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A Framework for Divisionwide Assessments of Student Learning and Institutional Effectiveness

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OVERVIEW

Evidence of student learning and resource stewardship are integral components to higher education's internal planning and external accountability fabric. Assessment offers educational leaders a powerful tool to address needs for detailed evidence that demonstrates areas of strength while pointing to areas that can enhance the educational environment delivered to students. Although a litany of resources exist to guide program- and department-level assessment, few resources are designed to help leaders in student affairs organize an integrated and cohesive approach to showcase the contributions of student affairs for planning and accountability. The purpose of this issue of *Policy and Practice* is to support the efforts of student affairs educators who want to build divisionwide assessment structures that are sustainable; enable practitioners to guide and document change; and support the division's ability to showcase the contributions of the cocurriculum toward resource stewardship, student learning, and university mission.

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A Framework for Divisionwide Assessments of Student Learning and Institutional Effectiveness

Calls for evidence of student learning have maintained a commanding presence in higher education's governance context. Several particularly notable national reports add historical milestones to the assessment movement in higher education. In 1986, the National Governor's Association released *Time for Results*, which called for colleges and universities to develop national standards and assessment instruments showcasing broad, comparable evidence of student attainment on key competencies. In 1993, Bogue, Creech, and Folger summarized a litany of policy actions focused on assessing quality across the 16 member states of the Southern Regional Education Board. More than a decade later, the Spellings Commission in 2006 released *A Test of Leadership*, a report that demanded more evidence that students were prepared to meet employer needs, among other reforms.

The seven regional accrediting bodies, because they are charged by the U.S. Department of Education with broad oversight of college and university eligibility for Title IV federal student financial aid and other benefits, are expected to enforce a comprehensive set of operational standards, including the collection and use of student learning outcomes (SLOs) for both academic and cocurricular learning. Appendix A provides a table that summarizes every regional accrediting body's standards on the collection, use, and reporting of SLOs and institutional effectiveness indicators (IEIs). The table is a resource for determining the assessment-related standards or principles with which the reader's institution must demonstrate compliance. The table also demonstrates broad overlap in what colleges and universities are expected to demonstrate for regional accreditation purposes. Leaders and educators in student affairs can also reference the information in this table and connect with accrediting teams on their campuses to ensure that information on assessment in student affairs is properly integrated within each section of the campus's accreditation reports and supporting documentation. Colleges and universities are expected by their regional accrediting body to

1. identify and assess SLOs and IEIs consistent with the institution's goals and mission;
2. conduct assessments of SLOs and IEIs on a periodic and cyclical basis, using the information to guide and document changes to programs, services, resources, and activities, and communicate the impact of the learning environment on students;
3. use the evidence of student learning and institutional effectiveness in institutional planning and resource allocation decisions; and

4. routinely assess the policies, processes, and practices governing assessment to ensure quality, consistency, and support of mission attainment.

In an evaluation of assessment-related policies among the seven regional accrediting bodies, Provezis (2010) found that each body (a) expects institutions to define, articulate, assess, and use SLOs to inform improvement; (b) utilizes the Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions' (2003) Principles for Good Practices in evaluating institutions' assessment policies and practices; and, perhaps most notably, (c) reports deficiencies in assessment of student learning as the most common issue encountered in evaluating institutions for compliance with accreditation standards or principles. Further, under the past two administrations, the U.S. Department of Education has affirmed its expectations of regional accrediting bodies to evaluate institutions' collection, use, and communication of SLOs to earn or maintain accreditation (Mitchell, 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Expectations for accountability have led many college and university leaders—including those in student affairs—to reevaluate campus assessment policies and practices.

Many efforts to collect evidence of student learning have boiled down the complex interaction between students and their learning environment into easily digestible information available to a broad stakeholder audience (Morse, 2012). For example, cohort-based value-added assessments of high-demand competencies (e.g., multicultural competence, written communication) from two distinct points in an educational experience may be meaningful to those curious about learners' gains. Additionally, overall averages of students' performance on a standardized assessment of

critical thinking may be valuable to those interested in comparing learners in one program against those in another. Assessments of use and satisfaction of cocurricular programs are a common approach to gathering data to determine whether students participate in and enjoy the learning environment. These types of data, however, rarely produce the detail required for educators to make informed decisions about whether particular learning interventions within a specific program, service, or activity contribute to student learning.

Relying on singular data points, including value-added gains, and indicators of use and satisfaction creates blind spots for educators to ensure high-quality experiences for students. Though these assessments yield important indicators of the student experience, they do not provide detailed evidence on the effectiveness of activity-level learning interventions designed to introduce or reinforce competencies expected of students. If expected SLOs or performance benchmarks are not met, overall or pre- and post-averages tell educators nothing about where programs need improvement—or how to improve them. Conversely, when expectations are met, educators have no indications about what components were most effective in educating students. Educators need adequate, activity-specific data from which to gain an understanding of whether their interventions support student learning and how they can maintain or improve successful learning environments.

Regional accreditation provides a canvas for higher education's broad charge to collect, use, and report evidence of student learning: Educators must identify SLOs and IELs that support their institution's mission. Educators are expected to routinely assess the curriculum and cocurriculum, and they must use the evidence to document change and inform resource allocation decisions. Although these expectations form the canvas frame, educators possess artistic discretion to paint the picture of the learning environment that educators provide. That is, educators have broad latitude to identify what students are expected to learn, develop sound assessment methods, and effectively utilize and communicate the results.

Resources have been developed to guide departments and functional areas to conduct sound assessments of cocurricular student learning. The Association of American Colleges and Universities' Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education initiative, which began in 2007, has led to the development of 16 rubrics that enable direct observational methods of learning domains such as teamwork, problem solving, civic engagement, and global learning. In 2007, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, a regional accrediting body, released the second edition of its comprehensive *Student Learning Assessment: Options and Resources* to guide educators

in the development of sound, sustainable cycles of program-, department-, and institution-level assessment in line with their institution's mission and in compliance with accreditation standards. The *Degree Qualifications Profile*—developed in 2008 through a partnership between the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment, the Institute for Evidence-Based Change, and Lumina Foundation—maps the knowledge, skills, and competencies of learners seeking associate's, bachelor's, and master's degrees. NASPA has also addressed the need for assessment in Sriram's (2014) *5 Things* issue brief on developing surveys for student affairs assessment. Further, NASPA Advisory Services has been launched to support the development of sound and effective student affairs practice, including assessments of student learning and resource stewardship (NASPA, 2019). The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (2015) has also created student learning and development outcomes for adoption and use within student affairs, and Schuh, Biddix, Dean, and Kinzie's (2016) text offers best practices for assessment in student affairs. These resources help educators develop assessments that are tailored to their areas of focus.

Despite a broad literature base on activity- or program-level assessment, leaders in student affairs have few resources to support their efforts to build high-quality, sustainable, and divisionwide assessment structures. Vice presidents for student affairs (VPSAs) and their leadership teams are also confronted with myriad challenges and questions to address along the way: How do leaders in student affairs establish a common set of learning goals across the division? What steps help guide educators to deliver cocurricular programs, services, resources, and activities within their departments to support student attainment of common, intentionally developed broad learning goals that align with the institution's mission? What resources must be invested to ensure that departmental leaders and educators have the skills and tools to develop meaningful assessments of their learning interventions and support structures? How do student affairs leaders and educators structure assessment across the division so results are adequately detailed to (a) guide the identification of strengths or improvements, and (b) ensure change is documented and stored for planning and accountability purposes? This issue of *Policy and Practice* addresses these and other challenges, and it introduces the Learning Outcomes and Organizational Planning (LOOP) framework as a resource to help leaders in student affairs build effective, sustainable, and ongoing cycles of assessment that link to institution- and divisionwide learning goals.

ABOUT THIS BRIEF

The purpose of this issue of *Policy and Practice* is to support the efforts of leaders and educators in student affairs to build divisionwide assessment structures that (a) are sustainable; (b) enable practitioners to guide and document change; and (c) support the division's ability to showcase the contributions of the cocurriculum toward resource stewardship, student learning, and university mission. It integrates literature on program- and activity-level assessment with best practices in the development of a high-quality, sustainable approach to the collection, use, documentation, and communication of assessment results across the division. The brief acknowledges that meaningful assessment must feed each department's need for evidence to inform areas of strength and improvement within specific programs, services, and activities (PSAs).

This brief outlines the LOOP framework for organizing department-specific assessment needs into a cohesive narrative on divisionwide contributions to student learning and resource stewardship. Based on their background in the scholarship and practice of assessment, the authors developed the LOOP framework as a resource for discussion and planning across institutions of varying sectors and sizes—and at different phases and stages of building assessment processes across the division of student affairs. The LOOP framework is just that: a framework. Its components may need modification to fit a division's specific needs, structure, and resources; however, the LOOP framework's principles and phases provide guidance that leads to effective, sustainable, and ongoing cycles of assessment of student learning and institutional effectiveness that align with divisionwide goals.

WHY ASSESSMENT?

Higher education institutions at their best create environments characterized by a drive to improve, an ethos termed *positive restlessness* by Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, and Whitt (2005) in their exploration of high-performing colleges and universities. Quality assessment practices create the mechanisms through which divisions of student affairs harness this positive restlessness in a systematic way, leading to concrete, ongoing, and documented improvement in the learning interventions provided to students.

Though higher education's governance context demands evidence of student learning and resource stewardship, accountability is not the primary reason for assessment. Sinek's (2011) *Start With Why* offers powerful insights on the true underpinnings of assessment purpose. Sinek encouraged leaders to dig deeper, to define the *why* before the *what* or *how*. Although assessment may be *how* educators demonstrate accountability, and the instruments and methods may be *what* are used to do it, starting with *why* requires a deeper level of reflection.

