

UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA SOUTHEAST

PROGRESS REPORT
TO THE FALL 2004 INTERIM EVALUATION REPORT AND
VISIT

NORTHWEST COMMISSION ON COLLEGES AND
UNIVERSITIES

APRIL 7, 2006

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INTRODUCTION

This Progress Report is to address three Recommendations made during the Fall 2004 regular interim evaluation report and visit. In reaffirming the accreditation of the University of Alaska Southeast (UAS), the Commission found that Recommendations 1, 2, and 3 of the report were areas where the University is in compliance with Commission criteria, but in need of improvement.

This Progress Report amplifies the response of UAS to Recommendations 1, 2, and 3 by the Commission.

Recommendation 1:

The evaluation committee recommends that UAS work toward consistent application of Policy 2.2 Educational Assessment, ensuring that assessment is integrated fully and thoroughly. While most syllabi appear to include objectives statements on the “six basic competencies” and the course objectives, they sometimes do not reflect how a particular course fits in the overall program. Students were notably naïve about the basic competencies. Some programs still have not adopted a “culture of assessment,” in particular a lack of attention to a continuous process of academic planning, the carrying out of those plans, the assessment of the outcomes, and the influencing of the planning process by the assessment activities. Furthermore, there does not appear to be consistency in reporting on how the evidence gathered on the “effectiveness of educational programs” results in “improvements in the Program” as a result of the evaluation process. Exemplary models can be found on the UAS campus in its professional programs, career education, MAT, and writing portfolios (Standard Two-Educational Program and Its Effectiveness; Policy 2.2-Educational Assessment).

UAS ASSESSMENT INITIATIVE

Chancellor’s Assessment Initiative:

Chancellor Pugh established a university-wide assessment initiative following recommendations made by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities concerning Standard 2A: Education and its Effectiveness. Through this assessment process all academic departments will strive to achieve the following outcomes for UAS students and their programs:

- Clear, intentional, and measurable student learning outcomes;
- A student learning assessment plan that regularly assesses achievement of learning outcomes that are important to student success in the program;
- A process for using the results of the student learning assessments in program planning and management; and
- A process for communicating the results of student learning assessment

An [Assessment Website](#) has been established linking from the [Chancellor's webpage](#) providing a thorough overview of the University’s Assessment Initiative (Appendix A).

Creating a Culture of Assessment:

According to Maki (2005), when a university collectively develops a commitment to the assessment of student learning, it then intentionally weaves that commitment into the fabric of its culture to demonstrate how well students learn and develop as a result of the programs and services offered. UAS began its journey to create an institutional culture of assessment in January of 2005 with a series of workshops offered at convocation to introduce faculty to the concept. Throughout Spring Semester 2005, faculty were facilitated in the development of student learning goals, outcome statements, exit outcomes, curriculum mapping, and assessment methods and measures. Each academic unit was charged by the Provost’s office with creating a sustainable process that achieved the outcomes for students learning described in the

Chancellor's Assessment Initiative. Faculty began participating in the following activities to develop and incorporate assessment activities:

- Program heads collaborated with their Academic Dean and Provost to prepare key assessment items and evidence;
- Program heads lead faculty in departmental-wide conversations to generate assessment plans to link student work to achievement of program outcomes;
- Student learning assessment activities were designed to be implemented in a manner that generates data useful for program management, program review, and accreditation.

Throughout the Spring and Summer of 2005 assessment plans were developed for implementation by all degree and certificate programs. Assessment plans for the Center for Teacher *Education*, Career Education, Humanities, and Social Science, PBAIS, Library, Natural Science, and Instructional Technology were completed and forwarded to the consultant Dr. Peggy Maki prior to her campus visit during convocation on August 23-24, 2005. Convocation was devoted entirely to the process of assessment with a keynote presentation by Dr. Maki and individual academic unit meetings with her to discuss and further develop the assessment plans. Assessment practices currently being utilized included faculty development seminars, newsletters, and demonstrations, e.g. electronic portfolios used in several academic programs. The Bachelor of Liberal Arts in General Studies is currently without a faculty coordinator and did not have an assessment plan. Once leadership is established in this program, it will be important for the BLA to develop its identity and assessment program. Both the librarians and the information technology professionals had focused assessment plans for faculty and student development and can be valuable assets for other university programs in carrying out their assessment plans.

The receipt of a Trio Grant and the initiation of this new program offer another opportunity to track a cohort of students over time in order to ascertain the efficacy of educational practices with this "at risk" group of students.

The university has established a website to record its assessment efforts and its chronological developments.

