Report to the Provost on Summary of Progress in APR, Program-Level, and GEP Assessment Processes Since 2012*

I.   APR Processes Since 2012

As part of the Academic Program Review (APR) each seven years, departments report on their assessment of student learning outcomes in the program and in a sample of general education courses. This self-study report also includes information on how they have used the results of that assessment to improve their programs. Some guidance for this process had been provided in the APR Guidelines, but it became clear in the past few years from department self studies that some departments needed more direction and support for this part of the review process. In consultation with the Faculty Development Center (FDC), the University implemented several changes during this assessment cycle (2012-2014) to address this issue:

- We expanded guidance on the assessment process in the APR Guidelines for departments (a new appendix—attached at the end of this document).
- The Director of the FDC now reviews the assessment section of draft APR reports.
- The Director of the FDC and the department assessment coordinator now join the initial conversations with department chairs about the APR process.
- We now ask external reviewers specifically to review and evaluate the assessment section of APR reports.
- We now have added discussion of student learning outcomes assessment to post-review reports and to the third-year update.

These changes not only help guide departments as they think through their assessment activities, but they also help disseminate the assessment results to a broader audience.

II.   Learning Assessment Processes 2012-14

Summary of Fall 2014 Council of Deans Meeting

The Council of Deans reviews Biennial Assessment Reports from the Deans. These reports include the Deans' summaries of department reports on their assessment of student learning in the program and in general education courses, including the processes used, findings, and interventions based on those findings. Deans share results at the institutional-level in this forum and report back to departments with feedback. The General Education Committee contributes to the feedback loop by reviewing the reports and synthesizing the results in a report for the Assessment Committee. FDC staff also participate in the review process and support departments with planning, implementing, and closing-the-loop with learning assessment processes. The Council discussed the following issues at the fall, 2014 meeting:

Templates: To facilitate the data collection process, the Council of Deans considered the use of templates: although disciplinary practices differ, common reporting requirements would facilitate closing-the-loop discussion at the institutional level. The Council recommended that standard reporting templates be developed capturing learning assessment findings, interventions applied, and follow-up measures and results. Standard reporting templates should help facilitate

discussions about student learning at all levels, and help to overcome challenges of synthesizing student learning results.

More Curricular Decisions Based on Direct Measures: Further, the Council discussed the challenges departments face in engaging data from direct measures. Indirect measures have been used more frequently in intervention decisions, and the Council would like programs to be using more data from direct measures for curricular intervention. (Progress has been made over the last several years, however, as shown in Table 1 below in section III Follow-Up).

Focus on Graduate Learning Assessment: Additionally, the Council recommended giving graduate learning assessment more attention.

Adjunct Challenges: The Council discussed challenges with adjuncts fulfilling learning assessment responsibilities.

> ### Recommendations:
> - Enhance and apply direct measures across the university
> - Focus on application of direct results and focus less on assessment processes.
> - Develop a reporting template to collate college-level learning data and foster discussions.
> - Implement a closing-the-loop reporting template (for details see section III).

Summary of Spring 2015 Assessment Committee Meeting

At the April 6th meeting of the University Assessment Committee, the Provost began by providing context for the meeting. He noted that combining the discussion on program-level assessment and general education assessment and including stakeholders across the University reflected the University's emphasis on the functional competencies—the institutional level student learning outcomes. The Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs shared the reporting structure for assessment information from the University Assessment Plan, again emphasizing the involvement of campus-wide stakeholders in reviewing the processes and results of student learning outcomes assessment.

The Provost then reviewed the UMBC Assessment Plan's mandate to integrate General Education Functional Competencies (UMBC's institutional-level student learning outcomes) in both the General Education program and the disciplinary programs. In this regard, the chair of the General Education Committee subsequently shared the Committee's report from review of the University's assessment reports during the 2012-14 assessment cycle and noted specific recommendations:

1. Foster a new culture of learning assessment, including sharing data and tools.
2. Help departments and programs still struggling to close the loop through workshops, FDC consultations, etc.
3. Offer additional guidance in direct over indirect measures and in aligning program learning outcomes to the institutional functional competencies. Create a repository of resources.

4. Avoid curricular decisions made without learning assessment evidence; emphasize evidence-based decision making. Institute an assessment committee for each department.

During the general ensuing discussion, participants in the meeting reported on successful changes in UMBC's learning assessment culture across the campus, as faculty have moved towards a more reflective process about student learning and away from a primary focus on the process of assessment itself. As a result, faculty have taken a more uniform approach to assessment, though some still struggle with using direct measures and applying the data to continuous improvement. Some resistance remains within some departments, but it dissipates when university leaders define assessment as central and separate from tenure and promotion processes. The revisions to the APR process to foster greater attention on the assessment of student learning outcomes were also shared with the Assessment Committee (see Section I).

