

University of Central Arkansas

PLAN FOR ASSESSING STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

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Note to the reader: What follows is UCA's 1995 university assessment plan. It is presented here in its original form (for ease of reference, page numbers from the printed document are noted in the text): though some minor mechanical and grammatical errors have been silently corrected, no attempt has been made to update other aspects of the document. A fall 1999 edition is anticipated; in the meantime, other documents linked from the [Assessment Index](#) offer current information.

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University of Central Arkansas Profile

The University of Central Arkansas is a comprehensive public university governed by a seven-member Board of Trustees appointed by the governor of Arkansas, with the members serving seven-year terms. Established in 1907 as the Arkansas State Normal School, the institution was granted authority to confer the baccalaureate degree in 1920. A graduate program was inaugurated in 1955. In 1975, the institution earned university status.

The university has experienced a dramatic, 40 percent growth in enrollment in the past five years. Over the same interval, the mean ACT scores of the entering students rose from 21.0 to 21.8. These average scores rank 1.7 points above the state average and 1.0 point above the national average. UCA enrolled 8,152 undergraduate students and 1,035 graduate students in fall 1994. Students from all 75 Arkansas counties, 30 states, and some 48 countries attend the university. Non-traditional students (defined as students older than 25 years of age) represent 22 percent of the enrollment.

UCA, a residential campus known for its beauty and friendliness, is located in Conway, a city of 35,000 situated in the center of the state. The location makes it easy for commuting students to enroll in UCA's programs of study. The state's colleges and universities, in collaboration with the state board of higher education, have established a 35-hour minimum general education core, which eases articulation between institutions. UCA's general education requirements total 46 hours, including the 35-hour transferable core. The curriculum, comprising mathematics, humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, and the arts, is designed to provide students with information they need to make informed decisions about their lives and the skills necessary to function in a constantly changing world. In compliance with Act 874 of the Arkansas General Assembly (1993), UCA students will be tested on their command of the general education curriculum after completing 45 credit hours of study.

Students build on their general education foundation with concentrated study in major and minor fields. Graduate students acquire more in-depth understanding in their disciplines in preparation for further graduate study or work in their chosen professional careers. The 96 undergraduate and 46 graduate programs offered by UCA lead to a total of 18 different degrees. UCA's undergraduate and graduate students have the opportunity to choose among strong and accredited, where appropriate, programs in the fields of health sciences, the arts, the sciences, education, the humanities, the social sciences, and business.

Curricular and other programmatic changes require review by department, college, and university committees. Changes in major and minor curriculum and programs are first proposed by one of the 26 academic departments, reviewed and recommended by a college curriculum committee, the originating department's dean, the UCA undergraduate council, (composed of [page ii] faculty and students), the council of deans, and the vice president for academic affairs. General education course changes follow the same process.

The assessment process described in the following pages depends on the leadership of a newly established Planning & Assessment Committee (PAC), but it is integrated with a longstanding and broad-based governance structure involving the committees, councils, and administrators listed in the preceding paragraph.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. To what extent has the institution demonstrated that the plan is linked to the mission, goals, and objectives of the institution for student learning and academic achievement, including learning in general

education and in the major?

The "Plan for Assessing Student Learning" developed at the University of Central Arkansas derives directly from the institution's mission, goals, and objectives. In a systematic fashion, members of the faculty, led by the director of assessment and the Planning & Assessment Committee (PAC), have designed program assessment plans.

In fall 1994, the departmental faculties or faculty assessment committees met with the director of assessment or members of the PAC, who provided them with copies of the "Profile of the University of Central Arkansas" (as published in the *1994-1996 Undergraduate Bulletin*) and "Philosophy" (as published in the *1993-1995 Graduate Bulletin*). (See Exhibit A for complete statements.) Both bulletins contain statements of the mission of the university that are consistent with the "Statement of Role and Scope" adopted by the Board of Trustees in 1979. (See Exhibit B.) These statements affirm the primary mission of this university is teaching, with a secondary focus on research and creative activities and a tertiary emphasis on service. The North Central Association (NCA) stress on student learning outcomes, therefore, reinforces and better defines the traditional values and ambitions of the campus.

The PAC reviewed with the academic departments the criteria for student assessment, as reflected in the NCA's "Five Evaluative Questions." The director of assessment and committee members underlined the fact that the institution's mission statement was to form the basis upon which to build a plan for assessing student learning. They explained that NCA guidelines require that the university develop plans for assessment that focus on student learning outcomes as the most important measure of programmatic and, ultimately, institutional effectiveness. By March 1995, twenty-five of the twenty-six academic departments that offer undergraduate academic majors or graduate degrees had responded. Each submitted departmental goals stated in terms of student achievement and a list of intended student outcomes that were tied directly to the mission of the university. The assessment subcommittee of the PAC reviewed, evaluated, and responded to each of these partial plans. (See Exhibit C for sample plans.)

The objectives for the general education curriculum, developed in 1983, are listed in Exhibit D. The exhibit graphically demonstrates that they derive directly from the mission of the university. By institutional policy, the Undergraduate Council has direct responsibility for the general education curriculum. It reviews all general education proposals and makes recommendations to vice president for academic affairs. Therefore, the director of assessment met with the undergraduate council in the fall 1994 to discuss the need to develop a list of [page iv] statements of intended student outcomes that are tied directly to the objectives of general education and the university mission. Those statements are anticipated in October 1995 and will be reviewed by the assessment subcommittee, and, in turn, the undergraduate council, the council of deans, the vice president for academic affairs, and the university president.

