

Learning Outcomes Assessment at Western Oregon University

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I. Introduction

In the last decade, WOU has undertaken a major effort to clarify, articulate and publish the goals of its educational programs and the learning outcomes for each degree and certificate program. In addition to the campus's success in identifying and listing program outcomes, many programs are emphasizing rigorous assessment of learning outcomes and the use of clearly defined assessment processes that are increasingly integrated into the overall planning and evaluation plan.

An excellent example of well-articulated assessment, the College of Education historically has developed exemplary performance assessment models and established a stellar record of using evidence to make programmatic decisions. Since the 1970's, the College of Education and Teaching Research Institute faculty have been guided by the principle that teachers' effectiveness should be measured by their ability to effectuate learning gains in their students. Teacher Work Sample Methodology developed by WOU faculty assesses measurable gains in student learning through clear descriptions of desired outcomes, pre- and post-assessments, consideration of content and contexts in which teaching and learning occur, and opportunities for faculty members to employ data in order to improve outcomes for WOU graduates. Faculty have used data gathered from over 1,200 student teachers and 25,000 P-12 students to guide refinements in their own teaching methods, improve assessment protocols and ensure evaluation reliability. Consequently, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) refers to WOU as a model for assessing faculty impact on learning. Dr. David Imig, the CEO of the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education (AACTE), cites WOU as a leader in connecting teaching to learning. Over two dozen institutions nationwide, including universities that are members of the prestigious Renaissance Partnership, are making use of WOU's experience in assessing faculty contributions to student learning and making appropriate curricular modifications based on sound data.

II. WOU's Learning Outcomes: The Institutional Aspirations for Learning

A critical step towards clarifying learning outcomes occurred during 2004-05 as the faculty achieved a consensus about the broad goals of WOU's educational programs. In a series of discussions at the Hamersly Library that Provost Spectar facilitated, the faculty spoke about their expectations for ensuring that WOU continues to provide a high quality education that prepares students for successful participation in an increasingly complex and rapidly changing world. Subsequently, the provost synthesized the views and ideas from these and other discussions (including insights from AAC&U dialogue about liberal education) into a document entitled "Institutional Learning Aspirations for WOU-Educated Graduates." This draft document was disseminated to all faculty members in mid-March 2005.

In the ensuing weeks and months, a broad spectrum of faculty engaged in a collaborative review of the proposed Institutional Aspirations. Moreover, each division/department was encouraged

and expected to prepare its own consensus document. In various divisional meetings, faculty members discussed, reviewed and evaluated the draft “Institutional Aspirations” document. Several divisions adopted it without any modifications or revisions, while other divisions contributed additional comments, questions and minor revisions.

On May 17, 2005, divisional consensus documents and perspectives were reviewed by a broad based Institutional Aspirations Task Force consisting of division chairs, faculty, deans and the provost. The extensive discussion and review of divisional reactions led to further refinements of the draft document. This process culminated in the Institutional Aspirations for Learning (IAL) document that was presented to the Faculty Senate. Between May and October 2005, the Faculty Senate discussed the Institutional Aspirations for Learning on several occasions. On October 11, 2005, the Faculty Senate voted unanimously to adopt it.

The “Institutional Aspirations” document, which updates, refines and affirms the faculty’s shared vision for learning, articulates the purposes of WOU’s general education program as well as related majors and minors. The Aspirations list and define the common set of knowledge, skills, attributes, dispositions, experiences and values that all students graduating from WOU are expected to possess. They also serve as common guideposts in the on-going assessment efforts. The final draft of the document listed below has been disseminated through inclusion in the catalog and posting on the Provost’s Web page.

The Aspirations

[As revised by campus consensus and unanimously adopted by the Faculty Senate on October 11, 2005]

(1) Critical Thinking: Students will develop refined analytical or reasoning skills, including logical and quantitative reasoning abilities, and problem solving.

Students will develop and exhibit habits of curiosity necessary for lifelong inquiry, discovery, learning and appreciation of the world of ideas. They will be able to think, question, investigate and reflect critically on human societies, individuals and the environment. As a result of refining their analytical abilities, students will be capable of rendering informed, mature, systematic and sophisticated judgments about ideas and intricate human and societal problems, including contentious and complex questions requiring focused and intense intellectual inquiry, modeling and analysis.

(2) Communication: Students will develop effective communicative abilities, including listening, observing, speaking, writing, and dialoguing.

Students will develop their capacity to listen and use language more effectively in both written and oral communications. They will be increasingly able to communicate cogently, persuasively and concisely. Students’ writing will reflect an increasing ability to acquire, assess and organize complex material and articulate sophisticated arguments in a variety of written formats, including essays, memoranda and letters. Students will also demonstrate increasing confidence and refinement in their speaking and rhetorical abilities in diverse settings. In addition to improving their individual communication skills, they will also be able to effectively listen and engage in respectful dialogues with others on a variety of subjects.

(3) Reading and Literacy: Students will become active readers.

Students will improve in their ability to carefully, closely, and thoughtfully read a range of texts, including journal articles, academic monographs, works of literature, visual images, performances, mass media and culture. Students will demonstrate a growing appreciation for the value of reading and the critical interpretation and evaluation of texts.

(4) Field or Discipline Specific Knowledge. Students will understand disciplinary modes of intellectual inquiry.

Through the introductory core and advanced study in their majors and minors, students will demonstrate a growing appreciation of disciplinary contexts, methodologies and conceptual frameworks. Students are expected to have a deeper understanding of the natural world and our human connection to it, a keener appreciation of the diverse forms of human creativity, a broader understanding of social and historical processes, a greater knowledge of literary and scientific traditions, and deeper insight into human behavior.

(5) Interdisciplinary and Integrative Perspective: Students will recognize, explore, appreciate and engage the interconnections between disciplines.

In addition to developing enhanced abilities in one or more fields, students will be increasingly aware of the interconnections between primary modes of thought and inquiry as well as the necessity for multi-disciplinary approaches to solving complex problems. Students will have growing capacities to effectively integrate and synthesize diverse or discrete aspects of their educational offerings into a coherent and relevant whole. Through capstones, theses and other integrative experiences, including multi-disciplinary and interdisciplinary programs, students will demonstrate abilities for linking knowledge from various sources and bringing such interrelationships to bear on pressing intellectual and social dilemmas.

(6) Research: Students will develop advanced research abilities.

Students will demonstrate improvements in their information and media literacy. They will demonstrate an ability to apply their critical thinking skills and discipline-specific knowledge to the evaluation of sources. Students will demonstrate an enhanced capacity to engage in, communicate and disseminate independent research that employs a range of information resources and technologies. Students will recognize and adhere to the ethical obligations of researchers.

(7) Technology: Students will learn how to use appropriate technologies effectively.

Students will demonstrate an ability to use a range of technologies for research and communication. These include basic, everyday technologies such as e-mail and Web search engines and more complex and discipline-specific technologies.

(8) Civic, Social, Intercultural and Global Competence: Students will demonstrate competencies, skills, attributes and values necessary for successful participation in a diverse, pluralistic and increasingly interdependent world.

Students will have a solid understanding of, and concern for, aspects of diversity, including race, gender, sexuality, religion, culture, ability, and opinion. Students will understand on-going social, political, economic, environmental, cultural and technological transformations and their mutually reinforcing impacts. Through a variety of international and intercultural learning

experiences, students will develop the skills needed for local, national and global citizenship as well as for meaningful participation in the quest for equity, dignity, sustainability and social justice.

(9) Collaboration: Students will be able to work effectively in teams.

While evincing a capacity for independence and self-reliance in thought and action, students will also demonstrate social and collaborative skills necessary for effective functioning in collective endeavors.

(10) Balanced Personal Growth and Development: Students will strive to be well-balanced persons capable of making thoughtful and healthy choices.

Students will demonstrate the capacity for informed ethical and moral judgment. They will be able to make responsible and healthy life style choices and to exercise ethical reasoning in all their interactions. Students will demonstrate creativity and imagination in their personal and professional lives. They will strive for a balance in their physical, spiritual, emotional and intellectual domains.

(11) Practicality and Real-World Relevance: Students will be able to apply theory in relevant, appropriate and reflective ways.

