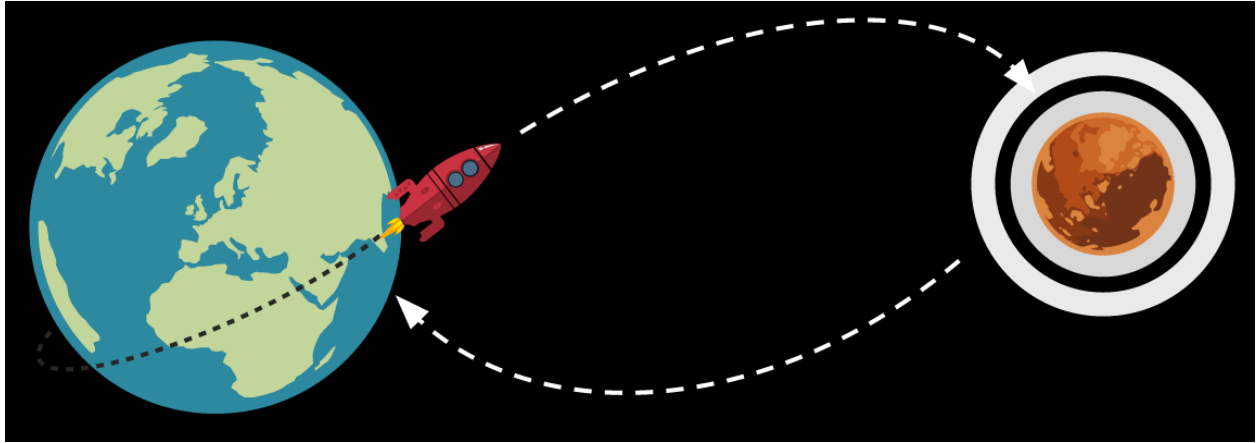


# **Academic Programs Assessment Self-Study Report**

**Humboldt State University**



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## Executive Summary

Humboldt State University (HSU) is an institution that strongly reflects its deeply held values, as exemplified by our first-in-the-nation Graduation Pledge of Social & Environmental Responsibility (<http://www.graduationpledge.org/about/history/>). Over the past eight years, however, the reporting and tracking of student learning assessment has not been among the highest priorities on campus. There have been notable exceptions to this pattern, which include efforts made these past two years to reorganize and revitalize the assessment process among academic programs.

The current annual assessment and program review processes were put in place with the addition of *Compliance Assist!* software suite in the 2011-12 AY. However, the process has suffered from low participation by academic programs and the administration. While most academic programs have made some small attempts to connect assessment or program review with continuous improvement at the program level, follow-through on these attempts, as well as continuous improvement efforts at the institutional-level, have failed to gain much traction due to campus cultural intransigence, personnel turnover, and a lack of institutional support. In short, it was clear that the assessment of student learning was not an institutional priority. In the 2010 WASC Commission Letter to HSU, general education assessment was described as “nascent.” In spite of the best efforts of the General Education and All-University Requirements committee (GEAR), however, there has been no meaningful assessment of GE outcomes since 2001.

In Fall 2016, Interim Vice Provost and Dean of Undergraduate/Graduate Studies, Dr. Mary Glenn, acknowledged the lack of institutional progress in assessment. Recognizing the need to make student learning assessment an institutional priority, she convened a group of stakeholders from across the division of Academic Affairs to review the current state of assessment at HSU and propose a new plan to address the scarcity of meaningful assessment at HSU. This group, which became known as the Five-year Program Review Working Group, clarified the process of program review to re-engage the campus community’s approach to assessment and continuous improvement.

In Fall 2016, the General Education & All-University Requirements (GEAR) committee also took up the charge to design an assessment framework for general education, beginning with an effort to completely overhaul and streamline the student learning outcomes of that program. While these efforts remain “nascent,” it is our intention to re-align the priorities of the institution to include assessment for continuous improvement at all levels.

This report contains a summary of the Five-year Program Review Working Group’s recommendations for addressing concerns and barriers to establishing a culture of assessment at HSU, and a plan that details a sustainable cycle of continuous improvement for all academic programs.

### **Assessing the Assessment Process**

Our new assessment process will, in turn, need its own assessment. By Fall 2017 we will have hired a new Academic Assessment Coordinator whose role it will be to engage with stakeholders in helping define their roles and track the effectiveness of our process as a whole. Participation will be the easiest concern to track within the first year, but it will be the least indicator of a new culture of assessment. The first Five-year Action Plans that will be generated from this process will be approved and put in place by the end of Spring 2018, and tracking progress towards those will be a five-year process until the next program review. However, each intervening annual assessment should provide evidence that programs are making progress towards the goals they and their deans have agreed upon.