Education is transformative. Colleges and universities are places where students gain the skills, confidence, and sense of purpose to flourish throughout their lives. They are places where students develop empathy, entrepreneurialism, personal responsibility, and many other characteristics that enable them to affect their homes, employers, and communities. This does not happen by accident; indeed, educators design learning experiences that impact the futures of their students.

Assessment measures the extent to which the knowledge, skills, or abilities that are introduced or reinforced within a particular program, service, or activity were met; if an intended outcome is not met, educators embrace *positive restlessness* by using assessment evidence to determine what, specifically, can be improved. Therefore, assessment supports educators' responsibility to affect the lives of students.

LOOP FRAMEWORK PRINCIPLES

The LOOP framework is a process for bringing a cohesive, divisionwide narrative and approach to each department's work of delivering and assessing PSAs that introduce or reinforce the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) that students are expected to gain. The LOOP framework supports educators within each department to develop PSAs that align with broadly defined divisionwide learning goals. It requires the development of SLOs and IELs that produce specific, detailed information to support educators' responsibilities to improve and document changes to PSAs. Designed to provide departments with the flexibility necessary to develop PSAs and assessment measures unique to their needs, LOOP is a tool student affairs educators can use for internal planning and external accountability purposes.

LOOP embeds standards of high-quality assessment: (a) SLOs are clear, measurable, PSA-specific, and aligned with

divisionwide learning goals; (b) assessment methods and measures are sound, appropriately tailored to the activity-specific SLOs being assessed, employ direct observational methods when possible, and yield evidence with decision utility; (c) PSA-specific assessment results are used to inform areas of strength and improvement, as well as resource allocation decisions; (d) changes made through the use of assessment results are documented; (e) the full complement of PSAs are assessed on an ongoing basis; and (f) SLOs and assessment methods and measures are routinely assessed for appropriateness to the programs or activities being assessed. LOOP encourages collaboration and reflection at the department and division levels.

A core set of LOOP principles guide effective, cohesive, and sustainable assessments of student learning and resource stewardship at the department and division levels.

KEY TERMS

Decision utility means that the evidence gained from assessment is detailed and sufficient to show that specific areas of strength or improvement to PSAs can be made when SLOs or IELs are not met. For example, if an educator is conducting a direct observational methods assessment of students' interviewing skills during a mock interview exercise, the educator would want to break down the specific KSAs expected of students. The educator would then assess those specific KSAs during the mock interview, documenting whether the student met, did not meet, or exceeded expectations for each KSA, noting specific actions that reinforce the findings. The assessment produces aggregate information from which the educator can discern patterns and outliers that emerged during the mock interview. This information can be used to identify whether expected outcomes were met and where, specifically, students' interview skills were particularly strong. Further, the results would help educators understand whether—and on what particular KSA—learning interventions could be integrated into future interview preparation programming.

A divisionwide learning goal is a broadly defined competency that is intentionally introduced or reinforced in unique, specific ways across cocurricular PSAs in one or more departments in the division of student affairs.

Institutional effectiveness indicators (IEIs) are supplemental measures that tell educators basic indicators of operational effectiveness and/or efficiency in designing and delivering the assessed program, resource, activity, or service. Often, IEIs measure utilization or satisfaction, but they can also be used to track whether a program, service, resource, or activity operates within certain parameters (e.g., budgetary, time expended).

Knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) refer to what students learn from a particular PSA. For example, a wellness services department might assess students' knowledge about signs of alcohol poisoning after students complete an alcohol education program. This form of knowledge is specific to the program and identified in the SLO.

Programs, services, or activities (PSAs) are specific educational interventions designed to meet the needs of students by introducing or reinforcing knowledge, skills, and abilities.

Student learning outcomes (SLOs) are expected behaviors, characteristics, and attributes that students exhibit as a result of a program, service, resource, or activity. SLOs include things educators expect students to know, be, or do as a result of a particular set of intentionally designed, clearly articulated learning activities.

PRINCIPLE 1: DIVISIONWIDE ASSESSMENT STARTS (AND CONTINUES) WITH THE DIVISION'S LEADERS.

Divisionwide approaches for cocurricular assessments of student learning and institutional effectiveness begin and continue with the division's senior leaders. VPSAs can set a lasting tone by conveying the importance of creating a cohesive approach to assessing SLOs and IELs that reinforces divisionwide learning goals. VPSAs empower departments to set attainable assessment goals and to provide time and space for staff to learn how to conduct high-quality assessments of student learning and resource stewardship. VPSAs must not only set the tone but also ensure adequate resources are invested so that staff can conduct divisionwide assessment over the short and long terms.

For example, at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University, the vice chancellor for student affairs created the full-time position that Kellie Dixon holds to integrate assessment into the division's planning and accountability efforts. Dixon (personal communication, March 14, 2019) acknowledged that a professional role focused primarily on student affairs assessment is rare at historically Black colleges or universities (HBCUs). She noted, "Out of all the HBCUs in the United States, there are less than five institutions I'm aware of that have a professional staff member focused primarily on assessment in student affairs, and I'm one of them." Dixon shared that the vice chancellor's creation of an assessment director helped bring assessment to the forefront of department-specific and divisionwide planning efforts, and noted the importance of offering professional development along the way. Dixon is responsible for providing a portfolio of professional development opportunities that help her colleagues create meaningful assessment plans that align with the division's and university's strategic priorities.

Division leaders may not be in a position to invest in full-time staff whose primary responsibilities focus on cocurricular assessment. That challenge is being navigated at Anne Arundel Community College. Kristen Vickery, director of testing and assessment services, is supporting the development of departmental assessment plans that nest under the community college's core competencies. She acknowledged that building assessment capacity is time and work intensive (personal communication, March 28, 2019).

Over time, however, as departmental directors and others charged with assessment gain comfort with the process, those tasked with leading assessment efforts become less focused on capacity building and more concerned about maintaining the structure that has been built. Assessment leads build capacity by offering routine professional development to new employees or existing staff who take on assessment roles, checking in with departments to address

assessment-related challenges or needs, and facilitating divisionwide meetings focused on assessment to reinforce its role in addressing educational needs. In some cases, student affairs leaders may be able to recalibrate the job description of staff charged with assessment to maintain a manageable workload.

PRINCIPLE 2: DIVISIONWIDE LEARNING GOALS GUIDE DEPARTMENT-SPECIFIC PSAS.

What broad KSAs are students expected to gain through engagement with cocurricular PSAs within the division? What PSAs within each department introduce or reinforce concepts that align with those KSAs? Developing sustainable, cohesive divisionwide approaches to assessment requires VPSAs, division assessment facilitators, departmental directors, and other stakeholders to know the division's broad goals for student learning. At the University of Northern Iowa, for example, the Division of Student Affairs has identified a divisionwide learning goal for personal agency, broadly defined as "preparing students to espouse strong senses of personal accountability, responsibility, and self-awareness" (A. Morse & K. Woods, personal communication, September 11, 2018). Each department is given latitude to develop assessable PSAs that introduce or reinforce personal accountability, responsibility, and self-awareness. One department educating students about personal agency is the Dean of Students Office. It is assessing the efficacy of a personalized self-reflection workshop, *Choices*, in helping students who are found responsible for violations of student conduct gain self-awareness of the relationship between their actions and values. The assessment of *Choices* will provide evidence to support decision making about what, if anything, should change to improve the program; in turn, the department is assessing a program that links directly to an educational need that the division intends to meet for students.

PRINCIPLE 3: DEPARTMENTS NEED FLEXIBILITY TO ASSESS PSAS THAT ALIGN WITH BROADLY DEFINED DIVISIONWIDE LEARNING GOALS.