At the conclusion of Dr. Maki's visit, she made several recommendations that she believed would contribute to building a sustainable university commitment to assessment:

- Deans and Chairs should make incorporating discussions of teaching and learning and assessment a regular part of meetings including reporting out on assessment process in order to help build shared responsibility among faculty
- Rewards and recognition of the commitment to institutional assessment, e.g. incorporate into promotion and tenure criteria; release time for assessment coordinators; support for faculty development; public recognition of individuals and/or departments/programs doing exceptional work on assessment; creation of an "intellectual celebration week" for students to present or perform their work for faculty and the community at large; public means to recognize developments in assessment such as through newsletter or web; a pool of funds that departments or teams might apply for (proposals for projects related to assessment)

- Embedding assessment into institutional practices, decision-making bodies, channels of communication
- Develop advisory boards to externally validate learning outcomes or verify the relevance of learning outcomes
- Involvement of other educators who contribute to student learning (student affairs, tutoring, other support services outside the classroom)
- Publication of learning outcomes statements in future catalogs, on the web and in other publications. These statements may distinguish UAS from other colleges and universities.
- Articulate the relevance of the undergraduate competencies to graduate programs or develop learning outcome statements for the graduate programs
- Position the institutional researcher to work with faculty before they describe outcomes to assure that the faculty identify and sample student work correctly so data can be collected accurately
- Consider an assessment outcome of the GE courses
- Create soft times and neutral zones to engage in dialogue about teaching, learning, and assessment
- Encourage peer to peer learning because assessment grows from within this approach

These recommendations are being taken under consideration by the Provost's Executive Council for implementation as appropriate. Throughout Fall Semester 2005, assessment plans have been modified based upon Dr. Maki's recommendations and the first cycle of assessment is being conducted within each program. Data was forwarded to the Academic Deans and Provosts in January for a report of the initial implementation of the Assessment Initiative. The complete timeline for the Assessment Initiative is included in Appendix B.

A university-wide Assessment Committee has been established and charged by the Provost. The Chancellor agreed to fund this committee for \$50,000 for the start-up year. This committee is key to building institutional commitment as this committee will look at the efficacy of collective practices across the campus. It also is in charge of orchestrating and calendaring assessment. The Assessment Committee is chaired by Karen Schmitt, Dean of Career Education and BPAIS. Committee minutes to date can be found in Appendix C.

In Fall of 2005, the Provost applied for Sharing Scholarship funding from the University of Alaska to continue the educational process for faculty, staff, students, and administrators in assessment. This will be managed through the Assessment Committee. UAS will promote teaching, learning and assessment throughout all programs by fostering a variety of effective learning environments stratified at three levels:

- I. Assessing Student Learning at the Program and Course Level
- II. Assessing Student Learning at the University Level
- III. Assessing Assessment through Evaluation of the Quality and Effectiveness of All Assessment Processes and the Overall Institutional Assessment System

These three tiers of goals will be best facilitated with continued consultation from experts in the field of Assessment. We propose using the Sharing Scholarship funds to bring experts to the university annually in the Fall (2 days) and in the Spring (1 day) over the next three years to

evaluate our assessment at the Program and Course Level, University Level, and Overall Quality Effectiveness of Assessment and provide feedback for improvement of our system.

The following experts or similar caliber field experts should these individuals be unavailable are proposed:

- **Dr. Peggy Maki** for the 2006-2007 academic year because of her expertise at the programmatic level and her familiarity with the assessment plans made by the academic units. Dr. Maki specializes in assisting universities integrate assessment of student learning into educational practices, processes, and structures within the context of accreditors' expectations for institutional effectiveness. The Provost' Council agreed in April 2006 to bring Dr. Maki back to UAS for selective workshops with individual programs during convocation in Fall 2006. Currently, this will be funded from the Chancellor's grant to support assessment until the University is notified of whether it received the Sharing Scholarship.
- **Dr. Peter T. Ewell** for the 2007-2008 academic year because of his expertise in assessment at the institutional level. Dr. Ewell believes that to achieve excellence, faculty and administrators must create explicit, institution-specific mechanisms for regularly assessing progress toward educational goals. By helping faculty and administrators understand institutional assessment not as a burdensome responsibility but as an opportunity to initiate constructive action, Dr. Ewell encourages a new perspective on student learning and institutional change. Properly understood and implemented, assessment becomes not a discrete activity but a natural, ongoing extension of institutional self-consciousness.
- **Dr. William H. Graves** for the 2008-2009 academic year because of his expertise and leadership in helping higher education apply technology to measurably improve institutional performance and his knowledge of quality improvement and effectiveness in assessing assessment. A focus of his evidence-based work is how to improve accountability in higher education.

