STANDARD TWO

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS AND EFFECTIVENESS
Educational Programs and their Effectiveness:

Boise State’s Story

—A SHIFTING FOCUS AND AN EMERGING PRESENCE

Until recently, Boise State University was the comprehensive state institution of higher education in the region, and we shouldered the bulk of the responsibility for post-secondary education in our community. It was our role and mission to offer an array of programs that spanned from certificates in professional-technical vocations all the way to doctoral programs in education and the sciences. In one sense, we had no choice but to be “all things to all people.”

However, effective July 1, 2009, Boise State transferred its Professional-Technical Educational (PTE) programs to the College of Western Idaho, a new community college in our region, along with responsibilities for non-credit workforce training and adult basic education. The College of Western Idaho will also take on substantial responsibility for offering developmental coursework and lower division general education academic coursework.

This transfer of our PTE function to another institution was a watershed moment for Boise State. We are now better able to focus on our vision to become a metropolitan research university of distinction, substantially increasing the (i) the number and size of our graduate programs and (ii) the capacity and sophistication of our research.

—A CAUTIOUS TRANSITION

Boise State University has a long history of adaptation and transition in response to growth in the University and to growth in and changing needs of the region and community. Our roots as a junior college provide foundational core values of access, responsiveness to the region, and a broad range of offerings.

As we move forward to achieve our vision, we fully understand our transition to increased graduate programs and research must be responsible and well planned. It is important not to lose focus on a key aspect of our mission, our undergraduate programs. Towards that end we have undertaken a major effort to enhance the undergraduate experience at Boise State.

It is also important that our expansion of graduate programs and research is done with deliberate attention to quality. We understand the need to (i) develop the mechanisms by which we ensure quality, (ii) develop and implement programs that are consistent with our goals and aspirations and that meet the needs of our community, and (iii) do so in ways that make the best possible use of the resources available to us.
Educational Programs and Effectiveness

Our response to Standard Two: Educational Programs and Effectiveness is divided into the following five sections:

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Educational Program Planning and Assessment

2.B – Educational Program Planning and Assessment. Educational program planning is based on regular and continuous assessment of programs in light of the needs of the disciplines, the fields or occupations for which programs prepare students, and other constituencies of the institution.

2.B.1 The institution’s processes for assessing its educational programs are clearly defined, encompass all of its offerings, are conducted on a regular basis, and are integrated into the overall planning and evaluation plan. These processes are consistent with the institution’s assessment plan as required by Policy 2.2 Educational Assessment. While key constituents are involved in the process, the faculty have a central role in planning and evaluating the educational programs.

2.B.2 The institution identifies and publishes the expected learning outcomes for each of its degree and certificate programs. Through regular and systematic assessment, it demonstrates that students who complete their programs, no matter where or how they are offered, have achieved these outcomes.

2.B.3 The institution provides evidence that its assessment activities lead to the improvement of teaching and learning.

To achieve our vision to become a metropolitan research university of distinction requires that we effectively assess our academic programs. One of the four destinations that defines our vision explicitly refers to assessment:

*Academic Excellence denotes high quality student focused programs that integrate theory and practice, engage students in community based learning, and are informed by meaningful assessment.*

Historical Perspective

Boise State’s most recent full review by NWCCU occurred in 1999.\(^\text{102}\) The report listed the following Recommendation:\(^\text{103}\)

“#5. The team notes that much progress has been made in the realm of outcomes assessment, particularly in the areas of evaluation of institutional effectiveness and the definition of expected student learning outcomes for the University’s academic programs and courses. Additional significant progress remains to be made in developing and adopting specific methodologies and instruments for assessing student acquisition of required learning skills and competencies.”

Boise State had its interim visit in 2004.\(^\text{104}\) The resulting report stated as an Institutional Concern the following:\(^\text{105}\)
“The 1999 Full Scale review resulted in the recommendation that continuing progress toward a viable program of outcomes assessment needed to be made. Boise State University has made considerable progress in meeting that recommendation but there is concern – that does not rise to the level of a recommendation – that the institution needs to find ways to link assessment data to learning outcomes. In all other ways, Boise State has made remarkable progress in responding to the 1999 recommendation while continuing to meet the requirements of the Standards.”

As a result of the Recommendation received in 1999 and the Concern received in 2004, NWCCU specified that a Focused Interim Evaluation would occur Spring of 2007, with the focus to be on Standard Two: Educational Program and Its Effectiveness and Standard 2B: Educational Program Planning and Assessment. In the report that resulted, the reviewer made the following points:\textsuperscript{106} \textsuperscript{107}

“The instruments and methodology to assess student acquisition of learning goals are in place, and there has been substantial progress in defining and assessing those goals and outcomes at the program and department level. These reports have often been accompanied by a change in the assessed program/course content and/or delivery method based upon the assessment data.”

“There is evidence in many areas, as verified by the Departmental Assessment Reports, of clear student learning goals, and that assessment measures are driving curricular change towards these goals.”

“The institution is encouraged to maintain the momentum it has already achieved in linking assessment data with learning outcomes. This is an ongoing process, and as more assessment cycles are completed, the results available by the 2009 Full Scale Evaluation should be even more impressive.”

As can be seen from the above quotes, we have made substantial progress in the creation of appropriate assessment tools, in linking the results of those tools to program learning goals, and in integrating assessment of programs into department and program processes. What remains are the following:

- We must continue to ensure that there is widespread use of the assessment mechanisms we have developed.
- We must continue to ensure that the system of program assessment is a sustainable and ongoing process.
Program-level Assessment: Overview and Context

As stated in the course catalog:

_Boise State University exists to educate people. Our goal is to foster an intellectual atmosphere that produces educated, literate people—people knowledgeable of public affairs, committed to lifelong learning, and capable of creative problem solving. As a student at Boise State University, you have an opportunity to receive an education that will prepare you not only for employment and career advancement, but also for participation in society as an active, informed citizen._

This statement puts forth general outcomes we expect of our students, and we facilitate the achievement of those objectives by the way in which we fashion the academic careers that students will pursue while they are our students.

