



## State Council of Higher Education for Virginia

### **The Academic Affairs Committee's Charge to the 2007 Task Force on Assessment**

Assessment has been a focus of the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) since 1986, when SCHEV first began drafting guidelines for the assessment of student achievement. In recent years, the Council has sought to balance Virginia's rich tradition of institutional mission diversity with the need to provide concrete, non-anecdotal evidence of student learning. Heretofore this has been accomplished via a policy that calls on institutions to assess six knowledge/skill areas: written communication, oral communication, information-technology literacy, critical thinking, scientific reasoning, and quantitative reasoning.

In order to develop guidelines for a new cycle of student learning assessment, and in keeping with the Council's legislative charge in this area, the Academic Affairs Committee of SCHEV has been sponsoring and engaging in a series of discussions over the past year. These efforts have included testimony solicited from assessment professionals, the creation of the Assessment of Student Learning Task Force, and subsequent dialogue with IPAC. Also during this period an emerging national discussion has taken shape that emphasizes the importance of assessment not only for ongoing program improvement but also for enabling the academy to respond fully to calls for accountability. In keeping with this national discussion the Council remains committed to serious examination of how to incorporate value added elements meaningfully into institutional assessment of student learning, even as it recognizes the significant logistical complexities inherent in this task.

Most recently, the Council of Presidents has come forward with a request to take additional time to examine these complexities in greater depth and an offer to collaborate with the Academic Affairs Committee on developing a new set of assessment guidelines that can be implemented beginning in fall 2008. The Committee has agreed to this request and gratefully accepts the Presidents' offer to collaborate—at the end of the day we want to put in place a system that affirms Virginia's position of leadership in higher education assessment. The Academic Affairs Committee of SCHEV accordingly creates the 2007 Task Force on Assessment to embody this collaboration and charges it with recommending process oriented guidelines for the development of institutional assessment plans—with a particular focus on the incorporation of value added methods and interpretations into institutional assessment programs.

The overarching goal of the Task Force is to steward a system wide approach to assessment that

- focuses on improvement while also demonstrating accountability;
- builds on successful value added aspects of current assessment practices;
- is meaningfully related to institutional missions, practices, and educational aspirations; and
- will be sustainable into the future.

The Task Force's work shall be guided by the principles and protocols outlined below:

- The State Council recognizes that the skills and preparation of incoming freshmen within and among Virginia institutions, as well as institutional missions, vary greatly. Consequently, the Council believes that assessment should focus on outcomes, student progress, and academic program improvement rather than on single or common standards for all students and/or



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institutions. Therefore, the Task Force shall ensure that its recommended guidelines afford institutions the flexibility to establish outcomes and concomitant methods of assessment that are appropriate to their student bodies and programmatic missions.

- While the most important purpose of conducting a rigorous assessment of student learning is to inform academic program improvements, the Council also recognizes the importance of accountability to students, parents, state government, and the citizenry in general. Thus, another important purpose of assessment is to demonstrate the nature and extent of the effect instruction and other relevant experiences have on students as they progress through institutions' academic programs. Accordingly, the Task Force shall examine and make recommendations regarding the parameters within which institutional assessment plans will include the demonstration of value added as a complement to the purpose of program improvement.
- The Task Force shall articulate and recommend an operating conception of value added that can be used to strike an appropriate balance among the requisites of the prior two bullets. In general, by value added, we mean measures that indicate progress, or lack thereof, as a consequence of the student's institutional experience; it is acknowledged that value added experience may be demonstrated through formal, orthodox value added instruments (i.e., strict pre-post tests) or through other instruments that may not be formally value added but have value added interpretations (e.g., locally developed assessment instruments). Student progress should be measured using statistically valid samples and the same instrument or methodology between the freshman year and a subsequent point in the future (sophomore, junior, or senior year).
- It is presumed that the value added assessment conducted by institutions will involve a first assessment taken in the freshman year followed by a second assessment at a future time using an appropriately parallel method. The Task Force shall consider and make recommendations regarding relevant technical aspects of conducting these assessments, including their timing, sampling methodologies, costs, subject-specific logistics, use of peer review, and any other such topic the Task Force judges necessary to consider. In this regard, the Task Force is encouraged to monitor institutions' preparations to assess quantitative reasoning in fall 2007.
- In keeping with the public accountability aspect of this initiative, the Task Force shall make recommendations regarding the proper mode of publicizing results of institutional assessments. These recommendations should balance the acknowledged differences among institutions with the public's right to accurate and useful information about academic programs at public institutions of higher education.
- In accord with discussions held between IPAC and Council members in November 2006, the Task Force should devote especial attention to the core learning area of information-technology literacy, with a view to addressing the rapid escalation seen in recent years in baseline competency in information technology and how this will affect attempts to do assessment in this area into the future. The Task Force is encouraged to consult with the newly formed Learning Technology Advisory Council on this issue.
- The Task Force shall conduct its work so as to produce a final report—including recommended guidelines for institutional implementation—by September 28, 2007. The Task Force report will be considered formally by the Academic Affairs Committee and the Council at its October 16, 2007 meeting. The Task Force shall provide at least one interim report on its progress to the Academic Affairs Committee (presumably, at either or both of its May and July 2007 meetings), and shall ensure appropriate consultation with IPAC prior to the final preparation of its report.