

**Student Learning Outcome Assessment at Central Washington University
2009-2010 Executive Summary
As Prepared by
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Assessment of student learning is an essential function of Central Washington University's efforts to evaluate student knowledge, skills, and dispositions as well as overall academic and institutional effectiveness. Central Washington University offered 87 undergraduate and 30 graduate degree programs during the 2009-2010 academic year in four colleges (Education and Professional Studies, Business, Sciences, and Arts & Humanities). As of spring, 2010, nearly all of 117 degree programs were expected for the third time to provide annual documentation of programmatic student learning outcomes achievement. Ninety-one percent (106/117) of academic programs submitted a report or revised plan for 2009-2010. This is the third straight year of increased report submission (from 75% in 2007-2008 to 86% in 2008-2009 to 91% in 2009-2010). Similar to 2008-2009, proportionally more undergraduate programs submitted annual reports than graduate programs (93% of undergraduate programs vs 83% of graduate programs), suggesting a more developed culture of assessment at the undergraduate level. However, the percentage of submitted graduate reports increased for the second straight year (from 40% in 2007-2008 to 73% in 2008-2009 to 83% in 2009-2010), suggesting greater development of graduate program assessment. The following summary is intended to provide an aggregated qualitative analysis of individual program reports and provide documentary evidence of college and university student learning outcome attainment for 2009-2010.

Programmatic assessment of student learning at Central Washington University is framed around five component questions:

1. Are learning outcomes appropriate?
2. Are assessment methods effective?
3. Is there evidence that students achieve stated learning outcomes?
4. In what ways are student learning results used for programmatic improvement?
5. In what ways are student learning results disseminated?

Component 1: Student Learning Outcome Appropriateness

All academic departments have developed clear student learning outcomes that encompass all degree offerings and focus on development of student knowledge, skill, and/or dispositions. (see http://www.cwu.edu/~avpugrad/programreview/assessment_plans.html). All student learning outcomes are aligned to Central Washington's goals to "maintain and strengthen an outstanding academic and student life on the Ellensburg and University Center campuses" as well as specific departmental and college goals as noted. This alignment demonstrates program coherence and connection with and between individual programmatic, departmental, college, and university goals, curriculum, instruction, and assessment processes.

In examining the 106 assessment reports and revised plans submitted in 2009-2010, all but one program linked student learning outcomes with broader departmental, college, and university goals. This is encouraging and verifies institutional, college, departmental, and programmatic goal coherence at Central Washington University.

Reports also indicated that student knowledge and skills were assessed much more frequently than dispositions/attitudes for the third year in a row. Specifically, 370 student learning outcomes were assessed across all university programs. Three hundred and forty-seven of the 370 outcomes (93%) were knowledge or skill-related, whereas 23 (7%) were dispositions. These results were similar to last year's finding where 91% of the measured outcomes were skill and knowledge while 9% were dispositions. These findings continue to demonstrate Central Washington's emphasis and varied approach to analyzing programmatic goals. It again indicates the need for more programs to assess dispositions since professional attitudes are likely to be important within most disciplines.

Component 2: Assessment Method Effectiveness

Effective methods of analysis should be related to learning outcomes and the activities that support those outcomes. Assessment methods should include *direct* (i.e., tests, essays, projects, assignments, etc.) and *indirect* (i.e., surveys, focus groups, interviews) approaches to provide as complete a picture as possible as to whether students are developing targeted knowledge, skills, dispositions. Methods should also have clear standards of mastery against which results are compared to provide assurance of student outcome attainment.

Examination of the assessment reports submitted during the 2009-2010 academic year showed all but one program (99%) used some form of direct or indirect method for programmatic outcome measurement. Direct methods were used more frequently and proportionately more often than indirect methods. Twenty-one programs (21%) reported the use of both direct and indirect methods for all goals assessed during programmatic outcome measurement. This is a significant improvement from last year when only eight programs (8%) did so. Fifty-six of the 106 programs (53%) had clear standards of mastery for all outcomes. This is important as it allowed definitive analysis of outcome attainment.

