

**Annual Report from the Learning Outcomes Oversight Committee (LOOC) to the
University of Rhode Island Faculty Senate
April 29, 2009**

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. Approved University Manual language (09/06/2007) is as follows:

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. #06-07—25

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. #06-07—25

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. #06-07—25

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; the dean of a degree-granting college; 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. #06-07--25 #07-08--40

Primary tasks taken up by the LOOC during the 2008-2009 academic year included the establishment of committee membership (Appendix A) and meeting times, the creation of three subcommittees - Nurturing and Monitoring the Assessment Process, Making Use of the Data and the Processes, and Promoting University-wide Engagement, active monitoring of assessment related events and activities in the University, addressing the change in SLOAA office leadership, and attempting to continue the development of a culture of assessment in the face of a slow transition of said leadership.

We continued the established pattern of monthly meetings, planned not to conflict with Faculty Senate. Meeting logistics and minutes continue to be managed by the Student Learning, Outcomes Assessment and Accreditation (SLOAA) Office. LOOC minutes, agendas, and handouts are all available from the SLOAA website:
www.uri.edu/assessment

Events and Processes in which the LOOC played an important role during the 2008-2009 year:

(1) Participation in the Wabash National Study of Liberal Education, and support for the implementation of the study by SLOAA, including a visit to the campus by Wabash leadership in April of 2009 to provide reports on data collected to date. (Appendix B.)

(2) Support for SLOAA's development and distribution of a mini-grant RFP, which will provide support to departments in the developmental phase, the second round of assessment or in response to current accomplishments as ascertained by the Office of Higher Education (OHE) and ultimately as reported to members of the Rhode Island Board of Governors for Higher Education (RIBGHE). The mini-grants begin support in Summer 2009.

(3) Monitoring the relationship between SLOAA and OHE with regard to implementation, continued development and reporting of assessment activities. Beginning in January 2009, the Office of Higher Education has sponsored monthly meetings of assessment coordinators from the three state institutions as a means to accomplish statewide assessment planning. The goal of these meetings is to provide input on the development of statewide assessment policies, share resources, and discuss topical issues and concerns.

(4) Monitoring the initiation of Graduate Program Assessment. An assessment effort is now underway by the Associate Dean of the Graduate School. A meeting with Dr. Peggy Maki, the OHE consultant on assessment and editor/author of works on graduate program assessment, will take place May 2009.

(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. Considerable progress is being made through the largely overload efforts of several faculty. (Appendix C.)

(6) Support for SLOAA's investment in faculty attendance at assessment conferences dedicated to disciplinary perspectives on assessment.

(7) Monitoring how URI is doing at assessment, and facilitating progress for programs at all stages. Several questions were raised in last year's LOOC Report to the Faculty Senate and many still pertain.

- 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?

In 2007-2008, LOOC determined its most important concerns, tasks and actions – many needing partnering with departments, deans, the Provost, OHE, etc. – as follows:

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; therefore, we need to find ways to support keeping track of information submitted to the SLOAA as well as a reporting mechanism for data.

Policy development (formal and informal) for internal and external sharing of assessment methods, findings, and consequences is imperative. LOOC focused on the priorities for policy clarification and development for both internal and external contexts. Such policies were believed to be essential to reassure programs regarding how data may be used so that fears of misuse do not sabotage the most valuable purposes for assessment.

Respect for faculty contributions to assessment calls for remuneration/credit on workload of faculty developing assessment tools and such credit, once approved by the Provost and Faculty Senate, must be widely publicized by SLOAA with LOOC's support.

(8) Support the creation of a culture of assessment through University-wide engagement with the organizational learning process. The institution gathers a significant amount of data – some formally mandated and some through the informal initiation of deans or units (e.g., NSSE, FSSE, Wabash, Career Services, Alumni Association, etc.). LOOC urges the administration to consider a more consistent and less duplicative process with regard to

surveys to avoid 1) survey fatigue and 2) incompatible data that is of less use due to the inability to create meaningful aggregates, etc. In keeping with the NEASC recommendations, this culture of assessment must work to link learning outcomes assessment to the planning and budgeting processes within the University, while retaining the formative purpose of the process.

