
Preparing for the **FUTURE**

Assuring Student Learning

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Executive Summary

UTK needs to create a healthy culture of assessment, one which centers on student learning and which includes a clear system of capturing assessment for decision-making in academic units as well as for reporting assessment results to our constituents. We need to know how our students learn; we need to know what and when they learn; and, we need to know this to make informed curricular revisions. Our decisions and actions will then be grounded in evidence, in what is actually happening in our curriculum.

This report is not a review of the literature on student learning and program assessment as they relate to institutional effectiveness. It is a blueprint of an approach to developing a culture of assessment at UTK based upon the research literature and best practices at other universities and those used by units at UTK.

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Current environment: challenges in higher education

In an age of growing economic uncertainty, rapid changes in the domestic job markets, and unparalleled competition around the globe, higher education institutions in the United States find themselves at the very center of the most current and pressing national public policy issues:

- States defunding higher education
- Institutional increases in tuition in response to the defunding of higher education
- Federal call for increasing college completion for more Americans
- The call to stimulate graduation from science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) areas

While the expectations for higher education continue to grow in terms of meeting these challenges, there are also increasing demands that higher education demonstrate its own effectiveness and accountabilityⁱ. As the costs of a college education increase each year, many external constituencies are beginning to be more vocal in questioning the value of post-secondary education. Recent Congressional testimony by Mike Rowe of the Discovery Channel on the need for people prepared in the skilled-trades (i.e., plumbers, electricians, HVAC technicians) highlights the disconnect between the national debate on K-16 education and national needs.ⁱⁱ Increasingly, public and private investment in higher education by funders, parents, and students will be contingent upon the demonstration of the value of a college degree. The era of accountability in education that was previously focused on public P-12 schools has now fully entered the halls of institutions of higher education.

These ongoing and expanding demands for accountability will not likely abate given the central role higher education plays with regard to the economy, job preparation, economic development, knowledge creation and dissemination addressing technical and social problems, as well as its many other major contributions towards social, cultural, and personal development. Both internal and external constituencies can be expected to continue the demand for evidence that higher education is accountable and that a college degree is of value. Some of the more pressing expectations of the various higher education constituencies can be briefly summarized as follows:

Expectations of External Constituencies

- *US Department of Education.* National policy makers and the US Department of Education (US DOE) expect higher education institutions to demonstrate the value of educational programs given the tremendous federal role and support for student financial aid. Moreover, national policy makers have also expressed growing concern about the ability of institutional accrediting bodies to regulate and formally sanction member institutions who cannot demonstrate the value of the college education they offer.
- *Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) and other programmatic accrediting agencies.* Regional and academic program accrediting agencies promulgate standards for accreditation that require evidence that academic programs (and services) are effective in providing students with needed levels of knowledge and skill. These accrediting agencies continue to strengthen the requirements (standards) by which they judge the educational effectiveness of an institution and/or its academic programs, and thus

the demonstrated achievement of specified student learning outcomes within courses and degree programs is central to their concerns. SACS requires documentation that specifically addresses institutional effectiveness.ⁱⁱⁱ

- *Tennessee legislature and THEC.* State leaders and funding agencies want assurances that the resources given to public institutions are leading to more graduates and that these graduates have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions suitable for a global market place. They also expect that we be stewards of state resources, being effective and efficient with state funding, student tuition, and utilization of campus facilities.
- *Employers and Chambers of Commerce.* Employers want assurances that graduates have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that are consistent with their educational credential. They want graduates to have marketable skills as well as the ability to think critically, communicate well, and work in a team setting. A degree has to signify something of value, and employers expect institutions issuing degrees to be able to demonstrate that a college credential signifies an appropriate level of academic accomplishment. Local Chambers of Commerce are interested in having an educated and skilled workforce to stimulate economic development and lure new businesses and industries to Tennessee communities.
- *The general public.* The general public seeks assurances that tax dollars spent on higher education and family resources spent on tuition costs are appropriate and justified, especially in terms of the final degree product. Various agencies and organizations offer competitive quality rankings to help the public make informed choices and decisions regarding higher education institutions and programs, and these rating systems can be expected to become more specialized and detailed.

