

Planning, Assessment, and General Education at UCA NCA/HLC Concerns, 1990–2010

The following pages compile concerns expressed by comprehensive evaluation teams visiting UCA in 1990, 2000, and 2010. Two common themes connect these three reports: (1) concerns about planning and (2) concerns about assessment. Note that a third factor related to institutional effectiveness – “significant change” in central administration – was identified by the university in 2000 and again in 2010.

In what follows, underscoring is added for emphasis.

from 1990 visiting team report

Criteria for Accreditation

3. The Institution Is Accomplishing Its Purposes

While data regarding some of the outcomes of students is available, it is noteworthy that little information is available regarding academic outcomes. The state has required that all Arkansas institutions must have an assessment program of the core curriculum in place by fall, 1991. The faculty and administration recognize that an assessment program for academic achievement must be developed and fully supported all efforts in this regard. The institution is encouraged to take advantage of this opportunity to develop a comprehensive assessment program. (31–32)

Strengths, Advice, Concerns

V. Concerns

1. There is no evidence of long term planning which involves faculty participation in arriving at policy conclusions.
2. There is insufficient comprehensive assessment of student outcomes, faculty productivity, and other institutional achievements.

from 2000 visiting team report

II. Institution’s Response to Previously Identified Concerns

A. Concerns from 1990 visit

1. “There is no evidence of long-term planning which involves faculty participation in arriving at policy conclusions.”

Planning does occur at UCA but it appears to lack systematic or formal coordination enabling persons to appreciate the interconnection of the parts. As the Self Study so ably demonstrates, each of the 147 units involved in the process were encouraged to plan. However, the published results stand as uncoordinated, unit planning efforts. The vision articulated by the President and members of the Board sets forth a clear vision for the whole University. Nonetheless as the Self Study stated, “strategic, unified planning remains a concern.” The evaluation team concurs with this UCA self-assessment.

2. “There is insufficient comprehensive assessment of student outcomes, faculty productivity and other institutional achievements.”

The NCA approved the UCA plan for Assessment of Student Learning in 1994. Under the leadership of a Director of Assessment and Planning each department is obligated to have on file a President approved assessment plan. Clear progress has been made in the activation of the plan. However, less clear is the existence of established feedback mechanisms to strengthen or modify educational delivery systems using the results of the planned comprehensive department assessments of student learning. Although the

visiting team believes sufficient progress has been made to remove the label of concern, the team will later in this report advise the University not to relax its efforts to strengthen efforts underway to be able to realize the full benefits of conducting continuous assessments of student learning.

III. General Institutional Requirements (GIRs)

P. GIR 16. The undergraduate degree programs include a coherent general education requirement consistent with the institution's mission and designed to ensure a breadth of knowledge and a promotion of intellectual inquiry.

The University has a coherent general education program that is consistent with its mission. The University has recognized the centrality of general education to its undergraduate degrees and has appointed a Director of General Education and established a General Education Council to monitor the objectives and continuing assessment of General Education programming. (GIR-16 is met.) (11)

V. Criteria for Accreditation

C. Criterion 3 – “The institution is accomplishing its educational and other purposes.”

2. Assessment of Student Learning. The University is making progress in implementing a learner-outcome based assessment program which was approved in 1994 and updated in 1996. However, the University cannot relax its engagement in this process as some reported achievements appear to remain stronger in rhetorical accomplishment than in measurable demonstration of resulting actions as a consequence of assessment. In particular, the student assessment of the general education learning appears to be only in the planning or description stage of implementation. However, the thematic approach referenced during the evaluation seems to point UCA in the right direction for assessing general education. (20)

D. Criterion Four – “The institution can continue to accomplish its purposes and strengthen its educational effectiveness.”

Continuing compliance with accreditation Criterion Four will benefit from UCA efforts to improve its planning processes, its communication processes and its structured assessment and action step activities. The team concurs, however, that the patterns of evidence reviewed meet the intentions of Criterion Four. (23–24)

X. UCA Challenges (Concerns)

(1) The first concern is the continuing challenge from the last accreditation for the University to develop a strategic plan. In the 1990 accreditation report it was suggested “there is no evidence of long-term planning which involves faculty participation in arriving at policy conclusions.” It was clear to this team that the Board of Trustees and President do share a vision but it is not clear that this vision for UCA is shared by UCA stakeholders. Similarly, the team found much evidence of fragmented planning efforts – especially with regards to financial and physical facility planning. However, no evidence was uncovered demonstrating a formal process of comprehensive long range planning involving all stakeholders.

Interestingly UCA's current Self Study (Volume II, page 1) identifies this concern not as a planning issue but as a communication challenge. The Self Study states “for want of a better term – (communication) refers, not to the all-too-common difficulties in faculty-administration communication found on University campuses, but to ‘horizontal communication’ and effectively cooperative relationships across the campus and among its units.” The team believes our concern about long range planning and UCA's concern about communication may be closely related. The achievement of 147 separate units evaluations in preparation for the accreditation visit is noteworthy. Nevertheless, lacking is the process for coordinating this evidence into a single action plan. The “silo” results reported in the UCA Self Study need to be woven into a singular action plan. Central to the achievement of an action plan will be the development of the communication facilitation recognized as a goal by the UCA campus community.

XI. Team Recommendations and Rationale

The team recommends that a progress report be required in the Spring Semester of 2005 which addresses coordinated planning and the continuing efforts to assess student learning.

