A GUIDE TO CO-CURRICULAR ASSESSMENT

Office of Institutional Effectiveness

Introduction

Co-Curricular assessment encompasses the annual evaluation of programs and operations within all co-curricular units, which we define as any unit not serving in a strictly academic capacity. The Office of Institutional Effectiveness wants to lend our expertise to other units to help them make better-informed and more effective decisions. The goal of this program is to provide unit managers with data and tools to assist them in managing and improving their units.

The data, dashboards, and reports produced by this process help unit managers to:
- Figure out what works and what does not
- Make better-informed decisions
- Present evidence when someone asks *why* they made those decisions
- Debate ideas for improvement based on that evidence instead of guesswork
- Defend requests for resources needed to meet the goals that they have set
- Demonstrate their unit's contribution to the college

The Process

Rather than taking a prescriptive, top-down approach, this process is driven by the individual unit managers with guidance from an assessment coordinator from the Office of Institutional Effectiveness.

The process consists of the following four stages:
1. Planning the assessment
2. Conducting the assessment
3. Closing the loop
4. Ongoing assessment

The assessment coordinator will be available to provide guidance and assistance at all stages of the process, though the degree of that involvement will vary from step to step. The coordinator's involvement in each unit's process will also likely decrease somewhat from year to year as individual managers become more comfortable with the process and can complete more steps independently. Conversely, the coordinator's level of involvement will be high if the unit manager is new to the position or to the assessment process. A list of questions for guiding assessment planning is provided below (Appendix A).

Stage 1: Planning the assessment
1. *Objectives*: Each manager identifies the major objectives of their unit which align with the strategic goals of Goodwin College. A unit will generally have 1-3 major objectives.
2. *Measures*: The managers and the assessment coordinator work together to develop several measures of each unit's progress—generally, a minimum of 2 per objective.
3. *Data*: Development of each measure requires careful consideration of what data is already available, what new data may be realistically obtained, and how to collect that new data. Planned data sources should be settled on for a measure before that measure is finalized.
4. *Goals*: The managers determine realistic performance goals for each measure.

Stage 1 is conducted in close collaboration between the unit manager and the assessment coordinator. While final decisions are left to the unit manager as much as possible, the assessment coordinator provides guidance to ensure that the plan provides a solid foundation for assessment efforts.

This includes wording measures in a way that:
- Makes their meaning clear to someone (like the coordinator) who does not necessarily use the specialized vocabulary of the unit on a daily basis.
- Ensures they can be measured properly as written.
- Is not open to alternative interpretations.
- Makes their saliency to the objectives apparent.

It also includes making sure that there is a workable and sustainable plan for collecting any and all data which is necessary for the evaluation of these measures, before moving forward.

When all of these things are settled on, the assessment coordinator will draft a formal plan. A template for this plan is provided below (Appendix B). The plan will then be signed by the coordinator, the unit manager, and the unit manager's direct supervisor. These signed documents will be scanned, and the coordinator will keep the original on file. A digital copy will be stored in the OIE drive, and will be emailed to the signatories, the relevant Vice President, and the Assistant Vice President of Institutional Effectiveness for their records.

Stage 2: Conducting the assessment

5. *Data collection*: This includes both marshalling any existing data and collecting any new data needed. The assessment coordinator assists the managers with developing data collection tools and tracking systems when necessary.
6. *Analysis*: The assessment coordinator assists the managers with analyzing the data.
7. *Self-judgment*: Now that the unit manager has measured their unit's performance on these measures, they decide whether or not they are satisfied with this level of performance by checking it against the goals they set.

Once the plan is in place, it must be carried out. The first time a unit conducts an assessment, this stage will also be conducted in close collaboration with the coordinator. The long-term goal of the Office of Institutional Effectiveness is to gradually train the unit managers to do most of this routine work themselves, while remaining available to assist with particularly rigorous or otherwise complicated analyses as necessary.

Particularly for the unit's first assessment, Step 7 can be tricky. Many of the initial goals will be set without a clear pre-existing picture of current performance. This means that in some cases, goals will have been set unrealistically high or low. Annual goals can and should be revised moving forward to reflect realistic ambitions for improvement.

