Policy Handbook

Illinois College Assessment Committee

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I. Why “Do” Assessment?

This handbook describes policies and practices for assessment of institutional success at Illinois College. Because the success of our College is the aggregated success of students, faculty, and staff, the policies and practices described here are relevant to all members of our College community. As Illinois College is committed to the highest standards of scholarship and integrity in the liberal arts, we must carry out and document a continuous cycle of reflection, evaluation, revision, and implementation of improvement in every aspect of our work.

To facilitate this cycle of systematic improvement we utilize written assessment plans, assessment implementation reports, and systematic reviews by peers and colleagues. Transparent and constructive review of the work serves to highlight areas that should be improved and allows for open discussions of our work with campus community members. Our process also includes the dissemination of results and practices throughout the College in order to prompt ideas for improvements as well as share demonstrated successes.

The practices described here have the added benefit that they can be used to demonstrate to outside audiences our ongoing cycle of reflection, evaluation, revision, and improvement. Two such audiences are the program and accreditation review teams. Usually, both types of reviews are carried out by external experts at five to ten year intervals. The program review examines data in the aggregate over that time period to understand how a department or program contributes to the College mission. Similarly, the accreditation review asks how, and to what extent, does the College meet its stated goals and mission. Thus both reviews often ask a remarkably similar set of questions. Both types of reviews use quantitative indicators and provide qualitative evaluations.

By carrying out a meaningful assessment process and documenting these activities in an annual Assessment Implementation Report, a department or program can effectively demonstrate their process of improvement and planned accomplishments. A documented cycle of data collection, interpretation, and information-based decisions about operational changes is essential (but not sufficient) to a comprehensive and successful program review. Similarly, by carrying out the assessment activities at the division and institution levels, as described in this handbook, the College can demonstrate the ongoing cycle of improvement and thereby prepare effectively for our next accreditation review.
II. Assessment Resources for Faculty and Staff

A. Assessment in Higher Education

Internet Resources for Higher Education Outcomes Assessment.
http://www2.acs.ncsu.edu/UPA/assmt/resource.htm

B. Assessment Glossaries
http://www.newhorizons.org/strategies/assess/terminology.htm
http://www.sabes.org/assessment/glossary.htm

C. Course Embedded Assessment

D. Grading Rubric Development
http://www.tcnj.edu/~writing/faculty/rubrics.html
http://www.winona.edu/air/rubrics.htm
http://www.engin.umich.edu/teaching/assess_and_improve/handbook/direct/rubric.html
http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/med/rubric.html
http://www.english.udel.edu/wc/faculty/tipsheets/rubrics.pdf

E. College-Wide Program Assessment
Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA).
http://www.cae.org/content/pro_collegiate.htm;
http://www.cic.org/projects_services/coops/cla.asp

F. Using Surveys to Determine Student Perceptions and Engagement
National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE).
http://nsse.iub.edu/html/quick_facts.cfm

G. Course Evaluations
http://www.mcgill.ca/tls/courseevaluations/interpretation/
http://www.jstor.org/stable/1981481?seq=1
http://www.springerlink.com/content/h6265223n1v2413x/
III. Functions of the Illinois College Assessment Committee

The Assessment Committee’s charge is to coordinate and facilitate assessment planning, implementation, and reporting. Specifically, the Assessment Committee performs the following functions:

1. Maintain regular communication about assessment practices within the campus community and with external audiences. This includes disseminating information in faculty meetings, staff meetings, the library, and the College website.

2. In coordination with the appropriate Vice Presidents, review and provide prompt feedback on assessment plans and reports.

3. Review and approve the Institutional Assessment Plan, submitted by the Director of Institutional Research.

4. Review and approve the Institutional Assessment Report, submitted by the Chair of the Assessment Committee.

5. Establish planning and reporting formats, as well as reporting timelines.

6. Recommend professional development opportunities regarding assessment, such as workshops or meetings, to members of the campus community.

7. Administer and interpret an updated handbook of assessment policies.
IV. Assessment in Academic Departments or Programs and Administrative Units

The Chair or Director of each academic department or program and administrative unit (DPU) typically is expected to coordinate the assessment activities within the DPU, ensure that the assessment documents are submitted on time, and serve as a liaison between the DPU and the appropriate Vice President in all assessment matters.

A. The Assessment Plan
Each DPU authors a plan for assessing how its goals are being accomplished. The plan should contain the following components:

1. A set of goals. All members of the DPU should be involved in the definition and selection of goals. Essentially, the goals articulate what it means to be a successful DPU. The goals of academic departments or programs should be directly related to student learning and student success. Administrative unit goals often are related to the specific goals that are articulated in the Strategic Plan of the College. In all cases, the goals must be measurable. All goals should be related to and supportive of the mission of the College.

