

# EVIDENCE & IMPACT

An assessment and research newsletter  
for student affairs professionals at UMBC

Assessment & Research  
for Student Affairs

Volume I, Number I  
November 15, 2005

## Student Affairs Assessment and Research Committee (SAARC) Begins Work to Create Divisional Assessment Plan

On December 2nd, eleven committee members will meet for the first time to begin work on the very first Assessment Plan for the UMBC Division of Student Affairs. Each team member was purposefully selected for his/her commitment to improving programs and services and/or an expressed interest in assessment. A high level of knowledge about assessment techniques or expert statistical skills were not prerequisites for a seat on this committee. This group will learn together as they examine the best practices literature and ways that other student affairs divisions have set up effective assessment programs. The team will also review the various types of assessment activities that are already occurring across the division and will determine with their colleagues the types of assessment projects most needed within their respective areas. This approach is being taken because the literature about assessment says that effective student affairs assessment programs are built over time, through interdivisional collaboration, and with a strong commitment to building the knowledge and skills of staff. A web survey has been designed to gather information about the types and levels of assessment knowledge and skills that already exist across the division. Staff will be asked to complete the anonymous survey in mid-November. While some staff are already doing various types of assessment, some may have had little or no formal training in this area. SAARC members will review the survey results and make recommendations about how to build the capacity of staff across the division to conduct assessment.

### SAARC MEMBERS

- Ramona Arthur
- Frank Caldwell
- Chris Carlton
- Layne Goble
- Lee Hawthorne-Calizo
- Kim Leisey
- Susan Martin (Chair)
- Michelle Myers-Brown
- Anne Scholl-Fiedler
- Shannon Tinney (OIR)
- Andrea Wynter

### What exactly is “assessment” anyway?

**Assessment is the systematic collection, review, and use of information about educational programs undertaken for the purpose of improving student learning and development. —Marchese, 1987**

The assessment movement has been around since approximately 1985 and has its roots in a number of scholarly research traditions: student learning in college (an outgrowth of education and developmental psychology), retention, evaluation, competency-based learning and scientific management (TQM). Regardless of the definition that “assessment” might have originally had in each these traditions, **consensus has emerged that assessment is conducted to improve student learning AND to improve the effectiveness of programs and services.** Effective assessment activities

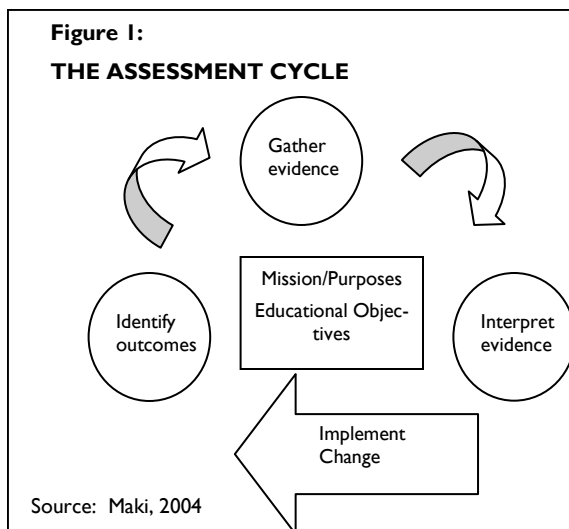
are ongoing and lead to program improvements and increased student learning and development (see figure 1 below). A number of types of activities fall along the assessment spectrum. Tracking usage is perhaps the simplest type of assessment activity, while learning outcomes assessment and

Program evaluation are more complex. See Figure 2 on page 4.

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## Principles of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning

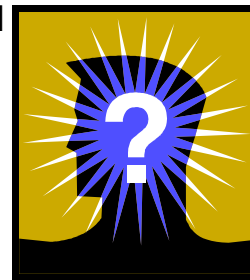
(American Association of Higher Education, 1992)

These principles were developed by the AAHE Assessment Forum. They have purposefully been included in the first edition of this newsletter to increase your knowledge of the philosophical foundation upon which effective assessment practices, programs, and plans are built. The authors are Alexander W. Astin, Trudy W. Banta, K. Patricia Cross, Elaine El-Khawas, Peter T. Ewell, Pat Hutchings, Theodore J. Marchese, Kay M. McClenney, Marcia Mentkowski, Margaret A. Miller, E. Thomas Moran, and Barbara D. Wright. The collective works of many of these scholars form a substantial body of literature about assessment in higher education. **Each of these 9 principles of good practice will be more fully explored in future editions of this newsletter. The emphasis will be on how they relate to assessment in student affairs. Other foundational documents and seminal works, such as The Student Learning Imperative (SLI) will also be presented to increase staff knowledge about assessment in student affairs.**