Expectations of Internal Constituencies

- *Students.* Students want to know the comparative value from each higher education course and academic program option available to them.^{iv} During their college career, students want to make informed educational decisions about programs of study and course options. They also want their degree credential to be recognized as signifying a level of quality and accomplishment of interest to future employers.
- *Parents.* Parents want to know that their child is receiving a quality education that will be valued, especially by potential employers. They want to be able to contribute to informed choices for their children regarding various higher education options and the available programs and courses offered. They want to see evidence of a worthy return on their increasingly more substantial higher education investment.
- *Faculty.* Faculty want to know that the students they educate and send out as graduates of their program have attained a requisite level of learning. They want to know that their teaching is effective, and they want to know how their teaching and student learning can be improved. Further, they want to ensure that all course options for their academic programs are effectively providing students with the desired program skills and competencies. They also want to be able to demonstrate and share the value of the academic programs they offer to attract talented students.

- *University Administration.* Universities want to know to what extent each program offered is effective in providing students desired levels of knowledge and skill. Administrators also want a viable method for determining and sharing the value of their degree programs, and using this information to attract more talented students as well as more external resources for supporting programs and services. At the University of Tennessee, the establishment and commitment underlying the top 25 initiative as well as the creation of the Teaching and Learning Center are two examples of a long-term institutional commitment to provide evidence of institutional accountability as well as enhance faculty teaching effectiveness and the promotion of student learning.

What has changed?

While some level of accountability expectations from internal and external constituencies has been active for years, the context in which higher education now operates has changed substantially, and higher education will have to rise to the occasion and effectively respond. The federal government appears to be ready to intervene if regional and program accreditors are not able to ensure academic program quality. National and state policy makers are increasingly expected to justify decisions on how to spend very limited public resources, and as such future investments in higher education will increasingly have to compete with major national priorities and needs such as health, national defense, transportation, etc., as well as national debt repayment.

Accrediting agencies are under notably increasing pressure to prove that the awarding of accreditation is based on solid evidence that institutions are effectively measuring and demonstrating their educational value. Should they be unsuccessful, member institutions can expect to lose their ability to engage in self-regulation, as national policy makers will most likely intervene. Tennessee, similar to all states, also has limited public resources and growing priorities. In some aspects, Tennessee has been a leader in promoting the effectiveness of public higher education institutions, beginning with the renowned performance-funding program. However, state policy makers also appear to be more than ready to set educational expectations and tie them to funding as embodied in the Complete College Tennessee Act of 2010 (HB7008).

In the past, it was possible for higher education institutions to selectively respond to various accountability pressures from internal and external constituencies on a piecemeal basis. However, it may no longer be wise or prudent to respond to accountability demands in the short term only to back off on the commitment until then next accreditation cycle or ad hoc requests from various constituencies. Those days are over. The federal and state involvement in public education through No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) suggests that if higher education does not meet the challenge of defining and demonstrating the value of college degrees, public policy makers at the state and federal level will feel compelled do it for them, and public higher education may forever lose its strong and proud tradition of institutional autonomy and self-governance.

What is required?

For higher education, there are two critical and inherent challenges in responding to these multiple demands for accountability. First, unlike private sector organizations, there is no single set of basic metrics (e.g., profit/net worth) that quickly demonstrates success or its lack thereof in higher education. Second, institutions of higher education are expected to take the lead on defining and demonstrating their effectiveness. These two challenges are substantial, but not insurmountable. While there are many potential indicators of higher education

accountability and effectiveness, most calls for accountability have a central focus on student learning. At this time, the key challenge for educational institutions appears to be the need to demonstrate for each course and program (and institution) that student-learning outcomes are defined, assessed, and that assessment results are used to improve the educational process. Each constituency presenting demands for greater accountability would find this focus (i.e., the value of a degree in terms of student outcomes) to be responsive to their accountability concerns.

