

THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT ASHEVILLE

FACULTY SENATE

Senate Document Number 7215S
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Statement of Faculty Senate Action:

EC 1

**Academic Assessment Revision Proposal
(includes explanation for revisions to
[SD0713F](#) and [SD10214S](#))**

Introduction

This summer, we will develop a plan describing what we will assess over the next two years for the Fifth Year Interim Review by the Southeastern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). Faculty Senate finds this an opportune time to evaluate where we are, look at what we are doing, and whether we are getting what we want from academic assessment. We find that a more focused effort would best serve our students and our goals. We recognize that there are great demands on faculty, more is not always better, and that narrowing the focus of assessment to what we most value in the academic experience is the most rational and sustainable approach to this endeavor. This document establishes a baseline level of academic assessment that we believe to be best for UNC Asheville which exceeds minimum SACSCOC and Board of Governors (BOG) requirements.

Rationale

Academic assessment is a relatively new endeavor for UNC Asheville. Ideally, assessment is a process of learning. It requires prioritization of values and cultivation of new skills and understandings. We have made great progress in *learning how to learn* to do assessment that is most valuable for us. We also recognize that we are a population of high achievers. Indeed, we have a tendency to do our best, to over-achieve, and even seek perfection. These traits serve us and the public well for the most part. In the case of academic assessment, however, we find that we have been overzealous. Specifically, we find that we have overshot our goal in terms of the number of things we assess, the complexity of our assessment methods, and the frequency with which we conduct assessment. The current approach is neither efficient nor sustainable. With this document, Faculty Senate establishes a new baseline for assessment at UNC Asheville.

We believe the overgrowth of assessment activities has occurred with good intention but perhaps without a full understanding of the requirements and implications of promises made. We recognize that an informed faculty is best qualified to determine what is assessed, how it is assessed, and how frequently it is assessed. As we cultivate a greater understanding of assessment methods and requirements, the Faculty Senate should refrain from passing any assessment-related documents without a full understanding of their impact and receiving broad support from the faculty.

Some academic assessment decisions have been made administratively, without full faculty understanding or consent. We value the principles of shared governance and plan to move forward with assessment activities embracing shared governance. To that end, Faculty Senate requests that the university administration provide complete and transparent information regarding the assessment requirements of outside bodies including SACSCOC and BOG or provide the means for the faculty to obtain such information.

This document intends to advance and redefine academic assessment to be more meaningful, focused, and sustainable; to encourage a faculty-driven process in decision making regarding any expansion of

assessment beyond the baseline established herein; remove some self-imposed language that triggers university-wide external assessment requirements; and to encourage departments* to remove or revise any self-imposed assessment burdens that do not contribute to student learning, as they see fit.

*For the purposes of this document, the term “department” is intended to include academic groups that are substantially similar to academic departments but that we label “programs.” It is not intended to include other things we currently refer to as “programs,” such as the Undergraduate Research Program or Service Learning.

Specific Actions

With these revisions and suggested actions, Faculty Senate intends that the terms competencies, learning goals, evaluate and any other verbiage in the proposed changes not be identified as things to be assessed for SACSCOC.

Reduce Assessment Requirements in the Liberal Arts Curriculum

1) The SACSCOC Principles of Accreditation do not require schools to have an individual assessment plan for each component of their general education curriculum, only an assessment plan for their general education outcomes. Our new Liberal Arts Core Outcomes replace our former University Student Learning Outcomes in all documents. They are intended to capture the fundamental values embodied in our general education curriculum, the Liberal Arts Core (LAC). We now have four LAC outcomes and the minimum number required by SACSCOC is three.

2) Reduce assessment required by Senate Documents [0713F](#) “Liberal Arts Core Implementation Proposal” (see [EC 2](#)) and [10214S](#) “Replace the Integrative Liberal Studies Program with the Liberal Arts Core” (see [EC 3](#)).

These documents propose and describe the LAC. As well, they include language that drives several academic assessment activities. They were written at an earlier time in our understanding of academic assessment. We now understand there is a difference between our student learning outcomes and our aspirations and that all of our excellent aspirations are not feasibly measured. Both documents include language requiring assessment we now understand to be unnecessary, overly-burdensome, and unsustainable. This document removes or rewords language in the aforementioned documents that triggers assessment but does not in any way modify the LAC curriculum. For example, the Information Literacy and Writing competencies remain with departments and programs, which must still define how students achieve these competences, however, the assessment requirement is removed.

Encourage Departments to assess only those outcomes most meaningful to their students and/or majors.

SACs requires academic departments to assess a minimum of two outcomes, both of which must be very well done. At UNC Asheville, departments should assess a minimum of three learning outcomes. Two of the three may be chosen from our USLOs. One outcome should be specific to the major.

A Note on Programs

Several programs**, especially, have imposed unnecessary assessment requirements on themselves by identifying “student learning outcomes,” which must always be operationalized and assessed. We encourage modification of the language, if so desired, to “goals,” “objectives,” “competencies,” or other terms that allow faculty the autonomy to determine whether and how best to evaluate themselves. We recognize that there should be some evaluation and that the faculty is best at determining what should occur and how often.

** Here we use the term to refer to programs like Arts and Ideas.