Recommendations from the Assessment Committee Meeting
1. Create a repository for exemplary learning assessment materials to foster collaboration across the campus. Share assessment plans, measures, data, interventions, and follow-up measures to identify where resources are needed and facilitate data-driven decision making.
2. Bolster UMBC's learning assessment culture by having administrators visit faculty meetings to discuss UMBC learning assessment processes, emphasize the vital importance of measuring and improving learning, and counter any remaining faculty concerns about assessment results being used in tenure and promotion processes. Continue to make direct assistance available via the FDC.
3. Explore solutions for broadening the view of learning in the General Education Program.
4. Institute an assessment committee for each department to create expertise and facilitate a culture of assessment.

Closing the Loop on Assessment Committee Recommendations for 2010 and 2012

2010 Assessment Committee Recommendations (as approved from the GEC Report)
In 2010 the General Education Committee Subcommittee on Assessment made recommendations for improvement in our assessment processes. Those recommendations were approved by the Assessment Committee on July 28th, 2010. Aspects noted as needing continued support included:

1. Departments would benefit from additional support in their efforts to include general education course assessments into their existing assessment plans. The GEC recommends that guidance and reference materials for the development of effective general education course assessment be provided to departments and individual faculty through the UMBC Faculty Development Center.

2. The principles and mechanisms for assessment of general education courses should be consistent with those already identified by the department for its program-level assessment.

3. To facilitate consistency and coherence of reporting, the GEC recommends the inclusion of the following guidelines in the biennial report template:

Information submitted should include; (a) summary of how the course addresses the distribution area(s) designated; (b) summary of how the course addresses and measures each of the functional competencies designated; (c) examples of learning activities and assessment criteria for measuring functional competencies; (d) summary of assessment results on student learning outcomes regarding designated functional competencies; (e) changes made or proposed to improve student learning; and (f) evaluation of changes and improvements implemented to improve student learning.

2010-2012 Learning Assessment Cycle Responses to the 2012 Assessment Committee Recommendations

1. The FDC provided and continues to provide extensive resources and support to faculty and departments around assessment of student learning outcomes (specific instances are documented elsewhere). The Director of the FDC met with individual faculty to formulate assessment plans and help interpret data, met with departments who requested help in refining their plans and developing rubrics, held workshops on developing rubrics, and conducted yearly workshops on assessment for chairs in the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences at the request of the Dean.

2. Most departments have developed plans for general education assessment which are indeed consistent with their program assessment plans. Some departments in the College of Natural and Mathematical Sciences (CNMS) continue to find this challenging, but in 2014 the Dean of CNMS instituted a College-wide Assessment Committee charged with providing support for assessment in general and including this specific issue.

3. Departments submitting courses for approval for the general education program are required to include information from items a-c in the application itself. Items a-f are also required as part of the report on assessment results in general education courses submitted as part of departments' biennial assessment reports.

2012 Assessment Committee Recommendations (as approved from the GEC Report)
In 2012 the General Education Committee Subcommittee on Assessment made recommendations for improvement in our assessment processes. Those recommendations were approved by the Assessment Committee on February 4th, 2013. Aspects noted as needing continued support included:
1. Evaluation of assessment using direct measures.
2. The use of the data from previously evaluated courses in order to continue to improve student learning.
3. Assessment of the processes of learning that the functional competences represent.
4. An internet-based submission process that is functional and is part of a work flow process that includes the Registrar, the UGC, and WI courses."

2012-14 Learning Assessment Cycle Responses to the 2012 Assessment Committee Recommendations

1. For undergraduate programs, 20/23 departments (87%) of CAHSS departments now use direct measures; 4/4 departments (100%) of CNMS departments do; and 3/4 (75%) of COEIT departments do. In addition, Erickson School has instituted direct measures during this last assessment cycle (see Table 1 above).
2. The "closing the loop" data will be forthcoming in collected form via the Provost's prompt to the Deans.
3. The form for submitting GEP courses now asks departments for an assessment plan as part of the process. The Committee provides feedback to faculty on these plans to make sure that selected learning goals align with the functional competencies addressed and that the assessment plan is appropriate for those functional competencies.
4. The Curriculog System being instituted may or may not address this issue.

III.   Follow-Up Actions from Assessment Discussions 2014-15

Implementation of Closing-the-Loop Report Template
In spring 2015, the Provost's Office and the FDC created a reporting template to streamline data and foster comparisons across departments. Each dean requested details on direct and indirect measures, learning data, interventions, and follow-up measures and applications. Departments submitted reports to deans in mid-spring 2015.

Compilation of Data on Use of Direct Measures
Given the recommendations to encourage the use of direct measures of assessment and use those results to propose evidence-based changes to programs, the FDC compared the data from the use of direct measures from an earlier compilation (2009-10) with those reported in this assessment cycle (2012-14). The results in Table 1 show that the University is making progress in that departments are more often using direct measures of student learning to inform meaningful curricular change.

