

Creighton University HLC Assessment Academy Proposal

Recent Efforts: Our Assessment Story

Creighton University has a bifurcated history of assessment, based on the presence or absence of specialty accreditations. Those professional schools and other academic programs who are accredited (e.g., School of Medicine, School of Nursing, School of Dentistry, School of Law, College of Business Administration) have established track records of setting learning goals, collecting assessment data and information, analyzing the data and information, discussing the results among the faculty and relevant staff, and effecting programmatic and curricular changes as warranted. Several of those units, including the School of Pharmacy and Health Professions and the Department of Education, have become leaders on campus in testing ways to assess professional dispositions and values, even beyond what is expected of them by their specialty accrediting commissions.

Within the College of Arts and Sciences, many departments engage in assessing student learning. Often, faculty members are conducting assessment but they do not recognize that they are doing so. Because of that, the sharing of assessment information among the department's faculty is spotty at times. That then inhibits the formal, intentional modification of programs and curricula based on assessment data and information. Changes are made regularly, but not as evidence-based or with as much inclusivity as could be accomplished if the entire cycle of assessment was enacted.

As with our society at large, there is a growing demand for accountability on our campus. This is a compassionate accountability, based on the widespread recognition that all of us choose to be here to help students learn. We want to improve our institution for the benefit of those students. Increasingly, faculty and staff members are expanding their paradigms to see how assessment can help us, individually and collectively, help students. As we have been going through the accreditation self-study process over the past year, faculty and staff members increasingly are seeing how assessment can play a central role in driving curricula, programs, budgeting decisions, and the like. We believe this is a sign of the beginning of a cultural change on our campus, signaling an acceptance of and willingness to embrace assessment and use it in strategic ways. This will be a movement away from the formerly widely accepted paradigm that assessment is intrusive to faculty and only done to appease accrediting commissions.

Strategically, we want to improve our assessment practices for several reasons. First, we want to do a better job of educating our students. Second, we want to use assessment as the means for interdisciplinary and cross-college/school discussions about teaching and learning. Third, we want to expand the practice of assessment beyond faculty members to include all areas of, and people in, the university who affect student learning. Fourth, we want to begin using assessment results as part of a larger effort to make strategic decisions across the university based on data and analysis.

Needs, Goals, and Desired Results: Our Foci and How Attending to Them Will Help us Help Students Learn

Needs

Need #1: Assessing Values

Today, we enjoy the presence of significantly fewer Jesuits at Creighton than we have historically. Unfortunately, there are fewer Jesuits today than in previous decades. This decrease in the number of Jesuits available for higher education is a trend that is expected to worsen. In the past, the Jesuits were the leaders of value-based education at our institution. Over the past

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years, they have worked hard to collaborate with the non-Jesuits who work at Creighton in order to encourage those lay people to pick up the mantle of embedding the Ignatian values that are the hallmark of Jesuit education and to perpetuate Ignatian values in the absence of a critical mass of Jesuits. At the same time, there is an increasing desire on the part of students, their parents, and the students' subsequent employers for students to acquire and enact strong, positive values and professional dispositions. Our need to demonstrate student acquisition of value outcomes necessitates a comprehensive, campus-wide initiative that frames student acquisition of Ignatian values as the work of each individual within the university community. This includes a university-wide assessment strategy that provides evidence of student acquisition of institutional Ignatian values as well as evidence of administrator, faculty, and staff performance consistent with Ignatian values and roles.

Need #2: Peer Review of Assessment Practices

While each unit of the university has established learning goals and has made some progress toward assessment of those goals, each unit acts like an autonomous body with respect to the assessment of learning. Each has established its learning goals and has developed, or is developing, strategies and processes for assessing them, but they have done so independently of the other units. Currently, the only process addressing the need for an evaluation of assessment that transcends the individual units is the collection of reports from the colleges and schools by the University Assessment Committee. At present, however, the process does not include a system of peer review and feedback to the academic programs. In addition, no assessment is in place or in development that focuses on university-wide goals. There is an urgent need to develop collaboration among the assessment efforts of the schools, colleges and other units of the university.

