Eastern Washington University

Assessment and Accountability Plan

Purpose and Scope of Assessment & Accountability at the University

First and foremost, the University, as a responsible steward of the authority granted to it as a publically funded institution in Washington state, openly recognizes and embraces its ethical responsibilities for accountability to its stakeholders. To that end, the University encourages data gathering and critical analysis at all levels of the university community. All areas of the University are expected to engage in systematic self-assessment and to use the results of assessment activities as one basis for strategic change and improvement. Academic programs are specially charged with measuring the impact of the curriculum and pedagogy on student learning and success. The University has devoted itself to comprehensive review and data-informed decision making for policy development and practice implementation. The purpose of this plan is to outline a university infrastructure for meeting our assessment and accountability obligations to the state, accrediting bodies, and student stakeholders in addition to specifying the methods through which these activities will be implemented.

I. Infrastructure Supporting Assessment & Accountability

The University charges its assessment and accountability activities to an identified set of key committees and offices, including leadership from Academic Affairs. Budgetary funds for assessment and accountability are provided through various funding lines from the Provost’s Office, the Strategic Planning Pool, and the Office of Institutional Research, Demography and Assessment operating budgets.

Vice-Provost: Graduate Education, Research, Academic Planning and Evaluation

The Vice Provost for Graduate Education, Research, Academic Planning and Evaluation has a significant role in the assessment activities at Eastern Washington University. He serves as the contact and reporting link between EWU and the State of Washington Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB), the body that approves new programs or revised programs for the State of Washington. As the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU) Liaison Officer, the Vice Provost submits all substantive change requests to the NWCCU and serves as the lead for preparing any reports (Interim Focused Reports, Yearly Reports, etc) that are required by the NWCCU. He is also a member of the Provost’s Advisory Committee on Assessment, Institutional Effectiveness and Accountability, representing the Provost’s Office on this committee. Finally, the Vice Provost is the official at EWU responsible for leading the program reviews that are required of every program once in every ten years by the HECB. He identifies which programs are to be reviewed in a given academic year, convenes the Program Review Committee (a subcommittee of the Academic Senate), and assigns the members of the committee to the various department program reviews.
Provost’s Committee on Assessment, Institutional Effectiveness and Accountability

Formally developed in 2005, this standing committee serves as the primary institutional coordinating body for assessment and accountability activities for the University. AIEA consists of cross-divisional membership including:

- One member from each of the Divisions of Business and Finance, Student Affairs, Academic Affairs and University Advancement
- One member from the Office of Institutional Research, Demography & Assessment
- Two College Deans or their designees
- Three members of the faculty nominated by the Faculty Organization
- One member from the General Education Coordinating Committee (recommendation)
- One member from the Teaching & Learning Center (recommendation)

The committee provides advice and recommendations directly to the Provost and to other governing bodies through its members. It is charged to:

1. review all EWU assessment and accountability initiatives.
2. develop, monitor and report on EWU’s Assessment and Accountability Plan.
3. suggest revisions and/or additions to current policy and practice to complement the university’s Strategic Plan.

Office of Institutional Research, Demography & Assessment

In addition to ensuring that the University meets its obligations for mandatory enrollment reporting to Washington state and the Department of Education, this office has responsibility for designing and conducting critical institutional studies and communicating the results to administrative leadership, staff and faculty. As a member of the AIEA committee, the office also provides personnel support required for assessment projects, maintains an Assessment Resource Library, serves as the Assessment Lead for state-wide assessment meetings, provides assessment consultation as needed, and coordinates funding for university-level assessment projects. Office personnel also engage in development and maintenance of the AIEA data portal system, the web-based software designed to gather and report student learning outcomes data for program and General Education assessment.

General Education Coordinating Committee

Assessment of the general education curriculum is the responsibility of the General Education Coordinating Committee (GECC), a committee of the Undergraduate Affairs Council in Faculty Organization. The committee maintains the assessment calendar for general education, conducts development workshops, and gathers/reports on results from each assessment cycle as described in Section III of this plan.

Teaching & Learning Center

The TLC advises and coordinates with AIEA on development activities for faculty and staff regarding the intersection between student learning and pedagogy. The Center also provides guidance to faculty who are incorporating technology into their instructional delivery, including relevant methods for assessing the impact of the medium.
Other supporting groups

Assessment and accountability activities at the University are also guided and influenced by the ongoing work and feedback from several standing committees at the university including:

- Strategic Planning Council
- Enrollment Management Team
- University Budget Committee
- Accreditation Steering Committee
- College- and department-level disciplinary accreditation committees

II. Assessment for Accountability & Institutional Effectiveness

Assessment and accountability are directly tied together in the strategic planning process, mandatory accountability reporting and internal institutional studies in the following ways.