Recommendation 2:

The evaluation committee recommends that UAS address how it meets Standard 4.B on Scholarship, Research, and Artistic Creation. This standard requires, "regardless of the size or nature of the institution," that all faculty engage in some level of scholarship. The Faculty Senate Committee on the Scholarship of Teaching may provide an excellent vehicle for the campus to define criteria that satisfy this standard. Likewise discussion of electronic teaching portfolios may provide a good method for reflecting on and documenting the scholarship of teaching. Multiple approaches exist from the campus may choose to implement this standard (Standard Four-Faculty).

The scholarship of teaching and learning encompasses activities that

- assist in acquiring and sustaining a faculty member's expertise
- entail the creation, application, synthesis, or transmission of knowledge [*from accreditation Std. 4.B*].

Such activities involve more than just engaging students in learning; in many instances, these activities might also be characterized as professional development, service, or research.

Faculty members should view evaluation of their scholarship of teaching and learning as an opportunity to

- affirm the work of faculty members;
- identify areas for improvement in performance;
- recommend new ways of engaging in teaching and learning activities;
- establish qualifications for promotion, tenure, and sabbatical leave.

For the purposes of retention, promotion, tenure, and post-tenure reviews, the evaluation of a faculty member's scholarship of teaching and learning will emphasize the quality of performance in categories outlined in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Matrix found in Appendix C. On occasion, these categories may overlap to some extent with those used for evaluating other parts of a faculty member's workload, such as research, service, or professional development. Such overlap generally contributes to scholarly merit and worth and provides evidence of a faculty member's overall commitment to the scholarship of teaching and learning. Hence, instead of concentrating on the degree of overlap, evaluation should assess to what degree expectations outlined in the matrix were satisfied and whether activities were commensurate with the rank under consideration.

An Ad Hoc Committee on the Scholarship of Teaching was appointed by the UAS Faculty Senate in August 2004. This Committee worked during the 2004-2005 academic year to develop a matrix of the scholarship of teaching which was presented to the Faculty Senate in October of 2005 and approved unanimously. The policy and matrix were then forwarded to the Chancellor for approval and adoption (Appendix C).

Recommendation 3:

It appears that some new academic programs which should have been submitted to the Commission as substantive changes have not been. The institution should move quickly to receive written confirmation from the Commission about the status of each of its new programs (Policy A-2 – Substantive Change).

In November of 2004, Provost Stell wrote to the Commission to receive confirmation on the status of each of UAS' new programs since the 1999 report. This included 7 Certificate programs, 1 Associate of Applied Science program, 3 Bachelor of Arts programs, 3 Bachelor of Science programs, and reinstatement of the MBA program in 2004 following a 9 year suspension. In January of 2005, UAS received a response from NWCCU approving all programs as "no change" confirming that no program had a substantive change as defined in Policy A-2. Since this time, UAS has added two new credentials (certificates in Pre-Radiology Technology and Drafting). In September 2005, the Provost Submitted these programs to the Commission. Later that month the Commission wrote back to notify Provost Stell that they approved inclusion of these new programs under UAS' accreditation and that they will be reviewed as part of UAS' decennial evaluation report and visit scheduled for fall 2009 (Appendix D)

SUMMARY

The University of Alaska Southeast has taken the opportunity to develop an institutional assessment program in response to recommendation number one by the reviewers. Chancellor Pugh has made Assessment a University initiative and we are developing a “culture of assessment” at UAS. All programs, departments, and schools are actively involved in the assessment process. Dr. Peggy Maki helped us direct and expand our initiative by providing direct feedback to departments and schools and facilitating the administrative team in developing an Assessment Committee to monitor and institutionalize assessment. We have also sought funding to support the expansion of the assessment initiative.

The Faculty Senate through an Ad Hoc Committee worked diligently throughout the 2004-2005 academic year to develop the Scholarship of Teaching document and matrix. This concept was embraced fully by the UAS faculty and adopted by the Faculty Senate in October of 2005. These guidelines provide new insight into how teaching may be viewed through a creative lens as scholarship by our faculty who pride themselves in their teaching accomplishments.

UAS academic programs are continually evolving and changing to meet the educational needs of the citizens of Alaska and to prepare people for employment opportunities in the State. Programmatic changes made since the 1999 review were submitted shortly after the interim visit and were approved by the Commission as “no change.” However, the University is reminded that we must continually apprise the Commission of changes made to enhance and improve our curricula and programming, but this is especially urgent when the programmatic changes may be viewed as substantive.

The interim evaluation provided an excellent opportunity for introspection and evaluation of UAS, its curricula, programs, and outcomes.

APPENDICES