

Academic Support Unit Assessment Plan and Status Report

Division of Academic Affairs

Accreditation, Assessment, and Evaluation (AAE)

Institutional Effectiveness

Assessment Plan and Status Report

April 2019

Ritu Subramony

Unit Director

1. History and Context

Accreditation, Assessment, and Evaluation (AAE) was formerly the Office of Assessment Services. AAE came into existence because of the merger of the Office of Assessment Services with the Academic Accreditation function – following the recommendation of the Program Prioritization Administrative Task Force effort in 2016. This new unit reports to the Office of Institutional Effectiveness (IE) formalized in Spring 2017, which also includes Institutional Research, Decision Support and Analysis, and Academic Planning. In its current form, AAE serves the centralized function of maintaining academic accreditation and supporting programmatic assessment of student learning outcomes to promote continuous curricular improvement. AAE also supports university-wide assessment and accreditation initiatives and consults with academic support units to advance educational excellence by evaluating unit-level learning outcomes.

Unit Composition

Around the time that OAS merged with Academic Accreditation in August 2016, the unit was faced with recent attrition of three key staff resources (Associate vice Provost for Academic Outcomes, Associate Director, and Assessment Coordinator). The merger offered a cost-saving opportunity by revising the unit lead’s position to a director’s position. In this capacity, the director of academic accreditation’s portfolio was expanded by adding assessment responsibilities. In order to support the unit’s operations, AAE was able to hire an associate director in a temporary capacity for one year (August 2016-June 2017). This position was vacant until AAE’s recent hire of an associate director in February 2019. Changes in unit composition are listed in table 1a and 1b.

Table 1a. Comparison of OAS and AAE Unit Composition

Office of Assessment Services (OAS) 2014	Accreditation, Assessment, and Evaluation (AAE) 2019
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Associate Vice Provost for Academic Outcomes Assessment • Associate Director, OAS • Research Associate for Special Projects • Assessment Coordinator • Office Manager • 3 Graduate Research Assistants (60 hours/week combined) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Director, AAE • Associate Director, AAE • Senior Research Associate • Educational Evaluation Program Coordinator • 2 Graduate Research Assistants (40 hours/week) • Intern* 10 hours/week

Table 1b. Personnel Changes by Year

Category	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Staff	4	3	3	3	4
Students	4	3	2	2.5	2.5

AAE Functions

AAE operations follow the five guiding principles of IE:

- 1) **mutuality and collaboration** with our internal clients and within our colleagues in IE
- 2) **communication** regarding our projects and processes with NIU stakeholders
- 3) **accountability and continuous improvement** efforts to promote accurate and timely information dissemination
- 4) **integrity and transparency** of data and information reported to clients
- 5) **respect** for our colleagues

As its primary function, AAE promotes and supports assessment efforts across campus by coordinating university-wide assessment initiatives and hosting workshops and individualized consultations with academic degree programs and academic support units across campus. AAE staff provide guidelines and templates for developing programmatic assessment plans and evaluating program-level student learning for academic degree programs and academic support units. Through its participation on the University Assessment Panel (UAP), AAE strives to ensure that programmatic assessment processes and methodologies are of high quality, reflect sound assessment practices, and involve substantial participation of faculty and staff.

One major assessment initiative coordinated by A is the annual alumni survey that gathers information on the experiences and outcomes of NIU graduates. Specifically, evaluated are: alumni degree satisfaction, employment opportunities, career advancements, and perceptions of academic and co-curricular support while at NIU.

In addition to maintaining our regional accreditation with the Higher Learning Commission, AAE supports all accredited programs across the seven colleges with any assessment needs to their specialized accrediting bodies. As part of an established process, all materials such as accreditation annual updates, self-study, interim reports, and progress reports to be submitted to any external programmatic/disciplinary accrediting agency are reviewed by AAE prior to their external submission. This model allows for quality checks and ongoing communication between central administration and program level administration in regards to the strengths and needs of our discipline specific accredited programs.

Serving as a resource repository of campus assessment efforts, AAE maintains an active website that contains all resource material for university assessment initiatives. Examples of resources include guidelines and templates, student learning-outcomes by degree program, trends in alumni outcomes, list of accredited programs and their cycles, and Assessment Expo materials displaying best practices in assessment at NIU. Additionally, several key university-level findings are shared annually through the assessment website:

<https://www.niu.edu/effectiveness/assessment/index.shtml> . Illustrative examples include: 1) Annual Assessment Update Report, 2) University Writing Project Report, and 3) Annual Alumni Survey Results with three-year trends.

