

Student Learning Outcome Assessment at Central Washington University
2010-2011 Executive Summary
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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 32 graduate degree programs during the 2010-2011 academic year in four colleges (Education and Professional Studies, Business, Sciences, and Arts & Humanities). As of fall 2012, all of the 119 degree programs were expected for the fourth time to provide annual documentation of programmatic student learning outcomes achievement. One hundred percent (119/119) of academic programs submitted a report or revised plan for 2010-2011. This is an increase from 2009/2010 which had 91% (106/117) reporting and is an increase for the fourth year in a row.

Table 1. Percent of CWU Degree Programs Submitting Annual Assessment of Student Learning Reports

Academic Year	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011
% of degree programs submitting	75%	86%	91%	100%

100% of graduate programs submitted reports, 100% of undergraduate programs submitted reports. This is the third annual increase in a row for graduate programs from 40% (2007/2008) to 100% for 2010/2011. This is very encouraging. 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 2010-2011.

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 disposition (see http://www.cwu.edu/~avpugrad/programreview/assessment_plans.html). All student learning outcomes are aligned to Central Washington University'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 119 assessment reports submitted and revised plans submitted in 2010-2011, 58 programs out of 119 reporting (49%) linked all student learning outcomes with broader departmental, college, and university goals. This is down from last year when all but one program linked goals to standards. The main reason for the drop is that many programs used the CWU Writing Rubric in lieu of assessing their own

programmatic goals and therefore did not overtly link writing outcomes to department or college learning outcomes or to CWU's mission.

Reports also indicated that student knowledge and skills were assessed much more frequently than dispositions/attitudes for the fourth year in a row. Specifically, 334 student learning outcomes were assessed across all university programs. 290 of the 334 outcomes (87%) were knowledge and/or skill-related, whereas 44 (13%) were dispositions. These results were similar to last year's finding where 93% of the measured outcomes were skill and knowledge while 7% were dispositions. These findings continue to demonstrate Central Washington University's emphasis and varied approach to analyzing programmatic goals. They also indicate 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, and 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 2010-2011 academic year showed that all programs (100%) used some form of direct or indirect method for programmatic outcome measurement. This is up slightly from 2009/2010 when all but one programs (99%) used some form of direct or indirect assessment. Direct methods were used more frequently and proportionately more often than indirect methods. Thirty programs (25%) reported the use of both direct and indirect methods for all goals assessed during programmatic outcome measurement. This is a slight improvement from 2009/2010 when 21 programs (21%) did so. Seventy-five of the 119 programs (63%) had clear standards of mastery for all outcomes. This is an improvement from the 53% of programs on the 2009/2010 study. Clear standards of mastery are important as it allows 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 2010-2011 academic year indicated that 119 of 119 (100%) of CWU programs collected data and reported on student learning outcome achievement. Graduate programs (100%) provided the same percentage of documentation of assessment practice as reporting as undergraduate programs (100%) for the first time in four years. Of the 32 graduate assessment reports that were submitted 22 or 69% presented student learning results in specific quantitative or qualitative (measurable) terms. Of the 87 undergraduate program assessment reports that were submitted, 66 or 76% presented student learning results in specific quantitative or qualitative (measurable) terms. This is down from the 88% for graduate and 91% for undergraduate programs who presented learning outcomes in specific quantitative or qualitative terms on the 2009/2010 report.

In addition, 55 of 87 undergraduate programs (63%) and 20 of 32 (63%) graduate programs submitted program reports that compared all outcome results to established standards of mastery. The overall percent (63%) is improved over the percentage (53%) of all programs reported in 2009/2010. Specifically, 334 programmatic outcomes (74 graduate and 260 undergraduate) were assessed this year.

Two hundred and sixty one of the 334 (78%) programmatic outcomes were reported as students meeting and/or exceeding stated outcome mastery/criterion levels. This trend was stronger at the graduate level (69 of 74, 93%) and improved from 2009/2010 when 67 of 78 or 86% of goals were met. At the undergraduate level, 192 of 260 learning goals (74%) were met. This is down from 2009/2010 when 244 of 292 undergraduate goals (84%) were met. The results are significant as they 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 CWU shows that learning evidence is analyzed and used to improve pedagogy and/or program curricula. Of the 119 assessment reports submitted for 2010-2011, 81 (68%) provided documentation of some pedagogical and/or curricular change as a result of their assessment findings. This is down from 94% of programs documenting some form of change in 2009/2010. In addition, some programs submitting assessment reports (n=52, 44%) provided evidence that assessment results and findings from previous years were being used for long-term pedagogical and curricular decision-making. This is down from 96% in 2009/2010. Both results can be explained by the number of programs submitting only General Education writing assessments using CWU’s writing rubric.

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 2010-2011 academic year, 71 of 119 (60%) program reports provided evidence that assessment results and/or changes were reported to internal and/or external constituents. This finding is significantly improved from the previous year (i.e., 46%) 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 CWU 2010-2011 degree program assessment report cycle:

1. 119 of 119 academic programs submitted a student learning outcome assessment report for the 2010-2011 academic year. The percentage of graduate programs submitting reports has more than doubled from 40% reporting in 2007/2008 to 100% reporting in 2010/2011.
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. All academic programs 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. 63% of all academic programs used clear standards of mastery for all outcomes 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. Many CWU academic programs (68%) documented pedagogical and/or curricular change as a result of assessment findings.
7. Many CWU academic programs (60%) 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 and report how many students were assessed as part of that 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.
6. CWU should raise the target outcomes for objectives 1, 2, and 3. CWU has been consistently exceeding the targets for those three objectives.