Introduction

As our Capacity Review mentioned, while BYU Hawaii has always strived to improve the quality of its programs and be increasingly able to fulfill its very clear mission, it is only recently that we have become involved in a systematic effort to collect reliable data to support the direction of our curriculum and teaching efforts. Despite this, since our accreditation was last reconfirmed, we have made serious strides towards developing a culture of evidence at our institution, with data driving decisions at all levels.

While department heads have had primary responsibility for assessment, under the supervision of the deans, the departments have all reported annually to a University Assessment Committee whose primary function is to provide resources and support to the departments in their assessment efforts. In this system each department submits a plan, developed in conjunction with a member of the UAC, which is then reviewed in a meeting with a sub-committee in order to help the departments develop a sense of how reliable data may be obtained and used to evaluate curriculum and drive improvement. The results of the prior year are also reviewed, and the involvement of the entire department is encouraged in discussing the findings of that prior plan and their implications for improvement of the program. This system has provided a central position from which to encourage the culture of evidence that we wish to establish while allowing departments the freedom to assess their programs in the ways they find most immediately helpful. It has, because of this, helped many initially reluctant faculty to become involved in assessment. In addition to our annual assessment plans, we have a vigorous system of program reviews to help assess broader issues in departments that may affect their accomplishment of many of their learning outcomes.

While this push has involved a sense of urgency in developing assessment at our university, it has also been generously supported with a variety of resources. $2000 dollars has been allocated for each department to use in completing each year’s assessment plan if they apply for them and can support the need for those funds. In addition, other grants have been made by the university for assessment where needed. Many of our faculty have been funded to attend one or more conferences on assessment in order to receive training. At the 2006 Texas A&M conference on assessment, for instance, 11 of our faculty were funded to attend. This year, # more were able to go, a number representing over 10% of our total faculty. In all, approximately #% of our faculty have been funded for outside training at conferences and workshops. In addition, outside consultants have been brought to provide training to an even greater cross-section of our university personnel. Program reviews have been provided with the funds to bring in outside reviewers from appropriately similar institutions. With training and involvement by faculty, a system of reporting, and ample monetary resources, we have laid the foundation for a deep and meaningful program of assessment at BYU Hawaii.

Collecting Meaningful Data

A genuine concern with understanding our effectiveness in promoting student learning has brought campus departments to be very creative in utilizing different methods of
Information Systems:
The Information Systems Department has been a leader in assessment and the use of their data to implement change. They are interested in adhering to national standards, and to this end have adopted a national curriculum and exam from the Education Special Interest Group of the Association of Information Technology Professionals. They also rely on several licensing exams, such as the A+HW exam. At the same time, many of their assessment measures are based on actual performance of higher-level skills by students to, for instance, "correctly use unassembled network pieces to make a working network. Such measures have led the department to begin teaching concepts they had previously taken for granted and to institute a senior level capstone course in order to help students understand and synthesize the standardized curriculum.

One of the outstanding examples of this is the EIL [English as an International Language] Department which tests every one of their 300 students at the end of each semester, using various combinations of final exams, locally produced tests and national TOEFL tests. Student writing, reading, speaking and listening skills are measured and the results are used to adjust the teaching focus and the score standards required to pass out of the EIL program. They also have conducted a university-wide survey of faculty's perceptions of L2 students' abilities after they leave the EIL program. Regular adjustments in each class, as well as program-wide improvements are based on this accumulation of data.

The IS [Information Systems] department has also been particularly good at using multiple testing methods to assess student progress. Pre-and post tests in individual classes, the national A+HW and ISA exams, and service learning and group project assessments, have all been used evaluate knowledge gained and skills mastered to the level of department specifications.

One goal of the ICS [International Cultural Studies] department has been to increase students' intercultural sensitivity, so they first compared the scores of ICS and non-ICS majors on an Intercultural Development Inventory. Then in the following year, they compared ICS freshmen to ICS seniors to demonstrate that the ICS curriculum did increase this awareness. In addition, maintaining an alumni data base allows them to track their student's performance into graduate school and the workforce.

