
APPENDIX 2.3

Dialogue No. 12 • Western's New Academic Assessment Structure

Western's New Academic Assessment Structure

by Gary McKinney

This issue of Dialogue summarizes Western's new assessment structure and organization. Designed to clarify responsibilities and to simplify and improve academic assessment, this restructuring is the first step in the university's preparations for the new assessment standards and accreditation cycle, which begins next year.

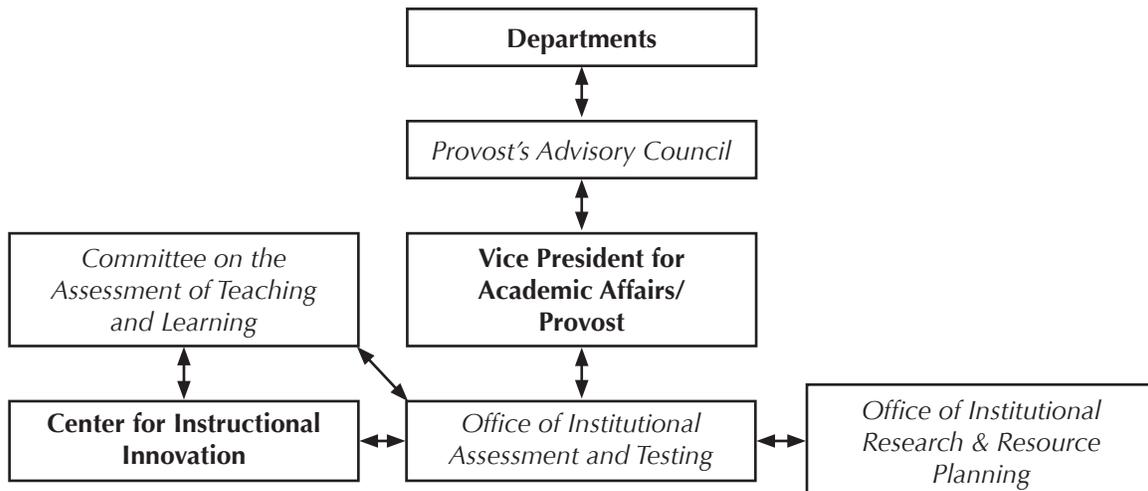
WHY A NEW ASSESSMENT STRUCTURE?

Accreditation requires both the publishing of performance results and the demonstration of how such results are assessed and utilized. Fortunately, Western's performance is exemplary. Washington State's higher education system is the most successful in the nation and Western is the second most successful university in that system. The Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU), our chief accreditation body, applauds these successes. Yet they've also asked us to improve our assessment processes and how performance results are incorporated. This is especially critical as the new accreditation model—the first phase of which is scheduled to be implemented in the spring, 2011—emphasizes assessment and its processes more than ever before. And the place that seems most logical to begin addressing the issue of process is our assessment structure.

PREVIOUS ASSESSMENT STRUCTURE

Western's previous assessment structure, called the "Assessment Plan Organizational Arrangement," depended on committees and offices that no longer exist. More importantly, this structure mapped poorly onto Western's institutional processes and created confusion regarding assessment roles and responsibilities. These inadequacies are evident in the diagram below (Figure 1). NOTE: Italicized components no longer exist.

Figure 1: WWU's Previous Assessment Plan Organizational Chart



RESPONSIBILITY CHARTING

This structure created confusion and a general sense of diffused responsibility for assessment. Simple responsibility charting makes this evident.

Table 1: Previous Assessment Plan Responsibility Chart

Assessment Level	Responsibility	Support	Supervisory
Course	Faculty	?	?
Degree	Chair	?	?
College	?	?	?
University	?	?	?

NEW ASSESSMENT STRUCTURE

To guide the formation of a new assessment plan structure, the following principles were established:

Table 2: New Assessment Structure Levels and Guiding Principles

Simplicity: The structure should be brief and well-defined.

Leadership: The structure should facilitate leadership of assessment activities.

Cultural Fit: The structure should feel “natural” to participants and map onto what already works well at Western.

Accountability: The structure should specify responsibility at each level.

Support: The structure should provide support at each level.

Efficiency: The structure should make assessment easier and less time consuming for faculty and chairs.

