

**Xavier University of Louisiana
Outcomes Assessment Focus Report
2008-2009**



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS ----- 2

INTRODUCTION ----- 4

Institutional Effectiveness Structure ----- 4

Assessment Components ----- 4

Program Review ----- 4

Internal Audits ----- 5

Performance Review ----- 5

Outcomes Assessment ----- 5

Institutional Assessment Activities ----- 6

Assessment Software ----- 6

Personnel ----- 6

Annual Outcomes Assessment Report 2007-2008 ----- 6

Professional Development ----- 7

One –On –One Work Sessions ----- 7

Workshop/Presentation ----- 7

E-mail Reminders ----- 7

Assessment Process ----- 7

REVIEW OF ASSESSMENT PLANS AND RESULTS ----- 8

Assessment Plans ----- 8

Accomplishments ----- 9

Weaknesses ----- 9

CONCLUSIONS AND RECCOMENDATIONS ----- 10

APPENDIX A ----- 11

Assessment Process Completion by Deadlines ----- 11

APPENDIX B ----- 12

Number of Outcomes and Assessment Measures ----- 12

APPENDIX C ----- 13

Areas of Knowledge and Skills Assessed by Academic Program Units ----- 13

APPENDIX D ----- 14

Outcomes Assessed by Support Service Units ----- 14

APPENDIX E	15
Assessment Tools Used to Measure Success in Academic Programs	15
APPENDIX E	16
Assessment Results	16

INTRODUCTION

This fall we begin the third year of our new TracDat based system of outcomes assessment. The TracDat system follows almost two decades of our earlier system using the Nichols model of outcomes assessment. The Nichols system was paper-based while the new system is supported by web-based software.

Since the implementation of the TracDat system a lot of initiatives have been taken in terms of design, implementation, and adjustment of the assessment process by academic program units focusing principally on learning outcomes and operational outcomes by administrative and academic support service units. The report summarizes the planning and implementation of the University's assessment activities for the past two years and offers a critical look at the effectiveness of the new system. This report also provides recommendations to further strengthen the process.

Institutional Effectiveness Structure

Xavier University's effectiveness processes are based on planning, assessment, and environmental monitoring. Planning encompasses both strategic planning and master planning. The annual planning focus report describes planning in detail. Assessment includes unit assessments coordinated by the Office of Planning and Institutional Research, five-year academic program reviews, an internal audit process, and faculty and university administrator evaluations. Environmental monitoring gauges both internal and external forces that impact overall institutional effectiveness. The environmental monitoring focus report provides substantial detail regarding the process.

Assessment Components

Assessment is a continuous institutional effort built upon four components: unit outcomes assessment which includes both student learning outcomes and department/unit operational outcomes; academic program review; internal audits; and performance reviews for faculty and university administrators. These four areas constitute a comprehensive framework for the assessment of the University's programs and operations.

Program Review

The Vice President for Academic Affairs (VPAA) Planning Council coordinates ongoing program reviews of academic programs. These reviews are on a five-year cycle. During the fall semester, the VPAA Planning Council recommends faculty for appointment to review committees which are assigned to review specific academic programs. The Associate VPAA meets with each

committee and explains the program review process, and provides guidelines and criteria that the committee should use in the program review.

Internal Audits

The internal audit process parallels program review but with a focus on the administration and management of the university. The Internal Audit activity focuses on whether the University's network of risk management, control, and governance processes, as designed and described by management, is adequate and functioning appropriately. The internal audit process includes risk analysis, unit spot checks, and special projects. Internal audit assessment includes Financial Audits, Compliance Audits, Operational Audits, Electronic Processing Audits, and Investigative audits. The steps in the audit process include engagement notification, entrance conference, field work, communicating results, exit conference, final audit report, and follow up reviews.

Performance Review

The president is evaluated annually by the University Trustees.

The vice presidents reporting to the president are yearly reviewed by the president.

University administrators are evaluated annually. Each Vice President annually receives instructions, evaluation instruments, and guidelines for the evaluation from the Office of Human Resources Office.

