

### AAACL Conference

Lecia Franklin

The semi-annual meeting of the Arkansas Association for the Assessment of Collegiate Learning met recently on the UALR campus in Little Rock, AR; this meeting was attended by 5 members of the Assessment Team (Wrenette Tedder, Bernie Hellums, Pam Ligon, Ginger Otwell, and Lecia Franklin). The keynote speaker was Dr. Douglas Eder of Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville (SIUE). The title for his presentation was **Assessment: What's the point, what's the use.** In addition to some practical advantages of assessing student learning, Dr. Eder gave examples of methods that he uses to assess his classes.

Some of the examples are:

- The student and faculty member each assess a writing assignment using a rubric, and the differences in their assessment are discussed.
- Marching card survey—SIUE developed a survey with a few key questions that served the assessment needs of several areas. The survey was printed on the back of the name card used at graduation, and they asked each student graduating to complete a card while waiting in line.

Dr. Eder also touched on the assessment terminology that is often thought to be confusing.

- Goals: what our students should be able to do or have knowledge of.
- Objectives: what we want our student to be able to do or make, can be assessed.
- Closing the Loop: making our observations from the data we have collected whether it is the end of the cycle on this goal or the end of one year of a three year cycle.

Dr. Eder closed with the thought that sometimes it can be something simple that can give you the information that you need to assess your program.

### Assessment Team for 2010-2011

Feel free to contact your representative on the Assessment Team. They are willing to assist you in the assessment process.

Phillip Schroeder, Chair	Ellis College
Debra Coventry	Ellis College
Brett Serviss	Ellis College
Joyce Shepherd	Ellis College
Margaret Hoskins	School of Business
Bernie Hellums	Teacher's College
Lecia Franklin	Finance and Administration
Lenette Bailey	President's Office
Pam Ligon	Provost's Office
Bob Yehl	Provost's Office
Karen Spradlin	External Programs
Chad Fielding	Student Services
Hope Warner	Graduate School
Jeff Bailey	Student Government Association

Are you interested in joining the Assessment Team? Please email Wrenette Tedder ([tedderw@hsu.edu](mailto:tedderw@hsu.edu)).



#### Special Points of Interest

Don't know where to begin? Have questions? Need help? Feel overwhelmed? Let our assessment team help you. They are available to assist your area with any aspect of the assessment of student learning.

Did you know that the Office of Assessment and Research holds training sessions throughout the semester?

Email Wrenette Tedder ([tedderw@hsu.edu](mailto:tedderw@hsu.edu)) to get help or request a training session.

Need help with TracDat? Look for information on classes on Page 3!

Want to know the Assessment Team member representing your area? Look on Page 4 for more information!

Interested in joining the Assessment Team? Email Wrenette Tedder ([tedderw@hsu.edu](mailto:tedderw@hsu.edu)).

Inside this issue:	
HLC and Assessment in Context	1-2
From the desk of... Wrenette Tedder	2
From the Chair	3
AAACL Conference	4

# Assessment Brief

Volume 4, Issue 1

September 2010

### HLC and Assessment in Context

Dr. Vernon G. Miles  
Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

By this point you have heard so much about the Higher Learning Commission and student outcomes assessment that you must be thinking something like, "So what do we actually tell the Higher Learning Commission about ourselves? What will they want to know about our assessment plans, analysis, and actions?" Below is the only slightly edited text of what we sent to the Higher Learning Commission only a few months ago, when we were asking for their approval for programs in Sheridan and DeQueen. Wrenette Tedder, others, and I collaborated on its original creation, and I have edited it only slightly here. I include it here because it will give you a sense of how comprehensive the Higher Learning Commission's appraisal of the university will undoubtedly be, particularly in regards to outcomes assessment. This is especially true because: **A.** the previous (2001) team recommended and got a 2007 focused visit on us concerning assessment, the results of which will be read, studied, and known by our 2012 team members; **B.** the 2012 visiting team will have access to all of the previous visiting team's reports about us; **C.** our own self study process requires that we cite and respond to the 2001 visiting team's concerns, telling how we have rectified them. I also ask you to read this because it could give you some sense of how what you are doing departmentally fits into the larger institution-wide scheme for assessment. Defects in this text, by the way, are entirely my responsibility. The Assessment Team stands ready to answer your questions or to help you in any way. Enjoy!

Henderson State University underwent its last comprehensive Higher Learning Commission visit from November 12-14, 2001. At that time, the Evaluation Visiting Team noted that it "found evidence that Henderson State University was in compliance with each of these [24 General Institutional Requirements] foundational principles for institutions of higher education. Further, the Visiting Team noted that each institution of higher education accredited by the Higher Learning Commission "must demonstrate that it fulfills the five Criteria for Accreditation." Once it had finished its comprehensive visit, the Visiting Team concluded "that Henderson State University fulfills these five criteria." The Visiting Team recommendation was that the accreditation of HSU be continued to 2011-12. However, at that same time, the Team further recommended that "a focus visit on assessment during the spring semester of 2007" be conducted. That focused visit did in fact occur over the February 26-27, 2007, period, with spectacular results. This Focused Visit evaluation team reviewed the university's Assessment Plan, a wide variety of academic and non-academic assessment plans, Assessment Team minutes, the Assessment Team handbook, the catalog, and other materials; it spoke with members of the university community from across the entire campus. Its final recommendation was "No Commission follow-up recommended," and so Henderson State University maintained its unblemished record with the Higher Learning Commission.