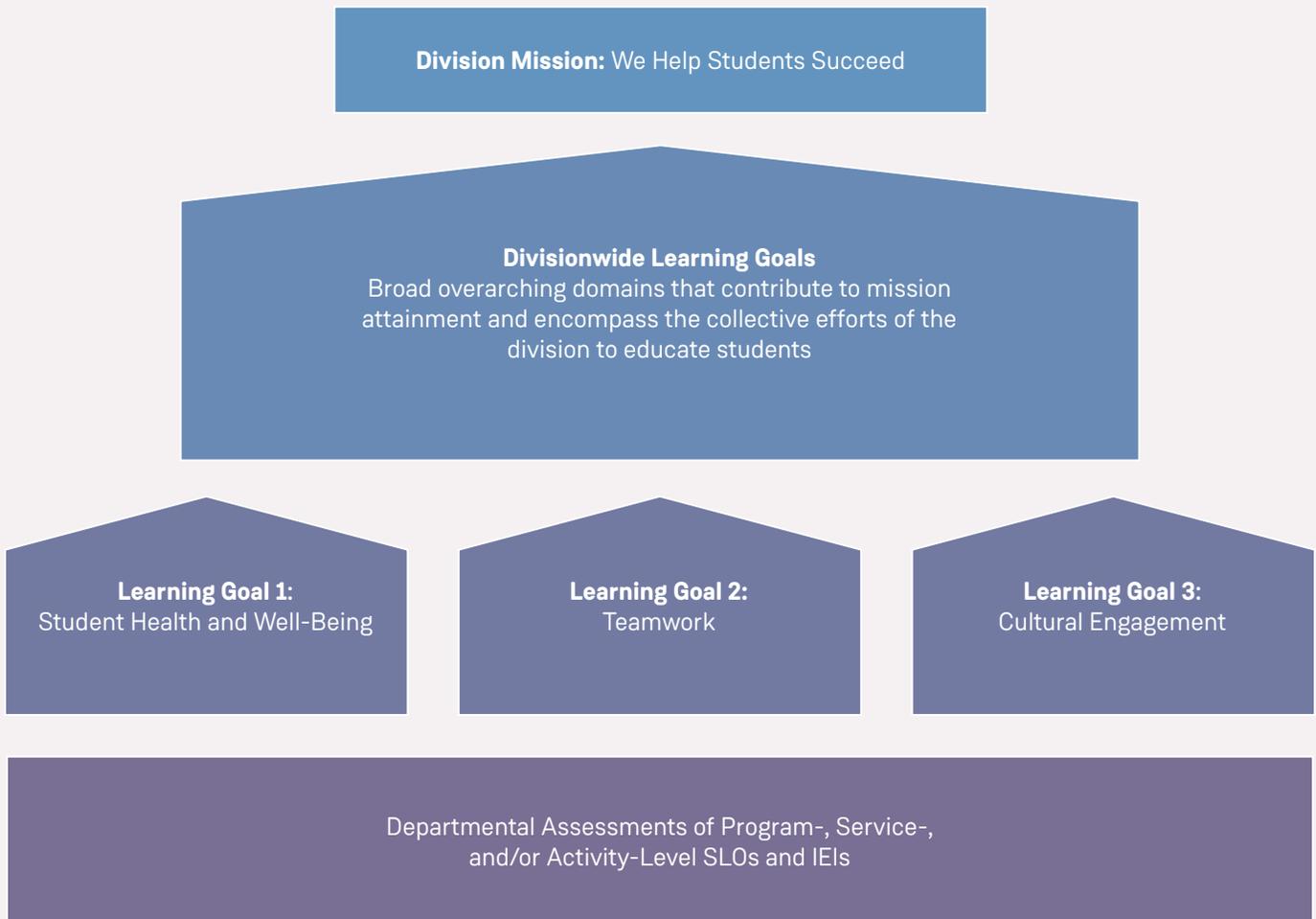
Each department has a unique role in the learning and development of students through its mission, function, and purpose; through its role each department serves as a partner in the attainment of the division's goals for student learning and the effective stewardship of institutional resources. The work of student affairs frequently involves the introduction and reinforcement of abstract concepts such as career readiness, teamwork, intercultural competence, and others. Such complex work requires both flexibility and intentionality at the department and division levels. Abstract concepts require educators to break down learning interventions within specific

PSAs into concrete, assessable behaviors, attributes, or characteristics; to develop methods that yield information with adequate decision utility to identify strengths or areas of improvement; and to document when changes are made based on the results. Though an intentional cocurricular learning program requires the division to define and set broad goals for student learning and development, departments must be given flexibility to articulate PSA-level outcomes and to develop assessment plans that support those broad goals. The department's PSAs thus help

educators facilitate the attainment of divisionwide learning goals, showcasing the division's collective contributions to student learning while stewarding resources.

Figure 1 shows the relationship between department-specific assessments of student learning and institutional effectiveness and divisionwide learning goals. This visual depicts the cohesion between a division's overarching mission, broad learning goals, and PSAs at the departmental level.

Figure 1. *Divisionwide Assessment Model*



PRINCIPLE 4: SET CHALLENGING GOALS, BUT DON'T OVERDO IT.

PSA-level assessment is about quality, not quantity. Leaders in student affairs should set expectations that their departments must assess PSAs each year, but engage in conversation with department directors to determine the appropriate number of PSAs to assess. By setting challenging but attainable goals, leaders in student affairs enable the development, implementation, and sustainability

of high-quality assessment efforts. Assessment is an iterative process, especially in the early phases. Revisiting expectations for assessment, solving technical or practical problems in the moment, and adjusting when necessary are all parts of the process to develop sound assessment methods across the division.

PRINCIPLE 5: PROVIDE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES ON ASSESSMENT FOR DEPARTMENT DIRECTORS AND STAFF.

Given the long-standing importance of data-supported decision making in higher education's planning and governance contexts, it is critical that division leaders and staff alike possess the skills required to conduct and use assessment evidence. Those who conduct assessments of student learning and institutional effectiveness need to know how to write clear, measurable SLOs and IEs, develop or identify existing high-quality measures, collect detailed evidence through assessment, utilize the results to support PSA-level change, and document each step of the process. Department directors and division leaders must be familiar with governance requirements from institutional, state, or regional accrediting bodies and be able to develop sustainable processes and practices to ensure compliance. Structures for ensuring divisionwide professional development and capacity building are outlined later in this document.

For example, at Cornell University, Leslie Meyerhoff leads an Assessment 101 course offered to staff of the Division of Student and Campus Life. The class reinforces student development theory and covers the necessities

of developing a comprehensive assessment plan. Dixon offers personalized attention to each department within the Division of Student Affairs at North Carolina A&T State University; each department submits a service request outlining its needs, and Dixon provides consultation and technical assistance to help her colleagues solve assessment-related challenges.

PRINCIPLE 6: ASSESS AT THE PSA LEVEL.

Educators must identify specific KSAs introduced or reinforced within a specific PSA and then develop specific SLOs for each KSA that they intend to assess for that cycle. Not every KSA is required to be assessed in a single assessment exercise; assessment occurs on a cyclical, recurring basis. The goal is quality over quantity; assessors should ensure that assessments are specifically tailored to the intended SLOs introduced or reinforced in the PSA, capture adequate detail to make decisions about whether the intended SLOs were achieved, and guide an action plan for improving specific interventions within the PSA when expectations are not met. A sample relationship between a PSA-level assessment and its divisionwide learning goals is provided in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Sample Relationship Between PSA-Level SLO and Its Divisionwide Goal



Critics of PSA-level assessment question whether its results provide enough information about student learning. Critics often call for common measures across departments (e.g., multi-departmental assessment) to enable large sample sizes. However, although large-scale assessment has merit, this line of critique offers a false dichotomy that often detracts from steady progress in building sound, sustainable, and needed information on student learning. It also overlooks the responsibility educators have to assess specific SLOs within their departments to inform whether their PSAs achieve intended effects on student learning and development.

Calls for large scale, multi-departmental assessment often get hung up by a lack of readiness. Being ready to conduct multi-departmental assessment requires at least the following components: (a) a common SLO; (b) a shared

experience across departments that deliver and assess the intended outcome; and (c) common methods and instruments for assessing the extent to which students achieve the intended outcome.

A common example is student employment. Advocates for large scale, multi-departmental assessment call for assessments of student employment on KSAs, oftentimes those valued by employers: teamwork, professional communication, or conflict resolution, to name a few. PSA-level thinking on assessment can be applied, but it often requires significant investments of staff time to (a) identify the specific SLO(s) commonly expected of students; (b) develop a common experience—and a set of activities within that experience—that introduces or reinforces the SLO; and (c) develop or adopt methods or measures to collect

adequate, detailed information on whether the SLO was met and, if not, where, specifically, improvements in the experience can be applied. Without a systematic approach, however, multi-departmental assessments will fail for reasons described above to produce the common, detailed information advocates for such approaches intend to gather. In addition, starting with multi-departmental assessment often stalls the PSA-level evidence departmental directors need on student learning and resource stewardship within their units.

PRINCIPLE 7: ENSURE THAT EACH DEPARTMENT ASSESSES AT LEAST ONE IEI THAT IS DIRECTLY RELATED TO A SPECIFIC SLO.

SLOs are a powerful resource in demonstrating and improving the experiences provided to students; however, they are limited in what they show about other critical components of the PSAs provided to students. Knowing whether students achieved expected SLOs does not mean, for instance, that students enjoyed the experience. Assessments of student learning also do not measure how many students participated in the experience. Educators need multiple sources of evidence to generate a holistic picture of the delivery and impact of PSAs. Collecting IEIs that are directly related to the PSA-level SLO being assessed will tell educators whether students attended or enjoyed the experience. To ensure that students learn, educators need to create and deliver programs that will draw students to the intentionally crafted PSAs within their departments.

PRINCIPLE 8: ESTABLISH A CALENDAR THAT ENSURES THE ROUTINE, PERIODIC ASSESSMENT OF EACH PSA WITHIN EACH DEPARTMENT.

In other words, develop an assessment cycle that is manageable but that ensures the routine assessment of every PSA within a department. Staffing and resources differ by department, division, and institution; however, institutions are generally provided substantial flexibility in setting the cycle during which PSAs are assessed, as well as the volume of the PSAs assessed. No magic formula exists for determining how many programs to assess in a given period; department directors need to practice thoughtful discretion in setting and documenting the assessment calendar to ensure regular, ongoing assessment of cocurricular SLOs and IEIs.

PRINCIPLE 9: ENCOURAGE INTERDEPARTMENTAL PLANNING AND COLLABORATION.

In the division's effort to assess SLOs and steward resources, departments should maintain regular engagement with one another. Opportunities may exist to sequence PSAs so that they complement—or deepen—intended learning outcomes. In addition, partnering across

departments may lead to greater resource efficiencies by combining PSAs when possible, enabling practitioners to better utilize existing resources. However, interdepartmental collaboration should be met with the same cautions as those applied to conducting large-scale assessment studies, as described in Principle 6.

PRINCIPLE 10: CAPTURE STUDENT IDS TO OBSERVE PATTERNS AND INTEGRATE ASSESSMENT DATA WITHIN THE INSTITUTION'S DATA WAREHOUSE.