1. **The assessment of student learning begins with educational values. Assessment is not an end in itself but a vehicle for educational improvement.** Its effective practice, then, begins with and enacts a vision of the kinds of learning we most value for students and strive to help them achieve. Educational values should drive not only what we choose to assess but also how we do so. Where questions about educational mission and values are skipped over, assessment threatens to be an exercise in measuring what's easy, rather than a process of improving what we really care about.
2. **Assessment is most effective when it reflects an understanding of learning as multidimensional, integrated, and revealed in performance over time.** Learning is a complex process. It entails not only what students know but what they can do with what they know; it involves not only knowledge and abilities but values, attitudes, and habits of mind that affect both academic success and performance beyond the classroom. Assessment should reflect these understandings by employing a diverse array of methods, including those that call for actual performance, using them over time so as to reveal change, growth, and increasing degrees of integration.
3. **Assessment works best when the programs it seeks to improve have clear, explicitly stated purposes. Assessment is a goal-oriented process.** It entails comparing educational performance with educational purposes and expectations--these derived from the institution's mission, from faculty [and staff] intentions in program and course design, and from knowledge of students' own goals. Clear, shared, implementable goals are the cornerstone for assessment that is focused and useful.
4. **Assessment requires attention to outcomes but also and equally to the experiences that lead to those outcomes.** Information about outcomes is of high importance; where students "end up" matters greatly. But to improve outcomes, we need to know about student experience along the way--about the curricula, teaching, and kind of student effort that lead to particular outcomes.
5. **Assessment works best when it is ongoing, not episodic. Assessment is a process whose power is cumulative.** Though isolated, "one-shot" assessment can be better than none, improvement over time is best fostered when assessment entails a linked series of cohorts of students; it may mean collecting the same examples of student performance or using the same instrument semester after semester. The point is to monitor progress toward intended goals in a spirit of continuous improvement. Along the way, the assessment process itself should be evaluated and refined in light of emerging insights.
6. **Assessment fosters wider improvement when representatives from across the educational community are involved.** Student learning is a campus-wide responsibility, and assessment is a way of enacting that responsibility. Thus, while assessment efforts may start small, the aim over time is to involve people from across the educational community. Faculty play an especially important role, but assessment's questions can't be fully addressed without participation by student-affairs educators, librarians, administrators, and students. Assessment may also involve individuals from beyond the campus (alumni/ae, trustees, employers) whose experience can enrich the sense of appropriate aims and standards for learning.
7. **Assessment makes a difference when it begins with issues of use and illuminates questions that people really care about.** Assessment recognizes the value of information in the process of improvement. But to be useful, information must be connected to issues or questions that people really care about. This implies assessment approaches that produce evidence that relevant parties will find credible, suggestive, and applicable to decisions that need to be made. It means thinking in advance about how the information will be used, and by whom. The point of assessment is not to gather data and return "results"; it is a process that starts with the questions of decision-makers, that involves them in the gathering and interpreting of data, and that informs and helps guide continuous improvement. (*continued on page 3*)



## The Office of Student Life participating in The Multi-Institutional Leadership Study



The Office of Student Life (OSL) has been selected to participate as an affiliate member in the Multi-Institutional Leadership Study (MLS). Fifty schools will participate in this national study funded by the National Clearinghouse for Leadership Programs. Dr. Susan Komives and Mr. John Dugan of UMCP are the principal investigators. The purpose of the MLS is to enhance knowledge regarding college student leadership development as well as the influence of higher education on the development of leadership capacities. Specific attention will be paid to the influence of environmental factors (e.g., educational interventions, faculty and peer relationships, diverse interactions, co-curricular involvement) on leadership. **The social change model of leadership** (HERI, 1996) is the theoretical framework for the study. From this perspective, leader-

ship is a relational, transformative, process-oriented, learned and change-directed phenomena (Rost, 1993 as cited in the MLS manual) **Astin’s (2001) inputs-environments-outcomes (I-E-O) college impact model** provides the conceptual frame. This frame allows researchers to examine pre-college characteristics, environmental factors and student’s characteristics after being exposed to the campus environment.

Our affiliate status affords us participation in the data collection phase of the national study. A random sample of 3,203 students and a comparative sample of 250 “involved leaders” will be invited to complete a web survey. The instrument that will be used in the study is a revised version of the **Socially Responsible Leadership Scale (SRLS) (Tyree, 1988)**. The analysis of the survey data will be

conducted by our own OSL research team (Erin Hundley, Lee Hawthorne-Calizo, David Hoffman, Patty Perillo, Jenn Dress, and Susan Martin) rather than the UMCP team. IRB and CACC applications have been submitted and data collection should begin in February. The research questions to be addressed in the study will be presented in the next newsletter.