## **Part I: The Current State of Assessment at HSU**

Currently, assessment is a portion of two related processes at HSU: Annual Review and Five-year Program Review. The annual review process has taken several different formats over the past five or six years. The rapid development of new formats (which seem to change every two years) has been a huge factor in why they have been so difficult to produce anything useful for programs; before we're able to consistently generate enough data over a long enough period of time to make informed decisions about how to improve our programs, we completely change direction.

### **Annual Assessment**

Annual Reviews in the first two years (AYs 2011-12 and 2012-13) were submitted using the *Compliance Assist!* Platform, but it was a long and cumbersome process that was designed to be a shorter version Five-year Program Review. The assessment of program student learning outcomes (PSLOs) consisted only a small part of the review. Departments selected one or more of their PSLOs and then selected a course and assignment with which to test their outcomes. These assessments received feedback from the deans, as well as occasional external peer review.

While the process in place seemed to be well-suited to gather the data necessary for continuous improvement, there were definite flaws in the system. Primarily, there was no standardization of program student learning outcomes. PSLOs were often broad, overarching, and compound outcomes, not lending themselves well to simple or direct measurement. Assessment data collection was cross-sectional, but not longitudinal. Perhaps even more problematic, course-specific learning outcomes did not always adequately represent the program's SLOs.

Dr. Edward Nuhfer, the Director of Educational Effectiveness, directed all programs to postpone all Five-year Program Reviews for the 13-14 AY and instead to map course-specific learning outcomes to PSLOs, which were themselves encouraged to be geared towards measuring the learning of the WASC Core Competencies: Information Literacy, Oral Communication, Written Communication, Critical Thinking, and Quantitative Reasoning.

Following this process, programs would be asked to assess one of their PSLOs by way of the Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U) Value Rubrics associated with the specific core competency. In fall 2014, programs assessed Information Literacy and in fall 2015 they assessed Oral Communication. And while these assessments did take place, they were neither given the support nor the follow-up or follow-through that had been promised. Dr. Nuhfer left the university in February 2014, and with him went the main responsible party for coordinating this process. Programs were already skeptical of the process, and Dr. Nuhfer's departure left his position unfilled to this day, further underscoring the lack of priority, continuity, or interest in assessment from the administrative level. In addition, starting fall 2014 the annual review process was moved from the Program Review platform in *Compliance Assist!* to the Planning platform, a cumbersome and frustrating change that further alienated program leaders from connecting with the work they were doing.

### **Participation**

In fall 2014, 48 academic programs underwent Annual Review and were thus required to assess the Information Literacy skills of their students through one of their PSLOs. Only 30 completed this assessment, a participation rate of 62.5%. Although discussions of the results followed in college-level meetings of the dean and department chairs, their engagement in the annual assessment process was limited during this time. To make matters worse, responsibility for tracking and administration of the annual review process (and really, all academic assessment processes) fell from the now-empty Director of Educational Effectiveness position to an Administrative Support Assistant in the Office of Academic Programs, a role with little context and less authority to handle such a monumental undertaking. By fall 2015, when 38 programs (there was a larger-than-usual cohort undergoing Five-year Program Review that academic year) were required to assess the Oral Communication skills of their students through their PSLOs, only 18 programs did so, a response rate of only 47.4%. There were two other required reports in the Annual Review process; the Enrollment/Diversity & Inclusive Excellence Report and the Annual Department Activity Report; participation rates in these reports were lower than in the Annual Assessment Reports.

The Five-year Review process was only slightly improved over the annual report participation. In the 2014-15 AY, nine academic programs underwent their five-year review; only six completed the assessment of student learning outcomes required; the other three did not complete this nor any other section of their review (66.7% participation). In 2015-16 academic year, 19 programs were up for review, and 15 programs completed their assessment of student learning outcomes (78.9% participation). However, one of those programs did not also complete their Five-Year Action Plan, and only two programs over the course of both years completed a Memorandum of Understanding (7.1% participation). Deans were rarely providing any comments, and while the Five-year Program Review states:

“The Dean, College Council of Chairs, ICC [Integrated Curriculum Committee], and Provost work with program faculty to create a memorandum of understanding that contextualizes the five-year plan for the academic program within the priorities of the college and university.”

few of the stakeholders listed ever participated directly in the process.