While many academic departments have found commercially published exams and rubrics to be useful, many have found the need to develop standards that reflect the needs of their individually established learning outcomes. These methods of assessment often include not only written products, but also senior oral presentations. English, Psychology, History, and ICS are among the departments which have expended considerable effort in creating, evaluating and revising rubrics and tests so as to adequately evaluate student progress and achievement. In some
cases this process has taken several years, but now the departments are poised to use their fine-tuned rubrics in a multi-year data collection project to assess long-term effectiveness.

Several departments also face the challenge of balancing assessment of their major programs with a heavy GE load for which they feel great responsibility. Thus English, for instance, was recently funded to assess the impromptu writing skills of students in GE classes, a project they felt was worthwhile in going beyond the assessment efforts of the GE committee because of their deep commitment to their GE offerings.

Despite this, all 22 of our academic departments have assessment plans for 2006/2007, and 18 of those departments have some findings for the 2005/2006 cycle. While this number is down from 20 departments with findings in 2004/2005, this number may not be un-encouraging, as in some cases it reflects a deepening concern with assessment rather than un-concern. Religious education, for instance, recently assigned the oversight of assessment in their department to a new hire and that faculty member was provided with valuable training. Reviewing the department’s earlier plans in order to complete the year’s assessment, this faculty member began to question the usefulness in evaluating the program of the data that was previously collected. As a result, time was spent on revising the department’s assessment plan to align it with best assessment practices and a new plan has been produced that the department feels more confident in using to assess learning and produce improvement. IBM [International Business Management] and EXS [Exercise Science] have also had difficulties this year in obtaining specific results because of a diverse faculty that is having difficulties coming together and a conflict with time for a faculty that doubles as a coaching staff respectively. Yet each of these departments has recently hired a part-time consultant to direct their assessment efforts because they are committed to producing reliable data that can lead to improvement.

Indeed, while most departments have produced some results, many departments are still struggling to produce results for all of their planned methods of assessments during each cycle. In many cases, however, this too is a sign of a maturing assessment process. English, for instance, while they have consistently offered the ETS field exam to their exiting majors have found assessing the writing of their majors to be more involved. They did not produce data for their plan to assess student writing in 2005-2006, but this reflects a movement from seeing grading methods, reproduced by multiple instructors as sufficient assessment to recognizing the value of producing a rubric that correctly represents their learning outcomes and providing for blind scoring of those papers, a task that will be handled by part-time faculty or outside reviewers with a stipend attached, as blind review is difficult in a department with so few instructors and so few majors. The final plan, to be completed in early fall calls for a longitudinal study of writing from the end of the introduction to English studies course to the end of the capstone senior seminar. This sort of updating of assessment methods is happening in many instances as the faculty receives training and carries that training back to departments who are able to produce better, more reliable assessment, though this process may delay the production of some results.
Service departments have also been involved in the collection and use of data. Admissions, Security, The Bookstore, and IT Services have used focus groups to assess their department’s performance. Customer satisfaction surveys have been used by Purchasing, Housing, CDC and Physical Plant to identify way to improve their services.

Various support services also track number, frequency or kinds of services performed. For example: Admissions tracks number of applications from Hawaii, Asia and the Pacific. CITO tracks faculty use of Blackboard in their classes. CDC tracks deliveries (achieving a 95% delivery rate within 24-hours). HR tracks attendance at mini-training programs. Career Services tracks average number of jobs posted, number of on-campus employer presentations, and number of Japanese students registered on the "YCareers" network. In addition, Academic Computing monitors computer lab usage; Financial Services monitors “error rates” in physical inventories; and PIRAT monitors completion of faculty profiles within academic departments.

Comparing different data sets has also produced useful evidence. Counseling Services administers both a pre and post test evaluation of GPA’s for students receiving special needs services. The Academic Advisors have assessed the correlation between students’ self-reported understanding and their performance on a short test administrated after the Academic Realities program. University-wide assessments such as the Graduate Student Survey and NESSE have also yielded information used by many departments in evaluating and planning their programs.

**Assessment as a Catalyst for Change**

While most departments have not yet assessed all of the outcomes for their programs, we already see evidence that data is being used as a catalyst for change. Some departments have used the results of assessment to change the curriculum. In other cases, assessment evidence is being used to change the material coverage or teaching approaches.

