2006 CHEA Award for Institutional Progress in Student Learning Outcomes

2006 CHEA AWARD

Evidence of student achievement – student learning outcomes – plays an increasingly important role in discussions of higher education quality and effectiveness. At the same time, developing and using capacity to address student learning outcomes is a complex and significant challenge for colleges and universities, whether pursued at the level of a major, a program or the institution.

In November 2005, the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) invited its institutional members to submit applications for the 2006 Award for Institutional Progress in Student Learning Outcomes. The award was created to acknowledge 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 of study. Thirty-two applications were received and reviewed by an award selection committee. Four applications were selected for award. Each institution has provided a summary of its application.

AWARD RECIPIENTS

The Community College of Baltimore County, Maryland
High Impact Course-Level Learning Outcomes Assessment Projects

The Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC) is successfully and effectively measuring student learning outcomes through its High Impact Course-Level Assessment Projects. CCBC developed a comprehensive assessment plan and measurable student learning outcomes for every course offered at the college. Data have been collected, results have been evaluated and the assessment feedback loop has been closed by re-assessing after implementing curricular and administrative changes to ensure that learning is improving. The courses involved in these projects (CCBC runs approximately 20 at any given time) involve multiple sections and multiple campuses. Hundreds of faculty members and thousands of students participate in assessment projects every semester. Consensus as to outcomes to be assessed is determined from the Common Course Outline, available for each course that is offered at the college. Faculty, the true experts on what students should know and do when they leave their classrooms, are the designers of these experimental, formative assessments. Direct advisory assistance and support ensure a risk-free process and are essential components to CCBC's assessment model. Every project follows the same five-stage process, yet each is unique and designed by faculty to meet the needs of the course, so that assessment is authentic and valid.

The evidence collected is shared with internal and external constituents in a variety of ways, including the Learning Outcomes Assessment Advisory Board and the Learning Outcomes Assessment Web page. Course-level assessment is the cornerstone of our assessment initiatives, but it is just one piece of the comprehensive assessment model at CCBC that also includes assessment at the program and institutional levels.

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Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis, Indiana
Implementing the Principles of Undergraduate Learning at IUPUI

Faculty at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) have defined general education through six Principles of Undergraduate Learning that permeate the curricular and co-curricular learning experiences of all of our students. These Principles articulate skills and ways of knowing that are important for every educated citizen of our global society. Implementing the Principles campus-wide from first year through the senior year has required a significant curricular transition for faculty who have integrated these Principles throughout their courses. Since not all Principles will occur in every course, this transition engaged faculty in considering not just "my course," but also "our program." This implementation process is supported by faculty development programs, Principle-based co-curricular programming and a student electronic portfolio to document and assess both improvement and achievement in the Principles in relation to the major. The goal of the Principles is to guarantee every student opportunities to improve and achieve in core communication and quantitative skills; critical thinking; integration and application of knowledge; intellectual depth, breadth and adaptiveness; understanding society and culture; and values and ethics. The goal of this implementation program is to provide the supports necessary for the learning outcomes to be achieved, documented and assessed.

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James Madison University, Virginia
Center for Assessment and Research Studies, The General Education Program

At James Madison University, the Center for Assessment and Research Studies (CARS) and the General Education Program have developed a long-standing partnership to evaluate the effectiveness of the General Education Program. Explicitly stated learning outcomes describe each of the five main areas or clusters of the program, and are assessed annually. Scientifically based data collection utilizes multiple models, including portfolio assessment of writing, competency testing for information literacy, and pre-test/post-test methods. The University has developed compelling evidence that JMU students benefit from instruction in its General Education Program and makes that evidence available to the public on JMU and State Council of Higher Education for Virginia Websites. Regular monitoring of results has led to ongoing improvement in both assessment methods and courses and has informed modifications of the curriculum.

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Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, Illinois
The Department of Psychology Senior Capstone

The Department of Psychology at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville (SIUE) received the 2006 Council of Higher Education Accreditation Award for Institutional Progress in Student Learning Outcomes based on a submission that described the Department of Psychology's Senior Capstone. By successful completion of the Senior Capstone, students fulfill a university requirement that they demonstrate proficiency in the major and academic breadth commensurate with SIUE's general education expectations. Faculty-developed baccalaureate learning goals are used to assess student learning outcomes in multiple ways. The assessment process includes a Primary Trait Analysis of research presentations at departmental paper or poster sessions across all learning goals and behavioral indicators, such as student research studies presented at peer-reviewed professional conferences. The Department of Psychology showed that an ongoing assessment program could inform curricular changes, promote program improvements, increase student learning and improve the time-to-degree rates of psychology graduates. The department demonstrated institutional leadership not only in creating this successful faculty-led system to assess student learning but also in sharing its format and results with constituents internal and external to the university. A Web site was created as a vehicle to communicate related information in support of the department's award submission (www.siue.edu/PSYCHOLOGY/CHEA.htm). The Senior Capstone in the Department of Psychology is the crowning achievement of students' undergraduate careers, and it is one of the things that make SIUE a premier metropolitan university.