Strategic & Action Planning Assessment

All functional units have prepared (1) strategic plans that identified up to 5 goal areas connected to the University’s strategic goals and envisioned progress over a five year period and (2) action plans that specifically addressed at least one strategy from the strategic plan to be accomplished over the next academic year. Units were encouraged to make this effort fully participative by incorporating all relevant faculty or staff in their respective area. Development workshops were conducted by members from the Strategic Planning Council and AIEA. AIEA reviews the assessment strategies for all strategic action plans submitted by units. An AIEA member works with any units where the strategies or instruments need to be revised. At the conclusion of the Action Plan time period, each unit submits in the portal a summary of the results and plans for actions to be taken. AIEA reviews the reports, works with any unit needing assistance, and create a summary report of all activities. This report is submitted to the Strategic Planning Council.

Budget Assessment

A cyclic assessment process is integral to the budgeting process at EWU. As per the Resource Allocation task Force Final Report dated May 21, 2008, all divisional budget proposals must include a brief narrative description and justification, a tie to the University Strategic Plan, the impact of no or partial funding, and a proposed assessment plan. A suitable budget proposal is described as including as assessment plan, which includes what will be measured and how that measure will indicate success. The Biennial budget outcome assessment reports are submitted to the University Budget Committee and the President by the Provost and VPs comparing funding allocation with actual spending, outcome and assessment measures and executive level progress on Strategic Plan goals. Final reports will be posted to the university website and made widely available to the campus community. This accountability step is in accord with the intent of new legislation concerning accountability in higher education, which established a performance agreement for public higher education institutions. As noted in the
legislation: The goals and outcomes identified in a performance agreement shall be linked to the role, mission, and strategic plan of the institution of higher education and aligned with the statewide strategic master plan for higher education. (EHB 2641, *Higher Education Performance Agreements*, p. 3)

**Accountability Reporting**

The University has several structured mechanisms through which it addresses its official accountability responsibilities. Eastern submits a variety of reports to the state Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB) and the Office of Financial Management (OFM) on a regular cycle. In particular, the University reports annually on the following accountability measures and has incorporated them into its strategic planning process (see category 7.1b):

- overall annual degree award production (undergraduate and graduate),
- degree award production in areas of high demand,
- Freshman retention and 6 year graduation rates,
- three-year graduation rate for graduates originating for Washington state community or technical colleges, and
- graduation efficiency (i.e., number of students graduating with less than 126% of required credits for their degrees)

In addition to the annual HECB accountability reporting, the University has spent the past 2 years in conversation with the state Performance Agreement Committee regarding the development of an institutional performance agreement. Should this process move forward, this document will be framed in the focus of our strategic plan. Finally, the University must report official enrollment numbers and progress on strategic planning to OFM as part of our annual or biennial budgeting process. The University also participates in a decennial HECB program review process for each program of study to maintain state approval for program delivery. The results these reviews are used to focus programmatic and service changes needed at the university and reallocate funding to support realignment of resources to meet the recommendations of these regulatory bodies.

Finally, the University has joined the **Voluntary System of Accountability** (VSA) as an inaugural member. We have provided university data in the VSA College Portrait program, designed to provide publicly-accessible information to prospective students and their parents about the University, its academic programs and success.

**Institutional Studies**

The Office of Institutional Research, Demography & Assessment routinely conducts institutional studies on student success particularly in the areas of retention, graduation rates and employment.

The University participates in the American College Testing’s *Collegiate Academic Achievement Program* which measures Freshman and Senior students’ skills in writing and critical thinking and provides us with comparison data (Sec.7.d). These data are shared with senior leadership during planning retreats and included in our VSA College Portrait. We gain valuable information from alumni and employers through advisory groups developed as part of our disciplinary accreditation process.
Stakeholder Surveys

EWU uses the data from a variety of student, staff and faculty surveys as indicators of satisfaction with the university’s services or academic offerings and measures engagement in academic and co-curricular activities. Surveys are administered to students throughout the course of their academic career. The current surveys and the data they provide include:

- **The Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE)** - entering college students’ high school academic and co-curricular experiences, as well as expectations for first college year.
- **Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP)** – previous year activities, general attitudes, and educational aspirations for entering Freshman.
- **The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)** – Freshman and Senior participation in programs and activities related to learning and personal development.
- **Survey of Student Opinions (SSO)** - students’ use of and satisfaction with a variety of university services and other aspects of the campus environment.
- **Graduate Student Exit Survey and Alumni Surveys** - quality and effectiveness of educational programs and support services.
- **Employer Surveys** – employer evaluations of graduates’ strengths and weaknesses.

### III. Assessing Student Learning Outcomes in Academic Programs

The EWU Assessment & Accountability Plan seeks to provide a consistent, integrated process for academic assessment. We begin with four basic premises that guide our plan: (1) program goals and student learning outcomes are to be organically-derived and reflect the current state of disciplinary expectation and values for high quality graduates; (2) program goals and student learning outcomes form a crucial base from which to assess program progress and student success; (3) many different forms of observation, interaction, data collection, and related activities can all lead to successful assessment; and (4) the precise nature of individual assessment activities is ultimately both the responsibility and the domain of the faculty and academic programs involved.