### **Access**

Prior to the 2014-15 academic year, all review and assessment processes (annual and five-year program reviews) were conducted using the *Compliance Assist!* platform’s Program Review module. This cumbersome module split reports into multiple templates, each one requiring a series of menu navigations in order to get to a point where one can post anything. Starting with the 2014-15 academic year, all annual review processes (including annual assessment) were moved to the *Compliance Assist!* Planning module, a module that was only slightly-more user-friendly, but now required program leaders to learn how to navigate two very differently formatted modules. This complicated process was rolled out without a Director of Educational Effectiveness to support it or to provide context for why it was best to separate the two processes between two different modules, and minimal technical support was provided to departments. Over the past three years we have heard about work that was completed with regards to either annual reviews or five-year program reviews that were not reflected in the data available on either the Planning or Program Review sites. It was clear that there was a barrier not only in accessing report data, but in *sharing* such data in the first place.

The other downside to moving the process to the *Compliance Assist!* Planning module is the lack of a structure for feedback from deans. In previous years there were built-in templates



for deans to comment and respond to both annual reviews and program reviews. These templates were not carried over to the annual reviews in the Planning module; it is unclear what if any interaction deans were having with their departments regarding their annual assessments from this point forward.

A nominal effort was made to provide an archive of past annual reviews and five-year program reviews. However, until a concentrated effort in December 2016 to update those archives, the most recent reviews available were from the 2013-14 academic year. These archives contain exported PDFs created from the *Compliance Assist!* modules. However, these modules do not auto-detect the proper orientation of the page, leading to some wider data tables being cut off in archived reports. Secondly, uploaded attachments are not attached to these created files, but are instead listed as links that one would need the proper access to the report in order to view (thus negating the idea behind a broadly accessible archive).

### **Responsibility**

The HSU 2013 WASC Interim Report detailed a major plan for improving the assessment of student learning at every level, including the assessment of GEAR outcomes and the development and improvement of teaching and learning at HSU. But the plan failed to fully take shape, and for one simple reason: the position responsible for nearly every aspect of the plan, the Director of Educational Effectiveness, was vacated shortly after the beginning of the second semester of the plan's implementation and remains unfilled now, three years later. No other administrator stepped up to take on this responsibility, and so the process lay fallow. Beginning in fall 2014, program-level assessment was still being done, but was being reported at less-than-ideal rates. There was no Director of Educational Effectiveness to coordinate responses with the associate deans of the colleges, who did not follow through either. Part of this problem can be attributed to the extraordinary level of turnover at the academic administration level. As of fall 2016, there was an interim vice-provost and Dean of Undergraduate/Graduate Studies, two of three academic colleges had interim deans, one interim college associate dean, and one vacant college associate dean position. The remaining college dean was beginning their first full academic year in the position, as was the Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs. This is not to say that every effort was put on hold while an

almost entirely new administration gained the lay of the land, but it is clear that administrative support for the assessment of student learning was a temporary casualty of the changing administration. We will see later that new personnel have crafted their own plans for assessment and breathed new life into this process, and one of their first tasks was to clearly define the responsibilities of every group involved in the process.

### **Closing the Loop**

This issue ties directly into the previous issue. Where once administrators (an Office of Academic Affairs administrator whose role was specifically tied to assessment, as well as each college's associate dean) were generating feedback for each department performing annual review tasks, past the 2013-14 academic year these responses simply stopped. Memorandums of Understanding that were supposed to be generated by the college deans and the departments were no longer being created, or if created, were not reviewed or tracked by the various stakeholders. Similarly, no one was tracking progress on Five-year Action Plans, in particular because the Annual Review process was not tied directly into that tracking.

Administrative support for programs was limited to data generation and technical support. Plans to address issues such as the improvement of teaching and learning failed to materialize. One of the most common questions that we heard from faculty was regarding the data showing the URM (underrepresented minority) student achievement gaps in some of their classes, or in their program's overall student retention and graduation rates. Faculty wanted to know what they could do to help close those gaps. Unfortunately, there was no one who could help them answer that question.

### **Conclusion**

A review of the current state of assessment at HSU uncovered the four key issues with assessment process as it stands as of the end of the 2016-17 academic year: (1) the participation in assessment activities by academic programs was on the decline; (2) access to needed data and other necessary materials is difficult at both the beginning and the end of each assessment cycle; (3) few positions have clearly defined roles and responsibilities in the process, and the most important clearly defined role to coordinate assessment efforts has remained unfilled for three years; and (4) the lack of clearly defined roles, administrative turnover, and the

disjointed nature between annual and five-year reviews have prevented key decision-makers from closing the loop and providing the follow-through that make assessment activities a worthwhile endeavor for academic programs to participate in. As each of these issues are interrelated, it was determined to produce a new strategy and process for improvement that addresses each one of these issues.