The Music Department, for example, has used the results from assessment to make significant pedagogical and curricular changes. Following assessment of one music theory course the department restructured that course to provide appropriate coverage. They ultimately decided to send someone to a conference to learn about teaching world music in a traditional theory curriculum, an issue that impacts our diverse student body. Because they found that instrumentalists did not have the sight-reading skills they expected, they decided to strengthen their sight-reading component and add sight-reading to the instrumental jury. Also, partially as a result of data collected on the graduation rate of majors in different majors in the department, they decided to drop the music education major.

The math department has also been involved in such efforts. Several years ago, they began using the MFT Exam as an assessment tool. Based on the results, the department added a seminar course to help the students synthesize previous learning. They also felt that the results of the exam indicated a need to revise the detailed outcomes for their
lower level service courses a process that meant a fundamental revision of curriculum. They correspondingly booked a bed and breakfast for a weekend and spent several days considering that curriculum in detail as a result of their findings. They are now discussing those changes with departments that they service in order to fine tune their approach in light of their data.

Some changes have preceded the assessment that has justified them. For instance, the History department decided, just as assessment was beginning to be formalized in their department that they were unsatisfied with their students’ research skills. As a result, the faculty created a new History 200 course teaching the historian’s craft. To assess the value of this course, the department used library personnel to evaluate student performance. The findings from this assessment have validated the value of this course in raising the research competency of history students.

On the other hand, assessment has also invalidated changes, and those changes have been discarded. The ICS department had eliminated the requirement that their students take advanced writing course (ENGL 315) because they felt that their own capstone course in the major was writing intensive. Assessment of student writing however, indicated that students’ abilities were not as high as they expected without this class and they re-instated the requirement.

Other changes have been less sweeping, but valuable on the level of instructional emphasis. The Information Systems Department uses a national curriculum and assessment test. The results of this test indicate that students do not adequately understand the vocabulary used in the exam, so they are now teaching that vocabulary which they had once taken for granted. The accounting faculty recognized that students were not adequately understanding the comprehensive concepts in their international capstone course. Accordingly, they decided that students needed more practice to fully integrate the new material in the course with corresponding material learned in earlier courses.

Some changes have even involved individual instructors reacting to data, which may be appropriate given that many courses taught at a small college are taught by only one professor, and at any rate, professors are always given much latitude in how they teach the relevant material. Those faculty members determine that changes are needed to improve student learning in a particular course or for a particular concept. In one theory course in ICS, for example, a faculty member reduced the amount of material covered after finding from departmental writing assessment that students need greater help in applying the material they learn. In accounting, as well, the assessment experience has also influenced approaches used to teaching accounting ethics and research skills.

Not all departments, of course, are implementing major changes at this point. Some departments have implemented assessment for a limited period of time and so are still in a discovery stage before significant changes can be made. For some smaller programs, data over a relatively limited period of time may not be adequate to determine the success of the program’s outcomes. There is some uneasiness about instituting major changes
until a sufficient sample size of data has been collected and analyzed. However, the influence of assessment on our academic programs increases each year, and is expected to increase its influence on program decisions in the future.

**Program Reviews**

In addition to assessment of student learning outcomes on a yearly cycle, periodic program reviews have helped departments to assess how they fit into the University’s mission and what changes in curriculum, staffing, and mission might make them better able to serve our student body and the needs of BYU Hawaii.

Several programs have undergone recent reviews under a newly rigorous process involving both reviewers from other departments on campus and from outside the University. In each case, the departments in question are asked to produce a self study in which they evaluate their needs, their identity, and their direction for the future. With this information, the team then spends several days interviewing all members of the department, including the support staff, meeting with administrators and students, touring the facilities, visiting classes, and discussing the department with all concerned parties. The results are presented in a preliminary report while the team is still present on campus and are then expounded on in a written team report.

