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**GOUCHER COLLEGE**  
**STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT PLAN**  
**FOR**  
**GENERAL EDUCATION**  
**AND**  
**PROGRAMS**

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June 2006  
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

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Preface	3
Background	5
Vision and Mission of Goucher College	6
Priorities of Goucher College	7
General Education Requirements	8
Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Plan	9
Guiding Principles	10
Institutional Learning Goals	12
Liberal Education Learning Goals	13
Course-Level Assessment	15
Procedures for Course-Level Assessment of Student Learning	17
Graduate & Undergraduate Program-Level Assessment	20
Closing the Loop	22
Conclusion	23
Appendix A – Assessment Project Plan and Report	25
Appendix B – Commonly Used Terms	32

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## PREFACE

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As complex as the topic of student learning assessment can be, in plain and simple terms, it is the process in the learning cycle that provides faculty true evidence of learning in the classroom. It is truly the essence of teaching.

Assessment has created a paradigm shift in learning and teaching. When faculty now plan the curricula for courses and programs, the primary question is no longer "What will I teach (or what content will I cover) in this class or program?" The primary question becomes "What will the students learn?"

Assessment forces us to look at what the students will be able to do at the end of the course or program that they could not do at the beginning. Additionally, two other important questions surface, "How will I know what they can do?" and "How will students know what they can do?" All of these questions are the heart and core of assessment.

Goucher College's commitment to learning is evidenced in its commitment to creating a learning-centered environment in which faculty work collaboratively to help students learn. Although the topic often seems overwhelming and complex, assessment can be straightforward while yielding bountiful returns to students and faculty.

This Plan sets forth for Goucher the general principles of assessment for the General Education core competencies (as defined by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education) and assessment of learning goals for the College's programs. To answer the most frequent questions asked by educators as to why student learning assessment is so important and how it will benefit students and faculty, there are several key responses to those questions.

1. It provides faculty with evidence on the strengths and weaknesses of student learning as it relates to defined learning outcomes for a course or program. This ultimately leads to better advising and academic guidance and higher retention rates.

*Start small, but think big...  
Good assessment should focus on things that matter.*

2. It creates a plan for measuring students' academic growth, development and the persistence of learning in five key competencies (i.e., communication, critical thinking, scientific and quantitative reasoning, information literacy and technological competence) throughout a student's college career. It has been proven that much of the value of assessment comes from the systematic way it allows faculty to collaborate, question, discuss, share and observe student learning.
3. Finally, it provides continuous feedback to students enabling them to learn, grow and change and take responsibility for their own learning.

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## BACKGROUND

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Student learning outcomes assessment at Goucher College is a comprehensive effort focused on measuring student academic achievement against stated goals in order to provide continuous feedback to students, faculty and professional staff for the purpose of improving academic programs, teaching and learning. As part of the College's mission which states that Goucher College is dedicated to a liberal arts education that prepares students within a broad, humane perspective for a life of inquiry, creativity, and critical and analytical thinking, Goucher seeks to establish a solid foundation for measuring the effectiveness of student learning throughout its curriculum. To achieve its mission, Goucher College is making learning its central focus, helping students be active partners in the learning process, and focusing on liberal education/general education learning outcomes to assess student learning. It is through the analysis of student learning efforts that the College will be able to continuously improve learning and teaching in a systematic and effective manner.

Assessment of student learning is a cycle of planning, implementing, assessing and using the results to improve student learning. It begins by establishing clear, measurable expected learning goals and outcomes where evidence of students' learning is systematically gathered, analyzed, and interpreted to determine how well a student's performance matches those outcomes; and using the resulting information to understand and improve student learning throughout Goucher. "Much of the value of assessment comes from the systematic way it makes educators question, discuss, share and observe." (Palomba, C.A. and T.W. Banta. 1999. *Assessment essentials: Planning, implementing, and improving assessment in higher education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.)

In the fall of 2004, the Faculty Curriculum Committee, working with the Curricular Transformation Group (an ad hoc faculty group elected to lead the curriculum review efforts), developed an articulation of overall Curriculum Learning Goals for the Goucher curriculum. These goals address learning for all students and are tied to Goucher's mission.

They are the foundation for the student learning outcomes assessment and the liberal education/ general education learning outcomes.

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## VISION AND MISSION OF GOUCHER COLLEGE

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Goucher College is dedicated to providing a liberal arts education that prepares students within a broad, humane perspective for a life of inquiry, creativity, and critical and analytical thinking. The College's principal objectives are to help each student master significant areas of knowledge and skills, while developing an appreciation for individual and cultural diversity, a sense of social responsibility, and a system of personal and professional ethics.

Goucher believes these goals are best achieved in an environment that responds to students as both individuals and as members of multiple groups. Accordingly, education at Goucher College is based on an expanding sense of community – a community where discourse is valued and practiced, where students attend small classes and interact closely with faculty and one another, and where students can participate in and lead extracurricular programs.

In undertaking its mission, Goucher College recognizes the centrality of four curricular and extracurricular themes:

- Scholarship and academic excellence in traditional disciplines in the humanities, social sciences, natural sciences and mathematics, and the arts.
- An interdisciplinary approach to important areas that cross or transcend the boundaries of traditional disciplines, including world peace, the environment, and the nature of knowledge.
- An international outlook extending liberal arts education beyond Western cultures to encompass the perspectives and achievements of other members of the world community.

- Commitment to experiential learning on and off campus as well as abroad, requiring each student to apply and extend what has been learned in the classroom.