Need #3: University-Level Learning Outcomes Assessment

In our Mission Statement we state that we are dedicated to the pursuit of truth in all its forms as we are guided by the living tradition of the Catholic Church, and we participate in the tradition of the Society of Jesus which provides an integrating vision of the world that arises out of a knowledge and love of Jesus Christ. These ideals are very important to us. Building on these ideals, Creighton's President, Fr. Schlegel, has identified five expected learning outcomes for all Creighton graduates:

1. a disciplinary competence and/or a professional proficiency aided by a liberal education and a global perspective,
2. ethical competence and values centered decision making,
3. a disposition towards service and an engaged civic responsibility,
4. an ability to communicate: written, verbal, and technical, and
5. a disposition towards life-long learning.

The University's Assessment Committee has identified three other learning objectives:

1. students should engage in deliberative reflection for personal and professional formation,
2. students should promote social justice in their communities, and
3. students' actions should affirm the inalienable worth of each person.

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The University's mission statement identifies other objectives and values as well including:

1. challenging students to reflect on transcendent values, including their relationship with God,
2. recognizing the value of service to others,
3. embracing the importance of family life and ethnic and cultural diversity, and
4. encouraging critical and creative thinking.

We do not know how successful we are in instilling these values in our students or achieving many of these outcomes. We need to be able to clarify our commitment to these objectives and assess whether we are achieving them. Our programs currently have assessment mechanisms, but the tools and approaches vary substantially in their forms, administration, and utility. Creighton needs to find ways to implement effective assessment mechanisms across the University in its diverse undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs, but at the same time allow maximum flexibility for specific colleges and schools to address their particular needs.

Need #4: Bridging Co-curricular and Curricular Learning and Assessment

Creighton University's mission challenges each member of the community to reflect on "transcendent values, including their relationship with God", provide "service to others", appreciate the "importance of family life, the inalienable worth of each individual, and (the) appreciation of ethnic and cultural diversity." Creighton's Division of Student Services has developed programs, with concomitant learning objectives, to enact the University's mission. However, the learning that occurs in the majority of those programs is not assessed. Beyond that, many faculty members do not recognize that much student learning occurs outside of the classrooms and labs, including learning directly related to course content. At Creighton, we have no assessment mechanism through which to identify and affect the co-curricular programs in which learning occurs, the relationships among co-curricular and curricular learning, or the communication about learning and assessment between Student Services and Academic Affairs faculty and staff members.

Goals

Goals for Need #1: Assessing Values

1. Using the method of appreciative inquiry, perform a baseline assessment of what strategies and evidence currently exists that demonstrate values outcomes across our colleges, schools, and programs.
2. Use the baseline assessment across programs to develop and implement a shared university-wide understanding of Ignatian values and role in student learning and outcomes.
3. Create university-wide accountability structures that ensure Ignatian values are consistently present in the institutional environment (this would include teaching and learning, course evaluations, and outcomes-based annual reviews of all personnel).
4. Develop and implement a University-wide teaching/learning environment that fosters curricular and co-curricular activities that emphasize Ignatian values and role in student learning and outcomes.

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5. Design (using current and new) and implement assessment strategies that provide evidence of student learning, and administrator, faculty, and staff performance consistent with Ignatian values and roles.

Goals for Need #2: Peer Review of Assessment Practices

1. Develop and implement a university-level evaluation of assessment.
2. Reconstitute and strengthen the University Assessment Committee to collect information on the state of assessment in the units, provide peer feedback to the units and serve as the medium for unit to unit mentoring and collaboration on assessment.
3. Develop and operate an annual State of Assessment open meeting for our campus community at which we celebrate the institution's successes, seek input on how best to address our challenges, and educate attendees about how assessment is feeding into strategic decision-making on campus.

