Chapter 6: Discovery and Improvement through Assessment
(Standard 7)

MSCHE Standard 7: Institutional Assessment

The institution has developed and implemented an assessment process that evaluates its overall effectiveness in achieving its mission and goals and its compliance with accreditation standards.

Delaware State University is in compliance with Standard 7.

Institutional assessment offers the most efficient strategy for identifying and supporting those programs, initiatives, and activities that successfully meet their objectives and advance the University’s Mission and goals. Using this data, programs that underperform are revised and improved to get them “back on track” and activities that no longer advance University goals and objectives are discontinued to make better use of finite resources. In this way, institutional assessment truly promotes institutional discovery and improvement. (Goal VIII)

The Process and its Implementation

A well-coordinated, systematic institutional assessment process has been implemented since the 2007 Periodic Review Report. As a result, University programs, initiatives, and activities have been developed, and continue to be developed, through established and well-coordinated cycles that measure the extent to which the University is making effective and efficient use of its human, fiscal, and physical resources. The overarching framework for assessing institutional effectiveness is the University Mission Statement and the nine institutional Strategic Goals that support the Mission and are captured in the 2007 Strategic Plan. These Strategic Goals are further delineated on page 9.

The Assessment Office, the institutional effectiveness unit at DSU, is responsible for the periodic review of academic programs and administrative service units. Institutional effectiveness involves the systematic process of collecting, analyzing, and acting on both internal and external information to accomplish the Mission and goals of the University. This broad-based and inclusive process, which requires measuring results and using the findings to inform change, is best captured through the strategic and operational planning process. The process is the same for strategic goals/objectives and learning goals/outcomes. Individual units design and implement their own assessment processes. The University’s assessment expectation for each academic and administrative service unit is outlined below and illustrated in Figure 6.1. Considered in a continuous cycle of planning and evaluation, the model contains four key components:

- Define Goals and Objectives: Set broad goals drawn from the unit mission statement. Determine specific measurable objectives that will support reaching the goals. Align objectives to the DSU Strategic Plan objectives and/or DSU student learning goals.
- Measure and Set Targets: Establish suitable methods of measuring how objectives are being met. Set benchmarks for success (achievement targets). Collect data.
- Analyze and Share Results: Analyze data. Review and share results with constituents.
- Develop and Implement Action Plans: Develop and carry out steps for potentially improving results. Revise objectives, if appropriate. Repeat cycle.
All units follow this cycle and, in 2009, the Provost directed that all units publish annual assessment updates in WEAVEonline®. This system is designed to facilitate the management of planning, assessment, and budgeting activities. It is the repository for each unit’s goals, measurable objectives, measures, benchmarks, data analysis, and action plans. The alignment to the University’s Strategic Plan and other plans is made explicit in this system.

Student-learning goals, measurable objectives/outcomes, measures, benchmarks, findings, and action plans are recorded in WEAVEonline® for both academic and co-curricular programs, such as Housing and Residential Education and Career Services. Actual data and/or graphs are uploaded and linked to the text. Program learning goals are linked to University Learning Goals and other concepts from appropriate accrediting or professional organizations. The Provost also directed that these reports be accessible to all faculty and staff so that the assessment results are shared and discussed in the appropriate unit meetings and are used in institutional planning and resource allocation. Appendix 6.1 contains the Assessment Process Feedback form used by the unit and others to improve the unit’s reporting.

**Institutional Assessment of Effectiveness**

The University established an Institutional Effectiveness Committee (IEC) in 2005 and the Strategic Plan Implementation Committee in 2007 to monitor progress in achieving the Strategic Plan Goals. The IEC charge was expanded in 2011 to improve ongoing, integrated assessment of academic programs and administrative services units and to strengthen institution-wide research-based planning and evaluation. Specifically, the IEC is charged to do the following:

- Provide oversight for the assessment of academic programs and administrative service units, as well as student learning outcomes that foster evidence-based teaching and learning, informed course and program development, and strategic academic and administrative planning;
- Review assessment tools, rubrics, and survey instruments and the use of data to improve academic programs, student learning outcomes, and administrative services;
- Make recommendations to the Provost based on the analysis of assessment data to inform academic and administrative policy-making, practices, and budget decisions;
• Provide annual reports to the Provost and President on the assessment process and outcomes.