An undergraduate academic degree at EWU consists of two main components: general education requirements and discipline-specific content. Both components have established goals and student learning outcomes. The following plan outlines a process for assessing these outcomes.

**General Education Assessment**

General Education assessment is the responsibility of the General Education Coordinating Committee (GECC). This group manages the learning outcomes for general education and selects one outcome to be assessed each year. Goals have been established in the following areas: writing, mathematics, computer literacy, natural
science, social science, arts and humanities, cultural and gender diversity and international studies. Assessment occurs on a three-year cycle:

Year 1 – University Competencies/Proficiencies
   Mathematics, Writing, Computer Literacy

Year 2 – Core Areas
   Natural Science, Social Science, Arts & Humanities

Year 3 - Graduation Requirements
   Cultural & Gender Diversity, International Studies, Capstone

Faculty who teach the courses submit an assessment strategy and instrument to GECC. GECC reviews and advises concerning appropriate strategies and instrument. Faculty administer assessment, summarize, and review results to determine appropriate actions. The summaries, results, and actions to be taken are reported on the portal. GECC reviews this information. GECC summarizes all reports for the year. This summary is submitted to the Office of Institutional Research, Demography & Assessment, the Undergraduate Affairs Council and the Faculty Senate.

Academic program assessment

Each academic department establishes program goals and corresponding student outcomes for all academic programs offered through the department. These goals have been posted on the EWU portal. The goals are assessed on a three-year cycle. In fall 2007, each department was required to indicate which program goals and student outcomes would be assessed during the 2007-2008 academic year. Departments will also determine which of the remaining goals and outcomes will be assessed in 2008-2009; those not assessed in the first two years of the cycle will be assessed in 2009-2010. It is planned that the three-year cycle will begin again in the 2010-2011 academic year, and the goals assessed in the current academic year will be assessed at that time. Departments will be able to check to see if changes made in response to results in 2007-2008 have resulted in the desired improvement in students’ learning (or some attribute related to students’ success.)

After collecting data for each year of the assessment cycle, academic departments will use the results to determine areas where improvement in students’ learning is needed. Then, faculty in the department responsible for the program will make decisions on necessary changes in curriculum, pedagogy, or program goals. At the conclusion of each academic year, academic departments will post assessment results, department conclusions, and planned changes on the EWU portal. In addition to making decisions regarding curriculum, pedagogy, and goals, departments may make decisions regarding the utility of the assessment strategies and procedures.
The process described in the two preceding paragraphs results in ongoing data collection and assessment of students’ learning. This assessment is most useful to the faculty who teach in an academic program; however, for some departments, it is required by professional accrediting agencies. In addition, the state of Washington requires each program at EWU to undergo program review every 10 years. The portal allows storage of assessment results from each academic year. These can be pulled for the last several years, and can be used in assessment reports to the state or to professional accrediting agencies. More important is the fact the department can view the results from several years. In addition, the dean of a college can use the portal to see areas of strength or weakness across the departments in the college.

Course Assessment

Assessment of students’ outcomes related to specific course objectives is generally informal and is generally initiated by the course instructor (or course coordinator when one instructor is assigned the role of facilitator of instruction for multiple sections of a course.) Instructors collect data from exams or projects, and use the information to improve instruction in subsequent quarters. Unless requested to develop a report related to this assessment, the information obtained is used only by the instructor who initiated the assessment.

In addition to instructor-developed assessment activities, our faculty union collective bargaining agreement calls for the use of a standardized individual course assessment instrument. In fall 2008, such an instrument was adopted through the Individual Development and Education Assessment Center. Administered through the college Dean’s office, the instrument provides feedback on student experiences in the course and is evaluated based on the stated
Development Opportunities and Assessment

AIEA is committed to incorporating opportunities for faculty and staff learning and development into the University Assessment and Accountability Plan. The following programs, made available annually, are open to all members of the university community.

**Winter Showcase on Assessment**

The Winter Showcase on Assessment has brought acclaimed experts in the area of assessment to present interactive workshops to EWU faculty and staff. In the past four years presenters include: Dr. Vincent Tinto, Dr. George Kuh, Dr. John M. Braxton, and Sylvia Hurtado. The Winter Showcase is co-sponsored by EWU Academic Affairs and the EWU Office of Institutional Research, Demography and Assessment to promote faculty development in the area of assessment and student success. An all-day celebration, the Showcase also includes a poster session highlighting new literature or assessment accomplishments of EWU colleges, departments and faculty and a keynote address by our featured speaker in addition to the workshops.

**Summer Institutes on Teaching, Learning & Assessment**

The Summer Institutes on Teaching, Learning & Assessment involve one-day development sessions on various topics including (1) use of the AIEA data portal; (2) goal and objective writing; (3) forms of assessment methods or strategies; and (4) planning for student learning outcome assessment. SITLA involve faculty, department chairs and staff interested in or involved in student learning.

**Assessment Mini-grant Program**

The mini-grant program is designed to provide modest funding to special projects that support the assessment plans of programs and departments.