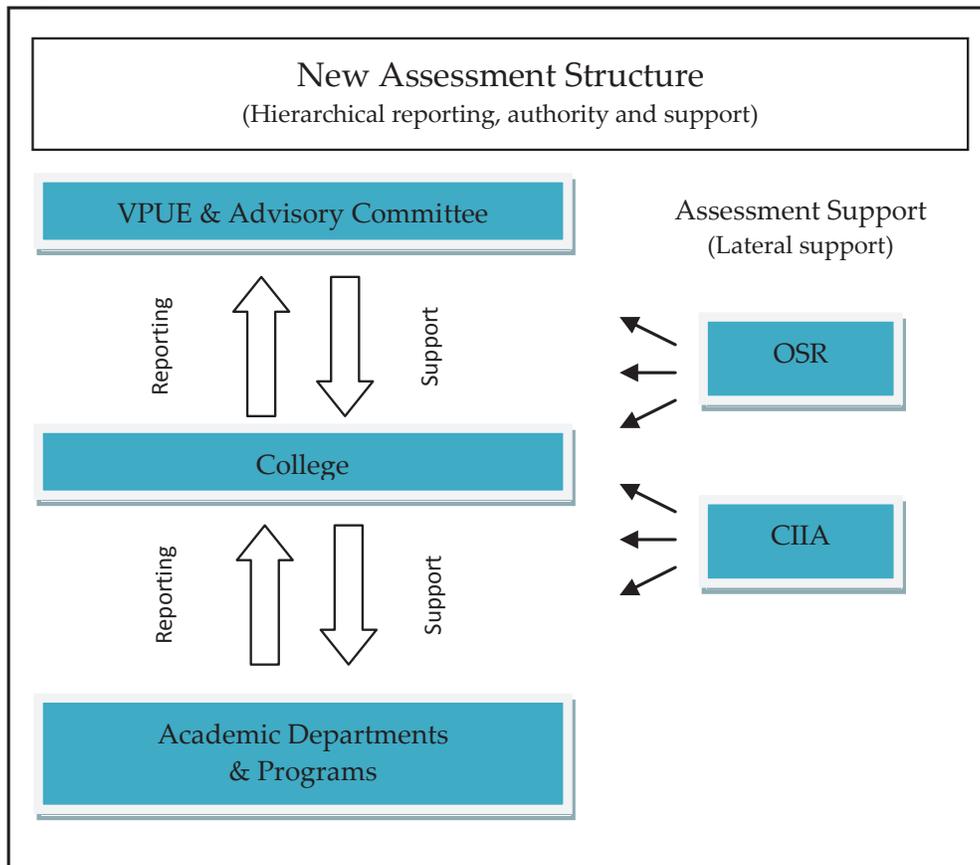
Sustainability: The structure should be easy for departments and colleges to sustain year to year.

Economy: The structure must reduce costs, compared to the previous structure.

Informed by these guiding parameters and qualities, Provost Riordan added the duties of “Director of Academic Assessment” to Vice Provost VanderStaay’s job description. She also formally named the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education (VPUE) as Western’s Accreditation Liaison Officer. These steps clarify campus responsibility by designating that the Vice Provost is both the campus coordinator for assessment and its chief representative/spokesperson for accreditation activities—duties that were diffused across several offices in the previous system.

To research the remaining components of a revised assessment structure, the Vice Provost reviewed the “best practice” research in assessment, studied assessment structures at other universities, received post-graduate training in performance assessment, and met to discuss Western’s assessment structure with deans, chairs, faculty and the Faculty Senate Executive Committee. Informed by this research and the parameters and qualities noted above, he proposed a revised assessment structure based on Western’s college structure. The Faculty Senate Executive Committee endorsed the structure with the provision that a faculty committee be established to advise and assist the Vice Provost’s assessment and accreditation activities. This provision was accepted and the structure presented in Figure 2 (below) was established.

Figure 2



*College level responsibility for assessment may be delegated to an Associate Dean, a faculty member or a college committee.

**OSR = Office of Survey Research.

***CIIA = Center for Instructional Innovation and Assessment.

This structure is simple, makes use of current hierarchies, accommodates diverse college assessment models, and provides a clear, hierarchical organization with lateral support. The structure specifies the following responsibilities:

University Level

The revised structure clarifies leadership by naming the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education (VPUE) as the University Director of Academic Assessment, unifying the roles of campus coordinator and spokesperson for assessment and accreditation. This provides accountability and facilitates the coordination of assessment activities. The assessment responsibilities of this position include:

- Supporting and advising deans, chairs and program directors.
- Ensuring the quality of college assessment activities.
- Summarizing university-wide assessment activities in annual accreditation reports.