Faculty are evaluated annually following procedures outlined in the Faculty Handbook.

Outcomes Assessment

The outcomes assessment process includes defining outcomes, specifying the assessment process and the appropriate benchmarks, gathering and analyzing data, evaluating results, and determining an action plan in response to results for all assessment units. The process also includes identifying and documenting the actual changes/improvement made due to the implementation of the proposed action plans in previous year. The charts cited in the Appendix section document Xavier's high achievement in completing all five benchmarks under the new system.

Xavier University has conducted outcome assessments for all academic program units and support service units since the 1999-2000 academic year. As previously noted, this system was reviewed and a new system was implemented for the 2007-2008 academic year. The implementation of this process has two fundamental focuses. The first is to develop and implement an effective and ongoing outcome assessment program that meets good assessment practices and that fully complies with SACS Comprehensive Standards 3.3.1 (Institutional Effectiveness). The second focus is to have an effective system to assess and

improve the performance of Xavier's educational programs, administrative and academic support service units, and to further Xavier's mission.

Institutional Assessment Activities

During the 2008-2009 academic year, Xavier University has undertaken several initiatives to improve the existing assessment process. Based on last year's recommendations, the Office of Planning and Institutional Research (OPIR) revised and implemented an earlier deadline for each stage in order to generate the 2008-2009 Institutional Assessment Report by deadline. In addition, OPIR sent several general e-mail reminders and initiated a series of discussions with assessment coordinators in order to help each assessment unit stay within deadlines. The Assessment Framework has also been revised for more effective implementation.

Over the past two years a number of activities and initiatives have been taken to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of Xavier's outcomes assessment. A new software system has been purchased and implemented, new personnel have been hired, the 2007-08 Annual Assessment Focus Report was published and distributed, a broad group of University faculty and staff engaged in professional development relevant to assessment, a series of one-on-one sessions with assessment coordinators in each academic department and administrative unit was held, email was utilized more fully to engage and remind, and a workshop/presentation on institutional effectiveness was held.

Assessment Software

In order to implement an effective institutional effectiveness program, Xavier University purchased and installed assessment management software: TracDat in 2007. TracDat is a web based software that provides a critical framework for institutional assessment, strategic planning, accreditation, and quality improvement processes across the campus. It is designed to allow individual units to input and update unit-specific data as well as generate standard reports suitable for review by an accreditation agency. The university also provided individual and group training sessions for each unit/department personnel/faculty on how to use and manage TracDat for outcomes assessment.

Personnel

In 2007-2008 year, Xavier University created a new position and hired a Director for Institutional Effectiveness and Assessment who is responsible for coordinating university-wide institutional effectiveness and assessment activities in order to build a long-term assessment culture.

Annual Outcomes Assessment Report 2007-2008

A major accomplishment during 2008-2009 year was to complete, publish, and present Annual Institutional Assessment Report 2007-2008 to the Xavier community including the University

Planning Council. Forty two copies of the assessment report have been distributed to Xavier University faculty and staff and the assessment report was also uploaded to the Office of Planning and Institutional Research (OPIR) website.

Professional Development

In order to promote culture of assessment and to improve skills needed for effective implementation of assessment activities, several faculty and staff including Xavier University President Dr. Norman Francis participated in SACS Summer Institute 2008 and SACS Annual Conference 2008. In July 2008, Dr. Loren Blanchard, Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs, Dr. Nasrin Fatima, Director for Institutional Effectiveness and Assessment, and Dr. Treva Lee, Director for Institutional Research attended the SACS - COC Summer Institute on Quality Enhancement and Accreditation. In December 2008, the following faculty and staff attended the SACS -COC Annual Meeting and participated in workshops to foster a deeper understanding of assessment, institutional effectiveness, and SACS reaffirmation requirements and procedures: Ms. Nedra Alcorn, Dr. Loren Blanchard, Dr. Kenneth Boutte, Dr. Ronald Durnford, Dr. Andrea Edwards, Dr. Nasrin Fatima, Dr. Norman Francis, Dr. Marguerite Giguette, Dr. Monique Guillory, Dr. Elliot Hammer, Dr. Wayne Harris, Dr. Michael Homan, Dr. Kathleen Kennedy, Dr. Treva Lee, Dr. Ross Louis, Dr. Ann Privett, Dr. Allen Rondall, Dr. Joseph Ross, Dr. Paul Schafer, and Mr. Calvin Tregre.

