

# The SUNY Assessment Initiative

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Office of the  
**Provost**  
AND  
**Vice Chancellor**  
FOR ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

**50**  
YEARS  
SERVICE, PRIDE  
& EXCELLENCE  
STATE UNIVERSITY  
OF NEW YORK

# SUNY Assessment Initiative

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- **Goals:**
  - **To improve the quality of undergraduate education across the University**
  - **To set standards of excellence that meet and exceed those of our national peers**

# Provost's Charge

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- To examine the issues involved in implementing undergraduate student learning outcomes assessment today—specifically, in the context of a large and diverse university system such as the State University of New York
- To make recommendations regarding a process for assessing student learning outcomes and intellectual growth in General Education and the Major that will provide:
  - *The faculty and academic leadership with an important and effective way of improving the quality of undergraduate education, and*
  - *The University with a coherent and meaningful longitudinal database with which to be accountable to stakeholders*

# Assessment's Dual Functions: Improvement and Accountability

- Assessment serves two complementary functions in higher education today:
  - *Assessment as Improvement*
  - *Assessment as Accountability*
- Both of these functions have an appropriate place in the SUNY Assessment Initiative, which should consist of:
  - *Campus-based assessment focused primarily on program improvement*
  - *University-wide assessment to serve accountability and advocacy functions*

# Assessment as Improvement

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- The SUNY Assessment Initiative places foremost emphasis on assessment as a means of improving student learning and to enhance:
  - *Programs*
  - *Academic reputation*
- Assessment is in the best interests of faculty, who have a great stake in knowing whether their teaching efforts are effective in promoting student learning.
- Growing literature on the advantages of assessment in:
  - *Facilitating communication, and*
  - *Providing an opportunity for faculty to collaborate*

# Assessment as Accountability

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- As a publicly supported institution, SUNY has a responsibility to demonstrate to stakeholders that it is fulfilling its mission. These stakeholders include:
  - *The Board of Trustees*
  - *College Council members and the Boards of Trustees of Community Colleges*
  - *Executive and legislative officials*
  - *Students and their parents*
  - *Employers and the communities served by campuses*
  - *Accrediting and regulatory bodies*
  - *The public*

# Respecting Campus Distinctiveness and Autonomy

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- The State University, largest in the nation, is also one of the most diverse:
    - Sixty-four distinct campuses
      - ▶ *Each with its own unique mission*
      - ▶ *Each with its own governance and curriculum processes*
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- The SUNY Assessment Initiative must respect the diversity that exists among SUNY institutions, especially their different missions.
- All activities carried out as a part of the SUNY Assessment Initiative should incorporate and respect existing governance and curriculum structures and processes.

# Campus-based Assessment of General Education

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- Campus-based assessment plans of General Education should be:
  - *Developed and implemented primarily by faculty members who teach in the program, and submitted to and approved by the campus's Faculty Senate or Council*
  - *Approved and reviewed regularly by a group consisting of University faculty, campus chief academic officers, and representatives from System Administration*

# University-wide Assessment of General Education

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- The Task Force believes that there is an appropriate place for University-wide assessment in the SUNY Assessment Initiative.
- University-wide assessment should periodically assess, using common measures, a representative sample of students from across SUNY in:
  - *Mathematics*
  - *Basic Communication*
  - *Critical Thinking (Reasoning)*
  - *Information Management, and*
  - *Understanding of the methods scientists and social scientists use to explore phenomena*

# Campus-based Assessment of the Major

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- Assessment of academic programs should take place every five to seven years, and should incorporate external review whenever feasible.
- Each year institutions should submit a report to System Administration providing:
  - *A summary of the academic programs that underwent review that year,*
  - *The major findings, and*
  - *A listing of programs scheduled for review during the next academic year.*

# Utilization and Reporting of Assessment Results

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- Stringent guidelines should be developed and adhered to in order to ensure that confidentiality of assessment data is maintained.
- Assessment results should never be used to punish, compare, or embarrass students, faculty, courses, programs, departments, or institutions either individually or collectively, or to make public comparisons among groups of students based on gender, race, ethnicity, or other demographic factors.
- System Administration should publicly disseminate assessment data only through aggregate reporting for SUNY as a whole, or by sector.