2. What is the institution's evidence that faculty have participated in the development of the institution's plan and that the plan is institution-wide in conceptualization and scope?

The PAC has a broad leadership responsibility for developing and coordinating the assessment plan. This committee is largely a faculty body representing all areas of the university in its membership. Chaired by the director of assessment, the committee is composed of ten faculty members (two from each college) selected by the university president from nominees of the faculty senate; the president of faculty senate or designee; the president of the staff senate or designee; and the president of the student government association or designee; the dean of the graduate school; the dean of the library; the dean of undergraduate studies; and the director of institutional research. The university president also appoints one member to serve a four-year term from each of the following: president's office, administrative affairs, financial affairs, public affairs, student affairs (with at least one of these five to be a vice president).

The PAC operates as two independent subcommittees: the assessment subcommittee and the planning subcommittee. The two subcommittees serve as checks and balances in a way that further ensures that

the information garnered through assessment will be used to plan and implement institutional improvement. In the fall term 1994, the assessment subcommittee directed all academic departments to draft a plan for assessing their respective programs based on student learning outcomes as the best index of program effectiveness. Every academic department established an assessment committee, or the entire departmental faculty acted as a committee-of-the-whole. Those departments that named faculty committees subsequently reported the results of their work to the entire departmental faculty for review and approval. After much discussion and careful consideration, twenty-five of the twenty-six departmental committees submitted to the assessment subcommittee preliminary drafts of their plans identifying the departmental goals and listing intended student learning outcomes to be measured. The twenty-sixth is expected to submit a plan by the end of summer 1995. (See Exhibit C for sample plans.) Guided by feedback from the assessment subcommittee, the departmental faculty committees are presently modifying their plans. Once the faculty complete their plans in October 1995, the assessment subcommittee will integrate these reported plans into a campus-wide plan for the university. This institutional plan for assessing student learning will be forwarded to appropriate academic and administrative committees and councils for further review before being submitted to the academic vice president and subsequently to the university president for final approval.

Thereafter, the departmental faculty committees will submit annual reports to the assessment subcommittee. These reports will detail the assessment activities taking place in that program during the academic year. Similarly, the subcommittee's responsibilities are on-going. [page v] Each year the subcommittee will evaluate the overall assessment process and submit a report to the university administration.

3. How does the plan demonstrate the likelihood that the assessment program will lead to institutional improvement when it is implemented?

UCA's plan for assessment provides a systematic means for measuring student academic outcomes. These outcomes will indicate the extent to which each program is achieving its educational goals. Assessment of student learning will inform the faculty about the strengths of their programs as well as the areas that need attention. The institutional plan requires that departments develop and report to the planning subcommittee plans to correct any deficiencies. These changes and the results will in turn be monitored and reported in the subsequent annual report. The goal is continuous improvement.

The probability of success is enhanced by three factors. First, the plans are being developed by those most intimately knowledgeable of the students, the curriculum, and the needs and standards of their respective disciplines. The departmental faculty have a direct stake in plans that will produce improvement. Their programs will be judged on the results. The assessment process is well-integrated with the governance structure of the university. The individuals who are most responsible for motivating change at the unit level, the department chairs, have direct curricular ties to the faculty and academic administrators represented on the PAC. The PAC is closely linked to the academic leadership essential for program change--namely, the undergraduate council, graduate council, council of deans, the academic vice president, and the university president..

4. Is the timeline for the assessment program appropriate? Realistic?

The UCA timeline for assessing student academic outcomes is appropriate and realistic. Assessment at UCA is an ongoing, cyclic process, composed of four initiatives, each of which is characterized by a distinct focus. In the first initiative (begun in AY 1994-95), individual departments are developing assessment plans for their undergraduate majors and for their graduate programs. In the second initiative (to begin AY 1995-96), faculty will assess multidisciplinary programs at the undergraduate (including general education) and graduate levels. In the third initiative (to begin 1996-97), faculty, following the procedures established for major programs, will generate assessment plans for programs that involve no major component (such as academic minors, honors programs, Honors College). (See [Table 2](#) . . . for the

assessment calendar.) departments will be asked by the assessment subcommittee to review their assessment plans, and the university will review the campus-wide plan (initiative four) in the spring 1998, after the first three initiatives have been set in motion.

During the first year of each of the first three initiatives, faculty define their goals and objectives for student outcomes, indicate in reports submitted to the assessment subcommittee [page vi] how these goals articulate with the larger university's mission and goals (see Exhibit C); develop statements of intended student academic outcomes that support the program goals; and choose appropriate instruments to measure intended student outcomes. These plans are submitted to the assessment subcommittee for approval. In the second year of each initiative, the faculty implement the assessment tasks they articulated in their initial plans by using the measurement instruments to collect relevant data on student achievement. (If necessary and with appropriate approvals, the department faculty can revise their assessment plan by defining one or more manageable assessment tasks for the next year.) The departmental committee determines if the data indicate that program goals are being achieved. The department then reports its assessment data, conclusions about attainment of goals, and, if necessary, proposals for programmatic changes to the planning subcommittee. The planning subcommittee reviews the report to determine if the conclusions are warranted by the evidence from the measures of student outcomes. Once the planning subcommittee has endorsed a proposed plan for programmatic change, it submits the plan to the university curricular governance system.