However, rather than stop there, the university community continued its stellar work on assessment, building on input from the Focused Visit Team and on increased schooling on the latest developments on assessment, both course imbedded and non-course imbedded. Each academic program, each unit, and each operation at the university has been asked to establish goals for itself, to link those goals to the larger unit goals (to college/school goals and Academic Affairs goals for academic programs, for instance) and to the university's goals; each unit has also been asked to establish outcomes springing from

## HLC and Assessment in Context

(Continued)

those goals, to relate those outcomes to specific courses in their curricula, and to establish **multiple** means of assessing those outcomes. Each unit either logs all of this directly into our TracDat system or submits to the Assessment Office or sometimes both. Virtually every program and operation at the university has completed this portion of our planning implementation, and nearly all of them have data/information resulting from the implementation of their assessment plans. They are using this information/data to make and document changes to their curricula, offerings, and services, and in some cases, to revise or add goals that the information indicates should be revisited or reformed in some way.

An indication of the seriousness with which the HSU community takes our assessment can be gleaned from the activities of the University Assessment Team over the last year. The Assessment Team is composed of faculty and staff members from across most of the areas of the university. The first example of the commitment of the Assessment Team and HSU community is revealed in the fact that in the late summer of 2009 the Assessment Team membership itself chose to begin to meet not monthly as most committees do, but every two weeks all year long. That is the level of dedication the university is applying to its assessment endeavors. Moreover, during the spring and summer of 2009, for instance, the Assessment Team collected the newly-updated assessment plans for each and every unit on campus, academic and non-academic. Then the Team divided into working groups of two to three members each, and each working group analyzed each and every assessment plan (all of them) in detail over the summer and early fall of 2009. In brief, the working groups looked at each plan to ensure that there was a succinct mission for each unit, that the mission produced goals, that outcomes reflected those goals, that the outcomes were connected to courses in the curriculum, and that outcomes were assessed by at least two (if not more) different means. Further, the group made some recommendations as to clarity of mission, difficulty of assessing certain outcomes, and the like. This analysis of each program was logged into the Assessment Office's data system for review by future HLC visiting committee members. The Assessment Team members then met to go over their findings for each academic and non-academic program; this occurred in the late fall of 2009 and early spring of 2010. Finally, during the spring semester of 2010, members of the University Assessment Team—along with the Director of Assessment and (usually) the Provost—met with the personnel of each academic and non-academic unit at the university to go over the Assessment Team's analysis of their assessment plan. These meetings usually included at least two members of the University Assessment Team and most of the department or unit faculty or staff, though admittedly not always all of them because of conflicts. It might be interesting to note that the final unit meeting with the Assessment Team was at 4:00 p.m. the last day of classes. Such is our resolve to involve the entire campus community in the assessment of student learning, academic programs, and enhanced service to our students so that we can continually improve the fulfillment of our stewardship mission to the community, Arkansas, and our region.

From the desk of...

### Wrenette Tedder

The Office of Assessment and Research is here to assist your unit in the assessment process. Once again this semester, my office will be holding training sessions to help you understand the process. As you may remember in the past newsletter, one of the stated goals for the Assessment Team is to have strong, sound plans in place for each unit. In order for us to accomplish this goal we need your help and for you to accomplish this goal you may need our help. TracDat 101 sessions have been scheduled to begin in early October (see schedule on next page). During the week of October 18<sup>th</sup>, sessions recapping the entire assessment process (mission statement, goals, outcomes/objectives, and methods) will be held. In early November, training sessions on entering observations into TracDat and how to make action plans will be scheduled. If you have any training needs, please contact me at [tedderw@hsu.edu](mailto:tedderw@hsu.edu). I am willing to hold one-on-one sessions or department/unit sessions.

Please let me know how my office and the Team can assist you in the area of assessment. We have come a long way and we need to continue improving.

I look forward to continuing my work with each of you.

### From the Chair

Dr. Phillip Schroeder

## Patience, Perseverance and More

Closing the loop, assessment criteria, student learning outcomes – the meaning of these and many other assessment processes, standard terminology, often eludes individuals as they begin working through the interdependent stages of the assessment cycle. As with so many complex systems, it is not until a person (or unit) goes through a process (and often several times) that the real meaning and application begin to emerge.

And here lies the paradox: intellectual frustration mounts when first working through assessment plans; and a cogent understanding may only begin once a cycle is completed. Here are 2 important suggestions drawn from my observations while assisting diverse units with their plans: be patient with the learning curve and persevere through the difficulties, especially with the first 1-3 assessment cycles. Those HSU units that have now completed a cycle or more have very few problems with the process. Those units that have continued to resist fulfilling their assessment responsibilities face the paradox – only completion of a cycle will help make the assessment process clear.

Additional suggestions include:

- Do not 'over-think' the assessment process.
- Allow all members of the unit to participate.
- Do not expect one person to be responsible for the unit assessment plan.
- Talk with your colleagues about assessment.
- Try to think in terms of "this could work *better*" or "this works *well*, yet could be *improved*," rather than in opposites – good/bad, right/wrong, and like/dislike (all of these are opinions and lack objectivity).
- Ask questions!

Please contact any member of the Assessment Team for advice and assistance!

## Need Help with TracDat?

Your area has developed a new assessment plan, but you are unsure how to add it to TracDat.....The Office of Assessment and Research has schedule several refresher classes to assist you.

### TracDat 101 for Staff

Tuesday, October 12, 9:30-11:00 a.m.  
Thursday, October 14, 2:00-3:30 p.m.

### TracDat 101 for Faculty

Tuesday, October 12, 3:00-4:30 p.m.  
Thursday, October 14, 9:30-11:00 a.m.  
Thursday, October 14, 12:30-1:30 p.m.

If these times do not fit your schedule, please email Wrenette Tedder ([tedderw@hsu.edu](mailto:tedderw@hsu.edu)) to arrange a TracDat 101 session.