The University has self-reported that “strategic, unified planning remains a concern.” Given that long-term planning involving faculty participation was a 1990 visitation concern, and given that this visiting team has commented “that the ‘silo’ results reported in the UCA Self Study need to be woven into a singular action plan,” a progress report will enable the University to provide the documentation now missing. The issue is not about results, as results are clearly evident. Rather, the issue is about pulling together the 147 separate plans reported in the Self Study into a unified single action plan. The team also believes that the UCA identified issue of communication is tightly linked to the planning issue. The visiting team has suggested, “Central to the achievement of an action plan will be the development of the communication facilitation recognized as a goal by the UCA campus community.” The development of a coordinated statement of planning will require communication between and among the separate units.

The second area to be addressed in the 2005 progress report is documentation of the continuing efforts underway to demonstrate that the assessments of student learning are being used to monitor and change as necessary the delivery of curricula. The visiting team has suggested earlier in this report, “UCA needs to strengthen efforts underway to realize the full benefits of conducting continuous assessments of student learning. The visiting team believes a 2005 progress report will help UCA to satisfy this expectation. (33–34)

from 2010 visiting team report

II. Commitment to Peer Review

C. Adequacy of Progress in Addressing Previously Identified Challenges.

The team considers the response of the organization to previously identified challenges to be inadequate.

The 2000 team identified three areas of concern that UCA was mandated to address:

- 1) comprehensive long-range planning,
- 2) governance processes and structures, and
- 3) policies and procedures for meeting diverse student and employee needs.

Moreover, that team required UCA to submit a progress report of coordinated planning and assessment of student learning outcomes by March 1, 2005. Ongoing challenges are addressed by the 2010 team in Criteria One, Two, and Three. (Assurance 9)

IV. Fulfillment of the Criteria

Criterion Two: Preparing for the Future

3. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components require Commission follow-up.

There is little evident planning related to diversity and internationalization of the campus. At a time in which even HLC Criteria specifically address diversity on campus, hardly any conversation during the site visit incorporated discussion of diversity unless the visiting team facilitator asked about it. While general education requires student coursework in world cultural traditions, neither students, faculty, staff, or administrators were able to articulate an understanding of expectations of living, learning, and working in a multicultural society. All of this attests to not only a belief, but also to a behavior, that indicates that the campus community does not perceive there to be a common set of strategic objectives toward which they work.

...

At the time of the HLC peer review team visit, UCA was under a mandated HLC Financial Recovery Plan. This plan resulted from a period of declining financial ratios beginning in the 2003 – 2004 academic year and continuing through 2008. The causes of this period of financial stress are well documented in the Self-Study. Although they include external contributors such as state budget difficulties that led to reduced per-student funding on the UCA campus as a consequence, a larger portion of the origin of the cash shortage is attributable to decisions made by the campus administration and by campus units. These, in turn, occurred because the campus did not succeed in complying with the recommendations of the 2000 visiting team or the subsequent 2005 progress report commitment regarding strategic planning. Consequently, considerable expenditures resulted from initiatives that were not anticipated in either planning or budgeting processes. (Assurance 18–20)

Criterion Three: Student Learning and Effective Teaching

3. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components require Commission follow-up.

First, to answer the question of assessability would require a much deeper review of individual programs than is current required. Second, this many years into the assessment process, recognizing that the 2000 comprehensive review team recommended a progress report by March 1, 2005 on coordinated planning and assessment of student learning, one would expect that expectations would be explicitly stated, as would be the evidence that a program would have, or would need to have, to be considered successful. Third, there is an absence of a recognized culture of assessment of student learning.

While UCA reviews general education, it appears unable to think broadly about the skills and attitudes this critical program implies for the students. UCA is aware of evidence that parts of its program are ineffective, specifically the sciences. While it might be accurate that the CAAP did not address the aims of the sciences, when the CAAP in Scientific Reasoning for UCA was below the national level in 2003/04 and declined further in 2007/06, it is time to explore why. In conversations during the site visit, team members were told that students do not understand why they need to take further coursework in the sciences or history, for example, when they already have high school coursework in these disciplines behind them. Student understanding that there is more to learn, as well as appreciating that university expectations are measurably different than those experienced in high school, are key elements of becoming a life-long learner. Team members agree that on-going discussions about adding upper-level General Education courses are wise to pursue.

The assessment effort appears to have lagged the Self-Study by about a year. For example, the Self-Study Coordinator went to the General Education Council in January 2009 to explain what needed to be done. The Self-Study document promised some closure in general education assessment by January 2010, which seems not to have been done, with the date moved back to the end of spring 2010. This meant inadequate materials available for team review and judgment. Moreover, team members found no evidence that curricular review of General Education was discussed with various external stakeholders. Nor had the faculty, at least at the time of the site visit, engaged in focus group conversations with the students or shared assessment results effectively with each other or with UCA students.

Currently, there are no demonstrated learning outcomes for UCA's General Education program. The assessment plan for General Education indicates that assessment of the various general education courses is done by the departments that teach them. This is not supported by any evidence available to the team. A review of the 2008 annual reports of the College of Liberal Arts found limited attention to assessment of courses offered within General Education. (Assurance 23–24)

V. Statement of Affiliation Status

C. Conditions of Affiliation

4. Reports required

Type of report: Monitoring Report

Topic(s) and Timing: The team recommends a monitoring report on the status of UCA long-range planning, processes, and procedures, due to the HLC by May 1, 2012.