<u>Stage 3: Closing the loop</u>

8. *Strategies for improvement*: If the unit manager is satisfied with performance, no particular strategy for improvement is necessary. If they are not satisfied with performance—either because the original goal was not met, or because they wish to meet an even higher standard next year—a strategy must be developed to address how current performance will be improved.
9. *Reporting*: A report will be submitted by the unit manager at the end of the assessment cycle (mid-January).
10. *Implementation*: Some strategies may require the approval of a higher authority within the college, or approval of a request for more resources. In these cases, implementation will necessarily be delayed until such approval is received. Any strategies which do not require such approval should be implemented immediately.

Step 8 is another one which must be handled carefully. It is tempting, when goals have been met—and perhaps even exceeded—to set them aside and not revisit them. It is entirely reasonable to do this with one or more satisfactorily fulfilled measures, particularly if a unit is falling short in another area which requires a concentrated redirection of efforts for improvement. However, for the sake of accountability, any decision to accept current performance on a measure should be explained in the report submitted by the unit manager. Keep in mind that if performance is far above the goal, this is likely a sign that the goal was unrealistically low and should be revised upward for future assessments.

There are also several responses when goals have not been met, depending on the exact circumstances. If performance is very close to the goal, it's possible that no specific strategy change is necessary in order to achieve it in the future, especially if historical data shows that performance has been steadily improving. If performance is far below the goal, this is likely a sign that the goal was unrealistically high and should be revised downward for future assessment. However, in such cases, the unit manager had some reason (expectation, intuition, or ambition) for setting the goal so high. This means the revised goal should likely still reflect an ambitious and aggressive drive for improvement.

The annual report is due in mid-January. It is timed this way so that any strategy for improvement which involves requesting greater resources can be submitted in time for annual budget deliberations. A basic template for this report is provided below (Appendix C), and the assessment coordinator is available to review drafts if necessary.

Reports are submitted by the unit manager to the assessment coordinator. The assessment coordinator will share these reports with the manager's supervisor and Vice President, the Assistant Vice President of Institutional Effectiveness, and the College Committee on Assessment (CCA). Digital copies will be stored in the OIE drive and on the CCA SharePoint.

Stage 4: Ongoing assessment
    11. Continuing assessment of existing measures
    12. Focus on measures for which improvement strategies have been implemented
    13. Add new measures as necessary or appropriate

Generally speaking, Stage 4 is rinse and repeat—an annual reiteration of Stages 1-3, but with Steps 11-13 conducted as part of Stage 1.

From a long-term viewpoint, Step 11 is arguably the single most important step of the entire process. Following it enables a long view of accountability within a particular unit, a demonstration of progress over time, and consistent documentation of results for the President's Cabinet and outside accrediting bodies such as NEASC.

For this reason, in almost all cases, *any measure which a unit starts assessing should continue to be assessed*, regardless of performance. Removal of measures from a unit's ongoing assessment program will only take place with the approval of both the assessment coordinator and the unit manager's supervisor. Measures should only be considered for removal if the measure does not relate to one of the unit's objectives, or if the unit consistently exceeds the goal for that measure *and* continued assessment of it is somehow an unreasonable burden. If a measure is removed for any reason, *the data collected on the measure up to that point must be retained*.

Any time a strategy for improving a particular outcome is implemented, the next year's assessment should give special focus to evaluating the success of this strategy. Depending on the complexity of the strategy, this may require the addition of new measures or data collection efforts, or may be as simple as continuing the existing data collection regarding this outcome.

Once an annual self-assessment program has been started, it is designed to be relatively easy to maintain; the unit just needs to keep collecting the data on a regular basis and submitting their annual report. If they are trying to improve in an area where they are not reaching their goals, then that area will be the primary focus of the next report.

Appendix A: Questions to Guide Co-Curricular Assessment Planning

Questions for Stage 1
The purpose of this stage is to help the unit choose measures, set performance goals, and make a plan to determine a baseline of performance.

1. *Objectives*: Keeping in mind the mission of this unit, what are our top-level objectives? How do these tie in to the larger strategic goals of the college?
2. *Output & outcome measures*: How will we know if we are achieving those objectives? What are the outputs and outcomes that need to be measured?
3. *Existing data*: What data are we already collecting which relates to the measures? How are we collecting it? Where is it stored? How far back does it go?
4. *New data collection*: What new data do we need to collect, who will be doing it, and how (surveys, pre- and post-tests, interviews, focus groups, etc.)?
5. *Goals*: What are your goals for each of the measures from Question 2?