Collecting the ID numbers of those students who participate in the PSAs within each department enhances the assessment activities at the department and division levels. By collecting student IDs, educators and assessors can glean the number of activities in which each student engaged during his or her time at the institution; this information can be shared across departments to observe student-level patterns of learning and engagement. Importantly, capturing student IDs enhances the sophistication of questions the assessor may ask about the impact of a learning experience, or set of learning experiences, on students. By collecting student IDs, for example, educators can explore such questions as, “To what extent does meeting expected learning outcomes through cocurricular PSAs increase a student's likelihood of retention or persistence, compared with those who do not engage in cocurricular experiences?” Assessors may also ask, for instance, “To what extent does participation in a cocurricular experience mitigate gaps in retention, persistence, or completion by race/ethnicity, sex, or some other factor?” Gathering student IDs and using them for the specific, educational interest of measuring student outcomes allows departmental and division leaders to track the progress of PSAs on critical performance indicators—while demonstrating the contributions of the cocurriculum to student success.

Department directors should exercise great care in gathering student ID numbers or other identity-related information. Students seeking confidential support, for instance, may not want their ID linked to a particular PSA; in these cases, student affairs professionals may decide to allow students to opt out of having their name, student ID, or other such information captured. Professionals can also avoid collecting this information altogether. This is an important consideration for PSAs in which the collection of this evidence may negatively affect participation.

PRINCIPLE 11: USE COMMON DOCUMENTS AND DEVELOP CENTRALIZED STORAGE.

Though each department must have flexibility to develop assessments of PSAs that nest under the division's learning goals/domains, systematic divisionwide approaches benefit

from common documents and reporting procedures. Each department should therefore use and submit to a central divisionwide repository a common set of documents. These documents comprise each department's assessment portfolio; see below for a description of a full departmental assessment portfolio.

The VPSA and lead facilitator should consult with colleagues in academic affairs to determine which type of storage system is used for academic program assessment. Assessment storage and reporting practices can then be aligned across university divisions. This cross-divisional conversation may also lead to other opportunities for collaboration, such as common assessment web pages and shared resources related to the assessment process.

Templates and supporting documents that form the assessment portfolio include the following:

- ◇ An assessment reporting template in which each department keeps a step-by-step record of the progress in developing and conducting assessments of cocurricular PSAs. The template should provide for one listing of each PSA being assessed. The template should include space for each assessed PSA to have listings for each of the following elements: (a) the name of the department/functional area; (b) the PSA being assessed within the department/area; (c) brief descriptions of the methods/measures to assess each PSA-level SLO or IEI; (d) expected outcomes for each SLO or IEI; (e) the divisionwide goal—or goals—supported by the PSA; (f) action steps that will be taken if the SLOs or IEIs are not achieved; (g) the results of the assessment; and (h) actions that were taken if SLOs or IEIs were not met. Remember that assessment is both ongoing and cyclical; therefore, if SLOs and IEIs are met within a specific PSA, and no actions are taken at one point in time, educators should identify the next point at which the PSA will be assessed.
- ◇ Overview and description of each assessed PSA, including any supplemental materials to demonstrate the alignment of the PSA-level SLOs or IEIs with the learning interventions
- ◇ Copies of the assessment instruments used to assess SLOs and IEIs
- ◇ A calendar to show when each PSA will be assessed within each department; this step shows the ongoing, cyclical process for assessing PSA-level SLOs and IEIs. It also ensures that each department has a sustainable approach to assessment.
- ◇ Evidence of change to assessed PSAs, including documented changes to learning interventions within a particular cocurricular PSA. This could include new

program descriptions, revised SLOs or IEIs, or modified syllabi to reflect new learning interventions.

- ◇ Meeting minutes in which changes to programs are discussed and/or made. This step adds further evidence that results inform discussion and improvement to the cocurriculum.

PRINCIPLE 12: DEPARTMENTS LIKELY HAVE ASSESSMENT NEEDS OUTSIDE OF THE DIVISION'S FRAMEWORK; PROVIDE FLEXIBILITY TO ASSESS DEPARTMENT-SPECIFIC AND DIVISIONWIDE SLOS AND IEIS.

Each department should have its own assessments tailored to its unique mission, function, and purpose; that is, there may be assessment activities that do not directly feed divisionwide learning goals, but must be collected to perform other necessary functions of the department. A divisionwide framework exists in parallel to that core work, but division leaders should recognize the need for supplemental evidence in setting expectations for the routine assessment of SLOs and IEIs that align with the division's shared learning goals.

At Cornell University, for example, more than 30 departments compose the Division of Student and Campus Life, which includes traditional student support offices as well as conference and event services, print services, and catering. Aside from divisionwide goals that may be met by engaging student employees in high-quality, intentionally delivered learning experiences in those offices, evidence on the effectiveness of services provided by each department is needed. Assessments of use and satisfaction among those who utilize Cornell Catering, for instance, are of high importance to assessing the delivery of services and, in turn, ensuring the high-quality fulfillment of the core function of the department.

PRINCIPLE 13: COMMUNICATE THE DIVISION'S IMPACT ON STUDENT LEARNING.

As discourse on the value of higher education continues, it is critical that educators proactively communicate the learning that occurs in the cocurriculum. Not only do SLOs and IEIs help educators make decisions that improve or affirm the quality of their PSAs, but the collection of PSA-level SLOs and IEIs also creates numerous opportunities to showcase the contributions of cocurricular learning interventions to student learning and the stewardship of institutional resources. In the words of Dixon at North Carolina A&T State University:

It is important that as a minority-serving institution—more specifically, an HBCU—we tell our story. Though our student demographics are constantly changing, the impact of student learning on our campuses is a combination of trends in higher education and our

rich history/traditions of educating the Black student. (personal communication, April 8, 2019)

Department and division leaders should use data garnered from assessment to tell the institutional and broader community about the effect of the cocurricular learning environment on students' attainment of high-demand skills

that align with and support the division's and university's missions. One-page infographics, annual department-specific or divisionwide reports, social media posts, and webpages are several such examples that can be used to inform partners and stakeholders of student affairs' contributions to student learning and success.

PRINCIPLE 14: ASSESS YOUR ASSESSMENT POLICIES, PROCESSES, PRACTICES, AND METHODS/MEASURES.

Depending on where the division and its departments are in the process of developing sound, sustainable cycles of cocurricular SLOs and IELs, practitioners may need to begin with this step. Beyond an initial assessment of assessment, however, is the ongoing need to ensure the relevance and sustainability of the division's assessment approach. Common questions involved in appraising a division's assessment approach include the following:

- ◇ What are the division's broad learning goals, and to what extent are departments capturing PSA-level evidence in support of those goals?
- ◇ What methods/measures are departments using to assess PSA-level SLOs? Are they appropriately tailored to the PSAs being assessed? Do they yield evidence with adequate detail to guide and document change (i.e., decision utility)? Are the departments assessing PSA-level SLOs and IELs in tandem?
- ◇ Do opportunities for departmental collaboration and integration with PSAs exist?
- ◇ What information is being gathered and stored centrally (e.g., within the division office) to ensure the ongoing collection and use of assessment evidence?
- ◇ How are departments using evidence of student learning to guide and document change (i.e., "closing the loop")?
- ◇ If it has been a few years since the division developed its learning goals, should they be revisited?
- ◇ How is the division using annual retreats, staff meetings, or other such opportunities for connection to reflect on the uses, challenges, and future opportunities of assessment? As division staff reflect together, how might assessment leads design new or combine existing PSAs that continue enhancing the learning environment and achieving resource efficiency and effectiveness?

PRINCIPLE 15: MORE THAN ONE WAY EXISTS TO CREATE A DIVISIONWIDE ASSESSMENT APPROACH.

Applying the principles of the LOOP framework requires careful deliberation and planning by division leaders, departmental directors, staff, and others involved in the collection, use, and reporting of SLOs and IELs. For example, several different approaches are guiding the work of the divisions represented throughout this brief:

- ◇ **University of Utah:** Each department is expected to develop assessment plans that align with learning domains that reinforce the attainment of the division's strategic plan.
- ◇ **North Carolina A&T State University:** Each department is expected to link its assessment plans to the university and division strategic plan. Additionally, each department must identify outcomes that provide impact of student learning through its departmental mission.
- ◇ **Anne Arundel Community College:** Each department is working to establish student development learning outcomes that align with at least one of nine institution-level core competencies.

Institutions must develop a systematic approach that couples the development of assessment processes with learning opportunities that equip staff with the skills to create and administer high-quality assessment plans. Four broad phases for developing divisionwide assessment are described in the next section.

LOOP FRAMEWORK PHASES

The LOOP framework's purpose is to guide VPSAs, departmental directors, and assessment leads and facilitators (see Appendix B for a description of roles) in building a cohesive and sustainable structure for the delivery and assessment of cocurricular PSAs that (a) ensure the routine collection, use, and communication of high-quality, detailed assessment evidence; and (b) showcase the intentional, strategic relationship between specific learning activities, the educational needs departments are seeking to meet, and the division's intentional, overarching goals for student learning.

In building a divisionwide assessment structure, one of the most significant challenges that VPSAs confront is the amount of time and energy required to bring cohesion and sustainability to departmental assessment activities. This work requires patience and collaboration among division leaders and staff. It is important to start small and set aside time and space for departmental directors and assessment leads to develop their skills while working as partners to build and maintain the division's assessment structure in

the short and long terms. The development of a cohesive, sustainable approach is an iterative process, and particular consideration should be given to the division's departmental composition and structure. The approach should complement the PSAs and the educational needs that must be met, and it should consider staff and resource availability.