In our view, an academic career can be divided into three broad areas:

- The academic degree program pursued by a student comprises the courses offered by the major department and, in many cases, a set of foundational courses offered by other departments, such as chemistry for nursing majors. The academic program will be the focus of the remainder of this section of the self study.
- The general education curriculum, which was addressed in our response to Standards 2A and 2C.
- Co-curricular components of an academic career, which are addressed in our response to Standard 3.

In order for a student pursuing an academic degree to be successful at achieving the general outcomes listed above, the student must successfully complete the program, and the program must be relevant and effective. The following are the ways in which we try to ensure that students complete their programs and that our programs are relevant and effective.

- For a student to successfully complete a degree program, that student must be retained by the University and must progress in a timely fashion through the degree program. We pay close attention to the University’s retention and graduation rates, and we have taken substantial actions to increase both. In response to lower-than-desired retention and graduation rates, we created a Freshman Success Task Force that was charged with addressing the low retention rate. See the Undergraduate Programs section above for a full description.
• For a program to be relevant, it must fulfill the needs of the student and of society. We create conditions that facilitate our ability to achieve that relevance by:
  o Evaluating the relevance of and need for new programs during the planning and approval processes for new programs (see Standards 2A, 2C, and 2D).
  o Requiring departments and external reviewers to carefully examine, during the Periodic Review process, (i) the processes by which departments create program learning goals and (ii) the contribution that departmental programs make to the University and to the community.

• For a program to be effective, students must successfully achieve the learning goals of the program. We create conditions for effective programs by having processes that:
  o Evaluate the quality of the structure and content of the curricula of proposed new programs and the quality of infrastructural support for those new programs during program planning and approval stages (see Standards 2A, 2C, and 2D) and through Periodic Review of Academic Programs.
  o Evaluate the quality of instruction by our faculty members and facilitate the improvement of that instruction through development opportunities (see Standard 4A).
  o Assess the attainment of program learning goals by students, and make improvements to our programs based on the results of those assessments. This process of assessment and improvement of academic programs will be the subject of the remainder of this section of the self study, as described in the following paragraph.

First, we give an inventory of the methods used by departments to assess whether or not students are achieving the learning goals of the departments’ academic programs. Second, we give a comprehensive treatment of our framework of learning, assessment, and program improvement. Figure 2.11 shows the way in which four key tools are used to strengthen and reinforce that framework: Department Assessment Reports (DAR), Periodic Review (PR), Curriculum Maps (CM), and the Annual Planning and Budget Process (APBP).
Assessment of Student Achievement of Program Learning Goals: Methods used by Departments

Departments use a diversity of methods to assess whether or not students are achieving the learning goals of their academic programs. The following table (Table 2.1) depicts which departments use what methods (information from the 2008 Qualtrics® survey and DARs).

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<th>Annual student satisfaction surveys</th>
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<th>Student proficiency</th>
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*Sources of information: Q = 2008 Qualtrics® Survey to department chairs; D = Department Assessment Reports
In the remainder of our response to Standard 2.B (pp 60 – 83), we describe the structures and processes by which we ensure that:

- Learning objectives and the processes of their assessment are kept current and revised as needed.
- The results of assessment are used to improve programs.
- The processes of assessment and improvement are now used and will be used in a sustained fashion in the future.

We also describe the evidence that indicates our success in maintaining assessment and improvement processes.
Evaluating and Sustaining Program-level Assessment: Key Structures and Processes

In this section we describe those structures and processes that we regard as key to the implementation, sustainment, and evaluation of our assessment-to-improvement program. Although described separately, there is substantial overlap and interplay among the elements and collectively they provide a solid framework for evaluation and assessment. The elements include Department Assessment Reports, Curriculum Maps, Periodic Review of Academic Departments, Core Curriculum assessment, Annual Planning and Budget Process, surveys and interviews to ascertain progress, and specialized program accreditation. A recent history of implementation of these tools follows this section.

—DEPARTMENT ASSESSMENT REPORTS

Each department is required to submit a Department Assessment Report (DAR) for each separate degree program it offers, so that the Department of Biological Sciences, for example, prepared five such reports: BS Biology; BS Biology, Secondary Education; MA Biology; MS Biology; and MS Raptor Biology. The format of the DAR is specified in a template supplied by the Provost’s Office.108

In each DAR, the department presents:

- A list of 3 to 10 student learning goals for the program,
- A list of the assessment measures used to determine how well students are meeting those goals,
- A mapping of assessment measures to learning goals,
- A description of how the information will be used,
- And the answers to three questions:
  - What did the assessment results tell you?
  - What are some examples of changes made over the last two years based on assessment findings?
  - What recommendations do you have for improving assessment processes?

At the time of the initial creation of DARs, we made extensive use of Dr. Barbara Walvoord, a nationally recognized expert in program assessment. She was brought to campus in both Fall 2005 and Spring 2006 to give a series of workshops and one-on-one consultations for department chairs, deans, and the University Core Curriculum Committee.

108 DAR template
DARs serve several purposes:

- They indicate the tools used to assess whether students have achieved the program learning goals and report on that achievement.
- They provide a vehicle for publicly sharing the program learning goals and assessment tools for each of our programs, as is now done on a website.\(^{109}\)
- They provide reviewers with a relatively uniform format that gives them a consolidated view of the assessment-to-improvement process for each program, pulling together in one document the program goals, assessment tools, results, and actions.
- Their construction and revision provide the faculty with an impetus for examination of learning goals and assessment tools, for discussion of assessment results, and for development of actions that should be taken in response to those assessment results.
- They provide a focus for centralized support such as the development of tools for evaluating assessment processes (e.g., rubrics and curriculum maps).