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## **PRIORITIES OF GOUCHER COLLEGE**

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The strategic plan developed for Goucher College in 2002 was designed to provide guidance for the college during subsequent years. The five priorities within the plan are:

- Developing students as true global citizens.
- Providing intensive experiential learning programs in the local community, around the United States, and overseas.
- Gathering community members in the free exchange of ideas.
- Increasing the diversity of Goucher's faculty, staff, and student body, and continuing to develop an atmosphere of inclusiveness and respect in which every voice will be heard and every idea considered on the basis of its intellectual merit.
- Expanding, enhancing, and reinvigorating the intellectual, cultural and social life of the Goucher College community.

To ensure that the mission and priorities of Goucher College are valued and cultivated by students, faculty and staff, the College is placing a high level of importance on the assessment of student learning. It is intended that the results of assessment at Goucher College will showcase the superior quality of teaching and learning that occurs here and enable the College to maintain, publicize and improve its unique learning environment.

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## GENERAL EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS

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In conformance with Middle States Commission on Higher Education's Standards 12 and 14, it is required that educational institutions must focus student-learning assessment at a minimum on five competencies related to general education and essential skills that are identified in Standard 12 of Middle States' accreditation process (see *Characteristics of Excellence*). These include:

- Written and Oral Communication
- Critical Analysis and Reasoning
- Information Literacy
- Scientific and Quantitative Reasoning
- Technological Competence

In addition, a student learning assessment plan as defined in Middle States' Standard 14 should be written by each institution and be an integral component of the college's overall institutional effectiveness plan.

The following plan outlines Goucher's goals for student learning and the processes it will take to ensure that its students are given the learning opportunities to meet these learning goals and outcomes.

Assessment should be viewed as a work in progress; a process that we will continuously strive to improve. As faculty and administrators at Goucher College go through the process of assessing student learning, more experience and knowledge will be gained; and as a result, this plan will grow and change in the years to come.

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**GOUCHER COLLEGE**

**STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT PLAN**

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*Start small, but think big...*  
*Good assessment should focus on things that matter.*

Goucher's *Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Plan* is a major component of the College's *Institutional Effectiveness Plan*. Middle States Commission on Higher Education states that every institution of higher learning must have an *Institutional Effectiveness Plan* which demonstrates and evaluates the degree to which an institution is accomplishing all aspects of its mission and goals with emphasis given to improving teaching and student learning. The assessment of student learning is one of the major components of institutional effectiveness. The process of assessing institutional effectiveness ensures that our college is doing what we say we are doing and that we are using results from assessment to make positive changes to all aspects of the college's services, programs, and especially student learning.

The assessment of student learning at Goucher is an ongoing institutional activity and embraces Middle States Commission on Higher Education's Standard 14 in *Characteristics of Excellence*, which states that "assessment of student learning demonstrates that the institution's students have knowledge, skills, and competencies consistent with institutional goals and those students at graduation have achieved appropriate higher education goals." Goucher College is committed to helping its students learn and without obtaining systematic feedback on how effective our teaching strategies are and how well our students have learned what we think is important, we would not know if they are learning.

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## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

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As the following diagram illustrates, assessment of student learning is a cycle of continuous feedback: planning, implementing, assessing and using the results for continuous improvement. Goucher begins by establishing clear, measurable expected learning goals and outcomes where evidence of students' learning is systematically gathered, analyzed, and interpreted to determine how well a student's performance matches those outcomes; and using the resulting information to understand and improve student learning throughout Goucher College.

### Assessment Planning Cycle

**Use**  
**Results...**  
*To improve  
teaching and  
learning*

**Assess...**  
*Student  
achievement against  
those goals and  
outcomes*



**Plan...**  
*Identify  
Learning Goals  
Learning Outcomes*

**Implement...**  
*Opportunities for  
students to achieve  
those outcomes*

*Start small, but think big...  
Good assessment should focus on things that matter.*

Guiding principles that are being used as the basis for assessment activities at Goucher are:

1. The Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Plan is linked to the College's mission and goals.
2. Student learning assessment is realistic and supported by an appropriate investment of institutional resources.
3. Assessment is a collaborative endeavor involving faculty, staff, administrators, and students. The faculty has prime responsibility for developing assessment policies, designing the assessments of academic programs, and using the results. The Assistant Director for Institutional Research for Outcomes Assessment provides assistance where possible to minimize the burden of assessment.
4. Assessment of programs, courses, and curricula have clear, measurable learning outcomes that meet the needs of students; address higher-order thinking skills as well as content mastery; and are shared with students and faculty.
5. Assessment activities enable students to have sufficient opportunity to master each key-learning outcome through appropriate learning activities during the course or program. Multiple assessment tools and techniques are used systematically over time with care taken to ensure that assessment tools and techniques match the learning outcomes being assessed and yield truthful and fair information that can be used with confidence. Assessments should provide equitable opportunities for students of varied backgrounds and learning styles to demonstrate what they have learned.
5. Assessment results are used appropriately. Major decisions regarding students, curricula and programs are based on the results of multiple sources of collected assessment data.

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## INSTITUTIONAL LEARNING GOALS

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In November 2004, the Faculty Curriculum Committee established the following institutional learning goals, which are implicit in the College's mission. These learning goals address learning as a multidimensional and integrated process for all students and are the foundation for the qualities and attributes our students should have after graduating from Goucher College.