Students will be familiar with the real-world contexts and applications of theories. They will be able to reflect on their academic experiences and relate them to diverse real-world issues. They will appreciate the connections between what they learn and their everyday lives. Students will successfully participate in experiences such as internships, research, service learning and study abroad. The connection to the real world will increase students' confidence in selecting majors and/or exploring career options.

Since the adoption of the Institutional Aspirations for Learning, academic programs have worked to align education goals for their students. For example, under the leadership of the dean, faculty in the College of Education engaged in a comprehensive effort to map program proficiencies as well as to crosswalk the Institutional Aspirations with college proficiencies. In addition, LAS divisions have examined their curricula with a view to determining how and to what extent their courses and programs achieve program objectives that are also aligned to the institutional learning goals.

In 2005, academic programs engaged in reviewing, revising and developing program mission statements as well as formulating program outcomes that are aligned with the Institutional Aspirations for Learning. (See program reviews for Philosophy, English and Humanities for a sample.) To ensure that students are made aware of educational goals, all programs have their essential outcomes listed in the new 2006-07 academic catalog. Program Web sites and other promotional materials also contain mission statements and outcomes. Various syllabi have also incorporated the Institutional Aspirations for Learning.

III. Assessment of Institutional Learning Outcomes, Liberal Arts Core Curriculum and General Education

On an institutional level, the campus has engaged in an extensive analysis of how academic programs of the university meet the Institutional Aspirations for Learning and related institutional learning aims. The university has intensified efforts to determine the effectiveness of the LACC and general education through the following projects:

- (1) Development of a LACC Assessment Framework by the IATF;
- (2) External analysis and review of institutional learning outcomes using random sample of liberal arts and sciences capstones, theses and portfolios;
- (3) Analyzing WOU Courses with regard to how they contribute to institutional learning goals and mapping courses to the Institutional Aspirations.
- (4) Administration of the Collegiate Learning Assessment (see below);
- (5) Use of the 2004 NSSE survey to better assess student learning (see below)
- (6) Student surveys of Freshman Integrated Seminars as well as review by an external consultant to evaluate their impact. (Freshman Integrated Seminars were introduced in 2004 as a means of creating greater coherence and integration in the LACC. The reviews indicated a high degree of student satisfaction with the Integrated Seminars.)
- (7) Selection of an external consultant to examine LACC and prepare findings for consideration, discussion and implementation; and
- (8) Review and implementation of the external reviewer's Report and Findings on the LACC (See Appendix 2).
- (9) Instituting efforts to review the LACC and to align it with Senate Bill 342. In early 2006, the provost has asked the LAS dean to convene a task force to review and update the LACC and to bring it in line with Senate Bill 342 which requires greater transferability of general education credits in Oregon.

Working collaboratively, faculty, staff and administrators are increasingly engaged in the process of evaluating educational programs and assessing institutional learning outcomes. In addition to evaluating individual course proposals and their alignment to the mission, there is growing emphasis on outcomes assessment at an institutional level. The rising emphasis on outcomes assessment was spurred in part by comments from the last NWCCU Interim Report as well as the robust institution-wide engagement with respect to the matter of assessment. The formation of the Institutional Assessment and Effectiveness Task Force, a broadly representative group of faculty and staff, played a key role in shaping assessment practices at WOU, including updating WOU's assessment plan and developing strategies for evaluating student learning. With greater

commitment to assessment at all levels, WOU faculty and staff are increasingly in collecting, sharing and evaluating as part of ensuring institutional effectiveness.

In addition to the program-specific assessments, the following strategies are used to measure the attainment of institutional learning outcomes and goals, including the efficacy of the LACC:

- *Collegiate Learning Assessment:* The university administers the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) tests to entering freshmen and seniors to develop pre- and post-assessments about the value-added of a WOU education. WOU was one of fifty institutions nation-wide selected to participate in this Lumina Foundation-sponsored assessment initiative. This assessment tool was chosen for its alignment to the Institutional Aspirations as well as growing interest in performance-based assessment of student learning. Data gathered from the pilot will inform understanding about the impact of a WOU education as well as the learning gains achieved as a result of a WOU educational experience. It is anticipated that over the long term, the project will provide the university with critical baseline data for further assessments as well as various indications about student learning at WOU. (See Figure 2 below) Findings from this initiative will also be used to evaluate the efficacy of the LACC, refine curriculum, and improve student learning and success.

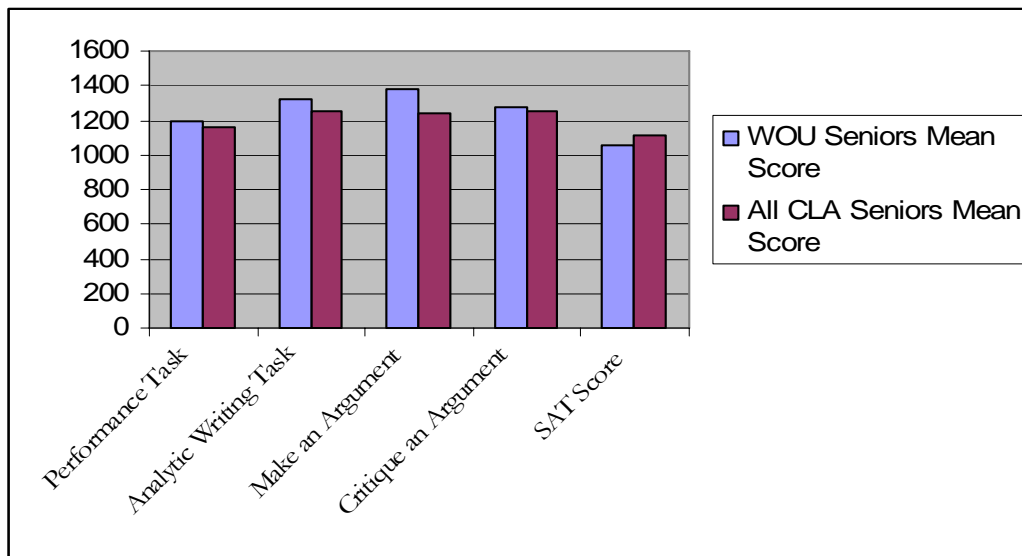


Figure 2: Results from CLA pilot in 2005-2006

- *Using NSSE Survey Results to Benchmark Campus Performance on Key Institutional Learning Outcomes:* In 2004-05, the university registered for and successfully conducted the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). Results were disseminated to the Institutional Assessment and Effectiveness Task Force as well as to other campus stakeholders. In a particularly innovative approach to using NSSE, the IATF mapped NSSE to the campus' Institutional Aspirations for Learning in a bid to better analyze student learning. By tracking NSSE scores on various aspects of key institutional learning goals, the university is developing a clearer picture of student learning as well as the impact and effectiveness of the university's programs. (See Figure 3 below) The lessons learned from the analysis of student learning using NSSE results will be used in

planning and improvement going forward. In addition, these data have laid a firm groundwork for efforts to enhance general education.