Questions for Stages 2 & 3
Once the data has been collected and analyzed, the unit will have performance baselines established for all measures, so they will be able to see where they are or aren't meeting their goals. The purpose of these stages is identifying opportunities for improvement and generating strategies for the same.

6. *Judgment***:** What is your judgment of current performance? Which outputs and outcomes merely need to be maintained, and which need to be improved?
7. *Goals:* Are the goals as previously set realistic, or do they need revision?
8. *Maintenance***:** For those outputs and outcomes which only need to be maintained, what are your strategies for maintaining them? Do you anticipate these strategies requiring any additional resources to implement?
9. *Improvement***:** For those measures which need improvement, what are your goals for improvement, and what are your strategies for reaching those goals? Do you anticipate these strategies requiring any additional resources to implement? How will you assess the outcomes of those strategies—will the current assessment program be enough?

Questions for Stage 4
Repeat Stages 1-3, with special emphasis on any areas the unit has identified as needing improvement.

Appendix B: Co-Curricular Assessment Plan Template

| Unit: |
| Unit Manager: |
| Fiscal Year: |

The unit indicated above wishes to determine whether they are meeting the objectives listed in column 1 below. To do this, we will be establishing baseline for the performance measures listed in the second column below. The third column indicates what data already exists or will be collected to establish this baseline. The unit has also chosen performance goals, with the understanding that they may or may not currently be meeting these goals.

Objective	Measure	Data	Goal

The analyst and the unit manager will meet again on _____ to analyze the data, create the baselines, and plan for the rest of the assessment cycle.

A final report will be due no later than _____. This report should include the data, analysis, strategies for improvement, and (if applicable) any additional resources the unit thinks it will require to implement these strategies. The analyst will provide a basic outline for this report at the _____ meeting, and will be available to review drafts if necessary.

I understand and agree to the plan described above:

_____   _____   _____
Assessment Coordinator   Unit Manager   Unit Manager's Supervisor[1]
(Name)   (Name)   (Name)

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[1] If this is someone other than a Vice President, the appropriate Vice President will also receive a copy of this document for their records, but does not need to sign it.

Appendix C: Co-Curricular Assessment Annual Report Template

Executive Summary
This section has a length limit of one page, because its purpose is to give a solid overview of the total contents of this report. It is a summary of everything below, primarily focusing on any recommendations and whatever you consider to be the most important pieces of information. It is acceptable to present some of this in bullet points.

Introduction
This section is a summary of the assessment plan, and may be anywhere from a paragraph to a page. What does your office do? What are the things you decided you wanted to assess? Why?

Major Objective 1 (Repeat section for each Major Objective)
Describe your first major objective, and what measures you're using to examine it.

Objective 1, Measure 1 (Repeat subsection for each measure)
Describe the measure, what the goal is (if applicable), and details on how the data was collected and where it is kept. Then present the data. Talk about how the results compare with the goal. Use the following matrix as a basic guide for how to approach this:

	Satisfied with results	*Unsatisfied with results*
Met goal	"We met our goal and it's a good place to be. We'll keep tracking it, but we're content with this state of affairs."	"We met our goal and expect that we would like to meet a higher goal to meet by the time of the next report. Here's how."
Didn't meet goal	It is unlikely you will find yourself in this quadrant. If you are, you need a very good explanation.	"Unfortunately we are not performing at the level we want to be. Here's how we plan to change that."

Please don't actually use the exact contents of this matrix. These sections should be as short or long as they need to be in order to explain what the data means, why it looks the way it does, what your plan for improvement is (if applicable), and why you're requesting resources for that plan (if applicable).

Recommendations
Anything you pose above which you believe requires other people to take action (approving requests for resources, some sort of collaboration with another office, etc.) should be combined in this section so it's all in one place. You can probably do some copy/paste work with minimal editing. You can elaborate further if necessary. The length of this section depends on how many things actually need to be included. If you're satisfied with all of your results, this section would just say something like "Given the results presented above, no recommendations are being put forward at this time."

The assessment coordinator from the Office of Institutional Effectiveness will be available to review drafts of this report on request.