### Institutional Learning Goals

1. Goucher students will acquire both discipline-specific and interdisciplinary knowledge
  - a. Students will attain a thorough foundation in at least one academic area of study sufficient to prepare them for graduate work, professional life, and informed citizenship;
  - b. Students will be exposed to the breadth of knowledge available across the disciplines in the liberal arts;
    - i. They will encounter diverse perspectives and methods of learning;
    - ii. They will acquire an interdisciplinary, intercultural, and contextual understanding of the world.
2. Goucher students will learn to acquire, process, and communicate information effectively
  - a. Students will learn to uncover, observe, and collect data and ideas in a variety of ways;
  - b. Students will learn to use logical, quantitative, and critical analysis to evaluate the information that they have gathered and to generate coherent thought;
  - c. Students will learn how non-verbal forms of communication express meaning;
  - d. Students are expected to communicate effectively using written and spoken English, and must be proficient in at least one foreign language.
3. Goucher students will learn the skills and understanding needed to be engaged global citizens
  - a. They will encounter diverse perspectives and beliefs in a variety of geographic, socio-economic, cultural, and historical contexts;

- b. They will enhance their understanding of the world by developing their international, intercultural, and environmental awareness.

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## LIBERAL EDUCATION LEARNING GOALS

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Goucher's institutional learning goals were subsequently translated into the new liberal education curriculum for the College on May 11, 2005. The Curriculum Committee and the ad hoc Curricular Transformation Group strove to make the articulation of curriculum learning goals consistent Goucher's mission and with Middle States' general education competencies and subsequently use the results of that assessment for curricular improvement.

As an important part of liberal education at Goucher, students should learn and experience various methods and modes of inquiry represented in the humanities, social sciences, natural sciences and the arts. The following liberal education learning goals address the Goucher College mission, its institutional learning goals and Middle States' core competencies.

### Liberal Education Learning Goals

1. Students must demonstrate proficiency in written communication. This will be satisfied by demonstrating proficiency within the English composition sequence of courses or through a portfolio. (*Communication*)
2. Students must demonstrate proficiency in a foreign language through the intermediate level. (*Communication*)
3. Students must become informed global citizens and gain intercultural awareness through a study-abroad experience. (*Multiculturalism*)
4. Students must become acquainted with different ages, societies, and cultures and learn how to use a variety of historical sources. This component will be satisfied by courses identified throughout the curriculum that deal with the past. (*Social Values*)
5. Students must be able to reason abstractly and appreciate the elegance of abstract structure. This will be satisfied by a course in mathematics or logic. (*Quantitative Reasoning*)

6. Students must understand the methods of scientific discovery and experimental design. This will be satisfied by a natural science course with a laboratory. (*Scientific Reasoning and Technological Competence*)
7. Students must acquire problem solving and research capability by identifying, locating, evaluating, and effectively using information. This will be satisfied by courses identified throughout the curriculum. (*Critical Analysis and Reasoning/ Information Literacy*)
8. Students must be able to analyze and understand the creative process, assimilate experience and communicate it. This will be satisfied by courses identified throughout the curriculum. (*Critical Analysis and Reasoning*)
9. Students must be able to interpret words, images, objects and/or actions that are expressions of human culture. This will be satisfied by courses identified throughout the curriculum. (*Critical Analysis and Reasoning*)
10. Students must understand the complex nature of social structures, and/or human relationships that involve issues of inequality and difference. This will be satisfied by courses identified throughout the curriculum. (*Scientific Reasoning and Social Values*)
11. Students must explore the ecological and/or policy dimensions of environmental sustainability. This will be satisfied by courses identified throughout the curriculum. (*Scientific Reasoning*)

In order for assessment to be meaningful, manageable, flexible and informative, a process with definitive guidelines will be followed. Student learning should be assessed from multiple perspectives and on multiple occasions in order to ensure that instruction is fostering high-quality learning. It is the intent of Goucher College to assess students at the course, program and institutional level.

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## COURSE-LEVEL ASSESSMENT

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The Middle States Commission on Higher Education's Standard 14 requires that colleges and universities assess student learning at the course, program, and institutional level. It is important to note that Middle States is flexible in its approach to how colleges define and assess student learning at these three levels. An institution can be as creative as they want in their assessment process as long as evidence of student learning is obtained. This plan advocates a bottom-up approach beginning with assessment of student learning at the course level within each of Goucher's five academic divisions: Humanities; Social Sciences; Natural Sciences and Mathematics; the Arts; and, Interdisciplinary Studies. The approach described in this plan seeks to obtain needed evidence of student learning and improvements to teaching and learning with a minimum of disruption to the daily operation of faculty.

For assessment to play a useful role in courses, it is essential that: (a) assessment techniques be clearly aligned with the learning outcomes and instructional processes of a course; (b) students be made aware of why, how, and according to what criteria their learning will be assessed; and (c) assessment methods and tools be carefully designed to meet the intended uses for assessment. Uses for assessment will typically include:

- Understanding how well students are prepared for class (additional resources might be necessary)
- Providing feedback to the instructor about students' strength and weaknesses in the subject matter (for on-going instructional adjustment)
- Providing feedback to students about their learning progress (to encourage adjustments in study habits, motivation, attention to learning, etc.)
- Obtaining students' perceptions on their learning processes and instructional effectiveness (what helps, what hinders, what changes need to be made), during and at the end of a course (for improving pedagogy, materials, delivery, and other course features)

- Providing feedback about students’ learning outcomes throughout the semester and at the end of a course (to make revisions in course content; to adjust the sequencing of courses; to improve overall degree program curricula)
- Summarizing students’ abilities and knowledge upon course completion (for communicating about the value of a course)

Figure 1 illustrates the relationship of course-level goals to program and institutional goals. This matrix is not presented as a model that must be followed, but rather an example of the relationship of learning goals at different levels.