2. The specific methods that will be used to measure the achievements of each goal. Each method of measurement should include performance standards by which the results will be evaluated. Methods of measurements can be quantitative or qualitative, but must be reliable. Evaluation methods also must be feasible, given current resource levels.

3. A regular schedule for evaluating the achievement of each goal. Although a four-year schedule is typical, DPUs may elect to use shorter schedules that fit their needs more appropriately.

The plan should establish audiences for the assessment results and analysis. Typically, assessment information available for use by these audiences varies according to the provisions made in the plan. The plan should be reviewed and approved by the DPU. An updated four-year (or shorter) plan is submitted in electronic format to the Director of Institutional Research by September 15. It is expected that new faculty and staff will be provided with the updated assessment plan.

B. The Mid-Year Assessment Progress Report
Each DPU authors a progress report that serves two main functions. One, provide an opportunity to revise the assessment plan, i.e., the goals and outcomes that are being evaluated that year. Two, formally communicate any changes or difficulties in assessment between the DPU and the Assessment Committee. In cases when problems or barriers to the assessment process are anticipated, the Chair of the Assessment Committee and the appropriate Vice President will contact the DPU and reach a resolution that will permit ongoing assessment activities. The Mid-Year Assessment Progress Report should contain the following components:

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2 Also see the resources listed in part II above
3 The Athletics and Institutional Research Directors report to the President, hence the President directly supervises assessment in those areas
1. The set of goals that are being evaluated or will be evaluated in the current academic year.
2. The specific methods that are being used or will be used to measure the achievements of each goal in the current academic year.
3. Any anticipated problems or barriers to timely and successful completion of the assessment process in the current academic year.

The Mid-Year Assessment Progress Report is sent in electronic format to the Chair of the Assessment Committee by February 1.

C. The Assessment Implementation Report
Each DPU composes an annual report of its assessment activities, findings, and conclusions. The report should be written in a narrative format and contain the following components:

1. The set of goals that are being evaluated in the current academic year.
2. The specific methods that have been used to measure the achievements of each goal.
3. The results.
4. Analysis of the results. In terms of the performance standards by which the results are being evaluated, were the goals met?
5. A discussion of the results and their implications for future policies. If goals were not met (or met only in part), what were the reasons? In all cases, how do the results from the current year affect plans for the next few years? For academic departments or programs, this discussion can include implementation of new pedagogies, proposals of new courses, modifications of current teaching methods, changes to academic requirements, changes to the advising strategies at the department, and reallocation of current resources. For administrative units, this can include reorganization of priorities, shifting of personnel from one area to another, or reallocation of current resources. It is expected that requests for additional resources will be made elsewhere.

The Assessment Implementation Report is submitted in electronic format to the appropriate Vice President by June 1.

D. Review of the Assessment Implementation Report
The Chair of the Assessment Committee and the appropriate Vice President review each Assessment Implementation Report and compose a joint written response. The review should include specific details about the strengths and shortcomings of each report. The response also should include constructive suggestions for changes in the assessment practices of each DPU. In part, the review should form the basis for discussions within each DPU regarding its assessment practices in the following academic year.

Reviews of the Assessment Implementation are sent to the appropriate Chair or Director by July 15.
V. Assessment in the Divisions of the College

A. The Vice President Assessment Synthesis Report

Each vice president authors a summary and analysis of the assessment activities in their division. In part, this report addresses the following questions:

1. Were your expectations regarding assessment practices in the division met by the current year’s report?
2. What were some of the useful assessment practices that should be of interest to many division constituents?
3. What were some of the most common deficiencies in assessment practices within the division? Of these deficiencies, which ones should be corrected most urgently? How can these deficiencies be remedied in the next year?
4. Are there assessment initiatives that will be introduced and carried out in the division over the next year, e.g., new methods or instruments?
5. What procedural or policy changes are recommended as a result of assessment data analysis?

The Vice President’s report is submitted to the constituents of their respective division, i.e., the faculty in Academic Affairs and the staff in the other divisions of the College. These reports also are submitted to the Chair of the Assessment Committee. Reports in The Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, and Advancement Divisions are submitted by August 15. Reports in the Enrollment and Financial Affairs Divisions are submitted by September 15.

B. Integration of Assessment Results and Decision Making Processes in the College Divisions

1. Division of Academic Affairs

Curricular and instructional changes that are adopted by departments or programs should be based on information collected, in part, by the formal assessment process. Many of these changes pertain to existing courses and are not expected to affect most members of Academic Affairs.

