

# National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment

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## Washington State University: Building Institutional Capacity for Ongoing Improvement

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*How do you eat the elephant? One bite at a time.*

—Washington State University faculty member  
describing the institution's approach to assessment

Washington State University (WSU) is a land-grant, research-intensive university with satellite locations statewide, and six campuses: Spokane, the Tri-Cities, Vancouver, Everett, the Online Global Campus, and the original campus in Pullman.

Founded in 1890 as the state's land-grant institution, WSU now comprises eleven colleges, 63 doctoral programs, 79 master's degree programs, and over 60 undergraduate degrees. Its 30,000-plus students are mostly from Washington, but it also attracts large numbers of international students (especially in graduate and professional programs) and an increasingly multicultural and first-generation population. Growing numbers now attend on-line through programs offered by the Online Global Campus.<sup>1</sup>

At the undergraduate level, WSU is known for its extensive undergraduate research program, enabling students to actively participate with faculty and one another in the kind of knowledge building and discovery that are a signature feature of learning in a research university. Many students also seek out opportunities for civic engagement, which the institution promotes as both building skills and contributing to positive social change. These and other features of the undergraduate program are key ingredients in moving WSU toward the “transformative student experience” identified in the institution's strategic plan (Washington State University strategic plan, n.d.).

WSU was selected as a case study site by the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) because of its promising approach to student learning outcomes assessment in the often challenging context of a large, highly decentralized research university. That approach is characterized by a deliberately incremental and iterative process, moving the institution step-by-step toward habits, practices, and policies that support ongoing educational improvement. As one individual interviewed for this report put it, what works for assessment is much like what's needed to “eat the elephant”: one bite at a time. The aim of this case study, then, is to provide a window into what it takes to support, scaffold, and build capacity for meaningful student learning outcomes assessment in a large, complex institutional setting. The focus is on assessment in the context of undergraduate education.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Statistics from <https://wsu.edu/about/facts>. Retrieved 10/18-2018

<sup>2</sup>This report is based on interviews with 21 individuals over several weeks in October 2018, including faculty, associate deans, administrative leaders on several of the WSU campuses, and staff from both the Office of Institutional Research and the central hub for work on the assessment of student learning outcomes assessment, the Office of Assessment of Teaching and Learning. It is informed as well by a review of websites, internal campus reports, and public presentations and publications.

## The Institutional Context and Culture for Student Learning Outcomes Assessment

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When asked what aspects of WSU's culture shape the institution's approach to student learning outcomes assessment, Vice Provost Mary Wack points to "a culture with a lot of historical memory," which has, she says, argued for working in ways that are "deliberate," "not too intrusive," not too much "in people's faces."

This embrace of a careful and deliberate approach aligns with WSU's highly decentralized structure where different colleges and departments have different ways of doing things, different timelines, different policies and processes, and where there is a high degree of faculty autonomy. A one-size-fits-all approach to assessment will not work. What is needed, rather, and what WSU has worked to create, is a process that respects and reflects different disciplinary and program cultures and that takes the time needed to shape approaches accordingly. This, then, has allowed programs and departments—again, in a decentralized way and one that recognizes faculty expertise—to own their assessment findings and use them to make decisions that strengthen curriculum and instruction.

As is true on the national level, the press to gather and use evidence of student learning in order to improve educational effectiveness comes from multiple sources, but one of these, certainly, is regional accreditation. WSU operates under the auspices of the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU), which has moved increasingly toward a model that calls for a clear focus on student learning outcomes and evidence of their achievement.

At WSU an important step in this direction was the development of cross-cutting learning outcomes expected of all undergraduates. Originally devised in 2005, these outcomes have been refined over time, and there are now seven of them:

- Critical and Creative Thinking
- Quantitative Reasoning
- Scientific Literacy
- Information Literacy
- Communication
- Diversity
- Integration of Learning

Building on this outcomes framework, WSU has undertaken a major revision of general education over the last decade. Setting aside an earlier distribution model, faculty created and approved a new structure, known as "UCORE—University Common Requirements" (Washington State University, WSU Undergraduate Education UCORE, n.d.)—aimed at balancing the specialized focus of the major with the broader objectives of higher education. As described more fully below, UCORE is book-ended by a required first-year course (Roots of Contemporary Issues) and a wide-ranging set of senior capstone experiences (CAPS). These are primary sites for the assessment of general education.