One –On –One Work Sessions

The Director for Institutional Effectiveness and Assessment conducted more than eighty one-on-one work sessions in order to complete the assessment cycle for 2008-2009 year based on the ad-hoc requests made by individual assessment units.

Workshop/Presentation

The Vice President for Planning and Institutional Research conducted a presentation for Xavier staff during the spring semester of 2009 covering an overall review of the SACS reaccreditation process and the importance of the institutional assessment process.

E-mail Reminders

The Director for Institutional Effectiveness and Assessment sent a number of mass e-mail reminders and many personal e-mail reminders to individual unit personnel to encourage timely compliance.

Assessment Process

During 2007-2008, Xavier University of Louisiana used a ten step framework for the assessment process. Evaluation at the end of that year led to a revisions and a 6-step process. Each step is connected to the next and ultimately contributes to the goal of successfully developing and implementing an effective assessment. These steps are summarized below:-

1. Assessment Orientation Meetings (September 2008- December 2008) – During this stage each individual unit head/chair was given suggestions and feedback to formulate outcomes and benchmarks for their respective units. All unit head/ chairs were asked to define their unit outcomes and articulate the measures that would be used to assess each outcome. During this stage, new faculty/ chairs/unit heads were also given one-on-one working sessions in order to train them in TracDat.
2. Define Outcomes, Assessment Methods, and Criterion (January 2009 – February 2009) – During this stage all unit head/chairs defined and documented a complete set of learning/operational outcomes, the measures that would be used to assess each outcome, and the criterion to ascertain success for each outcome for their respective units in TracDat.
3. Outcome Results Complete (May 2008 – July 2008) – During this stage all unit head/chairs gathered, analyzed, and documented their respective unit assessment results in TracDat, upload all relevant supporting documents in TracDat, wrote and documented action plans using the assessment results in TracDat for continuous improvement of programs and services.
4. Needed Remediation Identified (May 2008 – July 2008) – During this stage all unit head/chairs identified resources if needed for remediation.
5. Action Plan Follow Up Status Report (May 2008 – July 2008) – During this stage all unit head/chairs identified and documented the actual changes/improvement made in 2008-2009 year due to the implementation of the proposed action plans in 2007-2008.
6. Institutional Effectiveness and Assessment Report to UPT with Recommendations to Budget Committee (August 2008) – During this stage the Director for Institutional Effectiveness and Assessment is required to present Institutional Effectiveness Report 2007-2008 to the University Planning Council with the recommendation for needed action resources for future improvement.

REVIEW OF ASSESSMENT PLANS AND RESULTS

Assessment Plans

An analysis of the assessment plans documented in TracDat show that Xavier University academic program units have used a wide range of outcome indicators to measure student learning outcomes or academic achievements. These primarily consist of comparisons with national/regional norms using published test/exams, locally developed tests/exams, and grade

point average. A review of the assessment strategies indicate the about 16% of the outcomes were assessed using published tests/exams, 74% of the outcomes were assessed using locally developed test/exams. A small fraction of programs used course grades for their assessment measures (about 10% of the outcomes). It typically takes three years of data gathering and evaluation to assess effectiveness and to separate trends. The departments using grades are receiving one-on-one counseling for developing alternative measures for 2010-11 in order to meet good or best assessment practices.

The support service units also developed robust criteria and ways to measure their outcomes. Most of these units assessed processes and policies (work performance, project completion), customer satisfaction, and student learning outcomes. A review of the assessment methods indicate that 80% of all support service units assessed the effectiveness of their processes and policies, 50% of the units assessed customer satisfaction, and 45% of the support service units assessed student learning outcomes.

Accomplishments

Analysis of the assessment plans and results show substantial accomplishment and improvement but also weaknesses.