To address the concerns of data findings and distribution, under the authority granted in paragraph 5.84.10, LOOC proposes the following policies:
That with oversight and guidance from the LOOC:

1. The Office of Student Learning, Outcomes Assessment and Accreditation (SLOAA) shall be the coordinating office for all university-wide learning assessment. It will work in conjunction with the Office of Institutional Research (OIR) to provide a coherent centralized framework for collecting, maintaining, analyzing, and distributing information related to student learning assessment. This function does not preclude assessments that colleges, departments, or offices may wish to conduct for their own purposes nor does it require SLOAA to approve, conduct, or provide data for such assessments.
2. SLOAA shall ensure that assessment data are acquired in an effective, efficient, and timely manner. In cooperation with the OIR, SLOAA shall also ensure that assessment information made publicly available is presented in a context that explains its purpose, methods of collection and analysis, and meaning.
3. Assessment data shall be maintained in University computing systems as well as SLOAA office files except in cases where secure off-site data storage is contractually provided. Access to all source data shall be subject to privacy, confidentiality, and security requirements that protect the identity of individuals. Only aggregated data shall be available publicly through the SLOAA and OIR websites and printed reports.
4. SLOAA shall prepare statistical summaries and other reports concerning student learning outcomes assessment for the Rhode Island Board of Governors for Higher Education, the U. S. Department of Education, and other agencies as required.
5. SLOAA shall have a permanent full-time position dedicated to the support of these functions.¹

The effectiveness of this process relies heavily upon both SLOAA and OIR. It is important that the administration in concert with the Office of Higher Education

¹ This position is not to be confused with the need for a fulltime director of SLOAA, which is an imperative need. Administrative support for the staffing and funding of SLOAA must not only respond to institutional obligations but also reflect the primary commitment to a culture of assessment.

develop a clear plan and schedule for the assessment process and that OIR knows what its role is and is supported adequately in accomplishing additional assignments.

Finally, SLOAA wishes to acknowledge the superb work done by Elaine Finan, Assessment Coordinator, in running the office from September 2008 until a halftime-acting director was appointed in January 2009. Additionally, we appreciate the work of Anita Burke and the other SLOAA staff for their commitment to the work of assessment and improved student learning. This transition was the result of SLOAA Director Deborah Grossman-Garber's appointment to a position as Assistant Commissioner for Academic and Student Affairs at OHE – a position that allows her to focus on system-wide assessment issues. Grossman-Garber worked diligently to ease the transition but the five-month hiatus with no assigned leadership for SLOAA inevitably took its toll despite the best efforts of all the staff. LOOC is very pleased that Bob Shea is now serving as a halftime-acting director (although at a loss to the Instructional Development Program). LOOC members made every effort to support SLOAA during this period but the confluence of events has slowed the timeline for assessment efforts.

APPENDIX A
Membership

Committee Member	Position/Title	Representation
Barbour, Marilyn M.	Professor	College of Pharmacy
Beauvais, Laura	Interim Vice Provost, Faculty Affairs	Office of the Provost
Boden, Gary	Senior Info Technologist	Institutional Research
Boudreaux-Bartels, Faye	Professor/Department Chair	Electrical, Computer & Bio Engineering (sabbatical replacement)
Boulmetis, John	Professor	College of Human Science & Services Sch of Education
Burkhardt, Johanna M.	Associate Professor Librarian	CCE Library
English, Catherine	Professor/Department Chair	College of Environment and Life Sciences Food Science and Nutrition
Erickson, Bette L.	Director, IDP	Instructional Development Program
Finan, Elaine	Assessment Coordinator	SLOAA
Hames, Carolyn C.	Professor & Associate Dir.	College of Nursing and Honors Program
Hicks, Sandra Jean	Associate Professor	Chair, UCGE & School of Education
Higgins, Mark	Dean	College of Business Administration
Hubbard, Anne M.	Assistant Professor	Feinstein CCE, Bachelor of General Studies Program
Kowalski, James G.	Professor/Department Chair	College of Arts & Sciences, Computer Sci & Statistics
MacDonald, Mary	Associate Professor Librarian	CAC / UCGE
McQuaide, Andrew	Undergraduate Student	Student Body
Richmond, Jayne	Dean	University College
Rivero-Hudec, Mercedes A.	Professor	College of Engineering (on sabbatical)
Rosen, Deborah E.	Associate Dean and Professor	College of Business
Shea, Bob	Interim Director	Student Learning, Outcomes Assessment & Accreditation
Stevenson, John F.	Professor	College of Arts and Sciences (Psychology) (sabbatical)
Swift, Judith M.	Professor & LOOC Chair	College of Arts and Sciences (Communication Studies & Theatre)
Torrens, Kathleen	Assistant Professor	College of Arts and Sciences (Communication Studies)
White, Bryana	Graduate Student	Student Body
Yensan, Chip	Assistant Vice President	Student Affairs

