



# ASSESSMENT UPDATE

Early October, 2004

This month I want us to focus on the most significant challenges we face in preparing for and actually “doing” assessment.

## **The challenge of moving from a resources-actions perspective to an outcomes perspective**

Until the late 1980’s accrediting agencies focused on the resources institutions had and the actions or process by which those resources were applied. Assessment reports in those years included discussions of process issues (for example, committee structures, reporting chains of command, and the ways budget requests were approved) AND resource issues (for example, ratios of full-time faculty to students, the number of books/journal subscriptions in the library, and university revenues and expenditures).

In the late 1980’s and early 1990’s accrediting agencies made a shift to an outcomes perspective. They asked institutions to focus on results rather than resources and on outcomes rather than actions. The notion was simple – the return on resources was more important than the resources themselves (two institutions could possess the same revenue but one be far more effective in utilizing those resources), AND the impact of the processes employed was more important than the nature of the process (two institutions could follow the same process for hiring faculty but one could be far more effective in hiring high-impact faculty).

In Cedarville University’s last 1997 Self-study the NCA focused particularly on our assessment process. In our 2007 Self-study they will focus on our assessment outcomes – what changes across campus have been made in response to the assessment we have done. While other areas of the University’s resource base and operating process will be examined, we know that they will ask, “Have you followed through on your 1997 assessment plans, and can you point to clear connections between assessment and action?”

This question leads us to another challenge

## **The challenge of establishing a pattern assessment-based strategic change**

The NCA Self-study accreditation team will visit our campus in the Spring of 2007. They will conduct an examination of our institution based on the copy of the self-study we submit in the Fall of 2006.

This means that we have only two years to establish the case that Cedarville University utilizes its assessment processes to achieve significant and strategic change overall and in all sixty three of its assessment units.

Remember, in 1997 we said that we had meaningful assessment processes in place – so they assume we have followed those processes since that time. The question is, have we?

The answer to that question is complex. In many areas of our university assessment in some form is a regular part of that area's culture. For instance:

- ✓ The Business Division monitors the condition of facilities and works from a strategic plan to maintain the quality of those facilities.
- ✓ The Christian Ministries Division has regularly assessed the impact of its traveling teams.
- ✓ The Development Division has always kept careful records of donor activity.
- ✓ The Enrollment Management Division has been responsible for maintaining a great deal of detail on in-coming students, retention, grades and a variety of other indices of the character, quantity and quality of our student population.
- ✓ The Student Life Division has long been monitoring the results of the Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory and seeking to make changes in response to that survey's indicators.
- ✓ The Academic Division departments of athletic training, business, education, engineering and nursing have been engaged in assessment because of their own discipline-specific accreditation aspirations.

In most areas, however, assessment has been more sporadic and non-standardized than we would like. There are gaps in what we know about the results our actions/resources are achieving. There are gaps in clearly charting the connection between changes we have made in operational and academic areas and any assessment information that might have been used to support those changes.

Under Dr. Brown's leadership we have been asked to embrace an assessment approach that allows standardized reporting and that is closely tied to both the university strategic planning process and the university budgeting process.

Meeting this mandate has led to a third challenge.

## The challenge of change

Since 1997 we have instituted some important assessment changes (most of these beginning in the Spring of 2003):

- ✿ The Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness was assigned responsibility for university assessment.
- ✿ The University Assessment Committee was established with representative from all divisions (appointed by their respective vice-presidents and deans) and has met monthly since its formation in the Fall of 2003.
- ✿ A standardized 6-part reporting model was established.
- ✿ The six divisions designated 63 unique assessment units – each University Assessment Committee member coordinates the work of the assessment units in their divisions/schools.
- ✿ A timeline for all assessment units to complete a full assessment cycle (mission | objectives | assessment tools/process/benchmarks | results and analysis actions).
- ✿ The Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness has assumed responsibility for Alumni Surveys with plans for conducting the first surveys in Spring of 2005.
- ✿ The Administrative Council assumed responsibility for strategic planning both within their divisions and university-wide.

The hard work of 63 assessment units in combination with the efforts of all University Assessment Committee members and their sponsoring vice presidents and deans has enabled us to make considerable progress in a short amount of time.

This leads us to the forth challenge.

## The challenge of persistent commitment

At this time (early October, 2004) 42 (67%) of our 63 assessment units have established either their mission and/or objectives. A number of these units have also made progress establishing assessment tools/processes and even benchmarks. By December, 2004 all assessment units must have completed their assessment plans through the establishment of assessment tools/processes and benchmarks. Beginning January, 2005 a number of assessment units will begin gathering outcomes data and planning responses to the results of that data.

All this effort takes time and energy. Moving to a results-based model requires changes in both how we think about our offices and how those offices operate. The cooperation needed to make such a model work requires a sincere commitment to collaboration and communication. Making sure that every employee both understands and participates in assessment and strategic planning is no small matter.

However, Cedarville University is committed to this process. The assessment process has been established as an on-going effort that will last far beyond the 2007 re-accreditation effort. Our intention is that connecting decisions to assessment will become a normal part of our culture university-wide, just as it already is in many sectors of the CU community.

Cedarville University has a history of responding in excellence to the challenges we face. Those who have been part of the university community for any length of time know that asking much of ourselves is not new. While the forms, processes and language of assessment may seem new, the desire to ensure that what we do is making an impact in the lives of our students is as old as the first charter for Cedarville going back well over 100 years. We are stewards of God's rich blessings at Cedarville University and spending the time to both underwrite and document that stewardship is worth all the effort.

### **What if I have a question about assessment?**

Dr. Johnson, Director of the Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness, would be pleased to answer your questions, to speak at large or small group meetings and to supply you with all the information available from the OIRE possible, to support your assessment activities.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact the University Assessment Committee member from your area or Dr. Sharon Johnson, at phone extension 7922 or email at [johns@cedarville.edu](mailto:johns@cedarville.edu).