Institutional Support for the Assessment Process

Several tools have been implemented to support assessment, discovery, and improvement. Launched in 2009, WEAVEonline® provides the online infrastructure required to develop and track continuous improvement. The Assessment Office and the Information Technology Division have also developed the Assessment Data Collection System (ADCS), an electronic system designed to facilitate the collection and analysis of student learning data. The Professional Education Unit also uses TK-20 and the Hospitality Management Program uses LiveText.

Periodic Assessment of Academic Programs

Every academic program at Delaware State University undergoes an intense review every five years, coordinated by the Assessment Office, in order to systematically and continuously evaluate how the program or unit is meeting its goals and objectives and fulfilling the University’s Mission. Programs are required to provide assessment data on each learning outcome and provide evidence that the assessment data have been used to improve the program. Several programs are reviewed each year and program reviews include the following:
• A self-study by each unit;
• Visits by one external peer and three internal reviewers;
• Interviews with appropriate faculty, staff, and administrators;
• An exit interview with the Provost;
• A final report from the reviewers;
• A written response from the academic unit;
• Follow-up by the program and Provost to begin the evaluation process again.

Delaware State University modified the program review model developed by the United States Department of Agriculture/Science and Education Research Development, a process explicitly designed to examine critically both undergraduate and graduate education and to assess how each department uses its strengths to develop and sustain excellent programs. These program reviews not only evaluate the program or unit’s progress on recommendations outlined in the previous review, but also set new directions for the next five-year period. In addition to these academic unit reviews, learning outcomes for General Education and each major are assessed on a regular basis. Table 6.1 shows the cohort schedules for 2007-2012.
Table 6.1: Academic Program Review Cycle, 2007-2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of program review</th>
<th>Programs reviewed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007-08</td>
<td>Academic Enrichment, Mathematics, Black Studies, English and Foreign Languages, Honors Program, Music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-09</td>
<td>Biology, History, Political Science, Library Services, Mass Communications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-10</td>
<td>Academic Services for Student Athletes, Adult and Continuing Education, Chemistry, Law Studies, Sociology and Criminal Justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010-11</td>
<td>Art, Physics, Psychology, Aviation, Education (NCATE)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources of Data for Academic Program Assessment

Individual units, academic programs, departments, and colleges collect multiple sources of data to gauge their achievement of learning outcomes and strategic goals. All academic programs utilize the following to assess faculty instruction:

- An online student evaluation system was created in 2006, vastly increasing the percentage of students completing course evaluations and the number of courses being evaluated. Dates and times for course evaluations are established at the beginning of the semester and students are escorted to computer labs to complete the evaluations. The percentage of courses reporting student evaluations has risen from 34% to 58%.

- Peers and chairpersons conduct faculty evaluations.

- Faculty and deans evaluate chairpersons.

- The Assessment Data Collection System (ADCS) collects data on student achievement of learning outcomes.

- Academic programs participate in cyclical reviews requiring internal and external evaluations that are rich in the review of institutional data.

- External commissions and professional associations accredit academic programs.

- Student success is tracked after graduation.

The assessment of institutional effectiveness begins with students. The University places incoming students in appropriate mathematics and English composition and/or reading classes using Accuplacer® tests. The fall 2011 administrations provided empirical evidence that even though the University is attracting a slightly more academically prepared applicant pool than in the past, the University needed to expand its developmental mathematics offerings.

Student engagement, Strategic Goal IV, is assessed through the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). Administered to freshmen and seniors, it is cycled so that freshmen who participate are seniors on the subsequent examination. NSSE results are discussed in Chapter 9. The University also monitors graduation and retention rates via regular meetings of the Enrollment Management and Retention committees and are discussed in detail in Chapter 7.

Institutional effectiveness is also dependent upon optimal performance in both academic and administrative units. Individual colleges identify their own methodology for evaluating their performance. For example, the Colleges of Business and of Agriculture and Related Sciences conduct faculty and staff retreats to identify short-term and long-term goals. In addition, the College of Business uses the “Assurance of Learning Standards and Processes,” as defined by
the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business International (AACSB), in establishing their goals and identifiable outcomes. As a land-grant institution, the College of Agriculture and Related Sciences follows the specific goals and objectives identified by the US Department of Agriculture while also pursuing the University’s strategic goals. USDA administrators evaluate the College’s effectiveness during site visits as inspectors monitor whether the College meets USDA expectations and follows the identified goals.