In 2016, AAE added an evaluation function to its key roles in assessment and accreditation. Major evaluation initiatives since 2016 have been 1) developing an evaluation framework for a National Science Foundation (NSF) grant project, 2) evaluating the Program Prioritization process, 3) developing an evaluation framework and measures for two programs at the Latino Resource Center, and 4) ad hoc evaluation projects e.g., survey development and evaluation of external reviews for programs undergoing program review.

Table 2 below provides a comparison of the key OAS initiatives and the expanded AAE project inventory that is instrumental in pursuing its mission and goals as a function within Institutional Effectiveness.

Table 2: Major University Assessment Projects and Initiatives: OAS and AAE Comparisons

OAS 2014 Initiatives	Current Status/Change	Area	AAE 2016-2019 Projects
1. Annual Alumni Survey	continues	Assessment	1. Annual Alumni Survey
2. Annual Assessment Updates (academic degree programs; aka June 1 Report)	continues	Assessment	2. Annual Assessment Updates (academic degree programs; aka June 1 Report)
3. Annual Assessment Expo	continues	Assessment	3. Assessment Expo- conducted in 2017; Assessment Workshop in 2018
4. Assessment Funding Requests	Discontinued in 2016		
5. UAP Mid-Status Reports (academic degree programs and academic support units)	continues	Assessment	4. UAP Mid-Status Reports (academic degree programs and academic support units)
6. Campus Assessment Network (CAN)	Discontinued since 2014		
7. Capstone Course Development	Discontinued since 2016		
8. Fall Assessment Speaker Series	Discontinued since 2016		
9. Office of Assessment Services Website as university resource	modified	AAE	5. Institutional Effectiveness (IE) website as a university resource
10. Sabbatical Leaves Outcomes Report	Transferred to IR in 2017		
11. Student Advisory Council on Learning Outcomes (SACLO)	Discontinued prior to 2015		
12. University Writing Project (UWP)	continues	Assessment	6. University Writing Project (UWP)
13. Voluntary System of Accountability	Discontinued in 2016		
14. Assessment scholarship and research	Continues	AAE	7. Assessment, accreditation, and evaluation scholarship and research
	Added	Accreditation	8. Higher Learning Commission (HLC) regional accreditation maintenance activities in 10-year Open Pathway cycle
	Added	Accreditation	9. Ad hoc HLC projects pertaining to policy changes (e.g., facilitating faculty credentials policy in 2017)
	Added	Accreditation	10. HLC Off-campus site visits- every five years
	Added	Accreditation	11. Fourth year Assurance Argument to HLC (2018 submission)
	Added	Accreditation	12. Multi-year HLC Quality Initiative starting 2019

	Added	Accreditation	13. Twenty-six Programmatic/Disciplinary accreditation reports review- self-studies, annual reports, site visit support
	Added	Evaluation	14. Evaluation projects e.g., LRC programs, ad hoc surveys
	Added	Accreditation	15. Federal compliance activities e.g., Course Activity Documentation (CAD), Program Locations inventory
		Assessment	16. Assessment Workshops
Assessment consultations	Continues	Assessment	17. Assessment consultations
Committee participation GEC	Continues/added	AAE	18. Committee participation- GEC, SESS, UAP
	Added	Assessment	19. Program Review Dashboards for alumni outcomes
	continuous	Assessment, Accreditation	20. Assessment Summaries for Program Review linking assessment and accreditation reviews (by academic degree program)

2. Mission, Goals and Objectives

Vision Statement

Per the 2014 Vision of the Office of Assessment Services (OAS), the vision of OAS was, “to ensure that curricular, program, and student assessment is done exceptionally well, is intrinsically highly valued, and is incorporated in day-to-day decision making, ultimately furthering and advancing student successes.” AAE continues to abide by this vision as it supports excellence in assessment and accreditation actions to advance programmatic efforts in enhancing educational excellence for NIU students.

Mission Statement

The OAS mission from 2014 states that, “The Office of Assessment Services is committed to fostering engaged and proactive assessment across Northern Illinois University by providing program assessment resources and expertise, managing assessment initiatives, acting as a clearinghouse for assessment data, and conducting assessment research that is meaningful to NIU stakeholders.” Currently, AAE continues to adhere to this stated mission while also adding our commitment to fostering campus engagement in proactively meeting the university’s regional accreditation requirements to ensure positive institutional outcomes, due to our continued excellent standing with our regional accreditor, the Higher Learning Commission (HLC).

