

QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Submitted for: Action.

Summary: Goals 5 and 6 of *The Illinois Commitment* establish the policy framework for quality assurance and accountability in Illinois postsecondary education. To date, the Illinois Board of Higher Education has approved three elements of Goal 5: Redesign of Academic Program Approval, Redesign of Academic Program Review and Improvement, and Institutional and Statewide Results Reports.

Approval is now recommended for additional components of the Board's quality assurance and accountability program: Assessment of Student Learning policies and procedures; and Performance Indicators. The latter component is presented as agenda Item 6. The Board also is being asked to endorse participation in the National Forum on College-Level Learning pilot project (sponsored by The Pew Charitable Trusts).

Action Requested: That the Illinois Board of Higher Education approve Assessment of Student Learning policies and procedures, and endorse participation in the National Forum on College-Level Learning pilot project to develop a model for state-level assessment of educational capital in five states.

STATE OF ILLINOIS
BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Introduction

The Illinois Board of Higher Education authorized the framework for redesigning, enhancing, and integrating the components of its quality assurance and accountability program through a series of Board actions beginning in 1998. With approval of *The Illinois Commitment* in February 1999, the philosophical underpinnings of a systematic and comprehensive approach to quality assurance and accountability were firmly established.

Goals 5 and 6 of *The Illinois Commitment* establish the policy framework for quality assurance and accountability in Illinois postsecondary education. They assert, respectively, that Illinois colleges and universities will “hold students to even higher expectations for learning and will be accountable for the quality of academic programs and the assessment of learning,” and will “continually improve productivity, cost-effectiveness, and accountability.”

To date, the Board has approved three elements of Goal 5: Academic Program Approval (June 1999), Academic Program Review and Improvement (April 2002), and Institutional and Statewide Results Reports (February 1999). This item requests approval for a fourth element of Goal 5, Assessment of Student Learning policies and procedures, as well as endorsement of a national pilot project on assessing college-level learning in which Illinois has been invited to participate. A brief overview of the fifth piece of the quality and accountability program, Performance Indicators, is also included; this is presented for separate approval under agenda Item 6.

Academic Program Approval processes emphasize outcomes and include the assessment of student learning as an integral component. This assessment includes requiring: (1) evidence of a commitment to a monitoring and feedback mechanism for improving curriculum, instruction, and learning; (2) inclusion of a statement of expected student learning outcomes; and (3) a description of the process and elements by which student learning will be assessed.

Academic Program Review requires institutions to prioritize programs for review that may have quality or viability issues; implement Assessment of Student Learning in all academic programs; provide evidence of findings and recommendations; and submit evidence of a formalized and effective feedback mechanism. The following six elements are required for the satisfactory conduct of redesigned program review: a statement of program goals and intended student learning outcomes; systematic assessment of student learning (at different points throughout the program, including end-of-program evaluation); feedback gathered from key stakeholders; evidence of a formal and effective feedback/improvement mechanism; ongoing institutional monitoring of findings and recommendations for improvement; and submission of assessment and improvement results by program to IBHE as part of an institution’s Program Review findings and recommendations.

Institutional Results Reports contain: progress reports on the six goals of *The Illinois Commitment*; summaries of findings and recommendations by program from the annual Program Review process; and evidence and findings regarding Assessment of Student Learning in each reviewed program. The Results Report will also serve as the vehicle for an institution's reporting to the Board on state-level, common institutional, and mission-specific institutional performance indicators for each goal of *The Illinois Commitment*.

The Board is being asked to approve the fourth and fifth elements of its Quality Assurance and Accountability program: Assessment of Student Learning policies and procedures (Goal 5), and Performance Indicators (Goal 6). Approval of Performance Indicators is recommended in Item 6 of this agenda. In addition, the Board is being asked to endorse participation in a pilot project to develop a model that assesses the level of a state's educational capital, or college-level learning. The results of this activity are presented in Item 6 as a potential measure for Goal 5 state-level Performance Indicators.

