

COMPREHENSIVE STANDARD 3.3.1

The institution identifies expected outcomes, assesses the extent to which it achieves these outcomes, and provides evidence of improvement based on analysis of the results in each of the following areas (**Institutional Effectiveness**):

- 3.3.1.1 educational programs, to include student learning outcomes
- 3.3.1.2 administrative support services
- 3.3.1.3 educational support services
- 3.3.1.4 research within its educational mission, if appropriate
- 3.3.1.5 community/public service within its educational mission, if appropriate

Recommendation from On-Site Committee (March 2007):

The Committee recommends that the institution demonstrate that it has established clearly stated, measurable learning outcomes for each of its educational programs and has evaluated the extent to which these outcomes are achieved.

Comments from Commission on Colleges (from letter dated January 9, 2008 to the President of North Georgia College & State University):

The Commission acknowledges the strengths of the institution's institutional effectiveness and planning process. It also recognizes the institution's progress made in fully implementing the plan. It also observes, however, some units appear to still be in the developmental stage of their design and data collection pertaining to learning outcomes. For example, the English department appears to be among those departments that are still in the process of developing and assessing measurable learning outcomes. Consequently, the institution is to provide evidence that it has established learning outcomes for each of its educational programs and has evaluated the extent to which those learning outcomes are achieved.

Response to Commission on Colleges (April 2008)

Considerable progress has been made by departments to better define learning outcomes, to improve assessment methods, and to document improvements based on the analysis of the results. Direct measures of student learning are predominant and are supplemented in some departments with self-reported indirect measures. Embedded assessment techniques (e.g., grades on assignments, projects, exams—but not course grades) are the primary measures and are coupled with externally normed assessments (standardized instruments) as appropriate. Multiple measures are encouraged, but only when they are of high quality and provide

additional insight into the outcome being evaluated. A new assessment database (SAINT) was developed by the Institutional Effectiveness Office during spring and summer 2006, and implemented in fall 2006. The new database has been well received, and provides a much simplified interface for departments to record outcomes, measurement methods, results, and use of results. The Executive Director of Institutional Effectiveness continues to assist departmental assessment coordinators and other faculty in developing and deepening their understanding of assessment through one-on-one and departmental meetings, campus workshops, and access to on-line and hard-copy resources on assessment. Additionally, assessment coordinators have been offered the opportunity to attend assessment conferences (three attended the 2006 Assessment Institute at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis, four others attended the 2007 AAC&U General Education and Assessment Conference in Miami, and four are attending the 2008 North Carolina State Undergraduate Assessment Symposium).

After receiving the Report of the Reaffirmation Committee in spring 2007 and the January 2008 letter from the Commission, the Executive Director of Institutional Effectiveness met individually on multiple occasions with each academic departmental assessment coordinator to review the assessment plan for their degree programs. Guidance was provided in stating specific and measurable student learning outcomes, determining appropriate assessment methods (with a preference for direct measures over indirect measures), and documenting how results are used to improve the program and student learning.

When assisting faculty in developing assessment plans, it is important to respect the disciplinary differences in epistemology. Though faculty in some disciplines may consider a particular learning outcome as broad and not measurable, faculty in other disciplines may believe that breaking down an outcome into the components of a rubric is the antithesis of integrative learning and holistic thinking, which are two of the five undergraduate learning outcomes at North Georgia. Regardless of how broad a student learning outcome may be defined by a department, it is operationalized by at least one measure, thereby making the outcome explicit. An example is given in the next paragraph.

On the surface, one of the learning outcomes for the B.S. in Chemistry, "students will demonstrate an appropriate level of chemical knowledge and critical thinking skills," may seem general and not measurable. However, when the outcome is examined more deeply and defined by multiple measures, it becomes evident that this outcome measures integral knowledge and ability expected of chemistry majors. For this outcome, the

chemistry faculty has identified three measures and acceptable levels of performance on each. The first measure is performance on junior and senior seminars, in which competency is demonstrated by scoring 3 of 4 on chemical content; 3.5 of 5 on logical progression of ideas; 3.5 of 5 on evidence of speaker's understanding of material; and 3.5 of 5 on knowledgeable response to questions. The second measure is performance on selected questions from the final exam in Biochemistry I that reflect general chemical knowledge; at least 50% of students are expected to successfully answer questions pertaining to chemical equilibria, chromatographic techniques, and reaction mechanisms. The third measure for this outcome is performance on the ETS Major Field Test in Chemistry. Students are expected to score at or above the 50th percentile on the overall test and on each subsection (physical chemistry, organic chemistry, inorganic chemistry, and analytical chemistry).

An updated (as of March 29, 2008) SAINT assessment report of student learning outcomes for all degree programs is available in hard copy as part of this monitoring report and [electronically \[1\]](#). This report demonstrates that each program has established measurable learning outcomes and has evaluated the extent to which these outcomes are achieved, as recommended by the on-site committee and requested by the Commission.