5. What is the evidence that the plan provides for appropriate administration of the assessment program?

In 1994, the university president established the PAC, a broadly representative group (including faculty, staff, and students) with ties to all major divisions of the university. (See response to evaluative question 2, page iv.) The wide representation enhances the lines of communication between the assessment structure and the institutions governance system. It gives the committee the breadth of knowledge necessary to place assessment in its proper perspective.

The PAC reviews and coordinates the work of the faculty in the academic programs. The director, named by the university president and assigned to the office of the academic vice president, chairs both subcommittees of the PAC. Strong lines of communication between the office of the vice president, the university president, and the PAC are maintained through this relationship. The president, with the advice and assistance of the deans council, council of vice presidents, and, in appropriate cases, the student, faculty, and staff senates, makes recommendations to the board of trustees for significant programmatic changes that may result from the assessment process.

The university has budgeted to meet the costs of assessment. The director of assessment receives a reduction of one-half of his teaching assignment. In May 1995, the Board of Trustees, at the recommendation of the university president, established a five-dollar assessment surcharge on the fee bill of every registrant at UCA each semester. Funding for the assessment activities, including faculty development activities, comes through the academic vice president's office.

[page 1]

PLAN FOR ASSESSING STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

The University of Central Arkansas is dedicated to the ideals of excellence in student achievement. This plan to assess the student learning outcomes requires a coordinated effort of faculty and staff across academic areas. It means a focus on students and what they and their records tell us. The results of this examination of student achievement will be one index used in the evaluation of the university's instructional programs. Therefore, the UCA assessment plan, by design, is anchored in the faculty delivering the instruction. This is so in part because of the faculty's knowledge of the directions and

standards of their respective disciplines. No less important is their direct contact with students as they meet the challenges posed by their various degree programs.

Development of the Structure for Student Learning Outcomes Assessment

The development and implementation of any successful academic outcomes assessment plan requires the early participation of the teaching faculty. UCA's interest in academic assessment is longstanding, as will be shown in section entitled [Assessment Projects Antedating the NCA Assessment Mandate](#). It received fresh impetus from the North Central Association's (NCA) 1989 "Statement on Assessment and Student Academic Achievement." In 1991, three faculty members of a previously established ad hoc committee established to assess general education attended the annual meeting of NCA in Chicago as a fact-finding group. A second group of committee members attended the 1992 NCA meeting. The committee, upon the return of the task force, reported to the vice president for academic affairs the need to initiate an assessment process involving broad-based participation of faculty, staff, and students and focusing on student achievement.

A few weeks later, several members of the general education assessment committee, the university's director of institutional research, and the graduate dean attended a three-day workshop in Memphis to learn more regarding student outcomes assessment. This group also made recommendations to the vice president for academic affairs, specifically suggesting that a director of assessment and a university assessment committee be named.

At the beginning of the 1993 fall semester, the university president appointed a director of assessment, who was given half-time reassignment from his teaching responsibilities. During the 1993-1994 academic year, the new director of assessment participated in several workshops and conferences to study student outcome assessment techniques. During the 1994-1995 academic year, representatives of the faculty and academic department chairs traveled to assessment conferences. These individuals were then able to assist their colleagues and the [\[page 2\]](#) university administration in understanding the important principles that underlie assessing student academic outcomes.

Formation of the University Planning & Assessment Committee (PAC)

The university president established a university standing committee for planning and assessment in September 1994. The committee is representative of the university's faculty, is linked to key academic decision-making bodies, and is supported by staff having expertise to facilitate assessment activities. This committee is chaired by the director of assessment and is composed often faculty members (two from each college) selected by the university president from nominees of the faculty senate; the president of faculty senate or designee; the president of the staff senate or designee; and the president of the student government association or designee; the dean of the graduate school; the dean of the library; the dean of undergraduate studies; and the director of institutional research. The university president also appoints one member to serve a four-year term from each of the following: president's office, administrative affairs, financial affairs, public affairs, student affairs (with at least one of these five to be a vice president).

At the initial meeting of the PAC, the university president gave the committee its charge:

- To advise the appropriate vice president and the president on university-wide planning and assessment activities.
- To maintain a repository of all university planning and assessment activities and processes.
- To coordinate and implement planning and assessment activities upon approval by the appropriate vice president and president.

The committee members were assigned to one of two subcommittees of equal size. The two

subcommittees have been designed to function independently of each other with only the director of assessment sitting on both panels. The division of labor will serve as a system of checks and balances for the entire process of using student outcomes assessment to evaluate academic programs. The assessment subcommittee will shoulder the responsibility of monitoring the progress of the assessment efforts, and the planning subcommittee will monitor and assist with the changes in the academic program resulting from the assessment.

(1) The planning subcommittee has three responsibilities. The first and most immediate is to study the university's statement of mission, refining it where necessary, and to create a list of academic goals. The second is to help faculty develop and implement any programmatic changes deemed necessary as a result of assessment. Eventually, the planning subcommittee will function as a clearinghouse for all strategic planning carried out on the campus.

(2) The assessment subcommittee has three primary responsibilities. The members of the subcommittee will serve as resources to the members of the faculty assessment committees for the academic departments and other assessing units. After the members of the faculty are educated in the culture of outcomes assessment, the second responsibility of the assessment subcommittee will be to monitor the development of departmental assessment plans. Finally, the [page 3] process and results of the departmental assessment plans will be reviewed by the members of the assessment subcommittee.