### Step-By-Step Support and Development

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As many colleges and universities have learned, assessment is hard; it takes some figuring out, even some missteps and false starts. WSU's efforts began in the mid-2000s with an approach that turned out, some say, to be too rushed, too unsupported, and too "one size fits all." The institution learned from that experience, and in 2011 a new unit was created, the Office of Assessment of Teaching and Learning (ATL). Kimberly Green, its inaugural director, who continues in that position today, describes ATL's approach as "developmental." The aim is to build assessment capacity, engagement, ownership, expertise, leadership, and trust—and to do so one step at a time. Those features are, Green argues, prerequisites for assessment that is more than a compliance activity and that actually leads to improvements for students.

Today ATL is WSU's central hub for all things assessment, reporting to the Office of the Provost, which has been a significant and visible source of support, and coordinating with other offices (like institutional research) and initiatives (like the revamping of general education, and a special council on student success). With a four-person staff, Green's office provides an impressive suite of services—working with programs one-on-one (each undergraduate program has an ATL partner) to establish learning outcomes, map curriculum, identify or create measures and metrics, design effective assignments, and develop and use rubrics (see Appendix A on ATL services).

One of the most valued services is assistance with data analysis and visual presentation. As studies of the assessment of student learning outcomes have made clear, *getting* data is much easier than making sense of and acting upon it. This is particularly a challenge for disciplines that value more qualitative forms of evidence. Accordingly, ATL staff includes a data analyst and visualization specialist who helps programs make sense of their findings through representations that are clear and actionable. Additionally, she assists programs to develop their *own* abilities in this arena (ATL, Toolkit, n.d.). As one faculty member put it, adapting a familiar bromide, ATL is about “teaching people how to fish.”

In all of these ways and more, ATL encourages a variety of approaches, tailored to individual program needs and opportunities. Accordingly, many of the examples shared in interviews for this case study can be characterized as “embedded” assessment, in the sense that they build on what faculty are already doing (and value) in their program—for instance, developing and assessing capstone projects. An ATL staff member “will sit down with you and figure out what works in the particular setting,” as one faculty member noted.

Most important, perhaps, ATL has worked to provide a step-by-step roadmap to effective assessment. Thus, in 2012, the focus was on working with programs to establish explicit student learning outcomes statements. In 2013, attention turned to curriculum mapping, and from there, over subsequent years, to selecting methods and metrics, developing rubrics, and norming. With what one faculty member described as “reasonable and clear expectations for each year,” the aim has been to develop an infrastructure of processes and routines that support ongoing improvement in teaching, learning, and curriculum. An important support for this work is the extensive (and always growing) ATL website ([www.atl.wsu.edu/](http://www.atl.wsu.edu/)), which has been featured by NILOA for its attention to effective communication and useful assessment resources.

## **An Economy of Sharing**

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These processes and routines are not tasks that are “one and done.” Outcomes statements need to be revised and clarified over time. Rubrics are a work in progress as they are used and refined. To support this kind of iterative improvement, the institution has built what one associate dean describes as “an economy of sharing”—communities and structures through which those leading assessment—at whatever level—can learn from and support one another. These include the Liaison Council for Undergraduate Assessment, chaired by the ATL director, which brings together associate deans from each college, representatives from the Office of the Provost, and administrative leaders from regional campuses. This group meets twice a semester, working toward a vision of what assessment at its best can be at WSU, reviewing progress and practices, and identifying strategies and policies for making good work sustainable.

Another part of the sharing economy is groups of faculty assessment coordinators from each undergraduate program. In the College of Arts and Sciences, for instance, there are 22 such individuals, and it is the role of the Associate Dean for Curriculum and Assessment (who also sits on the Liaison Council and is thus in a position to connect longer-term plans to practice on the ground) to bring them together for monthly sessions where they share ideas and strategize about challenges and opportunities.