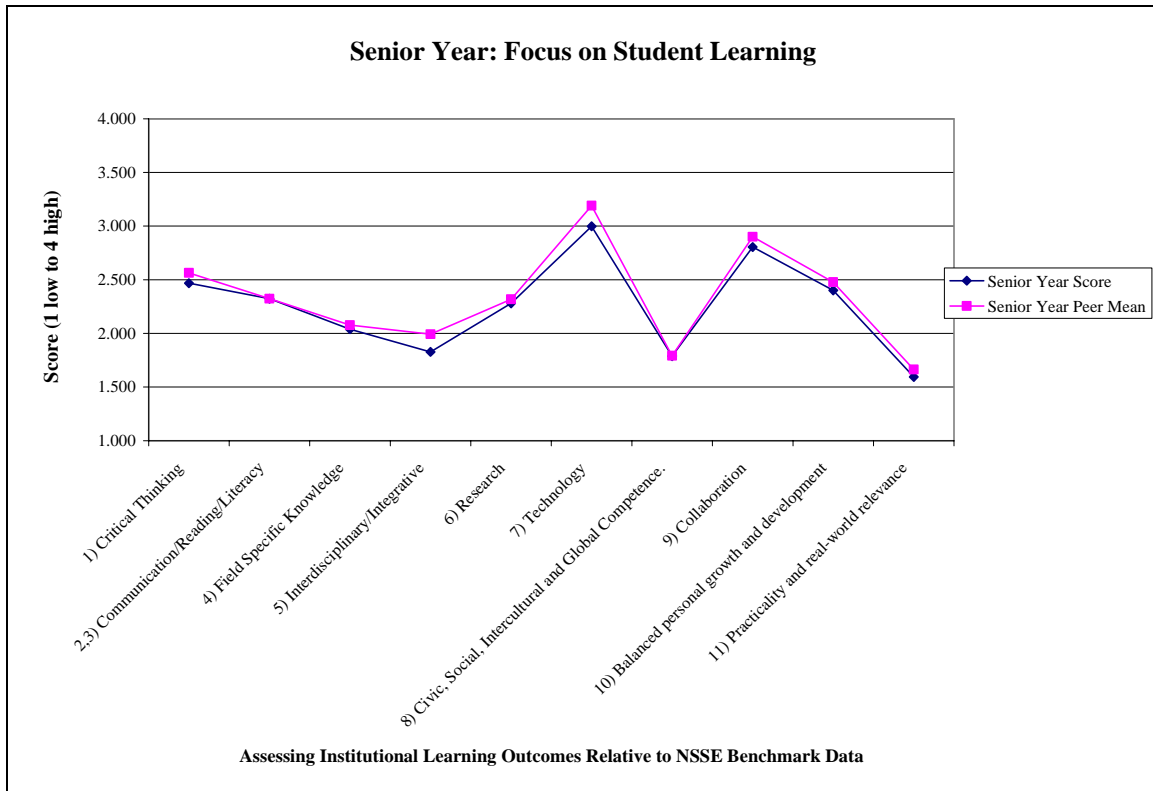


Figure 3: Assessing institutional learning outcomes relative to NSSE benchmark data.

- *External Reviews & Analyses of Cumulative Student Work (Capstones, Theses and Portfolios)*: To validate attainment of institutional learning goals, random samples of student portfolios, capstones and theses from the past 5 years were sent to external reviewers for analysis and evaluation. Results indicate that generally WOU students are demonstrating a significant level of goal attainment and success in the key areas of critical thinking, writing and communication. Going forward, the university will continue to use the results of such external reviews and analyses of students' culminating experiences (theses, capstones, portfolios) to understand the impact of its educational programs and the learning gains attained by students.
- Performance on various exit exams including graduate comprehensive exams, PRAXIS (for teachers), CPA exam (accounting students), ETS Biology.
- Surveys of graduates, alumni and employers (see Figure 4 below).
- Placement into pertinent careers and graduate schools.

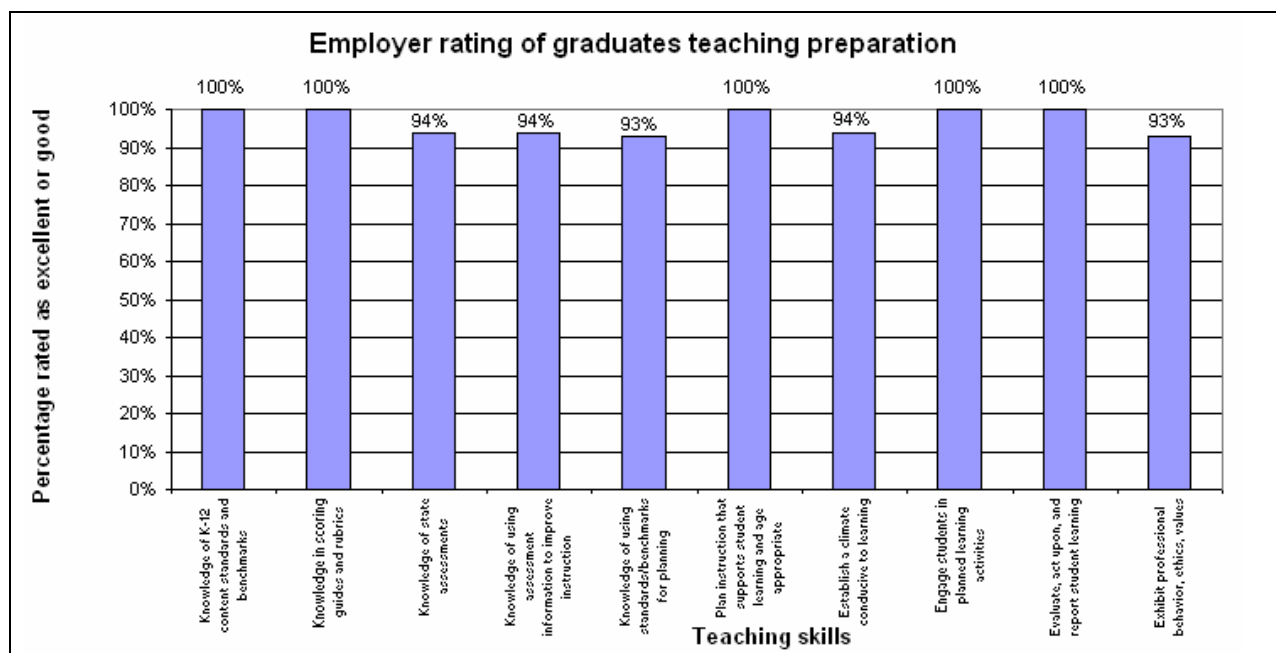


Figure 4: Employer rating of WOU graduates teaching preparation

Recognizing that no single test or assessment instrument can perfectly capture the entirety of learning gains and outcomes, WOU uses and is open to trying a combination of different approaches. Given WOU's interest in being more accountable to its students and the public, the university is always seeking better ways to measure its effectiveness.

Writing Assessment

To support the LACC and facilitate student writing achievement across the disciplines, the Writing Center offers students personalized learning opportunities for (1) negotiating the range of college-level writing assignments, (2) highlighting personal writing strengths and helping to demystify personal writing challenges, and (3) promoting success in writing-related endeavors. In 2003, the university transformed the Writing Center director position from an adjunct to a tenure-track split appointment. The change resulted in a revamping of the internship program (WR 412/512), a disciplinarily diverse tutor population, the institution of methods for program assessment and a more visible presence on campus. In 2004-05, the provost authorized a significant expansion of the Writing Center, including increasing the budget, providing funding for more tutors as well as computer terminals.

The Writing Center has developed innovative approaches to assessing student writing. Data from the Winter 2006 ICS 101, which was facilitated by the Writing Center, show a significant increase in students' knowledge/writing skills scores from pretest to posttest (all $p < .01$ level of significance) and a significant increase in writing self-efficacy scores from pretest to posttest ($p < .001$), as well as gains in global literacy. In effect, the Writing Center's course design and implementation provided freshmen with valuable tools: by participating in the ICS course, students gained knowledge and skills in critical areas and felt more confident about their writing skills. Today, the Writing Center assesses students through a variety of techniques including Intern Self-Evaluation, blogs, end-of-term reflections and student-writer post-session

evaluations. Moreover, the university uses SAT or ACT scores to assist in the placement of students into writing courses.

Alumni Assessment

The tracking of alumni at WOU historically has been handled program by program which results in sporadic and variable data across campus. More recently, the OIRPA initiated a comprehensive approach to track alumni that complements current processes (for example, in the teacher preparation programs) and will involve the Alumni Office, Registrar and OIRPA.