Assessment of Student Learning

Assessment of Student Learning is the central integrating quality assurance and improvement element binding Academic Program Approval and Academic Program Review and Improvement. Assessment of Student Learning is an ongoing process that occurs at the program level. It is also a key accountability element of the Performance Indicators presented in Item 6. Assessment is defined as the systematic determination of what students know and are able to do as a result of completing a unique program of study. This assessment should include multiple qualitative and quantitative measures of student learning. These assessment results must then be used to improve the quality of curriculum, teaching, and student learning.

Goal 5 of *The Illinois Commitment* stipulates, "by 2004, *all* academic programs will systematically assess student learning and use assessment results to improve programs." The following guidelines should inform the development of student learning assessment and program improvement:

- Assessment plans and quality processes should be faculty, program, and campus-driven.
- Assessment plans and program approval and review processes should build on existing activities, i.e., integrate and expand on existing assessment activities.
- Assessment activities should focus on the measurement and improvement of student learning outcomes, including multiple qualitative and quantitative assessments, as appropriate to the discipline.
- Assessment of mastery and quality should not be a one-time event, but rather, a continuing process that monitors and self-regulates the educational enterprise to ensure that quality is continually enhanced.

The Illinois Board of Higher Education staff, in cooperation with the Chief Academic Officers, identified the following elements as critical for assessment of student learning in all undergraduate (including general education) and graduate programs:

1. A statement of program goals and intended student learning outcomes developed by each program's faculty that reflects the uniqueness of that program.
2. Systematic (at different points throughout the program, including end-of-program evaluation) assessment of student learning that uses multiple qualitative and quantitative

- measures and reflects the uniqueness of academic programs and disciplines (e.g., evaluation of capstone experiences, internships, portfolios, and other types of performance measurements; performance on standardized, locally-developed, or professional licensure and certification exams).
3. Feedback gathered from key stakeholders—current students, alumni, and employers of graduates, graduate schools, etc. (e.g., surveys of student and alumni satisfaction; alumni job placement information; employer satisfaction).
 4. Evidence of a formal and effective feedback/improvement mechanism, i.e., that the program faculty are engaged in a regular assessment and review process, and that the assessment of student learning and stakeholder feedback are used to improve curriculum, instruction, and learning.
 5. Findings and recommendations for improvement are monitored by the institution for results at least yearly.
 6. Assessment and improvement results are submitted to the Illinois Board of Higher Education as part of an institution's normal schedule for reporting Program Review findings and recommendations, which are appended to the Institutional Results Report.

As part of the program review process, the execution and findings of assessment of student learning should be an integral element of the ongoing feedback loop that forms the basis for improving curriculum, instruction, and learning. Additional information and explanation is presented in the paper *Putting Students First: Assessing Mastery of Student Learning* which can be accessed through the Illinois Board of Higher Education website (www.ibhe.org).

National Forum on College-Level Learning Pilot Project

Illinois is one of five states invited to participate in the National Forum on College-Level Learning funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts. The goal of this project is to develop a test model for collecting and analyzing comparable college-level learning information across states for the purpose of benchmarking. The project has two principal components. The first entails assembling and analyzing data on existing certification/licensing and graduate school admissions examinations administered to recent or soon-to-be college graduates. These examinations may include tests typically given to two-year college graduates (e.g., the Physical Therapy Assistant examination) or to baccalaureate graduates (e.g., the Graduate Management Admissions Test). In addition, data will be analyzed from the National Assessment of Adult Literacy to produce state-level information.

The second component requires that participating states collect data from a sample of currently enrolled college students and recent college graduates. The project includes administering three instruments during fall 2003. A sample of students at two-year colleges will take at least two ACT Work Keys examinations. A similar sample of students at four-year institutions (both public and private) will take a battery of performance-based instruments in three clusters of disciplines designed to measure critical thinking, analytic reasoning, and communication skills. This latter instrument was developed through the Rand/Council for Aid to Education "Collegiate Learning Assessment Project." The Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) and the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) will be co-administered with each of these examinations respectively. Finally, a sample of recent

graduates of four-year colleges (and possibly two-year colleges as well) will complete an alumni survey called the College Results Survey (CRS) administered on-line by *Peterson's*.