## **Part II: A Revised Assessment System for HSU**

In the 2016-17 academic year the Five Year Program Review Workgroup developed a revision to the HSU program of assessment. The purpose was not to re-invent the wheel; creating yet another new assessment structure would only create more confusion and frustration. By better utilizing the model that currently exists, the workgroup determined that a few changes to the review prompts would help clarify the purpose and meaning of assessment activities and emphasize the cycle of continuous improvement to our academic programs. More importantly, the workgroup set out to revise the structure *surrounding* the review process. Some of these tasks were already underway by Academic Affairs units and divisions as the workgroup conducted their study; others were suggestions from the workgroup themselves. In order to address the four key issues uncovered in the self-study of assessment, the workgroup produced four major recommendations: (1) incentivize participation of academic programs not only by tying needs evidenced in assessment and review activities to academic program requests, but also by providing exemplars that demonstrate the power of assessment in improving student success; (2) create ease of access for information by developing interactive data dashboards that provide easy data visualization, as well as provide more technical assistance for the *Compliance Assist!* platforms, and creating a more user-friendly, reliable and accessible archive of past review/report documents; (3) adopting a RACI model to clearly define and delineate the roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders across the university community with regards to the assessment and review process; and (4) closing the loop by directly involving administration in the support of not only creating and sharing assessment and review reports but providing support to track programs progress and providing opportunities to improve teaching and learning for faculty members.

### **Annual Assessment & Program Review**

#### **Participation**

It was initially believed that the first key step in turning around the system of assessment at HSU has been to solve the issue of participation. Stakeholders discussed ways to create the proper incentives for academic programs to engage with the process of assessment. The first suggestion was to tie the approval of curricular changes or new tenure track faculty hires to

compliance with assessment and review activities. This strategy of holding academic programs accountable, not only for participating in assessment and review activities, but also being able to point to evidence already provided to prove a need for new lines or curricular changes, makes a great deal of sense in a system in which the former (assessment & review activities) are clearly linked to the latter (program changes & resource requests). However, our current process for assessment and review activities has never reached that point, and we have not yet had the opportunity to demonstrate how our plans for the new process will bear improvements. Ultimately it was decided to not move forward with that policy change in order to preserve efforts to gain buy-in from the faculty chairs and program leaders and maintain a positive outlook regarding the new process for assessment activities and program reviews. Building a culture of evidence means that we also need to provide evidence that we will continue to build support for this new process, and provide evidence that engaging in the process of continuous improvement is a worthwhile process regardless of any additional consequences (positive or negative) that might be attached to those efforts. Compelling participation through coercive methods is not productive in our academic setting.

So what would be an appropriate first step? To provide a definitive answer to the question: Why do assessment? Why put the time and effort in to compile a five year program review? And that answer has to be something more than simple compliance. The answer has to be one that has obvious and inherent benefits to the academic programs engaged in these activities. The best way to demonstrate the benefits of assessment is to embrace the culture of assessment from the top-down: receive and incorporate feedback in ways that ease burdens on academic programs without reducing the efficacy of their activity; prove that administrative support of, and expectations for assessment activities will be enduring and responsive; and provide incentives for exemplar programs who demonstrate the efficacy of assessment and program review activities (such as the curricular changes to CHEM 109). These actions will help develop the culture of assessment within programs that will lead to higher rates of participation. Once a new culture of evidence has proven enduring throughout the vast majority of the university should we begin to consider compliance policies to encourage full participation.

As mentioned previously, the Fall 2014 & Fall 2015 The Vice Provost asked programs to assess their Program SLOs utilizing student products in one of their courses and the AAC&U VALUE rubrics for one of two WASC Core Competencies (Information Literacy & Oral Communication). Because these activities were not tied directly to a process of continuous improvement, the feeling was that this was an onerous requirement serving no other purpose than compliance, and participation suffered. For the Fall 2016 semester, a new assessment activity was created, called the Assessment Process Based on Ongoing Curriculum/Pedagogy Report. This perspective on assessment hinged on the pretext that participation could be increased by tying assessment activity to self-improvement processes that academic programs were already engaged in. This new report asked programs to describe the curricular or pedagogical changes in their departments and asked them to provide data informing these changes and subsequently, the evidence that the changes had their desired effect. There were initial challenges in this process as programs struggled to understand the concept behind the report, and to report the specific evidence driving curricular change. However, increased program participation in the process was noteworthy: 29 out of required 41 programs (70.7%) submitted this report. In addition to the 8 out of 17 non-required programs that also participated, this represented over a 50% increase in participation over the previous year. We will continue to refine this new assessment activity as well as more clearly define our expectations regarding them, which we expect will enhance the shift in the culture of assessment and evidence needed at HSU to continue to improve the educational experience for our students.

