

Update on 2005-06 Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Process  
For Academic Leaders Meeting  
March 1, 2006

By creating the position of Director of Assessment, TCNJ has shown its commitment to creating and maintaining a culture of assessment on campus. We've gotten off to a shaky start with Ray's unexpected and quick departure and my involvement in PeopleSoft and backfill for those involved with it. Moving forward, however, the institutional commitment is real and making assessment a part of what we all do on an annual basis is clearly going to happen as part of the annual planning cycle of the strategic planning process.

As we transformed our curriculum, departments and programs were each asked to create a matrix of their learning goals and to indicate on that matrix in which courses basic knowledge, intermediate understanding and deep mastery of each goal was planned. As the first step toward systematic assessment of student learning outcomes, each program was asked to develop a program assessment matrix. The idea was that this matrix would have the same learning goals listed in the first column. Subsequent columns detail the assessment strategy, the cycle for this strategy, the results of the most recent assessment, and the action taken based upon those results.

In this academic year each program was asked to think about one question from one learning goal most important to their program. The idea was that the campus community would begin to think critically about:

- 1) what was most important to them in terms for what graduates from their programs knew, understood and/or could do; and
- 2) how such goals could be assessed.

All programs did submit this "one question" and should be working on the answers. I have met with individuals or small groups from various departments and schools to give guidance when requested. I will keep doing this.

There has been some rumor that work on the "one questions" has been halted. This is not true. I realize that the College has not provided training in assessment. Further opportunities for learning more about assessment are being planned for the future. Some of the kinds of activities we are planning:

- Half-day workshop to understand the basics of assessment and strategic planning;
- Monthly seminar series focusing on a different tool or technique each month (Fall 2006);
- Information sessions on how to use currently available campus technology (SOCS, Form Genie) to assist in assessment;
- Short presentations at venues such as Academic Leaders from various departments using various tools or techniques successfully.

However, we can think of this phase of the process as the first step in inquiry-based learning - we will all be more ready for formal training if we've thought about what we want to know, done some brainstorming about how we can find the answer to that burning question, and taken a first stab at doing it.

If you are "stuck" with your questions for this year, here are some suggestions:

- 1) Make the question simpler. Some questions were really multiple questions rolled into one and would require lengthy, or several, assessments. Break it down to one straightforward question.

- 2) Ask yourself the second question “How will I use the information gleaned from this project?”  
The answer may help focus your method or more sharply focus your original question.
- 3) If you are an accredited program, the question you are asking does not have to be in addition to the assessments you already do for accreditation purposes. What were you already planning on doing this year in preparation for your next accreditation visit? Does it assess a learning goal? Then use that project for this one!
- 4) Talk to others asking similar questions or using similar assessment methods (see the website: <http://www.tcnj.edu/~assess/onequestion.html>)
- 5) Contact me ([maas@tcnj.edu](mailto:maas@tcnj.edu), x2143)!

In addition, I will be setting up a number of informal discussions for representatives from departments tackling similar questions or using the same tools and techniques over the next few weeks.