Assessment Action Project Annual Update (Jan. 27, 2015)

VERSIONS
- [VERSION 4.0](#)
- [VERSION 3.0](#)
- [VERSION 2.0](#)
- [VERSION 1.0](#)

REVIEWED VERSION 4.0 📄

Project Details

Title	Implementation of Assessment Plans	Status	REVIEWED
Category	Any Category	Updated	01-27-2015
Timeline		**Reviewed**	**04-22-2015**
Planned Project Kickoff 04-26-2011		Created	04-24-2011
Target Completion 05-16-2015		Last Modified	04-22-2015

- 1: **CURRENT PROJECT STATUS SUMMARY**
  VU's Answer: **General project status: __Completed; _X_In Progress; ___Suspended; ___Reopened**
  Original Start Date: 4-26-2011
  Original Projected End Date: 5-16-2015
  Anticipated Completion Date if Not Completed: 5-16-2015
  Briefly explain the current status of the project: The project is still in steady progress; the University remains committed to the goals of the project.
  Explain how this project relates to any strategic initiatives or challenges described in the institution's most recent or soon-to-be submitted systems portfolio, if applicable.
  As noted in the 2012 AQIP Portfolio and the brief description of the original project, the Action Project is supported in the 2010 (and still current) Strategic Plan. It is Goal #1 of the plan, and the President asks for program assessment status updates every two weeks and strategic plan progress updates every six months. That progress is reported to the institution in the "Strategic Plan Progress Report," which is a visual representation of progress consisting of a series of check-boxes showing implementation progress on the objectives.
- **HLC Reviewer's Response***: Over the past four years, Vincennes University has made significant progress on this action project and appears to be reaching an "on-going" status. As VU states, there is still much to be done, but VU is ready to retire this action project, which seems appropriate at this time. The University should celebrate its successes and continue to strive for continuous improvement in its assessment processes.*

- 2: **ORIGINAL PROJECT GOALS AND DELIVERABLES**

- **VU's Answer**: The goals of the project, as stated in the original project are as follows: "VU assumes, first and foremost, that academic areas and programs will be affected by

this action project. Both the Systems Portfolio Review and the Quality Checkup stressed the need for a focus on academic data and improvement systems, but VU assumes that 'developing a culture of assessment' means data-driven improvement systems are necessary for all ancillary programs as well. In other words, the project will benefit the entire institution."

The "Strategic Plan Progress Report" is the best measure for assessing the progress on the project. The "Progress Report" identifies 10 general objectives and 28 objectives or subcategories of targeted action; progress is measured by five levels of implementation:

- o Level #1: Start-up actions taken; concept work completed; early organization efforts underway; 25% to goal
- o Level #2: Progress underway and on-track; steady progress being made; funding may be secured; 50% to goal, but no results yet
- o Level #3: Deeply deployed; substantial elements of the project may be nearly or fully completed; 75% to goal and beginning to have results
- o Level #4: Fully deployed; 100% success on results
- o Level A: Annual report showing on-going planning, program, or funding process

- **HLC Reviewer's Response**: *As an outside reviewer, it is difficult to know for sure where any action project is at in terms of full deployment, so that is a judgment call I will not make; however, it does appear that VU has developed a process for assessment and a process for assessing that process, which should provide a vehicle for the University to continue to sustain and improve its assessments.*

- 3: **ACCOMPLISHMENTS OVER THE PAST YEAR**

- **VU's** Answer: Status of the 28 objectives or subcategories of action, as reported to the President in August of 2014 is:
    - o 14 objectives/subcategories are listed at level "A," meaning they are systematically underway and part of the annual budgeting process for the Office of Institutional Effectiveness or other offices.
    - o 5 objectives/subcategories are listed at level "4," meaning they are fully deployed and producing results.
    - o 4 objectives/subcategories are listed at level "3," meaning they are nearly or fully deployed and beginning to produce results.
    - o 5 objectives/subcategories are listed level "2," meaning they underway or preliminary study has been completed.