The development of divisionwide assessment structures begins by meeting educators and assessment leads where they are—in other words, high-quality and sustainable assessment structures require base-level knowledge of both the theory undergirding student development and the current best practices in assessment. No two division's assessment structures will be identical; however, the process to develop and maintain divisionwide assessment structures follows a broad structure under which a set of strategic actions steps occur. The LOOP framework outlines four broad phases to guide the development and continuity of divisionwide assessment structures.

Figure 3. LOOP Framework Phases

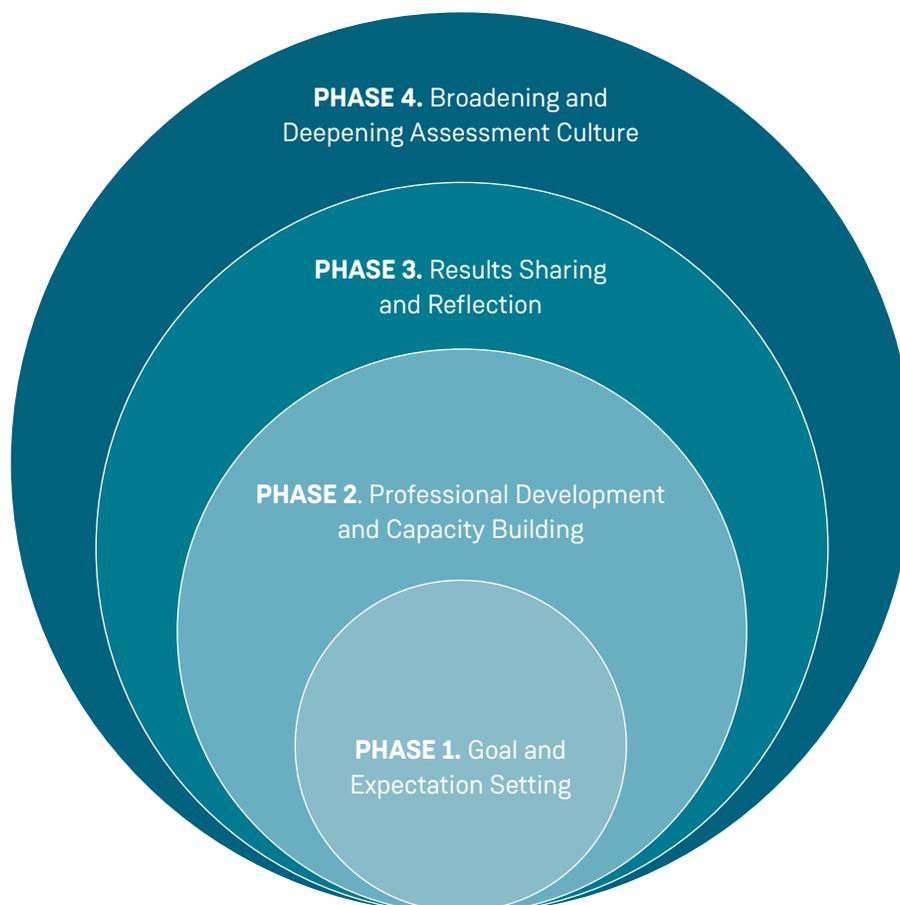


Figure 3 illustrates the relationship between each phase of the LOOP framework. Divisionwide assessment structures begin with division leaders. During Phase 1, VPSAs work with department directors to set goals, establish expectations, identify resource needs, select assessment leads, and prioritize short- and long-term action steps. Once goal and expectation setting is complete, Phase 2 involves developing the skills of department directors and assessment leads to ensure that (a) PSAs are aligned with divisionwide learning goals; (b) assessments yield evidence with sufficient decision utility to guide and document change; (c) action plans for improving PSAs based on assessment results are identified; (d) any necessary changes are made and documented, and the results are used in support of resource allocation decisions; and (e) each department’s assessment portfolio is updated annually, stored internally, and submitted to division leaders for centralized storage. In Phase 3, assessment leads, department directors, and division leaders use results to guide and document changes and reflect on progress, challenges, and unmet needs. Departmental meetings are held to discuss the findings in detail and solidify any necessary action steps that must be taken to improve PSAs. Department directors, assessment leads, and division leaders revisit progress on attaining short- and long-term goals, recalibrate goals and expectations when appropriate, and identify any additional strategic educational or operational needs that can be supported by assessment. Phase 4 focuses on the continuity of assessment within the division; new and established staff are expected to participate in additional learning opportunities, and subsequent assessments of each department’s assessment calendar are carried out to ensure the routine, ongoing collection of evidence to guide and document change. A detailed overview of possible action steps within each phase, coupled with suggested outcomes and resources, is described below.

PHASE I: GOAL AND EXPECTATION SETTING

The LOOP framework requires VPSAs and assessment leads to identify and describe their overarching learning goals before building a divisionwide assessment model. Clear expectations and attainable goals are key. The recommendations and examples below are offered to guide senior student affairs leaders in developing capacity for divisionwide assessment.

- ◇ VPSAs set the stage for developing a divisionwide assessment structure in partnership with department directors. Senior student affairs leaders can do this by facilitating conversations with the leadership team to build understanding about the importance of establishing divisionwide learning goals—and PSA-level SLOs and IELs that support them—as a mechanism for both planning and accountability. VPSAs work collectively with the

leadership team to set a work plan for the development and implementation of ongoing cycles of assessment within each department; while leading the broad charge, senior leaders support their departments by developing assessment structures that are responsive to the unique needs of each department. A great time to set the stage is late spring or early summer; this allows directors to ask questions, resolve challenges, and integrate assessment planning into their departmental goals and objectives beginning in the fall.

- ◇ VPSAs, lead facilitators, and department directors partner to establish an attainable, sustainable work plan. Dixon (personal communication, March 14, 2019) of North Carolina A&T State University acknowledged the advantages of using the late spring and summer, when many departments are preparing for the forthcoming fall and spring semesters, to develop or build on divisionwide assessment structures. To set goals and identify a work plan, Dixon consults with her departmental colleagues to support their responsibilities to use assessment results to modify programs and resolve questions or needs when planning assessments for the upcoming year.
- ◇ Establishing a divisionwide assessment structure is effective when division leaders (a) select assessment leads and a lead facilitator to steward the development of the division’s assessment structure; (b) work with the assessment leads and lead facilitator to establish divisionwide learning goals and formalize expectations for department-level assessment; (c) set expectations for departments to identify PSAs that align with and support divisionwide learning goals; (d) support the lead facilitator and assessment leads in the development of assessment plans, including SLOs/IEIs, methods measures, action plans, and learning opportunities to introduce and reinforce the skills required to effectively create, use, and report on assessment plans; and (e) set the timetable for each department’s assessment plan so that results can be used, any resulting changes can be made and documented, and the assessment portfolio can be compiled and reported consistently across the division. Specific considerations of the work plan are described below.
 - *Collaborating to set divisionwide goals.* These conversations begin by working with department directors, who may need time to consult with their staff teams, to identify broadly defined educational needs that must be met to effectively prepare students for their personal, professional, and intellectual lives. For example, should students have strong senses of health and well-being? Should students nurture a sense of curiosity for and appreciation of diverse cultures, and be able to develop healthy personal and professional

relationships? Should students be able to apply KSAs that foster teamwork, resolve conflict, and nurture constructive communication? Although the answers to such questions are obvious, this step is critical to organizing the division's assessment structure. Educators cannot assess everything all the time. Divisions must establish assessment calendars that support a sustainable approach.

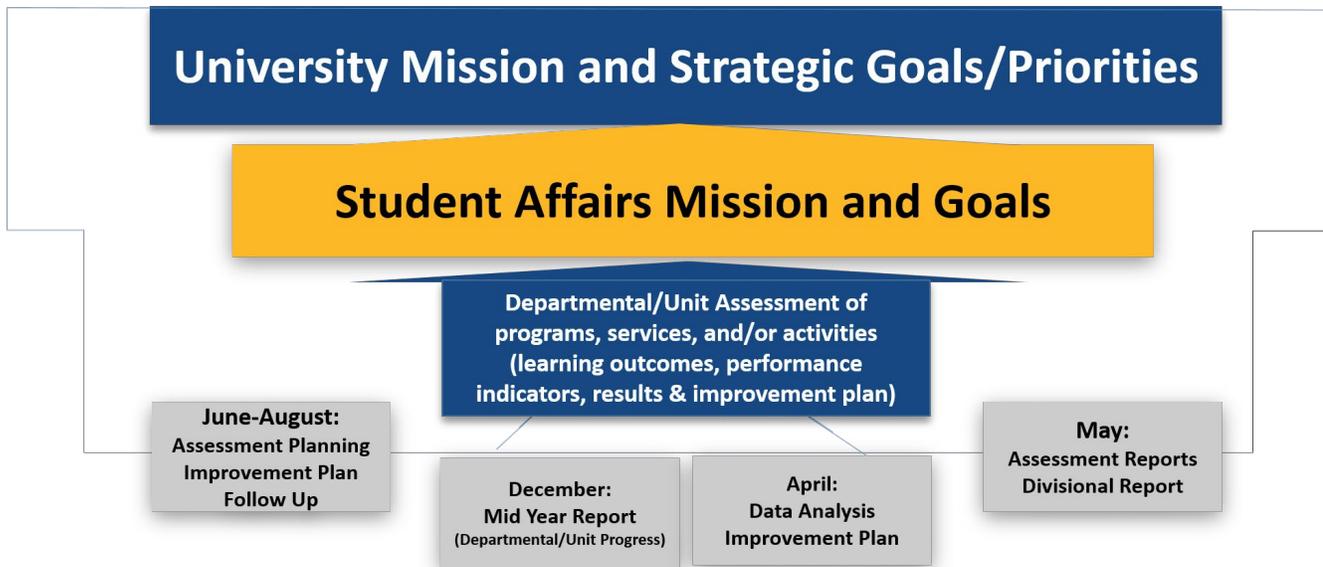
Once a landscape of broadly defined educational needs are set, VPSAs will likely need to prioritize the list of goals identified by department directors. The key is balance—establishing a set of goals that reflect the broad impact of educational needs met across the division while exercising care for finite staff time and financial resources. One possible starting place could be to establish three to five divisionwide learning goals. From there, VPSAs and department directors can establish and communicate expectations for the assessment activities within each department to assess SLOs and IELs within PSAs that align with at least one divisionwide goal.