Fortunately, the elements of a process for ensuring and documenting student learning accountability are not mysterious, overly complex, or particularly innovative.^v Every public P-12 school in the country has been under a mandate to measure and report on student academic outcomes under NCLB. For higher education, accrediting agencies and scholars have long suggested the criteria for accountability related to student learning, and these can be summarized as follows:

1. Student learning objectives and outcomes (SLOs) must be explicitly and effectively stated for each course and degree program.
2. Teaching and other learning experiences must ensure opportunities for students to be made aware of expected learning outcomes and to achieve them.
3. Learning assessments must be in place that aligns with stated student learning objectives, and these assessments must provide an accurate measure of the extent to which intended student outcomes have been achieved.
4. Assessment results need to be used responsively to gauge and further enhance the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process.
5. A process is needed for summarizing course, program, and institutional student learning outcomes processes (learning objectives, student achievement of the outcomes, and faculty use of assessment for improvements in the teaching and learning process). Moreover, a process needs to be in place for disseminating a summary of these results to intended internal and external constituencies.

Processes for consolidating and disseminating results at the institutional level will certainly require substantial, if not unprecedented, effort and collaboration among faculty, academic leaders, and administrators.

Many academic programs, especially those programs that are separately accredited by academic program accrediting agencies, have been required to develop and implement a process for student learning accountability. Other programs have aspects of these processes in place, but they may need to make enhancements to strengthen the process:

1. Expected course and program student learning outcomes need to be formally stated, stated in a measurable manner, and/or be available for students' review and consideration for course selection.
2. Learning opportunities need to be explicitly or tightly aligned with stated SLOs.
3. SLOs assessments need to adequately cover or effectively align with all student-learning objectives.
4. SLOs need to be used to support teaching and learning improvement.
5. SLOs results need to be formally consolidated, documented, and/or disseminated.
6. The SLOs process needs consistency across courses and academic programs allowing for effective summarization and dissemination of SLO progress across the university.

Higher education accountability in its current form is one challenge that cannot be avoided, endlessly debated, or shirked off until the next round of renewed external pressure. Higher education institutions who fail to address the accountability needs of internal and external constituencies can expect to lose their long-held and valued autonomy. Simply stated, institutions must discipline themselves now or someone else will in the very near future.

The time for action is now; failure to act is not an option for the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. We need to create a culture of assessment with a commitment to measuring and demonstrating the achievement and use of SLOs as an ongoing, standard institutional practice.

Overview of Proposed Project

The ideal culture of assessment is considered to be that

1. Every course/class has a set of e-searchable, achievable student learning outcomes (SLOs) that are linked to the SLOs of the academic program and relate to SLOs of other courses in the program.
2. SLOs are assessed in course and out of course.
3. The assessments are tied back to the course, instructor and unit with accountability for improvement

To get this this fully integrated assessment model, we need buy-in from each academic program to go through the process of

1. revisiting their SLOs established during preparation of the SACS 5th year interim report
2. ensuring that courses address SLOs by creating the program's curriculum map
3. implementing a systematic plan of assessing SLOs (connecting SLOs to specific student assessments)
4. making curricular changes based on the assessment findings

Concurrent with this, as an institution,

1. charge the Undergraduate and Graduate Curriculum Committees to examine the curricular revision process to ensure that approved changes are based on assessment findings (i.e., Rationale statements include data derived from assessment)
2. work with IT to identify appropriate technology to use for
 - a. assessment plans approvals and findings review
 - b. public-facing, searchable database of course syllabi (which contain the SLOs for the course) linked to the instructor (i.e. Is there a Banner module or add-on or some other system that can pull data from Banner?)
3. work with the Tennessee Teaching and Learning Center (TN TLC) to create guidelines for forming measureable SLOs
4. once each course and every program has SLOs that build the educational experience for the students, develop a system that utilizes assessment plan findings in unit strategic planning, academic and program review, and rewards system of the university (i.e., rewards for faculty and the units) by incorporating appropriate language into policies and procedures

The long-term goal is to improve the learning process by developing a continual process of change built upon sound assessment (Figure 1), the accepted norm endorsed by the regional and programmatic accrediting organizations and the US DOE.