Assessment of Learning Outcomes

With the innovative efforts of the College of Education paving the way, the university increasingly has moved towards embracing a culture of evidence marked by pursuit of “best practices” in assessment of learning outcomes. In the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, the faculty is increasingly engaged in more effective assessment of learning outcomes, with certain notable examples such as the Natural Science Division’s consistent administration of the ETS and the Humanities Division’s approach to reviewing its portfolios. Academic units in both colleges are using a mix of effective, program-specific ways to assess and evaluate learning outcomes:

- Humanities added the HUM 450 portfolio as an assessment tool for Humanities majors and English majors. To validate attainment of institutional learning goals, random samples of the Humanities portfolios from the past 5 years were sent to external reviewers for analysis and evaluation. Results indicate that a broad swath of WOU students is demonstrating significant learning gains in the key areas of critical thinking, and communication.
- As part of the overall assessment of general education learning outcomes, samples of senior capstone portfolios, thesis manuscripts and scientific research manuscripts were sent to outside reviewers for evaluation of students’ critical thinking, communication, reading and literacy and interdisciplinary and integrative perspective. During 2006-07, 59 samples were reviewed by two writing instructors in the Loyola Marymount University (Los Angeles) Writing Program. Holistic reviews and comments of the reviewers are provided to the divisions and major departments from which the writing samples were randomly selected for review.
- In Biology, assessment is supported by an ETS major field test, DAT and MCAT exams, and emphasis on teaching in faculty reviews.
- The Math major was reviewed and subsequently revised from 1997 to 1999 to include a capstone experience for assessment purposes. The curriculum for teacher education was aligned with Oregon Department of Education standards and Praxis II expectations. Math uses placement tests to assess students’ readiness and abilities to engage in various levels of work.
- In Anthropology, assessment includes reviews of Senior Projects as well as in-class evaluations (SIR and peer), samples of student papers/exams, entry in graduate school, internships/practicum experience, reports/final evaluations, grades, student feedback (e-mails, etc.).

- In Art, faculty uses a capstone course and a fifth-year BFA in Art for selected students (goals stated in BFA proposal). Foundation courses prepare the incoming student for the advanced courses in their specific discipline area of the major; all are required to complete these courses and demonstrate minimum proficiency in skills and knowledge prior to enrolling in upper-level studio courses. Art students are required to maintain a C grade average in their major coursework. There has been progress in asking graduating students to evaluate the program at exit.
- In the Music department, assessment is conducted through reviews of Senior portfolios, capstone project presentations, public concerts, workshops, festivals and recitals involving students provide bases for further evaluation and assessment.
- The Theatre Program has developed instruments that will address Post-Baccalaureate Impact and Assessment as well as procedures for assessing program quality including student exit interviews, alumni surveys, outside peer reviews and the annual departmental assessment procedure for student feedback. In product assessment occurs through reviews of productions by local press and production responses from the Kennedy Center/American College Theatre Festival (KC/ACTF).
- Dance conducts assessment through end-of-the-year department interviews with dance majors, administrative evaluations of faculty members, formal student evaluations of faculty members, and DVD evidence of concerts.
- Business programs completed alumni surveys in 2003 and 2005 respectively.
- The Psychology division monitors learning outcomes by tracking admissions to graduate programs and professional employment as well as surveys of alumni on preparedness for their chosen career tracks. The department also assesses the effectiveness of its experimental curriculum with capstone experiences through monitoring of student paper acceptances at research conferences, including the Oregon Academy of Science, Western Psychological Association, American Psychological Association and the American Psychological Society.
 - All of the teacher preparation programs in the College of Education collect exit data from candidates weeks before they complete their last term. These data assess the candidates' perceptions regarding their preparation on each of the respective program proficiencies as well as critical areas, such as knowledge of standards and ability to differentiate for special groups of students. These data become more powerful as they parallel data collected systematically through field experience rating scales, Teacher Work Sample scores and disposition scales as well as alumni and employer follow-up data collected two years later. The follow-up data are benchmarked against data that the OUS system collected earlier in the decade for all public teacher preparation programs.
- Teacher preparation courses require students to take state and national licensure exams at various points in their programs. For example, students must pass the CBEST or Praxis PPST or Praxis CBT and Praxis MSAT Exams prior to admittance to the programs. Admission to final student teaching requires successful passage of the Praxis II.

- ASL/English Interpreting uses the Oregon Skills Assessment to track student progress through the junior and senior years of the interpreting program.
- English majors in the Secondary Language Arts track take the PRAXIS content exam. Modern Languages has PRAXIS exam summaries for 2003-05. All students take the CBEST or ORELA as part of the entry requirements for the Middle Level/High School Authorization Program.
- All teacher education programs are reviewed every five to seven years, and the CORE review is conducted regularly, about every five years. All program changes are approved by the Faculty Senate and TSPC for teacher preparation programs. Mapping of program proficiencies completed for all Initial Teacher Preparation programs and Teacher Education programs is aligned with NCATE, Specialized Professional Associations (CEC, CED, CORE, NCSS, etc) and State standards (TSPC), and cross-walked with WOU's Institutional Aspirations and College proficiencies.
- Programs such as Rehabilitation Counseling, Deaf Education, and American Sign Language/English Interpreting track data on their graduates for purpose of federal reporting for grants they receive. The data consistently reflect high job placement rates and satisfaction ratings from employers. Employment statistics on the Rehabilitation Counseling programs indicate that for the past six years, 96% of WOU'S graduates have reported employment in applicable fields and almost 80% of the graduates have taken and passed the CRC exam, which is optional. The results are shared with the Special Education Advisory Committees, contributing to the refinement or improvement of the programs.
- The College of Education initial licensure teacher education programs have now developed an annual system of alumni surveys and employer satisfaction surveys that are conducted in collaboration with the Oregon Teacher Standards and Practices Commission. Although limited to those graduates who are employed in Oregon's public schools, the data are collected two years out and analyzed annually by faculty for purposes of program review and improvement.
- The HPE Division has instituted a Student Satisfaction Survey that is administered every two years to all students taking classes within the division. Faculty members use the results to make adjustments and improvements in their curricular offerings.
- In the Teacher Preparation Deafness Program, assessments are conducted at several stages in a student's program. At the end of their first quarter, TPD students must obtain three letters of evaluation from instructors indicating that they are making adequate progress at the graduate level. They must also pass their coursework with grades of B or better and produce a final project, e.g., a portfolio, field project or thesis. During practica and student teaching experiences, mentor teachers and university supervisors evaluate TPD students through use of formative evaluation checklists, dispositions forms, and evaluations of their lesson plans. At the end of the program, they must pass the PRAXIS DHH before they can obtain licensure.
- All students in the COE Master's programs must complete an exit requirement.

Many academic and administrative units have intensified efforts to undertake systematic and rigorous outcomes assessment for the purpose of enhancing the educational program and facilitating student learning. In preparing for a community-based approach to the Self Study, all programs and units were asked during Fall 2005 to respond to an inventory based on NWCCU standards. The OIRPA inventory elicited information on current practices, yielding sources of evidence to show how the unit evaluates and conforms to standard elements. This activity not only guided programs and units to focus on which processes and procedures aligned with regional accreditation expectations; it also allowed the Self Study team to engage the entire community. Important outcomes included community awareness of areas where programs and units are not collecting data to drive decisions. WOU programs and units were candid in detailing their inability to evaluate their performance in terms of particular elements; however, over 65% identified a particular action plan or future direction that they planned to include in their program-level strategic planning. Nearly 75% of programs and units participated in evaluation activities used to determine the merit of their programs and outcomes.

The program reviews revealed that there were many instances where assessment evidence had been used to make decisions to enhance program effectiveness. Successful instances of evidence-based decisions to support and improve teaching and learning and enhance educational effectiveness through continuous improvement include:

- The COE used results from exit surveys, Professional Development Seminar surveys, alumni surveys (see Figure 5 below), and discussions with the COE Consortium to develop a curricular revision for the undergraduate teacher education program. Specifically, the approved changes:
 1. Increased the amount of field experience that prospective education majors have prior to being admitted.
 2. Increased the amount of embedded field experience prior to full-time student teaching.
 3. Formed stronger partnerships with school districts that go beyond student teacher placements.
 4. Involved pre-education majors in educational settings prior to their being fully admitted to the professional educational core.
 5. Improved preparation for candidates to teach diverse students in diverse settings.
 6. Increased the amount of preparation in literacy in Early Childhood through Elementary/middle authorizations levels.
- The Division of Business and Economics updated its major and minor requirements after its comparison with programs at similar institutions clarified the need for the updates.
- The English department redesigned the major several years ago, creating four major tracks: Literature, Linguistics, Writing, and Language Arts/Secondary Education. All four tracks have a common core curriculum; the portfolio project in the course HUM 450 presents additional evidence for assessment purposes.