- *Identifying PSAs.* Department directors, their staff teams, and assessment leads will need to identify PSAs within their departments that align with the divisionwide goals. The number of PSAs and SLOs/IELs selected for assessment will depend on the division's expectations and guidelines. In determining the assessment plans for each PSA, department directors and assessment leads must ensure that assessment of SLOs and IELs will follow high-quality standards (see page 4, last paragraph under LOOP Framework Principles). Specific guidance for developing skill sets to conduct high-quality assessments of student learning and institutional effectiveness are outlined in Phase 2. In some cases, identifying PSAs that link to divisionwide goals may lead department directors to spot gaps in meeting educational needs. This provides an opportunity to develop or vet new PSAs that introduce or reinforce critical KSAs to support divisionwide goals.
- *Formalizing and communicating expectations.* Once VPSAs and department directors set divisionwide learning goals and department-level assessment guidelines in alignment with those goals, the expectations should be communicated to departmental employees; in particular, staff members who deliver, manage, or advise the PSAs that will be assessed should have a clear understanding of their expectations.
- *Selecting assessment leads and the lead facilitator.* Institutions employ myriad models in building the

division's assessment team. At the University of Utah, Stacy Ackerlind leads an office with an associate director, business analyst, and graduate assistant who provide guidance to staff within each of the more than 30 offices composing the university's Division of Student Affairs. At North Carolina A&T State University, Dixon provides personalized consultation and technical assistance to 18 departmental units as they plan and carry out their assessment activities. At Anne Arundel Community College, Vickery provides individualized guidance to each department in identifying assessable programs that align with at least one core competency of the college. Each institution's approach may be built according to its specific needs and composition. Some divisions may not be in a position to appoint a lead facilitator; in those cases, VPSAs may consider engaging faculty members or administrators outside of the division who possess background knowledge and experience with assessment, particularly at the course, program, service, or activity level.

- *Setting the timetable.* In building a divisionwide assessment approach, it is important to recognize the time this process will take. Selecting divisionwide learning goals; identifying PSAs that align with those goals; developing assessment plans; building skill sets to assess SLOs and IELs; conducting assessments; and using, reporting, and communicating results require significant time and effort on the part of staff. Sequencing milestones, learning opportunities, departmentally tailored outreach, and reporting due dates help staff stay on track. For example, Figure 4 displays North Carolina A&T State University's Division of Student Affairs assessment cycle, including its alignment with division- and universitywide missions and goals. The approach includes a yearlong process that feeds the development of improvement plans each year.
- For divisions building an assessment structure for the first time, beginning the process in the summer allows time for staff professional development and assessment activities to take place during the academic year. Achieving initial progress over the summer provides momentum for a full cycle of assessment to be completed by the following late spring. Such progress enables department directors to integrate changes informed by the first year's assessment activities into the second year's programs. Then, the following summer can be used to plan for the following year's assessment activities. Creating rhythm supports the need for ongoing, cyclical assessments that guide change.

Figure 4. North Carolina A&T State University Student Affairs Assessment Timeline



Note. Reprinted with permission from Kellie Dixon.

PHASE 2: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND CAPACITY BUILDING

Although the forum and delivery mode for professional development opportunities may differ based on each institution’s characteristics, staff must receive learning opportunities that prepare them to create, conduct, use, report, and communicate assessments of student learning and institutional effectiveness. A comprehensive overview of learning opportunities—including recommended outcomes and resources—to develop staff capacity for cocurricular assessment is provided in this section.

- ◇ *Learning Opportunity 1: Grounding in Student Development Theory and the Purpose of Assessment.* Leslie Meyerhoff (personal communication, March 12, 2019) of Cornell University noted that her approach in beginning the work of developing the capacity for staff to collect, use, and report evidence of student learning is “to ground assessment in theory and best practice.”

Meyerhoff provides course-based assessment learning opportunities for staff in Cornell University’s Division of Student and Campus Life. Noting that “student development theory could span several weeks,” Meyerhoff’s assessment course begins with a broad overview of key concepts in student development and enables staff to apply the concepts into the practice of assessment (L. Meyerhoff, personal communication, March 12, 2019). In student affairs, expertise draws from myriad disciplines. Health care and counseling providers, community engagement specialists, career services professionals, and campus life staff all come from different corners of the university to help students succeed. As a result, Meyerhoff reinforces student development at the core of each department’s assessment work.

WHAT DO THE AUTHORS MEAN BY *LEARNING OPPORTUNITY*?

Learning opportunities can take many forms—from classroom learning structures to cohort-based workshops. However, in this brief, the term *learning opportunity* is a facilitated exercise intentionally designed to prepare professionals with the skills to conduct high-quality assessments of student learning.

Typically, these learning opportunities sequence topic coverage over the course of the academic year, while also equipping staff with key skills to effectively plan their assessments, gather and analyze data, develop improvement plans based on the results, and report their assessment portfolios to the division.

In the first of a series of workshops, department directors and assessment leads in the Division of Student Affairs at the University of Northern Iowa took part in a presentation and facilitated discussion on the purposes and standards of assessment. Directors and assessment leads were shown Higher Learning Commission Accreditation Standard 4.B and its close relationship to the collection, use, and reporting of cocurricular SLOs and IELs. More important, however,

directors and assessment leads took part in a discussion about how assessment's primary function is to support their shared commitments to student learning and quality improvement. Department directors and assessment leads also discussed the division's learning goals and participated in a discussion about how the PSAs in their departments aligned with one or more of those goals.

LEARNING OPPORTUNITY 1 OUTCOMES

Following the learning opportunity, participants will be able to:

- ◇ Identify the regional accreditation standards that apply to the assessment, use, and reporting of SLOs and IELs
- ◇ Describe how assessment can be used to improve cocurricular PSAs
- ◇ List the divisionwide learning goals

LEARNING OPPORTUNITY RESOURCES

Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions. (2003). *Principles for good practices*. Retrieved from <http://www.sacscoc.org/pdf/Regional%20Accreditation%20and%20Student%20Learning-Principles%20for%20Good%20Practice.pdf>

Meyerhoff, L. (2017, September 11). Student development theory and assessment [Web log post]. Retrieved from blogs.cornell.edu/cultureofevidence/2017/09/11/student-development-theory-and-assessment

Schuh, J., & Gansemer-Topf, A. (2010). *The role of student affairs in student learning assessment*. Retrieved from National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment website: <http://www.learningoutcomeassessment.org/documents/StudentAffairsRole.pdf>

Slager, E., & Oaks, D. (2013, July-August). A coaching model for student affairs assessment. *About Campus*, 18(3), 25-29. Washington, DC: ACPA-College Student Educators International.

Timm, D., Barham, J., McKinney, K., & Knerr, A. (2013). *Assessment in practice: A companion guide to the ask standards*. Retrieved from https://thekeep.eiu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=1032&context=csd_fac

Between Learning Opportunities 1 and 2. The lead facilitator receives the PSAs each department will assess in the first year, noting those that align with at least one goal. The lead facilitator conducts departmentally tailored guidance, as needed, to ensure that PSAs have been identified and that the linkage to at least one divisionwide learning goal is clear.

Learning Opportunity 2: Divisionwide Learning Goals and Writing PSA-Level SLOs and IELs. Department heads and assessment leads need to be skilled at writing clear, measurable PSA-level SLOs and IELs. The assessed PSAs

need to align with divisionwide goals, and each SLO and IEL needs to provide evidence with decision utility. It is important to distinguish between SLOs and IELs in the assessment plans; that is, SLOs measure learning, whereas IELs measure contextual factors tied to the experience, such as use, satisfaction, and operating within set budgetary parameters. IELs are not measures of learning. It is critical to apply both SLOs and IELs in determining the effect of PSAs on student learning, while gauging utilization, satisfaction, and other indicators of resource stewardship.

The lead facilitator should help department directors and assessment leads develop PSA-level SLOs and IELs. During this learning opportunity, the facilitator can reinforce the division's overarching learning goals and department-specific assessment expectations. Then, the facilitator can walk department directors and assessment leads through the steps involved in writing clear, measurable PSA-level

SLOs and IELs. Before the session, the facilitator should ask each department director and assessment lead to identify relevant PSAs and to come prepared to reference them during the learning opportunity; this step facilitates interactive learning exercises that lead to the development of each department's assessment plans under the divisionwide structure.