**Table 1**  
**Mapping of Course-Level Goals to Program/Liberal Education Learning Goals**

Institutional Learning Goal	Liberal Education Learning Goals	Program Learning Goals	Course-Level Learning Goals	
		Theatre	Acting I	20 <sup>th</sup> Century Theatre
Multiculturalism	Become informed global citizens and gain inter-cultural awareness	Compare different theatrical cultural contexts	Compare different theatrical forms	Examine and investigate a variety of European artists
Communicate Effectively	Demonstrate proficiency in written communication	Formulate constructive critical responses to theatrical phenomena	Critique a performance in written form	Communicate theatre history in a clear manner through writing
Critical Thinking	Acquire problem solving and research capability	Compare different theatrical forms, aesthetic values or cultural contexts	Identify a variety of acting theories and reflect on which ones inform one’s approach ...	Compare and contrast different styles in theatre

Another form of learning-goal mapping that departments may find useful is a Core Competency Matrix (Figure 2) which illustrates where in the curriculum each core competency is met before beginning to identify methods for assessing student learning. The process of curriculum mapping ensures alignment of Middle States’ core competencies with the College’s learning goals and highlights the level of learning that is taking place in the course (e.g., I=Introduced; P=Practiced; R=Reinforced).

**Table 2**

**Core Competency Matrix**

<b>Department</b>	<b>Core Competency</b>				
<b>Chemistry</b>	Written and Oral Communication	Critical Analysis and Reasoning	Information Literacy	Scientific and Quantitative Reasoning	Technological Competence
<b>CHE111</b>	<b>I</b>	<b>I</b>		<b>I</b>	<b>P</b>
<b>CHE235</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>P</b>	

I = Introduced; P = Practiced; R = Reinforced

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**PROCEDURES FOR COURSE-LEVEL ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING**

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Course-level assessment involves a cycle of formal, rigorous assessment projects undertaken in three courses by an academic department within one of the five divisions using faculty team leaders. These self-selected faculty team leaders will accept the responsibility for their departments and oversee the two-year assessment project. They will be responsible overseeing faculty in the design, implementation, collection and analysis of assessment data, and submission of the final course-level assessment report. All faculty within a department should have an opportunity to participate in the assessment process and be involved in any professional development that is offered to help in the designing and undertaking of future assessment projects in future two-year cycles. A model of this two-year cycle is shown in Table 3 but can be modified in any way by the academic division.

**Table 3**  
**Course-Level Model of the Two-year Assessment Cycle**  
**Department Assessment Cycle**

Division	Arts	Humanities	Social Sciences	Natural Sciences	Interdisciplinary
<b>Fall 2006 - Spring 2008</b>					
Department	Theatre	English- Writing Program	Management	Chemistry	Frontiers – First-Year Seminar
Course	THE140	ENG103	MGT110	CHE000	FRO100.001
Course	THE220	ENG104	MGT245	CHE000	FRO100....
Course	THE390	ENG105	MGT380	CHE000	FRO100.029
Course	THE391	ENG106			FRO140.001
<b>Fall 2007 - Spring 2009</b>					
Department	Art	Modern Languages	Sociology	Mathematics	Frontiers – First-Year Seminar
Course	ART100	FR/SP/...110*	SOC000	MAT000	FRO100.001-
Course	ART102	FR/SP/...120*	SOC000	MAT000	FRO100.029
Course	ART330	FR/SP/...130*	SOC000	MAT000	FRO140.001

\* FR = French, SP = Spanish, German, Italian, Russian

To ensure that the assessment project is sufficient and likely to yield meaningful, reliable, and valid data about teaching and learning, each department will submit an **Assessment Project Plan (APP)** (see Appendix A) to the Department Chair and Chief Academic Officer who will then consider and approve the plan. Once approval is given, the department may proceed to plan, collect and analyze data, implement change, and reassess for effectiveness. The cycle would work like this:

**■ Year 1**

- Write Assessment Project Plan and submit for approval to Department Chair and Chief Academic Officer/Provost
- Design and test rubric or scoring tool
- Collect assessment artifacts
- Analyze results and recommend improvements to teaching and learning

**■ Year 2**

- Implement changes to improve student learning
- Reassess

- Write Assessment Project Report and submit for approval to Department Chair and Chief Academic Officer/Provost

The cycle then begins again with a new department team assessing different courses. As mentioned above in year two, each assessment project should address at a minimum three out of the five Middle States' competencies. It is understood that some competencies may be more or less relevant than others to certain disciplines. Emphasis or de-emphasis of any one of the competencies is up to the faculty team and should be explained in the Assessment Project Plan. For example, if the Art Department does not feel that it can adequately assess Scientific Reasoning, an explanation as to why it cannot be assessed should be given in the Assessment Project Plan.

Recognizing that faculty is stretched with teaching, committees, etc., the College has committed resources to facilitate assessment practices at Goucher. An outcomes assessment staff member has been hired to provide training and assist faculty in the implementation of their assessment processes; workshops will be given to all departments to provide a practical guide for assessment; and, the software package, TrueOutcomes, has been implemented to provide the technology to support continuous, sustainable assessment.