In the fall, 1994, the PAC and the director of assessment began meeting with department chairs and directors of other academic program units to explain the specific responsibilities of departments and faculty in the assessment process. A consultant, Dr. Kay Schallenkamp, Provost, University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, who is experienced in the development and evaluation of the assessment of student outcomes, held a series of on-campus workshops for various personnel, including members of the faculty, department chairs, members of the PAC, and academic deans. The purposes of the workshops were to:

- Educate key personnel about the nature of assessment, the purpose of which is produce to improvement, as opposed to accountability, the purpose of which is to prove worth.
- Assist in the conceptualization of student outcomes assessment.
- Deliver to the university community the expectations NCA has for an assessment plan.

The director of assessment developed and distributed to all departments a packet of information describing the nature of the process and several models of assessment plans for academic programs (Exhibit C).

During the fall 1994 and spring 1995, the assessment subcommittee, drawing on the expertise gained in attending assessment conferences, worked with faculty committees or with departmental faculties to design the individual program assessment plans. The director of assessment and other members of the assessment subcommittee instructed departmental faculty committees in developing program goals and statements of student outcomes. These initial efforts to develop assessment plans were approved by the departmental faculty and subsequently submitted to the assessment subcommittee. The subcommittee then reviewed these goals and related intended student outcomes and advised the assessment director about how to respond to the academic departments. The feedback either told the department faculty that their plans were on target or offered suggestions as what could be done to improve the assessment plans.

Redrafting of Mission and Goal Statements

Recognizing that there must be a relationship between the stated mission of the university and faculty expectations for student achievement, the planning subcommittee began in October 1994 to evaluate the university mission. It found three overlapping versions of the mission statement. All emphasize the primacy of teaching in the mission of the university, with a secondary role for research and creative activities and a tertiary role for service. The subcommittee decided that the mission should be

consolidated into one clearly defined statement. It also recognized that academic goals focusing on student achievements must be added to the existing mission statement. In meetings during the 1994-1995 academic year, the planning subcommittee began the task of focusing the mission of the academic programs while maintaining the integrity of the existing statements of the university mission. Drawing on the advice of colleagues who had attended assessment seminars and on documents from other institutions, an *ad hoc* writing group of the planning subcommittee drafted a revised mission statement in late April 1995. The entire subcommittee shall revisit the new mission statement in [page 4] early fall 1995. Following its approval by the PAC, the institutional mission statement will be submitted for the approval of the university community through the normal academic channels. Specifically, the mission statement will be examined in order by the undergraduate council and the graduate council, the council of deans, the academic vice president, and the university president, who will submit it to the UCA Board of Trustees for ratification.

Bases for Academic Assessment at UCA

With continuous improvement of student academic achievement as the objective, assessment at UCA is supported by four convictions: programs are the unit of analysis; faculty control and evaluate assessment of student learning with the supervision and support of the university administration; assessment is phased and will be implemented gradually; and the entire assessment plan is subject to revision as experience is gained.

1. *Programs.* Programs will be evaluated on the basis of data collected in the assessment of student academic outcomes. Three questions guide the evaluation of programs: First, "What do we want our students to know when they complete the program?" Second, "How will we know they know it?" Third, "Will the assessment of students outcomes result in data that are useful in improving the program?" The NCA assessment effort is to be focused solely on program improvement through the examination of student outcomes. This is not an accountability mandate.

2. *Faculty Control and Evaluate Program Assessment.* Direct responsibility for assessment rests with the faculty because it merges two traditional faculty arenas. Faculty are closest to the students and have long evaluated individual student academic achievement. Faculty have also customarily had direct responsibility for curricular development and program design. In determining assessment plans for various programs, faculty committees shift the focus from measuring student academic achievement for a single course to the examination of the knowledge, behavior, and attitudes of students who have completed the entire program. This direct involvement of the faculty in designing plans to evaluate their programs captures the diversity of the curriculum and of the faculty. It maximizes the faculty involvement with assessment and fosters commitment to what will be an ongoing process.

The departmental faculty are the authors of the departmental program goals and communicate those goals to the assessment subcommittee for review. Upon receiving the response of the assessment committee, it is those same faculty who define what types of student outcomes best illustrate program goals and ascertain how to assess learning outcomes. Once again, the assessment subcommittee monitors the intended student outcome statements for appropriateness. The faculty in the program, in collaboration with the director of assessment and director of institutional research, determine what types of instruments will best measure those outcomes. Finally, after the data are obtained, whether by the members of the departmental faculty or by other university assessment personnel, the faculty will respond to the results. These results and recommendations for programmatic change will then be communicated to the planning subcommittee for review and ratification. Both subcommittees report to the university [page 5] administration the findings and recommendations concerning the assessment projects in the various academic programs.

In such interdisciplinary programs as physical science, general science, teacher education, and general education, the responsible unit will be the most fundamental unit that comprehends the program. It may

be the undergraduate council, graduate council, professional education council, or interdepartmental faculty committees. The structure of the assessment process for these programs will parallel those in the major programs.

3. *Phased and gradual.* Assessment at UCA is organized around four initiatives. These initiatives, described more fully below, allow the various components of the university to participate in the process and ensure that careful implementation takes place. Initiative 1 (Assessment of Department Majors and Graduate Programs) began in fall 1994, Initiative 2 (Assessment of General Education and Interdisciplinary Programs) will begin in fall 1995, and by the time Initiative 3 (Assessment of Special Programs) gets underway, Initiative 1 will be in the midst of collecting data.

