

February 14, 2005

Dear President :

Thank you for the conscientious and useful feedback your campus provided at the end of the Fall 2004 semester in response to the draft guidelines for strengthened campus-based assessment, as developed by the General Education Assessment Review Group (GEAR). As you know, revisions to the existing GEAR guidelines were necessitated by the June 2004 SUNY Board of Trustees' resolution, which called for campuses to use externally referenced measures in assessing Mathematics, Critical Thinking [Reasoning], and Basic Communication [Written].

Overall, while campus feedback indicated that substantive changes were not required in the guidelines themselves, campuses did raise a number of important issues regarding strengthened campus-based assessment that require clarification. These issues can be classified into four general clusters, which I address immediately below:

**Resources/Funding.** Campuses are assured that System Administration will bear the cost of strengthened campus-based assessment, supporting the administration of externally referenced measures in assessing the three learning outcomes areas as well as the NSSE/CCSSE or other measure of campus academic environment. In order to keep costs at a reasonable level, we must establish limits on sample size, using the same criterion as required by GEAR for general education assessment plans. Specifically, for each of the three learning outcomes areas we will fund the administration of externally referenced measures to 20% of the total students enrolled in that learning outcomes area at the time of the assessment. Further, we will fund these assessments for both nationally normed and locally developed instruments.

**Level of Detail.** There were many questions requesting detailed clarification on the actual implementation of strengthened campus-based assessment, related to topics such as: Standards for establishing concurrent validity, the specific role of the discipline-based panels, criteria for evaluating nationally normed tests, which mathematics outcomes will be utilized, and ensuring student motivation when administering nationally normed measures. As such, System Administration will work with GEAR to conduct a conference in mid-April 2005 that will focus in a comprehensive manner on the implementation of strengthened campus-based assessment. This event is intended to clarify many of the questions raised by campuses and provide specific protocols for each of the three measurement options, featuring presentations by experts in rubric construction as well as representatives from companies that construct nationally normed tests (including the NSSE/CCSSE). As soon as the details of the conference are available, we will inform you so that you can plan to send representatives from your campus.

**Lack of Correspondence Between SUNY Learning Outcomes and Existing Nationally Normed Measures.** Members of my staff have met over the past few months with representatives from several well-known testing companies. We have shared the learning outcomes for Mathematics, Critical Thinking [Reasoning], and Basic Communication [Writing], and emphasized to these companies that their products will only be useful to our campuses to the extent that they map to these outcomes and yield separate scores for the different outcomes. We have reason to believe that the companies are interested in meeting the specific needs of the SUNY Assessment Initiative, and representatives from those companies will be asked to present more specific information at the conference described above.

**Integration of Strengthened Campus-Based Assessment Into Existing General Education Assessment Process.** As called for in the Trustees' resolution, strengthened campus-based assessment is scheduled for implementation in Fall 2006. Prior to that time (i.e., through 2005-06), campuses should adhere to their original assessment plan and schedule as submitted to and approved by GEAR. Beginning in Fall 2006, campuses may continue to follow their established assessment schedule, using externally referenced measures as approved by GEAR to assess Mathematics, Critical Thinking [Reasoning], and Basic Communication [Written].

Finally, I need to address the issue of ensuring adequate safeguards for the use of assessment data and reporting of results. Attention and commitment to this issue has been a fundamental component of the SUNY Assessment Initiative since its inception, as documented in the final report published in November 2000 by the Provost's Advisory Task Force on the Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes. Campuses are assured that System Administration fully appreciates the sensitivity of assessment data and maintains unequivocal commitment to their utility first and foremost as a mechanism for improving teaching and learning. As such, we will never use this information to embarrass or punish institutions, programs, faculty or students or to make inappropriate comparisons.

Recent events have demonstrated, however, that as a public agency SUNY System Administration – like individual campuses – can be required to release information under certain conditions. Consequently, it appears appropriate to review the specific manner in which we ask campuses to categorize their assessment data and report it to System. In the near future, I will call a task force together from across the State University and ask this group to conduct such a review and suggest alternative approaches.

Enclosed for your information are the operative guidelines for strengthened campus-based assessment. Campus proposals detailing how your institution will meet these guidelines are due to my office **no later than November 30, 2005**. Early proposals are encouraged, and will be reviewed by GEAR as they are received. Any questions about the guidelines or submission process should be directed to Dr. Patricia Francis, Assistant Provost for University Assessment and Academic Initiatives, at (518) 443-5644 or [Patricia.Francis@suny.edu](mailto:Patricia.Francis@suny.edu).

Thank you in advance for your cooperation in this important matter.

Sincerely,

Peter D. Salins  
Provost and Vice Chancellor  
for Academic Affairs

Copy: Chief Academic Officer  
Dr. Huot  
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