Unit Goals and Objectives

The 2014 OAS assessment plan covered four overarching goals supported by several objectives. The status report in the following sections illustrates the evaluation of these goals based on data available. The 2016 merger between the university’s academic accreditation and assessment functions necessitated the need for a revision of our unit goals and operations. The impetus to develop a new culture was fueled by an environment that had suffered a significant loss of operational knowledge due to the turnover of three key employees of OAS. The revised assessment plan presented to the UAP for review has been devised based on our current team’s (4 staff and 2 graduate research assistants) analysis of the following factors:

1. Alignment of our unit’s values to IE’s guiding principles and expanded mission of AAE beyond assessment
2. Revised project inventory since the creation of AAE
3. Analysis of operational metrics
 - a. Unit efficiency (i.e., active projects per year and process time for each project)
 - b. Unit quality (i.e., product/process quality gauged through client satisfaction and self-evaluation by AAE team members)
 - c. Unit skillset (i.e., individual professional skills, collective capacities, and professional development needs)
4. Improvement actions undertaken in 2016-2019 period to address noted gaps in any of the above operational metrics
5. Actively fostering a cohesive culture of collaboration, accountability, communication, and teamwork within AAE.

AAE’s revised goals and objectives are cross-mapped with the previous OAS 2014 goals and objectives in table 3 below.

Table 3. Revised AAE Goals and Objectives

OAS 2014 Goals (Previous)	AAE 2019 Goals (Revised)
1. The Office of Assessment Services will manage and coordinate university-wide assessment initiatives that meet the needs of multiple stakeholders.	I. AAE will manage, coordinate, and enhance university-wide assessment initiatives to advance academic and co-curricular student learning outcomes at NIU.
Objective 1.1. The assessment programs of academic degree programs and support units will be of high quality, demonstrating: clear, appropriate, and measureable student learning outcomes; appropriate direct and indirect assessment methods that address all student learning objectives on a regular basis; effective data analysis, interpretation, and reporting; and appropriate use of results for continuous improvement efforts.	Objective 1.1. Enhance the quality and completion of annual assessment updates (June 1 Report) to continually improve use of student learning outcomes data in programmatic decision-making.
Objective 1.2. The Office of Assessment Services will manage major university-wide assessment initiatives efficiently by acting on opportunities to constrain costs or improve efficiencies (i.e., increase production for the same cost).	Objective 1.2. Enhance the quality and timely completion of mid-status reports to enhance the use of effective assessment systems that inform programmatic decision-making for student learning outcomes.
	II. AAE will manage, coordinate, and enhance university-wide accreditation initiatives to advance institutional outcomes for NIU stakeholders.
	Objective 2.1 Maintain the quality, accuracy, and timeliness of all regional and disciplinary/programmatic accreditation reporting and initiatives for the institution.
	Objective 2.2. Facilitate linkages between programmatic assessment and disciplinary accreditation standards, where relevant, to support and enhance continuous quality improvement of programs in supporting learning outcomes.

<p>2. The Office of Assessment Services will provide quality program assessment resources and expertise to the NIU community through outreach, consultations, and professional development.</p>	<p>III. AAE will provide effective program assessment resources and expertise to the NIU community through their website, consultations and professional development.</p>
<p>Objective 2.1. At the conclusion of OAS sponsored events, participants will indicate the professional development opportunity topic is relevant, useful, and has potential to positively impact student success.</p>	<p>Objective 3.1. At the conclusion of AAE-sponsored events, participants will indicate a high level of satisfaction with, and value for the usefulness of the professional development activity and or consultation in enhancing their understanding of assessment practices</p>
<p>Objective 2.2. Office of Assessment Services clients will be satisfied with the services they received and better able to improve their assessment program.</p>	<p>Objective 3.2. AAE will provide direct consultations and professional development activities based on client need.</p>
<p>Objective 2.3. The Office of Assessment Services website will be a useful resource for program assessment information</p>	
<p>3. The Office of Assessment Services will facilitate the collection, linking, and dissemination of assessment data and activities for use by the NIU community in continuous improvement efforts.</p>	<p>IV. AAE will provide results of centralized assessment initiatives to enhance the culture of assessment and evaluation at NIU.</p>
<p>Objective 3.1. The Office of Assessment Services will facilitate the collection of program assessment data and activities for continuous improvement efforts through sufficient participation and representative response rates</p>	<p>Objective 4.1. AAE will disseminate results and reports annually to various university committees in order to enhance data-informed decision-making and quality improvement based on assessment results.</p>
<p>Objective 3.2. The Office of Assessment Services will disseminate results and reports that are useful for continuous improvement efforts.</p>	<p>Objective 4.2. AAE websites will contribute to disseminating knowledge of assessment practices, results, and resources.</p>
<p>4. The Office of Assessment Services will conduct assessment research that identifies best practices, addresses strategic issues, and informs decision-making.</p>	<p>V. AAE members will individually and as a unit actively conduct research and promote the use of evidence-based best practices in the areas of assessment, accreditation, and evaluation to impact institutional policies and procedures</p>
<p>Objective 4.1. Annually, the Office of Assessment Services will produce or co-produce at least one high quality article accepted for publication in a peer-reviewed journal that identifies best practices, addresses strategic issues, and/or informs decision-making.</p>	<p>Objective 5.1. Annually, each AAE team member will present or co-present research findings at a minimum of at least one regional or national conference related to higher education assessment, evaluation, or accreditation.</p>
<p>Objective 4.2. Annually, the Office of Assessment Services will present or co-present research results at a minimum of at least one regional or national professional conference that identifies best practices, addresses strategic issues, and/or informs decision-making.</p>	<p>Objective 5.2. Annually, AAE will collectively make at least 3 presentations at regional or national higher education conferences/workshops.</p>