4. *Routine evaluation of UCA's Assessment Plan.* Once Initiative 3 is begun, the PAC, with input from the faculty, will begin Initiative 4, the evaluation and modification of the overall Assessment Plan.

Assessment Implementation: Process

[Table 1](#) summarizes the assignment of responsibilities for academic outcomes assessment at UCA. The types of programs to be assessed are found on the left side of the table; the faculty unit responsible for the assessment plan is found on the right side. The table shows that all aspects of education provided by UCA will be assessed, and that faculty and staff from throughout the institution are actively involved in assessment activities. Components of our educational programs that are necessarily interdepartmental (including general education) will be assessed by those faculty councils given responsibility for them.

Table 1

Academic Outcomes Assessment University of Central Arkansas

What Should Be Assessed?	Who Should Do the Assessment?
Department/Program majors	Faculty in departments/programs
Graduate programs	Faculty in departments/programs
General Education	General Education Committee
Interdisciplinary programs	Faculty responsible for programs
Special programs [page 6]	
Honors	Exemplary Studies Committee
Minors	Faculty in departments/programs
University Assessment Plan	PAC

Four Initiatives of Assessment Activities

The assessment of student academic outcomes at UCA will be developed in four initiatives that, in keeping with our commitment to a phased and gradual assessment, are implemented one at a time over

three years. All initiatives proceed through the same course. Generally speaking, faculty have a year-and-a-half to complete the pertinent plan, and almost the same amount of time to execute it, including gathering and interpreting the data, and submitting the report to the assessment subcommittee. Specifically, during the first half-year of each initiative, relevant faculty write *Goals and Intended Student Outcomes/Objectives*. Then they develop *Assessment Criteria and Procedures*. Third, faculty identify and/or develop measurement instruments. Once the full plan is in place and approved by the assessment subcommittee, faculty in these programs collect and explain the data, determining the value of the results. Finally, faculty will review, recommend, and initiate any programmatic changes. Whether or not faculty decide to modify their programs, they will submit a report to the assessment subcommittee, and continue the assessment cycle during each academic year, with reports due every May. Naturally, the assessment subcommittee provides feedback at each step. The charts in Exhibit E provide a view of this process.

As we submit this plan to the NCA, we have completed the first step of Initiative 1 and are in the middle of the second step. [Table 2](#) indicates that various disciplines with majors and graduate programs spent a large part of the 1994-95 academic year reviewing their program objectives, revising where necessary, and determining expected student outcomes. They have been mindful of the university's mission statement during these processes, as Exhibit C demonstrates. By the middle of October 1995, these units will have determined ways they might measure student academic achievement, recognizing that there may be several methods to measure a single student outcome. They will then spend the next several months identifying existing assessment instruments or developing new ones, and determining a schedule or time-line for implementing the actual assessment. By March 1996, they will be ready to begin monitoring student academic achievement and will have a year in which to collect data and initiate the analysis. Programs must complete data interpretation in time to write a report to the assessment subcommittee that explains the findings, evaluates both the program goals and the assessment plan, and makes any recommendations for change. Those changes dealing with program will be forwarded to the planning subcommittee; those changes dealing with the assessment plan will be evaluated by the the assessment subcommittee.

As Initiative 1 programs undertake identifying existing assessment instruments or developing new ones this fall, Initiative 2 programs (general education and interdisciplinary [\[page 7\]](#) programs) will start to write *Goals and Intended Student Outcomes/Objectives*, and will follow the same steps earlier traced by Initiative 1 progress. By March 1997, Initiative 2 programs will be ready to collect data. And the following March, Initiative 3 programs (special programs) and Initiative 4 (the assessment of assessment) will also be ready to put their plans in action.

Of the twenty-six assessing units in Initiative 1, twenty-five are on or ahead of schedule at the end of the 1995 spring semester. In addition, the multi-disciplinary undergraduate council, which is the assessing unit for the general education curriculum, and the faculty committees responsible for physical science and general science have submitted preliminary work on identifying program goals and intended student outcomes statements.

The assessment subcommittee reviewed each submitted plan to determine if the program goals and statements of intended student outcomes were consistent with the ten characteristics of an acceptable plan as defined by NCA (Exhibit F). If the plan had been developed beyond the initial review stage, the committee reviewed the entire plan and responded accordingly. Each assessing unit received a follow-up letter from the subcommittee noting those areas, if any, where improvements could be made or where there might exist a problem. For example, many of the plans submitted were overly ambitious. In such cases, the subcommittee recommended to the department that the number of objectives be pared back so as to not overburden the members of the department faculty. The completed assessment plan is expected by November 1995. It was the consensus of the assessment subcommittee that the first submissions by the academic departments were largely successful. They reflected a serious effort on the parts of the faculty to develop plans that will ultimately lead to improving the programs. All units submitting plans will file written reports with the assessment subcommittee annually to inform it of activities completed during

the last year, and of plans for continuing assessment activities for the next year.

The assessment subcommittee assumes the responsibility for ensuring that the units move from assessment of one objective to another, that multiple measures are used to assess each objective, and that each unit develops and follows a plan for evaluating its assessment plan. The planning subcommittee will monitor the reporting cycle to ensure that improvements in programs are being made as a result of the assessment plan. Also, the planning subcommittee will review the university's strategy for outcomes assessment after the units associated with the three assessment phases have implemented components of their plans.