The monitoring report will review and document the results of the strategic planning process at UCA, which will lay the foundations for implementation of the long-range plan. HLC staff will expect to see a completed, comprehensive, long-range plan ready for implementation. At a minimum, this plan will include processes and procedures to implement and monitor the plan, as well as to take action for 1) meeting the needs of diverse students and employees and provide for full inclusion of diverse groups into the life of the university; 2) incorporating shared governance, transparent communication, and an organizational and administrative structure with well-defined roles and responsibilities; 3) establishing a culture of assessment of student learning that is aligned with the mission of the university; and 4) evaluating and measuring institutional effectiveness in non-instructional programs, institutional outreach, and student support for all instructional delivery modes.

Rationale and Expectations: Both the 1990 and 2000 accreditation team reports noted that UCA had not developed comprehensive academic or institutional plans. Between 2000 and 2010, initiatives were undertaken to address the concerns of the accreditation report. These efforts are well-documented in the institutional Self-Study, and they include a “Strategic Framework” developed and disseminated in 2004 and a campus master plan developed in 2006. The Self-Study acknowledges that even these planning processes and documents fell short of the expectations set by the 2000 accreditation report, nor were efforts the result of wide participation by a broad base of campus and external constituencies. Consequently, the team notes that continued Commission attention is needed to assure that UCA develops a long-range plan and that it creates mechanisms and relationships needed to prioritize budget decisions toward implementing its strategic objectives.

5. Other visits scheduled

Type of Visit: Focused Visit

Topic(s) and Timing: If the monitoring report meets expectations, the focused visit will occur two years later, in spring 2014 [HLC has scheduled the visit for November 11–12, 2013]. If HLC staff determines that the monitoring report fails to meet expectations, the focused visit will occur one year later, in spring 2013. The focused visit team will expect to see the comprehensive, long-range plan fully established. Successful results of the implemented plan will include a budgeting process that reflects allocations based on strategic priorities, which in turn advance diversity, governance, communication, assessment of student learning, and assessment of institutional effectiveness. Members of the 2010 team are unanimous in recommending that the team be large enough to include expertise needed to examine UCA’s progress in these critically important areas and further recommend that one or two experienced members of the current 2010 team be appointed to the focused visit team.

If both the monitoring report and the focused visit affirm that expectations are fully met, the focused visit team could consider moving the next UCA comprehensive visit to 2019-20[2]0. However, if at the point of the focused visit, in whichever year it occurs, the focused visit team determines that expectations are not fully met, the team could recommend that the comprehensive visit be moved up or that further monitoring or even a sanction be imposed, if necessary.

Rationale and Expectations: This new planning process will need to be aggressive and persistent over a period of years to overcome what was expressed as a significant element of disbelief in administrative

commitment to planning and to broad-based involvement in planning. In a meeting with faculty, it was clear that there was still a willingness to give this new process a chance and to participate, but that it needed to be consistent and lead to results for faculty involvement to continue. The university leadership anticipates that the strategic planning process recently initiated will be completed within 18 months. The team notes that continued Commission attention is needed to assure satisfactory completion of this process and its on-going implementation across the campus and in campus budgeting processes.

V. Assessment of Student Learning

The conclusions of the HLC team report were that UCA's assessment efforts were uneven and in need of immediate improvement. A plan to revise assessment practices was submitted in a progress report to the HLC in 2005, and was accepted. Unfortunately, given the institution's financial challenges at that time, no additional funding was allocated in support of the assessment process, and the plan was not fully implemented. In Fall 2011, a Director of Assessment was appointed. It was realized, however, that to build a campus-wide culture of assessment, the institution must also provide funding for faculty development in assessment. A decision to fund the participation of a UCA faculty team in the HLC Academy for Assessment of Student Learning was approved, and an application for participation in the Academy was submitted and subsequently accepted.

Concerns relative to the assessment of student learning specified in the Assurance Section of the HLC team report included the following:

Review of ... program assessment plans shows a confusion among program review, direct and indirect measures of learning and also of student satisfaction, and grading of students as opposed to program analysis over time. Also, assessment goals and objectives are often abstract and general, even when clearly stated, which makes it difficult to state whether effective assessment is possible. (p. 22)

... UCA should consider separating assessment from the Academic Planning and Assessment Committee and create a new, separate Assessment Committee with a clear charge and direct, high-level support from at least the Provost. (p. 23)

This many years into the assessment process ... one would expect that expectations would be explicitly stated, as would be the evidence that a program would have, or would need to have, to be considered successful. (p. 23)

There is an absence of a recognized culture of assessment and student learning. (p. 23)

While UCA reviews general education it appears unable to think broadly about the skills and attitudes this critical program implies for the students. (p. 23)

UCA recognizes that we need to change much of what we do in assessing student learning. This chapter describes how we have addressed the concerns outlined above:

- A. Building a Culture of Assessment
- B. Reorganizing Assessment Infrastructure

- C. Plans for Continued Improvement of Assessment
- D. General Education Mission and Student Outcomes
- E. General Education Assessment

A. Building a Culture of Assessment

Of most importance in creating a culture of assessment was to apply for the spring HLC's Academy for Assessment of Student Learning (Academy). We recognize that while we have begun making changes in planning, implementing, and using assessment and in improving student learning, we need to sustain our efforts and build upon them. The Academy provides a four-year program that will help us focus on our short term goals and plan for how we can create and sustain a culture of assessment for students, faculty, and administrators. On March 12, 2012, UCA was notified of its acceptance into the Academy. UCA's President, Provost, and Director of Assessment participated in the Academy's Information and Planning workshop, April 26–27, 2012. A six-member faculty team, including the Director of Assessment, will participate in the HLC Cohort Group Training that begins on June 6, 2012. As they complete each phase of their work with the HLC Academy, team members will return to the campus to conduct in-service assessment workshops for other members of the UCA faculty.