Table 1: Comparison of Direct Measures and Closing-the-Loop Applications
Undergraduate Programs 2009-10 and 2012-2014

	% Proposing Changes Based on Assessment	% Using Direct Measures of Assessment	% Proposing Changes from Direct Measures
Colleges' Dept Reports AY 2009 and 2010*			
CAHSS depts (21)	48%	61%	43%
CNMS depts (4)	25%	100%	25%
COEIT depts. (4)	50%	75%	25%
Colleges' Dept Reports AY 2012 to 2014			
CAHSS depts (21)	81%	90%	52%
CNMS depts (4)	50%	100%	25%
COEIT depts. (4)	25%	75%	25%
Erickson School (1)	100%	100%	100%

*Does not include changes proposed to assessment process; numbers thus revised from earlier report

Creation of Sample Templates for Graduate Program Assessment
The Graduate School created sample templates for departments to consider or adapt as they review their learning assessment plans for graduate programs. This template was discussed at the Graduate Program Director's meeting on April 15, 2015. The Director of the FDC was invited to be present and answer questions at that meeting.

*Prepared by Jennifer Harrison and Linda Hodges, Faculty Development Center, 5/28/15

Appendix _____
Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes

1. CONTEXT: Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes

The purpose of assessment is to *improve student learning* by:
- gathering evidence on what students are and are not learning and
- proposing changes to instruction or curriculum based on the findings.

Assessment has four steps:

1) Articulating learning goals or objectives: What do you want students to be able to **do** as a result of taking this course or completing this program?

2) Collecting information on student achievement of these goals, both *direct* and *indirect* measures.

Direct includes specific measures of student learning, such as:

- performance on exam questions related to specific learning goals, not just overall grades;
- performance on written work related to specific learning goals as evaluated by specific criteria or rubrics;
- performance in capstone experiences, portfolios, exhibitions, presentations, internships, or creative or research experiences related to specific learning goals as evaluated using specific criteria or rubrics;
- scores on standardized national tests or pass rates on certification or licensure exams. It's especially helpful if the standardized tests have sections that allow you to see where students are achieving specific learning aims and where they are not.

Indirect includes measures such as:

- surveys or focus groups of students' or alumni perceptions of their own learning;
- surveys of employers;
- placement of graduates into jobs, or graduate and professional programs;
- department or program review data;
- student achievements such as honors, awards, and scholarships;
- exam or course grades

3) Using the results you collect, *especially the results from direct measures*, determine what step(s) to take to improve student learning.

4) Repeating the process as results from assessment of implemented changes become available.

For examples of evidence of student learning see

from the Middle States Commission of Higher Education web resources reprinted from Suskie, L. (2009). *Assessing student learning: A common sense guide* (2nd ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

2. REPORTING STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES AS PART OF THE SELF-STUDY

Below is more detailed information about incorporating information about assessment of student learning outcomes into the Self-Study as specified on page 7, section A3c, of the APR Guidelines.

Part A,3
c) **Educational goals, learning outcomes, and program assessment plan:** UMBC's assessment program requires that at the time of the APR, departments take these three steps:

i.   Provide in the body of the self-study a summary of the direct assessment of student learning outcomes for the program, including general education courses. This summary includes:

- a description of the direct measures used to evaluate student achievement of the program level goals or general education functional competencies. Direct measures include, for example, *the evaluation of student performance*:

  o   in capstone experiences or on dissertations using evaluation criteria or rubrics;
  o   on student work or performances using evaluation criteria or rubrics;
  o   on embedded test questions;
  o   on pre-and post-tests;
  o   on student portfolios using evaluation criteria or rubrics; and/or
  o   on standardized exams.

The summary may also include *indirect* measures of student learning such as exam or course grades, student evaluations of courses, student perception surveys, and student placements. These indirect measures can provide additional perspective on, or descriptive information about, the results from direct measures.

- a description of outcomes determined from the direct measures of student learning.
- an analysis of strengths and weaknesses of the program identified by reviewing results from the direct measures of student learning.
- a discussion of changes made or proposed at the course and/or program levels to improve teaching and enhance student learning outcomes based on the results found through both direct and indirect measures of student learning.

For additional information and support, please contact the Faculty Development Center at fdc@umbc.edu or lhodges@umbc.edu.
3. APR-CONCURRENT SUBMISSIONS TO THE GEC

The following submissions, while not a part of the APR, per se, are required as part of UMBC's Assessment Plan and are prepared in conjunction with the APR.

ii.   Submit to the General Education Committee (GEC) a summary of indirect and direct assessment of student learning outcomes for a sample of general education courses. Information submitted should include:

- summary of how the course addresses the distribution area(s) designated
- summary of how the course addresses and measures each of the functional competencies designated
- examples of learning activities and assessment criteria for measuring designated functional competencies
- summary of assessment results on student learning outcomes regarding designated functional competencies
- changes made or proposed to improve student learning
- evaluation of changes and improvements that have been made.

iii.   Submit for review by the GEC all courses that have GEP designations except those that have received GEP designations in the three years prior to the APR. (Courses that fall into this latter category should be submitted by the department for review concurrently with the Year Three Review.) Guidelines for these submissions are available from the GEC.

For questions or additional information about APR-concurrent submissions to the GEC, contact the Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs at mcdermot@umbc.edu.