LEARNING OPPORTUNITY 2 OUTCOMES

Following the learning opportunity, participants will be able to:

- ◇ Apply at least one concept of student development theory to the delivery of an assessable PSA
- ◇ Articulate the division's expectations for assessment during the academic year
- ◇ Describe the divisionwide learning goals
- ◇ Identify PSAs that align with at least one divisionwide learning goal
- ◇ Write SLOs and IELs that are clear and measurable

LEARNING OPPORTUNITY RESOURCES

Middle States Commission on Higher Education. (2007). *Student learning assessment: Options and resources* (2nd ed.). Retrieved from https://www.nova.edu/ie/ice/forms/sl_assessment.pdf

South Arkansas Community College Office of Institutional Research. (2005). *Core indicators of institutional effectiveness*. Retrieved from http://www.southark.edu/institutional_research/core-indicators-of-effectiveness.pdf

University of Rhode Island. (n.d.). *Developing and writing course-level student learning outcomes*. Retrieved <https://web.uri.edu/assessment/developing-writing-course-level-student-learning-outcomes>

Between Learning Opportunities 2 and 3. The lead facilitator and department director, and their assessment lead, should meet for individualized consultations on the development and finalization of PSA-level SLOs and IELs. Before moving to learning opportunity 3, the assessment leads and lead facilitator need to ensure that each department's SLOs and IELs are clear, measurable, and in step with divisionwide goals. Each department's SLOs and IELs should be captured by the lead facilitator and integrated into the next learning opportunity on methods and measures.

Learning Opportunity 3: Progress Sharing and Assessment Methods and Measures. Progress sharing is important to the process of building a divisionwide assessment structure. A good place to begin is during Learning Opportunity 3. Having captured each department's PSA-level SLOs and IELs from Learning Opportunity 2, the lead facilitator should build time

into the session for department directors and assessment leads to share their SLOs and IELs with the group. They can highlight the educational need met by each PSA and describe how each PSA supports divisionwide learning goals. Sharing SLOs and IELs also serves as an effective point of entry into learning about the methods and measures department directors and assessment leads will use to gather evidence of student learning and institutional effectiveness.

The lead facilitator should help department directors and assessment leads understand that high-quality assessment yields evidence with decision utility; that is, the information gathered from assessment must provide detailed information about whether—and how—intended outcomes were met, and where particular improvements in particular learning interventions within a PSA may be needed. Facilitators should cover qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-

methods assessment approaches. They should help their colleagues understand and distinguish between direct and indirect measures of learning; that is, measures that require observation to gather evidence versus secondary data sources such as surveys, pre- and posttests, or multiple-choice instruments. Guidance should be provided on how

to develop surveys, open-ended questions, and rubrics. For departments considering a standardized instrument, facilitators should help directors and leads identify whether the questions posed in the assessment are aligned with the intended SLOs and IEIs—and whether the results yield evidence with decision utility.

LEARNING OPPORTUNITY 3 OUTCOMES

Following the learning opportunity, participants will be able to:

- ◇ Identify methods for assessing SLOs
- ◇ Identify methods for assessing IEIs
- ◇ Develop assessment methods that yield detailed information on their assessed PSA
- ◇ Apply assessment methods to their departmental assessment plans

LEARNING OPPORTUNITY RESOURCES

Association of American Colleges and Universities. (n.d.). VALUE rubric development project. Retrieved from <https://www.aacu.org/value/rubrics>

Lane, J. (2007). *How to develop a rubric*. Retrieved from The Pennsylvania State University Schreyer Institute for Teaching Excellence website: https://www.schreyerinstitute.psu.edu/pdf/Develop_a_Rubric.pdf

Schuh, J. (Ed.). (2009). *Assessment methods for student affairs*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Sriram, R. (2014). *Five things not to do in developing surveys in assessment for student affairs*. Retrieved from NASPA–Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education website: https://www.naspa.org/images/uploads/main/5THINGS-SURVEYS_FEB2014_WEB.pdf

Between Learning Opportunities 3 and 4. The lead facilitator, department director, and assessment lead meet to discuss and finalize assessment methods and measures. The goal should be to have each department’s SLOs, IEIs, and assessment methods and measures finalized before Learning Opportunity 4. Again, the facilitator should capture progress to share in the next learning session.

Learning Opportunity 4: Action Planning, “Closing the Loop,” and the Assessment Portfolio. When departments have their SLOs, IEIs, and methods and measures finalized, the next step is to prepare department directors and assessment leads to (a) develop action plans for PSA-level changes based on the assessment results; (b) create an assessment report and summarize the results; (c) change PSAs based on the assessment results when expected outcomes or performance indicators are not

met, and document such changes (i.e., “close the loop”); and (d) compile, store internally, and report to the division leadership a comprehensive set of documents generated through the department’s assessment activities (i.e., the assessment portfolio).

Between Learning Opportunities 4 and 5. The lead facilitator, department director, and assessment lead meet to discuss and finalize assessment action plans and review the documents required of the assessment portfolio. Departments are ready to conduct assessments after finalizing their PSA-level SLOs and IEIs, methods and measures, and action plans. After departments are cleared to assess SLOs and IEIs, lead facilitators should check in with the departments on their progress to assess SLOs and IEIs, and maintain availability to help work through questions or problems.

LEARNING OPPORTUNITY 4 OUTCOMES

Following the learning opportunity, participants will be able to:

- ◇ Describe how their SLOs, IELs, and methods and measures produce results that feed action planning
- ◇ Develop action plans based on their assessment results
- ◇ Document changes made to PSAs based on assessment
- ◇ Create a comprehensive assessment portfolio

LEARNING OPPORTUNITY RESOURCES

Baker, G., Jankowski, N., Provezis, S., & Kinzie, J. (2012). *Using assessment results: Promising practices of institutions that do it well*. Retrieved from National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment website: http://learningoutcomesassessment.org/documents/CrossCase_FINAL.pdf

Middle States Commission on Higher Education. (2007). *Student learning assessment: Options and resources* (2nd ed.). Retrieved from https://www.nova.edu/ie/ice/forms/sl_assessment.pdf

Schuh, J., Biddix, P., Dean, L., & Kinzie, J. (2016). *Assessment in student affairs* (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

PHASE 3: RESULTS SHARING AND REFLECTION

Learning Opportunity 5: Results Sharing and Reflection. The VPSA and the lead facilitator should build in time at the end of the assessment planning process for department directors and assessment leads to showcase the results of their assessment and highlight any changes that will take place due to the findings. Results sharing offers an opportunity for reflection; cross-functional planning; and the identification of positives, challenges, and next steps in meeting assessment needs at the department and division levels. In addition, new PSAs may be identified to support the attainment of divisionwide learning goals.

Some divisions may choose to sequence Learning Opportunity 5 with the need for department directors to submit their assessment portfolios to division leaders for use with planning, resource allocation, and reporting purposes. The lead facilitator can use the time with department directors to walk through the submission process and address any questions.

Preparing departmental directors and assessment leads to conduct assessment—and providing learning opportunities that encourage sharing and conversation—offers space for robust interdepartmental collaboration and planning. Conversations can and should continue to focus on the intradepartmental needs for PSA-level assessment evidence; however, planning and collaboration should lead

to the creation of broader studies of the cocurriculum's contributions to learning and success on key division- and institutionwide performance indicators. Setting aside time for interdepartmental reflection offers an opportunity for increasingly sophisticated assessment studies in support of the division's mission and goals that can answer questions such as the following: What is the impact of engaging in cocurricular learning experiences on retention and persistence? What demographic differences, if any, exist in retention and persistence among engaged students? What common sets of learning activities are taking place across the division? Where appropriate, how might departments consolidate learning activities into a single program that could introduce or reinforce intended outcomes and show broad impact across the division? Are there opportunities to link the results of this assessment to the institution's data warehouse, and what would educators find out about the impact of this program on key institutional priorities such as retention, graduation, and time-to-degree? Answering such questions requires collaboration, planning, and knowledge of fundamental assessment principles described throughout this brief. By exploring opportunities for collaboration across departments, and becoming ready to broaden the scope of assessment, educators can demonstrate the holistic, substantial contributions of the cocurriculum toward the institution's mission.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Is it necessary to invest in new software licenses to build divisionwide assessment processes?

Not necessarily. Many forms of assessment—such as surveys, rubric-guided direct observational methods, and multiple-choice instruments—can be conducted without the need for a software package. For basic survey assessment with a limited number of questions and potential respondents, for instance, educators can access no-cost services through many survey software providers. For data analysis and the storage of assessment portfolios, educators can utilize word processing and spreadsheet software packages already installed on most desktop computers, laptops, or other devices. Survey assessments that yield large sample sizes or that are benchmarked by a national organization for institutional comparison purposes may require a subscription. Sophisticated statistical analysis tools are likely not required, if access to such tools is not already provided under an overarching institutional license.

How many PSAs should be assessed each academic year?

The scope of the assessments required to produce evidence with sufficient decision utility will vary according to several factors, such as the sample size of the target population, reasonable expectations for the time and resources needed to complete a high-quality assessment, the department's needs for assessment; and the resources available to plan and conduct the assessment. Remember that not every PSA has to be assessed every year. Department directors should keep an assessment calendar to monitor which programs over the course of several years will be assessed within a given semester or academic year. Making sure programs are assessed at least once over that period ensures the routine, cyclical assessment of PSAs within the department. This might mean that a total of three to five assessments of PSA-level SLOs or institutional effectiveness take place in a given year.

Why are SLOs or IEIs assessed, and why do they need to align with divisionwide goals?

Learning is fundamental to the work of student affairs, and ensuring that the educational needs of students are met requires systematic collection of evidence beyond what educators believe happens through PSAs. Collecting evidence of student learning enables educators to observe patterns and outliers and use the results to guide and document change. Educators also need evidence that institutional resources are

stewarded efficiently and effectively; student learning is a critical component of responding to that need, but information about program utilization and satisfaction, as well as other indicators that resources were expended within reasonable parameters, are also necessary to demonstrate stewardship of resources and mission.