To help departments improve the effectiveness of their DARs, we developed a rubric that departments use to “score” the various components of their DARs.\(^{110}\)

One action that remains to be undertaken is to ensure up front that all new programs have in place a set of program learning goals and a set of tools by which to assess success of students in attaining those goals. We plan to include this requirement in the procedures for creating new programs.

We recognize that DARs should not be the sole indication of University-wide progress in implementing a comprehensive and sustained assessment-to-improvement program. It is worth noting that several of our departments had created excellent assessment-to-improvement programs prior to the requirement that all programs have DARs. If a department were to create a DAR solely to fulfill a requirement, there is no reason to believe that the program assessment process represented in the DAR would be effective or sustainable.

As described above, our NWCCU focused visit left us with the need to achieve widespread and sustainable use of assessment-to-improvement processes. We regard creating a sustainable system as substantially more challenging, because it requires the creation of an assessment process that is initiated, supported, and organized centrally while at the same time grassroots derived and internally motivated. Although the initial implementation plan for DAR
required annual revisions, we opted to relax the top-down, external motivation of this requirement and instead, as is described in the following sections, to (i) rely heavily on the revised Periodic Review process to reinforce and evaluate department assessment processes, (ii) provide support to help academic departments develop their assessment processes, and (iii) use surveys and interviews to assess progress in a way designed to provide insights on the degree to which our processes have truly taken root. Interviews, in particular, are also more likely to spur new actions rather than causing a defensive reaction. This approach will lead to an environment conducive to sustainable assessment.

—CURRICULUM MAPS

A Curriculum Map explicitly ties the required coursework of a program to the program learning goals. A well-constructed curriculum will be shown by a curriculum map to (i) give comprehensive coverage to each of the program goals, (ii) make use of each of the required courses without excessive redundancy, and (iii) have a sequencing of courses that supports program goals.

Use of a curriculum map by a department can serve four purposes:

• During the creation of a new program, a curriculum map can help ensure that the program learning goals are well addressed by elements of the curriculum.

• Examination of a curriculum map of an existing program can serve to point up weaknesses in the curriculum for that program or needs for modification of the program learning goals.

• If assessment tools for each course indicate that students are doing well, then this may serve as one demonstration that students are achieving the desired outcomes.

• If assessment tools indicate that students are not doing well at achieving a particular learning goal, then a curriculum map can help to diagnose the cause of the problem (e.g., lack of depth of coursework contributing to that goal) and to design a remedy.

To facilitate their efforts in constructing curriculum maps, department chairs were supplied with (i) a “tip sheet” designed to illustrate how curriculum maps work and how they may be interpreted, (ii) a set of draft curriculum maps for each of their programs, with the program goals and the curriculum already entered into the matrix, and (iii) a worksheet for individual faculty members to fill out for individual programs providing information to consolidate onto the information map. The staff within Institutional Assessment Analysis and Reporting and the staff in the Center for Teaching and Learning supported this process.
PERIODIC REVIEW OF ACADEMIC DEPARTMENTS

During a two-year hiatus (2006-2008), the process of “Program Review” was revised by a committee made up of faculty and administrators in the following ways and for the following reasons:

• The process was renamed “Periodic Review of Academic Departments” to reflect that the review is not simply of the academic programs within a department, but of the department as a whole. The emphasis on the department instead of the program broadens the focus of the review to include, among other things, service courses and research.

• To give the opportunity for comprehensive review of graduate programs, an entire section is now devoted to those programs. Previously the emphasis was nearly entirely on undergraduate program.

• There was little emphasis on the service courses, including general education courses, provided to other departments. So as to emphasize the importance of that coursework, an entire section is now devoted to service courses.

• To give the opportunity for comprehensive review of research and creative activity, an entire section is now devoted to that subject. Previously there was little emphasis on research and creative activity.

• Previously, departments subject to specialized accreditation were not required to undergo program review. However, to ensure the review of all aspects of departmental operations that we deem important, those departments are now subject to Periodic Review.

With respect to the assessment of program learning goals and the use of assessment results to create improvements in curriculum, the primary role of Periodic Review of Academic Departments is one of reinforcement of the processes of creation and sustainment. The recent revision of the Periodic Review process led to the inclusion of two sets of queries relevant to the assessment of academic programs.

The first set is in one sense a reiteration of the DAR, but differs in that it requires that departments address, for each of their academic programs, a standard but broad set of measures of student success and program effectiveness, including: (i) how well the program prepares students to move to the next phase of their lives, (ii) how well students perform on standardized exams, and (iii) how well students are retained in the program and able to graduate from the program.
The second set of queries determines the degree to which departments have in place the structures, processes, and resources that are known to facilitate development of a successful program; departments are asked to: (i) describe and evaluate the mechanisms they have in place to facilitate assessment and continuous improvement of their programs, (ii) describe how they ensure that their programs are relevant to the needs of their students and to the needs of society, and (iii) describe the mechanisms they use to ensure that students receive high quality instruction in high quality coursework.

External reviewers are asked to evaluate departments on the same criteria. The departmental and reviewer responses to the queries provide an assessment of whether program assessment processes are working well and therefore whether changes are called for in the departments under review. In addition, the queries themselves become a set of guidelines for expected behavior, both in terms of assessment processes and in terms of the sustainability of those processes.

If a department is found to be lacking in its system for assessment, it will be expected to develop, as part of an action plan, the needed improvements to the assessment process. Progress in implementing those changes will be monitored via progress reports as specified in the Periodic Review process.

During the charter year of the revised system (2008-09) seven departments (Communication, Instructional & Performance Technology, Kinesiology, Mathematics, Respiratory Care, Sociology, and Theatre Arts) prepared their self studies. During that year, bi-weekly meetings were held with the Associate Vice President for Academic Planning, to answer questions, to discuss queries in the self study guidelines, to discuss overall strategies for completing the self study, and to discuss data that was provided. Personnel from Institutional Analysis, Assessment, and Reporting (IAAR) were charged with providing an extensive array of analyses to support the self studies, and those personnel often attended the bi-weekly meetings.