The College of Education, Health and Public Policy evaluates its faculty and staff in order to assure that the College is moving towards its goals and objectives. Standardized tools, grounded in the CBA, are used to assess faculty performance. Staff evaluation is rooted in their respective contracts and is consistent with protocols approved and supported by the Office of Human Resources.

College effectiveness is closely tied to its program accreditations. The Nursing Department requires a pre-admission test. At present the National League for Nursing Pre-Entrance Examination (NLN PAX) is used because it is a proven predictor of student success. As the student progresses through the Nursing Program, subject-specific standardized tests are administered prior to the completion of each course. The results may indicate the need for remediation or confirm mastery of the subject. Before the end of the academic program a standardized test, the National Nursing League Comprehensive Exam (NCLEX), is administered to the students to determine end-of-program readiness for successful completion of the licensure examination. The Nursing program’s effectiveness is linked to student success in achieving licensure as Registered Nurses, i.e. by passing the National Center of Licensure Examination (NCLEX-RN). Approximately 80% of the nursing students have passed the NCLEX-RN. A primary College goal is to increase this number.

Similarly, Education undergraduates are required to pass the Praxis I exam as part of their admission to the Teacher Education Program. DSU also requires students to pass Praxis II prior to student teaching and, subsequently, program completion. Other disciplines within the College also review the number of students who pursue graduate programs following completion of their undergraduate degree.

Sources of Data for Assessment of Administrative Units

Administrative units utilize a variety of measures to evaluate their effectiveness as depicted in Table 6.2.

Table 6.2: Administrative Assessment Measures Utilized

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Administrative Unit</th>
<th>Measures</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Admissions</td>
<td>Weekly Enrollment Management Council review of admissions funnel and progress toward goals, event surveys (Open House, tours, etc…), SMART approach model development and implementation and external reviews of best practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Enrichment</td>
<td>Retention planning committee with periodic review; recruit-back; early alert system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance and Administration</td>
<td>External assessments by specialists such as SGHE for IT, accounting firms and the EBI survey; Board of Trustee meeting reports and progress-toward-goals; self assessments; annual reports; MEAC benchmarks for athletic assessment; and the University’s CAFR—distributed to interested parties such as the State of Delaware, Bond</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Technology</td>
<td>Responsibilities, accountability and milestones; application of Project Management Institute standards; Incident Management System to track all jobs including feedback from jobs completed; regular management meetings including meetings with Executive Vice President of Finance and CIO/Associate Vice President for Systems; quarterly presentation of Finance Committee of the Board of Trustees</td>
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<td>------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Institutional Advancement</td>
<td>Weekly development progress toward-goals; surveys of key constituents (alumni, parents, event participants, etc…); website user testing; SWOTs; price elasticity study; fundraising feasibility studies; policies and procedures developed to strengthen federal compliance and workflow in financial aid; recruitment external review of communication vehicles; weekly scholarship leveraging reviews plus development of yearly model; SSI results pertaining to financial aid/support services; marketing changes tied to feedback mechanisms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office of Judicial Affairs</td>
<td>Establishment of benchmarks based on peer institutions; documentation of all Cleary Act violations; satisfaction surveys; tracking of repeat offenders including tracking turnaround time for first and second offenses, progression of offenses, appropriateness of sanctions, and student personal history</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Affairs</td>
<td>Satisfaction surveys in career, health, counseling, wellness and recreation services; Health service data on types of cases and frequency of visits to identify patterns; guidelines of American College Health Association (ACHA) and Accreditation Association for Ambulatory Health Care (AAAHC), ACHA National College Health Assessment; Weekly review of housing occupancy and work order logs; Incident reports forwarded to Judicial Arbitration and Mediation Services; Counselor Skills Inventory that govern the work of counselors and are adhered to at DSU; National College Counseling Association (NCCA), American Counseling Association (ACA) and National Association of Social Work (NASW) ethical standards, policies, and procedures</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Availability and Transparency of Assessment Results**

WEAVEonline® is the central depository for assessment results at the unit level. Currently, all stakeholders are given a login and password upon request, allowing them to view unit assessment processes and findings as well as annual reports. DSU was also an early adopter of the College Portrait®, which allows the greater DSU community, including current and potential students, parents, and community stakeholders, to compare DSU to other institutions. Key institutional indicators and reporting disclosures are also accessible on a web page that compiles student consumer information as part of the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008. See [http://www.desu.edu/general-institutional-information](http://www.desu.edu/general-institutional-information).
Examples of Improvement as a Result of Assessment

Assessment results are a vehicle to help the University make informed decisions for planning and resource allocation in an open and transparent manner. Results are used to improve student learning, unit operations, and program effectiveness. The following are examples of improvements that resulted from the assessment of institutional effectiveness. These improvements are specific to the institution’s tripartite mission of teaching, research and service/outreach.