- Faculty members in the ESOL program have aligned the program and courses to TESOL standards.
- The undergraduate teacher preparation program regularly analyzes data collected from students who apply to the program to refine and improve the application process.
- In Spring 2004, faculty in HPE analyzed results of close to 600 student responses on a Student Satisfaction Survey. Results were used to guide curriculum revisions that occurred in 2005-06.
- A survey of students taking ASL classes was used to analyze the feasibility of offering the ASL major already approved by OUS.
- Several programs in the Creative Arts Division were entirely restructured and enhanced, changes that led to two new BFAs and a Master of Music degree in 2005. Creative Arts faculty paid attention to teaching across the discipline (content awareness so that classes build upon each other). The recently revised curriculum and new BFA degree ensured that learning outcomes for all classes include an intellectual skills component, as well as the development of creative capabilities (addressed in all production work as evidenced by production programs). In addition, Creative Arts is committed to ensure learning outcomes for all classes provide coverage of key areas and attainment of career competencies.
- The Theatre program recently began holding “post mortems” for each of its productions in which faculty and students discuss all processes of the production, identify its weaknesses, and determine methods for improving it, with the purpose of raising the standard on all of the department’s productions.
- The Special Education Division instituted a change in program sequence and schedule in Fall 2005 that reflected student needs and placed into the foreground the division’s need for more coherent courses and program goals.
- In response to the added focus on assessment, the Writing Center has substantially revised its mission statement, created program objectives, and produced service-related outcomes. The Writing Center is currently working toward designing and implementing necessary outcomes instruments and assessment processes.
- In Spring 2006, the biology program redesigned its curricular requirements to emphasize more clearly the appropriate coursework needed to meet requirements for six different professional directions. This redesign, which also included some course deletions, additions, and revisions, has improved advising efficiency and reduced student confusion about which courses to take if interested in pursuing a particular professional career in the biosciences.
- WOU’s Office of Study Abroad and International Exchanges has developed and implemented an assessment survey, in collaboration with AHA International. This instrument consists of a pre-post survey that students take online.
- Responding to a 2004 survey showing concerns about advising on campus, the Academic Advising and Learning Center revamped its processes and practices to effectively address student needs. Surveys over the last year have shown great satisfaction with the AALC.

These successes notwithstanding, it was also apparent from the program review process that while programs/units regularly collect data, ways in which data were used to make decisions about curriculum, student learning, and program-level impact had not always been consistent, formal and systematic. In the absence of consistently comprehensive and systematic assessment, various units relied upon informal assessment of student learning. More frequently, there was resort to informal assessments such as interviews with individuals or groups of students. Although many programs regularly collected descriptive data on student enrollment, credit hours, faculty characteristics and student participation rates in co-curricular events, data-based decision-making was not uniformly systematic.

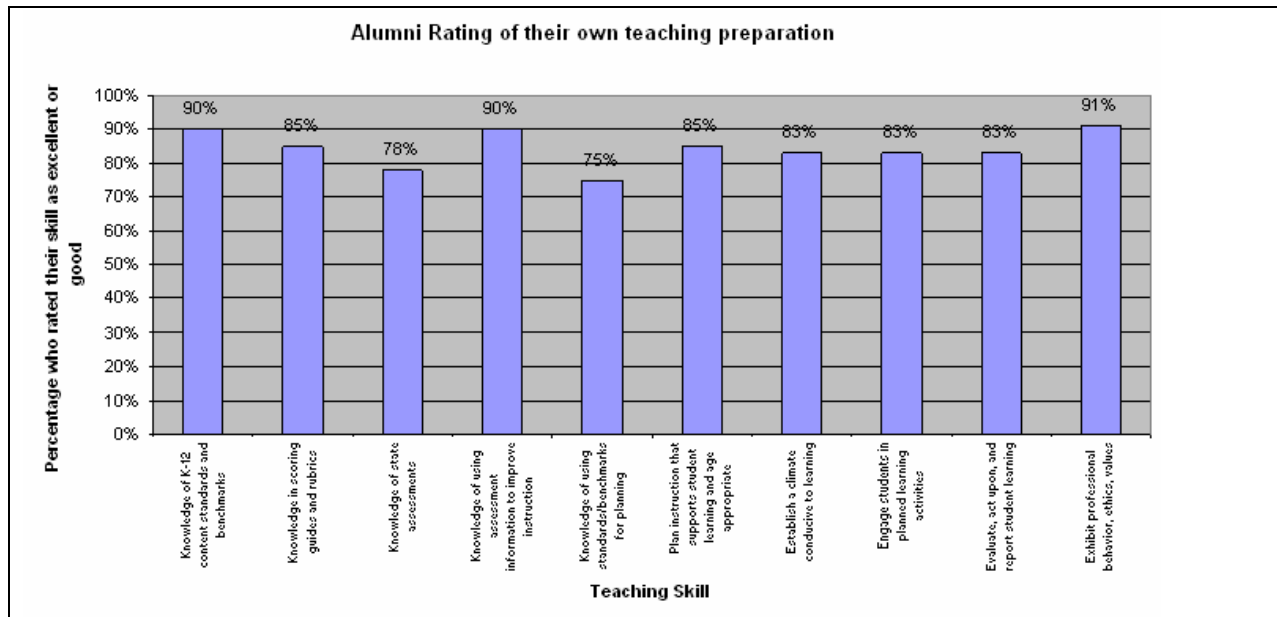


Figure 5: COE teacher education alumni (from both undergraduate and graduate programs) rate their teaching preparation.

IV. Towards a Culture of Continuous Improvement: Using Assessment Data to Make Changes

Effective and comprehensive learning outcomes assessment is increasingly part of the institutional culture and practice. As a result of the campus's growing focus on formal, systematic and comprehensive assessment, many academic programs are in the process of developing more effective assessment instruments. Moreover, all academic programs now publish their learning objectives in the university catalog. In the course of the Program Review and Self Study process, the university's programs addressed NWCCU Standard Two and identified assessment practices, processes and procedures. In the past year, programs have developed assessment plans in line with the institutional assessment plan as well as the respective program missions and goals. There is also an institutional commitment to implement assessment plans or pilot aspects of plans, to use evidence/data in related decision-making including modifying programs, goals and assessment processes as necessary, and to

communicate results of planning, assessment and related decision-making. Meanwhile, consistent with the Institutional Assessment Plan, five years from now all programs will undergo another comprehensive program review. Through periodic program reviews, the appropriate faculty and administrative leader can review progress, provide feedback and support programs/units in making decisions based on data.

Overall, the institution is moving in the right direction with regard to learning outcomes assessment, including comprehensive program reviews, focused assessment of the strategic plan, monitoring of program performance using the AAC template, and a growing emphasis on defining and evaluating learning outcomes. Outcomes assessment results are now widely available. The annual reports submitted annually through the AAC are provided to the provost, deans, Self Study writing teams, and anyone else who requests them. They are also on file in the Provost's Office, where community members have ready access to them upon request. Summaries of the individual units' assessment experience are also available on file and on appropriate Web sites. Each summary identifies key objectives and specifies assessment techniques. Thanks to lessons learned from analysis of various surveys, the university has begun to implement several changes in the curriculum and co-curriculum. Not only are assessments at the program and unit levels generating rich quantitative and qualitative data to populate the institution's data system, important efforts are also underway to drive data based decision-making with respect to teaching and learning. Educational programs are progressively more prepared to demonstrate what they have learned during systematic program review. Not only will they show how findings have led to or will lead to future planning and improvement, but they also increasingly will be able to show a connection to improved teaching and learning and target courses of action. These and other efforts clearly indicate WOU's strong commitment to engaging its community in regular and ongoing assessment activities.

Yet, even though much has been accomplished with regard to systematic and comprehensive learning outcomes assessment, the university as a whole has increasingly recognized that it needs to *actively* and *purposefully* build on the momentum and progress to date. Assessment processes need to be more extensively institutionalized and utilized. While there is significant awareness in the university about this challenge, WOU should continue to vigorously emphasize the importance of assessment to all university constituencies. Broader commitment and ownership of existing assessment plans, processes and results must occur at the unit level. In addition, the university should address the matter of resources for assessment by continuing to strengthen support mechanisms to implement assessment initiatives. While maintaining the autonomy of educational programs, there should be greater coordination of assessment activities at the institutional level to ensure that assessment of learning remains a systematic and comprehensive endeavor. Additionally, WOU expects to move towards a more consistent and comprehensive approach in the use of data to support decision-making.