# Implementation of Campus-based Assessment of General Education

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## *Timeline*

March 1, 2001- January 31, 2002	Collaborative dialogue with campuses as they develop their General Education Assessment plans. Steps include approval by campus Faculty Senate or Faculty Council
February 1, 2002- May 31, 2002	Review and approval of campus General Education Assessment plans by the General Education Assessment Review (GEAR) group.
Fall 2002	Implementation of General Education assessment on all SUNY campuses.
June 1, 2003	Initial annual report on campus-based assessment of General Education from Chief Academic Officers.

# Implementation of Campus-based Assessment of the Major

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## *Timeline*

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|--------------|---|
| June 1, 2001 | Chief Academic Officers submit the schedule for the program review cycle to the Office of the Provost.                                |
| Fall 2001    | Campus-based assessment of the Major begins.  |
| June 1, 2002 | Chief Academic Officers submit initial summary of the academic programs that underwent review during the year and the major findings. |

# Campus-based Assessment of General Education: Progress to Date

- Formation of General Education Assessment Review (GEAR) Group:
  - *Assigned responsibility for overseeing campus-based general education assessment in the report of the Task Force on the Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes*
  - *Specific responsibilities are to provide “initial and ongoing review” of campuses’ general education assessment plans*
  - *Formed jointly by leadership from System Administration, the University Faculty Senate, and the Community College Faculty Council*
  - *Membership comprised primarily of faculty, and includes a campus chief academic officer, several Institutional Research staff members, and a System Administration representative*

# Campus-based Assessment of General Education: Progress to Date

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- Planning for System-wide Conference on General Education Assessment
  - *Primary purpose to provide direction and momentum as campuses begin or continue to develop their general education assessment plans*
  - *To be held in Syracuse in June, with representatives invited from all 64 campuses*
  - *To feature “best practice” institutions in the assessment of general education, from both within and outside SUNY*

# Principles and Implementation of Campus-based Assessment of General Education

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- GEAR group to work with campuses as they develop their campus-based plans for assessing student learning outcomes in General Education
- Fundamental and common criterion for all assessment plans to be the student learning outcomes outlined in the *Implementation Guidelines*
- GEAR group reviews to focus exclusively on a campus' processes and procedures for assessing general education, not assessment outcomes themselves

# Initial Review Process by GEAR Group of Campus General Education Plans

- Primary purpose will be to ensure that campus plans are comprehensive and rigorous, and that they include appropriate standards of excellence
- Other essential components of assessment plans:
  - *Delineation of clearly-stated goals and objectives for the program, including learning outcomes from the Implementation Guidelines*
  - *Description of program activities that are intended to ensure that goals and objectives are achieved*
  - *Identification of the assessment measures and criteria to be used in determining extent to which students are achieving goals and objectives*
  - *Description of strategies for using assessment data to improve program as appropriate*

# Initial Review Process by GEAR Group of Campus General Education Plans

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- After reviewing and critiquing a campus' general education plan, the GEAR group will approve those that meet established criteria
- For campuses that do not meet established criteria, the GEAR group will provide written recommendations for revisions that, when made, would likely lead to approval
- All evaluations by the GEAR group to be submitted simultaneously to individual campuses and to System Administration

# Ongoing Review by GEAR Group of Campus General Education Plans

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- After initial approval, individual campuses will undergo biennial review by the GEAR group
- Review criteria will be the same as were utilized in the initial review process, with emphasis placed on how campuses are using assessment data to improve their programs
- Review will be staggered across campuses so as to relieve some of the administrative burden

# Ensuring Standards of Excellence and Accountability

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- During the Initial and Ongoing Review processes:
  - GEAR group will have responsibility to ensure that:
    - *Assessment measures and criteria in campus assessment plans are consistent with best assessment practices nationwide, with appropriate consideration given to the diversity in missions across institutions*
    - *Campuses are using assessment results to improve general education programs*
  - System Administration will be fully informed at all times regarding the status of reviews conducted by the GEAR group for all 64 campuses

# Ensuring Standards of Excellence and Accountability

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- As a part of the Campus Reporting process:
  - Campuses will provide an annual report of their general education assessment findings to System Administration
  - Report will follow a standardized format, developed jointly by the campuses and System Administration
  - Reported results will include, at a minimum, the percentage of students exceeding, meeting, approaching, and not meeting the assessment plan standards for the delineated student learning outcomes