SUNY Cortland Assessment Plan

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College Mission

SUNY Cortland is an academic community dedicated to diverse learning experiences. Students grow as engaged citizens with a strong social conscience fostered by outstanding teaching, scholarship, and service.

1. Assessment Philosophy

The purpose of assessment at SUNY Cortland is to support holistically student learning, growth, and development in as broad a range of endeavors and activities as possible. To achieve this goal, the institution, departments, programs, and courses are studied from multiple perspectives at different levels using mixed methods to shed light on the impact the institution is having on students both in and out of the classroom and provide insight on how to improve. Applied learning and student engagement are two areas that become particularly salient lenses through which the college views its assessment program.

This philosophy is grounded in the rich history the College has in providing experiences in physical education, the outdoors, and in athletics, among other related fields. The College views not only its educational experiences but also its assessment program as participatory and co-constructed by students. Therefore, SUNY Cortland will be a leader in developing innovative approaches to assessment that engage students in the assessment process itself and help them grow in their roles as citizens of a democratic society.

2. Mission-Linked and Mapped Learning Outcomes

The Director of Institutional Research and/or Assessment will be responsible for reviewing the mapping of all learning outcomes and their linkage to the College mission. Groups at higher levels below will be responsible for informing groups at lower levels of changes in learning outcomes. Learning outcomes at the levels noted below will be created and revised *as needed* by the groups and individuals specified.

Program – Learning outcomes for each course and program will be created and revised by teams of subject matter and curricular experts (faculty) within each program.

Department – Departmental outcomes will be created and revised by teams of subject matter and curricular experts (faculty) within each department in cooperation with respective department chairs.

School/College – Learning outcomes at the school level will be created and revised by the dean and a team of senior faculty in each respective school.

Institution – Learning outcomes at the institutional level will be created and revised by deans, senior administrators, faculty, the Associate Provost, and the Provost.

3. Specific Assessment Plans

A. Course-Level Assessment Plan

The course-level assessment plan at SUNY Cortland is grounded in the assessment philosophy. Because the plan is outlined at the level of the course instead of at the level of the major/program, department, or institution, the plan by intention decentralizes authority. That is, decision making is delegated to teaching faculty. Decentralization will help the assessment process remain meaningful. Those closest to students, faculty, will largely make decisions about how to implement the plan and ensure it is sustainable.

Techniques and Target Groups- Faculty in the classroom know their subject matter and students better than anyone else and thus are best positioned to determine precisely how assessment at the course-level will occur. SUNY Cortland as an institution is dedicated to the academic success of all students and this can only occur if students are succeeding in the classroom. For that reason, SUNY Cortland will continue three distinct modes by which course-level assessment occurs: 1. Indirectly, through a standardized system of assessment in the form of course evaluations, 2. Through education, training, and other methods of supporting faculty such as faculty brown bags, seminars and workshops, which will include assistance in interpreting and using data from course evaluations. In this way, faculty not only are able to compare their course outcomes to other faculty and programs if they like and receive useful qualitative comments from the course evaluation forms, but they also are able to take what they learn from the faculty support opportunities and determine themselves how the principles, concepts, and tools that they learn are best implemented in their classrooms and what further methods to use, and 3. <u>Assessment of student learning outcomes for every student, every term, in every section, through course-embedded assessment tests, homework assignments, etc.) will be use to determine whether learning outcomes have been met. Thus, the target group in this plan is all students. Students will be impacted insofar as their work will be assessed and they will be provided feedback</u>.

Time Line – Data will be collected each term for every student in every section. Reports will be available and recommendations will be made at the end of each term, and as requested, during courses.

Provisions for Administration- Institutional Research will see that the plan is carried out and that data is analyzed, summarized, and reported.

Uses of Information- Reports by Institutional Research will provide feedback on the achievement of outcomes so that adjustments can be made during courses. These reports will be shared with faculty and periodically discussed by experts to make any suggested changes to the course.

These reports would not preclude additional informal mechanisms by which faculty could assess student learning, specifically student learning outcomes, and make changes.

Assessment Evaluation-- To assess the assessment process, implementation research will be carried out to investigate the question of whether changes instigated as a result of the process are actually leading to course level improvement. In addition, an indirect method - a survey of department chairs and assessment committee members - will be conducted to gain an indirect perspective on the assessment process.

B. Academic Programs and Department Assessment Plan

Techniques and Target Groups- The assessment plan for Academic Programs and Departments will build on key features of the Course-Level Assessment Plan such as the implementation of an assessment management system(e.g. TK20, LiveText, TracDat), which, it is hypothesized, will facilitate a more structured assessment process. Although the culture of departments/programs is believed to be quite decentralized and informal, the College overall is proficient in a number of systems and there has been relative success in implementing systems in the past, with processes seeming to follow or be propelled by system implementation, including at the department/program level.

The plan is intentionally similar to and is combined with the course level assessment plan (the structure and data sources are basically the same, so I will not repeat them here) except in terms of the scale and level (the program/department level). The reasons for this are 1. Simplicity (it is not necessary, and would even be counter-productive to reinvent the wheel) and 2. The plan as modified with direct assessment of learning outcomes already seems to be a strong plan. The idea of making the process as streamlined, simple, and straightforward as possible is key because otherwise it will be more challenging to get faculty and staff on board. Thus, a holistic approach similar to an all-in-one plan -- http://learningoutcomesassessment.org/documents/Occasional%20Paper%2019%20FINAL.pdf (see especially p. 8) where course-level outcomes are mapped to program and/or department outcomes and evaluated -- will be used.