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## GRADUATE & UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAM-LEVEL ASSESSMENT

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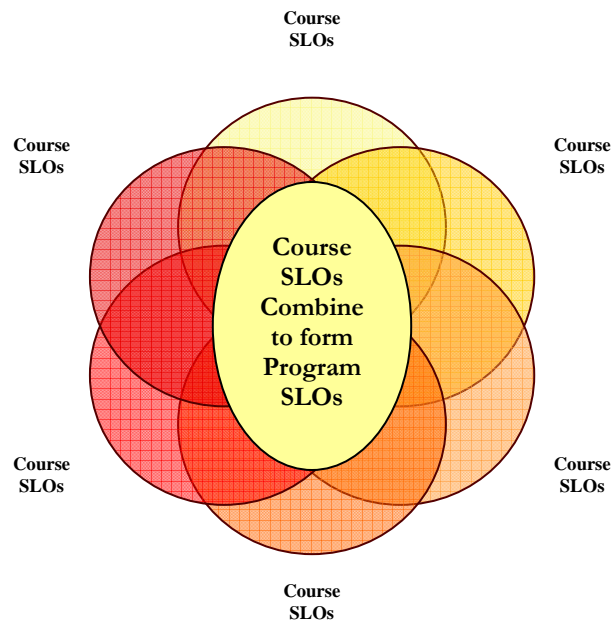
The purpose of assessing student learning within each undergraduate and graduate program is to provide information regarding the effectiveness of each program's curriculum, instruction, and resource allocation. Assessment plans for individual programs will be similar in overall structure but may differ on which Institutional Learning Goals they fulfill. Programs will also prepare an Assessment Project Plan (APP) which will be approved by the Department Chair and Chief Academic Officer/Provost. In preparing these APPs, it is essential that the entire department collaborate and agree upon a learning goal(s) and outcomes for their respective program. To ensure that the program meets the needs of all concerned, faculty (tenured and non-tenured) who are teaching prerequisites, co-requisites and courses within the program should be involved in defining the learning goal for the program.

Program-level goals are broad statements that articulate what you want your students to be able to do after finishing your program. Once a consensus is reached on the program goal definition, faculty can then concentrate on defining measurable learning outcomes. Learning outcomes are the specific skills, knowledge, and/or traits a student should acquire through courses of instruction in this particular program. Ideally, three or four measurable learning outcomes are adequate for a program.

The College developed a five-year plan for implementing, coordinating and refining the Assessment/Program Review efforts of individual departments and programs. Ideally, program assessment should just be an integration or merging of the assessment work done at the course level within the program (see Table 4). For example assessment of three chemistry courses could be combined to form the assessment of the Chemistry major. Four or five academic programs with majors and minors will be identified to work on developing their assessment plans, including the development of learning outcomes, learning strategies, assessment methods and scoring tools (rubrics).

Table 4

Integration of Course SLOs to Program SLOs



The following schedule for program-level assessment and review will work like this:

■ **Year 1**

- Write Assessment Project Plan for the program and submit for approval to Department Chair and Chief Academic Officer/Provost
- Design and test rubric or scoring tool
- Collect assessment artifacts
- Analyze results and recommend improvements to teaching and learning

■ **Year 2**

- Implement changes resulting from the assessment to improve student learning
- Reassess

■ **Year 3**

- Write the self-study in preparation for the program review
  - Enrollment data

- Retention figures
- Graduation trends
- Assessment results

#### ■ Year 4

- Meet with outside peer reviewers and undergo program review

#### ■ Year 5

- Respond to recommendations
- Implement any changes based on the program review

Workshops and faculty development opportunities will be made available so that the faculty as a whole will gain greater familiarity and confidence with student learning assessment. Financial resources will be dedicated to the programs identified for this assessment work each year.

The process for developing a self-study program and program review has been long established at the College. In addition to the self studies presenting data about enrollment, retention, graduation trends, etc., the new self-studies will look closely at the results of the student learning assessment data for the department. This data will give the department and the outside peer reviewers, who come during the program review period, more solid information with which to design the programs' curricular and program changes.

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## CLOSING THE LOOP

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By examining student work and other indicators about student learning, academic units can make better decisions about needed adjustments to those programs. The assessment of student learning accompanied with feedback to the student is also a critical part of the educational process for students. As students develop a clearer understanding of what they have achieved and have yet to achieve they become better learners. In addition, the results of the assessment of student learning can be used for purposes of quality assurance. An understanding of what students know and can do is an essential element in showing public audiences, including accrediting agencies, the educational value of programs at Goucher College. The assessment plan serves to organize and focus assessment efforts such that these purposes can be met in an effective and efficient manner.

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## CONCLUSION

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Broad, meaningful reform in higher education has reached every campus in the United States. This means that institutions of higher education need to focus on student-centered and learning-centered changes to facilitate and promote the kinds of learning students need in order to meet the challenges in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Greater Expectations National Panel calls “for higher education to help college students become intentional learners who can adapt to new environments, integrate knowledge from different sources, and continue learning throughout their lives.

To thrive in a complex world, these intentional learners should also become:

- **Empowered** through the mastery of intellectual and practical skills
- **Informed** by knowledge about the natural and social worlds and about forms of inquiry basic to these studies
- **Responsible** for their personal actions and for civic values.”

Goucher College is committed to ensuring that its students achieve the learning goals and outcomes defined for its students and will use assessment results to improve students’ learning.

This Student Learning Assessment Plan, which is based on the following Best Practices, will satisfy the requirements of external stakeholders, provide for internal assessment needs, and are minimally intrusive on the daily operation of faculty.

- Best Practice Learning Outcomes describe what students will know, think, and be able to do upon completion of the course or program. They are clear and measurable, they are written using action verbs, and most focus on higher order thinking skills rather than conceptual understanding.
- Best Practice Learning Strategies are those that give every student in the course or program ample opportunity to master the learning outcome, either through multiple courses, study in one course or co-curricular activity.

- Best Practice Assessment Methods match the learning outcome being assessed; are multiple measures; are used systematically (repeatedly, on a schedule) over time; and yield truthful, fair information that can be used with confidence.
- Best Practice Uses of Results lead to appropriate modifications in learning outcomes, teaching methods, curriculum, and/or assessment strategies, as suitable. Furthermore, positive assessment results are shared with faculty, students, academic administrators, prospective students, and other stakeholders as appropriate.