### **Access**

The earliest and easiest improvements to the assessment and program review process were made to improve access to information. The first step was to reduce and remove barriers to the completion of assessment and program review activities by the way of making these activities not only simpler to create but also simpler to report and, ultimately, simpler to access for future reference. Actions in all of these areas were underway even before the Five Year Program Review Workgroup first convened, simplifying their task in identifying these projects for future support and expansion.

First, data collection needed to be made simpler and easier to access for program leaders. Prior to Fall 2016 the newly minted Office of Institutional Effectiveness created the first in a planned series of interactive data dashboards through the *Tableau Reader* software. These dashboards were designed utilizing best practices in data visualization, with data and tool sets composed specifically around helping programs answer the questions associated with the Enrollment, Diversity & Student Success Report, a portion of the annual review process. Current plans are to expand these data dashboards to encompass other reports as well, specifically the Five-year Program Review prompts in Sections II (Program Quality and Continuous Improvement) & III (Diversity & Inclusive Excellence) that will be in use beginning with the 2017-18 academic year. Feedback on these dashboards have so far been largely positive, with a few minor exceptions related to the ease of copying the data visualizations from the dashboards into the reports. These dashboards will continue to be refined and expanded upon as more feedback comes in, but were intended to save countless hours of data mining and individually-made charts and graphs on behalf of the program leaders, as well as provide a common and consistent style that will ensure that comparing data across multiple reports and multiple programs is as simple as possible.

Starting in Fall 2016, the Academic Programs Office and OIE created and disseminated a number of guides to assist with reporting assessment and program review activities through the *Compliance Assist!* modules. While Word templates with review prompts were already being disseminated, we also created quick-start guides; a step-by-step PDF tutorial on how to post those reports online through the Planning or Program Review modules. Video tutorials were also created and posted on the HSU Assessment website. For data-based questions that required data not yet found in data dashboards, OIE crafted a linked guide to help point program leaders directly to the data they would need to find, rather than having to scour the OIE website to look for them. Finally, the AP office sponsored open lab workshops and face-to-face meetings with program leaders to provide personalized guidance in sharing assessment and program review documents.

The final step has come in terms of modernizing our annual review and five-year program review archives. As late as December 2016, the most recent reviews available in the

online archives were from the 2013-14 academic year. These archives are valuable for a number of reasons; first, they provide a sense of continuity and historical context for programs, especially when there is program leader turnover. As we begin to develop the annual review to better reflect its nature as a follow-up on the Five Year Plans generated by the five-year program reviews, having a current review archive will become even more vital. While it is possible to read old reviews through the *Compliance Assist!* modules, this can be a cumbersome process and it is much easier to open and read a PDF document with all the same information located in one place. Second, the archives are valuable because they provide for transparency. Access to any given report on the *Compliance Assist!* modules is fairly restricted; meanwhile anyone with an HSU log-in (student, staff or faculty) can log-in to the archives to read about the assessment and reviews programs are conducting.

In December 2016 an effort was made to update the archives, which are now up-to-date. However, there are still a few issues with the archived reports, as was mentioned in the previous chapter. Attached documents are still gated by the *Compliance Assist!*'s log-in restrictions, and reports defaulted to portrait orientation, meaning some content (data tables in particular) were cut-off in archived reports. This last issue was corrected in the newly posted reports (from the 2014-15 and 2015-16 academic years) but past reports still have truncated data tables, and missing attachments. Finally, compliance is not easily tracked in the archives; every program's annual review reports and five-year program review reports are listed in the archives; even if completely blank, these files are still several pages long (still listing the un-answered prompts) and posted in the archives as if they were complete. This is particularly difficult in the case of the annual review, which is made up of multiple components due at different times of the year, with varying levels and degrees of participation. In the archives, the annual review report is a single file.

A plan is in place for the Summer of 2017 to modernize the archives in line with the planned launch of a new, more accessible Academic Programs website. The intent is for these archives to accurately reflect what has, and has not, been completed by programs since the 2011-12 academic year. The annual review reports will be split into their components for easier access as well as help programs be aware of the holes in their own review activities as they seek



to catch up on compliance. Attached documents will also be available directly through the archives, and reports will be easier to read with data tables exported in landscape orientation so as to not cut off any valuable information contained therein.