Notes on reading SAINT assessment report: a) This assessment report is approximately 200 pages. Within the report are electronic links to supporting documents such as details on embedded assessment assignments, etc. Because of the volume of these supplemental documents, they were not printed but can be accessed with an active internet connection through the pdf electronic report on the flash drive or from this [link \[1\]](#). b) Some of the learning outcomes have a prefix of NGLO, which means the outcome is one of the five North Georgia Learning Outcomes for undergraduates. These outcomes are in the process of being implemented in both the core curriculum and the majors. Some departments, such as business administration, have restated the outcome to better fit that discipline. In such cases, both the standard language for the North Georgia Learning Outcome and the interpretation of it to the discipline are listed. c) Each learning outcome is connected to at least one of the purposes of the degree program, which, in turn, is associated with at least one of the university's strategic directions (abbreviated in the SAINT report as SD). d) The SAINT Assessment Report is sorted by school (Arts & Letters, Business, Education, and Science & Health Professions) and then by department within school. Some departments contain "umbrella entities." For example, "Fine Arts: Art area – Bach" is an umbrella entity. All undergraduate majors in Art areas are assessed on the outcomes in that entity. There are additional outcomes

assessed, depending on whether the student is pursuing the BA in Art, BS in Art Education, or BS in Art Marketing.

The institution is puzzled by the reference to the English Department in the Commission's January 2008 letter. As demonstrated in the accompanying [SAINT assessment report \[1\]](#), this department has been assessing learning outcomes using embedded assessment (i.e., grades on specific assignments) for several years. We wonder if the following statements in the Response to the Reaffirmation Committee (August 2007) were misinterpreted.

As their understanding of assessing student learning has evolved, departments are improving their assessment processes. For example, from 1998/99-2001/02, the English Department used course grades as a primary measure of student learning outcomes in the undergraduate major. From 2002/03-2006/07 the department used grades on specific assignments to measure student learning outcomes. In fall 2007, the English faculty will be developing rubrics that break down the skills and abilities demonstrated by the students in order to separate data for measuring outcomes.

These statements were intended to be an example of continuous improvement. The rubrics that the department began developing in fall 2007 are not a requirement of Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1. The English Department has gone above and beyond that which is required (identifying student learning outcomes, assessing the extent to which these outcomes are achieved, and providing evidence of improvement based on analysis of the results).

Departments use assessment information to make curricular changes, but not every result from every assessment measure is worthy of a statement of how the result was used to make improvements. Often, it is the combination of results from multiple measures across time that leads to change and improvement. Several examples of improvement that have occurred through "closing the assessment loop" are listed in the following bullet points.

- The English Department has begun using rubrics to assess research papers written by their majors. As a result of the high rate of unsatisfactory student performance in stylistic and grammatical effectiveness, the department has proposed a new course, ENGL 2050 (Basic English Grammar). This class will serve to better prepare students for upper level writing proficiency.
- While assessing the competencies of Middle Grade teacher certification, faculty have determined that the traditional work sample process is unworkable for MGED pre-service teachers who seldom have

the opportunity to have 10 consecutive days of teaching with the same group of students. Faculty have modified the process to ensure that students display mastery of the components of the work sample in specific courses, and have more opportunities to submit "mini" work samples of 3-5 lessons in length.

- One of the learning outcomes for undergraduate math majors is the demonstration of knowledge in probability. Results from the Praxis II test (certification of secondary education math majors) helped the department discover they needed to include more statistical theory in Math 3350, so the syllabus was revised for that course.
- Student responses to the senior exit survey indicated a need for courses in information security for students in the BS Computer Information Systems and BS Computer Sciences programs. Beginning in fall 2006, students have the option to declare a concentration in Information Assurance and Security. The courses that make up the concentration (CSCI 3050, CSCI 3250, CSCI 3350, CSCI 4650) are included in the course rotation in computer science. Since beginning this concentration, the enrollment in these courses has been: fall 2006 CSCI 3050 (6 students), spring 2007 CSCI 3250 (6 students), summer 2007 CSCI 3350 (7 students), fall 2007 CSCI 4650 (8 students), and spring 2008 CSCI 3350 (18 students).
- One of the learning outcomes for students completing the B.A. in French is to demonstrate proficiency in speaking, which is assessed by making an A or B on oral exams or presentations in their intermediate and advanced courses. Based on previous assessment results in FREN 3450 (Advanced Conversation I), this course was modified to increase the amount of oral/aural material and to decrease the amount of reading and writing. Also, more use was made of the internet due to its availability in the classroom. In fall 2006, the percentage of students (n=5) meeting the assessment criteria was 80% on oral exams, 80% on major oral presentation, and 80% on shorter presentations. The faculty plan to increase the internet-based content of the course.
- A major oral presentation in SPAN 2002 (Intermediate Spanish II) is one of the measures used to assess speaking proficiency for Spanish majors. Based on assessment results from earlier courses, work on oral presentations started at the beginning of the spring 2007 semester. This allowed time for several draft readings and enhanced the quality of the final product.