The assessment process is clearly taking hold under the new system. Ninety-seven percent of programs and units completed 2008-09 outcome assessment by deadline (up from 77% in 2007-08). All academic programs met deadline in 2008-09 (up from 85% the previous year); all academic support units completed the assessment process by deadline (up from 88%); the deadline completion rate for administrative support units improved dramatically from 57% to 90%.

The assessment process at Xavier is broad in scope. In 2007-08, 252 outcomes were assessed using 369 measures. In 2008-09, 273 outcomes were assessed using 417 measures. One cannot but conclude that there is a lot of assessing going on at Xavier. In aggregate, a higher fraction of benchmarks are being met in 2008-09 than in 2007-09. In 2007-08 about 44% of the benchmarks were met; in 2008-09 about 61%. Units have used and followed up on these assessment results. In 2008-2009, 97% of programs and units have implemented the proposed action plans by deadline.

Weaknesses

There are also weaknesses in the assessment process that will require corrective action. Some of the programs, as noted above, use course grades as an assessment measure. As also noted, we will be working to correct this during the next assessment cycle by helping departments find

alternative benchmarks that meet good practices. We will be doing one-on-one counseling to help departments and units to more effectively and clearly define some of their outcomes. In a few instances, program assessment for upper class students and seniors will need to add measures to assess a higher level of skills in Bloom's taxonomy (for instance, analysis/synthesis of knowledge).

Some of the support service units are limited in the power of their assessments by relying too heavily on indirect measures to assess learning and other outcomes. The outcomes for some units need refinement of specification and more clearly defined benchmarks. The vast majority of the outcomes in support units do not contain these problems (more than 80% of the outcomes do not have these issues).

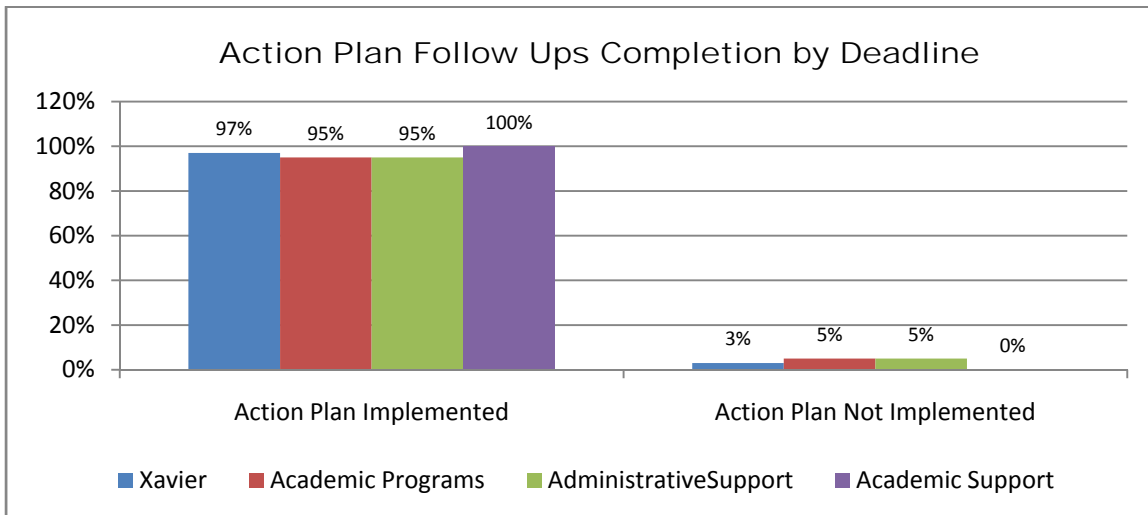
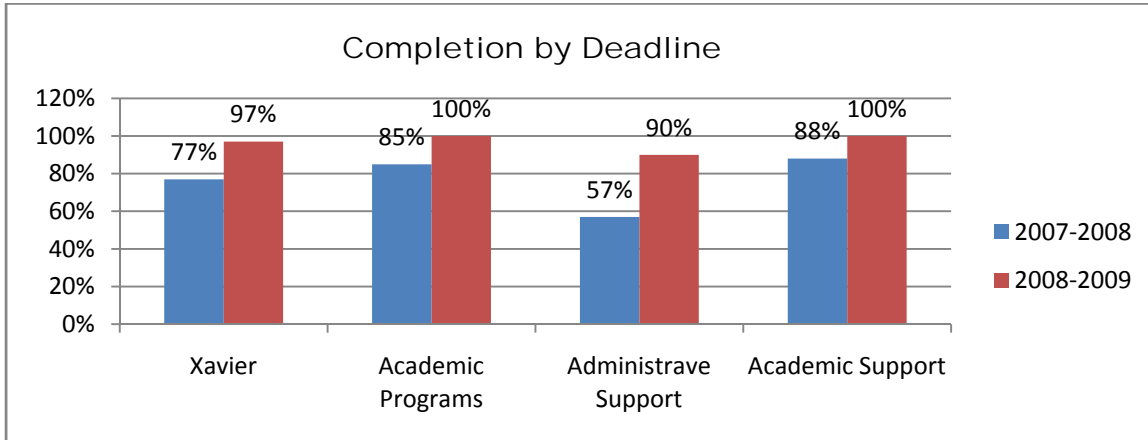
CONCLUSIONS AND RECCOMENDATIONS