Division of Student Affairs. The Division of Student Affairs was re-structured after an assessment initiated by the newly appointed Vice President of Student Affairs. In support of Goals I, IV, VII and VIII of the Strategic Plan, data was gathered by interviewing program staff, student leaders, student affairs directors, faculty, and other constituents regarding multiple issues such as identification of learning outcomes and student success, the relation of the division’s programs to the University Mission, and the functional responsibilities of each department. Queries were also made regarding departmental planning, decision-making and evaluation processes, and by comparing the division to similar units at peer institutions. Outside consultants were hired to analyze areas identified as priorities such as Housing and Residential Education, Student Leadership and Activities, and Public Safety. The data was analyzed as it related to standards set by the Counsel for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) and the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE). As a result of this review process, the Division of Student Affairs was re-structured and an Assistant Vice President was hired with responsibility for the newly established assessment committee. Additional improvements include the creation of the Student Affairs Professional Development Program, review of policies and procedures, and division-wide and departmental communication plans. The next phase in the process will include conducting additional program reviews by external consultants, conducting additional research on best practices in student leadership development, and developing strategic plans for each department that align with the division’s strategic plan.

Honors Program. In support of Strategic Goal I and based on the findings from the 2008 program review, the Honors Program has made significant improvements to its program management and student services including the following:

- Establishing partnerships with the Admissions and Registrar’s offices to facilitate admission, orientation, demographic data gathering, and course enrollment;
- Standardizing the procedure for identifying Honors students in Banner in order to give Honors student immediate prerequisites for course registration;
- Renumbering of courses for identification of General Education requirements;
- Establishing an Honors Program Office in the new Student Center, an Honors Student Study Lounge, and acquiring a full-time secretary;
- Establishing an Honors Student Association, Honors Program Student Council, Honors Program Repository, a peer mentoring program between the Graduate Student Association and Honors Student Association, and the Honors Program newsletter;
- Establishing an Honors Program new student orientation, annual induction ceremony, and cohort classes based on year of student;
- Incorporating a community service component;
Establishing Honors Program Faculty Workshops to guide the creation of honors courses and a seminar series to showcase faculty research.

These changes have resulted in significant improvements. In 2008 there were no Honors students actively pursuing the Honors curriculum despite the fact that over 90 students were listed on the roster. As of spring 2011 there were 74 active students (11 seniors, 19 juniors, and 44 sophomores) with the expectation that 104 freshmen would matriculate in fall 2011. The program now has 185 students, including 109 freshmen.

**Advising.** Delaware State University has undertaken multiple initiatives in an effort to improve the advisement process based on several sources of data. Table 6.3 outlines the data and resulting actions in the area of advisement undertaken since 2004.

*Table 6.3: Closing the Loop in the Advisement Process*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Data Analyzed</th>
<th>Resulting Actions based on Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Retention and Graduation Rates</td>
<td>Joined Building Engagement and Attainment in Minority Students (BEAMS) national initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-2008</td>
<td>NSSE; SSI; Senior Audits</td>
<td>Provost formed Advisement Committee; Degree Audit System re-implemented; Advising and BEAMS Action Plans developed for the Retention Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-2011</td>
<td>NSSE; SSI; Senior Audits</td>
<td>Advising Handbook published; Advising Workshops each semester; Early Alert system re-vamped and automated; College of Education, Health and Public Policy set up Advisement Center base on College of Business Center; Held National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) regional conference on campus; Initiated an annual Excellence in Advisement Award for faculty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>NSSE</td>
<td>Plan to establish Advisement Center in College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences in 2012; College of Mathematics, Natural Sciences and Technology and College of Agriculture and Related Sciences in 2013-14; Update Degree audit system</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Additional improvements based on the assessment of services offered across the University include the following:

- **Library:** Based upon the results of focus group sessions conducted by the Student Government Association on topics related to academic support services and student life, the first floor lobby of the William Jason Library is being converted to a 24-hour Computer Lab.
- **Residential:** SGA focus group sessions indicated a need for more student dining options so the Conrad Dining Hall was renovated and re-opened in fall 2011.
- **Research:** Based upon a needs assessment conducted by the Administrative Council, together with the University’s expanding research portfolio, the University is currently recruiting a Vice President for Research and Sponsored Programs.
- **Information Technology:** Due to individual complaints and general survey results regarding the University’s Information Technology Division as well as system downtime and unreliability, the entire Division was outsourced to an independent information technology contractor, a leading software and technology services company.
- **Admissions:** Based on feedback, orientation programs for transfer students were created and are held throughout the year.
- **Academic Enrichment**: In support of Strategic Goals I, III, IV and IX to enhance the quality of life for all students through a holistic array of activities, programs, and events, four learning communities were developed: College Advance, SMILE, Project Success, and Project Jumpstart.

**Using the Assessment of the 2007 Strategic Plan to Inform the New Strategic Planning Process**

The University’s 2007 Strategic Plan provides a framework for the programs, initiatives, and processes that support the University’s Mission. Well-established processes related to planning and resource allocation and program development and assessment further support the University Mission. For example, the Ph.D. in Optics grew out of the Optics Center in the College of Mathematics, Natural Sciences, and Technology. Similarly, the Ph.D. in Applied Chemistry grew from the Hydrogen Storage Research Center in the same College. These programs were implemented in support of the University Mission as an 1890 land-grant institution to provide practical solutions for state and regional problems. The commitment to grow doctoral and graduate programs, as indicated in the 2007 Strategic Plan, resulted in the addition of these Ph.D. programs along with the Ph.D. in Neuroscience in the same College. Additional financial resources from the University, supplemented by federal grant funds, were dedicated to plan and establish these graduate programs. (Goals, I, II, III and IX)

The 2007 Strategic Plan Implementation Committee is charged to systematically monitor progress in achieving the nine Strategic Goals of the University and to review the implementation of new initiatives by monitoring the completion of the action items under each objective of the individual Strategic Goals. The results are routinely accessed by the President’s Administrative Council and the University Board of Trustees and are used to calibrate progress in implementing the Strategic Plan, and to develop appropriate policy initiatives to inform change in the quality of programs and services.

In addition, the University is using the assessment of the current strategic planning process to guide the development of the new strategic plan. As the new strategic plan is being developed, improvements are being made in the development of measurable goals and objectives to facilitate the monitoring of operational plans by the divisions/unit plans. The new strategic plan, and its goals and objectives, will be clearly stated and more easily measured. Working together towards accomplishing consensus goals ideally raises the vision of key participants and encourages them to reflect creatively on future directions. Further, the new strategic plan will help to set priorities as each department, program and/or unit aligns its goals with University goals. Going forward, using an open, inclusive and university-wide process, the 2013 Strategic Plan will be organized in the standard goals and objectives format. However, each objective will include strategies and success indicators that will be implemented to achieve the objective. Furthermore, these strategies and success indicators will also be assessed, as outlined in the Strategic Plan itself. This approach is the most logical and completes the cycle for achieving each Goal: Objective → Plan → Assessment → Revised Plan or Achieved Goal.

In contrast to the 2007 Strategic Plan, the new strategic plan for Delaware State University is being designed with assessment as its core component. The Board of Trustees will vote on this plan in the winter of 2013. DSU is now poised to accurately and readily assess the progress made towards realizing its institutional goals. This foresight and commitment to institutional assessment has come as a direct result of the assessment of the previous process.
**Action Items for Standard 7**

- Provide resources for the University to improve its institutionalization of data-informed decision-making including training and accountability components that should be implemented at the program and university levels in order to analyze current practice and justify change in the status quo;
- Continue to invest in presenting assessment data (other than in the College Portrait) in a form that is easily accessed and understood by various constituencies so that relevant stakeholders may easily find and interpret assessment data specific to their responsibilities and needs;

Continue to encourage all units to embrace and use the concepts of institutional effectiveness to measure outcomes and inform decision-making.