- The conceptualization and realization of a project in PSYC 3080 (Research Methods for the Behavioral Sciences) is used to assess a learning outcome relating to the knowledge of empirical psychological research methods attained by undergraduate psychology majors. The percentage of students achieving a "B" or better on this project increased from 47% (9 of 19) in spring 2005 to 74% (14 of 19) in spring 2007. Reflecting upon the low percentage of students achieving this outcome in spring 2005, the principal instructor made adjustments, including allowing group work, which has improved student learning.
- Low scores by students on the marketing assessment indicator of the ETS major field test for business resulted in changes to the marketing curriculum. It is too soon to tell if there is a corresponding improvement in student performance on the marketing assessment indicator.
- Low scores by students on the information systems indicator of the ETS major field test for business have prompted changes in the approach to teaching this topic. In the past, information systems concepts were integrated across multiple business courses. Beginning in summer 2008, Area F Business Foundations will include CSCI 1250 Information Technologies. This course shifts the emphasis from elementary computer applications to information management
- Assessment of written presentations in the Business capstone course shows that students struggle with depth of analysis and with identifying appropriate outside sources. Concepts relating to information literacy have been added to MKT 3700, a course that is prerequisite to the capstone. Also, library workshops on searching databases and using RefWorks have been provided for faculty so that they could feel more comfortable working with students in this area.
- One of the measures used by the biology department to assess written communication skills is a research proposal developed by students in Evolutionary Biology. Data from spring 2005 indicated a positive correlation between number of times submitted manuscripts were revised and final grade on project. A more rigorous timetable encouraging more revisions was implemented. Student performance improved from an average score of 89.4 (n=20) on final submission in spring 2005 to 94.2 (n=21) in fall 2006.
- In assessing junior and senior seminars, chemistry faculty expressed concerns about lower-than-desirable level of chemistry content in

student presentations and student difficulty in organizing and appropriately pacing seminars. In addition, students had difficulty identifying appropriate primary references. Additional information concerning these issues is now presented to students during the initial course meeting. Primary references are now discussed and students are supplied with access information for database of scientific journals during the initial course meeting.

- Though the pass rate of 83% on the first attempt at state board exam in physical therapy is acceptable performance to CAPTE, the accrediting agency for physical therapy, the faculty felt improvement was needed. Therefore, they implemented an innovative study approach utilizing clinical education assignments in the final clinical experience in fall 2006. Students were given weekly assignments using the Scorebuilder's textbook to enhance students' review for the licensing exam during clinical practice. Additionally, during Professional Socialization III course, PT 7433, students complete a computerized sample board exam. Students who are unsuccessful on this exam may return after graduation for additional study with various faculty members to improve their learning/comprehension and test-taking abilities prior to the state board of physical therapy licensing examination. Students graduating in the May 2007 class are now beginning to complete their boards and the results will be monitored.
- Program completion rates are an important indicator of student success for nursing programs and are a required assessment indicator for accreditation through the National League for Nursing Accrediting Commission (NLNAC). The associate degree program is 4 semesters or 2 academic years in length and the nursing faculty has set the level of successful achievement at 80% of the students who complete the first clinical course (NURS 1110) will complete the program in 3 years. Of the students who complete NURS 1110 in fall semester 2004, 69% graduated by Spring 2006. Faculty determined that they were not satisfied with this result and they have reviewed the admission criteria and changed them in an attempt to improve retention. Admission criteria were revised for the fall 06 class to include a pre-admission test (TEAS) which indicates students strengths in math and English and would therefore identify students who should be more successful in the program. Additionally, the minimum GPA for entry into the program was raised to 2.75.
- Students in the Family Nurse Practitioner program within the Master of Science program are required to submit an evidence-based practice paper as a part of their nursing research class (NURS 7130). Although

a passing grade for graduate courses in nursing is 80% or higher, the faculty set the criteria for this outcome measure at 90% for all students. Of the 13 students in NURS 7130 during fall 2006, 10 achieved a score of greater than 90%. In reviewing the papers that scored lower than 90%, it was noted that the literature review section of the paper was a particular problem area for students. In response to this finding, additional emphasis in course content and assignments was included for the fall 2007 course and an additional workbook style text on writing a literature review was added to the required reading for the course.

North Georgia College & State University believes that this monitoring report (narrative plus the SAINT assessment report) provides evidence that it has established learning outcomes for each of its educational programs and has evaluated the extent to which those learning outcomes are achieved, as requested by the Commission. Furthermore, the institution will continue assessing learning outcomes for each educational program on an annual basis.

Document Reference:

| Number | Document Title | Resource |
|--------|--|---|
| 1 | March 2008 SAINT assessment report for degree programs | http://www.ngcsu.edu/sacs/Reference_Room/documents/Monitoring_docs/AcademicAssess20080329.pdf |