## (Re) Introducing the Office of Institutional Research

Some of you may already know much about the UMBC Office of Institutional Research (OIR) and its staff; others may not have even heard of OIR. The OIR staff is comprised of: Connie Pierson (Acting Director), Shannon Tinney (Research Analyst), Robert Williams, Jung Soon Byun, Michael Glasser and Tracey Musick. The latter four staff members manage data and information systems for OIR. A search is currently underway to select a new Director. OIR provides ongoing support for campus planning and decision-making. Through the integration and analysis of campus data they facilitate decision-making in the areas of budget, resource allocation, enrollment management/projections, campus performance, and the setting of campus goals and objectives. OIR is the primary source for official campus statistics; they conduct surveys, and respond to requests for information about UMBC. Most recently staff have been heavily involved in the Middle States re-accreditation process and building a data warehouse to support retention research.

**Check out the OIR website ( <http://www.umbc.edu/oir/> ) for:**

- List of UMBC’s current and inspirational peer institutions
- The Annual Common Data Set –enrollment numbers
- Enrollment projections through Fall 2014
- Special reports

### Principles of Good Practice *(continued from page 2)*

8. **Assessment is most likely to lead to improvement when it is part of a larger set of conditions that promote change. Assessment alone changes little.** Its greatest contribution comes on campuses where the quality of teaching and learning is visibly valued and worked at. On such campuses, the push to improve educational performance is a visible and primary goal of leadership; improving the quality of undergraduate education is central to the institution’s planning, budgeting, and personnel decisions. On such campuses, information about learning outcomes is seen as an integral part of decision making, and avidly sought.
9. **Through assessment, educators meet responsibilities to students and to the public.** There is a compelling public stake in education. As educators, we have a responsibility to the publics that support or depend on us to provide information about the ways in which our students meet goals and expectations. But that responsibility goes beyond the reporting of such information; our deeper obligation--to ourselves, our students, and society--is to improve. Those to whom educators are accountable have a corresponding obligation to support such attempts at improvement.



## Assessment & Research for Student Affairs

Newsletter written by:  
Susan Martin, Ed. D.  
Assessment & Research Coordinator for  
Student Affairs  
UMBC  
1000 Hilltop Circle  
Residential Life Office  
Baltimore, MD 21250

Phone: 410-455-5625  
Fax: 410-455-8956  
E-mail: s\_martin@umbc.edu

### MISSION STATEMENT Assessment and Research for Student Affairs

The Assessment and Research Coordinator is responsible for **collaboratively developing and supporting a culture of assessment and research within the UMBC Division of Student Affairs**. The position exists to support efforts within the division to gather, analyze, and use empirical evidence to evaluate the effectiveness of programs and services and to assess their impact on student learning outcomes, student development, and retention. The Assessment and Research Coordinator for Student Affairs will accomplish this mission by:

- providing the foundation for a division-wide philosophy of assessment,
- providing the support and education necessary for all units within the division to fully engage in the assessment of student learning, student development, and programs and services,
- conducting and supporting research and assessment of divisional objectives.

## Why is it so important for us to conduct assessment in student affairs? (from page 1)

A number of powerful forces outside of higher education have fueled the assessment movement over the past 20 years. Legislators, employers, parents and other constituents have been increasingly critical of the quality of and the rising cost of pursuing higher education. Guidebook rankings, increased competition among institutions, and consumerism have created a high level of demand for information about the specific performance of individual institutions. Assessment is not just going to go away—as some may have thought in the past. So why do we need to do assessment in student affairs? Each of the following reasons will be more fully explored in future editions of this newsletter.

1. Assessment results provide concrete evidence that can be shared with others about the impact of our individual and collective programs and services have on student success, learning, and retention.
2. Assessment provides targeted information for program improvement or enhancement of services.
3. Effective assessment provides systematic and useful information to various internal and external policy and decision makers.
4. Demonstrating that effective assessment is occurring at an institution is an integral part of the accreditation process.

Figure 2: Continuum of Assessment Activities

Increasing complexity and integration of assessment →

Tracking Usage	Needs Assessment	Satisfaction Surveys	Learning Outcomes Assessment	Benchmarking	Program/Unit Evaluation	Strategic Planning	System Effectiveness Evaluation
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Created by Gavin Henning, Office of Institutional Research and Assessment, University of New Hampshire, 2005