Divisions establish missions and strategic plans that align with the institution's mission and articulate the broad goals and priorities under which departments develop PSAs. Educators develop intentional cocurricular learning experiences for students on high-demand skills and abilities. Both realities require the intentionality on the part of division staff to develop PSAs that cohere with divisionwide goals. Developing assessment processes that ensure PSAs are aligned with at least one such divisionwide goal reinforces intentionality and cohesion, while creating systematic documentation that the programs are achieving their intended expectations, and, when expectations are not met, a detailed plan of action is in place to improve. Such strategies also respond to external expectations for accountability.

Why are measures of satisfaction and utilization not enough to determine the effectiveness of a PSA?

Though such measures are an important component, they do not tell educators what students learn. Evidence of student learning is critical to ensure that educators can discern whether students met intended expectations as a result of PSAs. When expected outcomes are not met, evidence yielded through assessments of student learning helps educators make precise, informed decisions about how PSAs can be improved.

PHASE 4: BROADENING AND DEEPENING ASSESSMENT CULTURE

Learning Opportunity 6: Student Development Theory and Assessment 101 for New and Returning Student Affairs Professionals. Lead facilitators can broaden and deepen assessment culture across the division by engaging new or returning professionals in the fundamentals of student development theory and assessment, and walking them through the division's learning goals and PSA-level assessment expectations. The session should include components of the learning opportunities described throughout Phase 2, including (a) fundamentals of student development theory; (b) the purposes of assessment; and (c) writing SLOs and IELs, developing appropriate assessment methods and measures, action planning, and closing the loop. Professionals can integrate these skills into their practice and may—depending on their current or eventual roles in the division—be or become stewards of the division's assessment process. Offering this type of learning opportunity on a regular basis helps ensure continuity of divisionwide assessment culture.

Facilitators should consider reaching out to colleagues from other university divisions who facilitate cocurricular programs for students. Inviting staff and faculty across divisions to collaborate on assessment workshops will create opportunities to share resources and discuss potential collaborative assessment projects. Out-of-classroom learning programs such as academic advising and academic support services are often housed in

academic affairs divisions, although their approach to PSAs align well with those offered in many student affairs departments. Although the divisional learning goals that PSAs nest under will vary across divisions, all of those working to support students outside of the classroom will benefit from conversation about the cocurricular assessment process, including ongoing results sharing and improvement planning.

CONCLUSION

This brief focused on guiding VPSAs toward developing high-quality, sustainable assessment processes that support divisionwide goals for student learning and resource stewardship. It showcased the broad latitude colleges and universities possess to devise divisionwide assessment processes in the midst of a persistent call for evidence of student learning and resource stewardship from a wide internal and external stakeholder audience. Creating divisionwide assessment structures builds on efforts already underway at many institutions. The LOOP framework, as presented in this brief, offers guidance to ensure quality, cohesion, and sustainability in divisionwide assessment processes, while showcasing examples from colleges and universities from various sectors, sizes, and geographic regions.

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APPENDIX A

OVERVIEW OF ASSESSMENT-RELATED ACCREDITATION STANDARDS BY REGIONAL ACCREDITING BODY

	Institutions Must Identify and Assess SLOs/IEIs Consistent With Their Goals and Mission	Assessment Must Be Conducted on a Periodic or Cyclical Basis, and the Results Must Be Used to Guide, Document, and/or Communicate the Learning of Students and Any Appropriate Change to the Assessed Program, Service, Resource, or Activity	Assessments of Student Learning/Institutional Effectiveness Used in Institutional Planning and Resource Allocation Decisions	Institution Must Routinely Conduct an Assessment of Its Assessment Policies, Processes, and Practices to Ensure Quality, Consistency, Support of Mission
Middle States Commission on Higher Education^a	Criteria III(2); Criteria V(2)(a)–(c)	Criteria III(8); Criteria V(2)(a)–(c); Criteria V(3)(a)–(h)	Criteria VI(1)	Criteria III(4)
New England Commission of Higher Education^b	Criteria 8.2–8.5	Criteria 8.8	Criteria 8.10	Criteria 8.9
Higher Learning Commission^c	Criteria 4.B.1–2	Criteria 4.B.1–4	Criteria 5.C.2	Criteria 4.B.4
Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges, Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities^d	Criteria 4.A.1	Criteria 4.A.1–4; Criteria 4.B.1–2	Criteria 4.A.5; Criteria 4.B.1	Criteria 4.A.6
Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, Commission on Colleges^e	Sections 7.1, 7.3, 8.1–2	Sections 8.1–2	Section 7	Section 8
Western Association of Schools and Colleges, Senior College and University Commission^f	Criteria 1.2, Criteria 2.3; Criteria 2.11	Criteria 2.11; Criteria 4.1–4.6	Criteria 4.7	Criteria 4.1
Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, Western Association of Schools and Colleges^g	Standard I.B.1–4; Standard II.C.2	Standard I.B.1–4, 8; Standard I.C.3	Standard III.D.1	Standard II.A.8

^a Middle States Commission on Higher Education. (2015). *Standards for accreditation and requirements for affiliation*. Retrieved from <https://www.msche.org/standards>

^b New England Commission on Higher Education. (2016). *NECHE standards for accreditation*. Retrieved from <https://www.neche.org/resources/standards-for-accreditation>

^c Higher Learning Commission. (2019). *Criteria for accreditation*. Retrieved from <https://www.hlcommission.org/Policies/criteria-and-core-components.html>

^d Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges, Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities. (2019). *NWCCU standards*. Retrieved from <http://www.nwccu.org/accreditation/standards-policies/standards>

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^g Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges. (2014). *Accreditation standards*. Retrieved from https://accjc.org/wp-content/uploads/Accreditation-Standards_-_Adopted-June-2014.pdf

APPENDIX B

LOOP FRAMEWORK ROLES

The LOOP framework outlines the principles and phases for organizing and implementing a flexible, cohesive approach to assessments of student learning and institutional effectiveness that align with divisionwide learning goals. Each of the various stakeholders in building divisionwide assessment structures play an integral role in creating high-quality, sustainable assessment processes. The roles identified below are not necessarily calls for the addition of new personnel; rather, these descriptions are meant to clarify the duties of the various assessment stakeholders. Establishing roles across the division may require student affairs leaders to recalibrate the duties of current full- or part-time personnel or paraprofessionals to include responsibility for the division's assessment needs. Faculty partners may also be an important resource in building high-quality, sustainable models of assessment. Role descriptions for each major stakeholder of the LOOP framework are provided below.

ROLE OF VPSA

- ◇ Sets the vision and facilitates expectation and goal setting with department directors, the lead facilitator, and assessment leads
- ◇ Designates an assessment lead facilitator for the division; charges the lead facilitator to coordinate with department directors to select assessment leads
- ◇ Works with the lead facilitator to set an attainable timeline for meeting division assessment goals and expectations
- ◇ Empowers the lead facilitator, department directors, and assessment leads throughout the process; helps provide broad leadership in solving problems or addressing needs as they arise
- ◇ Ensures continuity in divisionwide assessment processes and encourages broader and deeper levels of assessment as staff build capacity to gather evidence of student learning and institutional effectiveness

ROLE OF LEAD FACILITATOR

- ◇ Assists the VPSA in setting goals and expectations for divisionwide assessment and serves as primary point of contact with department directors and assessment leads during all phases of the divisionwide assessment process; this role could be performed as a portion of someone's existing position or as a dedicated position, depending on an institution's resources and needs
- ◇ Coordinates with the VPSA and department directors to identify the assessment leads
- ◇ Designs and delivers learning opportunities or coordinates with any third party who delivers such experiences to department directors and assessment leads
- ◇ Communicates with assessment directors in academic affairs to identify opportunities for collaboration, resource sharing, results sharing, and alignment of assessment portfolio storage systems
- ◇ Directs technical assistance with department directors and assessment leads in between learning opportunities, or coordinates with any third party who provides such assistance
- ◇ Gathers departmental progress reports during each phase to integrate into learning opportunities

- ◇ Empowers department directors and assessment leads throughout the assessment process
- ◇ Manages the central storage database for each department's assessment portfolio, receiving submissions annually
- ◇ Encourages increasingly deeper levels of assessment across the division by engaging departments in interactive opportunities for learning, conversation, and planning

ROLE OF DEPARTMENT DIRECTOR

- ◇ Works with the lead facilitator and department assessment lead to develop the department's assessment plan
- ◇ Participates in learning opportunities
- ◇ Guides the assessment lead in conducting assessments, summarizing assessment findings, and completing reports
- ◇ Facilitates changes to PSAs based on results; ensures that proper documentation is generated and stored
- ◇ Supports the assessment lead in generating the assessment portfolio and submits it to division leadership; ensures proper, consistent storage internally
- ◇ Identifies opportunities for cross-departmental PSAs and/or assessment projects
- ◇ Reviews the department's assessment to ensure decision utility and alignment with intended PSA-level outcomes and performance indicators

ROLE OF DEPARTMENTAL ASSESSMENT LEAD

- ◇ Leads the development of the department assessment plan and facilitates assessments of student learning and institutional effectiveness with other colleagues, as appropriate
- ◇ Participates in learning opportunities
- ◇ Works with the department director to summarize assessment findings, complete reports, capture documentation of any PSA-level changes based on results, and compile comprehensive assessment portfolios
- ◇ Supports the department director in identifying opportunities for interdepartmental collaboration on PSAs and/or assessment projects
- ◇ Assists the department director in assessing the efficacy of assessment plans, recommending changes to the director

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