

University Assessment Committee

***Report on the Quality of Student Learning at the University***  
For the 2014-15 Academic Year

**Introduction**

During the 2014-15 academic year, the University Assessment Committee (UAC) developed, distributed, and collected the *Annual Program Improvement and Assessment Report* from 68 University of New England (UNE) reporting entities<sup>1</sup> and the *Annual College & Division Assessment Report* from the six UNE colleges (College of Arts and Sciences, College of Osteopathic Medicine, College of Pharmacy, Westbrook College of Health Professions, College

- the process employed to interpret the data;
- and the changes made as a result of that interpretation.

The four questions that the UAC added to the form ask about:

- the strengths identified in each program's assessment results;
- the challenges identified in each program's assessment results;
- the steps taken to improve student learning;
- and which learning outcome(s) UNE as a whole should address.

The UAC then asked the College Deans and the Vice President for Student Affairs to synthesize their program report findings and provide a summary analysis in the *Annual College & Division Assessment Report*. This reporting form asked the Deans to discuss:

- what the assessment findings revealed about strengths in student learning;
- the areas of student learning that require special attention;
- the actions needed to improve those areas;
- the improvements that have been made in majors or programs as a result of prior actions that were based on assessment findings;
- and the student learning outcomes that need the most attention by the university as a whole.

To facilitate analysis, the UAC, in conjunction with the Office of Institutional Research & Assessment (OIRA), identified broad categories/domains into which the student learning strengths and challenges cited in the above reports can be grouped. These categories/domains include:

- student learning of content knowledge;
- student learning of general education skills (including writing, math, and data collection and analysis);
- student application of skills;
- student job placement in the field;
- student personal growth and professionalism;
- pedagogical practices of faculty;
- program emphasis on interdisciplinary studies;
- and reflections on the assessment process itself.

### **Ongoing Assessment Activities**

In addition to conducting major program assessment, the six UNE colleges and the Division of Student Affairs have also carried out their own assessment and faculty/staff development activities.

#### College of Arts and Sciences:

In addition to program assessment, faculty who teach in the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) Core Curriculum are conducting assessment on all 11 areas of the core curriculum. A formalized structure consisting of an overall Core Curriculum Assessment Coordinator and Core Area Coordinators organize the assessment work and reporting for each of the core groups. Interdisciplinary groups of faculty are assessing the interdisciplinary core areas. The

CAS Dean's office held several all-day workshops on core curriculum assessment where faculty refined assessment methods and evaluation rubrics, reviewed and summarized results, and



of the program.” However, “a small percentage of our students struggle to pass COMLEX Level-1.” The program has been taking steps to monitor students and provide more support before and after they take the exam. CDM recognizes strengths and challenges within the content knowledge domain as well. The program believes “all students from our inaugural class (Class of 2017) achieved an appropriate level of competence...to begin treating patients in Spring 2015.” Yet, the program has been trying to provide more support for first-year students by implementing the Student Success Team, an “early intervention initiative to identify struggling students and help them generate personalized improvement plans to prevent course failures.” The report adds, “Assessment of this initiative is ongoing, but initial indicators (from the 2014-2015 academic year) suggest that it is helping to reduce the number of students who need to remediate a course.”

While some colleges noted their programs have made incremental changes to improve the assessment process, others have only begun assessment. CGPS explains, “The changes and improvements within programs as a result of student learning assessment have been incremental (i.e., adding policies around course updates, and developing program-wide learning objectives).” However, CGPS finds, “Implementing a college-wide system will help track improvements that are currently being implemented, and will help to identify areas that need improvement.” CAS explains, “In those programs where assessment is already a culture, we see greater progress than in those in which assessment remains a fairly nascent enterprise. Furthermore, it is critical that in the core curriculum, assessment includes all faculty teaching the relevant courses. Human Traditions, Social and Global Awareness and other core areas that transcend department boundaries are not as strong due to selective faculty participation.” COP “is really just beginning true assessment of student learning. A Student Learning Outcomes Plan is slated to be designed in AY 2015-2016 based upon the structure of the new curriculum.”

After inquiring about the colleges’ strengths and challenges, the report asks colleges about the student learning outcomes they think UNE as a whole should address. Five colleges request more emphasis on improving students’ oral and written communication skills; three colleges want the University to focus on further developing students’ professional values and behavior, as well as emotional intelligence and resilience; three colleges want UNE to develop more tools to measure assessment; two colleges seek more emphasis on developing students’ critical thinking skills; two colleges want UNE to further encourage student service learning and community outreach; one college wants students to improve their math, data, and computation skills; one college wants UNE to foster students’ research and citation skills; and one college believes UNE needs to better address diversity.

## **Implications**

The UAC has drawn several meaningful conclusions from this annual assessment process:

1. First and foremost, every reporting entity<sup>2</sup> completed and submitted a report, which is a major achievement in this first year of carrying out a revised assessment process. All programs and colleges are now engaged in formal assessment. By shaping and refining their curriculum, activities, and assessments, UNE programs and colleges demonstrate

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<sup>2</sup> With the exception of Medical Education Leadership.





