

**Kean University**  
**Periodic Review Report**  
**To Middle States Commission on Higher Education**  
**2006**  
**Section on Assessment**

**ASSESSMENT**

The Quality First Initiatives (QFI) Program President Farahi initiated in Spring 2004 includes an integral component: an outcomes assessment plan. Successful applicants must identify clear and measurable objectives for their projects and describe in detail how progress toward these objectives will be measured. The theoretical foundations for outcomes assessment and the methodologies to be employed are a required part of the initial project description and final summary report.

The QFI assessment requirements are representative of the broad institutional commitment Kean University has made to meaningful outcomes assessment as an indicator of program quality, institutional effectiveness, and student learning. Recent academic and student support activity has demonstrated an acute awareness of the vital nature of assessment, and its importance is stressed throughout the university community. Kean fully recognizes its obligation to meet the assessment standards described by the Middle states Commission on Higher Education. It also recognizes the immense value of assessment to the institution and the central role assessment must play in any effective planning activity.

In that context, implementation of assessment has never been uneven. However, the numerous assessment activities underway, including those associated with re-accreditation, have yet to be effectively coordinated. The two presidential transitions and a number of corresponding changes on the vice presidential and provost levels have led to unavoidable interruptions in the development of an overall vision for assessment at the University, as discussed in planning activities that followed our 2001 self-study. The work of assessment has continued throughout these transitional periods. Across the University, assessment planning and implementation has become an established element within the great majority of academic and service units at Kean.

Two functions, external accreditation and Kean University's five-year program review model (Appendix M), shape the assessment activities of academic units. Over 100 undergraduate and graduate degree programs, degree options, and certificate programs at Kean University are subject to external specialized review by 23 accrediting agencies. (Appendix N) All academic programs, including academic support services, participate in the University's program review process, following a five-year cycle. While the program review standards are internal to Kean, the process focuses on the same program elements that accreditation examines: mission, scope, governance, finance, curriculum, student outcomes, alumni feedback, faculty/student ratio, faculty credentials, facilities, and technology needs. The process also includes an external consultant's visit

and written report. Of all the accreditation and assessment activities at the University, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE, Appendix O) is the most encompassing since it includes all education programs as well as those disciplinary programs that offer a second major for students seeking certification.

Whether linked to NCATE or not, all academic departments at the University engage in assessment activities involving both current students and alumni. Assessment data are used for the program review process and, subsequently, program improvement and development. Over the past five years, assessment of student outcomes in the academic majors has evolved in conjunction with the model adopted by the General Education Program—course-embedded assessment. Following a cardinal principle—that assessment is an integral part of teaching and learning—academic departments throughout the University establish student outcomes when developing GE curricula and incorporate into these a variety of course-based assessment activities—tests, presentations, written reports, surveys, clinical evaluations, electronic portfolios, capstone course projects, comprehensive departmental exams, and exit interviews. In many cases, rubrics for various assessment activities are in place, making the evaluation of students consistent and allowing for comparisons within and across cohort groups. These activities are well developed in many units but rudimentary in others.

Non-academic units and programs engage in assessment as well. In some areas, such as Facilities and Human Resources, state-of-the-art technological applications designed specifically for the professional area measure efficiency and effectiveness. A number of other in-house tools measure the effectiveness of different units on campus. These include reports, meetings, focus groups, audits, surveys, needs assessments, electronic monitoring, informal feedback, testing, external data reports, accountability reports, outreach programs, interviews, audits, surveys, self studies, and utilization reports. A number of non-academic units are likewise subject to external standards; among these are Human Resources, Athletics, and Financial Aid.

Data collection is a strong point. For example, the New Jersey Commission on Higher Education requires all public institutions to submit an annual Institutional Profile. A public document, this required report prescribes content: the condition of the University; information on graduation rates; test scores; enrollment of state residents; scholarship recipients; Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) students in attendance; faculty information, including research and service, the number of full-time and adjunct faculty; the institutional profile of programs, accrediting bodies, and capital projects; and a profile of the Board. Kean University's most recent report, 2004-2005 (Appendix P) contains these required elements along with information on the characteristics of the student body, including demographic information, placement testing, and remedial skills needs; student outcomes; articulation agreements; student life and student development initiatives; and University partnerships for addressing State and regional trends.

An impressive amount of well-planned and utilized assessment activity is underway at the University. However, since assessment often occurs in isolation, the insights gained about one program or a cluster of programs rarely inform other units on

campus. Shortcomings exist, as would be expected when assessment is not fully coordinated:

- The quality and extent of assessment activities are not consistent across the University. Some programs have a few simple assessment activities and conduct such activities every five years. Some lack assessment instruments.
- In general, those disciplines seeking outside accreditation or re-accreditation tend to have more systematic and comprehensive assessment activities and plans.
- A substantial number of departments do not have externally-validated assessment activities. In such cases, how does Kean benchmark students' performance against students in similar or other institutions?
- In some instances, assessment activities in a given unit do not match the mission and goals of that unit.

In Fall 2005, the University Planning Council analyzed the assessment information gathered for this report from an historic perspective. Council members' examination of principal documents (accreditation and institutional reports) resulted in the recommendations that:

- An Assessment Committee be formed to function as a subcommittee of the University Planning Council;
- The reporting line for an Assessment Coordinator receive priority consideration;
- The Assessment Committee use the work of the 2002 Committee on Assessment as a basis for their own development of assessment strategies;
- The responsibilities of the Assessment Committee clearly designate the connection between their responsibilities and those of the coordinators for ongoing assessment (accreditation) activities in various academic areas;
- The Assessment Committee establish timelines that permit the immediate implementation of assessment activity that allows for the experience of the unit to accomplish assessment activity. This would also include "closing the loop" to implement change resulting from assessment information;
- The final format proscribed for the reporting of assessment activity be consistent (across academic departments and administrative departments) and that both be user friendly.

With the implementation of these recommendations, the University will address a longstanding, critical need for coordination and consistency, making both visible and operational the value it places on outcomes assessment.