Finally, there is the UCORE subcommittee on assessment. Faculty from a variety of disciplines look at current issues facing WSU's assessment of general education and recommend actions. The committee interprets

results from university-wide capstone assessment and other data sets, makes recommendations about faculty development and course reviews, and refines processes and tools, especially the capstone rubric. Working with this group, ATL provides leadership, expertise and administrative support, and helps with assessment planning, data analysis and reporting. UCORE assessment is shaped by NILOA's Transparency Framework (National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment, 2011), which guides campuses in making evidence of student accomplishment readily accessible, useful and meaningful to various audiences.

### **Roles and Responsibilities, Recognition and Rewards**

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One of the most important tasks of the Liaison Council has been clarifying the various roles and responsibilities for program-level assessment. The result, which has gone through multiple refinements over time, is a “suggested list” indicating who needs to do what (see Appendix B). At the top of the list are, for instance, department chairs, whose importance as assessment leaders has become increasingly clear. As the document notes, chairs must (among other things) communicate the value of assessment; articulate goals and priorities; ensure that student learning outcomes are reviewed by faculty and published; report on assessment annually; and support faculty development in assessment. The document also addresses the roles of faculty assessment coordinators, faculty participating in program assessment, deans and associate deans, ATL, and (for the assessment of graduate programs) the Graduate School.

This exercise in specification has turned out to be a critical piece in the assessment picture. Early on, Vice Provost Wack recalls, the institution was “just sort of floating along,” assuming that people would know what to do when informed that assessment needed to be done. That turned out not to be the case. The new framework has been critical in conveying the idea that “everyone plays,” and that “there are important assessment roles and responsibilities at all levels.”

Assessment is now being incorporated into the faculty recognition and reward system as well. It is true that some faculty are motivated to work on assessment for personal reasons (being “part of something bigger and meaningful,” as one person put it) But there’s a sense, as well, that the intellectual work that goes into meaningful assessment and improvement should be recognized in more formal, *institutional* ways—not simply as service, that is, but as a dimension of effective teaching (Green & Swindell, 2018, June).

In 2018 a proposal to recognize the work of assessment as a component of teaching came before the Faculty Senate where it met with “almost no opposition,” as one member of the Liaison Council recalled with some surprise. Accordingly, starting in 2019, faculty can report substantive work on assessment as teaching in annual review (Washington State University 2018 faculty manual, 2018-2019, pp. 40-41). This development is not unique to WSU, but it is certainly not the norm at research universities, and it speaks to the institution’s attention to policies and structures that can support and sustain improvement in teaching and learning. As of this writing, the new policy is being built into the software that faculty use to document their activities for annual review. Many believe that this will send an important signal, reinforcing the message that assessment is integral to what faculty regularly do as teachers.

### **Assessment in Academic Programs**

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The Associate Dean for Curriculum and Assessment for WSU’s College of Arts and Sciences has held that position since 2016. One of the things that experience has underscored for her is that “strong programs do not happen by chance.” Excellence requires “thought and planning and ongoing review because programs evolve and *should* evolve.” And, as she has seen, assessment can play a vital role in that process of ongoing improvement. Indeed, ATL director Green notes that assessment—the idea that evidence can be brought to bear on decisions about curriculum and teaching—is a relatively easy fit for some fields: psychology, economics, neuroscience, and human development, to name a few. It is a good fit, too, with the ethic of inquiry and analysis that drive work in a research university setting. Of course this does not mean that everyone embraces assessment. And even some faculty who see its value confess to being unclear about how to proceed.

Accordingly, WSU has, over time, put in place a carefully scaffolded set of assessment routines and structures that have yielded significant improvements in teaching, learning, and curriculum at the program level. Each college now has an administrative leader (often an associate dean) for this work, and, as noted earlier, every program has a faculty assessment coordinator who works with program colleagues (and with other assessment coordinators) to fashion locally useful approaches. Further, with support from ATL, all programs now have clearly articulated student learning outcomes, curriculum maps that document the alignment of those outcomes with course outcomes, and tools and strategies for generating direct and indirect evidence of the student learning experience.

