effort.
- Serve supporting role for accreditation activities by working with and advising departments and colleges in the preparation for institutional, college, and discipline accreditations.
- Perform data analysis and interpretation, writing as well as disseminating reports. The coordinator will also prepare reports and publications on assessment for faculty, administrators, students, and the public.
- Work with the University Assessment Council, and Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs to coordinate assessment across the University. Serves as an ex-officio member (speaking seat) of the University Assessment Council
- Obtain information from units and work with units to assure that reporting is complete and accurate.
- Support web based campus communication activities including assistance with the maintenance of the Institutional Research and Assessment website through the contribution of assessment information and resources.
- Identify professional development needs and collaboration with the Center for Instruction, Research and Technology (CIRT) and work with CIRT to plan and deliver professional development opportunities and training related to assessment.

- Coordinate assessment work and projects with other offices such as Student Affairs and Business Affairs on assessment projects.
- Provide data and assist with analysis and interpretation in support of scholarly work on assessment.
- Provide support for various office projects. Serve as a member of the Academic Affairs team and aid in projects as needed. Serve on university committees as assigned by the AVP and the Director, Institutional Research and Assessment.