### **Responsibility**

Perhaps the biggest reason why assessment activities dwindled in the previous two years is because the previous model for assessment placed too many responsibilities on the shoulders of a position that only remained filled for half a year after that model was put in place. As that role remained unfilled, those responsibilities fell by the wayside as nobody took them up for themselves. When the Five Year Program Review Workgroup completed their work, they found they had made few changes to actual content of the review itself; some prompts were re-written and data collection simplified, but at the end of the day they knew that the bulk of their work would have to come in the form of re-envisioning the model for Program Review, and re-engaging all of the responsible stakeholders on campus to get involved in the process. While there is a plan to hire a new Academic Assessment Coordinator beginning in Fall 2017, that role will ultimately be one of coordination and support, not responsibility.

This shift in re-envisioning the five-year program review process was a deliberate one following the RACI model of the responsibility assignment matrix. The RACI model encompasses the four roles that can (or should) be a part of every project. The first two, “Responsible” and “Approver”, are mandatory to every step; the second two, “Consulted” and “Informed”, delineates who else is a part of the project. These terms are mostly self-explanatory, but a quick breakdown is that the “Responsible” role does the work; the “Approver” role has final authority when it comes to decision-making regarding the work; the “Consulted” often have information that is required to complete the work; and the “Informed” are those who need to know about the work in order to perform their own tasks.

The new Program Review Logic Model is broken up into six pieces: Launch, Program Work, External & Peer Review, Five Year Action Plan, Dean’s Review and Subsequent Annual Review.

#### ***Launch***

Responsible: College Dean

Approver: Vice Provost

Consulted: Vice Provost

Informed: OIE, College Associate Deans, Program Leaders

Timeline: Spring of Previous Year

In this step, the College Deans are responsible for letting the individual academic programs know if they are going to up for a Five Year Program Review in the upcoming AY. The timeline and program review rotation schedule is set by Office of the Vice Provost, who provide the Deans with this information. OIE is responsible for crafting the data dashboards and providing PREP training and workshops for the programs as they prepare for their reviews. The College Associate Deans also need to be aware of the timeline, as they are the ones responsible for tracking progress on the review.

### ***Program Work***

Responsible: Program Leader (Dept Chair, Dept Assessment Coordinator/Committee, etc.)

Approver: College Dean

Consulted: OIE, Academic Assessment Coordinator, Program Faculty

Informed: College Associate Dean, Program Faculty

Timeline: Due February 28th

This is the step where the program completes their review report, compiling the necessary data and evidence and crafting the narrative of their self-study. While typically this work is given a single faculty member (either Department Chair or a Department Assessment Coordinator), some programs also elect to have a committee to handle the work. Whether this is an individual or group of faculty, we will refer to this role as the Program Leader. Regardless, this is a process in which all faculty within the department are consulted with and informed about, so that each faculty member has a stake in the final product of the review. Questions or issues that arise (such as waivers for certain requirements, or a postponement of the review) ultimately fall on the College Dean to approve or deny. OIE will likely continue to be consulted throughout the process as questions arise about data collection and representation. And again, the College Associate Dean is responsible for keeping track of progress towards the completion of the review.

***External & Peer Review***

Responsible: College Dean/Program Leader & Integrated Curriculum Committee (ICC)

Approver: Vice Provost

Consulted: N/A

Informed: Program Leader, Program Faculty

Timeline: Due April 15th

This step contains two separate but simultaneous processes. The College Dean works with the Program Leader to identify, hire and invite an external reviewer for a site visit to campus to conduct their own review of the department and the program review report they've produced. At the same time, the ICC is responsible for conducting a Peer Program Review (PPR) of the written program review report through their PPR Subcommittee. Both of these responses serve to provide an outside perspective that will help broaden the context of the final report.

***Five Year Action Plan***

Responsible: Program Leader

Approver: College Dean

Consulted: OIE, Center for Teaching & Learning (CTL), Program Faculty

Informed: Program Faculty, Provost, Vice Provost

Timeline: Due May 15th

The Program Leader incorporates the feedback provided by the External and Peer Reviews and finalizes their program's Five Year Action Plan. The Five Year Action Plan is meant to be a list of goals and targets for the program to achieve by the time of their next five-year program review, and should provide at least a few examples of strategies designed to help the program achieve those goals. These goals and strategies will be shared with program faculty to help collaborate on the overall direction of the program for the next five years. Ideas for improvement can be generated by the Academic Assessment Coordinator out of OIE, as well as the Director of the Center for Teaching and Learning. This action plan is to be approved by the College Dean, which are then presented to the Provost & Vice Provost to codify in the Dean's Review.