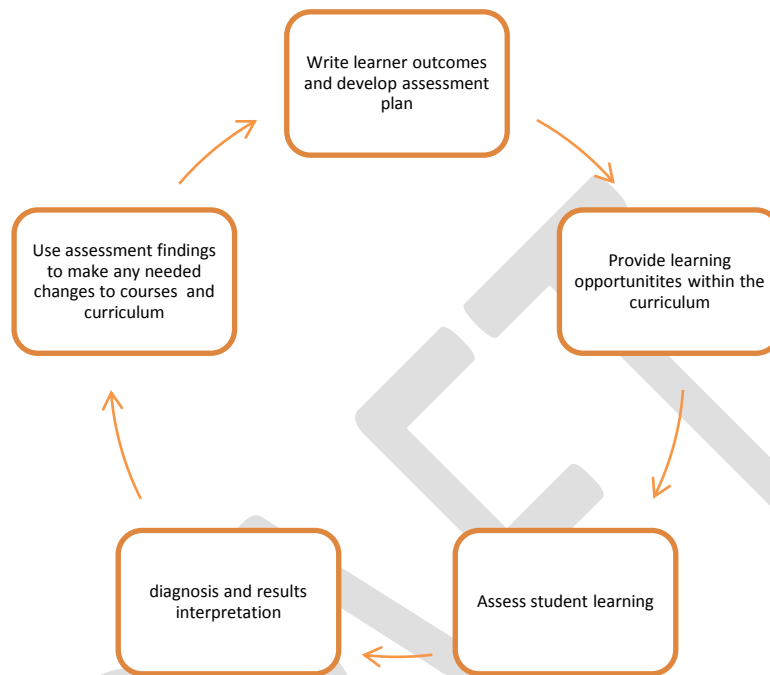


Figure 1 The cycle of assessment used to ensure student learning

Project Activities and Timeline

The timeline will be dictated by the next round of SACS accreditation. The mid-cycle report for UT was submitted March 21, 2011. We recommend that work progress at a rate to meet the next submission to SACS. **The task is to implement a more formalized learning outcomes assessment process that is in place for at least the two academic years prior to the next reaffirmation documentation to SACS. This would allow the outcomes from the first year to be used to inform changes to programs leading to improvements the second year. These results demonstrate a more formalized university process in making steps toward best practices in achieving optimal student learning.**

Efforts to implement use of learning outcomes or how to encourage use:

- Submission to curriculum committee of the learning outcomes with revised/new courses and with assessment data supporting the requested changes to courses and curricula
- Development of syllabi standards with the inclusion of SLOs in syllabi for all courses
- Linked syllabi to timetable entries for courses
- Through peer evaluation of teaching, assess how well learning outcomes are made apparent in the course itself and the use of SLOs in the assessments of courses and programs

- With SAIS and other forms of classroom evaluation, including asking students about whether the learning outcomes were met
- In the various reviews conducted on campus of personnel and programs
 - Faculty reviews: retention review of tenure-track faculty and non-tenure track faculty (lecturers and clinical faculty), promotion and tenure review process and annual review process of tenured and tenure-track faculty
 - GTAs reviews
 - Department heads and deans (i.e., heads need to hold faculty accountable and deans need to hold heads accountable)
 - Academic program and unit reviews

By making the effective use of SLOs and the assessment process part of faculty and academic program review processes, faculty and academic units will be held accountable for building a culture of assessment.