Use of indirect outcomes like graduation and retention rates, as one of the key sources of data that Institutional Research already provides, will be incorporated into assessment at the academic program and department levels. Assessment management system results on learning outcomes (the data on which will ultimately come from tests, homework assignments, etc.) will be aggregated at the program/department level and compared and corresponding reports will be provided to program/department chairs (by IR), as will course evaluation data at the program/department level, to shed light on what aspects of the programs seem to be working and what possibly could be improved, in particular how aspects of academic programs could be modified to ensure the goals are achieved. Thus, target groups are all programs and departments. Students will be impacted indirectly as improvements at the department/program level affect the course level.

Time Line – Data will be collected for every department/program every term. Reports will be available and recommendations will be made at the end of each academic year.

Provisions for Administration- Institutional Research will play a key role in collecting data and disseminating reports at the program/department level as a result of this process. Assessment groups at the program/department level will be charged with creating learning outcomes at the program/department level as was noted earlier. Use of indirect outcomes like graduation and retention rates, as one of the key sources of data that Institutional Research already provides, will be incorporated into assessment and provided at the academic program and department levels.

Uses of Information- Corresponding reports will be provided to program/department chairs (by IR), as will course evaluation data at the program/department level, to shed light on what aspects of the programs seem to be working and what possibly could be improved, in particular how aspects of academic programs could be modified to ensure the goals are achieved.

Assessment Evaluation- To assess the assessment process, implementation research will be carried out to investigate the question of whether changes instigated as a result of the process are actually leading to program level improvement. In addition, an indirect method - a survey of department chairs and assessment committee members - will be conducted to gain an indirect perspective on the assessment process.

C. Assessment Plan Outline for School/College/Institutional Assessment

Techniques and Target Groups- The assessment plan for the Institution will build on key features of the Assessment Plan for Academic Programs and Departments such as the implementation of an assessment management system (e.g. TK20, LiveText, TracDat), which, it is hypothesized, will facilitate a more structured assessment process. One of the main purposes of this system will be for planning. Institutional level learning outcomes and strategic goals are what is being assessed. Indirect outcomes such as graduation rates, retention rates, and NSSE results will also be assessed as indicators. Objectives/goals will be set as determined by senior administration and faculty.

Time Line – Data will be collected every term and aggregated. Reports will be available and recommendations will be made at the end of each academic year.

Provisions for Administration- Institutional Research will see that the plan is carried out, data is analyzed, and reported. The College has significant experience with systems, and since there has been relative success in implementing systems in the past, this bodes well for the implementation of an assessment system. Some key tools that have not been used as much at the lower levels but will be used at the institutional level include the SUNY Data warehouse (BI) to analyze graduation and retention rates (indirect assessment of student learning outcomes) and a local data warehouse which Argos taps into. Using both of these systems, Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) will be developed, and the CLA (Collegiate Learning Assessment) (direct assessment of student learning) will also be used. Information from these latter two sources, it is hoped can be entered into or incorporated into the assessment management system. Thus, similar to the previous two plans, a holistic all-in-one plan --

http://learningoutcomesassessment.org/documents/Occasional%20Paper%2019%20FINAL.pdf
assessment plan (see especially p. 8) where course-level outcomes are mapped to program and/or department outcomes which can then be mapped to institutional outcomes-- will be used.

Uses of Information- reported chairs by IR to senior administration and IR to shed light on what aspects of the institution seem to be working and what possibly could be improved, in particular how aspects of schools/the College/the Institution could be modified to ensure the goals are achieved. This plan will be grounded in the assessment philosophy described in the first post.

Assessment Evaluation- To assess the assessment process, implementation research will be carried out to investigate the question of whether changes instigated as a result of the process are actually leading to institution-level improvement. In addition, an indirect method - a survey of senior administrators and faculty members - will be conducted to gain an indirect perspective on the assessment process. To oversee the process will be a planning and assessment committee for the institution.

4. Resources and Support - Resources and support for the overall plan including assessment facilitation will mainly consist of the assessment technology management system, stipend, and certificates of participation to recognize engagement. Institutional Research, the groups specified earlier, and the Assessment Committee will facilitate assessment. The system itself should help get faculty on board as it should make the process easier. The plan will be sustainable because the resources in terms of a course evaluation system and the small amount of money needed for training and educational opportunities have been in place for many years. Finally, to coordinate and coach faculty and oversee analysis, the Director of Institutional Research will play a pivotal role in helping guide, facilitate, and revisit, in consultation with the Assessment Committee, this assessment plan. The role and stability of the Director in the assessment process over the years will contribute to the plan's sustainability. The following is a summary of specific resources and support, in addition to overall support, that is provided at each level: Course-Level – Stipends, certificates of participation to faculty. Programs and Department – Stipends, certificates of participation to chairs, faculty. School/College/Institutional – Stipends, certificates of participation to deans, faculty.

5. Role of Assessment Committee

The role of the assessment committee at the different levels will be as follows: Course-Level – Check-in periodically with randomly selected faculty once per year; Programs and Department-Level – Check-in once every two years with program and department chairs and working groups about status of learning outcomes and assessment; School/College/Institutional-Level – Coordinate overall assessment process.

6. Technology to Facilitate Assessment Work will include an assessment management system (e.g. TK20, LiveText, TracDat), Operational Data Store (ODS), Enterprise Data Warehouse (EDW) connected to the Argos Reporting Tool, and "Select Survey" Survey Tool.