

THE GRAND VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY GUIDING PRINCIPLES of ASSESSMENT

Assessment and Accreditation Office

September 2008

The purpose of assessment at GVSU

Grand Valley's two-pronged mission is to *educate students to shape their lives, their professions, and their societies* and to *contribute to the enrichment of society through excellent teaching, active scholarship, and public service.*

To monitor the extent to which student education and societal enrichment are occurring and the quality of the outcomes achieved as the result of the University's activities, Grand Valley has established a comprehensive, multi-level assessment structure.

This assessment structure and the processes required to ensure that the structure permeates the entire institution are integral to the institution's cycle of continuous program improvement. Improvement in which administrators, faculty, students and external organizations are engaged in examining and refining all aspects of the university's operations – including its academic components, its administrative functions, its facilities, its policies and procedures, its impacts on students, and its relationships with the broader community and world.

Background of assessment at GVSU

In 1991, Grand Valley's Provost established the institution's first assessment task force. Several years later the *ad hoc* task force was renamed the University Assessment Committee and in April 2003, the University Academic Senate approved the UAC as a standing committee of faculty governance, placing assessment responsibility within the purview of faculty governance.

Today the University Assessment Committee (UAC) is responsible for developing the formats for the assessment reports and Grand Valley program self-studies that guide units in analyzing and reporting their findings. The committee reviews all assessment plans, reports and self studies and provides feedback and guidance to academic units for using assessment findings to drive programmatic improvements. In 2005, the University created the position of Assessment & Accreditation Officer, which is positioned within the Provost's Office, as a support for assessment and reaccreditation activities institution-wide. The Pew FTLC Assistant Director of Assessment is a position

created in 2006 in response to the need for more training and support with assessment. Both positions work in close collaboration with the UAC to provide assistance to units for their assessment activities.

The assessment philosophy of Grand Valley as explicated by the UAC

Assessment of student learning at Grand Valley is based on the "Principles of Good Practice in Assessing Student Learning," first promulgated more than a decade ago by the American Association of Higher Education (1992). These principles assume that assessment of student learning begins with the explication of an institution's broadest educational purposes and conclude when information about the outcomes of student learning assessments are used to shape future learning experiences within the university community. Those broad purposes are further defined by the question, "What do we expect students to know, believe and be able to do when they have completed their educational programs?" The AAHE principles further suggest that, through assessment, Grand Valley meets an important obligation to its students and to the public from which the institution derives its mission and financial support by providing solid, current evidence of its effectiveness in promoting learning on a regular and ongoing basis.

Grand Valley's assessment philosophy recognizes the connections between assessment and the act of learning itself. Effective learning integrates knowledge, occurs on many levels, and is demonstrated in students' performance across time. For this reason, the institution believes that assessment works best when it is multi-faceted, multi-level, ongoing and able to identify changes in student knowledge, skills and attitudes, as well as their performance at multiple points during their academic careers. The kinds of learning experiences provided for students affect their learning; therefore, the involvement of all faculty in the assessment process is important in developing a complete understanding of students' success in learning.

Underlying assumptions of GVSU's assessment of student learning outcomes:

- Faculty determine student learning outcomes for their programs. These outcomes may be shaped by the requirements of accrediting agencies.
- Student learning outcomes help the institution achieve the institution's mission and college, departmental and academic units' goals and objectives.
- Student learning outcomes are written in clear, measurable terms (qualitative and quantitative in nature) and are understandable and understood by students.
- Student learning outcomes address student knowledge, behavior/skills, and attitudes.

Underlying assumptions of GVSU's development and use of assessment instruments and methodologies:

- Faculty determine the assessment instruments and methods used in assessing student learning outcomes established for their programs and classes.
- The institution determines and implements instruments and methods to assess broader (cross-cutting) learning outcomes that are benchmarked to national standards or outcomes from comparable institutions.
- Different assessment methods and instruments may be appropriate for different programs, reflecting the diversity of Grand Valley programs and their student learning outcomes.
- Instruments and methods used are appropriate for the learning outcomes being assessed.
- Criterion-referenced instruments are used whenever possible in assessing student learning. That is, learning is assessed against pre-determined standards or qualities of performance. Exceptions to this guideline may be made if departments wish to consider the results of norm-referenced, standardized examinations such as the GRE, national discipline-based exams, or national/state licensure or certification exams.
- Student learning outcomes are assessed by a variety of direct and indirect measures chosen by the faculty. Examples of effective **direct indicators of learning** include pre- and post-testing; capstone courses; oral examinations; internships; portfolio assessments; evaluation of capstone projects, theses or dissertations; standardized national exams; locally developed tests, performance of licensure, certification or professional exams; and juried reviews and performances. Examples of effective **indirect indicators of learning** might include information gathered from alumni, employers and students; graduation rates; retention and transfer studies; graduate follow-up studies; success of students in subsequent institutional settings; and job placement data. **Examples of effective data collection methods** include paper and pencil testing, essays and writing samples; portfolio collections of student work; exit interviews, surveys, focus group interviews; the use of external evaluators; logs and journals, behavioral observations; and many other research tools. Research methods should be tailored to the type of data to be gathered and the degree of reliability required.
- Assessment at Grand Valley includes measures of "value added," such as pre- and post-tests.
- Assessment at Grand Valley occurs not only at the end, but also throughout the program.

- Assessment of student learning outcomes avoids curriculum review reports, program evaluations, faculty recognition, student/faculty ratio, grades earned in courses and GPAs. It is the Grand Valley philosophy that these measures do not directly reflect student learning.

Underlying assumptions of GVSU's data collection, data analysis and data reporting components of assessment

Grand Valley believes that to be effective, assessment planning and implementation must include:

- a clear plan for and designation of the party or parties responsible for collecting and analyzing all pieces of assessment data, and the provision of adequate resources to support this collection and analysis;
- regular, frequent collection and analysis of assessment data;
- multiple measures of key learning outcomes;
- clarity about the audience and distribution of all assessment reports or findings (ex. faculty, students, dean, , alumni, community members, etc.).

Although it is a Grand Valley philosophy that there should be assessment activity and reporting of findings to the UAC and other constituents at least annually, the institution does not believe that every student learning outcome must be assessed every year. Rather, all outcomes are expected be addressed comprehensively at least once during each program review cycle in order to provide current and robust data for that review.

Overall, it is Grand Valley's philosophy to focus assessment on the enhancement of student learning through the continuous improvement of the educational process.

Feedback loops are an essential element in Grand Valley's philosophy that values providing faculty with information useful to the improvement of their instructional activities and student learning. Assessment is not an end in itself. Feedback from analysis of assessment data leads to conclusions about current program effectiveness. This, in turn leads to recommendations and plans to improve program content and delivery. Effective feedback loops are characterized by clarity at this stage--what will happen/change to improve student learning as a result of assessment results. These changes are then implemented and evaluated within the University's assessment cycle.

Underlying assumptions of Grand Valley's assessment results dissemination processes:

- Faculty design and implement the assessment program and use its results in many ways to improve the educational content and learning experiences they provide.
- Authority and responsibility for the design and operation of assessment is shared throughout the faculty and administration, and by many other institutional stakeholders.
- Assessment of student learning outcomes is linked to program review to encourage continual program improvement.
- Students understand the purposes of assessment and participate in meaningful assessment of their learning experiences. In addition, students are represented on the University Assessment Committee and other unit assessment committees. Program-related student learning outcomes and related assessments should also be included in course syllabi.