Programs and departments report to ATL annually on how they have used their findings to make improvements in teaching and curriculum (ATL, *How assessment is used*, n.d.). The process has given them a high degree of ownership for their assessment activities, employing approaches that resonate with the types of questions and methods valued by their disciplinary colleagues.

In Neuroscience, for example, assessment has evolved to include multiple methods. With the program capstone course as a vehicle, neuroscience seniors make a ten-minute presentation which is assessed by three faculty members using a shared rubric. Also in play are findings from the National Survey of Student Engagement, disaggregated (as NSSE recommends) by ATL and Institutional Research in ways that more usefully illuminate department-specific issues. Additionally, to supplement findings from both of these sources, neuroscience has instituted student focus groups. Together, these activities have prompted a number of curricular revisions, including a change in the course sequence, and a move to make an important 300-level course into a two-semester requirement. Looking at the effect of these changes will be “our next big assessment project,” the program’s assessment coordinator says.

In the Apparel, Merchandising, and Design Department, assessment includes a role for the program’s industry advisory board. “We navigate together through the curricular map,” explains the faculty member leading this work, “And we involve our board in assessment.” One critical context for this partnership is the program’s annual fashion show held in WSU’s Beasley Auditorium. Prior to the event, faculty and industry members come together to jointly assess the designs that students have selected to exhibit in the show. This process has yielded useful (and reassuring) “inter-rater reliability” across faculty and those working in industry. It has also moved the program to involve industry representatives more fully in the teaching and learning process, inviting them to collaborate with faculty to revamp learning outcomes in 2014, and more recently to speak in classes and help shape industry-related student projects. Additionally, assessment findings have prompted the department to support faculty members in visits to relevant industry settings for professional development.

In Psychology, where the idea of assessment is familiar to the field, the approach has been to design and embed a set of common items across an array of courses. Faculty then evaluate student performance on these items using a program rubric that focuses on both content and abilities, and also on “soft skills.” Like a number of programs, Psychology has developed its approach to align with WSU learning outcomes but has also drawn on resources and guidelines from its scholarly society—in this case the American Psychological Association.

Program assessment, as these examples make clear, have led to concrete improvements in curriculum and teaching. It has also led to changes that are less tangible, and perhaps less directly a function of data, but equally important if what one is after is a culture committed to inquiry, reflection, and ongoing improvement. As one person noted, assessment gets faculty to “think bigger”—not just about “*my* course but about *our* curriculum.” Another noted assessment’s power to prompt a process of stepping back, asking questions, examining evidence, seeing teaching and learning as sites for inquiry. The Associate Dean of the College of Veterinary Medicine (which includes four life science fields that serve undergraduates), points to the College’s work on rubrics, seeing them as useful tools but equally important as “statements of shared values” and thus as a route to more collective ownership of and responsibility for the quality of students’ educational experience. Similarly, the Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs on the Vancouver campus points to the development of shared

assessment archives in each department—a notable shift from five years ago when program assessment was owned by one person and files were not accessible to others.

As these examples illustrate, program-level assessment takes a wide variety of forms and prompts a wide array of changes and improvements. The institution sees this variety as a virtue—and indeed as a key to ensuring that faculty can actually *use* what they discover to improve their educational program. To showcase and celebrate this variety, the Office of the Provost recently established departmental awards for excellence in undergraduate program assessment. Fifteen awards were made in the first year (ATL, 2017, November). Not only did departments appreciate the recognition, but their diverse approaches to assessment were highlighted in ways that other programs can learn from and build on. A next round of awards will be given in 2019.

### **Assessment of General Education**

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As noted earlier, WSU has a recently revamped general education program—UCORE. The new model includes, at the front end, a course required of all students. Roots of Contemporary Issues or simply “Roots” as it is called, is offered by the Department of History but is designed to teach and assess a broad array of general education outcomes. On the other end is UCORE’s capstone course requirement (CAPS). Over several years, faculty proposed, and the UCORE committee approved, more than a hundred capstone courses organized around selected UCORE learning outcomes and, where appropriate, additional outcomes for the major (Green & Hutchings, 2018).