Analysis of department or program assessment data may suggest that significant curricular changes are needed. Such changes include new course proposals, deletion of old courses, and changes to the requirements for the major or the minor. Because significant curricular changes require faculty review and approval, the department or program presents an explanation, which should include assessment data and analysis. The usual procedure for authorizing significant curricular changes in academic programs includes approvals by the respective academic division, the Educational Policies Committee or the Curriculum Review Committee, and the full faculty. Often, changes in
academic programs may be tested successfully for their impact on student learning through pilot studies.

When proposing changes in academic programs these points should be addressed:

a. The purposes of the proposal.
b. An explanation of the anticipated impact on student learning and development.
c. A plan that addresses how changes in student learning will be measured.
d. An evaluation of the availability of resources to sustain the proposed program changes, including personnel, classroom space, and technological resources.

2. Division of Student Affairs

Analysis of assessment data may suggest that significant program changes are needed. Such changes include revisions to the policies regarding student health, e.g., changes in the alcohol consumption policies, as well as major revisions to the social structures on Campus, e.g., changes in student government, literary societies, and other student organizations. Because such changes are likely to have a significant impact on student life on Campus, the unit presents an explanation, which should include assessment data and analysis. The usual procedure for authorizing policy changes in the Student Affairs Division involves approvals by the Student Life Committee, the Vice President for Student Affairs, and then the President. The Vice President for Student Affairs will inform the faculty of such changes. Often, changes in academic programs may be tested successfully for their impact on student learning and social interactions through pilot studies.

Proposed changes in student life programs should address these points:

a. The purposes of the proposal.
b. An explanation of the anticipated impact on student learning and development.
c. A plan that addresses how changes in student learning and development will be measured.
d. An evaluation of the availability of resources to sustain the proposed program changes.

3. Administrative Divisions (Advancement, Enrollment Management, and Financial Affairs)

Analysis of assessment data may suggest that significant program changes are needed. Because such changes are likely to have serious impact on all Campus constituents, the unit presents an explanation, which should include assessment data and analysis. The usual procedure for authorizing changes in the administrative divisions involves approvals by the appropriate Vice President and then the President, who will report the
changes to the faculty. Often, changes in strategies and policies may be tested successfully for their impact on unit performance through pilot studies.

Proposed changes in administrative divisions should address these points:
  a. The purposes of the proposal.
  b. An explanation of the anticipated impact on DPU outcomes.
  c. A plan that addresses how changes in DPU outcomes will be measured.
  d. An evaluation of the availability of resources to sustain the proposed program changes.
VI. The Institutional Assessment Report

The Chair of the Assessment Committee compiles a report on the assessment activities, results, and interpretation that took place over the preceding two academic years. The report should include data and interpretation collected according to the Institutional Assessment Plan as approved by the Assessment Committee. The Institutional Assessment Report is expected to rely, for the most part, on two main sources of information:

1. Division-level reports by the Vice Presidents (see section V above).
2. Institution-level data and interpretation, such as institution-wide surveys and student examinations. This information typically is provided by the Director of Institutional Research.

The Report is submitted to the Assessment Committee in October of even years. After review and approval by the Assessment Committee, the Chair will submit the report to the Vice Presidents and President. The report also will be made available to faculty, staff, and students, in a format to be determined by the Assessment Committee in consultation with the President.

Strategic planning is an attempt to articulate and realize a desired future state for an institution, with consideration for its internal strengths and weaknesses and its external threats and opportunities. Because assessment results can be used to form the basis of the Strategic Planning Committee’s understanding of the institution’s position, the Institutional Assessment Report is submitted to the Chair of the Strategic Planning Committee.
VII. Assessment Annual Cycle

Assessment processes at Illinois College follow a schedule that permits information-based decision-making. Figure 1 shows an illustration of the assessment cycle at the College.

The Assessment Plan for academic departments or programs and administrative units is submitted by September 15 and the Mid-Year Assessment Progress Report is composed by February 1. The annual Assessment Implementation Report is submitted by June 1. Thus there are ample opportunities during the academic year to identify potential problems in the assessment process, communicate these problems in writing to the Assessment Committee, and reach a resolution. Reviews of the Assessment Implementation Reports are completed by July 15, thus departments or programs and units have the remainder of the summer break to update and revise their assessment plans, which again are due by September 15.

Department-level assessment reports and reviews form the basis for the division-level Vice President Assessment Reports, which are submitted by August 15 or September 15. The Vice President Assessment Reports serve two main functions. First, they are provided to faculty and staff in the respective divisions, thus the Vice President reports can inform department-level decisions about assessment practices and policies, which may be incorporated into the upcoming Assessment Plans. Second, the Vice President Assessment Reports are featured in the Institutional Assessment Report, which is submitted to the Assessment Committee in October of even years. Then, the approved Institutional Assessment Report is submitted to the President.

Figure 1. Assessment annual cycle