Implementation should include:

- Top down directives with adoption as essential - buy-in by Chancellor and Provost
- Bottom up from tenure, tenure-track, and non-tenure-track faculty and other instructional staff; need to seek out early adopters and begin to change the culture
- Provide funding for faculty development to kick-start the process
 - Training in writing SLOs
 - Training in creating assessments to evaluate SLOs
 - Training in how to use the assessment results to make appropriate changes that result in the desired changes in learning
 - Training on how to include in faculty (tenure, tenure-track, and non-tenure track faculty) annual reviews and academic program reviews
- Adoption of above suggested changes to the curriculum process by the Undergraduate and Graduate Councils' procedures for course and curriculum changes.
- Adoption of new language in Faculty Handbook and the Manual for Faculty Evaluation, where appropriate, to build in the use of SLOs, academic assessment, and accountability into the various review processes.
- Provide incentives during a phase-in period such as
 - waiving the 30/70 room (use of 8 am courses),
 - departmental bonuses for early implementation
- Provide summer salary stipends (for 12-month faculty, extra-service pay) for faculty serving on college-level or university-level assessment review teams that provide constructive feedback to departments on how to improve their processes (review teams are not intended to be overseers who approve or reject assessment plans and application of results)

Timeline:

A timeline is proposed, however, there are more details to be fleshed out such as process to identify faculty to participate on committees.

Deadline	Activity	Responsible Unit/Person
May 2012	A year of training and revision of policies and procedures: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify Early Adopters 2. Training faculty on how to write SLOs and how to assess 3. Undergraduate and Graduate Councils: revise curricular submission guidelines documents 4. Faculty Affairs of Faculty Senate: annual review, promotion and tenure documentation 5. Office of the Provost: Academic Program Review documentation 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. All 2. TN TLC: Schumann 3. Undergraduate Council and Office of the Provost/ McMillan; Graduate Council and Graduate School/ Hodges 4. Faculty Senate Leadership and Office of the Provost/Gardial 5. Office of the Provost/ McMillan
August 2013	SLOs should be written, incorporated into course syllabi with assessment plans in place	Office of the Provost: McMillan and Graduate School/ Hodges TN TLC: Schumann
May 2014	First assessments due to each college's Office of the Dean	Department heads
August 2014	Establish college-level and/or university-level, faculty-led committees to review assessment plans and use of results; train members to be able to do the work for the first time during summer 2014	Office of the Provost: McMillan and Graduate School/ Hodges TN TLC: Schumann
August 2015	Website with links to a searchable database of syllabi—syllabus repository / searchable catalog / even possible “pull down” of potential learning outcomes, educational objectives, department objectives, instructor objectives	Office of the Provost with OIT OIT will need to be a partner in either a home-grown database system or evaluating commercial assessment products that can interface with the current academic catalog management system (ACALOG) on-line catalog and, possibly, Banner
August 2015	Assessment results database, for <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • THEC and SACS reporting needs; • linking to unit responsibility; the information should be used to inform course changes, • creating reports by the unit for program and faculty reviews; • availability for academic advisors in guiding students to understand the curriculum and rationales for taking courses 	Office of the Provost with OIT OIT will need to be a partner in either a home-grown database system or evaluating commercial assessment products that can interface with the current academic catalog management system (ACALOG) on-line catalog and, possibly, Banner

Outcomes

Measurable Project Outcomes:

1. Every course/class has a set of e-searchable, achievable SLOs that are linked to the SLOs of the academic program and relate to SLOs of other courses in the program.
2. SLOs are well written according to common practice in higher education, and to disciplinary practices specifically.
3. SLOs are assessed in course and out of course (i.e., major field test, licensure exams, portfolio review).
4. The assessment results are tied back to the course, instructor and unit with accountability for improvement action plans.
5. End-of-course assessment is tied explicitly to the SLOs.

Operational Outcomes:

1. Increased student satisfaction in terms of empowerment in choosing courses, ability to make better choice decisions, and clearer timelines to graduation through choices of majors through access to syllabi and outcomes.
2. Timeliness in SACS and other accreditation reports creation and compliance.
3. Improved better program evaluation in university departments.