Assessment was built into the design of UCORE almost from the beginning. In the case of Roots, an initial focus has been around the assessment of three outcomes which students must develop and demonstrate through a carefully scaffolded culminating research paper: critical and creative thinking, information literacy, and written communication. With support from ATL, and from library faculty, Roots leaders developed a rubric and a norming process using anchor papers. Faculty are highly engaged in reading and rating students’ research papers, discussing their findings from that process, and using those findings to make adjustments to course design and assignments.

For instance, as the assistant director of Roots recalls, students’ difficulty formulating a strong and effective thesis for the culminating research project “stuck out like a sore thumb” after the first round of assessment. Reflecting together on this shortfall, faculty realized that they were asking students to formulate a thesis too early in the process and hypothesized that doing so might make it difficult for them to rethink, modify, and refine that thesis as their research unfolded. Accordingly, faculty collectively decided to experiment with the sequence of scaffolding assignments, pushing the formulation of a thesis to later in the research process. This change has led to improved student performance in the area of thesis development (ATL, 2017, September).

More recently, Roots, which has a ten-year assessment plan, has turned to other UCORE outcomes. In summer 2018, faculty engaged in direct assessment of student learning outcomes related to understanding diversity. Assessment leaders developed a rubric, and (testing it against samples of actual student work), refined it in order to specify as clearly as possible what, exactly, is expected around this learning goal. The first sets of data are encouraging (ATL, 2018b, September; ATL 2018, October), and faculty look forward to comparing these initial findings with those from subsequent years. In the meantime, faculty are preparing to provide baseline first-year student data for UCORE’s integrative learning goal in summer 2019.

UCORE assessment has also depended heavily on capstone and culminating experiences. As an ATL report observes, “Given their position within the UCORE curriculum, CAPS courses carry a strong responsibility for culminating evidence of student achievement of the learning goals for undergraduate education” (ATL, 2018a, September, p. 1) Accordingly, in 2015, with the first cohort under the revamped general education program approaching graduation, WSU launched its initial assessment of student performance in CAPS courses. This pilot highlighted the essential role that capstone assignments play in fostering and improving integrative

learning as well as in generating authentic evidence about students' achievement as they near graduation. Building on this idea, ATL has sponsored a number of activities designed to help faculty design capstone assignments aligned with UCORE learning outcomes (Green & Hutchings, 2018).

The approach, Green emphasizes, is fully “embedded”; that is, faculty use a common rubric to assess the work students do in their own classes; these ratings are then “aggregated up” providing a holistic portrait of student achievement at the senior level in critical and creative thinking, information literacy, written communication, and integrative thinking. In some capstones, faculty also assess quantitative reasoning, scientific literacy, oral communication, and/or diversity.

## The Challenge of Communicating Results

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Following its visit to WSU in 2018, the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities issued a commendation for the institution’s “assessment of student learning outcomes, especially the assessment of the learning outcomes of the UCORE general education outcomes,” and praised ATL for its leadership (Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, 2018, July, p. 2). But more was wanted. WSU should “incorporate student learning outcomes assessment findings into the evaluation of mission fulfillment,” the Commission recommended (p. 1); and the visiting team expanded on this point, calling for reports of “student learning outcomes (rather than the process of assessing student learning outcomes)” and asking that summary achievement data from degree programs serve as a university metric (Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, 2018, April, p. 4).

Recommendations related to assessment are common in regional accreditation today. And a demand for more accountability—for “summary achievement data” documenting how the institution is delivering on its promises to students and society—is a theme in these recommendations. Process is no longer enough. And reports about the *uses* of evidence are an important and valued step but, without corresponding outcomes data, incomplete.

As it happens, NWCCU’s focus on evidence of learning outcomes is a match with WSU’s commitment to become increasingly data-driven at all levels of decision making. This has meant significant investments in institutional research (developing a robust data warehouse, for instance, and establishing norms for how data can be accessed and used, and by whom). It is reflected in the institution’s use of the National Survey of Student Engagement, results from which have supported a number of improvements, including a common reading program for first-year students, and (on the Vancouver campus) a one-stop approach to student support services. As Vice Provost Wack makes clear, assessment’s emphasis on evidence of student learning outcomes is critical so the institution can “tell its story. We can’t really do that without some results. The story needs a punchline.” In short, like many other institutions today, WSU is seeking better ways to communicate what students are learning to various stakeholder groups and decision makers both within and beyond the institution.