Goals for Need #3: University-Level Learning Outcomes Assessment

1. Identify the institution's core values and related learning outcomes that cross all curricular and co-curricular programs.
2. Identify assessment practices that can assess the learning associated with university-level and mission-specific learning outcomes.
3. Guide the institution in implementing those assessment practices while allowing colleges, schools, and programs adequate flexibility.
4. Learn, from other institutions, about effective methods through which to loop assessment data back to decision makers who can analyze and act upon the data.

Goals for Need #4: Bridging Co-curricular and Curricular Learning and Assessment

1. Identify methods for assessing learning that occurs in co-curricular programs and activities, and then enact that assessment. (Input from other institutions will be particularly helpful here.)
2. Identify methods for integrating curricular and co-curricular planning that is driven by assessment results, and then enact that integration.
3. Train non-academic staff to recognize and assess student learning in co-curricular programs and activities.
4. Include this area of assessment in the annual State of Assessment meeting described above in Goals for Need #3.

Desired Results

Need #1: Assessing Values

Once mission-based values move from being implicit to more broadly understood by stakeholders across campus, we will have the foundation to begin a systematic assessment process. This shared understanding and structure grounds the values so they can be translated to explicit, well-defined outcomes for student learning. With an enhanced recognition of the role of the institutional context in *formation of students* grounded in Ignatian values there is more likely to be consistency with what we declare for our students, what we teach our students, and what our students learn. In the long-term, we may want to explore how these values may be expressed in our graduates' lives. We are working to make the historically implicit assumptions about

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student acquisition of Ignatian values more explicit as well as enhancing institutional accountability.

This effort would provide strong evidence consistent with Creighton's claim that the institution offers a "degree of difference." A systematic assessment process focused on values in a comprehensive institution like Creighton, where there are several professional schools sitting alongside strong liberal arts education, would be an excellent model for higher education. This assessment initiative also fits well Creighton University's role as a lead institution in the Carnegie CASTL Cluster initiative that is focused on affective learning. Creighton has been chosen as a lead institution to explore and document the nature of the affective side of student learning in the health professions and provide leadership for a national interdisciplinary dialogue on affective learning.

Need #2: Peer Review of Assessment Practices

The principle result of this initiative will be a changed assessment environment. No longer will assessment consist of several independent efforts. Instead we will become a collaborative assessment community. The collaboration should result in more effective assessment of learning and more responsive feedback to programs, colleges, and schools. The cooperation that will be exhibited at the administrative level can be the beginning of the development of a genuine culture of assessment in the university.

Student learning will be affected by the improvements in assessment engendered by peer review feedback. With better data and an efficient feedback process, we will be more confident in and more sensitive to the data we collect and analyze. The improvements in our assessment cycle will result in a more responsive assessment process, resulting in faster implementation of changes suggested by the data, and better learning in the courses.

Need #3: University-Level Learning Outcomes Assessment

The Academy will help us to educate ourselves and in turn carry the message back to our colleagues. Study, reflection, and exposure to new ideas, all will help us identify specific proposals to help Creighton raise assessment in its colleges to a higher level, with commensurate improved results. We do not want to be just another institution of higher learning. We want to produce what we promise.

If we determine that we are not achieving our outcomes, the educational environment must be changed accordingly. The administrators and faculty in the respective colleges, with input from students, are in the best position to decide exactly what it will take to achieve these outcomes, but they likely will not do it unless they perceive that there is a problem and believe that there is institutional support to solve the problem. The goals we have identified for this need will allow us to build a system through which administrators and faculty can take college-level ownership of the university-level learning outcomes, yet still seek, and gain, university-level support for their assessment and programmatic efforts.