—CORE CURRICULUM ASSESSMENT PROCESS

Our “Core Curriculum” constitutes the bulk of our general education curriculum, and the process by which it is assessed is described extensively in our response to Standards 2A and 2C Undergraduate Programs. However, that description is from the standpoint of assessing general University-wide outcomes. We have found, however, that from the standpoint of the departments, the process of assessing Core Curriculum coursework has the potential to provide valuable assessment information on courses that are often key to the departments’ programs.
As mentioned earlier in this Standard, the Core and related assessment process are undergoing substantial revision, but suffice it to say here that every five years a department is charged with assessing the Core courses it offers. Therefore, by its very existence, the assessment of Core Curriculum reinforces assessment of departmental courses. Because Periodic Review now includes a comprehensive evaluation of a department’s Core Curriculum contributions, there is additional reinforcement of the assessment process.

—ANNUAL PLANNING AND BUDGET PROCESS

The Annual Budget and Planning Process is described in detail in our response to Standard 1. The process is important to program assessment-to-improvement because it is the place where:

• The results of the program assessment process have direct impact on budget decisions.

• Departments describe their strategic planning activities, which often involve the development of new academic programs.114

• Departments describe their accomplishments over the last several years, including measures used to assess progress. Sometimes those accomplishments include creation or modification of academic programs.

• Departments are supplied with extensive data on departmental functions, including a number that have direct bearing on program success:
  o Rate of retention within the major gives broad-scale indication of the satisfaction of students with the program.
  o The percent of seniors graduating within a year indicates the ability of students to move through a department’s programs in a timely manner.
  o Numbers of faculty members, lecturers, and students, and budget information indicate, for example, size and productivity of the department.

• Departments make requests for new funds and describe reallocations of existing funds. Departments must justify their requests with evidence and must describe what the proposed initiative will accomplish and how they will assess success of the initiative. These initiatives may include the improvements that are proposed as a result of program assessment data.

—SURVEYS AND INTERVIEWS TO ASCERTAIN PROGRESS

We continually are monitoring implementation of assessment activities and their effectiveness via surveys and interviews. In Spring of
2007, an email survey was conducted in which department chairs were asked about their assessment activities. They were also asked to share examples of changes they had made to their programs in response to assessment results. A full description of the survey and our results is contained in our self study for the focused visit prepared in Spring 2007.\textsuperscript{115}

In Spring of 2008, a Qualtrics\textsuperscript{®} survey was conducted to again quantify the level, type, and frequency of activity within departments. Departments were asked to report the manner and frequency of conversations and actions related to program assessment.\textsuperscript{116}

In spring of 2009, interviews of department chairs were conducted. The data from the 2008 Qualtrics\textsuperscript{®} survey indicated that departments were engaged in assessment activities and had made changes in response to assessment results. We opted to conduct interviews with a sample of department chairs as a way of gathering information not extractable with surveys. Interviews (i) situated department responses into an appropriate context (e.g., specialized accreditation, faculty size, or program offerings), (ii) helped us to understand the ways in which specific curriculum changes were developed and implemented, and (iii) illuminated the perceptions of the department chairs regarding the supports and barriers to assessment that are key in addressing the sustainability of the processes.

Interviews of roughly an hour each were conducted with seven department chairs, and two other department chairs were interviewed less intensively but submitted written material. Those nine departments represent 20% of the 45 academic departments at Boise State. Two of the chairs represent departments subject to specialized accreditation, and we were therefore fortunate to gain substantial information about the interdigitation of specialized accreditation and program assessment. One department was in the midst of preparing a self study for Periodic Review, and we were therefore able to gain an understanding of the way in which Periodic Review reinforces a department’s assessment program.

The interviews covered the following subjects: (i) Do the program learning goals do a good job of capturing what is important that students learn in the program? (ii) What progress has been made in developing a curriculum map, and what utility has been gained by using the map? (iii) What changes have been made to the program in response to assessment results? (iv) What documentation do you have of those changes? (v) What have you found to be barriers to your assessment and program improvement efforts and what have you found to support and facilitate those efforts?

\textsuperscript{115} Self Study for focused visit

\textsuperscript{116} Qualtrics survey
During summer of 2009 another Qualtrics® survey was conducted to give an indication of the progress we have made in ensuring widespread and sustained use of assessment processes. Departments were asked about a number of assessment related items, including the adequacy of program learning goals, the tools used in assessing student achievement, the overall level of success of students in achieving learning goals, and the degree to which the department has a culture of assessment.

—SPECIALIZED ACCREDITATION

We recognize that successful reviews by specialized accrediting agencies are by no means sufficient as sole evidence of compliance with Standard 2B. However, in general, all specialized accreditation agencies put substantial emphasis on achievement of learning goals and most emphasize assessment of achievement of learning goals. Therefore, specialized accreditation reviews provide important information. Thirty of our academic departments have one or more programs that have specialized accreditation. During the last three years, the following accreditation visits have occurred.

2006-07
• Construction Management
• Computer Science undergraduate program
• Materials Science and Engineering undergraduate program

2007-08
• Counselor Education
• Kinesiology for athletic training programs
• Public Policy and Administration
• Radiologic Sciences (part)

2008-09
• All departments of the College of Education
  (excluding Kinesiology)
• Radiologic Sciences (part)

Program-level Assessment: A Recent History of Implementation

The following is a timeline designed to give an overview of the implementation of the various structures and mechanisms described below, as well as other relevant events.
Spring 2005
• Pilot implementation of Core Curriculum evaluation.