The PAC has been established as a university standing committee. This committee has determined a process and a calendar for the University of Central Arkansas to ensure that assessment activities are completed in a timely manner and that assessment continues as an ongoing component of university life. The assessment process has involved virtually all of the faculty on campus. All major programs of study at the graduate and undergraduate levels as well as the general education curriculum will be assessed.

Schedule for Academic Outcomes Assessment

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The PAC's basic schedule for academic outcomes assessment as an ongoing and developmental process at the university is summarized in [Table 2](#). This calendar, which begins with the naming of the director of assessment in 1993, highlights the systematic and cyclic nature of UCA's academic outcomes assessment process. The main characteristic of this process is that it is focused at the departmental level (or responsible unit) and is faculty-driven.

Table 2

**Assessment Calendar
University of Central Arkansas**

Initiative 1	Majors & Graduate Programs
October 1994-March 1995	Programs write Goals and Program Intended Outcomes/Objectives for Majors.
March 1995-October 1995	Programs develop Assessment Criteria & Procedures
October 1995-March 1996	Programs identify and/or develop assessment instruments.
March 1996-March 1997	Gather data.
March 1997-May 1997	Interpret data, submit report to assessment subcommittee, and make recommendations.
May 1997-December 1997	Affect any programmatic changes with assistance of planning subcommittee.
September 1997-May 1998	Begin annual reporting cycle. (Gather data; interpret data; submit report to assessment subcommittee; make recommendations; effect any programmatic changes with assistance of planning subcommittee.)

Initiative 2	General Education & Interdisciplinary Programs
October 1995-March 1996	General Education and Interdisciplinary Programs write Goals and Program Intended Outcomes/Objectives.
March 1996-October 1996	General Education and Interdisciplinary Programs develop Assessment Criteria & Procedures.
October 1996-March 1997	General Education and Interdisciplinary Programs identify and/or develop assessment instruments. [page 9]
March 1997-March 1998	Gather data.
March 1998-May 1998	Interpret data, submit report to assessment subcommittee, and make recommendations.
May 1998-December 1998	Effect programmatic changes with assistance of planning subcommittee.
September 1998-May 1999	Begin annual reporting cycle. (Gather data; interpret data; submit report to assessment subcommittee; make recommendations; affect any programmatic changes with assistance of planning subcommittee.)
Initiative 3	Special Programs
October 1996-March 1997	Special Programs write Goals and Program Intended Outcomes/Objectives.
March 1997-October 1997	Special Programs develop Assessment Criteria & Procedures.
October 1997- March 1998	Special Programs identify and/or develop assessment instruments.
March 1998-March 1999	Gather data.
March 1999-May 1999	Interpret data, submit report to assessment subcommittee; and make recommendations.
May 1999-December 1999	Effect programmatic changes with assistance of planning subcommittee.
September 1999-May 2000	Begin annual reporting cycle. (Gather data; interpret data; submit report to assessment subcommittee; make recommendations; affect any programmatic changes with assistance of planning subcommittee.)
Initiative 4	Assessing UCA's Assessment Plan
October 1996-March 1997	PAC writes Goals and Program Intended Outcomes/Objectives for the Assessment Plan.
March 1997-October 1997	PAC develops Assessment Criteria & Procedures.

October 1997-March 1998	PAC identifies and/or develops assessment instruments. [page 10]
March 1999-May 1999	Interpret data, submit report to academic vice president, and make recommendations.
May 1999-December 1999	Effect programmatic changes with the assistance of university administration.

Assessment Projects Antedating the NCA Assessment Mandate

University-wide Projects. Predating the university's initiative to assess our student's academic outcomes were some centrally administered assessment activities. Typically, these efforts, coordinated by the dean of undergraduate studies or the institution's career guidance officer, were descriptive in nature. Characteristics of incoming students, the retention and graduation of students, and the placement of students in careers are representative of the types of data derived from these assessment efforts. However, exit exams and other means were used to determine the amounts of learning that had occurred in some basic courses.

Demographics of Incoming Students. Annually the American College Testing Service (ACT) provides UCA data on its class of new freshmen. The information includes scores for a wide group of respondent groups, including newly enrolled students and students who asked that their scores be sent to the institution, even if they chose not to enroll or were not admitted. These data are cross-tabulated by a variety of criteria, including by the students' planned educational major and by identified needs for special programs and services. These ACT data supply important indicators of the level of preparedness of our students and the kinds of services that they may need for academic success.

Retention and Graduation of Students. The Office of Institutional Research annually assesses the extent to which students persist at UCA from year to year and the extent to which entering cohorts of students graduate together. Graduation data provide an indicator of the success of students in meeting degree requirements in a timely fashion. These data monitor student success by gender and ethnicity, consistent with the goal that the student population mirror the diversity of the population of Arkansas. Data from these studies are found in the annual publication by the Office of Institutional Research, *The UCA Fact Book*.

Career Placement. The Office of Career Placement publishes yearly data on the success in finding jobs by graduating students. Disseminated widely on campus, this information indicates the extent to which the institution is successful in preparing students to practice a profession, an important goal in the university mission statement.