Another significant action was appointment of a Director of Assessment in August 2011 and to assign to that individual those duties related to assessment of student learning which were previously part of an Associate Provost's position and to add new duties to the new role. Funding has been provided for salary and training and development of the director, who is responsible for centralizing assessment data and creating a more systematic way of collecting, disseminating, and using it. This position originally bore the title Director of Academic Assessment; the person filling this position is, however, expected to have a broad view of assessment beyond academic program assessment. While not responsible for assessing all of the academic and non-academic units on campus, this position will collaboratively reach out beyond Academic Affairs to help ensure that our assessment efforts, broadly defined, are targeted toward improving our academic programs and, importantly, our institutional effectiveness overall. These extended responsibilities will be specified over the coming weeks.

By having a full-time Director of Assessment housed in the Provost's Office, faculty will come to associate all forms of assessment and all procedures for assessment with a central figure. The Director of Assessment is responsible for

1. Working with academic units in developing and implementing plans for assessing student learning outcomes.

2. Serving as an assessment resource for the university community.
3. Facilitating communication about assessment activity through a variety of venues.
4. Maintaining and updating UCA's Assessment Handbook.
5. Maintaining and updating the assessment website.
6. Maintaining the current library of assessment plans for all academic programs.
7. Overseeing the collection of data and information for external reporting and monitoring the colleges' compliance with state, regional, or national accreditation.
8. Managing the evaluation system for evaluation of instructors by students.
9. Organizing and managing the distribution, analysis, and reporting for the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) every three years (2012, 2015, 2018, etc.).
10. Analyzing and posting the annual summary of learning outcomes to all stakeholders, including an executive summary for the Provost, the President, and members of the Board of Trustees.
11. Organizing in-service seminars and workshops on assessment of student learning for members of the UCA faculty.
12. Collaborating with others as part of an institutional effectiveness team, and assisting with preparation of the annual institutional performance report.
13. Coordinating evaluation of software systems offered by academic service providers for aggregation and analysis of student learning outcomes; and recommending an appropriate system for UCA.

The Director of Assessment also serves as chair of the University Assessment Committee and the Student Evaluation of Teachers Committee and serves as an *ex-officio* member of the General Education Council.

The Director of Assessment works closely with the Director of General Education so that a direct line of communication is always working between the General Education Council and the Director of Assessment, who is ultimately responsible for assessment of the General Education Program. The Director of General Education is responsible for

1. Overseeing and facilitating a continuous process of general education review and reform.
2. Chairing the general education council and conducting annual elections for the council.
3. Maintaining a file of course syllabi for all approved general education courses as well as a file of assessment plans for all general education courses.
4. Working with the advising center to update general education information for the advising staff as needed.

5. Communicating recommendations from the General Education Council to the Council of Deans.
6. Preparing grant applications as appropriate to fund aspects of the general education program.
7. Serving as a resource person for questions and issues related to general education.
8. Working with the chair of the University Assessment Committee in supervising the evaluation and assessment of the general education program.
9. Working with the registrar's office on pre-approval and transfer credit issues.
10. Participating in summer orientation programs for new students and faculty.
11. Developing and disseminating an annual report on general education.

B. Reorganizing Assessment Infrastructure

Background: While UCA requires every degree program to have an assessment plan, in some cases, the plans are not clearly articulated, data collection is uneven, feedback is limited, and the results do not go beyond the office of the provost. While most assessment data filters up to the provost, the provost's office has simply stored data without means or mechanisms to analyze it and offer feedback. University committees involved with assessment mostly worked independently of each other, and their work did not filter back down to the department or chair level. Assessment data generated by faculty largely remained with faculty, and if faculty were not engaged in systematic assessment, there were often no consequences. In the past, learning outcomes data were analyzed and aggregated into the Enhanced Assessment Report for each college. This process was not, however, uniformly followed in all academic units.

The Director of Assessment established new university committees to facilitate and monitor assessment. The former Academic Planning and Assessment Committee has been disbanded as recommended by the HLC visiting team, and a new committee focused solely on assessment has been formed, the University Assessment Committee, of which the Director is the permanent chair. The charge of the University Assessment Committee is to provide oversight, identify needs, develop recommendations and policies regarding institution-wide assessment of student learning in order to create a framework for the improvement of student learning. It will also recommend changes in academic assessment processes; review the usefulness of academic assessment strategies, reporting strategies, and feedback processes; and ensure that assessment data is used to inform decision-making at all levels. The committee will support, fully or in part, faculty initiatives related to the improvement of academic assessment programs. The committee will also maintain close communications with the Faculty Senate, the Office of the Provost, the

General Education Council, and other appropriate committees, administrative bodies, and academic units.