Outcomes Defined in Terms of the Impact on the Various Constituencies

For the external components:

For the US DOE, accrediting agencies and the state government

We would have documentation showing what we are delivering and the process we are using to access and update the way we deliver it. We will be able to easily report on our actions and to respond to new demands and opportunities.

For the state government, employers of our students, and the general public

We could provide detailed and assessed sets of desired student attributes from the university level on down to the individual student. We will be able to match our outcomes with longer term success of our students.

For the internal components:

For students

We would provide more clarity of the value of their degree and degree components to larger scale outcomes. Students will be able to make more appropriate decisions as they complete their education and they will be able to express to future employers the specific contributions of their coursework to their preparedness as an employee. Students would better understand the importance of course sequence, which should facilitate staying on track towards degree completion.

For faculty

We would provide data and a process for assessing individual courses and entire majors in terms of their contribution to the overall education and quality of their programs' graduates. This will allow faculty to make better decisions in designing and teaching individual courses and entire programs. It also allows the faculty to more easily recognize quality components that can be used to recruit new students. For interdisciplinary courses or service courses, faculty can better communicate with colleagues in other departments about expected student learning in prerequisites. For new faculty, we would be able to provide a foundation for their entry into teaching courses at UTK, since course and program SLOs will have been established.

For the administration

We would have a transparent way of reviewing and impacting the academic performance of students, faculty and entire programs. The information produced will allow us to identify areas of strength and weakness, assess the impact of actions taken and decisions made in these areas, and to measure our progress against university-wide goals (e.g. Top 25 Initiative). The process we will have in place, provides a natural way of implementing new goals.

Implementation - Evaluation

A number of suggestions have been made for routes to implementation. They represent two separate initiatives and each of these then serve as a path to be evaluated:

Incorporation of SLOs into Syllabi

- **Submission to curriculum committee of the learning outcomes with revised/new courses.** Is there evidence that all curricular revisions submitted to the Undergraduate and Graduate Councils include learning outcomes for the courses submitted? As submissions are received, approval could be contingent upon inclusion of the learning outcomes. This could be tracked to determine success or failure at this level.
- **Inclusion in all syllabi for existing courses.** Evaluation would be tied to the question of whether a central repository of course syllabi with learning outcomes included in the syllabi has been established. A web accessible repository is ideal and would facilitate a review of syllabi for the inclusion of SLOs. An assessment could be made of how many course syllabi provide learning outcomes and which departments are early completers. The repository could be monitored for use and by whom. Data can be used for evaluation.
- **Linked to timetable entries for courses.** When students go into the timetable or into Banner (My UTK) to register, they should be able to link to course syllabi and read the learning outcome expectations. If built properly, we can track the number of hits, thus generating data used for evaluation.

Assessment of Faculty Adoption, Implementation and Continued Practice

- **Use peer evaluation of teaching / assess how well learning outcomes are made apparent in the course itself / link in the use of assessments in courses.** Guidelines for peer evaluation of teaching can be written to include the expectation that explicit learning outcome expectations are apparent in the materials provided to students. The evaluation from the peers should include a determination of the effectiveness of this effort.
- **P and T review process.** The instructions for preparation of the dossier to be considered for promotion and tenure should include an expectation that learning outcome expectations are an integral component of the teaching requirements. P and T dossiers can be assessed for quality of SLO presentation and discussion and results used to improve faculty training. This form of assessment would not be part of the promotion and tenure review decision.
- **Annual Retention, retaining non-tenure-track faculty and GTAs.** The above would hold for the annual retention evaluations of performance as well.
- **Departmental review:** an assessment report would become an integral part of the academic program and unit review process and other types of departmental reviews (i.e., assessment of low-producing programs as required by THEC).
- **SAIS / classroom evaluation—ask students about whether the learning outcomes were met.** This should be integrated into the student evaluations and this item should become one which peers who are reviewing teaching evaluate. This information would then be in the annual retention reports and the P and T portfolios.