Appendix B

Wabash Study Summary

Background

The Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education, sponsored by The Center of Inquiry at Wabash College, began in the fall of 2006 and currently includes 50 colleges and universities nationwide. The goal of the study is to refine methods of assessing a liberal arts education, and to provide both the evidence *and* support necessary to help liberal arts institutions systematically improve student learning and enhance the impact of their programs by assessing, for example, the impact of teaching practices and institutional conditions on student learning outcomes.

Study Overview

This longitudinal study investigates critical factors that affect student outcomes through both institutional and student data. Students are assessed, using a variety of surveys and tests, at three points during their college experience: fall and spring of their freshman year; spring of their senior year. Institutional data are provided to enhance the primary data gathered. The study focuses on the following seven outcomes associated with a liberal arts education:

1. the inclination for life-long inquiry and learning;
2. leadership;
3. effective reasoning and problem solving;
4. well-being;
5. moral reasoning;
6. the integration of learning;
7. intercultural effectiveness.

Participation at the University of Rhode Island

The University of Rhode Island has just completed its second year of participation in the Wabash Study. To date, more than 1700 traditional freshmen have volunteered to participate in the Study:

1st Cohort: Fall 2007 – Part I, Freshmen Survey, completed (600 students)
Spring 2008 – Part II, Freshmen Survey, completed
Spring 2011 – Part III, Senior Survey, TBA

2nd Cohort: Fall 2008 – Part I, Freshmen survey, completed (1150 students)
Spring 2009 – Part II, Freshmen survey, completed
Spring 2012 – Part III, Senior Survey, TBA

Study Highlights from the first year's group (2007 – 2008)

Research indicates that four broad categories of teaching practices and institutional conditions promote student growth on a wide variety of qualities, including critical thinking, moral reasoning, leadership, openness to diversity and challenge, political and social involvement, and positive attitude toward literacy. These good practices and conditions are: Good teaching and high-quality interactions with faculty; academic

challenge and high expectations; diversity experiences; deep learning. Typically, across all categories measured, however, research indicates that the range of student experiences within the institution is far greater than the range of experiences across institutions. There is no one institutional experience, nor one factor, which clearly defines the outcome of that experience. This research serves as a basis for continued exploration.

Visit from Wabash

On April 1, 2009, representatives from The Center of Inquiry in the Liberal Arts at Wabash College visited URI for a day-long series of presentations to the URI community of faculty, staff, students and administrators. They presented key findings from the results of the first year cohort's participation in the Study, and stimulated discussions to identify key questions the campus community has about their students' experience. Additionally, three focus groups of freshmen and sophomore students were held to engage students in deeper conversations about their first year at URI.

Appendix C

Assessment of General Education

Professors Sandy Hicks and Anne Hubbard gave a presentation at the American Association of Colleges and University's "Network for Academic Renewal Conference: General Education, Assessment, and the Learning Students Need" on February 27, 2009. The title of the presentation was "Using Course-Based Assessment to Transform General Education."

The presentation reported on findings from the work conducted in Summer 2008 related to the classification of sample general education course assignments according to the general education learning outcomes, and the development of a sample rubric for use across the four knowledge domains (Social Science, Natural Science, Fine Arts & Literature, and Letters) of URI's general education program. (This work was completed by Professors Hicks, Hubbard, John Stevenson and with SLOAA assistance from Deborah Grossman-Garber.)

Professors Hicks and Hubbard discussed the work carried out to date on using course assignments to refine the definition of the outcomes of general education, and reported on the data collected. After Professors Hicks and Hubbard described a sample assignment and the coding scheme they had developed, session participants had the opportunity to work in groups to code 3 sample assignments and report on their results.