Xavier has made great strides in a relatively short period of time in implementing a new system of leaning and unit outcomes assessment. A broad range of improvements and corrective actions have been taken to improve the process since the system was launched. A permanent position has been created to oversee and facilitate the assessment process. A major milestone was met in 2007-08 with the production of the first focus report for senior staff, the budget committee, and a broad range of University constituents. The report is published on the website of the Office of Planning and Institutional Research. A substantial group from the Xavier community has undertaken professional development to assist in improvement of the process. The process has been streamlined (from ten steps to six in 2008-09) and substantial effort has been given to one-on-one counseling and training. The improvement in deadline completion rates and the sheer volume and measurement of outcomes highlights the commitment of our community to the process. Because so many of our assessment criteria are being successfully met, we can expect in the next assessment cycle to raise our expectations and the assessment bar.

We have identified areas of weakness needing remediation but this in itself demonstrates that the process is working. We know where we need to focus and what we need to do to improve.

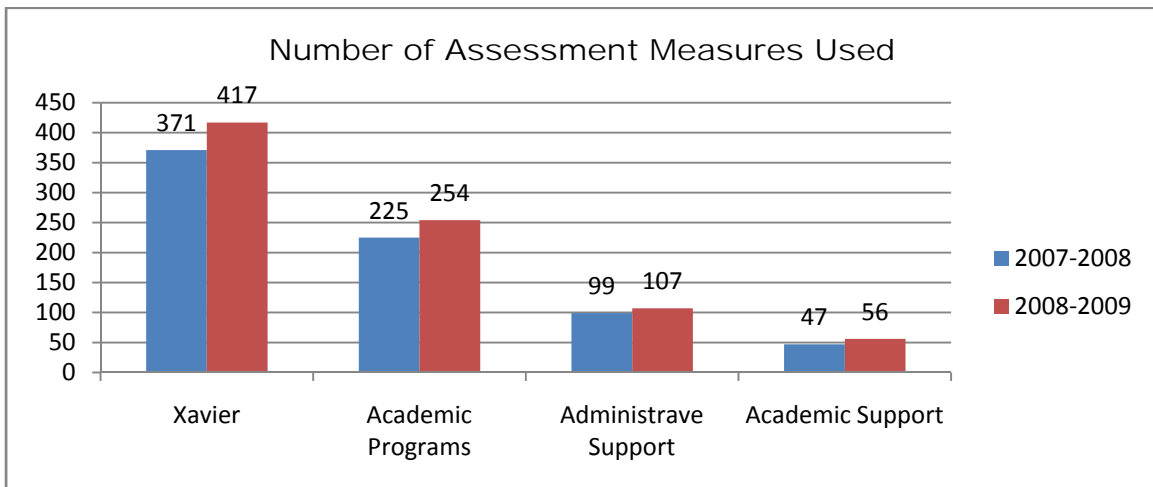
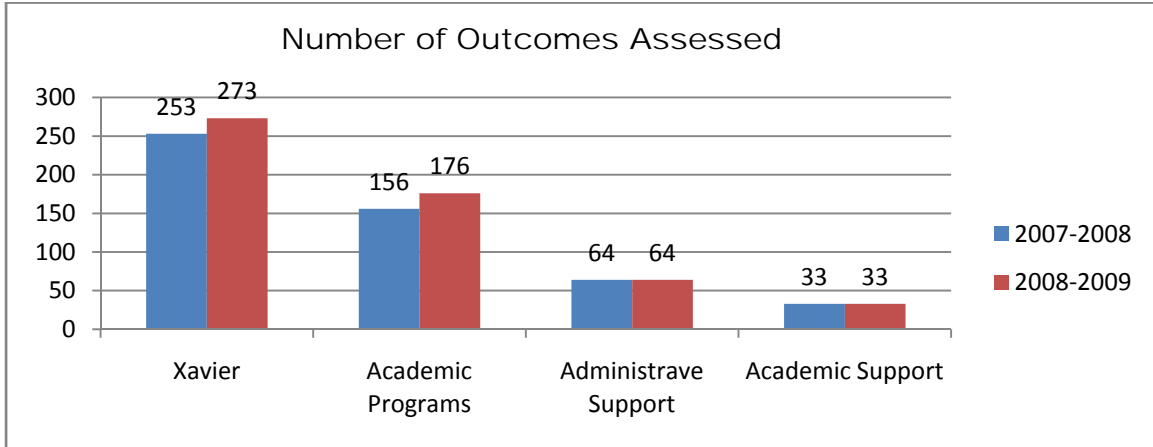
APPENDIX A

Assessment Process Completion by Deadlines



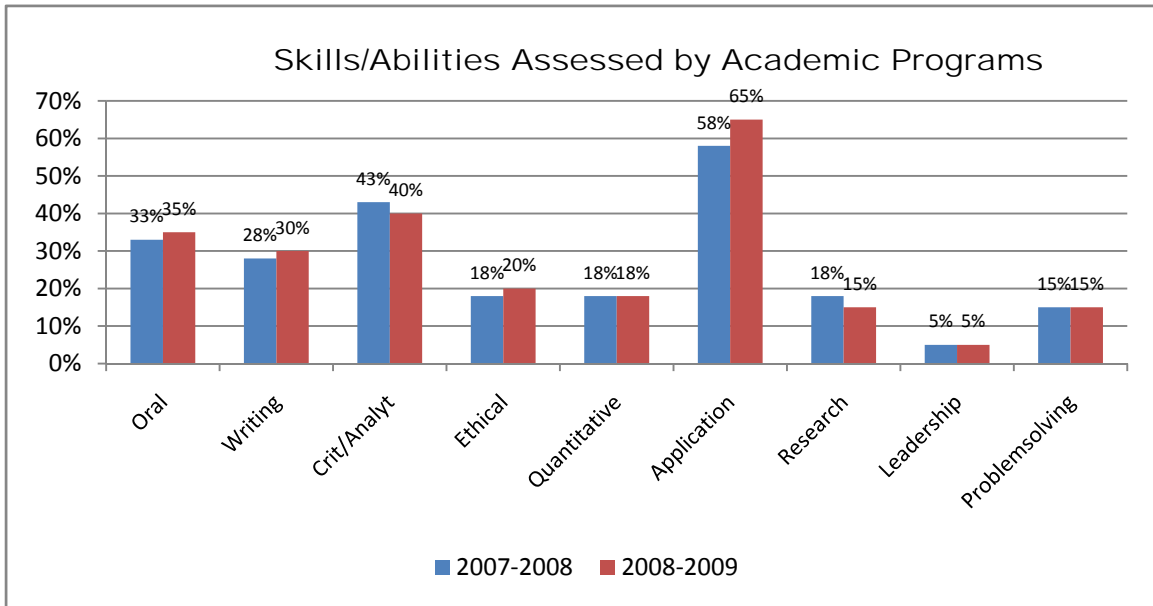
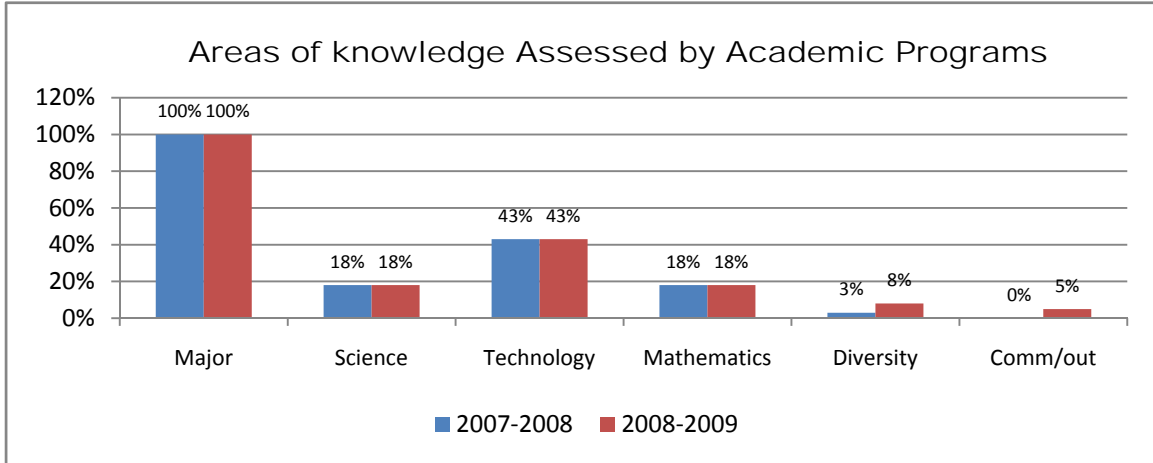
APPENDIX B