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CRITERIA FOR THE AWARD

The scope of an application could be institution-wide, focused on a specific program or focused on a major.

Applications were judged using evidence that demonstrated the extent to which four award criteria were met:

- Articulating and providing evidence of outcomes.
- Providing evidence of success with regard to outcomes.
- Informing the public about outcomes.
- Using outcomes for institutional improvement.

Evidence had to be relevant to what was being claimed, potentially verifiable through replication or third-party inspection and representative or typical of major, program or institutional performance. It could involve examination of student levels of attainment (e.g., individual students or representative samples) and could include faculty-designed comprehensive or capstone examinations and assignments, performance on external or licensure examinations, authentic performances or demonstrations, portfolios of student work over time or samples of representative student work. Self-study reports and student satisfaction surveys were not accepted as direct evidence of student learning outcomes.

Criterion 1: Articulation and Evidence of Outcomes

Evidence of development and application of expectations of student learning outcomes in one or more majors, program areas or institution-wide.

Applicants were asked to describe how a major, program or institution:

- Develops and publicly commits to specific student learning outcomes associated with various courses of study.
- Determines and clearly communicates what counts as evidence that outcomes have been achieved. This may include, for example,
    - faculty designed comprehensive or capstone examinations and assignments, or performance on licensing or other external examinations;
    - professionally judged performances or demonstrations of abilities in context, or portfolios of student work compiled over time; or
    - samples of representative student work generated in response to typical course assignments.
- Regularly collects and interprets evidence of outcomes.

Criterion 2: Success with Regard to Outcomes

Evidence of the extent to which expectations with regard to outcomes are successfully met by a major, program or institution-wide.

Applicants were asked to describe how a major, program or institution:

- Determines whether student learning outcomes have been achieved, either at an individual or aggregate level for the major, program or institution.
- Documents whether actual achievement levels of students are acceptable given the mission, student population and resources available to the major, program or institution.
- Supplements evidence of student achievement levels with information about other dimensions of institutional effectiveness (e.g., graduation, retention, transfer, placement or admission to graduate school).

Criterion 3: Information to the Public About Outcomes

Evidence of the ways in which students and the public are informed of the success of a major, program or institution in achieving these outcomes.

Applicants were asked to describe how a major, program or institution:

- Routinely provides students and the public with information about major, program or institutional performance in terms of attainment of student learning outcomes, either individual or in the aggregate.
- Supplements this information with additional evidence of the soundness of operation and overall effectiveness of a major, program or institution with respect to mission fulfillment.

Criterion 4: Using Outcomes for Improvement

Evidence of how information about student learning outcomes is used to further improve a major, program or institution.

Applicants were asked to describe how a major, program or institution:

- Incorporates information about success with student learning outcomes into regular discussions and decision-making processes about a major, program or institution.
- Shares information about student learning outcomes across, for example, departments, faculty and schools.
- Uses information about student learning outcomes when making specific changes in, for example, curriculum, pedagogy or policy.
- Ensures that evidence of student learning outcomes is used to assure and improve the quality of a major, program or institution.

CONCLUSION

The first year of the CHEA award attracted institutions that clearly demonstrate the significant capacity within higher education to successfully address the challenges of student learning outcomes: how to frame outcomes, evidence of outcomes, informing the public about outcomes and using information about outcomes for quality improvement. Information about the 2007 CHEA award will soon be available on the CHEA Website at www.chea.org.

CHEA AWARD SELECTION COMMITTEE

The selection committee was comprised of individuals from higher education institutions, accreditation organizations and the public.

- Roger Benjamin, President and Chief Executive Officer, Council for Aid to Education
- John Dill, Deputy Chancellor, Office of the Chancellor for Education and Professional Development, Department of Defense

- Peter Ewell, Vice President, National Center for Higher Education Management Systems
- Bret Eynon, Assistant Dean, Center for Teaching and Learning, LaGuardia Community College
- Debra Humphreys, Vice President, Communications and Public Affairs, Association of American Colleges and Universities
- Laura Palmer Noone, President, University of Phoenix
- Kathleen O'Brien, Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs, Alverno College
- Jerry Trapnell, Executive Vice President and Chief Accreditation Officer, The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business International
- Belle Wheelan, President, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools

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