These program reviews have lead to a variety of valuable improvements in the respective programs. In the International Cultural Studies department, for instance, concerns were raised in the review about keeping the department’s three areas balanced with limited faculty, and with helping students to build the sort of practical experience that would pay off in jobs later. While the department has chosen to stay with a very theoretical basis for their curriculum, seeing it as central to their identity, they have expanded their efforts in placing students in internships, and have used a new hire to bring in someone interested in practical conflict resolution. In addition to the new hire, the efforts to balance the department have included the creation, in conjunction with the School of Arts and Sciences, of a new category of adjunct assistant professor, so that those with terminal degrees who are doing extensive work in the department can have more job security and the sort of benefits that will make them more stable and contributing faculty.

Hawaiian Studies also benefited from their program review by forging stronger ties to BYUH’s Pacific Institute, both in terms of curriculum and geographically, since the Institute was moved into offices that adjoin the Hawaiian Studies department. Exercise and Sports Science has been reexamining their curriculum as well. The review determined, among other things, that the department had developed, over its life, into an unfocused entity trying to serve the needs of what amounted to a coaching program, an exercise science program to prepare students to be trainers or attend graduate or medical school, and a health and wellness program. Since the review their has been a review of curriculum to try to bring coherence to the department and decide on a direction that is suitable for all involved.
Other departments such as English Language Teaching and Learning and the English Department have had very recent reviews. (At this point, English has only very recently received their written report, and ELT has not received theirs.) and so haven’t made extensive changes as of yet. Still, the self-review process has helped the English Department to consider the direction that changes in the department might take to better serve students and use the resources available, while the ELT program is eagerly awaiting the results of their review for suggestions about dealing with staffing, developing a new model of EIL that spans a student’s academic career instead of front-loading the experience, and the possibilities for developing an MA in TESOL.

**Departmental or School-level Accrediting Organizations**

Four divisions of the university are at various stages of accreditation by accrediting organizations in their areas. The School of Education recently received renewal of their accreditation from the Hawaii Teacher Standards Board (HTSB), and the Department of Social Work is nearing the end of the accrediting renewal process with the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE—The organization will conduct their site visit in October). In addition, the school of business is actively seeking to prepare themselves for accreditation by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) and will complete this process in either 2009 or 2010, and the School of Computing is preparing to make application for accreditation to the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET).

As these segments of the university have prepared for the accreditation process each has gone through a planning stage that requires reflection and self-study. They have written or will write reports indicating how they have complied with the standards required by the accrediting agency. On-site visits are conducted by the accreditation agencies where observations, interviews and records reviews are completed by a team of representatives expert in the standards used and the required accreditation process.

Those involved in these accreditation efforts have noted that BYU Hawaii’s administration has been supportive of the process, increasing the likelihood of successful accreditation. There is, in fact, a reciprocal benefit at the Department and School levels in seeking accreditation either through WASC or an external agency.
outside accrediting agency. The quality and efficiency of School, Department, and Division assessment plans is increased by the accreditation process and this accreditation process helps drive decision making as each of those entities makes plans for improving delivery of their services. In the case of both the school of education and the department of social work the process of accreditation by their respective organization has meant that their assessment efforts have been more rigorous than the university normally asks of its departments. While most departments assess a subset of their learning outcomes annually on a 5-year rotation, these departments assess all of their learning outcomes every year.

The CSWE requires the social work department to assess their 6 program goals and 13 program objectives for improvement purposes in eight distinct areas. To do so, they use a variety of assessment tools including the national Baccalaureate Education Assessment Project (BEAP) Entrance and Exit Surveys, Field Practicum Assessments, In-depth interviews with recent international practicum students, and a BEAP Employment Survey (done by the alumnus’ employment supervisor). The School of Education, as well, has been involved in very thorough efforts at assessment. HTSB reported their excellence in their final report granting accreditation. As other departments follow their example, we expect similar results.

**Conclusion**

Our institution still faces many challenges in assessment. We struggle to find the resources to assess all of our learning objectives, and we struggle to keep the level of enthusiasm high as often as would be helpful. We are only now, in many cases, beginning to see mature assessment measures being implemented and assessment driving meaningful change at the department level. And yet, we are beginning to see these results from our program, and we expect more as time goes on. What is most encouraging is that we are seeing fewer and fewer departments and individuals who are interested in simply fulfilling the requirements of assessment and more and more who are interested in good data that can fuel change. More of our faculty and staff are really interested in building a culture of evidence.