The institution's capability to evaluate learning and engage in continuous improvement will increase as assessment activities become more structured, coordinated, and aligned to the strategic plan and university mission. The infrastructure support provided by OIRPA and the efforts of campus leaders point to even more successful outcomes in the years ahead. While much work remains to be done, the WOU community is undoubtedly engaged in effective teaching and learning assessment.

Appendix 1 Sample Unit Assessment Plan

Earth Science

I. Statement of unit mission:

The Earth Science program provides a liberal arts core education in geoscience with an emphasis on the scientific method, problem solving, and interdisciplinary science education. A key objective of the program is to prepare undergraduates for careers as professional geoscientists and educators. The program also promotes the development of an informed citizenry for wise decision-making on issues related to natural resources, environmental quality, and sustainability in Oregon and beyond.

II. Unit intended objectives/outcomes:

1. Acquire a comprehensive understanding of the interrelated physical, chemical, and biological processes operating in the Earth system.
2. Develop proficiency in using technology-enriched analytical techniques to solve geologic problems.
3. Gain experience in conducting inquiry-based science in the context of outdoor adventure.

III. Tactics for achieving the objectives:

1. A newly reorganized B.S./B.A. Earth Science major was approved by WOU/OUS administration in 2000-2001; the new major was implemented in the catalog in 2001-2002. The original intent for creating a new Earth Science major at WOU was to align the curriculum with nationally-recognized education standards and to update the program to better prepare graduates for careers as scientists and educators in the 21st century.
2. Earth Science courses are directly aligned with the learning objectives in listed section II, according to the matrix provided below.

EARTH SCIENCE Program mission statement

The Earth Science program provides a liberal arts core education in geoscience with an emphasis on the scientific method, problem solving and interdisciplinary science education. A key objective of the program is to prepare undergraduates for careers as professional geoscientists and educators. The program also promotes the development of an informed citizenry for wise decision-making on issues related to natural resources, environmental quality, and sustainability in Oregon and beyond.

Program student learning outcomes	Courses that have no contribution to learning outcome	Courses that have minimal contribution to learning outcome	Courses that have moderate contribution to learning outcome	Courses that have extensive contribution to expecting mastery of learning outcome
Acquire a comprehensive understanding of the interrelated physical, chemical and biological processes operating in the Earth system.			ES301, ES 302, ES 303, ES 453/553	ES 104, ES 105, ES 106, ES 201, ES202, ES 203W, ES 321, ES322, ES 331, ES 390, ES 392, ES 407, ES 431/531, ES 450/550, ES 454/554, ES 458/558, ES 460/560, ES473/573 ES476/576, ES 491/591, ES492/592, GS 351
Develop proficiency in using technology-enriched analytical techniques to solve geologic problems.	ES 203W, ES 453/553	ES 302, ES 331, ES 392, ES 431/531, ES458/558, ES 491/591	ES 104, ES 105, ES 106, ES 201, ES202, ES 321, ES322, ES 390, ES 454/554, ES 458/558, ES 460/560, ES473/573, GS 351	ES301, ES 303, ES 407, ES 450/550, ES476/576, ES492/592
Gain experience in conducting inquiry-based science in the context of outdoor adventure.	ES 104, ES 105, ES 106, ES 203W, ES 331, ES492/592	ES 201, ES202, ES 303, ES 390, ES 407, ES476/576, GS 351	ES322, ES 431/531, ES 450/550, ES 453/553, ES 460/560, ES473/573, ES 491/591	ES301, ES 302, ES 321, ES 392, ES 454/554, ES458/558

IV. Basic approach for assessing our unit intended objectives/outcomes

Formative Assessment

Formative assessment of Earth Science students is performed on a course-by-course basis with a range of traditional methods including inquiry-based lab exercises, writing assignments (informal short essays and longer-form expose), short active-learning exercises, oral group presentation, multi-media work samples, and objective quizzes and exams (essays, multiple choice, true/false, lab practicum). The style and level of formative assessment tool varies according to instructor and course content. Some courses are based on quantitative problem solving and computer applications (e.g. ES 301 Quantitative Methods, ES 321 Structural Geology, ES 492 GIS Applications, ES 476 Hydrology), others focus on lab and field techniques (e.g. ES 302 Field Methods, ES 303 Petrographic Microscopy, ES 450 Petrology), still others on written/oral multi-media presentation (e.g. ES 473 Environmental, ES 453 Geology of the Pacific Northwest, ES 454 Volcanology).

As highlighted in the Student Learning Outcomes section, the focus of our program is on proficiency in quantitative techniques, technology applications, multi-media communication, and problem solving through application of the scientific method. Geoscience curriculum by its very nature is activity-based and involves outdoor adventure, field trips, hands-on lab exercises, geological conundrums, and problem-solving sets. All of these active learning strategies are employed as formative assessment tools to varying levels on a course-by-course basis in our program.

Summative Assessment

Senior Seminar (ES 407) serves as the degree-program assessment tool and capstone evaluation for majors preparing to graduate from the Earth Science program. Students are required to complete ES 407 during the final term of their senior year. The objective of the course is for students to conduct in-depth study and research on relevant topics in the Earth Sciences, by requiring students to draw on information from the full range of major courses they have completed during their time as an undergraduate. A department-wide seminar session is conducted at the end of the term, providing students with an opportunity to demonstrate proficiency in the Earth Science content areas. Seminar sessions are modeled after theme sessions at professional meetings, and each student is required to give an oral presentation. Senior Seminar employs inquiry-based, work sample techniques to demonstrate student proficiency in Earth Science content areas. Students are required to satisfactorily complete the capstone course to graduate from the program. Although ES 407 was initially conceived and placed into the catalog during the 2001-2002 academic year, it is a work in progress and was implemented in earnest during the past three academic years (2003-2004, 2004-2005, 2005-2006). During the present academic year (2006-2007), the seminar work sample methodology will be dove-tailed with the rejuvenated, university-wide, Academic Excellence Showcase event sponsored by the Phi Kappa Phi honor society and the Program for Undergraduate Research Experience. This linkage between ES 407 and the Academic Excellence Showcase was pilot tested last year (2005-2006) and was well received by students, faculty, and parents; however no evaluation metrics have been employed to definitively measure efficacy.

In conjunction with seminar work-sample method described above, a capstone standardized exit exam was initially conceived and implemented during Spring Term 2005. It too is a work in progress and is actively being developed at the time of this writing. The exit exam is based on national standards established by the Educational Testing Service and was formerly part of the Geology Graduate Record Exam used to evaluate entrance qualifications into graduate school. While ETS no longer offers the GRE Geology exam, Earth Science faculty have adapted the question sets from two editions of the ETS Geology Preparation Manuals (1st ed. 1988, 2nd ed. 1996). Exam questions were captured in digital format and imported into the WebCT class management software system for online testing and automated scoring. Exit exam procedures are modeled after those of the GRE. Students are provided practice exams and instructional materials to prepare for the test. Exam results are scored and ranked in comparison to national standardized results from Geology/Earth Science graduates in the U.S. during the late 1980's and mid 1990's.

In addition to GRE-style procedure above, Earth Science faculty are also exploring other standard exit exam tools. One is the education-based PRAXIS exam for teaching candidates with an emphasis in Earth and physical science content. Two recent Earth Science graduates completed this exam for entrance into the Masters of Art in Teaching program at WOU. The other summative assessment tool that is currently being evaluated is the Fundamental Geology Exam that forms part of the Oregon State Board of Geologist Examiners (OSBGE) professional licensing process. The state of Oregon utilizes a nationally standardized process for professional licensure of engineers, geologists, engineering geologists, landscape architects, and land surveyors. The initial registration in the

professional geologist certification is that of “Geologist-in-Training” (GIT), which includes successful completion of 45 upper-division credit hours in geoscience and passing a nationally standardized fundamental geology exam that is offered through the Association of State Boards of Geology (ASBOG). OSBGE and ASBOG are currently in communication with geoscience programs throughout the state of Oregon, encouraging them to adopt the fundamental geology exam as a summative evaluation tool for Earth Science / Geology graduates. One of our recent graduates from the Earth Science program passed the ASBOG Fundamentals Exam in 2005, but the tool has not been systematically adopted. The primary limitation to adopting the ASBOG fundamentals exam is the cost required of students to apply for the initial OSBGE GIT license and fundamentals exam (currently ~\$300).