Number of Outcomes and Assessment Measures



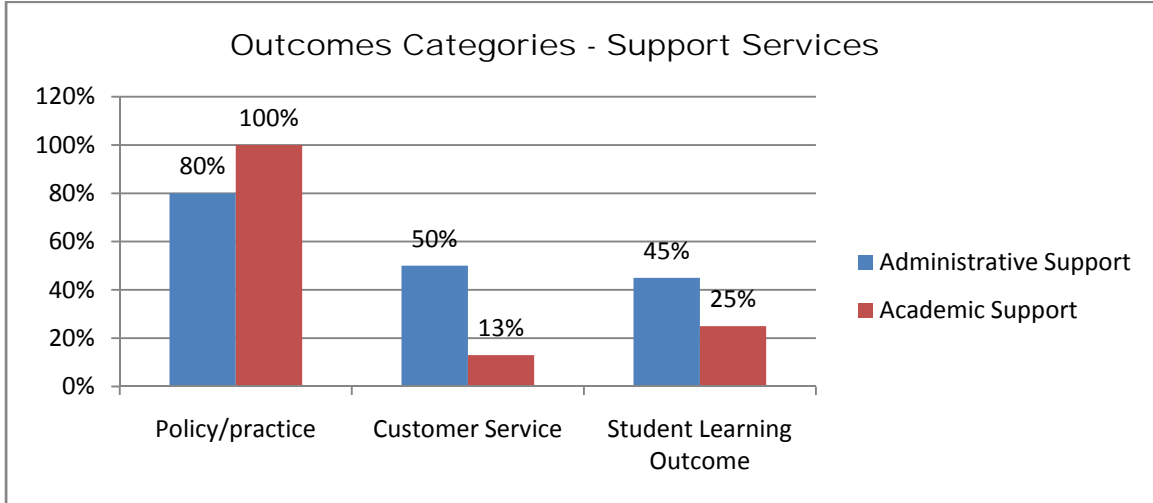
APPENDIX C

Areas of Knowledge and Skills Assessed by Academic Program Units



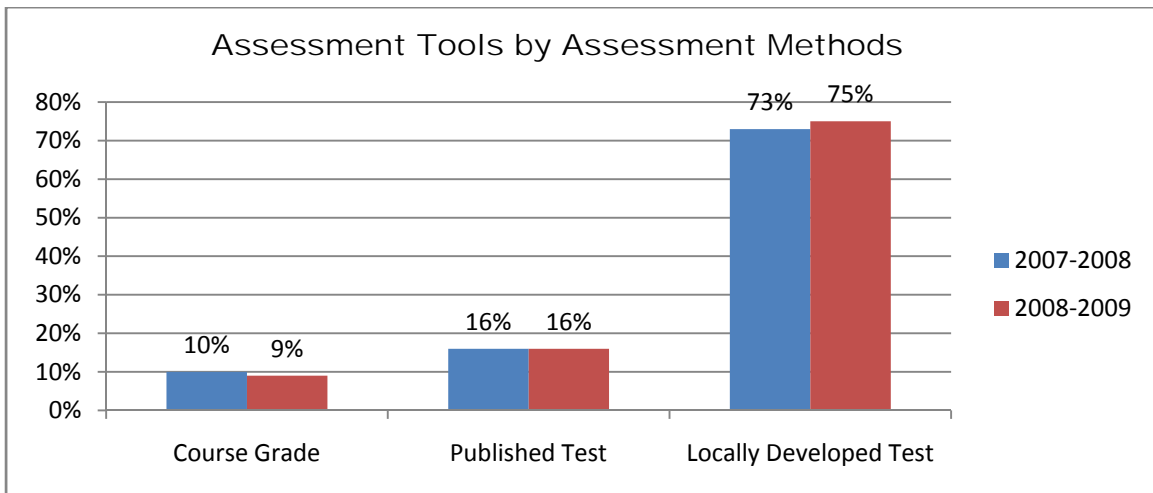