Spring 2006
• The NWCCU interim visit illuminated weaknesses in our assessment program. Boise State undertook a centrally-organized effort which required that each academic department create a DAR for each academic program using a specified format.
• The Provost’s Office facilitated the development of DARs by departments by bringing in a nationally known assessment figure, Dr. Barbara Walvoord, to give a series of workshops for deans, department chairs, and members of the Core Curriculum Committee.118

Fall 2006
• The guidelines and process of “Program Review” of academic departments had not been revised since the beginning of the process in 1995. Therefore, a two-year hiatus was implemented, during which the guidelines and process were completely revised to, among other things, (i) better align with NWCCU standards and (ii) include comprehensive analysis of graduate programs and of service coursework.
• A report was developed for Core Curriculum Assessment pilot.
• During the first year of its existence, the Center for Teaching and Learning emphasized assessment of learning.

Spring 2007
• Department chairs were surveyed via email to assess the level to which they had been regularly assessing program learning goals and acting on those assessment results.
• Faculty Senate approved revised Core Curriculum Assessment Policy.
• NWCCU conducted a focused visit in April 2007, with emphasis on Standard 2B noting that “assessment has become an integral part of departmental program processes…” (Interim Visit Report119).
• A revised Annual Planning and Budgeting Process was created with extensive data sets going to academic colleges and departments.

Fall 2007
• Revised Core Curriculum assessment was fully implemented.
• A committee of faculty members and administrators revised Periodic Review process and guidelines.

118 Information on Walvoord workshops
119 Focused visit report
Spring 2008
- Colleges and departments discussed DARs, curriculum maps, and rubrics for evaluation of program learning goals.
- “How to” for curriculum maps was created and distributed.
- To assess compliance issues, Core Curriculum Assessment Policy was revised to include additional compliance expectations and processes.
- Annual Planning and Budget process occurred.
- Department retreats and meetings focused on assessment, facilitated by the Center for Teaching and Learning and/or in consultation with CTL staff.

Fall 2008
- Departments submitted revised learning goals and assessment plans (if applicable) prior to their being posted online.
- Qualtrics® survey of department chairs evaluated level of activity in assessment of programs.
- Seven departments (comprising the first cohort under new Periodic Review guidelines) began self study process.

Spring 2009
- Interviews to evaluate the status of program assessment were conducted in 8 representative departments.
- Annual Planning and Budget Process occurred with an emphasis on budget reductions.
- Core Reform Task Force was created and began deliberations on major conceptual revision to Core Curriculum.

Summer 2009
- Qualtrics® survey to department chairs evaluated level of activity in assessment of programs.
- Preliminary report submitted by the Core Reform Task Force.

Fall 2009
- External reviews to occur for first cohort of departments under new Periodic Review guidelines.
- NWCCU review team visits to occur October 12-14.
- Second cohort (of eleven departments) to begin Periodic Review self study.
Program-level Assessment: Support Given to Departments

In addition to the support to departments described in the previous section (e.g., in developing DARs, in constructing curriculum maps, and in preparing Periodic Review self studies), there are two entities that are key to supporting departments in their efforts to assess their programs.

—THE CENTER FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING (CTL)

The CTL is described in the faculty development section of our response to Standard 4A.

The CTL offers support focused on teaching to faculty and departments on campus. Through workshops and consultations with faculty, the CTL supports the effective use of both formative and summative assessment of student learning within faculty members’ courses. These assessment measures can then be used to support departmental/program assessment efforts.

Examples of CTL support of assessment of student learning are:

- **Workshops**
  - Specific workshops (e.g., “Writing Exams that Challenge Students...Moving Beyond Knowledge Recall,” “Classroom Assessment Techniques,” “Designing Courses for Significant Learning”)
  - Components within other workshops (e.g., “Just Use Your Brain!: How to Help Students to Think Critically”); Upcoming for August 2009: “Teaching in the Core”

- **Institutes**
  - Summer 2009 Course Design Institute had a significant component focused on assessment
  - Summer 2008 and 2009 Writing Across the Curriculum Institutes had a significant focus on assessment of and through writing

- **Individual Faculty Consultations**
  - Many faculty consultations either are focused on how to assess student learning in a particular area, or have assessment as a component of the consultation. Support is tailored to the individual faculty member

- **Boise State Teaching Scholars (Faculty Learning Communities)**
  - Each of the six learning communities offered by the CTL so far included discussions about how to assess student learning

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120 CTL 2008-2009 Annual Report
In addition to these efforts focused on faculty, the CTL has recently consulted with two department chairs, helping them to write assessable program level outcomes or to find examples of high quality assessment plans in their disciplines from other institutions. Finally, CTL staff has assisted in the development of tools for use by departments/program (e.g., process for developing a curriculum map, rubrics for assessment of DARs).

—INSTITUTIONAL ANALYSIS, ASSESSMENT, AND REPORTING (IAAR)

IAAR is described in more detail in our response to Standard 1B. IAAR provides support for departmental processes of assessment in the following ways:

- IAAR administers several of the surveys that are used by departments in their assessment of program learning goals. Those surveys include the graduating student survey, the alumni survey, and the advising survey. Results are provided directly to departments.\textsuperscript{121}

- IAAR is available to run customized queries to provide departments with information that they may need regarding students and their success in courses. As an example, the Department of Biological Sciences had IAAR do an analysis that linked success in their introductory majors course with successful completion of mathematics courses.

- IAAR is responsible for the implementation and maintenance of the iStrategy Data Warehouse, and for the training of department chairs, staff members, and other administrators in its use. Training occurred during Spring 2009 in 15 sessions with a total of 196 participants. A number of reports have been designed to answer specific questions commonly posed by department chairs and others. Already, department chairs are finding the Data Warehouse to be very useful in answering questions about the students in their departments, either the already-developed reports or developing their own ad hoc queries. As the system becomes more widely used, IAAR will continue to develop additional reports to replace ad hoc queries that are run repeatedly.\textsuperscript{122}

- IAAR is responsible for providing much of the data that is used in the Periodic Review process. Much of that data pertains to the success of students in departmental programs.\textsuperscript{123}

- IAAR is responsible for providing to deans data that supports the Annual Planning and Budgeting process.\textsuperscript{124}
Program-level Assessment: Evidence of Assessment, Student Learning, Program Improvement, and Sustainability

Standard 2B requests evidence that (i) programs assess student learning, (ii) students achieve program learning goals and (iii) we use evidence from assessment processes to improve our educational programs. We add a fourth key component: assessment and improvement processes must be widespread and sustained over the long term.