In addition, the revised structure establishes a University Assessment and Accreditation Advisory Committee to advise the Vice Provost and help coordinate campus assessment and accreditation activities. The following faculty have been named to this advisory committee by the Faculty Senate and/or their dean:

Kristin Anderson, Sociology
David Bover, Computer Science
Alex Czopp, Psychology
Shaw Gynan, Modern & Classical Languages/Linguistics
Pamela Hall, Accounting and Finance
Michael Lorenzen, Library
Tracy Thorndike-Christ, Special Education
Paula Johnson, Elementary Education
Sara J. Wilson, Student Affairs
Susan Kincaid, Human Services and Rehabilitation

College Level (College Assessment Coordinator)

Each college designates a person or committee to oversee college-wide assessment activities and fulfill the following responsibilities:

- Supporting and advising Departmental Assessment Coordinators.
- Ensuring quality of departmental and program assessment activities.
- Summarizing departmental and program assessment activities and results in a brief, annual college report.

Department/Program Level (Departmental Assessment Coordinator)

Each department and program designates a person or committee to oversee department-wide assessment activities and fulfill the following responsibilities:

- Supporting and advising faculty in carrying out assessment activities.
- Ensuring quality of departmental assessment activities.
- “Closing the loop” by making program improvement decisions based on assessment.
- Summarizing departmental assessment activities and results in a brief annual report.

ASSESSMENT SUPPORT

The proposed assessment structure establishes both hierarchical and lateral support. In traditional fashion, Departmental Assessment Coordinators may seek support and guidance from their College Assessment Coordinators. However, they may also seek support from the Center for Instructional Innovation and Assessment (CIIA), and the Office of Survey Research.

Center for Instructional Innovation and Assessment

Departments and colleges seeking assessment-related resources and advice may contact the CIIA directly for assistance with drafting student learning outcomes, assessing student learning outcomes, making evidence-based program improvements, and documenting assessment results for accreditation purposes.

Office of Survey Research

Under the leadership of Dr. John Krieg, the Office of Survey Research has standardized Western’s longitudinal assessment efforts. We now have robust surveys of our freshmen, seniors, and alumni. These surveys can be customized for specific departments and colleges and, in this way, can replace the use of departmental surveys, eliminating duplication and reducing workloads for department chairs.

NEXT STEPS IN UNIVERSITY ASSESSMENT AND ACCREDITATION

Revising Western's academic assessment structure is the first of many steps that must be taken to fulfill our accreditation demands. Additional steps include the following:

Fill All Positions in the Revised Assessment Structure

To complete the revised structure, each college must designate a person or committee to fulfill the role of the College Assessment Coordinator. In addition, each department must designate a person or committee to fulfill the role of the Departmental Assessment Coordinator. The department chair may fulfill this role.

Revise the Campus Assessment Plan

The revised assessment structure requires a revised assessment plan. The Vice Provost, together with the University Assessment and Accreditation Advisory Committee, will coordinate the development of a new plan in coordination with the College and Departmental Assessment Coordinators and the Academic Coordinating Commission (ACC).

Establish a GUR Assessment Plan

The last NWCCU accreditation report mandated the establishment of a GUR assessment plan. The Committee on Undergraduate Education (CUE), chaired by Professor Kathleen Kennedy, has been at work on this responsibility since fall, 2009. The CUE will pilot components of a revised GUR assessment plan beginning spring, 2010.

NWCCU Follow-Up Visit and Report

Western will host a NWCCU follow-up visit in fall, 2010. The VPUE and the University Assessment and Accreditation Advisory Committee must submit a report detailing its response to the NWCCU's previous four accreditation concerns in advance of this visit.

NWCCU Year One Report

Western will submit its first report under NWCCU's new accreditation standards in spring, 2011. The year one report requires the designation of strategic objectives, which NWCCU calls "themes," and benchmark performance indicators for each theme. President Shepard, in discussion with the University Planning and Resources Council (UPRC), will determine Western's "themes" next year.

Source data cited in this Dialogue include the following:

Western's undergraduate success and progress rate:

http://www.collegeportraits.org/WA/WWU/undergrad_success

Degree production rates across the U.S.:

http://www.councilofpresidents.org/docs/ba_degree_prod.pdf

National degree production and efficiency comparisons:

http://www.councilofpresidents.org/docs/IR_PPF.pdf

Retention and graduation rates as reported in the University Fact Book:

http://west.wvu.edu/factbook/report_page.aspx?rep=Graduation_Rate_-_Freshmen_by_Gender.pdf&xls=Graduation_Rate_-_Freshmen_by_Gender.xls

Western's four accreditation "Concerns," as delineated by the NWCCU accreditation team in July, 2008:

<http://www.wvu.edu/provost/documents/AccreditationLetter.pdf>

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