3. Assessment Methods per 2014 OAS Assessment Plan

Assessment Method	Description	Method Type	Assessment Target	Timeline	Person Responsible	Goal Addressed
Annual Assessment Update Report (all degree programs)	An authentic assessment of the quality of degree program assessment activities conducted over the past year. Degree programs annually report on data collection, analysis, and use of results for two program assessments. A rubric is used to assess the quality of the assessment activities, with a focus on clear and appropriate student learning outcomes, appropriate direct and indirect assessment methods, effective data reporting, and appropriate use of results for continuous improvement efforts.	Direct Data available in status report	All degree programs have all criteria met	Summer	Associate Director	1, 2, 3
UAP Status Report Review (1/8 th of degree programs)	An authentic assessment of the status reports that degree programs submit at the mid-point of the program review cycle. A rubric assesses the quality of the assessment program, with a focus on clear and appropriate student learning outcomes, appropriate direct and indirect assessment methods, effective data reporting, and appropriate use of results for continuous improvement efforts.	Direct Current data available	All degree programs have all criteria met	Fall	Associate Director	1, 2, 3

Assessment Method	Description	Method Type	Assessment Target	Timeline	Person Responsible	Goal Addressed
Annual APC Program Review Report (1/8 th of degree programs)	An assessment of the findings of the APC's yearly program reviews. The APC Program Review Report documents the number of degree programs that are required to submit follow-up reports related to their assessment of student learning outcomes.	Direct No data available	No degree programs are asked to submit a follow up report related to their assessment of student outcomes	Fall	Associate Vice Provost	1, 2, 3
OAS Event Survey	Following OAS-sponsored events, participants are surveyed to measure perceptions of the relevance and usefulness of the topic, and how the professional development opportunity may positively impact student success.	Direct Data available in status report	80% of participants find the topic relevant, useful, and has potential to positively impact student success.	After each professional development opportunity	Associate Director	2, 3
Project Cost Allocation Report	A cost allocation evaluation to estimate project costs associated with University level assessment initiatives (e.g., the alumni survey and VSA)	Direct Data available in status report	Total Activity Cost is the same or less, or production is higher at the same cost	Annually for one major university assessment initiative	Associate Vice Provost	1
Alumni Survey	A survey of all graduates one year after graduation is administered. The information from this survey is used in making improvements to programs and services, as well as helping to measure the value of earning a degree at NIU. The alumni survey is administered first in electronic format, then hard copy, then via phone calls until the target response rate is met.	Direct Data available in status report	Sample has a 30% response rate, and the distribution represents the university at the College level	Spring	Assessment Coordinator	1, 2, 3

Assessment Method	Description	Method Type	Assessment Target	Timeline	Person Responsible	Goal Addressed
University Writing Project	An authentic assessment of upper-level student writing skills utilizing course-embedded assignments. Student writing samples are scored using a Department of English general writing rubric that assesses focus, genre, audience, organization, critical thinking, writer's presence, and presentation.	Direct Data available in status report	Sample contains 450 writing samples, with a distribution representing the university at the College level	Spring	Assessment Coordinator	2, 3
VSA-VALUE Rubric Project	An authentic assessment of student writing and critical thinking skills using course-embedded writing assignments from freshman and seniors. Student writing samples are scored using rubrics that are aligned with AAC&U VALUE rubrics. The assessment data is reported in the Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA).	Direct Project discontinued	Sample contains 350 freshman and 350 senior writing samples, with a distribution representing the university at the College level	Spring	Research Associate	2, 3
Published article	A manuscript submitted for publication reporting results that identify best practices, addresses strategic issues, and/or informs decision-making. The manuscript will be evaluated based on its quality and suitability for publication in a peer-reviewed journal.	Direct Previous data not relevant	At least one article published in a peer reviewed journal	Summer	Associate Vice Provost	3, 4