The objectives of the University Assessment Committee are to

1. Review individual programs' assessment plans and processes and recommend strategies for improvement.
2. Advise faculty, departments, and colleges on assessment procedures and methods.
3. Review and implement policies for reporting assessment data.
4. Develop and implement policies for dissemination of assessment data.
5. Solicit proposals from faculty and award funds for initiatives to improve assessment.
6. Participate in institutional effectiveness work both within and outside the Division of Academic Affairs.

With the creation of the University Assessment Committee, the work has begun to build a culture of assessment of student learning at UCA. The committee is creating a guide for departments and programs that explains the elements of a successful assessment plan, defines terms, and suggests ways to determine appropriate direct and indirect measures of student learning outcomes for programs. They will begin reviewing existing assessment programs and writing feedback reports as soon as the guide is completed in May 2012.

The Director of Assessment has worked with programs as a consultant – namely, Geography, Writing, Speech, Public Relations, Psychology, Kinesiology and Physical Education, Music, Art, and Mass Communication and Theatre. The goal is to have assessment plans in every department that use appropriate direct and indirect measures and are manageable and feasible in data collection by fall 2013. The plans must be tied to department, college, and university mission statements and contain appropriate rubrics and feedback loops. Based on UCA's mission and core values, the University Assessment Committee will recommend 4–6 overarching student learning outcomes (SLOs) and receive approval by appropriate committees and councils for undergraduate and graduate programs. The General Education Council is in the final stages of finalizing a recommendation for primary SLOs for the General Education program (the UCA Core). See section D of this chapter for the current draft proposal.

The Student Evaluation of Teachers Committee (SET) was formed to review our existing evaluation instrument and construct a new instrument for campus discussion by fall 2012. The Director also chairs this committee. A major shortcoming of current procedures is the inconsistent rate of return of student responses across programs. To increase the rate of return and improve procedures for data analysis the institution entered into a contract with a company

(SmartEvals) that has a strong track record in assisting institutions with teacher/course evaluation systems. The objectives of SET are to

1. Periodically review and update a standard evaluation instrument.
2. Validate the instrument through voluntary pilot testing if deemed necessary.
3. Develop standard procedures for administration of the evaluations.
5. Develop guidelines for use of data.
6. Evaluate the effectiveness of the instrument, administration procedures, and guidelines for data analysis.
7. Openly communicate all SET activities to the university community.
8. Develop an annual summary of the activities of SET for dissemination to all stakeholders.

Programs with specialized accreditation have conducted annual assessment of student learning outcomes for years, as have many non-accredited programs. The university recognizes that *all* programs must be engaged in systematic assessment of learning outcomes. The first step we have taken was to determine why these programs were not doing assessment. In discussions with faculty, chairs, and deans, the answer has been, overwhelmingly, that faculty members are not trained in programmatic assessment and do not have an understanding of why it needs to be done or how it can be done well. Beyond fostering a better understanding of the importance of assessment, incentives such as released time and funding for special assessment initiatives have been implemented. Additional incentives are being explored through networking with institutions noted for their effective evaluation programs.

The General Education Council (GEC) has focused on assessment of the General Education Program by rewriting the student learning outcomes, funding reassigned time for some Council members to work as a GEC Assessment Subcommittee to review all course level assessment plans, and working with instructors to improve assessment.

The University Assessment Committee is writing an assessment plan guide to help faculty understand why and how we do program assessment. This guide will be part of an Assessment Handbook, which will detail UCA's assessment program and provide the framework for all academic assessment.

The Director of Assessment is available for faculty consultation and workshops. Some departments have worked with the Director this year; as the assessment plan reviews begin and feedback is given to the departments, more and more faculty will avail themselves of this

service. If needed, the review will prompt the departments to work with the Director to improve their plans.

C. Plans for Continued Improvement of Assessment

In addition to those measures mentioned above (writing a guide for successful assessment plans, writing an Assessment Handbook, reviewing and offering feedback on all assessment plans, offering consultations and workshops on assessment), an Academic Affairs retreat in May 2012 will focus on assessment as one of only two agenda items, the university has the following plans to continue improving our assessment of student learning:

1. Participate in the HLC Academy for Assessment of Student Learning, 2012-2016.
2. Review the General Education Program's assessment program and put in place needed changes (a General Education Task Force will complete its work by December 2012).
3. Review systems for centralizing assessment data that are available for purchase through several vendors.
4. Create a website to house assessment plans and results of yearly assessments by programs.
5. Post the results of existing program reviews for each program.
6. Fund faculty initiatives in assessment through the University Assessment Committee.
7. Disseminate and use the results of NSSE as needed to improve student learning outcomes.

Many assessments in our degree programs and majors are well-developed with annual data collection and analysis, which is regularly used by faculty to improve teaching and curriculum. However, some departments have recognized a need to work on their assessment programs either by training faculty, revising procedures or implementing new assessments. Recent examples of revised assessment practices in selected programs are presented in Appendix 5.1.

D. General Education Mission and Student Outcomes

As stated in the Assurance Section of the HLC visiting team's report, there was a lack of demonstrated student outcomes and student understanding of the purpose and goals of the program (23).

Background: The General Education Council adopted a "statement of purpose" and a list of "objectives" for area knowledge, skills, and attitudes and values when the current program was fully established in 2002. The purpose and objectives were reviewed by the General Education Council in 2009 and found to be generally acceptable but needing revision to make them

accessible and to put them in terms of student outcomes for General Education rather than objectives for disciplines or particular courses. The need for this action was reinforced in the 2010 HLC team report wherein it was stated, “While UCA reviews general education, it appears unable to think broadly about the skills and attitudes this critical program implies for students” (Assurance Section 23).