It should be noted that some of the level "2" items will not change or progress beyond that level because certain goals have been deemed unworkable or inappropriate at this time. For instance, VU is not ready for a full-blown e-portfolio process to assess all academic areas. Some programs use e-portfolios, but the resource demands are too great and too much a complication and threat to the assessment process that is still in its early stages. Some of the items just create certain political challenges that make it hard to progress too quickly, such as determining how best to work assessment into the evaluation process.

More specifically, key progress that has been made this year includes the following:

o VU has established a process for assessing Critical Thinking (pilot completed and reported) and other liberal education outcomes. VU has recently purchased Blackboard "Outcomes" in order to improve the process and ensure that all general/liberal education faculty participate in the assessment process and requirements. The tool will be essential for maintaining student artifacts and making them accessible for assessment sampling.

o VU brought in Dr. Gary Brown (lead developer of the AAC&U Critical Thinking rubric) to lead a half-day workshop on critical thinking instruction and assessment. One goal of the activity was to help faculty better understand the CT rubric that VU is using (which is based on the AAC&U VALUE rubric).

o In the last year, co-curricular programs have been added to the list of programs being assessed on an annual basis.

o The first 3-year cycle, including trending, has been completed for program assessment, and 96% (82 out of 85) of the programs have submitted new projects for the 2014-15 academic year; most programs had their new assessments underway by the end of the Fall semester.

o A draft of another assessment survey to determine faculty and staff perception of the assessment process has been developed; the survey will be distributed it during the February college meetings so all faculty can respond. The survey will also be send to all staff doing co-curricular assessments. Results will be presented in VU's assessment progress report.

o A rubric has been developed for use in evaluating assessment report quality; the results will be shared with those submitting reports, the deans, the Provost and the President.

o VU is participating in the Multi-State Collaborative, a 9-state assessment project with Gates Foundation funding and AAC&U oversight. VU successfully completed and submitted the maximum number of samples, one for each of the following: writing, quantitative literacy, and critical thinking. Forty-four faculty participated in the submissions process.

o A Critical Thinking Learning Community has been established to lead the assessment of critical thinking. This group of twelve faculty participated in norming activities and completed the critical thinking pilot assessment this past summer. They also participated in a video that was presented at the University opening meeting, and they produced another video on improving critical thinking instruction and assignments. The latter video was presented during the September College meetings.

o More than forty faculty participated in a January professional development workshop in which faculty worked on norming their evaluation of critical thinking artifacts. A repeat workshop will be offered in May. All VU faculty teaching general education courses are expected to participate in one of the two sessions.

o Most recently, VU has introduced a new Action Project that focuses on taking VU's general/liberal education assessment off-campus and into the early colleges and eventually military sites.

o   The Director of Institutional Effectiveness continues to provide reports and workshops on assessment. The Director is also taking the "lessons of assessment" into the discussions about co-curricular assessment and the AQIP process.

o   The institution has developed and deployed a standardized Advisory Committee Survey. VU hopes the results will provide information to both programs and the institution regarding the effectiveness of academic programs.

o   The President and Provost hosted a breakfast to invite key faculty to participate in the HLC peer review process. While the HLC limits the number of reviewers from any one institution, at least six VU faculty and staff submitted applications, with one accepted.

- **HLC Reviewer's Response**: *Again, as in the previous versions of this action project, VU has made significant progress on this action project. It is clear that there is strong dedication to this action project from those involved. The University is to be commended for these efforts and for this dedication!*

- 4: **INSTITUTIONAL INVOLVEMENT**

- **VU's Answer**: As suggested in the responses to question #3, faculty members are increasingly aware and accepting of their responsibilities to assessment and improvement. The work is now expanding to the Student Services and Learning Resources areas. As AQIP discussions continue, the role of assessment expands, specifically as VU establishes the practice of identifying objectives and targeted actions as a way of measuring progress towards strategic objectives and improvement projects. For instance, VU's Continuous Quality Improvement Committee has enhanced its proposal process with greater emphasis on establishing measurable targets for newly proposed projects; additionally, the process now expects alignment with the strategic plan and/or needed improvements identified in the Systems Analysis report. This Action Project, as originally identified, is having the intended impact of creating a "culture of assessment."