Not surprisingly in a context committed to faculty and program ownership of assessment, the prospect of more public reporting can feel uncomfortable. “I’m a bit nervous,” says the Associate Dean for Curriculum and Assessment in the College of Arts and Sciences. “We’re going to have to figure out a way to meet expectations at Northwest, but still walk this tightrope of maintaining our current buy-in from faculty about the process.”

ATL director Green concurs: “We want to avoid a system which encourages programs to plan assessment that emphasizes success at the expense of genuine inquiry about curricula and areas for improvement. I think we’ll need to collectively understand what a university-wide dashboard for accountability should look like and what its limitations are, stripped of departmental context,” she explains. “To support *continual improvement*, assessment needs to be relatively nimble, driven by faculty questions, innovative and responsive to changes in students, disciplines, and society. To support *accountability*, assessment needs to be stable and focused on long-term trends.” The challenge is finding ways to balance those two goals.

## Next Steps

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In a discussion with assessment coordinators from a number of WSU programs, one person likened assessment to painting the Golden Gate Bridge: “You get done and it’s time to start again.” In a similar spirit, another noted, “You ask one question and then you have another and you just kind of keep going.” Indeed, perhaps the most important next step for WSU is to “keep going,” to continue doing what it has been doing, providing significant, carefully tailored support, mapping out next steps, and celebrating good work in ways that make it more visible and more valued as a route to effective student learning.

This kind of work, maintaining and sustaining what has already been done, will be all the more important in light of a second next step: meeting the challenge—from both NWCCU and from WSU administrative leadership—of making assessment findings more visible. This, as noted, will make some people nervous, but the tension between an internal, improvement-focused approach and the responsibility that higher education (especially public higher education) has to its various constituencies, is long standing and central to the story of assessment. What’s needed is a balancing act, not an either-or. WSU is well positioned in this regard. It has figured out ways to keep general education assessment in the hands of faculty, connected to teaching and curriculum, while also reporting results around specified outcomes. In the coming year ATL will be piloting a similar approach with departments, informed and supported by the Liaison Council, to refine subsequent reporting cycles.

Third, assessment raises questions about what Vice Provost Wack points to as “complementary faculty development coming into being in parallel with assessment.” This is something she hears faculty asking for, and the time is right to think about what would be useful and, in tight budget times, feasible. On the one hand, as examples throughout this case study suggest, engagement in assessment can, itself, be a form of faculty development, opening up new ideas about intentional curriculum and teaching practices, promoting greater clarity about goals and assignments, and forging a more shared sense of responsibility for student learning. That said, the mission of ATL is clearly focused on programs, not on individual faculty development.

Thus, a next step may be to devise a dedicated program to support faculty in improving their teaching. Wack points to the WSU “Teaching Academy” as a possible vehicle for this kind of support. And perhaps (as other institutions are discovering) there are ways that individual faculty development and program-level assessment can support each other, be that through formal partnerships, new structures, or collaborations around specific opportunities, such as the design of assignments.

Finally, a next step will be implementing the new annual review policy that recognizes substantive work on assessment as teaching rather than service. As noted earlier, many believe this will send an important signal to faculty. It will also likely raise issues that need study and clarification: Might assessment sometimes take the form of scholarship? How will the new policy play out for faculty holding different kinds of positions? Will work on assessment, as an administrator on the Tri-Cities campus hypothesized, bring special benefits for WSU’s clinical faculty (essentially, non-tenure-track instructors), affording new opportunities for leadership or scholarship? Will greater recognition for assessment efforts change the behavior of tenured faculty? These are the kinds of questions that will be important to explore.

## Lessons Learned

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1. “You can make real progress by taking one step at a time.” This comment from an associate dean speaks to her surprise at the progress made over the three years since she took on a leadership role for assessment. At that time, she recalls, assessment looked like a truly daunting task, but WSU’s incremental, step-at-a-time approach has made significant progress possible. The lesson is: move carefully, create a roadmap, provide support all along the way, put a focus on improvement...and be patient. Assessment, as ATL director Green notes, must be “right sized,” “based on reasonable expectations and available faculty time and resources.”