Post-Baccalaureate Impact/Assessment

The Earth Science program lacks an organized and systematic post-baccalaureate assessment tool. There has been some informal discussion of creating such a system, and developing a related alumni newsletter, but no action has been taken to date. The only post-baccalaureate data available is that from informal correspondence and networking between graduates and faculty (e.g., emails, phone calls, requests for recommendation). Most of this data is anecdotal and collected within the first six months after students exit the program.

B. RELEVANT QUANTITATIVE AND/OR QUALITATIVE EVIDENCE:

No systematic data analysis or comprehensive program evaluation has been completed for Earth Science. There is a significant need for administrative assistance to conduct a comprehensive data analysis and review of student performance.

1. Student Demographics

Our student population is quite diverse with a wide array of skills, interests, and career goals. The student population ranges from serious Earth Science majors with focused career objectives, to Environmental Studies minors to Science Education majors. The annual number of majors and minors in the Earth Science program ranges from 25 to 40, with over 1500 students tracking through the LACC ES 100 sequence. Over 60% of the ES 100 students are in their freshman or sophomore years, and commonly list their major as “pre-education”. Typical enrollment in upper division specialty courses typically ranges from 8-15, with 25 to 60 in more accessible lower division courses (e.g. ES 200 Physical / Historical Geology, ES 331 Oceanography, ES 390 Meteorology). Based on enrollment data from 2002-2005, the Earth Science program supports an average of 37 majors and 13 minors, with a range of 6-12 graduates per year. Demographically, our students are categorically white/Caucasian, 20-24 years of age, with a female-to-male ratio of 1:3.

2. Post-Baccalaureate Analysis

As an attempt at preliminary analysis, Dr. Taylor compiled select course data from 1999-2005 (Dr. Taylor upper division class rosters; n = 176), compiled a list of ES program students, and tallied the anecdotal information regarding their post-graduate activities. Of the 176 students compiled, 124 were actively involved in the ES program as majors, minors, or related fields such as Environmental Studies or Education. There is no data available for 59 of the 124 program students (i.e. 48% “no data”); however, some anecdotal post-baccalaureate information exists for the remaining 65. A tally of known student post-program activities follows:

21 = K-12 teaching, 6 = GIS/geospatial technology, 5 = retail sales, 4 = military, 5 = graduate school (3 = geology, 2 = MAT), 3 = geotechnical/construction, 3 = forest resources, 3 = public policy, 2 = hydrologic technician, 1 = river guide, 1 = Peace Corps Volunteer, 1 = registered nurse, 1 = watershed volunteer, 1 = physician’s assistant, 1 = emergency medical doctor, 1 = librarian, 1 = law school, 1 = federal forest ranger, 1 = federal customs agent, 1 = federal homeland security, 1 = commercial fisherman, 1 = fire fighter

This preliminary post-baccalaureate analysis of a select subset of ES program students suggests that approximately 3 percent of the declared majors advance on to graduate school in either education or geoscience. Over 20 percent of the same group obtained employment as K-12 teachers, and approximately 12 percent found at least temporary employment in the fields of geospatial technology or natural resources management (GIS, forestry, geotechnical, watershed resources).

C. MISCELLANEOUS DATA COLLECTION ISSUES: *Any special issues regarding data collection and instrument design, as well as pertinent timelines, procedures and stakeholders:*

The following issues have been identified as significant road blocks to Earth Science program assessment:

- (1) Lack of established institutional culture and infrastructure regarding systematic program assessment,
- (2) Lack of systematic institutional reporting guidelines and timeline for annual program assessment,
- (3) Lack of administrative support personnel for data collection, data management, instrument design, and statistical analysis,
- (4) Lack of adequate faculty time, beyond primary teaching load, to adequately conduct scholarly activity and program assessment tasks,
- (5) Lack of institutional funds to support effective and systematic program assessment (e.g. funds to cover nationally standardized exam fees)
- (6) Persistent unanswered requests (over the past year) to the WOU Office of Institutional Research, Planning and Assessment for Banner data

D. ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION OF EVIDENCE

No analysis or interpretation has been conducted to systematically assess student outcomes or how well the program meets the stated mission objectives. There is a significant need to develop quantitative assessment metrics that measure student performance over time and how well the Earth Science program meets the stated objectives.

E. RESULTS AND REPORTS

No systematic analysis or assessment reports have been completed. As stated above, there is significant need for WOU to establish systematic reporting guidelines and timelines for annual program assessment. In addition, there is significant need for institutional support, funding, and faculty release time to conduct such comprehensive program assessments.

F. FOLLOW-UP AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT: THE FEEDBACK LOOP

Systematic program assessment for WOU Earth Science is in the nascent stages. While the program has conducted some preliminary analyses and is working on an exit-exam methodology, much work remains. As stated above, there is significant need for WOU to establish systematic reporting guidelines and timelines for annual program assessment. In addition, there is significant need for institutional support, funding, and faculty release time to conduct such comprehensive program assessments.

Appendix 2

Assessment of General Education at Western Oregon University

Report by Dr. Terrel Rhodes,
Vice President for Quality, Curriculum, and Assessment,
American Association of Colleges & Universities

26 August 2006

Western Oregon University's General Education Curriculum

Consultant's Report

In preparation of this report, I met with Provost Jem Spectar, reviewed syllabi for the Liberal Arts Core Curriculum, the 2005-06 Catalog, the Fall 2006 Schedule of Classes, the Institutional Aspirations, NSSE data, CLA/Lumina project data, the WOU Assessment Plan, a copy of the WOU Mission statement, and the Freshman Academy brochure. In addition, I spent several hours meeting and talking with WOU's deans and division chairs. The provost asked that I review WOU's general education program with an emphasis on assessment of student learning and accreditation expectations. The following report summarizes both the efforts that have been taken to date surrounding the structure and assessment of the general education program, and the current approach and expectations of the Northwest Commission of Colleges and Universities.

Western Oregon University Liberal Arts Core Curriculum (LACC)

Western has a fairly traditional distributional approach to general education. Reviewing syllabi for the LACC courses, it was apparent that a systematic change occurred a couple years ago that incorporated learning objectives into each course syllabus. Evidence nationally suggests that clear articulation of student learning at the beginning of a course (and throughout the course) helps students know what is expected of them. The inclusion of learning expectations in every syllabus is an important step forward.

What is not as apparent from the syllabi is the degree to which the assignments and evaluation methods also included in the syllabi ask students to demonstrate the stated learning outcomes. A closer link between the work in the course and the expected student learning would facilitate the transparent assessment of student learning through the course.

Course grades are typically not sufficient to demonstrate student learning outcomes in and of themselves – they are indeed one partial indicator. Because course grades frequently include such things as attendance, punctuality or participation, a final course grade may not actually reflect well the focus on student learning of stated outcomes. If a syllabus (and thus the professor and course) directly linked the grades to the actual demonstrated student performance on the outcomes; essentially using the course grade as the summation of a rubric for performance on the expected outcomes, grades might be useful indicators of the desired learning. In and of themselves, though, grades are usually not direct reflections of the degree of student learning

associated with expected outcomes as utilized on course syllabi, and are not considered as such by external accreditation agencies.

It is possible to develop assignments and grading that are directly linked to prompting students to demonstrate their learning of expected outcomes; in which case grades become the actual summary indicator of expected learning. When students are unable to demonstrate the learning we expect, it is typically because students either do not know the material well, or that the assignment or question is not clear about what it is we are asking the student to demonstrate. Campus faculty development programs have had success at other institutions in helping faculty redesign assignments that better serve the purposes of assessing student learning outcomes; clearly asking for what the faculty member is really expecting the student to provide.