- **HLC Reviewer's Response**: *As long as faculty continue to become aware and accepting of the new assessment process, the University is making great strides. As stated in sections 6, 7, and 8, the University recognizes that there is faculty resistance to this new process, which is not surprising. The University is encouraged to stay with the process, continue to pull it forward, and celebrate the gains that are made while recognizing it will always face some hurdles.*

   Moving assessment into other non-academic areas is an excellent idea. VU may want to consider allowing those non-academic areas that are ready for the change to begin this process on their own (with assistance) and rewarding them along the way. This may help other areas to see the benefits of the process and therefore join in.

   The concept of setting measurable targets for newly proposed projects is an excellent idea that the University is encouraged to pursue.

- **5: EFFECTIVE PRACTICES**

- **VU's Answer:** The project has had a significant positive impact on the institution. A good example is the quality of the 2014-15 proposals for new assessment projects. As noted above, VU completed its first 3-year cycle of program assessment. New outcomes and assessment projects are required as programs begin a second 3-year cycle. The Assessment Committee reviews the proposed projects and offers improvement suggestions. All the members of the Committee have recognized two things: (1) the Committee's project evaluations have become much more sophisticated as the Committee has worked through the first three years of the project, and (2) the Committee is now able to move through the proposals much more quickly, offering only minor suggestions, because of the improved quality of the assessment projects and plans. While there are still pockets of resistance, VU's assessment process is being established as both an expectation, and in the best cases, a way to systematically identify needed improvements. The institution has learned a number of things:
  - o Administrative and Board support is crucial to successfully implementing an assessment plan and building a culture of assessment. The President and Provost have been visible supporters of the process and have made their expectations for assessment clear. More recently, three new deans have added to the administrative support for the process. The support from the deans, who have direct oversight over the faculty, has helped to clarify assessment expectations and has sped up the response rates.
  - o Assigning individual college assessment liaisons who serve on the Assessment Committee helps the iterative review process VU has established. The back-and-forth between programs and the Committee is helped by the liaisons, and the process keeps the assessment activities on track and helps produce high quality reports.
  - o Developing a group of faculty (a learning community) committed to a specific general/liberal education outcome appears to provide the faculty leadership that is essential for improving instruction and assessment. VU's Critical Thinking Learning Community is still in its infancy, but it appears to have the potential to foster an improvement dialogue that will continue to develop critical thinking instruction and learning.
  - o Continuing professional development is required to enhance understanding of both learning goals and assessment best-practices. VU has recently had a significant number of retirees and new hires, and VU is expanding the expectation for assessment, both major program and general education assessment. Professional development is essential, and it is especially important to remember to provide instruction on basic assessment concepts and techniques for new faculty.

- **HLC Reviewer's Response***: VU has had strong administrative and Board support. Its use of college assessment liaisons and a faculty learning community for general education are excellent, and the University should rely on these individuals to keep the processes moving forward. Finally, continued professional development, especially*

assuring that new faculty understand and learn about the assessment process, will help the University build its assessment base.