2. Effective assessment meets people where they are. Progress is much more likely when support is tailored to the particular context and culture. This means attention to faculty time and resources, but it also points to the importance of disciplinary norms and values, especially as related to questions about the kinds of evidence that can catalyze constructive conversation and action. WSU's Office of Assessment of Teaching and Learning—with its department-based consulting and mentoring model—provides one example of how such an approach can be shaped and managed.
3. Assessment is about people working together toward shared goals. Of course it means getting and using evidence about student learning. But it's also about relationships, trust, and building communities of reflective conversation where informed colleagues can have sustained exchanges about how to improve the learning experience of their students. These kinds of results should be valued equally with results in the form of reported data.
4. Assessment works best where there is clarity about roles and responsibilities. For most academics, assessing student learning is new. It is important, then, to have clarity about who needs to do what in their respective roles and contexts. What is the role of the department chair? What can a dean do to encourage meaningful assessment? How about faculty and students? Perhaps trustees? Spelling out their respective assessment roles and responsibilities, as WSU has done, is time well spent.
5. Assessment is intellectual work worth sharing and recognizing. Drawing on faculty's habits and values as scholars, it means asking questions, gathering evidence, making meaning of that evidence, and working toward positive changes. Accordingly, such work can and should be visible, recognized, and rewarded. This can take different forms. For individual faculty at WSU, assessment can now count as teaching. Departments are also being recognized for their assessment efforts and achievements. But it's possible to imagine other ways to signal its value as well: travel funds to participate in conferences and seminars that focus on teaching, learning, and assessment; campus-based events showcasing departmental examples of evidence-based improvements in student learning; or support for the scholarship of teaching and learning.
6. Assessment means living with and managing competing goals. Institutions need to be able to tell their story—with data—in ways that speak to a diverse set of stakeholders. At the same time, improvement is likely only where faculty feel free and safe to explore areas that need further development. The challenge is for institutional leaders to hold programs accountable while also supporting meaningful and honest inquiry.

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## Appendix A:

### Services Offered by the Office of Assessment of Teaching and Learning

# HOW CAN WE HELP YOU?

The Office of Assessment of Teaching and Learning offers consultation and services to help undergraduate programs in their assessment activities. Let us help you in your efforts to improve student learning.

#### REVISE KEY ASSESSMENT ELEMENTS



Revise program learning outcomes



Map your curriculum



Develop direct and indirect measures

#### PLAN FOR PROGRAM ASSESSMENT



Optimize tools and logistics



Coordinate to find sources you need

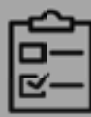


Establish a realistic schedule

#### ASSIST WITH DATA COLLECTION



Facilitate student focus groups



Design student surveys



Create rubrics and conduct norming sessions

#### SUPPORT YOUR SPECIFIC NEEDS



Analyze data and draft summaries



Engage faculty and provide workshops



Communicate your successes

LEARN MORE: [ATL.WSU.EDU](http://ATL.WSU.EDU)

# Assessment of Student Learning in Degree Program-level Assessment Summary of Suggested Roles and Responsibilities at WSU

### 1. Chair/Director Responsibilities for Program Assessment

- Provide leadership and oversight for assessment of each degree program (see *EPPM*); supervise the delivery and assessment of the department's curriculum (see *Provost's Guidelines for Chairs*) on all campuses
- Communicate the value of assessment to the department/school; articulate goals/questions and priorities
- Implement a sustainable assessment plan, including faculty and all campuses offering the degree
- Ensure student learning outcomes are reviewed by faculty and published (department website and catalog)
- Regularly review and share assessment results for discussion; include assessment results in department's decision-making to support student learning and effective curriculum
- Report on assessment annually; distribute annual report to ATL, Dean/Associate Dean
- Ensure infrastructure so assessment results and documents are regularly archived, with appropriate stewardship and access to department members. Appoint Faculty Assessment Coordinator.
- Recognize assessment in workload and in annual review; support faculty development in assessment

