

October 5, 2005

MEMORANDUM

To: State University Campus Presidents

From: Provost Peter D. Salins

Subject: Update on Implementation of Strengthened Campus-Based Assessment

I am writing to provide an update on our collaborative efforts to implement Strengthened Campus-Based Assessment, as directed in the SUNY Board of Trustees' June 2004 resolution. Since my last communication to you regarding this issue, sent in early July, my staff has been working to coordinate the multiple actions required for implementation. Detailed information regarding these actions is included in the attachment to this letter

I will also take this opportunity to inform you that, based on feedback I have received from campus administrators and faculty, the campus deadline for submitting revised general education assessment plans for implementing Strengthened Campus-Based Assessment has been extended, with these plans now due February 15, 2006. This extension of the deadline should provide campuses with the time they need to make thoughtful decisions about their approach to Strengthened Campus-Based Assessment, involving faculty governance in the process as appropriate. Of course, if your plans are ready prior to February 15, we would appreciate receiving them before that date.

To conclude, I continue to appreciate the cooperation that campuses have displayed as we all work to make the transition to this next phase of the SUNY Assessment Initiative. It is for this reason as well that I am confident we can meet the Fall 2006 date for implementing Strengthened Campus-Based Assessment, as established in the Trustees' resolution. Please feel free to contact me or Assistant Provost Patricia Francis (Patricia.Francis@suny.edu or (518) 443-5644) with any questions or concerns.

Attachment

Copy: Chancellor (Acting) Ryan
Vice Chancellor Capaldi
Vice Chancellor (Acting) Cline
Campus Chief Academic Officers
Mr. Sheppard
Dr. Porter
Dr. Francis
Mr. Wiezalis
Dr. Reiser

***Strengthened Campus-Based Assessment
Implementation Update
October 4, 2005***

The following information is organized by the major actions required in the implementation of Strengthened Campus-Based Assessment, and include: identification of measures for assessing academic environment; the development of rubrics and standards by our discipline-based panels; selection of nationally-normed measures to assess Mathematics, Basic Communication [Written], and Critical Thinking [Reasoning]; and identification of those activities that will be funded by System Administration as institutions implement Strengthened Campus-Based Assessment.

A. Assessment of academic environment

We have been in contact with representatives from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE), and have received cost estimates for administering these instruments. At present, we anticipate that the first administration of these measures will take place during the Spring 2007 semester, and my office will coordinate this process, working with NSSE, CCSSE, and individual institutions. Administration of the NSSE and CCSSE will be funded by System Administration, and will take place every three years, using sample sizes and sample selection procedures as recommended by NSSE and CCSSE. Campuses choosing to use another measure of academic environment must demonstrate to the General Education Assessment Review (GEAR) Group the appropriateness of that measure.

On a related matter, many of you have asked about our plans for the Student Opinion Survey (SOS) and, according to Associate Provost John Porter, this instrument will be administered as scheduled during the Spring 2006 semester. After that time, we will review the SOS for the purpose of eliminating overlap between it and the NSSE/CCSSE, but it is likely that we will continue to administer the SOS in the future – every third year, as is now the case – since it provides so much useful information regarding students’ perceptions of campuses’ facilities and services.

B. Development of rubrics and standards by discipline-based panels

The discipline-based panels working on the rubrics and standards for the three student learning outcome areas have worked very hard to develop valid scoring schemes that faculty across SUNY can use reliably to evaluate student work. In addition, over the summer System Administration hired nationally recognized consultants to provide assistance to the panels in their efforts, to assure that the resulting rubrics and standards are of the highest quality. The final version of these rubrics should be ready soon, and the latest drafts of the rubrics are always available for inspection off of the GEAR Website (www.cortland.edu/gear). At present, Mr. Carl Wiezalis, University Faculty Senate President, and Dr. Kimberley Reiser, Faculty Council of Community Colleges President, are working with their respective organizations to confirm procedures for approving the rubrics and standards. As soon as both organizations indicate their approval, we will notify you and your chief academic officer via e-mail and alert campuses more generally through SUNY’s Assessment ListServe. In the meantime, campuses intending to use the panels’ rubrics are encouraged to refer to the existing drafts on the GEAR Website.

C. Nationally-normed measures

Over the summer, we received recommendations from ACT for the assessment of Critical Thinking [Reasoning] and Basic Communication [Written], and these recommendations meet criteria established by System Administration and provided to testing companies for Strengthened Campus-Based Assessment (i.e., inclusion of items that map to the individual learning outcomes and provision of sub-scores for each outcome, ability to administer the tests in the context of a class session). ACT is in the process of making its instruments for assessing Critical Thinking [Reasoning] and Basic Communication [Written] available on its Website, so that interested campuses may review them, and we will notify you and your chief academic officer via e-mail and alert campuses via the Assessment ListServe once this information is accessible on the ACT Website.

We are still awaiting satisfactory recommendations from vendors for the assessment of the Mathematics learning outcomes that meet our criteria. Until we identify an acceptable nationally-normed measure, campuses that intend to use a nationally-normed test to assess Mathematics will only need to describe their plans for assessing Critical Thinking [Reasoning] and Basic Communication [Written] in their revised assessment plans. Those campuses that intend to use rubrics and standards for assessing the Mathematics outcomes will obviously not be affected by this development.

Finally, consistent with the statements in my July 2005 letter to campuses, the learning outcome included under Basic Communication [Written] referring to students' ability to "research" a topic will be omitted from Strengthened Campus-Based Assessment because of the difficulty of assessing such a competency using externally-referenced measures. This competency must still be included in an institution's campus-based general education plan, and the GEAR Group will have responsibility for providing specific directions to campuses as to how to address this issue.

D. Determining activities to be funded under Strengthened Campus-Based Assessment

As I stated in my July 2005 letter to campuses, System Administration support for Strengthened Campus-Based Assessment will be limited to the costs of activities and materials that: a) Result directly from the implementation of Strengthened Campus-Based Assessment; and, b) Are clearly above and beyond what campuses do and purchase on a routine basis.

In the use of nationally-normed measures, System Administration will coordinate this effort for the three learning outcome areas, to include negotiation of a pricing structure with testing companies and payment to these companies centrally. Since this pricing structure will include materials, scoring, and standard reports, the use of nationally-normed measures should not result in much up-front expense to campuses. To the extent that campuses do incur such costs, they will have the responsibility for monitoring expenses and submitting them to System Administration for reimbursement, using standard forms developed by my staff for this purpose.

Rubrics-related activities that would be eligible for funding include: Conducting norming sessions in the application of the rubrics, attending such sessions, and providing a second evaluation of a student's paper or portfolio for the purpose of providing a check on inter-observer reliability. As noted above, individual campuses will have responsibility for

monitoring expenses and submitting them to System Administration for reimbursement, using the forms developed by my staff.

Please note that these listings of activities are not intended to be prescriptive, since campuses will likely engage in a number of other activities that qualify for funding. Similarly, we have decided not to make specific recommendations about compensation levels for faculty members who fulfill duties above and beyond the norm as a function of Strengthened Campus-Based Assessment. Instead, we are recommending that campuses follow their own existing practices in this regard.