

**Annual Report from the Learning Outcomes Oversight Committee (LOOC)  
to the University of Rhode Island Faculty Senate<sup>1</sup>  
April 30, 2008**

The Learning Outcomes Oversight Committee (LOOC) was established in the spring of 2007 as a joint committee with representation from many important constituencies within the University, all of which have an important stake in the assessment of student learning outcomes. Approval by the Faculty Senate and the President was noted for Bill # 06-07—25 in the April 19, 2007 Faculty Senate Agenda. Some highlights from the approved University Manual language (09/06/2007) include:

*5.84.10 Learning Outcomes Oversight Committee (LOOC) shall create policies for URI student learning outcomes assessment, data distribution and frequency of measurement at the university-wide level, with the approval of the Faculty Senate and the Provost. Such policies would include but not be limited to external reporting and the release of assessment data, setting of standards for outcomes assessment, identification of strengths and limitations of existing assessment practices and recommendations for resource allocation to enhance assessment practices.*

*5.84.11 The committee shall provide advice and guidance to the Office of Student Learning, Outcomes Assessment, and Accreditation relevant to faculty learning of best practices of student learning outcomes and assessment and oversee implementation and facilitation of approved policies by the Office of Student Learning, Outcomes Assessment and Accreditation.*

*5.84.12 The committee shall also develop an ongoing review of the learning outcomes assessment process, interpret external expectations for university-wide learning outcomes assessment, including those of accreditation bodies and facilitate internal communication across units regarding ways of meeting those expectations.*

*5.84.13 The membership shall include fifteen faculty members appointed by the Faculty Senate: four from Arts & Sciences, one from each of the other degree-granting colleges and one from the University Libraries, as well as one faculty representative of each of the following committees, the UCGE Subcommittee on General Education Assessment, the Curricular Affairs Committee, the Teaching Effectiveness Committee and the Graduate Council. Faculty representatives shall be individuals involved in assessment in their departments/colleges. All faculty appointments shall be for three-year staggered terms. In addition, administrative members shall include the Vice Provost for Academic Affairs, the Dean of University College or the dean's designee; two designees of the Vice President for Student Affairs, one representative of the Office of Institutional Research; one representative of the Instructional Development Program; and the Director of the Office of Student Learning, Outcomes Assessment, and Accreditation; A graduate student, an undergraduate student, and a student representing the Feinstein CCE campus, appointed respectively by the Graduate Student Association, the Student Senate, and the FCCE Student Government Board shall also serve on the committee. A faculty member appointed by the Faculty Senate in consultation with the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs shall chair the committee.*

Primary tasks taken up by the LOOC during the 2007-2008 academic year included the establishment of committee membership and meeting times, active monitoring of assessment related events and activities in the University, and attention to priorities for direct committee action.

A list of the current members of the committee is appended as Appendix A. At its September 2007 meeting the Committee voted to request the addition of a dean representing the deans of degree-granting colleges. Dean Mark Higgins, College of Business Administration, has agreed to fill that role, pending approval by the Faculty Senate.

Committee procedures: We established a pattern of monthly meetings, planned not to conflict with Faculty Senate. Responsibility for meeting logistics and minutes were assumed by the Student Learning, Outcomes Assessment and Accreditation (SLOAA) Office.

Events and Processes in which the LOOC played an important role during the 2007-2008 year:

- (1) Decision to recommend participation in the Wabash National Study of Liberal Education, and support for the implementation of the study by SLOAA
- (2) Meeting with the NEASC site visitors on October 22, 2007 to discuss assessment role and progress at URI
- (3) Decision to recommend adding the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE) as a complement to the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) at URI
- (4) Monitoring the implementation of the review of program assessment undertaken by the Academic Student Affairs Committee (ASAC) of the Board of Governors for Higher Education, with recommendations to Deborah Grossman Garber and Lynn Pasquerella for University approaches to compliance
- (5) Monitoring the implementation of general education assessment at URI by the Subcommittee for Assessment of General Education (SAGE) of the University College and General Education Committee.

Priorities for committee attention: At the October 11, 2007 meeting we identified three primary University-wide assessment needs for the 2007-2008 academic year, and we began work on these tasks in subcommittees at the November 15, 2007 meeting.

- (1) **Monitoring how URI is doing at assessment, and facilitating progress for programs at all stages.** How do we track assessment progress? What kind of help and support can programs use to get to “completing the loop” and what can they reasonably sustain? How often is a given outcome assessed? How will we determine the level of support needed to address deficiencies? How will programs be rewarded for “completing the loop” and not penalized for honest reporting of challenges (consistent with the RIBGHE expectations stated by Commissioner Warner that the purpose of outcomes assessment was to encourage improvement and not penalize programs for negative findings.) Is it good policy to put all information on a website for all to see? Can we identify best practices in assessment; what models for successfully meeting assessment challenges are locally available? Peer-to-Peer consultation may be most useful. Subcommittee discussion concluded: (a) that programs

could use help bridging learning outcomes to the measures for identifying the achievement of them, and will need support and training to do so; (b) we need to find ways to support keeping track of information submitted to the SLOAA Office; and (c) reporting mechanism for data, i.e. where data are going, could affect departments' goal – trying to improve programs.