Component 3: Evidence of Student Learning Outcome Achievement

Student learning and programmatic outcome attainment is an important element of institutional academic integrity and achievement. Assessment reports submitted during the 2009-2010 academic year indicated that 106 of 117 (91%) of CWU programs collected data and reported on student learning outcome achievement. Undergraduate programs (89%) provided greater documentation of assessment practice and reporting than graduate programs (77%). Of the 81 undergraduate assessment reports that were submitted, nearly all (n=74, 91%) presented student learning results in specific quantitative or qualitative (measurable) terms. Of the 25 graduate level assessment reports that were submitted, most (n=22, 88%) presented student learning results in specific quantitative or qualitative (measurable) terms. In addition, 56 of 106 programs (53%) submitted program reports that compared all outcome results to established standards of mastery. These comparisons, when qualitatively analyzed, reflected strong and positive academic programmatic outcome attainment. Specifically, 370 programmatic outcomes (78 graduate and 292 undergraduate) were assessed this year and were compared to established standards of mastery. Three hundred and eleven of the 370 (84%) programmatic outcomes were reported as students meeting and/or exceeding stated outcome mastery/criterion levels. This trend was slightly stronger at the graduate level (67 of 78, 86%) than it was for the undergraduate (244 of 292, 84%). However, in either case, the results provide an important element of assurance for institutional student learning and outcomes achievement.

Component 4: Using Student Learning Evidence for Programmatic Improvement

“The important question is not how assessment is defined but whether assessment information is used...” (Palomba & Banta, 1999). The assessment system in place at Central Washington University shows that

learning evidence is analyzed and used to improve pedagogy and/or program curricula at Central Washington University. Of the 106 assessment reports submitted for 2009-2010, 100 (94%) provided documentation of some pedagogical and/or curricular change as a result of their assessment findings. In addition, almost all programs submitting assessment reports (n=102, 96%) provided evidence that assessment results and findings from previous years were being used for long-term pedagogical and curricular decision-making. This finding is significantly improved from the previous year (i.e., 57%) and provides strong evidence that academic programs have been increasingly more actively engaged in continuous improvement over time.

Component 5: Student Learning Results Dissemination

Student learning is a campus-wide responsibility. Disseminating programmatic assessment results is important, particularly for increasing the transparency of how assessment processes are (and should be) used to continuously improve student learning, instruction, and ultimately programs. Whereas faculty play a key role in all aspects of the assessment process, questions of program and institutional effectiveness cannot be fully addressed without participation and collaboration with other internal (student-affairs, librarians, administrators, faculty, and students) and external (alumni, trustees, employers) audiences whose experience and potential input can enrich discussion and further broaden programmatic understanding and support. During the 2009-2010 academic year, 49 of 106 (46%) program reports provided evidence that assessment results and/or changes were reported to internal and/or external constituents. Also, this finding is significantly improved from the previous year (i.e., 25%) and demonstrates an increased emphasis of dissemination or at least the reporting of such dissemination across programs.

Summary

The development of systematic and routine assessment processes by departments and programs is encouraging and improving at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. The following conclusions can be drawn from the Central Washington University 2009-2010 degree program assessment report cycle:

1. Nearly all academic programs submitted a student learning outcome assessment report for the 2009-2010 academic year. Although undergraduate programs tended to submit proportionately more reports than graduate programs for the third straight year, an increase again in the number of graduate program reports submitted this year suggests a more developed assessment culture across both levels.
2. Programmatic student learning outcomes were again aligned this year to broader departmental, college, and university goals. This continues to demonstrate program coherence and connection with and between programmatic, departmental, college, and university goals, curriculum, instruction, and assessment processes.
3. Nearly every academic program used some form of direct or indirect methods for outcome measurement again this year. Direct methods were used proportionately more often than indirect methods again this year while there was an increase in the number of programs using both direct and indirect methods. Approximately half of all academic programs used clear standards of mastery that allow for focused analysis of outcome attainment.
4. The majority of CWU academic programs collected quantitative data, reported on student learning outcome achievement, and compared outcome results to established standards of mastery.

5. Students again met and/or exceeded most mastery/criterion levels this year for programmatic outcomes. This finding was again somewhat stronger at the graduate level than at the undergraduate level this year.
6. Nearly all CWU academic programs documented pedagogical and/or curricular change as a result of assessment findings.
7. Almost half of all CWU academic programs report assessment results and curricular/pedagogical changes and improvement to internal and/or external constituents.

Suggestions for Continuous Improvement

As a result of this year's programmatic assessment reporting and feedback cycle, the following suggestions are made to improve the process and departmental performance for next year:

1. Highlight institutional assessment progress and remaining challenges to campus constituency groups.
2. Expect all departments and programs to engage in the annual assessment process.
3. Continue to provide professional development to assist faculty in integrating best practice assessment processes. This should continue to bolster and improve direct assessment methods and include greater focus on indirect assessment of knowledge, skill, and student dispositions.
4. Continue to recognize and reward departments and programs that exhibit best practice assessment processes.
5. Continue to provide examples and means for programmatic assessment information dissemination through the academic assessment website.