Approach to Assurance of Learning Assessment

1. Assessment should reflect the school’s vision, mission statement and values.
   Seidman’s vision is that our graduates will be able to “apply a creative, integrated and cross-disciplinary approach to business”. This is a new vision statement, so these efforts are beginning. Our current Assurance of Learning Plan has a few learning objectives that address students’ ability to integrate, and the Strategic Planning Committee is soliciting curricula proposals that will help us achieve our vision. As these proposals are approved and implemented, our learning objectives and measures will focus on integration to a greater degree.

   Seidman’s mission, as well as our “Diversity” value states that we have a global focus. We are therefore assessing international/cultural knowledge in four of our five degrees, with more emphasis in the graduate programs. Our mission further states that we have a regional commitment. Our Assurance of Learning Plan uses regional employers as the assessors for our mock interviews, and one of the cases that is used to assess learning involves a Grand Rapids company. Seidman’s mission also stresses the application of knowledge. Most of our assessment measures involve the application of knowledge in the form of case analysis, presentations, mock employment interviews, and behavioral exercises.

   Grand Valley State University’s Vision encompasses teaching in the liberal tradition to provide all students, regardless of academic major, with a liberal education that “transcends the acquisition of information” and helps students develop “the skills of inquiry, reflection, critical analysis, dialogue, and expression”. Seidman’s “Teaching Excellence” value reflects the university’s vision through its focus on liberal learning, critical thinking, expression, and independent thinking. Consequently, although we have a few content-based learning objectives, most of our learning objectives address liberal education skills.

   Finally, Seidman’s “Ethics and Integrity” value says that faculty will teach the process of ethical development. We have therefore incorporated an Ethical Reasoning learning goal/objectives into each of our five degree programs.

2. Assessment should take place at the program level and be developmental in focus.
   Seidman faculty members felt it was important that assessment not become a method of evaluating faculty performance; therefore, we decided that we would not trace assessment data back to individual faculty, thus erasing motivation to inflate assessment results. We wanted faculty members to regard assessment as helpful, not punitive.

   At the same time, we realize that there must be accountability in the process. A new Seidman requirement, introduced in Winter 2006, is that faculty members prepare a teaching portfolio to be used in teaching evaluation. As part of this portfolio, instructors will be asked to address how they are meeting each of the learning
objectives specified in the syllabus of record for each class. They will be asked to include assignments/tests that demonstrate the incorporation of the objectives.

3. There should be heavy faculty involvement in the development of the plan and the correction of revealed deficiencies.
Seidman wanted significant faculty involvement in the development of the Assurance of Learning Plan. Twenty-four faculty members served on one of the four task forces that developed learning goals and objectives; thirty-nine faculty members helped develop the measures. In total, 50 of our full time faculty and three non-regular faculty members were involved in the development process. The complete Assurance of Learning Plan was presented to and/or voted on by the entire Faculty Senate six times.

The faculty will also be heavily involved when assessment results are presented and decisions are made about how to correct curriculum deficiencies. If faculty members are going to assume ownership of the plan, this is where their input and commitment will be most needed. Assessment Committee members, each department, and the Faculty Senate will participate in developing and approving plans to remedy any learning deficiencies uncovered by the assessment process.

4. We should adhere to the principles of good research design and sound measurement techniques.
Seidman members talked about how best to collect and process results that would indicate the true state of how well our students are learning designated knowledge and skills. As in any school, we know that some faculty members are more forgiving graders than others. We also know, from a survey of faculty conducted two years ago, that visitors and adjuncts are significantly less rigorous than regular instructors. We concluded we would get the most accurate results if the process of course grading was separated from the process of assessment.

We collected assessment materials across all sections of courses designated for assessment. Because we wanted consistency in measurement, we decided, for the most part, to use a small group of faculty who were briefed to do the actual assessment work. Had we asked that all instructors in each course assess, we would not know whether differences across results were attributable to real learning differences or differences in grading rigor.

Seidman intends to keep investigating the best way to handle assessment grading. For one measure, we used two faculty members working independently on the same student work to get a reliability measure. For a second measure, we did use all the instructors in all the sections of a course to try and determine how well that approach works.

Because we did not use a large group of assessors, we decided to use sampling procedures for some of our measures. In order to ensure representativeness, we chose either a population or a randomly drawn subset for most measures. Whenever we used a sample, we conducted power tests to make sure the sample size was sufficient.