NORTHWEST COLLEGE
IS ACCOMPLISHING ITS EDUCATIONAL AND OTHER PURPOSES:

ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING

Northwest College embraces assessment of student learning by implementing a multi-tiered Assessment Program that provides important feedback about how we can enhance student learning at the course, program, general education, and all-college levels. As part of the ongoing development and implementation of the Assessment Program, the College continues to further integrate assessment into the activities and culture of instruction. Multiple methods of assessment provide information that is used to improve course, program, general education, and all-college student learning outcomes. A structure is in place to ensure ongoing data gathering, updating of outcomes, and the use of assessment information to guide improvements that promote student learning.

The following principles and activities provide a brief overview of the foundation for our Assessment Program.

- The Assessment Program flows from the Northwest College Mission, with consideration also of the College's Vision, Goals, and Enduring Values.
- Improved student learning is the purpose of the Assessment Program.
- Development of an effective assessment effort is an ongoing process. The current Assessment Program began in 2000. Materials and process have continued to evolve to enhance the usefulness of the data generated and to address increasing other demands on the time of faculty and staff.
- Broad-based involvement is essential to the success of our Assessment Program. Faculty, staff, and students have developed the Assessment Program from the ground up. Three key committees Academic Advisory Council, Curriculum Committee, and the Assessment of Learning Outcomes Committee have played leadership roles in the development and expansion of the program. Faculty members in all divisions of the College have been involved from the beginning and continue to play an important and ongoing role in the design and implementation of the Assessment Program.
- The Assessment Program addresses all levels of the student-learning experience. Our Program is college-wide and addresses course, program, general education, and all-college student learning outcomes.
- Clear and broadly-supported learning outcomes guide effective teaching and student learning and provide a foundation for course and program development.
- Multiple measures of student success relative to expected learning outcomes provide information that helps improve teaching effectiveness, curriculum development, instructional program designs, and student support activities.
- Repeated cycles of Assessment Program activities add to the richness and usefulness of available student learning assessment information.
- Institutional support for program and college-level conversations about assessment strengthens the impact of assessment activities on the improvement of student learning.

BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE EXPANDED ASSESSMENT PROGRAM

The new Assessment Program created in 2000 was a significant improvement over the plan initiated in 1994. Course, program, general education, and college-wide expected student learning outcomes have been adopted and incorporated into the College catalog and course syllabi. Faculty, staff, and students collaborated to build the new multi-level and outcomes-based Assessment Program.

To accomplish the goal of having a strong Assessment Program that leads to enhanced student learning at all levels, the Assessment Program activities listed below have been accomplished since 2000.

Course-Level Outcomes
- All new course proposals specify expected student-learning outcomes and how these outcomes are assessed.
- Syllabus Guidelines clarify that all courses are to include expected student learning outcomes as a guiding element in the design of courses and assessment of student learning.
- The use of a new general education course approval form helps faculty specify outcomes and how proposed courses help students achieve these expected outcomes.
- Faculty use learning outcome assessment information from required courses to contribute to program assessment activities and reports.

Program-Level Outcomes
- All programs and certificate programs specify:
  - student-learning outcomes;
  - required and elective courses that help students reach each of those outcomes;
  - methods of assessing student accomplishments relative to those outcomes; and
  - the activities that will be implemented to ensure that assessment information is used to enhance student learning.
- Faculty from all programs complete a yearly report that:
  - updates program-specific learning outcomes;
  - specifies the associated courses and learning activities intended to promote student accomplishment of those outcomes;
  - analyzes assessment information regarding student performance in relation to those outcomes;
  - identifies ways to enhance instruction, courses, student-support activities, and program requirements to enhance future student performance; and
  - implements a capstone course in which student cumulative learning is demonstrated in relation to program and all-college outcomes.
- The Program Review process addresses student performance regarding expected learning outcomes, enrollment trends, facilities and equipment needs, transfer and employment feedback, and other activities to enhance student learning.

General-Education Outcomes
- Specific outcomes for each of the required general education categories have been identified.
- General education outcomes have been adopted that apply to students in all degree types: Associate of Arts, Associate of Science, or Associate of Applied Science.
- A review of existing and new general education courses was implemented to ensure that each existing and new course meets the outcomes for the appropriate general education category.
- The Curriculum and Academic Advisory Committees use student general education outcome feedback to plan course changes, reconsider general education requirements, and to plan faculty development activities.