Need #4: Bridging Co-curricular and Curricular Learning and Assessment

The desired outcome of this effort is the integration of curricular and co-curricular programs, activities, and experiences that lead to student learning. In the long-term, this integration may drive organizational restructuring through which to more effectively deploy the limited resources available to the institution. In the short-term, this integration will facilitate a paradigm shift, encouraging faculty and staff to replace their narrow view of academic divisions

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as independent silos with a view that is more closely aligned with how students perceive and act upon the university. As that paradigm shift occurs, we expect faculty and staff will gain an understanding of the role co-curricular programming and activities play in enhancing and inhibiting student learning. As the students' and faculty and staffs' paradigms converge, we expect an expansion of students' awareness of how they, and their educational experiences, fit into and are affected by the global, diverse, and technology-rich world in which they live.

Commitment, Leadership, and Capacity: Evidence for Our Commitment and Capacity for Assessing Student Learning

Of primary importance is our President's understanding of and support for the initiatives advanced in this proposal. Father Schlegel clearly understands Ignatian values, how they can be infused throughout the organization, and the ways in which students can be exposed to, and subsequently adopt or adapt to, those values. He is adamant that we, as an institution, deliver on our promises to students, their parents, and our other constituencies. At the same time, he is fully aware of the time, energy, and capital it takes to effect lasting organizational change, particularly with things with a "history", such as assessment. Still, he is fully behind the ideas contained in this proposal.

Our University Assessment Committee (UAC) is poised to be the driving force behind the initiatives in this proposal. The UAC is comprised of representatives from every college and school on campus, including several Associate Vice Presidents, Associate Deans, senior faculty, and senior staff. In recent years, UAC membership has been expanded to include representatives from our Division of Student Services, Division of University Ministry, and Division of Information Technology. In so doing, the UAC is modeling the curricular/co-curricular integration approach that we want the rest of the university to adopt. The representatives on the UAC hold staff, faculty, and administrative positions. Further, we have one person trained as an HLC consultant-evaluator, and another who will be trained this November, on the committee. That connection will help guide the UAC's efforts to stay in line with HLC expectations for accreditation and, more importantly, institutional efforts beyond the accreditation site visit.

Budget has been allocated from the Office for Academic Excellence and Assessment for the four years of the Assessment Academy. While this office can absorb the entire cost of this effort, we will seek matching funding from all areas of the university so that this becomes a university-wide partnership. We will also reach out to assessment and organizational change experts on our campus, inviting them to play leadership roles in these initiatives. In so doing, we will help expand the Assessment Academy from a UAC-driven process to a collaborative, university-driven process.

Competing Priorities: Potential Initiatives and Issues that May Interfere with Our Full Participation in the Academy.

We are in the midst of our university self-study process, with our accreditation site visit scheduled for mid-March, 2007. On one hand, that self-study process will consume significant resources and energy that could interfere with the initiatives described in this proposal. However, we expect something different. Through the conversations and discussions occurring to date, faculty and staff across campus are recognizing and beginning to appreciate the opportunities for organizational reflection and improvement that the self-study process affords us. We believe that now is the perfect time to participate in the Assessment Academy and move assessment to the forefront of our institutional efforts. The initiatives contained in this proposal fit well with the

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organizational opportunities we are finding through our self-study process. They also address some of the assessment challenges we are identifying. Waiting until next spring or summer to start on these efforts will likely allow the accumulating energy to dissipate. Worse, our faculty and staff may interpret the delay to mean that we are neither serious nor committed to the ideals we are enacting through the self-study process. Not only will that reinforce the perception that the self-study process and accreditation need attention “only” every ten years, but it will put up a barrier that need not be there.

We have sufficient financial resources to fully participate in the Assessment Academy for all four years. And, we have sufficient human resources to fully attend to the self-study process and to all that must happen through the Assessment Academy. But most importantly, we have a critical mass of people, in the University Assessment Committee and beyond, who are passionate about assessment, give freely of their time and energy, and truly believe that through our increased efforts to advance assessment we will fully enact our institution’s mission and serve our students as they deserve to be served.