—EVIDENCE OF WIDESPREAD ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING

An examination of Table 2.1 (above) reveals that each of our departments uses a diversity of tools to assess student achievement of program learning goals. Those tools include alumni surveys, performances, capstone courses, course assignments and exams, culminating projects, employment, employer satisfaction surveys, graduation rates, interviews, portfolios, student evaluations, and results of professional examinations.

The use of those tools are described in the DARs that departments have created for each of their programs. DARs also map those assessment tools to the program learning goals. The first two sections of DARs (learning goals and assessment plan) for each program are posted on the Provost’s website.

—EVIDENCE OF STUDENT LEARNING

In this section we describe evidence that students are achieving learning goals. Note that the actual evidence of attainment of learning goals resides with the departments. The evidence is as follows:

1. DARs pose the question, “What do your assessment results tell you?” The answers indicate substantial evidence that students have achieved the program learning goals. For example:
   a. Standardized test scores in Biology, Management, Modern Languages, Elementary and Secondary Education, Math, Nursing, Respiratory Care are in at least the top 75% percentile and most in the 80% and above.
   b. In some cases, students cannot progress within their program without demonstrating the intended compe-

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125 DARs for all programs
126 Website for posted DARs
tencies identified for the program (e.g., Criminal Justice and Psychology).

c. In many cases, the final projects are reviewed and selected for presentation at national conferences (Chemistry and Biochemistry, Biological Sciences, Geosciences, Physics, Electrical and Computer Engineering).

d. In theater, dance, music, and art, in juried shows and critiqued recitals, students demonstrate skills indicating they are ready for their profession or for graduate school.

2. In the Qualtrics® survey of Summer 2009, departments were asked, “On a scale of 1-5, give an overall rating of the success of your students: do they achieve the learning goals of your program(s)? 1 = Student not successful at reaching program learning goals; 3 = Students moderately successful; some successful, some are not; 5 = Students generally highly successful at reaching program learning goals. No departments responded with a ‘1’ or a ‘2’ and most had ‘4’ or ‘5’ (15% responded with a ‘3’; 51% with a ‘4’; and 34% with a ‘5’).

3. Seven departments developed Periodic Review self studies during the 2008-09 year, in which they provided extensive answers to several questions about student success in their programs. The full answers to those questions may be found in the departmental self studies.127

4. As noted above, although we recognize that successful reviews by specialized accrediting agencies cannot be the sole evidence of student learning, successful achievement of specialized accreditation is generally a solid indicator that graduates of those programs are successfully achieving program learning goals. In the evidence room are reports from our most recent specialized accreditation reviews.128

---EVIDENCE OF USE OF ASSESSMENT RESULTS TO IMPROVE PROGRAMS

Understandably, not all students achieve at the desired levels. Ideally, assessments will detect any lower than desired achievement, and departments will act on those results by making improvements to their programs.

In this section, we present evidence that departments use assessment information to make improvements in their programs. It should be noted that, in some cases, changes were made in response
to information on student success in achieving learning goals. In other cases, changes were made in a proactive fashion based on, for example, discoveries made while mapping curriculum to program learning goals.

Evidence is as follows:

1. Thirty-nine of our departments out of forty-four responded to the Spring 2008 Qualtrics® survey regarding their progress in implementing program assessment, and reported on their recent assessment activity. The results included the following:
   a. 35 of the 39 (90%) responding departments had analyzed assessment results and/or planned actions and/or changed curriculum and/or changed learning goals.
   b. 26 departments (67%) had made changes in program requirements or other curriculum changes.
   c. 17 departments (44%) had developed curriculum maps, and another 17 were planning to create one soon.

2. Of the 41 departments responding to the Summer 2009 Qualtrics® survey regarding their progress in implementing program assessment, 98% reported making plans or taking action in response to assessment results during the last two years (compared to 89% in 2008). More specifically:
   a. 71% have made changes to content and/or pedagogy.
   b. 64% have made changes to their curricula.
   c. 57% have made changes to assessment tools.
   d. 41% have revised program learning goals.

3. All nine of the departments interviewed during Spring of 2009 had made changes and/or are planning changes to their curricula in response to assessment results and/or in response to analysis of curriculum maps. Those changes included the following examples:
   a. Accountancy learned from their advisory board that a content area (audit process) needed to be added to their curriculum and it was. They also found, through an examination of their curriculum maps, that students were not linking computer spreadsheet skills to their accounting coursework. The department now requires excel spreadsheet coursework as co-requisite with ACCT 205 thereby increasing the likelihood of achieving the desired learning outcomes.
b. Anthropology developed a curriculum map to focus their annual assessment activities, refined their tools for assessment, and made improvements in the curriculum.

c. Biological Sciences found that quantitative skills were weak and so they are developing math learning modules to insert into their second semester majors course.

d. Community and Environmental Health reviewed the data from the graduating student survey and learned that students perceived a need for more experiential learning opportunities. In addition, their community partners in the field expressed a need for students to have greater preparation for work environment experiences. In response, the department now includes Service-Learning experience in some of its courses.

e. Criminal Justice found when mapping their course offerings onto their program learning goals that students may not have had a course from a full-time faculty until several semesters in the major courses. To expose early-career students to experienced faculty members and to build relationships between students and faculty members, the department adjusted teaching loads so that the full-time faculty increasingly taught the lower division courses and adjunct instructors were hired for specialty areas related to their practical experiences.

f. History moved their introductory majors course to the sophomore year and incorporated world history into the curriculum in response to recommendations in a previous Program Review.