# APPENDIX A

## ASSESSMENT PROJECT PLAN AND REPORT



## ASSESSMENT PROJECT PLAN

**Department/Program Name:**

**Program/Course Being Assessed:**

**Assessment Team Leader:** *Name of the person(s) working on assessment.*

**Department/Program Goal Statement(s):** *Select from catalog description and/or Goucher's liberal education goals.*

### Key words

**Course Goal Statement(s):** *Select from program description in recent catalog, Goucher's liberal education goals, Middle States core competencies i.e., Communication, Critical Thinking, Information Literacy, Scientific or Quantitative Reasoning, and Technological Competency. Specific course goals may also be added.*

**Learning Outcomes (approximately 2-4):** *Specific, measurable learning outcomes that tie into course goals. What do you want your students to learn or be able to do upon completion of this course? Different course goals should correspond to different set of learning outcomes.*

**Assessment Methods:** *Please state what methods will be used to evaluate student learning. These can be direct (e.g. term paper, capstone projects, reflective writing, portfolio, exams, exhibits, licensure, certification tests) or indirect methods (e.g., employer or alumni surveys or student perception surveys). If possible, use the same artifact for multiple learning outcomes and corresponding goal.*

**Assessment Scoring Tool:** *For direct measures, please attach the scoring tool that will be used to evaluate student learning (e.g., rubric, rating scale, etc.) The assessment tool should be based on a set of criteria for evaluating students' work.*

**Course Goal Statement(s):**

**Learning Outcome 1:**

**Assessment Methods:**

Direct Method:  
  
Scoring Tool: Please describe and attach.  
  
Indirect Method (if applicable):

**Learning Outcome 2:**

**Assessment Methods:**

Direct Method:  
  
Scoring Tool: Please describe and attach.  
  
Indirect Method (if applicable):

**Learning Outcome 3:**

**Assessment Methods:**

Direct Method:  
  
Scoring Tool: Please describe and attach.  
  
Indirect Method (if applicable):

**Learning Outcome 4:**

**Assessment Methods:**

Direct Method:  
  
Scoring Tool: Please describe and attach.  
  
Indirect Method (if applicable):

**Timeline:**

*When do you expect to begin collecting the assessment information?* **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

*When do you expect to report assessment results?* **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Submitted by:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Reviewed by:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

*Department Chair*

Be sure to attach your **Assessment Tool** (i.e., rubric or rating scale for each assessment strategy) to this Plan

**Please forward a copy of this Assessment Project Plan and Rubric to:**

Institutional Research Office

[gwisan@goucher.edu](mailto:gwisan@goucher.edu)

[pallabi.roy@goucher.edu](mailto:pallabi.roy@goucher.edu)

*Received by:* \_\_\_\_\_ *Date:* \_\_\_\_\_  
*Director, Institutional Research*

*Approved by:* \_\_\_\_\_ *Date:* \_\_\_\_\_ *Chief*  
*Academic Officer/Provost*



## ASSESSMENT PROJECT REPORT

*Please use your completed assessment plan form to fill in the program goals, course goals, corresponding learning outcomes and assessment methods.*

**Department/Program Name:**

**Program/Course Being Assessed:**

**Assessment Team Leader:** *Name of the person(s) working on assessment.*

**Department/Program Goal Statement(s):** *Select from catalog description and/or Goucher's liberal education goals*

**Course Goals:**

**Learning Outcomes:**

**Assessment Methods:**

Direct Method:

Scoring Tool: Please describe and attach.

Indirect Method (if applicable):

**What Are the Findings (e.g., Results) From Your Assessment Endeavors?**

*Based on the assessment data collected, please provide a summary report of the results (both quantitative and/or qualitative) regarding student learning in your course or program. You may attach your report as a word document..*

**How Will Those Findings Be Used To Improve Student Learning?**

*Please state how assessment results will be used for course/program improvement or any other action that may be taken to improve student learning.*

**What Changes Are Suggested To Improve Student Learning?**

*Please state what changes to the curriculum, rubric or teaching style are necessary for course/program improvement or any other action that may be taken to improve student learning.*

*Submitted by:* \_\_\_\_\_ *Date:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Reviewed by:* \_\_\_\_\_ *Date:* \_\_\_\_\_  
*Department Chair*

**Please forward a copy of this Assessment Project Report to:**

**Institutional Research Office**

[gwisan@goucher.edu](mailto:gwisan@goucher.edu)

[pallabi.roy@goucher.edu](mailto:pallabi.roy@goucher.edu)

*Received by:* \_\_\_\_\_ *Date:* \_\_\_\_\_  
*Director, Institutional Research*

*Start small, but think big...  
Good assessment should focus on things that matter.*



## APPENDIX B

### Commonly Used Assessment Terms

*Note: Listed below is a glossary of terms and concepts commonly used in assessment and research literatures. Some of these terms may appear to be very simple while others appear to be more complex. This list is not meant to be comprehensive of all terminology used in these fields but is meant to be representative of those concepts and terms commonly used and perhaps most relevant to your department's assessment process.*

#### **Academic program review**

The periodic peer evaluation of the effectiveness of an educational degree program usually encompassing student learning, faculty research, scholarship, and service, and assessment resources.

#### **Assessment**

In an educational context, the process of observing learning; describing, collecting, recording, scoring, and interpreting information about a student's or one's own learning. At its most useful, assessment is an episode in the learning process; part of reflection and autobiographical understanding of progress. Traditionally, student assessments are used to determine placement, promotion, graduation, or retention.

In the context of institutional accountability, assessments are undertaken to determine the principal's performance, effectiveness of schools, etc. In the context of school reform, assessment is an essential tool for evaluating the effectiveness of changes in the teaching-learning process.