- **6: ANTICIPATED CHALLENGES TO PROJECT SUCCESS**

- **VU's Answer:** VU recognizes that most of its challenges to full implementation of its assessment plan are the result of both the breadth of the strategic plan and the aggressive timeline set for the objectives, especially considering that the implementation was delayed by almost a year during the search for the Director of Institutional Effectiveness. VU is proud of the significant amount of the plan that has been (and will continue to be) implemented, but the reality is faculty have been asked to complete a great deal of work that was not being done earlier. That work, plus a great number of recent state and institutional initiatives, has led to faculty and staff complaints about the workload and the expectation of more and more work to be done. Some of the following challenges should be understood in this light.
   o   The curriculum mapping process has been started with professional development and some programs developing models, but most programs have not completed maps.
   o   General education assessment is underway and a process has been developed, but the institution needs to finalize implementation of all its gen. ed. outcomes on campuses and locations with full-time faculty and then begin to move the process out to its early college and military locations, and implement into its dual credit and distance education offerings. As noted in Section 3 above, VU has implemented an Action Project designed to move general education into its early college locations, to be followed by implementation at military locations.
   o   Program assessment is moving along well on the Vincennes and Jasper campuses and at the Indianapolis Aviation and School for the Deaf locations. While most of VU's distance education programs are taught by VU's faculty, VU needs to include distance education program assessment in its current program assessment. The plan has always been to establish the program assessment plans first at the Vincennes and Jasper campuses and Indianapolis locations and then expand it to include distance education. VU believes the basic design and process for program assessment is established.
   o   Qualitative program review is the assessment plan objective that VU has probably moved the least on, although there have been discussions about it and a new common program advisory committee assessment has been developed as a piece of a qualitative program review.

VU is also facing two other more general challenges. Not surprisingly, some faculty (especially those more experienced at VU) continue to drag their feet on assessment. Most of them will do the work with prodding, but their resistance creates extra work for the Assessment Committee liaisons, deans, the Office of Institutional Effectiveness, and other administrators.

Also, the Assessment Committee has, at times, been criticized for becoming more demanding than it was initially. Some part of the criticism is the result of an evolution of

expectations based on experience from the first three years; some less-than-ideal assessment approaches and activities were overlooked as VU was trying to implement its processes and in a hurry (90+ programs assessment plans developed, completed, and reported in nine months). Some of the criticism, on the other hand, reflects what might be the Assessment Committee's excessive review of plans. Some faculty and staff complain, with some justification, that the Committee has become hard to satisfy. While VU's iterative process for completing reports has enhanced the quality of the reports and increased the institution's understanding of what is required for quality assessment, the review process should now be simplified and greater responsibility shifted to faculty and staff to ensure responsibility for completing timely, high-quality reports.

- **HLC Reviewer's Response:** *Assessment can become overwhelming. It can also become bogged down by well-intentioned individuals who expect too much or move the process too fast. Assessment for the purpose of assessment will soon lose its support, and its true focus and purpose will disappear. It is very easy for assessment to become a "task that must be done" instead of an engaging process for the improvement of student learning.*

  This is not to say that VU is at that point; however, the University will want to assure that it does not reach that point. Some questions to consider as VU moves forward:

  1. *Does the assessment add value? Does it make a difference? Do we learn from it? Do we make changes based on it? Does it tell us what we want to know? If the answers to these questions are "yes", then the assessment is working. If not, it may need to be changed.*
  2. *Can we simplify the process? Are there steps that are unneeded? Is the process too long? Sometimes steps are added to a process making it too long and too complicated when something simpler would suffice.*
  3. *Would a shorter and simpler report provide enough information for decision-making? How formal do the reports need to be in order to have worth? Who reads the report (does anyone read the report)? What do they do with the report, or is the report just something we put on the shelf? If individuals believe that the report is just a required exercise, it will soon become just a required exercise.*
  4. *Finally, what should the cycle be? Do all assessments need to be done every year by every program for every outcome? Can we rotate them, either by outcome or by program or by both? It may not be necessary to everything every year. Cycling the work over time may help reduce the load on faculty.*

  Again, VU may not be facing these issues and may not need to answer these questions, but it may be something for the University to consider now that it is completing the action project.

- **7: PLANNED NEXT STEPS AND TIME LINE**

- **VU's Answer**: Although VU plans to close this Action Project in the next 6 months, it will continue to move assessment forward driven by VU's strategic plan. In the next

12-24 months, the following steps will be taken to push VU to both complete the assessment strategic plan and strengthen VU's developing culture of assessment. As with the progress made so far, all of the following activities will require administrative support and extra effort to implement and embed in thinking of the institution.