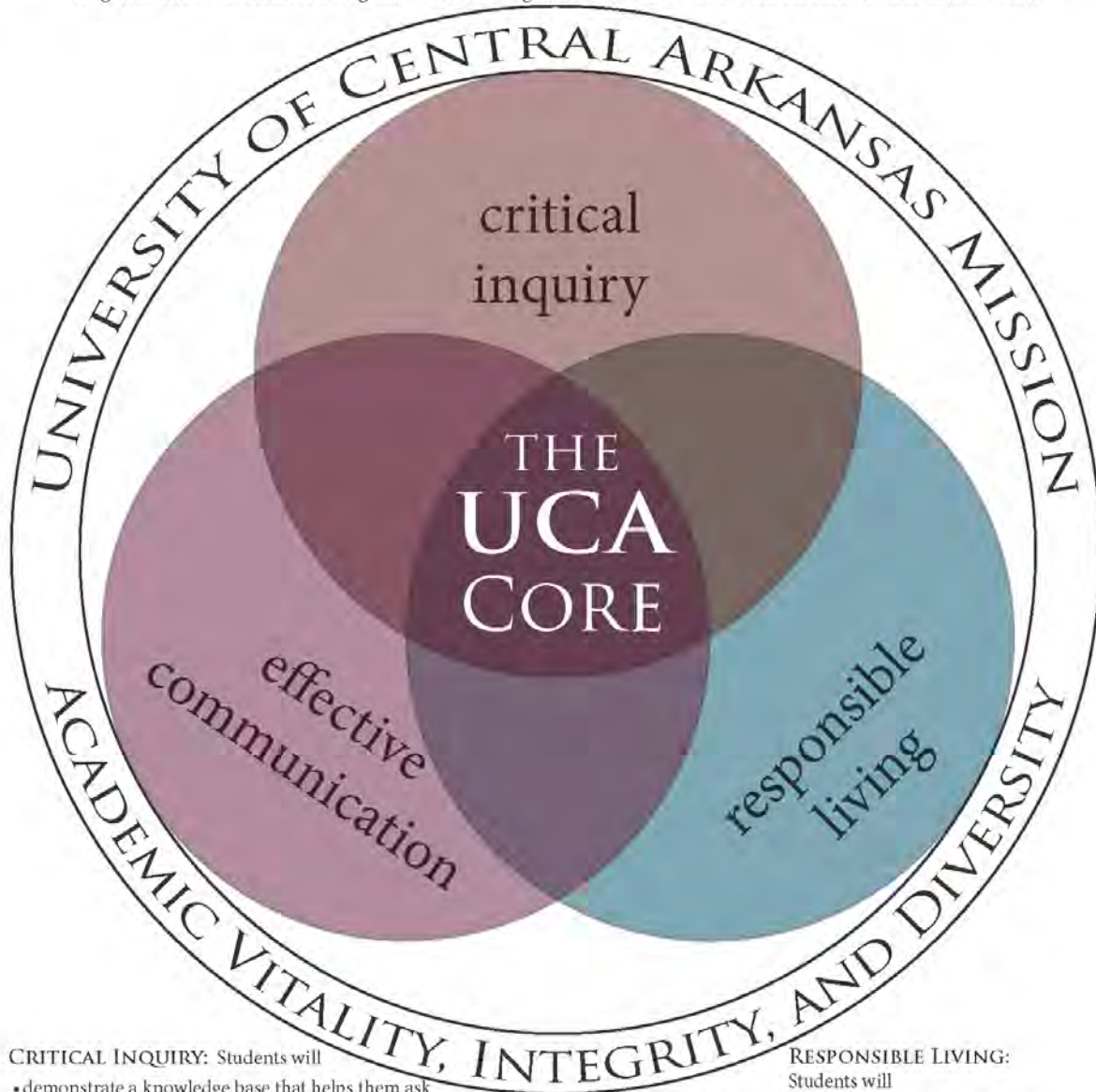
In the past our focus on assessment has been limited to concerns for whether a given course is effective in meeting stated learning outcomes. There is now a growing recognition that beyond this important work, more attention must be given to how that course contributes to the primary learning outcomes of the entire General Education Program. The General Education Council recognizes the need to establish a clear identity for the program and to effectively communicate that identity to faculty, students, and parents. In recognition of that need, the provost’s office has authorized one course released time for General Education Council members serving on the Mission and Objectives Subcommittee in order to facilitate their work on these important tasks, and the Council is addressing the concerns in the following ways:

- ◆ The Mission and Outcomes Subcommittee of the General Education Council drafted a mission statement and a list of basic outcomes which are intended to establish the identity of the general education program in a form that is clear and accessible. This document was approved by the General Education Council and submitted to the faculty and the Student Government Association for comment. Then, based on faculty and student response, the statement was revised by the subcommittee, approved by the General Education Council, and presented to the Faculty Senate, the Council of Deans, and the Provost for final approval. See Figure 1 (page 46) for the current version of the summary document.
- ◆ The Mission and Outcomes Subcommittee has, in addition, nearly concluded its revision of specific outcomes for area knowledge, skills, and attitudes and values. These more specific outcomes, which will serve as a basis for course-level assessment, are being revised in close consultation with departments that teach general education courses and will go through the approval process outlined above.