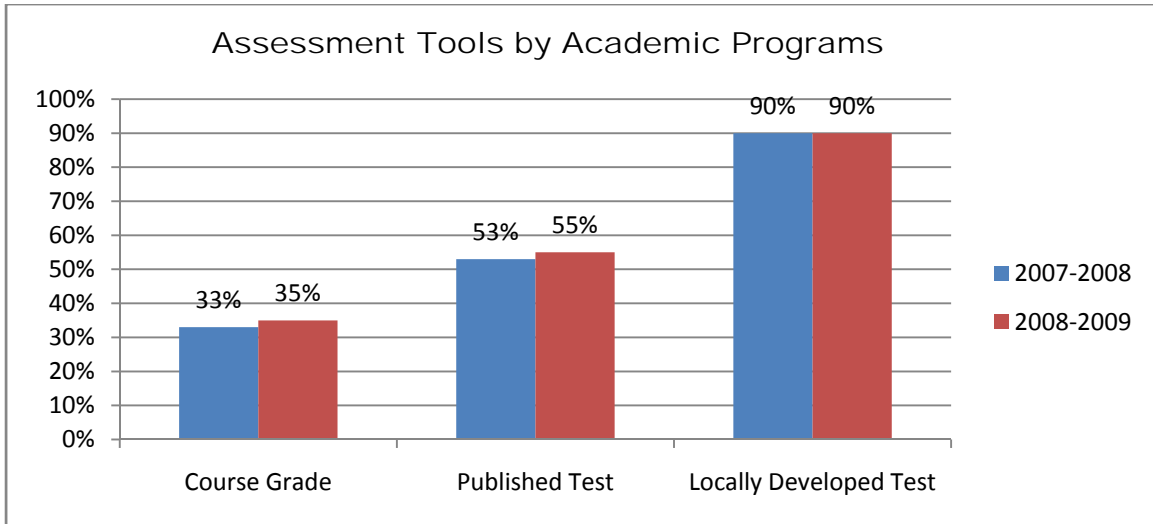
APPENDIX D

Outcomes Assessed by Support Service Units



APPENDIX E

Assessment Tools Used to Measure Success in Academic Programs



APPENDIX E

Assessment Results