Because of the Pew-funded project budget constraints, it appears that testing for this pilot study will be limited to between 1,200 and 2,000 students per state for each of the two test batteries. Similarly, funding is available for about 1,500 recent graduates per state to complete the CRS. This will necessitate using a cluster sampling approach for each state in which a sample of institutions is drawn first, and then a sample of students from each institution is so identified. Anticipating some refusals to participate, such procedures generally also target a set of alternate institutions and selected students to substitute for those dropping out of the study.

The suggested measurement timeframe is the most recent three years of data available for the first component (existing tests) and the results from the second component (fall 2003 tests). While the results of this study will be used only at the state level, it is possible that the project will set the national standard for gathering state-by-state information. If this does occur, Illinois will benefit from helping to shape the model, will be well ahead of the curve in this type of data gathering, and will have student learning information aggregated to the state level to be used as part of the Goal 5 state-level Performance Indicators. Finally, Illinois will be well-positioned to retain its high ranking in *Measuring Up 2004*, the national report card on higher education.

Performance Indicators

Performance Indicators are designed to assess the overall performance of colleges and universities in meeting the six goals of *The Illinois Commitment*. Three types of indicators directly related to *The Illinois Commitment* are included:

- State-level indicators – pertaining to the performance of Illinois' system of higher education as a whole;
- “Common” institutional indicators – related to the statewide goals for higher education enumerated in *The Illinois Commitment*;
- Mission-specific indicators – pertaining to each institution's unique role and mission within the overall context of *The Illinois Commitment*.

The final recommendations of the Performance Indicator Advisory Committee propose a single statewide indicator and three common institutional indicators for Goal 5. The proposed state-level indicator is the information obtained from Illinois' participation in the Pew-funded National Forum on College-Level Learning pilot project; this information will be available in 2004. The three common institutional indicators proposed are: (1) the extent to which institutional quality and effectiveness are recognized by graduates through alumni surveys; (2) pass rates on professional/occupational licensure exams relative to state and/or national averages; and (3) description of good practices demonstrating institutional commitment to academic quality and assessment (e.g., institution-wide use of assessment results to improve program quality; *formalized* end-of-program assessments for academic programs).

Recommendation

The staff recommends approval of the assessment policies and procedures described above. The staff also recommends endorsement for the state's participation in the National Forum on College-Learning pilot project sponsored by The Pew Charitable Trusts.

The staff recommends adoption of the following resolution:

The Illinois Board of Higher Education approves implementation of procedures designed to ensure assessment of student learning in all undergraduate, general education and graduate programs.

The Illinois Board of Higher Education defines assessment of student learning in all programs as the systematic (at different points throughout the program, including end-of-program evaluation) determination of what students know and are able to do as a result of completing a unique program of study. This assessment should include multiple qualitative and quantitative measures of student learning. These assessment results must then be used to improve the quality of curriculum, teaching, and student learning.

The Illinois Board of Higher Education approves the following key elements for assessment of student learning in all undergraduate (including general education) and graduate programs:

A statement of program goals and intended student learning outcomes developed by each program's faculty that reflects uniqueness of that program.

Systematic (at different points throughout the program, including end-of-program evaluation) assessment of student learning that uses multiple qualitative and quantitative measures and reflects the uniqueness of academic programs and disciplines (e.g., evaluation of capstone experiences, internships, portfolios, and other types of performance measurements; performance on standardized, locally-developed, or professional licensure and certification exams).

Feedback gathered from key stakeholders—current students, alumni, and employers of graduates, graduate schools, etc., (e.g., surveys of student and alumni satisfaction; alumni job placement information; employer satisfaction).

Evidence of a formal and effective feedback/improvement mechanism, i.e., that the program faculty are engaged in a regular assessment and review process, and that the assessment of student learning and stakeholder feedback are used to improve curriculum, instruction, and learning.

Findings and recommendations for improvement are monitored by the institution for results at least yearly.

Assessment and improvement results are submitted to the Illinois Board of Higher Education as part of an institution's normal schedule for reporting Program Review findings and recommendations, which are appended to the Institutional Results Report.

To further the priorities of assessing student learning, quality, and accountability, the Illinois Board of Higher Education endorses participation in the National Forum on College-Level Learning pilot project sponsored by The Pew Charitable Trusts for the purpose of securing state-level information on student learning and to facilitate development of a test model for the collection of comparable college-level learning information across states.