THE UCA CORE

MISSION: The UCA Core is designed to help students develop the knowledge and skills necessary for critical inquiry, effective communication, and responsible living in a diverse and changing world.

CORE VALUES: The overarching goal of the program is to develop curious, knowledgeable, articulate, and ethical people who are prepared for greater success in future learning and who are willing and able to make effective contributions to their communities.



CRITICAL INQUIRY: Students will

- demonstrate a knowledge base that helps them ask more informed questions and learn more complex concepts;
- use scientific, quantitative, and computational processes in order to solve real-world problems;
- analyze their own cultural assumptions in the context of the world's diverse values, traditions, and belief systems;
- analyze the major ideas, techniques, and processes that inform creative works within different cultural and historical contexts.

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION:

- Students will
- develop and present ideas logically and effectively in order to enhance communication and collaboration with diverse individuals and groups.

RESPONSIBLE LIVING:

- Students will
- describe ways in which ethical principles affect human choices;
 - analyze the effect that decisions have on self, others, and the environment;
 - evaluate and practice strategies leading to individual and social well-being.

Figure 1: Proposed UCA Core

- ◆ Using the clarified mission statement and outcomes, along with data provided by our assessment efforts, a General Education Task Force, supported with stipends from the Provost's Office, will begin an intensive review and, as appropriate, make recommendations for a revision of the general education structure and curriculum in Summer 2012. The task force will include General Education Council members as well as faculty from departments that do not teach general education courses. It will present its recommendations to the General Education Council by September 2012, at which point the General Education Council will organize faculty and student forums on the task force's recommendations. The General Education Council will then present plans for a revised program, with time to make necessary curricular and other changes for implementation in Fall 2013. This process will involve significant faculty and student participation and should result in a sense of ownership of the program by all. In preparation for this process, the Director of General Education attended the AAC&U pre-conference workshop – From “Why?” to “How?” to “Well Done!”: Strategies for Strengthening General Education – in February of 2012.
- ◆ In response to the recommendation expressed in the Assurance Section of the HLC visiting team report that UCA pursue “on-going discussions about adding upper-level General Education courses” (23), the Director of General Education has invited departments to present proposals for including upper-division courses as general education requirements and has met with several chairs to discuss such proposals. Currently at least two proposals involving upper-division courses are being drafted, and the inclusion of such courses in the program will be considered by the General Education Task Force.
- ◆ Based on the mission and basic outcomes statement, an Outreach Task Force will formulate ways of presenting the goals of the general education program to appropriate audiences – students, potential students (through recruitment materials and the web site), faculty, and parents – so that the program will have a well-established identity and students will understand the way it serves their education as lifelong learners. The outreach materials will be revised as necessary based on the changes in the program resulting from the recommendations of the task force and the process described above.

E. General Education Assessment

As stated in the Assurance Section of the HLC report, focus groups involving students or outside stakeholders have not been conducted; the results of assessment efforts have not been communicated to faculty or students; and assessment in General Education has been done at the department level but not reviewed at higher levels (23-24).

Background: Each course in the General Education program was reviewed when the current program was established, and the proposal for each course included an assessment plan that would measure student outcomes in area knowledge, skills, and attitudes and values; these assessment plans required approval by the General Education Council. Most departments then carried on some kind of assessment of their general education courses. However, until recently there has been virtually no follow-up to ascertain whether departments were participating in meaningful assessment of their courses or whether that assessment was resulting in course review or revision.

In addition, the state-mandated “Rising Junior Exam” (the Arkansas Assessment of General Education, which used the ACT CAAP test) had been a significant measure of the skills gained by students. When that assessment was discontinued in 2007, the university expressed its commitment to finding an alternative measure of student skills on a programmatic level. The General Education Council recommended use of the ETS Proficiency Profile and of focus groups to supplement the assessment information gained through meaningful course-level assessment, but the administration was unable to act on that recommendation because of financial problems. With the university’s return to fiscal health, the administration is providing the means to act on the General Education Council’s recommendations, including providing released time for Council members working on assessment in Spring 2012, and thus a culture of assessment will be established in General Education through the following means:

Course-Level Assessment

- ♦ *Evaluation of Assessment:* The Assessment Subcommittee of the General Education Council is systematically evaluating assessment in all general education courses to ensure that the courses are being assessed to confirm the link to the general education mission and program outcomes. The subcommittee will also gather, review, and report the data that is compiled through the assessment process and any changes based on assessment data. It has evaluated the assessment of 30 courses in spring and fall semesters of 2011. Assessment in a similar number of courses will be reviewed in the spring and fall semesters of 2012, at which point assessment in every general education course will have been evaluated and recommendations for its improvement communicated to departments. After that, course assessment will be reviewed on a 4-year cycle, with assessment in one fourth of general education courses being evaluated each year. The subcommittee is also following up with the departments that were evaluated the previous semester, asking them to report on how they are responding to the recommendations that were made and to any necessary changes based on the data they have collected. The responses to this follow-up will be included in

each assessment report after the initial one, and the General Education Council will continue to follow up on any concerns about assessment until the issues are resolved.