***Dean's Review***

Responsible: College Dean

Approver: Provost, Vice Provost

Consulted: Program Leader

Informed: Program Leader, Program Faculty

Timeline: Due September 1st

Replaces the Memorandum of Understanding. In this final step of the five year program review, the College Dean meets with the Provost & Vice Provost, presents the review documents, and together they craft a Dean's Review for the program that finalizes the program's Five Year Action Plan for the following review cycle, as well as provide additional recommendations for how to achieve the targets established therein.

***Subsequent Annual Reviews***

Responsible: Program Leader

Approver: College Dean

Consulted: OIE, Academic Assessment Coordinator, Program Faculty

Informed: College Associate Dean, Program Faculty

Timeline: Due October 31st

Each program conducts a new annual review for each of the four years between five year program reviews. Each annual assessment activity should reflect measurement of progress towards the goals and targets established in the previous cycle's Five Year Action Plan. These assessments should speak to challenges, opportunities and weaknesses as they relate to these targets, providing real-time evidence to support minor strategic adjustments in the five year action plan. Once again, this should be done in collaboration with the program faculty, data dashboards are provided by OIE, and the College Associate Dean is responsible for keeping track of progress.

As you can see, this model has been designed so that every step of the way the main Responsible parties are either the Program Leader or the College Dean, and that these two roles are deeply involved at every step of the process. The Academic Assessment Coordinator is at no

point responsible for the work nor are they the final approving authority; they serve to support and coordinate the process and while that help is extremely valuable, it is no longer essential for the continued functioning of the process. There are two other key additions to this process, thanks to the RACI model. The first is the new Center for Teaching and Learning, which will open in Fall 2017 and provide a wealth of information and support for the continuous program improvement process. The second key piece is that it clearly delineates that the program faculty are to be Consulted AND Informed at nearly every step of the process. In years past it has been typical for the work not only be the sole responsibility of a single faculty member (either Chair or Assessment Coordinator), but neither the work nor the results (such as they were) tended to be shared with the faculty at large in those departments. By clearly established that all faculty have a major role to play in the process, throughout the process, we hope to garner buy-in from the entire faculty. Rather than leave program review an onerous task left to fall on a single individual, we hope to turn it into a process in which all faculty feel like they have an opportunity to shape and steer the direction of their department.

### **Closing the Loop**

This issue is itself mostly resolved through the new model that clearly defines roles and responsibilities (RACI). However, it does bear repeating how important closing the loop is. Past examples of administrative nonresponsiveness are a major reason why many academic programs are skeptical about assessment and program review activities. Clearly establishing these activities as an institutional priority by consistently and efficiently closing the loop will be the most important step in rebuilding that trust and thus a culture of assessment at HSU. The establishment of the Center for Teaching & Learning allows for the strengthening of faculty development and program improvement as a part of this continuous improvement cycle. By emphasizing the development of Five Year Action Plans and following up with those plans through annual assessment activities, we give a clear indicator that this is a process we believe strongly in, and our expectations for the programs' roles in this process are clear, attainable, and are focused specifically and entirely on the improvement of the success of our students.

### **Part III: Other Assessment Activities**

#### **GEAR (General Education & All-University Requirements)**

As stated earlier, the assessment of student learning outcomes in the GEAR program has been nearly non-existent. The GEAR sub-committee of the Integrated Curriculum Committee has spent the 2016-17 academic year seeking a way to develop an appropriate assessment of GEAR SLOs. The largest hurdle seemed to be the GEAR Area Specific SLOs; there were 39 distinct SLOs, broken up and distributed among the various GEAR sub-areas. Assessment of the effectiveness of GEAR courses mainly fell on the departments and programs that offered them. These issues, combined with the GEAR subcommittee's lack of authority and inability to oversee the program, has left the GEAR program a series of disparate requirements rather than a single, cohesive program.

In response to this issue, GEAR has begun its work by reforming the program's SLOs, creating a smaller subset of overarching GEAR Program SLOs that not only represented a cohesive and coherent vision for GEAR as a whole, but also provided easily measurable outcomes for assessment. These outcomes tie directly to the WASC Core Competencies (written & oral communication, information literacy, quantitative reasoning and critical thinking). As the GEAR Program SLOs proposal made its way through the approval process in the Academic Senate, the GEAR subcommittee also began developing a pilot assessment plan to propose for approval in Fall 2017.