All-College Outcomes
- The instructional community of faculty and staff contributed to the development of expanded and clearer all-college outcomes.
- All-college outcomes guide curriculum development and the assessment of cumulative student learning as demonstrated in capstone course performance.
- Revised data gathering methods have been implemented to better assess student accomplishment of these outcomes, including student product evaluation and student self-assessments.
- The use of rubrics has expanded as a positive way to enrich the information provided to students about their accomplishments relative to the outcomes and to allow for faculty-led periodic research studies.

CAMPUS-WIDE INVOLVEMENT IN CREATION OF THE ASSESSMENT PROGRAM
Through their programs, divisions, and committees, faculty are involved in the implementation and revision of our Learning Outcomes Assessment Program. Faculty members are the primary developers of our student-learning outcomes, assessment activities, and consideration of student performance results. They provide direct feedback to students about their accomplishments relative to expected outcomes, and faculty also provide the campus with information about student learning so course, program, and other changes can be made to further enhance student learning.

Student Senate representatives are voting members in our Assessment Program decisions and processes through their role in the Curriculum Committee. Student feedback was gathered in the early years of the capstone courses to determine the extent to which students thought they were reaching required all-college outcomes.

Learning Outcomes Assessment Program Leadership Committees
Primary leadership for coordination and development of the Assessment Program is provided by three major committees. Each has an ongoing role in the development and monitoring of the Assessment Program.

<u>The Curriculum Committee</u>
In collaboration with the Vice President for Academic Affairs the Curriculum Committee, provides first-level approval of all courses, programs, certificates, and also general education designations for courses in the General Education Program. This group has revised course, program, and general education approval materials and processes to facilitate this focus on and utilization of outcomes in all of our instructional activities. The Committee coordinated the collaborative development and approval process for general education and all-college outcomes. This group has scheduled the periodic review process for all general education courses.

The Curriculum Committee designed the first all-college outcome assessment instruments used in 2000 and the following three years. The Committee also played a leadership role in the development and approval of the new all-college assessment instruments now in use.

As a result of the Committee's review of the data from the first learning outcome assessment instruments and activities, two years of professional development activities were developed to enable faculty to more effectively help students develop strong presentation and writing skills. This Committee also identified the need for faculty to learn more about rubrics as a feedback mechanism to enrich the information provided to students about their learning. (This task was forwarded to the Faculty Development and Morale Committee.)

More recently, the Committee has used student learning outcomes assessment data as a foundation for the review of the College's general education requirements. These deliberations confirmed most current general education requirements and initiated additional review for potential changes in requirements in the future.

The Curriculum Committee is chaired by a faculty member and includes faculty representation from all seven of the College's divisions. Two students selected by the Student Senate serve as voting members. The Committee also includes the involvement of liaisons from the academic affairs are, student affairs area, and library.

<u>Academic Advisory Council (AAC)</u>
The Academic Advisor Council plays the major leadership role in the development of academic plans, procedures, budget allocations, instructional technology development priorities, faculty-position allocations, and program review. This group has also assumed primary responsibility for facilitating the process of program-specific outcome development, assessment, and quality. In addition, they have contributed to changes in the syllabus guidelines used by all faculty members. The AAC is chaired by the Vice President for Academic Affairs and includes the Dean of Student Learning and Academic Support, the Dean of Extended Campus and Workforce, seven Division Chairs, Director of the Library, and *ex officio* members from Student Affairs.

The results of student learning outcomes assessment activities have led to the creation of professional development opportunities for faculty. These programs have been designed to enhance the range of ways faculty are able to facilitate student success particularly in relation to the all-college outcomes of presentation/speaking and writing. A committee of the Faculty Organization provides the leaders role for faculty professional development. Grants have also

contributed to the ability of the College to provide workshops for college faculty and to send faculty to targeted professional development opportunities away from campus

Faculty Development and Morale Committee
The Faculty Development and Morale Committee provides professional development programs for faculty and instructional staff. Several of the programs have focused on topics related to effective assessment including: the design and use of rubrics; digital resources for storing and sharing grades and assessment information with students; use of portfolios for student learning and assessment; designing and providing feedback on student writing; methods for assessing and improving student presentations. Other sessions have focused on the use of instructional technology to enhance student engagement and learning. For several years, this Committee has hosted a Regional Yellowstone Master Teacher Seminar that has provided opportunities for our faculty to reflect on their teaching in a retreat setting with faculty from other colleges.

This Committee is composed of five faculty elected by their peers. The Committee has a separate budget to support the delivery of professional development activities and to send faculty to professional development activities off campus. This group collaborates with the Vice President for Academic Affairs on the design and delivery of new faculty orientation activities.