Preliminary Budget

Activity	Personnel	Amount	Operating	Amount	Total by Fiscal Year			
					2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015
Faculty development:								
Workshops on writing and assessing SLOs	Professional staff member for the TN TLC with expertise in SLO construction and assessment (salary \$60K plus 25% fringes)	\$75,000	Meeting supplies and possibly food/snacks for workshops; monthly workshops for one year, length of workshop TBD	\$5,000	\$80,000	\$80,000	\$75,000	\$75,000
Campus-wide lecture series on SLOs and assessment	Administrative support staff to help schedule speakers, make accommodations, prepare materials, etc. (Level 40, salary @ mid-point plus 30% fringes)	\$60,107	Outside speakers used for lecture series (travel, housing, meals, honoraria); speakers could also conduct workshops; one each semester	\$5,000	\$65,107	\$65,107	\$60,107	\$60,107
Train faculty assessment review committees	Persons from lines 4 & 5 can also work on this	No additional	Meeting supplies and possibly food/snacks for workshops; monthly workshops for one year, length of workshop TBD	\$5,000	\$5,000	\$5,000		
Faculty assessment review committees stipends	Summer salaries and/or extra service pay for 3 to 5 faculty per college (used avg. 4 per college, 11 colleges, \$5,000 stipend plus 20% fringes)	\$264,000			\$264,000	\$264,000	\$264,000	\$264,000

<i>Activity</i>	<i>Personnel</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Operating</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Total by Fiscal Year</i>			
					<i>2011-2012</i>	<i>2012-2013</i>	<i>2013-2014</i>	<i>2014-2015</i>
Implementation incentives for a phase in period of 3 to 4 years	Rewards for faculty and departments for meeting deadlines in preparing SLOs, incorporating SLOs in syllabi, developing assessment plans, and implementing assessment (63 depts / colleges; @ \$5,000 per unit spread over implementation period of 3 years)	\$315,000			\$315,000	\$315,000	\$315,000	
Assessment coordination across the university	Assessment professional coordinator in appropriate campus unit (salary \$60K plus 25% fringes) Provide coordination and collection of unit reporting; support for college-level/ university-level committees; provides the feedback to the units.	\$75,000			\$75,000	\$75,000	\$75,000	\$75,000
Technology Needs								
Development of a searchable database of course syllabi link to timetable	IT personnel	TBD	Enterprise software or build-your-own	TBD				
SLO and assessment plan database with reporting capability	IT personnel	TBD	Enterprise software or build-your-own	TBD				
Annual Totals					\$804,107	\$804,107	\$789,107	\$474,107

ⁱ At the national level, increasing attention had been paid to accountability in higher education. The Commission on the Future of Higher Education, established in 2005 by the Department of Education, identified some key areas of needed higher education reform, including quality and accountability, and called for “mechanisms to ensure that colleges succeed in educating students” (US Department of Education, 2006). With the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AACSB) and the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities (APLU) also calling for learning outcomes assessment, developing the [Voluntary System of Accountability](#) which would allow for comparisons across institutions (Liu, 2011a), it seems only a matter of time before outcomes assessments are mandated.

ⁱⁱ See videoed testimony posted at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cCOJPs-rcF0&feature=youtu.be>.

ⁱⁱⁱ From SACS’ *Principles of Accreditation*, 2012 edition (see page 27 and 29 of the document posted at <http://www.sacscoc.org/webChanges.asp>)

- 3.3.1 The institution identifies expected outcomes, assesses the extent to which it achieves these outcomes, and provides evidence of improvement based on analysis of the results in each of the following areas: (Institutional Effectiveness)
 - 3.3.1.1 educational programs, to include student learning outcomes
 - 3.3.1.2 administrative support services
 - 3.3.1.3 academic and student support services
 - 3.3.1.4 research within its mission, if appropriate
 - 3.3.1.5 community/public service within its mission, if appropriate
- 3.5.1 The institution identifies college-level general education competencies and the extent to which students have attained them. (General education competencies)

^{iv} **Student Forum on Learning: Curriculum Regulations and Expectations**

Issue:

The general education curriculum, academic advising, course selection process, and grading

Stance:

Based on our experiences with general education, academic advising, course selection, and the grading process, we feel that the below recommendations would allow students to take greater ownership of their learning.