#### **Assessment Plan**

A document that outlines the student learning outcomes (for academic programs) or courses, the direct and indirect assessment methods used to demonstrate the attainment of each outcome, a brief explanation of the assessment methods, an indication of which outcome(s) is/are addressed by each method, the intervals at which evidence is collected and reviewed, and the individual(s) responsible for the collection/review of evidence.

#### **Benchmark**

A criterion-referenced objective; “performance data that are used for comparative purposes. A program can use its own data as a baseline benchmark against which to compare future performance.

### **Capstone Project**

A kind of holistic project at the end of a program which ties together all of the program elements (e.g., theses, exhibit, strategic plan, musical production, etc.)

### **Classroom assessment techniques**

Classroom assessment techniques (CATs) are “simple tools for collecting data on student learning in order to improve it” (Angelo & Cross, 1993, p. 26). CATs are short, flexible, classroom techniques that provide rapid, informative feedback to improve classroom dynamics by monitoring learning, from the student’s perspective, throughout the semester. Data from CATs are evaluated and used to facilitate continuous modifications and improvement in the classroom.

### **Classroom-based assessment**

Classroom-based assessment is the formative and summative evaluation of student learning within a single course. This assessment involves evaluating the curriculum as designed, taught, and learned. It involves the collection of data aimed at measuring successful learning in the individual course and improving instruction with a goal to improving learning.

### **Closing the loop**

The use of assessment results for program change and improvement.

### **Course-embedded assessment**

Collecting assessment data information within the classroom because it provides an opportunity to use already in-place assignments and coursework for assessment purposes. This involves taking a second look at materials generated in the classroom so that, in addition to providing a basis for grading students, these materials allow faculty to evaluate their approaches to instruction and course design.

### **Criterion-based assessments**

Assessment evaluated or scored using a set of criteria to appraise or evaluate work. Criterion-referenced evaluation is based on proficiency not subjective measures such as improvement

### **Critical Thinking**

Is a widely used term to include analysis, synthesis, evaluation, problem solving and some of the productive habits of mind such as working independently, setting goals, persevering, organizing, etc.

### **Culture of evidence**

An environment in which the use of research and/or assessment results to guide policy decisions is expected and valued.

## **Curriculum-embedded or Learning-embedded Assessment**

Assessment that occurs simultaneously with learning such as projects, portfolios and "exhibitions." Occurs in the classroom setting, and, if properly designed, students should not be able to tell whether they are being taught or assessed. Tasks or tests are developed from the curriculum or instructional materials.

## **Direct Measures**

Direct measures of student learning require student to display their knowledge and skills as they respond to the instrument itself. (e.g., objective tests, essays, presentations, and classroom assignments all meet this criterion).

## **Embedded assessment**

Embedded assessment occurs within the regular class or curricular activity. Class assignments linked to student learning outcomes through primary trait analysis, serve as grading and assessment instruments. Individual questions on exams can be embedded in numerous classes to provide departmental, program, or institutional assessment information. An additional benefit to embedded assessment is immediate feedback on the pedagogy and student needs.

## **Evaluation**

Both qualitative and quantitative descriptions of pupil behavior plus value judgments concerning the desirability of that behavior. Using collected information (assessments) to make informed decisions about continued instruction, programs, and activities.

## **Formative Assessment**

Formative assessment generates useful feedback during the course the semester for development and improvement. The purpose is to provide an opportunity to perform and receive guidance (such as in class assignments, quizzes, discussion, lab activities, etc.) that will improve or shape a final performance. This stands in contrast to summative assessment where the final result is a verdict and the participant may never receive feedback for improvement such as on a standardized test or licensing exam or a final exam.

## **Grade Equivalent**

A score that describes student performance in terms of the statistical performance of an average student at a given grade level. A grade equivalent score of 5.5, for example, might indicate that the student's score is what could be expected of an average student doing average work in the fifth month of the fifth grade.

## **Holistic Scoring Method**

In assessment, assigning a single score based on an overall assessment of performance rather than by scoring or analyzing dimensions individually. The overall quality of a final product or performance is evaluated rather than the process or dimension of performance. A holistic scoring rubric might combine a number of elements on a single scale. An example might be, "outstanding,

acceptable, or unacceptable” for a capstone independent project, sculpture, poetry, etc.

### **Indirect Measures**

Measures of learning that are not direct and tangible. They are less clear and less convincing (e.g., placement rates; satisfaction surveys; assignment grades, if not accompanied by a rubric or scoring guide; student evaluations, etc.)

### **Information Literacy**

The ability to access, analyze, and determine the reliability of information on a given topic.

### **Institutional effectiveness**

Broadly refers to the extent to which an institution meets its unique mission. Typically includes functions associated with assessment and institutional research.

### **Item Analysis**

Analyzing each item on a test to determine the proportions of students selecting each correct answer. Can be used to evaluate student strengths and weaknesses; may point to problems with the test's validity and to possible bias.

### **Learning Outcomes**

Learning outcomes are the specific abilities, knowledge or skills that students actually develop through their college experience.

### **Likert Scale**

The Likert scale assigns a numerical value to responses in order to quantify subjective data. The responses are usually along a continuum such as - responses of strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, or strongly agree- and are assigned values of such as 1-5. This allows easy manipulation of data but attention must be given to the validity and reliability of the tool.

### **Journals**

Students' personal records and reactions to various aspects of learning and developing ideas. A reflective process often found to consolidate and enhance learning.

### **Measurement**

Quantitative description of student learning and qualitative description of student attitude.

## **Metacognition**

Metacognition is the act of thinking about one's own thinking and regulating one's own learning. It involves critical analysis of how decisions are made and vital material is consciously learned and acted upon.