Assessment Method	Description	Method Type	Assessment Target	Timeline	Person Responsible	Goal Addressed
Conference presentation	A proposal submitted to a conference reporting results that identify best practices, addresses strategic issues, and/or inform decision-making. The proposal will be evaluated based on its quality and suitability for presentation at a regional or national conference.	Direct Current data available	At least one regional or national conference presentation	Summer	Associate Vice Provost	3, 4

2014 OAS Goals-by-Methods Matrix

Assessment Method	Goal (Outcome)			
	1	2	3	4
Annual Assessment Update Report (all degree programs)	D		D	
UAP Status Report (1/8 th of degree programs)	d		d	
APC Program Review Report (1/8 th of degree programs)	d		d	
Professional Development Survey	D	I		
Project Cost Allocation Report	D			
Alumni Survey		D	D	
University Writing Project		D	D	
VSA-VALUE Rubric Project		D	D	
Published article			D	D
Conference presentation			D	D

OAS 2014 Note. D = Direct assessment method, I = Indirect assessment method. Bold indicates data is present in the status report, lower case indicates data has not been collected.

2019 AAE Goals by Methods Matrix	2019 AAE Revised Goals (Outcomes)				
	I. AAE will manage, coordinate, and enhance university-wide assessment initiatives to advance academic and co-curricular student learning outcomes at NIU	II. AAE will manage, coordinate, and enhance university-wide accreditation initiatives to advance institutional outcomes for NIU stakeholders	III. AAE will provide effective program assessment resources and evaluation expertise to the NIU community through their website, consultations and professional development	IV. AAE will provide results of centralized assessment initiatives to enhance the culture of assessment and evaluation at NIU	V. AAE members will individually and as a unit actively conduct research and promote the use of evidence-based best practices in the areas of assessment, accreditation, and evaluation to impact institutional policies and procedures
Annual Assessment Update Summary Report (Completion rates; Gap analysis for university degree programs)	1.1 (D/S)			4.1 (D/S)	
UAP Status Feedback Summary Report (Gap analysis for all programs reviewed)	1.2 (D/S)			4.1 (D/S)	

Program Review Assessment Summaries(Academic Planning Council review feedback of assessment summaries)	1.2 (D/S)	2.2 (D/S)		4.1 (D/S)	
AAE Project Self Evaluation	I/F	I/F	I/F	I/F	
Professional development events e.g., workshops, expos, consultations (frequency of events; client satisfaction and usefulness of content)			3.2 (D/S)		
Alumni Survey (Response rates; trends; satisfaction with Alumni dashboards)			D/S	4.1 & 4.2 (D/S)	
University Writing Project (participation and usefulness)				4.1 (D/S)	
Website page tracking				4.2 (I/F)	

Accreditation- reports review (frequency, client feedback on usefulness)		2.1 (D/S)			
Program evaluations projects (client satisfaction, frequency of projects)			D/S		
Growth in accreditation, assessment, evaluation consultations (tracking database for frequency counts, and content area needs)			3.2 (D/S)		
Conference presentation, grants, published articles, external recognition					5.1 and 5.2 (D/S)
*Client satisfaction surveys (for all above projects used as methods)	I/S	I/S	I/S	I/S	

2019 AAE Revised Goals-by-Methods Matrix- summarized

Assessment Method	Goal (Outcome)				
	1	2	3	4	5
Annual Assessment Update Report (Appendix A template aggregated for all degree programs)	X			X	
UAP Status Feedback Report	X			X	
Program Assessment Summary for Program Review (appendix G Alumni Dashboard trends)	X	X		X	
AAE Project Self Evaluation	X	X	X	X	
Professional development events e.g., workshops, expos, consultations (Appendix D Evaluation form)			X		
Alumni Survey			X	X	
University Writing Project				X	
Website page tracking				X	
Accreditation- reports review		X			
Annual program evaluations			X		
Growth in accreditation, assessment, evaluation consultations (tracking database for frequency counts and content area needs)			X		
Conference presentation, grants, published articles, external recognition					X

Client satisfaction surveys (Appendix F)	X	X	X	X	
--	---	---	---	---	--