g. Kinesiology found through an examination of curriculum maps that there is a disconnect between the program learning goals previously published in the DARs, the learning goals that the faculty now thinks are important, and the courses that are intended to support those learning goals. A retreat will focus on changes to the curriculum in response to these realizations.

h. Philosophy found substantial content variation among sections of their first semester course that corresponded to whether or not the section was oriented towards majors. They are now planning distinct courses for majors and non-majors.
4. The seven departments that underwent Periodic Review self studies during the 2008-09 year answered several questions about their use of assessment data as a basis for program improvement. Those answers may be found in those departmental self studies.129

5. Core curriculum: In several cases, the Core course being assessed is required of the major/academic program. Therefore, any changes to the Core course as a result of the review process will affect the department program as well.

   a. The chair of Anthropology “plans to hold department level discussions about core vs. disciplinary objectives and the Core assessment program, especially in the context of majors’ assessment.”

   b. The chair of Curriculum and Instruction plans to emphasize “data analysis and logic and the use of and interpretation of results” in ED-CIFS 201 because the Core assessment reported that students in this area demonstrated the smallest increase in knowledge. Because this course is required of all education majors, changes to address this learning outcome should affect the learning in subsequent courses and, ultimately, in the program.130

   c. Modern Languages and Literatures faculty members plan to discuss learning outcomes in their core courses, and then compare those outcomes with departmental outcomes and identify methods for improvement.

—EVIDENCE OF SUSTAINABILITY

Research131 cites two categories of actions that will facilitate sustained faculty engagement, and therefore a sustained assessment system: make it count (e.g., by tying it to budget decisions) and make it easy (e.g., by providing support and tools).

Here we expand on those categories and use three questions to organize our evidence of sustainability:

- Does assessment “matter” at Boise State?
- Do we provide the support structures that have been found to facilitate sustainability?
- Do people engage in the behaviors and have the attitudes that demonstrate the existence of a “culture” in which assessment is valued and practiced? In particular, does that behavior occur as a result of internal motivation as opposed to external pres-
sure? Such behavior will tend to occur when it “matters” to the department and to the individual. That is, will it occur when faculty members (i) believe that the quality of their programs is important and (ii) believe that assessment is a good way to achieve high quality?

These questions are used to organize the evidence as to whether, at Boise State University, the departmental assessment of program effectiveness is a sustained and sustainable process. Note that there is substantial overlap among these categories: many of the examples listed could count several places.

Does program assessment “matter” at Boise State?

1. As described at the beginning of this section, one of the four “destinations” that defines our vision of becoming a metropolitan research university of distinction explicitly refers to assessment: “Academic Excellence denotes high quality student focused programs that integrate theory and practice, engage students in community based learning, and are informed by meaningful assessment” (emphasis added).

2. In its evaluation of President Kustra, the SBOE places substantial emphasis on student achievement. Similarly, in the evaluation of Provost Andrews by President Kustra, there is substantial emphasis on student achievement.

3. Our revision of the mathematics curriculum is closely intertwined with assessment. Assessment results led to a number of changes including funding for a new Director of Developmental Math and new special lecturers. Subsequent assessment indicates that the changes we have made are effective.

4. The University is planning to invest >$100k of permanent funding to reform of the Core curriculum and another >$400k of one-time funding in course redesign. In both cases, the investments will only be made in proposals that include substantive assessment regimes.

5. The process of Periodic Review involves the comprehensive evaluation of academic programs in the department and results in an action plan that is agreed to by the department, the dean, and the Provost. In addition, we invest in bringing in two external reviewers for each Periodic Review of a department so as to gain their additional expertise and impartial perspective.
In the Annual Planning and Budgeting Process, budget requests regarding academic programs must include a plan for assessing the impact of the program change.

There are a number of examples in which fundraising case statements describe scholarships, faculty positions, and facilities that are linked to student learning needs.\textsuperscript{132}

As part of the process of their evaluation by the Provost, college deans were required to submit an enrollment management plan that also addresses student retention and success.

The President and the Provost welcome input from students, parents, community members, and employers, and never hesitate to follow up on complaints and concerns with deans and department chairs.

\textbf{Do we provide the support structures that have been found to facilitate sustainability, and are those structures used?}

1. The University has made substantial investments in the support structures and personnel (e.g., IAAR, CTL, data warehouse) described above.

2. IAAR provides departments with substantial information about program effectiveness. Department chairs reported that they make use of that information to assess their programs and guide improvements. For example, the Department of English requested data on success of students in several variations of their developmental English sequence, and modified the curriculum as a result.

3. CTL provides workshops in assessment and supports the development of assessment tools. The workshops are well-attended: during 2008-09, 26 workshop sessions were offered on 11 assessment-related topics, with a total attendance of 222.

4. We provide support in many other ways, as described above, e.g., help with curriculum mapping, bi-weekly meetings to facilitate Periodic Review, etc.

5. We have created our assessment-related structures (DARs, Periodic Review, Core Curriculum Assessment, and the Annual Planning and Budget Process) so that they are mutually reinforcing. In particular, the Periodic Review process requires that departments evaluate the processes by which they assess and improve their programs.

\textsuperscript{132} College case statements
6. In our processes of DAR and Periodic Review, we have balanced standardization and autonomy. We standardize in broad terms the questions to be asked to help ensure that we can evaluate the assessment process. However, we give departments substantial autonomy in the way questions are addressed, in the assessment tools used, and in the nature of the evidence provided. We thereby take into account the peculiarities of departments and help ensure buy-in by departments. Therefore, the Department of Theatre Arts and the Department of Mathematics addressed their assessment of learning goals in very different ways in their Periodic Review self studies.

Do people engage in the behaviors and have the attitudes that demonstrate the existence of a “culture” in which assessment is valued?

1. In the spring 2008 Qualtrics® survey, 74% percent of department chairs reported that their faculty had reviewed their program learning outcomes in the past year, and 87% indicated that faculty members and department chairs are equally responsible for “gathering, processing, and appraising assessment information.” Together these results indicate that the process is a shared responsibility, not simply one undertaken by the department chair to fulfill a central mandate.