Assessment Project Resulting From the NCA Mandate

Department Projects. [Table 3](#) summarizes the assessment projects for those departments that have determined their plans and are ready to implement them in the 1995-1996 academic year. [\[page 11\]](#) The table organizes activities in terms of the kind of knowledge about student outcomes that is likely to be gained. The table shows that the departmental faculties are following the NCA directives to use multiple measures to assess student academic achievement. Although the departments, or assessing units, are responsible for the design of their own program assessment plans, there are fundamental commonalities across disciplines. All plans contain these basic features: (a) measures of mastery of subject matter; (b) measures of student attitudes toward the discipline; (c) a post-graduation survey of satisfaction by graduates; and (d) a study of the satisfaction by employers or graduate/professional school personnel.

Student Achievement in Major Programs. The members of the faculty who have attended various assessment conferences and workshops have advised the campus community on the importance of utilizing multiple measures of student outcomes to measure program achievement. The assessing units are also aware of the need to be cost conscious when choosing instruments to measure student outcomes. Therefore, some departments or assessing units will ask students to develop portfolios of work completed during their program of study. Faculty from the department/program will evaluate these portfolios in light of the learning objectives defined for their students.

Table 3

What Students Learn	How Will We Know They Know It?	Programs
Have students mastered a field of study?	Major Field Examinations	Accounting Biology Computer Science Economics Finance Foreign Languages Information Systems International Trade Management Marketing Political Science Sociology
	Grade point in specified courses	Sociology
[page 12]		
	Portfolios	Foreign Languages Political Science Public Administration
	Application/Acceptance to Graduate School	Biology Chemistry Computer Science Health Sciences History Mathematics Music Psychology Speech Language Pathology
	Survey of graduate directors	Political Science Public administration

	Certification examinations	Foreign Languages Health Sciences History Home Economics Mathematics Psychology Speech Language Pathology
	Exit examinations	Foreign Languages Philosophy
Are students satisfied with the program?	Exit survey	Computer Science Political Science Public Administration Sociology
[page 13]		
	Alumni survey	Accounting Computer Science Economics Finance Foreign Languages Information Systems International Trade Management Marketing
Are students successful in their careers?	Alumni survey	Accounting Biology Computer Science Economics Finance Health Sciences Home Economics Information Systems International Trade Management Marketing Speech Language Pathology
Have students expanded their understanding of the world?	Exit examination	Foreign Languages Political Science Public Administration Sociology

Many departments/units plan to use examination data as indicators of student mastery of the content of their programs. Faculty indicate that they wish to continue to administer the major field assessment tests where those tests exist. Nationally-normed tests available through such organizations as Educational Testing Service provide one approach; locally created exit exams that are explicitly tailored to the precise learning objectives of the unit provide another.

A sizeable number of students take examinations as part of larger, external processes for certification or licensing or for admission to graduate and professional schools. Among these testing programs are the National Teachers Examination, GMAT, LSAT, and the GRE to name a [page 14] few. Students' major departments use the data from these tests as indicators of mastery of fields of study.

Student Attitudinal Assessment. Several departments expressed interest in organizing focus groups to gather information on student achievement and satisfaction. One advantage of the focus group is the ability of faculty assessment researchers to use the dynamics of the group to expand both the depth of discussion and range of topics covered. Further, many faculty, concerned with the limitations of the kind of quantitative data typically derived from questionnaires, find the open-ended, qualitative nature of focus group discussions more useful for evaluating student learning.

A number of departments will implement assessment instruments that ask students and/or alumni to reflect on their mastery of subject area content or that ask them to report on their level of satisfaction with their learning experiences. Continuing and graduating students furnish the most current information about programs, while alumni can better link their learning to the requirements of their personal and professional lives after graduation. Departments that have larger graduating classes will mail seniors a graduating student questionnaire. The alumni surveys will also be used to gather self-reports of learning, in addition to affording information on alumni career success.

Student Progress. While the assessment techniques discussed above focus on student learning at or past the end of academic programs, several units will monitor students as they progress through a program of study. The director of assessment administers the ACT Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency exam as a "rising junior exam." All students must take this exam battery, which measures a student's ability in reading, writing, mathematics, and scientific reasoning, after they complete 45 semester hours but before they complete 61 semester hours. These scores, as well as other measures, permit the undergraduate council to monitor the progress of students as they finish their general education study and to ascertain whether they are meeting the objectives of the core curriculum. Students trying to gain admission to the teacher education program must pass the Pre-Professional Skills Test. Students in the teacher education program also have grade point average requirements. The faculty council responsible for the teacher education program keeps careful track of students progress as they move through the teacher education curriculum.

Success of Program Graduates. Several departments have as a student outcomes objective the preparation of students for success either in careers or in graduate/professional education. Some of these departments will gather information from practitioners in the field who work with our students in internships and field experiences. These students' supervisors will be asked to give information on the extent to which students have mastered program learning objectives and on the extent to which these supervisors consider students primed for career success.

Other departments will mail a questionnaire to their recent alumni. These surveys will determine the graduates' success in finding employment or admission to graduate or professional [page 15] schools. Further, such questionnaires will ask alumni to report on their perception of the strengths and weaknesses of their program of study in preparing them for continuing schooling or employment.

Surveys of employers or graduate/professional school faculty supply still another measure of student success, and several departments will administer such employer/graduate school questionnaires for 1995-1996.