Rationales/Solutions:

Syllabus Database

Rationale:

- A syllabus database would:
 - *give students insight into the required readings, grading scale, course expectations, and teaching method of each course*
 - help students plan their schedules to match their preferred learning styles or to create variation of instructional method
 - prevent students from taking courses with significant overlap, allowing them to broaden the range of classes they take

Solutions:

- We would like to see a database where instructors submit their most recent syllabi. This database could be streamlined to work with the existing TN101 system, allowing students to also see evaluative data alongside the syllabus, course objectives, etc.

Restructuring General Education

Rationale:

- The current general education curriculum, we feel, is very limiting. Students must sacrifice exploring courses of interest in order to fulfill gen. ed. requirements.

- By increasing options and general education flexibility, students will feel:
 - more ownership for their academic career
 - as though the gen. ed. curriculum is valuable, rather than a waste of time and class space.

Solutions:

- Create a simple way for students to petition to replace courses of interest with a general education requirement
 - This process should be guided by academic advising and
 - should occur before the student takes the course
- Increase the available course options for required gen. ed. fields

Improvements in Academic Advising

Rationale:

- Advising often feels impersonal and indifferent to the individuality of each student's experience.
- Students are often not fully informed on the requirements needed to stay on track to graduate, study abroad, and/or seek an internship
- This issue is compounded when a student changes colleges

Solutions:

- Uniformity of advising format across colleges
- Online sign-up for appointments
 - Lengthened and individual appointment time
- Quality assessment after the session

Selected references regarding SLOs and assessment

1. Walvoord, Barbara E. 2010. *Assessment clear and simple: A practical guide for institutions, departments, and general education*, 2nd edition. Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 126 pp. ISBN=978-0-470-54119-7 (pbk), <http://www.josseybass.com/WileyCDA/>

This would be the place to start if you want more information. It is written in very clear and understandable terms. Walvoord discusses why assessment is important in terms of the students and the faculty. She takes assessment beyond accreditation.

2. Allen, Mary J. 2004. *Assessing academic programs in higher education*. Anker Publishing (now part of Jossey-Bass), San Francisco, 193 pp. ISBN=978-1-882982-67-7 (hbk), <http://www.josseybass.com/WileyCDA/>

This is another good reference for how to develop your plan. More detailed than Walvoord. Dr. Allen is a frequent presenter about assessment at regional accrediting commissions' annual meetings.

3. Banta, Trudy W., ed. 2002. *Building a scholarship of assessment*. Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 339 pp. ISBN=0-470-62307-1 (pbk), <http://www.josseybass.com/WileyCDA/>

This book covers the history of assessment and covers the process much more in depth than Walvoord. It would be good for a person who has experience with assessment and wants to begin to use the assessment process as a basis for research into student learning.

4. Banta, Trudy W., Elizabeth A. Jones, and Karen E. Black. 2009. *Designing effective assessment: Principles and profiles of good practice*. Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 338 pp. ISBN=978-0-470-39334-5 (pbk), <http://www.josseybass.com/WileyCDA/>

Detailed discussion of assessment along with examples of rubrics, assessment plans, and implementation schemes from other institutions.

5. Suskie, Linda. 2009. *Assessing student learning: A common sense guide*, 2nd ed. Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 342 pp. ISBN=978-0-470-28964-8 (pbk), <http://www.josseybass.com/WileyCDA/>

If you're ready to move beyond the basics as discussed in Walvoord, this would be the next place to look. Parts three and four provide more detailed discussion and "how to's" of assessment tools and discussion of how to use assessment results to improve instruction and the learning environment.