The session ended with a discussion of SAGE's current activity and the next steps in assessing the general education program outcomes.

In addition, Professor John Stevenson has spent his sabbatical year working on general education assessment at Northern Arizona University in preparation for the next steps in URI's assessment process. His eloquent reports on his findings have been of tremendous use to the committee.

Appendix D TrueOutcomes

TrueOutcomes is an e-portfolio system that allows faculty to assess course-based assignments that have been designed to measure student performance and which have been aligned with program outcomes. The TrueOutcomes software also has the capability to allow students to create electronic portfolios of their work. Anything that a student produces can be added to the portfolio and can be shared with others as the student desires.

TrueOutcomes has been used extensively in the School of Education for a number of years, and several other programs have experimented with its use. Beginning last summer, the SLOAA office worked to grow the number of programs using the software in support of program assessment efforts by bringing together an early adopters/users group. The group met over the summer and into the early fall. SLOAA also hired a graduate assistant, Abigail Baker, to serve as a functional user and to support programs in their move to TrueOutcomes.

In October 2008, OHE informed us that Cengage Learning, the parent company of TrueOutcomes, had decided to sunset the product. The details of the relationship with Cengage and the future of the product at URI remained unclear until early April 2009. OHE recently informed the SLOAA staff that the contract with Cengage would end in June 2009 with some resources returned to OHE. OHE will be granted a perpetual site license for the product. Deborah Grossman-Garber has indicated that OHE plans to continue to endorse TrueOutcomes for the foreseeable future (3-5 years period) and that some of the returned resources will be available to hire a programmer familiar with the product. The URI computing staff believe that the product can be supported locally for several years with the support of an external programmer.

The Cengage technical staff also urged the transition to version 2 of TrueOutcomes because of security concerns with the first version. That conversion took place in December 2008. The conversion came with a number of technical “bumps,” most of which have been worked out due to the extraordinary efforts of the URI computing staff who worked tirelessly with their counterparts at Cengage. Several important issues, most notably problems with a survey feature, remain to be resolved at this point. Complicating all of this transition is URI’s move to Sakai as its new course management system. While it appears that Sakai has a portfolio module, that has not been activated and there is no clear timetable as to when that might happen. One area to explore is the degree to which TrueOutcomes might be made to interface with the Sakai Open Source Portfolio module.

On a positive note, SLOAA has been successful in supporting the adoption of TrueOutcomes by several new programs. The School Psychology program and the Graduate School of Library and Information Studies are using the software to support their assessment efforts. The Nursing program has also begun to use TrueOutcomes to survey students and for collecting student reflections.

Appendix E
Organization and Membership of SLOAA Office*

Acting Director: Bob Shea 401-874-5401 Fax: 401-874-4133 bshea@uri.edu	Assessment Coordinator: Elaine Finan 401-874-9503 Fax: 401-874-4133 efinan@uri.edu
Administrative: Anita Burke 401-874-4274 Fax: 401-874-4133 anita@uri.edu	Information Technologist: Tina Yetman Academic Roadmap Website 401-874-2217 tyetman@uri.edu
Graduate Students: Abigail Baker TrueOutcomes 401-874-9517 bakerhounds@msn.com	Kristen Weissinger Wabash Study, Website Editor 401-874-9517 kweissinger@mail.uri.edu

* Reports to Office of the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

Staff funding:

- 50% of Bob Shea's time is committed to the IDP;
- 50% of Elaine Finan's time is committed to the FIPSE-funded Academic Roadmap Project²;
- 58% of Anita Burke's salary is grant funded;
- 100% of the information technologist and grad student funding is grant funded.

² The goals of the FIPSE-funded Academic Roadmap project are to improve student recruitment and retention, and to empower student learning by creating better communication and advising tools that render higher education transparent for learners and their families. To achieve this, we seek to improve access to postsecondary education, encourage persistence to degree completion in a timely fashion, represent an alignment of curricula between 2/4-year institutions, and encompass all disciplines. Note: the addition of outcomes was prompted by the realization that students should begin to identify with the knowledge and skill areas within a program as they chose their path. It was also a decision of the Co-PIs to introduce the idea of assessment of one's own learning.