## **Norm-referenced assessment**

In norm-referenced assessment an individual's performance is compared to another individual. Individuals are commonly ranked to determine a median or average. This technique addresses overall mastery, but provides little detail about specific skills. This can also be used to track an individual's own improvement over time.

## **Norm Referenced Tests**

A test in which a student or a group's performance is compared to that of a norm group. The student or group scores will not fall evenly on either side of the median established by the original test takers. The results are relative to the performance of an external group and are designed to be compared with the norm group providing a performance standard. Often used to measure and compare students, schools, districts, and states on the basis of norm-established scales of achievement.

## **Outcomes**

Outcomes are the specific abilities, knowledge or skills that students actually develop as a result of attendance in a course or program.

## **Pedagogy**

Pedagogy is the art and science of how something is taught and how students learn it. Pedagogy includes how the teaching occurs, the approach to teaching and learning, the way the content is delivered and what the students learn as a result of the process. Pedagogy is commonly used in reference to any aspect of teaching and learning in any classroom.

## **Portfolio**

A systematic and organized collection of a student's work that exhibits to others the direct evidence of a student's efforts, achievements, and progress over a period of time. The collection should involve the student in selection of its contents, and should include information about the performance criteria, the rubric or criteria for judging merit, and evidence of student self-reflection or evaluation. It should include representative work, providing a documentation of the learner's performance and a basis for evaluation of the student's progress. Portfolios may include a variety of demonstrations of learning and have been gathered in the form of a physical collection of materials, videos, CD-ROMs, reflective journals, etc.

## **Portfolio Assessment**

Portfolios may be assessed in a variety of ways. Each piece may be individually scored, or the portfolio might be assessed merely for the presence of required pieces, or a holistic scoring process might be used and an evaluation made on the basis of an overall impression of the student's collected work. It is common that assessors work together to establish consensus of standards or to ensure greater reliability in evaluation of student work. Established criteria are often used by reviewers and students involved in the process of evaluating progress and achievement of objectives.

## **Program review**

Many different perceptions and models exist of program review. In higher education, a program review could consist of anything from a judgment by experts of the worth of the curriculum based primarily on observations to a comparison between student performance indicators and objectives and actual student performance on either standardized or evaluator-constructed measures.

## **Qualitative Data**

Data collected as descriptive information, such as a narrative or portfolio. These types of data often collected in open-ended questions, feedback surveys, or summary reports, are more difficult to compare, reproduce, and generalize.

## **Quantitative Data**

Data collected as numerical or statistical values. These data use actual numbers (scores, rates, etc) to express quantities of a variable. Qualitative data, such as opinions, can be displayed as numerical data by using Likert scaled responses which assigns a numerical value to each response (e.g. 5 = strongly agree to 1 = strongly disagree). This data is easy to store and manage; it can be generalized and reproduced, but has limited value due to the rigidity of the responses and must be carefully constructed to be valid.

## **Rating Scale**

A scale based on descriptive words or phrases that indicate performance levels. Qualities of a performance are described (e.g., advanced, intermediate, novice) in order to designate a level of achievement. The scale may be used with rubrics or descriptions of each level of performance.

## **Reliability**

The measure of consistency for an assessment instrument. The instrument should yield similar results over time with similar populations in similar circumstances.

**Rubric**

A rubric is a set of categories that define and describe the important components of the work being completed, critiqued or assessed. Each category contains levels of achievement or competence with a score assigned to each level and a clear description of what criteria need to be met to attain the score at each level. Holistic rubrics may be holistic providing general guidance or analytical assigning specific scoring point values.

**Sampling**

A way to obtain information about a large group by examining a smaller, randomly chosen selection (the sample) of group members. If the sampling is conducted correctly, the results will be representative of the group as a whole.

**Scoring**

A package of guidelines intended for people scoring performance assessments. It may include instructions for raters, notes on training raters, rating scales, samples of student work exemplifying various levels of performance.

**Scoring Criteria**

Rules for assigning a score or the dimensions of proficiency in performance used to describe a student's response to a task. May include rating scales, checklists, answer keys, and other scoring tools. In a subjective assessment situation, a rubric.

**Self-Assessment**

A process in which a student engages in a systematic review of a performance, usually for the purpose of improving future performance. May involve comparison with standard, established criteria. May involve critiquing one's own work or may be a simple description of the performance. Reflection, self-evaluation, metacognition, are related terms.

**Student Learning Outcomes (SLO)**

Student learning outcomes are the specific measurable goals and results that are expected subsequent to a learning experience. These outcomes may involve knowledge (cognitive), skills (behavioral), or attitudes (affective) that provide evidence that learning has occurred as a result of a specified course, program activity, or process.

**Student Outcomes**

The achieved results or the actual consequences of what a student has demonstrated or accomplished; maybe academic and occupational, as well as the intellectual, personal, civic development, attitudes, values, and beliefs that students attain as a result of postsecondary education.

**Summative assessment**

Assessment that is done at the conclusion of a course or some larger instructional period (e.g., at the end of the program). The purpose is to determine success or to what extent the program/project/course met its goals.

**Validity**

An indication that an assessment method accurately measures what it is designed to measure with limited effect from extraneous data or variables. To some extent this must also relate to the integrity of inferences made from the data.

The definitions in this glossary were derived from several sources, including:

- *ASSESSMENT TERMINOLOGY. Division of Student Affairs, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. March 2005*
- *Assessing Student Learning in Community Colleges (2004), Bakersfield College*
- *Suskie, L. (2004). Student Learning a common sense guide. Bolton, MA: Anker Publishing Co.*