

A Brief History of University of the Cumberlands' Assessment Process

University of the Cumberlands has engaged in a comprehensive and formal institutional assessment process since the 1991-1992 academic year. The University has gathered assessment data through a variety of instruments and means, including:

- ✓ Graduating Senior Survey – a survey given to all graduating seniors in their last semester at the University assessing their evaluation of University programs and services.
- ✓ Alumni Survey – a survey sent annually to three groups of alumni- those who graduated the previous year, those who graduated 11 years ago, and those who graduated 21 years ago. The survey assesses alumni's evaluation of University programs and services from their post-graduate perspective.
- ✓ ETS Academic Profile – administered at first to a random sample of the senior class but since the 2004-2005 academic year administered to all freshmen and juniors to assess students' general knowledge.
- ✓ ACT Student Opinion Survey- a survey administered each fall to all freshmen, sophomores, and juniors to assess satisfaction with University services
- ✓ Exit exams – exams administered to graduation seniors by their major departments. Since 1992-1993 all departments have administered exit exams to their majors to assess their knowledge in their major field.
- ✓ Library Survey – administered in the spring of the year to all freshmen, sophomores, and juniors to assess the Library services.
- ✓ Departmental and Unit Assessment- assessment reports compiled and reviewed annually to assess the effectiveness of academic programs and units.
- ✓ Strategic Plan Audit – regular audits of the *Strategic Plan* to determine what has been accomplished, what remains to be accomplished, and what changes or additions need to be made to the Plan.
- ✓ *Information Almanac* and *Peer Comparison Fact Book*- documents prepared by the Office of Institutional Research showing enrollment, retention, and other trends at the University and the results of comparisons with peer institutions.

All of these instruments have had implicit and explicit expected outcomes. The University has expected satisfaction to improve as programs and services improved. Academic Profile scores have been expected to

improve or remain at a high level. Faculty have expected graduating seniors to demonstrate competency in their field through the departmental exit exam. Departments and units have expected greater satisfaction with programs, academic progress, and increased productivity through departmental and unit assessment. Audits of the *Strategic Plan* have been expected to demonstrate progress in the accomplishment of the Plan and expansion of the Plan into new areas. Statistics from the *Information Almanac* and *Peer Comparison* Fact Book are expected to show steady or increasing recruitment and retention data and comparability with peer institutions. The University's focus in assessment has always been on improving student performance.

In 1989 the institution began to develop its formal, comprehensive assessment plan. In September of that year Cumberland College (now University of the Cumberlands) formed the Long-Range Planning Committee (now the Strategic Planning Committee) to bring together a variety of functions that were viewed as vital to the strategic planning needs of the institution. This Committee, with input from many sources, reviewed and revised the Mission Statement of the University which was approved by the Board of Trustees in April 1990. Based on the Mission Statement, the Committee also identified long-term goals and strategies for the University to improve the University's educational programs and assist the University in pursuing its mission.

The work of the Strategic Planning Committee in 1989 and in the years following led to the formation of the Assessment Committee in 1990 charged with developing an assessment plan for the entire University, coordinating comprehensive evaluative activities, and distributing assessment data to all units that needed data. In the spring of 1993 the Assessment Committee presented its assessment plan to department chairs. Departments then developed unit assessment plans with goals tied to the institutional goals established by the Strategic Planning Committee and ultimately to the Mission Statement. Departments then did a trial run by completing a Unit Assessment Report for the 1991-1992 academic year. By the end of 1993 academic units had completed assessment reports for two academic years (1991-1992, 1992-1993) and most support units and administrative offices had developed their plans. The Assessment Committee coordinated, updated, and maintained the assessment records.

The assessment plan developed by the Assessment Committee provided a giant leap forward for University of the Cumberlands. All academic departments and most units engaged in annual assessment and evaluation with information provided through annual assessment reports to faculty, administration, and staff and reviewed and discussed by all concerned from top to bottom.

Assessment that had been sometimes more informal than formal became more formal and effective. Assessment provided a rationale for course changes, new courses, and improved services as well as a continuing method for evaluating changes and improvements. Academic departments focused on student learning continuing the University's commitment to strengthen academic programs and provide a quality liberal arts education.

As assessment continued, University of the Cumberlands continued to assess the assessment plan. Noting that some non-academic units were not part of the assessment plan and wanting to focus more on learning outcomes, the University in the spring of 2004 began a major revision of the assessment process that was completed in early 2005. Each unit within the institution wrote a **Purpose Statement**, a series of **Program Goals** and a list of **Outcomes**- learning outcomes for the academic units, and desired outcomes or goals for the non-academic units- to articulate each unit's focus and efforts in accordance with the Mission Statement of the University. Fifteen academic support units that had not previously had formal assessment plans were added to the institution-wide assessment program.

In these new unit assessment plans, all assessment ties back to the Mission Statement of University of the Cumberlands. From the Mission Statement, the University has developed *Institutional Goals*. The Assessment Committee and the Strategic Planning Committee continue to monitor the results of assessment and contribute an institution-wide process of planning and assessment as the University continues to pursue its mission.