### 2. Faculty Assessment Coordinator

- Develop a working knowledge of good practices in assessment in the discipline
- Develop and implement the degree program's assessment plan; coordinate assessment efforts and logistics with faculty participation across all campuses offering the degree
- Liaise with chair and departmental committee, faculty, and support offices
- Analyze results and prepare them for discussion by chair, faculty and curriculum committee
- With chair, report on assessment annually; archive assessment results and documents for the department
- Note: Initially, additional effort and support are typically needed for interdisciplinary or multi-campus program assessment, or when a degree is extended online.

### 3. Faculty Participation in Program Assessment

- Participate in assessment activities (e.g., develop learning outcomes, collect student work, score student work for program outcomes, interpret results)
- Situate own courses in the curriculum, and advance student achievement of degree outcomes
- Discuss and act on assessment results; refine own courses and/or coordinate w/other faculty/courses/sections
- May participate similarly in assessment for UCORE (general education) and for interdisciplinary programs

### 4. Dean / Associate Dean Responsibilities for Program Assessment

- Provide overall leadership and oversight of program assessment in the college
- Communicate the value of assessment in the college and articulate goals
- Ensure effective assessment of student learning college-wide and assessment of WSU 7 Learning Goals
- Identify needs to build and sustain assessment at all levels, and archives, over time
- Use assessment data in college's decision-making and strategic planning

### 5. Support & Resources

#### Undergraduate Programs: Office of Assessment of Teaching and Learning (ATL)

- Consult and support undergraduate programs, colleges and campuses to plan and implement assessment of student learning, analyze data, and share results for decisions about curriculum and instruction.
- Build undergraduate assessment capacity and systems at WSU; provide faculty development and training; review literature and share good practices for assessment activities and innovation; provide assessment support.
- Report annually to the Provost, Deans/Associate Deans and campuses, and to support university accreditation. Manage annual undergraduate reporting and summaries and document systems.

**Graduate Programs: The Graduate School** manages assessment reporting and review for graduate programs and provides information and data for program review.

## NILOA Examples of Good Assessment Practice

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With funding from several foundations, the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment's (NILOA) mission is to examine institutional practice and help institutions productively use assessment data to inform and strengthen undergraduate education as well as to communicate with policy makers, families, and other stakeholders. Documenting what students learn and can do is of growing interest both on campus and with accrediting groups, higher education associations, families, employers, and policy makers. And yet, we know far too little about what actually happens in assessment on campuses around the country. NILOA conducted several short case studies, titled *Examples of Good Assessment Practice*, of two- and four-year institutions in order to document institutional achievements in the assessment of student learning outcomes and highlight promising practices in using assessment data for improvement and decision-making. The data collection process included a thorough examination of the websites and relevant assessment documents (accreditation self-studies, assessment reports, program reviews, etc.) for selected institutions and interviews with key institutional representatives.

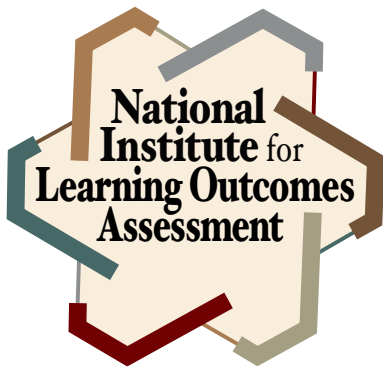
## About NILOA

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- The National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) was established in December 2008.
- NILOA is co-located at the University of Illinois and Indiana University.
- The NILOA website contains free resources and can be found at <http://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org>
- The NILOA research team has scanned institutional websites, surveyed chief academic officers, and commissioned a series of occasional papers..
- NILOA's Founding Director, George Kuh, founded the National Survey for Student Engagement (NSSE).
- The other co-principal investigator for NILOA, Stanley Ikenberry, was president of the University of Illinois from 1979 to 1995 and of the American Council of Education from 1996 to 2001. He served again as Interim President of the University of Illinois in 2010.

## National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment

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For more information, please contact:

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