

Virginia Commonwealth University
Office of Assessment Update: October 14, 2009

SACS Fifth-Year Interim Report for VCU: Due March 2010

Our Vice Provost for Academic and Faculty Affairs, Laura Moriarty, is overseeing preparation of the SACS Fifth-Year Interim Report. The target date for completing a solid draft is December 2009.

Assembling the Assessment Team

Kathy Ingram, an associate professor in the Department of Psychology at VCU, was appointed Interim Director of Assessment on August 19, 2009. Linda Birtley, a senior research associate at VCU's Survey and Evaluation Research Lab, is serving as Assessment Project Manager. Gaurav Gupta, a web services specialist at the VCU Center for Teaching Excellence, is the assessment team's IT Analyst.

Our Focus in Recent Weeks and for the Foreseeable Future

To prepare for the SACS report, we are focusing on assessment of student learning among VCU's degree-granting programs. We seek to help programs enhance the quality of their assessment plans and the completeness of their assessment reports in WEAVE, the central repository for assessment information. To promote a positive view of assessment at VCU, we emphasize the following:

- Assessment of student learning is a critically important process that we are committed to conducting on an ongoing basis across academic programs at VCU.
- WEAVE is simply a receptacle. We should not equate WEAVE with assessment.
- The Office of Assessment will take steps to enhance to the culture of collaboration and of sharing resources related to assessment at VCU.

Audit Scorecards for Academic Programs

We retained Steve RiCharde, former Director of Assessment at VCU, as an external consultant. Steve has prepared audit scorecards for the assessment of student learning in each degree-granting program. Based on information reported in WEAVE, the audit scorecard includes ratings (*compliance*, *needs work*, or *non-compliance*) for goals, objectives, measures, findings, and continuous improvement. For elements rated as *needs work*, codes were provided, along with a code key and a document suggesting ways to address common problems. Steve completed scorecards every few months for each program beginning in November 2008; he will complete the fifth and final set in late November 2009.

Assessment Council

VCU's Assessment Council for academic programs consists of 18 members from our Monroe Park Campus and our Medical Campus. Approximately half of the members are associate deans; most of the others are program directors. We conducted a 2-hour meeting with the Council on September 10, during which we outlined our focus for the coming months. We also sought input about our efforts to: (a) reorganize the WEAVE "entity" tree (list of units), such that academic programs and administrative units are now on separate "branches"; and (b) update the list of individuals with access to WEAVE and the type of access for each person (i.e., read only, read/write). Steve RiCharde attended the meeting and gave an overview of the scorecards. The Assessment Team emphasized that this is an unusual year because of the SACS report. The Council agreed with the recommended strategy: We will focus for now on preparing for the report, and we will have discussions in Spring 2010 about what can be done to take assessment to the next level at VCU and to elevate the Council's leadership status.

This week, we met with the Assessment Council to ask representatives for updates on the work they are doing to help their programs address issues noted on the scorecards, and to identify common issues that we could work on as a group. Our target date for programs to finish entering information into WEAVE is November 2 (so Steve RiCharde can complete his final set of scorecards). It appears that we will meet the target date for most programs and we can offer brief extensions for others as needed.

WEAVEonline: Problems and Modifications

WEAVEonline, a web-based assessment management system, was originally developed at VCU and housed on a VCU server. Subsequently, WEAVE became a standalone commercial product owned by Centrieva and no longer affiliated with VCU. We recently encountered two problems with WEAVE: (1) when users revised Outcomes/Objectives or Measures for 2008-2009, entries in those categories for previous cycles were automatically overwritten; and (2) some of our users mistakenly logged into an old version of WEAVE (on the VCU server) to enter findings. Although these problems have been resolved, we continue to emphasize the importance of preparing and saving assessment plans/reports in a separate document (e.g., a Word file) from which information can be copied into WEAVE.

In the Achievement Summary / Analysis section of WEAVE, the existing questions (about strengths and areas for improvement) did not yield the kind of information we need for SACS to demonstrate continuous improvement. We recently made those questions optional and added three new questions:

1. How were the assessment results communicated to your faculty?
2. How did the faculty review the results for the purpose of improving student learning outcomes?
3. What changes, if any, were made to improve student learning outcomes?

WEAVE Training

In October, we are offering a 1-hour WEAVE workshop on five different dates. This workshop includes a brief overview of assessment of student learning and is geared toward academic programs. We plan to offer a workshop geared toward administrative units next month.

One-On-One Sessions to Discuss Assessment Plans with Academic Programs

In the past 4 weeks, we met with representatives from 10 different academic units from our Monroe Park Campus and Medical Campus. These meetings have ranged from individual consultations to a session with all department chairs and associate deans from one of our schools.

Other Projects for the SACS Fifth-Year Interim Report

We are compiling evidence that VCU assigns responsibility for program coordination and curriculum development/review to persons academically qualified in the field (SACS Core Requirement 3.4.11). We do not have a central repository for that information at VCU, and we have had to determine how to collect it. We also are preparing a tally of off-campus and online courses. Finally, we are preparing a document that aligns discipline-specific accreditation standards with SACS standards.

Resources Developed or in Progress

We updated our webpage to include additional resources (e.g., an updated Quick Start Guide for WEAVE users). We are preparing to launch a Blackboard page for Assessment Council members, which will include exemplary assessment reports, sample scoring rubrics, and other materials. As time permits, we are preparing tip sheets and other handouts for developing assessment plans.