- ◆ *Communication of Course Assessment Information:* Each semester a report on evaluation of assessment is sent to department chairs, the University Assessment Committee, and the provost and is posted on the General Education web page. The Director of General Education has met with chairs in several departments to answer questions they had about course assessment. As a result of those meetings, the Assessment Subcommittee has developed two new forms – one for reporting assessment data in general education courses, which clarifies the information departments should provide in order to show how they are assessing the course’s achievement of general education outcomes; and another for reporting changes in general education assessment plans, since most departments will be making changes as they follow the subcommittee’s recommendations. These forms will initiate a systematic process to make sure the changes are implemented. Both forms have been posted on the General Education web page so departments can access them electronically. Both forms are included in Appendix 5.2. The revised plans will be reviewed by the Assessment Subcommittee and the General Education Council and passed on to the University Assessment Committee.

Program-Level Assessment

- ◆ **Focus Groups:** The General Education Council conducted student focus groups involving seniors from the College of Business and the College of Liberal Arts in Fall 2011. These groups were led by an experienced focus-group leader who is a faculty member in the Department of Marketing and Management. At least two focus groups involving students from two different colleges will be conducted each year until all colleges have participated. At that point the General Education Council will evaluate the process and decide on a schedule for the continued use of the focus groups. The General Education Council also sponsored focus groups involving representatives of the primary local employers of UCA graduates. These focus groups were conducted in March 2012. Information from all of the focus groups will be used to inform program revision, and reports on the focus groups will be posted on the general education web page as part of the semi-annual assessment reports.
- ◆ The Council of Deans has endorsed the use of the ETS Proficiency Profile (the abbreviated version with the writing component) to test a sample of incoming freshmen and seniors who have completed most of their general education requirements at UCA. The test will be administered to 250 seniors in Spring 2012 and to 250 freshmen in Fall 2012. The results will be posted on the General Education web page and will be used to complement course assessment information and to provide a regional and national context in which to evaluate

student skills outcomes and identify areas in which the program needs to work on those outcomes. Based on our use of the Proficiency Profile, UCA will explore participation in the Voluntary System of Accountability, which could enable us to contextualize and communicate our assessment results more widely.

- ◆ The Director of General Education and selected members of the General Education Council have been provided with funding to attend AAC&U conferences on assessment and will begin participating in the HLC's Assessment Academy in June, 2012. Through these experiences we will develop an effective and systematic plan for assessment.
- ◆ Now that financial support for assessment efforts has been assured, the GEC has presented its assessment plan (adopted by the GEC in 2009 but held up because of questions about funding) to the newly formed Academic Assessment Committee.
- ◆ The General Education Task Force (described above) will focus on program assessment as a key factor in its recommendations for revision of the program. The provost has agreed to charge the task force to recommend revisions that will result in a program that is more readily assessable than the current model.

2013

Plans for 2013 and subsequent years will be reviewed and modified as necessary in light of the work of the General Education Task Force in summer 2012.

Course Level Assessment

- ◆ Fall semester: The General Education Council will complete the evaluation of assessment in all of the courses offered for GE credit, informing departments of what needs to be done in order to enhance their assessment efforts and to act on assessment data. It will also follow up on its previous recommendations to departments regarding course assessment, ensuring that the departments are revising assessment plans as necessary and acting on assessment data where appropriate.
- ◆ Spring semester: The GEC will follow up on its previous recommendations and begin its regular cycle of assessment evaluation, reviewing assessment in 25% of general education courses.

Program-Level Assessment

- ◆ The General Education Council will conduct focus groups involving students from at least two more colleges.
- ◆ The Proficiency Profile exam will be administered to 250 incoming students and 250 seniors.

- ◆ The GEC will review data from the Proficiency Profile exam and make recommendations about such issues as sample size and selection, scheduling of the exam, the validity of the writing component, ways to integrate Proficiency Profile data with course assessment data, etc.
- ◆ Data from the NSSE survey will also be reviewed and used to inform program planning.

2014

Course-Level Assessment

- ◆ The GEC will evaluate departmental assessment efforts in 25% of general education courses and review actions taken by departments in response to assessment data.

Program-Level Assessment

- ◆ The GEC will conduct focus groups involving students from the final two colleges.
- ◆ The GEC will review the focus group process, making recommendations about the format and future scheduling of the groups.
- ◆ The GEC will use data from course assessment and the Proficiency Profile to identify areas in which student outcomes need to be improved and will make appropriate recommendations to departments, deans, and the provost. If the program has been significantly revised, the GEC will explore and implement appropriate assessment strategies to measure the effectiveness of the revision.

2015

Course-Level Assessment

- ◆ The GEC will evaluate departmental assessment efforts in 25% of general education courses and review actions taken by departments in response to assessment data.

Program-Level Assessment

- ◆ The GEC will conduct focus groups as deemed appropriate by our evaluation of focus group information.
- ◆ The GEC will use data from course assessment and the Proficiency Profile to identify areas in which student outcomes need to be improved and will make appropriate recommendations to departments, deans, and the provost. If the program has been significantly revised, the GEC will complete implementation of appropriate assessment strategies to measure the effectiveness of the revision.

2016

Course-Level Assessment

- ◆ The GEC will evaluate departmental assessment efforts in $\frac{1}{4}$ of general education courses and review actions taken by departments in response to assessment data.

Program-Level Assessment

- ◆ The GEC will conduct focus groups as deemed appropriate by our evaluation of focus group information.
- ◆ The GEC will use data from course assessment and the Proficiency Profile to identify areas in which student outcomes need to be improved and will make appropriate recommendations to departments, deans, and the provost.