2. There are a number of indications that assessment and program improvement have become part of the culture of departments.

   a. A number of departments reported that assessment is the topic of informal conversations among faculty members and with the department chair.

   b. Six of the seven department chairs participating in in-depth interviews mentioned using institution-alized mechanisms for gathering data (e.g., data warehouse), depositing information (e.g., Digital Measures) and/or support for responding to data, (e.g., curriculum mapping).

   c. For several of department chairs interviewed, discussions of the assessment of program goals was or will be the focus of spring or fall retreats.

   d. A number of examples have come forth in which faculty members are recognized for expertise in assessment, e.g., English faculty members for their expertise in portfolios.
e. There has been very little “push back” from departments and faculty members regarding assessment and program improvement.

3. Departments are not stopping after one turn of the assessment cycle, but are, in some cases, assessing, making changes, and then reassessing. For example:

a. In 2006, in an attempt to ensure that students were prepared for upper level courses and to monitor entrance into their major, the Department of Criminal Justice instituted a requirement that students need to earn at least a B- in their lower level Criminal Justice courses to be able to enroll in an upper division course. However, the department found, upon assessment of enrollment patterns and GPAs, that an unintended outcome was that more students were retaking the courses to raise their grades, that more students were appealing the need to take prerequisites, and there had been no substantial change in student preparation. The B- prerequisite for upper division courses was removed in 2008.

b. In 2005 we revised our developmental mathematics courses based on poor performance by many of students. In 2007 we initiated a new set of revisions based on assessment information indicating continued poor performance by too many students.

c. The Department of English assesses and revises its English composition courses on a yearly basis.

4. In a number of cases, departments and colleges have gone above and beyond the requirements of specialized accreditation. For example,

a. The College of Business and Economics has adopted a software package to assess their business core (as required by their accreditors) but have expanded that mechanism to look at program specific learning goals as well.

b. The College of Engineering made use of a very broad definition of their accreditor’s requirement that students attain learning outcomes: instead of focusing only on coursework, they took additional actions such as creating learning communities.

5. The large amount of assessment activity noted above indicates that the behavior was largely internally motivated,
given that departments were not required centrally to update their DARs or otherwise pressured to comply.

6. The 2009 Qualtrics® survey asked department chairs whether they agreed or disagreed with four statements regarding values and behaviors having to do with assessment. Their responses, depicted in Table 2.2, indicate in general a strong culture of assessment in our departments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Use responses to the following statements to rate the degree to which you perceive your department to have a &quot;culture of assessment.&quot;”</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assessment occurs because our faculty members are genuinely interested in understanding what affects student learning</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment is often the subject of informal conversations among faculty members</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We often find ourselves using data as a foundation for making small and large changes to program structure, curriculum, and/or pedagogy (i.e., closing the loop)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We believe department assessment processes are essential to create and maintain high quality programs</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7. Faculty members concerned with the Core have taken key actions:

a. The Core Curriculum Committee, a standing committee of the Faculty Senate, changed the Core policy to increase compliance with reporting requirements, thereby holding peers accountable for expected behaviors.

b. The Core Reform Task Force has undertaken an assessment and complete examination of our Core Curriculum, including the development of new learning objectives and assessment mechanisms. In addition, the revised Core will be structured to recognize the meshing between University-level learning goals and the learning goals of programs.
Commendations, Recommendations, and Action Plan

—COMMENDATIONS:

• The University has achieved widespread use of program assessment processes and those processes are being used to create changes in program curricula. In addition, there is substantial evidence of the behaviors and attitudes that are indicative of sustained and internally-motivated activity.

• The University has done an excellent job of creating assessment mechanisms that are mutually reinforcing as opposed to duplicative. Especially important is the integration of program assessment and improvement into the Periodic Review process.

• We have provided a wide range of solid support mechanisms, including data sources, to facilitate the work of department chairs.

—RECOMMENDATIONS:

• Although the University does put substantial effort into providing support to departments for the purposes of assessment of programs, it should continue to develop additional support mechanisms, as feasible.

• Although there is evidence of widespread and sustainable use of assessment processes and improvements based on those processes, departments vary somewhat in their levels of sophistication and accomplishment. The University should look for ways to strengthen all programs and to create cross-fertilization among departments. It should also increase the degree to which assessment “matters” at Boise State by tying program assessment even more tightly to budgetary decisions.

—ACTION PLAN

• Continue to enhance the development of assessment expertise in departments and their faculty members:
  o Offer additional workshops in relevant subjects.
  o Facilitate discussions among department chairs, creating a “best practices” forum.
  o Give guidance as to the best way to mesh our present processes with the revised standards of NWCCU.
Develop additional ways in which assessment will “matter” at Boise State, for example, by being a key criterion in budget decisions.

We will continue to refine our processes and structures.

- We will morph the present DARs from a pure reporting mechanism into one that will be focused on the sharing of techniques and outcomes amongst departments. We will model this after the work of other institutions. The result will be: (i) Because DARs will have increased usefulness, they will be considered and updated on a more regular basis, and (ii) department chairs will have an excellent source of ideas for how to structure learning goals, assessment tools, and actions taken in response, resulting in increased sophistication of those departments lagging behind.

- We will alter, as needed, the Periodic Review process and other processes to ensure that they are highly effective, that they align with the needs of the newly revised NWCCU standards, and that they do not place an undue burden on department chairs.

We will continue to enhance our data support activities as provided by IAAR and by other entities, and will do so in a way that is particularly sensitive to the needs of departments for information needed for program assessment and program review.

- IAAR will continue to enhance data warehousing capabilities.

- IAAR will enhance other data reporting mechanisms, such as graduating student surveys.

- Create a “users group” for IAAR to provide them with guidance on types of data needed and used.