Institutional Aspirations

Western has adopted a set of Institutional Aspirations for Learning that encompasses most of the goals of the LACC. The Institutional Aspirations provide a cohesive statement of the institution's expectations for learning for all of its graduates. Nationally, many universities and colleges are adopting similar statements of student learning as a means to link the various components of an undergraduate curriculum from the classroom level to program and institutional levels. Accrediting agencies are also increasingly looking specifically for how an institution connects assessment of student learning from the classroom, program, department to the institutional levels as reflective of the student experience at the campus.

The Institutional Aspirations also provide a focus for the development and use of institutional data from such sources as surveys of current students or graduates, employers, or other sources, e.g. the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), grade distributions, course taking patterns, etc. as indicators of student learning aligned with the Aspirations.

The Freshman Academy was one attempt to introduce WOU students to institutional expectations and to enhance their successful transition to the university. As a starting point, the Academy concept could be a beginning point for various forms of assessing students as they enter the university. Other options are also possible, e.g. orientation sessions, introductory classes, co-curricular activities, etc. Whether the academies continue or not, they are one example of where and how one might gather information and baseline data on students as they enter the institution for use in advising students early in their academic careers, as well as for comparison later in the student's academic progress at Western.

Another opportunity for examining the progress of students in an intentional manner, could be through the integrated seminars. In addition to the focus of the seminars on helping students integrate their learning across boundaries of disciplines and knowledge domains; the seminars develop student abilities associated with the Aspirations that are foundational for learning in the remainder of the curriculum regardless of the specific path a student selects to pursue. The integrated seminars could be a place for the development of assignments or portfolios that students could use to demonstrate their learning surrounding the specific content of the courses as well as the institutional expectations associated with the Aspirations. The same assignment used by faculty upon which to determine a grade for a particular seminar can also be used as indicators for demonstrating Aspirational learning. As a sample of students at a point in their academic career, these artifacts and examples of authentic student work provide another direct demonstration of what Western is accomplishing in relation to student learning campus wide.

Institutional Assessment

Western has also developed an expansive and comprehensive assessment plan for the campus. It is a model of comprehensive assessment for an institution, growing from the mission of the institution through the processes that can be used to operationalize the learning expectations and student demonstration of their learning. It is also ambitious. The groundwork for implementation of aspects of the plan have begun to be laid, the framework for successful demonstration of student learning and its assessment is described, and the potential use of the findings of learning assessment are integrated into the plan. The challenge, obviously, is to continue to implement the plan across the campus. The plan envisions a campus wide approach that is doable, but requires commitment from all parts of the campus.

The assessment plan, however, can be staged, and actually appears to be being implemented in various places on the campus based on the conversations I had. Some departments have articulated student learning expectations in conjunction with the Aspirations, have collected student work that demonstrates learning, and findings are being examined. Closing the circle for these departments is typically the remaining step, i.e. making use of the findings of the analysis of student work in the context of the expected learning outcomes to improve the curriculum and the opportunities for students to successfully demonstrate their learning. Bringing all units across the campus to a similar place is the challenge that Western (and virtually every campus) confronts as they strive to both truly gain a sense of student learning on their campus, as well as provide accrediting agencies with the types of evidence they expect when they engage in reaccreditation reviews of campuses and programs. It is not sufficient any more from an accreditation standpoint to provide examples of “good” or “complete” assessment of student learning; rather, accreditors are looking for entire campuses to demonstrate comprehensive and intentional assessment, including the use of actual findings to make adjustments or to support on-going successful curricular actions that advance student learning.

Accreditors are not interested in a specific or single approach to accomplishing the measurement of student learning, but rather to ensure that campuses are focused on student learning generally and intentionally across a campus. The focus of faculty has always been on student learning – in their courses or in their program/major. This is good; however, accreditors are focused on student learning as a career endeavor. They expect all segments of a campus to be engaged in student learning enhancement and to be able to demonstrate how they contribute to the learning in the overall development and experience of the student. This is the campus wide emphasis and demonstration of commitment to student learning that is central to accreditation visits.

Summation

This report is purposefully brief, partly because my time on the campus was brief, and partly because the lessons learned for the campus are relatively straightforward. Much good work has already been accomplished at Western, and much is yet to be done. Not all of it can be realized prior to your next regional accreditation visit; however, significant progress can be made before your campus visit, and much can be done relatively easily to sustain progress into the future. In sum:

- WOU has an excellent assessment plan already articulated and in place. The plan provides a map for extending the assessment processes across the campus to realize a more consistent level of activity focused on gathering evidence of student learning through the regular activities and assignments students and faculty have developed for use in the classroom and other venues.

Action: Every unit on campus needs to examine what it does in the context of the plan and articulate how it reflects the necessary parts of the plan in the unit for measuring and assessing student learning.
- WOU has adopted a statement of Institutional Aspirations for Student Learning. There are thirteen articulated aspirations for WOU students. Faculty and staff need to help students realize learning in these aspirational areas in clear and frequent statements and ways so that students and everyone on and off the campus easily understand how students are assisted in learning in these important areas.

Action: Redundancy and intentionality are two useful concepts to guide units as they examine how they contribute to the accomplishment of student learning in the aspirational areas. The aspirational areas are generic to the campus – all units contribute to student learning in these areas – perhaps not every unit for every aspiration, but all units for at least one aspiration. An articulation by every unit of how they contribute to each aspiration is a good way to begin to map how the aspirations are realized across the campus. This mapping exercise both allows faculty and staff to see how each contributes, as well as to reveal where there may be need for greater attention to some aspirations and less to others. An institutional picture results and an affirmation of the work of units and individuals on campus emerges.
- The statement of Institutional Aspirations articulates expectations; however, communication of the aspirations in terms that relate to the student experience is less apparent. The more students experience the integration of the aspirations in a variety of contexts across the campus, the more likely they themselves are to be able to articulate the learning they are gaining at WOU.

Action: Find ways to communicate the aspirations and their realization across the campus through a variety of means, e.g. through course syllabi, orientation materials, student organizations, assignments, etc. Reinforcing the familiarity of the aspirations for students and faculty and staff helps to make the aspirations and the learning expectations an integral part of the campus environment. Self reflection by students on their own learning is an important aspect of being able to demonstrate student attainment of the aspirations.
- Faculty, staff and students tend to focus on the particular component of campus life they are directly engaged with, e.g. a course, a program, a group, office or organization. Often the activities and work in specific areas can be used as indicators of broader student progress toward realizing the Institutional Aspirations as an expression of campus wide goals for students.

Action: Identify places and ways that the work already being done by faculty, staff and students can be sampled, aggregated, or analyzed to provide a comprehensive, institutional picture of student learning. One example might be the Integrative Seminars that are designed to help students learn how to integrate

their learning at various levels. Another example might be the use of institutional data from NSSE or the CLA program as illuminating areas where individual faculty or programs might want to focus attention to enhance the student learning experience in specific areas where the data suggest room for improvement. The development of institutional measures of student learning flow both from the local level up and from the central level down so that all indicators of student learning contribute to refinement of processes and practices that support student learning.

The foregoing comments and suggestions are simply suggestive of what Western might do as next steps. Strong groundwork has been laid for successful assessment of student learning in an intentional and effective way. Much good work has been done at the course level and at the institutional level. The challenge now is to engage in the actions that will bring the existing good work together in a comprehensive, intentional whole; that will assist in tweaking what is being done to enhance its usefulness both at the unit level and institutionally; and to articulate how what is being done supports student learning in relation to the mission and the aspirations of the institution for its students. Immediate attention to analyzing the work of students and other indicators of student learning to illustrate the use of this information for curricular improvement is essential.

Everything cannot be done at once. At the same time many things can be done simultaneously and with little effort or resources. If particular actions or undertakings are not resulting in useful information, then stop doing them. If other actions result in useful results for advancing student learning, disseminate and replicate them where possible. Mapping what is being done often reveals useful patterns and examples. None of this work needs to be onerous, but it does require us to take the time to intentionally and explicitly examine what we are routinely doing and to explicate how what we do adds to the overall enhancement of student learning as laid out in the institutionally adopted Aspirations and mission. This work is not about evaluating specific individuals, but about student learning during (and after) the time we have students in our presence.

Western Oregon University has a strong beginning on which to build and great promise for success in the future. It was a privilege to learn more about the good work of the campus in relation to student learning expectations and outcomes.

Terrel L. Rhodes