

2009 CHEA Award for Institutional Progress in Student Learning Outcomes

In 2005, the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) established the *CHEA Award for Institutional Progress in Student Learning Outcomes*. The award acknowledges outstanding institutional progress in developing and applying evidence of student learning outcomes as part of the ongoing evaluation and improvement of college and university programs.

In establishing this award, the CHEA Board of Directors recognized the importance of attending to student achievement, especially given the current intense focus on accountability. The award underscores the academic and accreditation communities' commitment to serving the public interest through providing evidence of both institutional and student performance. The award also highlights the critical importance of locating primary leadership for student achievement within colleges and universities.

Finally, by creating the *CHEA Award*, the board wanted to send a clear and powerful signal to students and society that student achievement is at the heart of the long-standing commitment to the quality of higher education programs, institutions and accrediting organizations.

The Importance of Student Learning Outcomes

The *CHEA Award* winners from 2005 to the present affirm that, on a number of college and university campuses, attention to student learning outcomes is thoughtful, robust and creative. Faculty at these institutions are significantly engaged in the design and direction of these outcomes and in judging the success of their efforts. Institutions are adept at crafting and

applying their own tools and strategies that yield reliable evidence of student success. Both institutional and programmatic accreditation are playing a central role in assessing student achievement by requiring that institutions plan for and have processes in place to support and evaluate student success.

Certainly, much work remains to be done. However, as is demonstrated by the winners of the *CHEA Award*, ongoing institutional efforts in student achievement are indeed responsive to the needs of students and society.

The Selection Process

A committee of experts from higher education institutions, higher education associations, accrediting organizations and the public judges the winners on the basis of four award criteria:

- Articulation and evidence of outcomes
- Success with regard to outcomes
- Information to the public about outcomes
- Use of outcomes for educational improvement

In addition to the four criteria, the committee looks for evidence outcomes embedded in an institutional culture, good use of current technology in the methods and tools to track outcomes, extensive use of faculty and strong faculty support, institutional leadership that is dedicated to the importance of outcomes and approaches to outcomes that can be replicated at other institutions.

The selection process for the award is rigorous: Of 32 applications received this year, two institutions were selected to receive the 2009 *CHEA Award*.

The Winners of the 2009 CHEA Award

The winners of the 2009 *CHEA Award for Institutional Progress in Student Learning Outcomes* are Delaware Technical & Community College and Northern Arizona University. Both schools provide excellent examples of institutional progress and effective approaches to the use of student learning outcomes.

Delaware Technical & Community College Planning and Assessment Program

Delaware Technical & Community College (DTCC) is a state-wide community college. DTCC's Institutional Effectiveness Structure, implemented in 2004, is a comprehensive outcomes assessment model designed to identify opportunities for improvement in student learning outcomes, educational support outcomes and mission-level institutional outcomes. This assessment structure provides clear evidence of the effectiveness of programs to advance student learning. Improvements generated as a result of assessment activities include changes to curricula and instructional practices, as well as increased services to students.

The college's assessment guidelines and processes, as detailed by the Institutional Effectiveness Structure, can be viewed at <http://www.dtcc.edu/effectiveness/>. The Community College Survey of Student Engagement, as well as the newly implemented general education and e-learning assessment models, help to assure that DTCC will continue to use assessment data to improve institutional effectiveness and enhance student learning outcomes.

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Northern Arizona University Office of Academic Assessment

Northern Arizona University (NAU) is a state institution that offers both undergraduate and graduate degree programs. NAU's strong institutional focus on student learning is reflected by the extensive use of assessment data to track and improve the effectiveness of educational programs and activities and is a key component of the university's strategic plan.

NAU develops academic curricula and co-curricular programming to promote positive student learning outcomes that are assessed at course, degree-program and university levels. The university broadly disseminates assessment findings that guide improvements in all areas of the institution. NAU's Strategic Planning Council monitors progress toward university goals, many of which involve student learning. A recent report by the Office of Academic Assessment (http://www4.nau.edu/assessment/documents/ROAR_draft_08.pdf) provides evidence of measurable success throughout the university, while indicating areas for improvement. NAU uses this assessment process for purposes of accountability and improvement throughout the university.

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