(2) **Policy development.** What are the existing policies (formal and informal) for internal and external sharing of assessment methods, findings, and consequences? What are the priorities for policy clarification and development for both internal and external contexts? How clearly and consistently communicated are the policies? Subcommittee discussion concluded: (a) why are policies needed? One reason is to reassure programs regarding how data may be used so that fears of misuse do not sabotage the most valuable purposes for assessment; (b) what policies are necessary and how are they developed? We may be able to use existing professional accrediting standard, NEASC standards, etc. to find out what's already being required to be publicly available; (c) respect for faculty contributions to assessment calls for remuneration/credit on workload of faculty developing assessment tools; and (d) LOOC should engage in publicizing policy, once approved by the Provost and Faculty Senate, so all are clear at all levels.

(3) **Promoting University-wide engagement with the organizational learning process.** Moving forward from the August 23<sup>rd</sup> Summit on Student Learning, what do we know about ourselves and what would we like to know (including NSSE, FSSE, Wabash data, and OIR data)? How can we explore how we (faculty, Student Affairs staff, academic deans, students) are doing relative to our own aspirations for the institution? What processes can we facilitate to move even closer to our aspirations? Subcommittee discussion concluded: (a) develop a belief system through faculty liaisons in departments to share information about assessment results from different sources; (b) have broad assessment summits periodically to spread information; (c) provide recognition for departments making progress in assessment; and (d) incorporate a reward system for those involved, i.e. stipends.

At our December meeting we agreed to focus on policy issues as the first priority, and we have been exploring policy considerations and choices since then. Appendix B presents some early thinking on the range of policy issues the Committee may wish to address with recommendations. As the table shows, we have identified several kinds of content domains for policy, as well as possible responsible parties for policy creation, implementation, oversight, and enforcement. Drafts of more specific considerations for policies on reporting have been circulated and are under discussion.

Over the year our discussions have crystallized several broad positions to guide our action:

- Our central mission is to make the assessment process a genuinely useful one within the institution; this will take collaboration among many parties, including the deans and Provost as well as faculty, professional staff, and students on ways to transform our culture, building enthusiasm and fostering productive use of assessment at all levels.
- In keeping with the recent NEASC recommendations, we are working to link learning outcomes assessment to the planning and budgeting processes within the University, while retaining the formative purpose of the process.

- Given the constraints imposed by our resources, we want to maximize the effort while preserving a positive, collaborative spirit. We believe it is important for us to continue recognizing – and asserting -- the extent of resources needed to make assessment feasible.
- We have recognized the potentially sensitive nature of some of the program-level findings, and we believe there is a need for varying amounts of disclosure at varying levels, calling for policies on reporting that respect both formative and summative uses of assessment.

<sup>1</sup> LOOC minutes, agendas, and handouts are all available from the SLOAA website:  
[www.uri.edu/assessment](http://www.uri.edu/assessment)

## APPENDIX A: MEMBERSHIP

Barber	Stephen	GRAD COUNCIL
Barbour	Marilyn	PHARM
Boden	Gary	OIR
Burkhardt	Joanna	LIB
English	Cathy	CELS
Erickson	Bette	IDP
Evans	Kathy	CCE student (F07)
Frenzel	Grace	Student Aff
Grossman-Garber	Deborah	SLOAA
Hames	Carolyn	NUR
Hubbard	Anne	CCE
Kowalski	James	A&S
MacDonald	Mary	CAC
McCurdy	Karen	HSS
McQuaide	Andrew	Undergrad Student
Pasquerella	Lynn	Provost
Richmond	Jayne	UC
Rivero-Hudoc	Mercedes	Engineering
Rosen	Deborah	BUS
St. Pierre	Kristin	CCE student (S08)
Stevenson	John	A&S/GE
Swift	Judith	A&S
Torrens	Kathleen	TEC
White	Bryana	Grad Student
Yensan	Chip	Student Aff
Finan	Elaine	Research Associate

## APPENDIX B: Creating Sustainable Learning Outcomes Assessment at URI (3-08 Draft)

Issues	Policy Development and Review	Oversight, Responsibility and Authority
<p><b>HOW:</b></p> <p>How will resources be allocated for conducting and reporting?</p> <p>How will help will be provided for data analysis?</p> <p>How will data be released?</p> <p>How will faculty and colleges/departments be supported for ongoing assessment?</p> <p>How will we create a sustainable internal learning process at URI?</p>	<p>LOOC recommends to Provost/VP of Academic Affairs and FS Executive Committee</p> <p>LOOC recommends to SLOAA, SLOAA recommends to Provost/VP of Academic Affairs</p>	<p>Deans and Provost/VP of Academic Affairs</p>
<p><b>WHAT:</b></p> <p>What are the standards for types of data collected?</p> <p>What is the standardized format and structure for reports?</p>	<p>IR recommends to LOOC, LOOC recommends to Provost/VP of Academic Affairs and FS Executive Committee</p> <p>OSLOAA recommends to LOOC, LOOC recommends to Provost/VP of Academic Affairs and FS Executive Committee. Some authorities requiring reports may mandate format and structure.</p>	<p>Provost/VP of Academic Affairs</p> <p>LOOC, Faculty Senate Executive Committee, Provost/VP of Academic Affairs</p>
<p><b>WHO:</b></p> <p>Who sets internal URI requirements for assessment and reporting?</p> <p>To whom do we report and are there reporting differences to different audiences?</p>	<p>OSLOAA recommends to LOOC, LOOC recommends to Provost/VP of Academic Affairs and FS Executive Committee</p> <p>OSLOAA recommends to LOOC, LOOC recommends to Provost/VP of Academic Affairs and FS Executive Committee</p>	<p>Provost/VP of Academic Affairs</p> <p>Authority requiring reports</p>
<p><b>WHY:</b></p> <p>Why must we do outcome assessment and what happens if we do not?</p>		<p>Deans and Provost/VP of Academic Affairs</p>