UCA Support for Assessment

While the primary advantage of the PAC having a leadership role in assessing academic outcomes is faculty involvement, another benefit is the guarantee of widespread administrative support. The deans

council, vice presidents council and the president's office are all guaranteed representation on the committee. These individuals have been involved in discussions of academic outcomes assessment since the beginning and have endorsed the institution's strategy for outcomes assessment.

Ongoing funding for the PAC and assessment activities comes through the academic vice president's office, which oversees budgeting and funding for all academic programs and directly funds programs outside colleges and departments. Units needing funding for carrying out assessment activities will apply to the assessment subcommittee, which will make a recommendation to the office of the academic vice president. However, limitations on fiscal resources have accustomed departments to being fiscally responsible; departments have been asked to display this same restraint in their assessment plans. The assessment subcommittee will also seek ways to facilitate interdepartmental cooperation as a means to reduce costs.

Each year, personnel representing both the faculty and the administration attend a number of workshops and conferences on assessing academic outcomes. Also, consultants are brought to campus to work with all of our personnel. In the fall 1994, a consultant gave three workshops on campus for administrators and faculty. Finally, resource materials on assessing student academic outcomes will be made available to the faculty in the assessment director's office.

Assessment at UCA has been and will continue to be a topic of discussion across the campus, and participation in the assessment activities will be widespread. Administrative support has been forthcoming, with institutional resources committed to underwrite the process, which continues by design and necessity to be cost-effective.

Feedback on Assessment Activities

The PAC is charged to report routinely on its activities to the vice president for academic affairs. Additionally, plans are being made to include articles regarding assessment activities in the campus-wide publication, *Campus Contact*. As goals are articulated for programs, these objectives and goals will be published in both the undergraduate and graduate bulletins.

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Departments are explicitly asked by the assessment subcommittee to keep their faculty well-informed about assessment activities and findings and to facilitate discussion of the implications and impact of what has been learned. Departments may vary in their approaches to such internal communication. Some departments discuss assessment issues as a committee-of-the-whole; others divide into smaller sections, usually defined as faculty with similar content area expertise, to discuss their students' achievement and progress. The assessment subcommittee will ask departments to devise strategies for informing students about the rationale underlying assessment and about what departments are learning concerning their students' success.

Students, who after all are the central focus of assessment, are included in all aspects of UCA's assessment plans. The PAC has benefited from the participation of students in the ongoing discussion and decisions. At the same time, students throughout the university gain from having their interest and perspectives represented in the process and from learning about assessment directly from their peers in leadership positions.

Student Outcomes As An Index of Program Evaluation

The purpose of academic outcomes assessment is to make programmatic improvements as they relate to student learning. The PAC's assessment procedures are designed to increase the likelihood that

assessment data will be used to this end. The membership of the PAC itself is structured to ensure a link between the departments/units and the administration. The close ties that the committee has with both the administration and the faculty structures are important because to be successful, assessment must produce results across the campus. That requires the broadest possible understanding and support among the faculty, staff, and the students, who are the focus of the process.

Second, the committee is to report on assessment activities to the major curricular bodies: the undergraduate and graduate councils and the council of deans. The committee does not initiate curriculum change itself; it apprises these curricular bodies of the progress in academic outcomes assessment.

Finally, UCA's assessment initiative is likely to lead to improvement in student learning because the entire assessment process is firmly rooted in the institution's governance structure. By placing the direct responsibility for assessment in the faculty's hands and by empowering departments and other assessing units, the PAC has assured that the individuals most directly responsible for pedagogy, for course assignments, for course content, for program development, and for initiating curriculum change are the ones with direct access to assessment data and with direct control over the nature of assessment tasks undertaken.

Evaluating the Assessment Plan

The PAC recognizes the need for periodic review of assessment itself. Therefore, the committee will ask departments and other assessing units as well as the academic governance structure to give periodic reviews of the process. In addition, departments will be asked to develop departmental structures that will ensure that departmental assessment initiatives are reviewed periodically. Systematic evaluation of the assessment plan is built into this program. [page 17] Initiative 4 puts the overall UCA assessment plan through the same rigorous steps it demands of all programs.

Exhibits

[Note: Exhibits included in the 1995 document are listed, but not included, here. The list includes links to current document collections.]

Exhibit A: UCA Profile Statement and Statement of Philosophy

- Profile of the University of Central Arkansas, *Undergraduate Bulletin 1994-1996*, page 11.
- Philosophy, *Graduate Bulletin 1993-1995*, pages 11-12.

Exhibit B: UCA Role and Scope

Exhibit C: Sample Department Assessment Plans

[See a current online library of plans at <http://www.uca.edu/divisions/academic/assess/aslibrar.htm>.]

Exhibit D: Objectives of General Education

[See current documents at <http://www.uca.edu/divisions/academic/gened/>.]

Exhibit E: Charts

- Chart 1: Developing Program Goals & Related Statements of Student Outcomes

- Chart 2: Developing Assessment Instruments & Standards
- Chart 3: Data Collection & Interpretation

Exhibit F: Handouts

- Five Evaluative Questions on Assessment Plans (NCA)
- [Guidelines for Statements of Intended Student Outcomes]
- Assessment Plan Examples
- Principles of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning (AAHE) [This document is available online at <http://www.aahe.org/assessment/principi.htm>.]
- Criteria for Evaluation of Academic Outcomes Assessment Plans (NCA and UCA)

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First prepared for Online Viewing 1998-12-03

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