The proposed pilot begins by identifying a group of GE faculty who would in turn identify a handful of lower division GE courses from which to assess these outcomes. The instructors of those courses would then identify a representative assignment, exam or project and make numerical evaluations for each student using the appropriate AAC&U VALUE rubric. The GEAR subcommittee would, alongside the Academic Assessment Coordinator, then serve as an advisory body to this process. As a long-term goal, a repeated assessment of these outcomes would occur later in the students' academic careers, which could be done either in upper division GE courses or in a capstone course within the student's major program. In this way, we can chart the effectiveness of the GEAR program in providing our students with learning in the core competencies.

The GEAR Program SLOs proposal gained final approval from the Academic Senate in Spring 2017. The GEAR pilot assessment proposal will continue development in Fall 2017.

#### **WAC (Writing Across the Curriculum)**

HSU is also beginning to review its approach to the assessment of written communication for its students, and specifically its Graduation Writing Assessment Requirement (GWAR). Currently, HSU is one of three remaining CSU campuses still utilizing a timed essay examination as the sole measurement for

this assessment requirement. In Spring 2017, a new proposal was put forward to replace this timed written examination with a contextual and/or disciplinary approach to assessing writing through a Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) initiative. The goal of this new program is to develop Writing Intensive (WI) courses in each major program and course of study to satisfy the GEAR, and thus ultimately phase out the Graduation Writing Proficiency Exam (GWPE). This five-year plan is summarized below:

#### **Year One (AY 17-18)**

- Form a WAC Advisory Committee
- Conduct a search for a faculty WAC Director
- Determine the criteria for what constitutes a WI course.
- Work with faculty to identify, convert or develop five WI courses across the three academic colleges.

#### **Year Two (AY 18-19)**

- Expansion of Year One pilot; double the number of WI courses across the university.
- In conjunction with the Center of Teaching & Learning, establish WI/WAC workshops for programs looking to develop their own WI courses.
- In conjunction with the Academic Assessment Coordinator, develop assessment measures for student writing in WI courses.

#### **Year Three & Four (AY 19-20 & 20-21)**

- Assess and report the Year Two WAC Pilot.
- Continue to expand on the Year Two initiatives (double WI courses each year, continue to host workshops through CTL, continue to develop assessment measures).
- Conduct a search for a faculty Assistant WAC Coordinator.

#### **Year Five (AY 21-22)**

- University-wide implementation of upper division WI courses in major programs of study to meet GEAR (GWPE is no longer offered).
- Assess and report findings from Years One-Four.
- Continue to develop and revise workshops and assessment measures.

This proposal includes additional recommendations for the addition of a second-year GEAR WI course, or the development of an e-portfolio tool to allow the assessment of the student's writing portfolio as a function of the student's major-specific WI capstone.

## Conclusion

A culture of evidence (and thus, a culture of assessment) is a critical component of any continuous improvement process. In many ways, building that culture of evidence has presented itself as a herculean effort at HSU. The status quo is a powerful force that impacts all levels of campus, a force that any amount of institutional change or progress must overcome in order to be successful. Specifically, the culture of assessment at HSU has failed to flourish due to four unique but interrelated issues: a lack of meaningful incentives to participate in assessment and review activities, the degree of difficulty in accessing and reporting information, the lack of clarity in roles and responsibilities throughout the process, and the inability of the university administration to effectively close the loop on these activities. The work of the Five Year Program Review Workgroup has been to identify these issues and develop a new plan that addresses each of them. To that end, the Workgroup developed a new plan that delineates responsibilities across the university and places an emphasis on feedback and review to promote buy-in from the faculty at-large. The addition of a new Academic Assessment Coordinator will allow for a greater degree of guidance for these new activities, and the development of a new Center for Teaching and Learning will allow for faculty development and program improvement to play a role in this new process. A culture of assessment at HSU cannot be accomplished simply through the vision of a workgroup, however, exemplars of evidence-based improvement, such as the restructuring of CHEM 109 or the development of placed-based learning cohorts such as the Klamath Connection, have inspired efforts across the university to develop and refine the role of assessment at HSU. Proposals regarding the assessment of GEAR outcomes and the Graduate Writing Assessment Requirement show that the culture of assessment is growing at HSU. Time will tell just how much positive change these efforts will bear, but the future of assessment and program review at HSU is as bright as it has ever been.