- o Curriculum mapping is easy enough to complete, but the value of the mapping process needs to be understood by everyone and administrative support for mapping is necessary, as it will be "one more thing" that faculty and staff are expected to do. Assessment can be done without curriculum maps, but better, more intentional assessment would be completed if the mapping includes a thoughtful review of program curriculum that makes assessments more intentional. The education process should be completed by the end of the spring or summer of 2015, and the maps should be completed by the end of 2015.
- o The two general education outcomes that have yet to be fully added to the curriculum and assessment processes are ethical thinking and integration. Rubrics are being developed to combine these skills with critical thinking. Curriculum development activities should begin in the fall of 2015, with sample course curricula and assignments ready for discussion.
- o Regarding the issue of resistance to doing assessment, VU is considering making assessment more a part of the annual evaluation process. Figuring out how to work assessment responsibility into the merit system poses a challenge. VU must be careful not to make evaluation about the results of assessment, but more about the quality of the assessment work itself. VU must also convince the governance groups that this work is as much a part of the process as they see more traditional expectations. A draft evaluation plan that includes assessment has been developed, but it will take a year or so to move the process through all the political channels.
- o VU has developed an assessment plan evaluation rubric that can be used for a final review of plans. The Committee hopes that the rubric and certain incentives for well-done reports can help move programs to take more ownership for timely, high-quality reports. The Committee is considering a report review process that includes two reviews of draft plans and then a final date when plans must be submitted. Once the deadline for submissions has passed, the Committee (and possibly a larger body of faculty) will use the rubric to finalize a qualitative review. A report of results would be prepared for each program, College Dean, and the Provost. At that point, the Assessment Committee would turn over to the Deans and Provost responsibility for addressing assessment quality or any incomplete reports. The Assessment Committee hopes to move into this new process beginning Fall 2015.

- **HLC Reviewer's Response**: *It is obvious by these next steps that VU is very committed to assessment even though the action project is coming to an end. VU is again commended for this dedication! The steps are excellent and will move the University forward.*

  If the University has not done so at this time, it should begin working the new assessment process into the Systems Portfolio. Defining the entire process (especially creating a

visual representation of the process) may help the University find methods to streamline the process further and reduce the work required to complete it. Assessment should flow freely from what is already happening in the classroom and in the programs. It does not have to be an "add on" as much as a part of the curriculum.

- **8: ADDITIONAL INFORMATION, QUESTIONS, OR CONCERNS**

- **VU's Answer**: As noted above, VU has moved aggressively to change attitudes about assessment and has worked to make assessment more about improvement than accountability. VU has planned to complete this Action Project once it submits its 2015 Progress Report on Assessment. VU will need to gauge the impact dropping the Action Project if, as the institution anticipates, it will no longer be required to complete Progress Reports on assessment. If VU does drop the Action Project, VU will need to ensure that assessment remains a priority. Systems and reports dates are well established by now, but as was noted above, pockets of resistance still exist, and VU must consider plans for maintaining the significance of the work when no specific HLC expectations exist. One idea is to maintain some annual reports, such as progress reports and one derived from the rubric-driven qualitative review of program plans. VU would appreciate suggestions for how to avoid a natural decline in energy when the HLC expectations are gone.

- **HLC Reviewer's Response:** *In order to maintain assessment, consider working to build a base of individuals (academic and non-academic) who believe in assessment and will champion it. Then, consider using these individuals as liaisons and learning communities to help others with their assessments so that all individuals have resources to turn to. Also, the institution may consider training on assessment. These types of commitments to assessment could lead to professional development for new employees. This, in turn, may help grow the process of assessment. Finally, adding assessment as a requirement may be appropriate. Hopefully, the institution finds the assessment adds value, that it does not just become something that has to be done. If the University makes decisions and provides additional resources based on the results of assessments and makes sure others understand that these decisions were based on assessments, then more employees may want to join the assessment process.*

  Good work -- the University has made tremendous progress! Celebrate!