Introduction

Gonzaga University is pleased to submit this report at the request of the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities and in advance of a focused visit by Dr. James D. Worthington, scheduled for April 25, 2007.

The focus of this report pertains to the progress made by Gonzaga University with respect to the development of an institution-wide academic outcomes assessment program. At the time of Gonzaga University’s comprehensive evaluation in April 2004, the visiting team found the institution’s assessment-related efforts inadequate, particularly as they related to (a) faculty involvement, understanding and interest, and (b) consistency across academic departments. As a result, the Commission recommended that Gonzaga University take the necessary steps to assist faculty members in enhancing and expanding their knowledge of assessment, in addition to developing a more comprehensive assessment program.

At the conclusion of a focused interim visit in Fall 2005, the evaluator concluded that insufficient progress regarding the development of an institution-wide outcomes assessment program had been made. Though the same visitor determined that excellent progress had been made with respect to faculty evaluation, the Commission determined that the institution remained out of compliance with regards to outcomes assessment and requested a focused visit for the Spring of 2007.

This document is intended to provide the evaluator with a report of progress on the significant amount of work carried out and substantial progress made with respect to learning outcomes assessment at Gonzaga since the time of the original comprehensive visit, as well as the focused visit in Fall 2005.

Recommendations

(1) Although a small number of administrators and faculty have worked with dedication and diligence on outcomes assessment, much remains to be done and progress toward the required goal of assessment is disappointing. Although there is guarded optimism among those most committed to the assessment process, this evaluator can only repeat the words
of the 2004 evaluation committee: “there is concern that the University has not yet implemented a university wide program.” It is recommended that all those programs without an implemented assessment process move with dispatch to develop and use assessment in their planning and that the University work to insure that assessment is effective and ongoing for its various programs (Standard 2.B and Policy 2.2). [Recommendation 1 of the Fall 2005 Focused Interim Evaluation Report.]

(4) It is recommended that faculty be involved in the development of Gonzaga University’s outcomes assessment. This is crucial to the usefulness and success of assessment. Faculty should see this process as something other than added work, but as a process which offers opportunity for developing more successful student learning (Standard 2.B, and Policy 2.2). [Recommendation 4 of the Spring 2004 Comprehensive Evaluation Report.]

Response to the Recommendations

Gonzaga has thoroughly considered each of the Commission’s recommendations and developed a multi-pronged approach to develop a structurally sound and sustainable outcomes assessment program. Notwithstanding the conclusions of the focused visit, the University has been actively involved in the development of a comprehensive outcomes assessment program since completion of the 2004 Self-Study. Most of these efforts have been designed to educate, encourage, and engage the faculty – an issue at the core of the original Comprehensive evaluation. Though the development of a robust, sustainable outcomes assessment program is an ongoing process, we believe our accomplishments to date have been significant and effective. In addition to our internal sense of progress and achievement, the University has also received external validation and approval with respect to assessment from two of its specialized accrediting bodies: the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business, International Association for Management Education (AACSB), and the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). Gonzaga hosted both site visits in November 2006 (see Exhibit 1 for documents relevant to these visits).

Much of what has been accomplished has been the result of rethinking our basic approach to the assessment and shifting that approach to move from an administratively-driven effort to a faculty-driven one. It is an approach that seeks to generate faculty understanding of and enthusiasm for developing a culture of assessment which in turn
creates more effective classroom learning and academic program development (and ultimately, more competent graduates). Initially, the general faculty response to this initiative was one of apathy and, in some cases, outright hostility. To more effectively engage the faculty, we made a concerted effort to effect attitudinal change through education and open dialogue.

By late October of 2005, every academic area was directed by the Academic Vice President to submit an assessment plan to Assistant Academic Vice President Jolanta Kozyra that clearly indicates the learning objectives, the measures and tools by which these objectives will be gathered and evaluated, and a timeframe for their implementation. To assist the departments with the development and/or the fine-tuning of these assessment plans, Jolanta Kozyra and Dr. Herzog met with virtually every academic department and/or Department Chair to clarify the task at hand, to offer assistance, and to listen to their concerns so that they could be effectively addressed. With the support of the University President, the Academic Vice President also encouraged the Deans to identify any resources needed to ensure that assessment becomes a sustainable institutional priority now and for the years ahead.

In December of 2005, the University immediately set up a discussion board, or “Blackboard,” providing a place for faculty to express their concerns, to ask questions, to discuss various assessment issues, and begin to explore ways of making assessment more relevant, effective, and efficient (ref. Exhibit 2). Fully cognizant of the importance of dialogue, the Academic Vice President made it clear that he was operating out of an open-door policy to allow faculty to express their concerns about assessment and ask questions about how to recognize and effectively implement “good assessment” practices in the classroom, as well as how to maximize student learning outcomes through effective teaching methods. In October 2005, the Academic Vice President appointed Jolanta Kozyra, Assistant Academic Vice President, to oversee the entire process and to provide regular updates about the status of the assessment program to him, to the Deans, and to the faculty. Dr. Michael Herzog, a professor of English, was asked to become the primary liaison of the AVP regarding assessment with the College of Arts and Sciences, our largest school. Further, each of the professional schools also appointed a faculty member to serve as that area’s liaison and representative on assessment (see Exhibit 3).

The Assessment Committee of the Academic Council, comprised primarily of faculty, had previously been identified as the central body that would review, analyze, and return the submitted materials with appropriate feedback (see documents at Exhibit 4). Under the supervision of and coordination by Jolanta Kozyra, this committee provided comprehensive feedback to each department early in the Spring 2006 semester. By way
of this formal feedback, the departments were informed if their plan needed further revisions or if it was ready for implementation (example at Exhibit 5).

In February 2006, Jolanta Kozyra, Dr. Michael Herzog, and Dr. Heather Easterling (Assistant Professor of English) attended the 6th Annual Assessment Conference hosted by Texas A&M University. They returned to Gonzaga University with valuable information and ideas to enhance and make more effective the University’s assessment program. Drs. Herzog and Easterling made presentations to interested faculty groups on what they had learned, specifically the ways in which understanding, application, and measurement of student learning outcomes could benefit the work faculty care about most.

In Spring of 2006, the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences invited Dr. Elizabeth Street [Professor of Psychology and Executive Assistant to the President, Central Washington University] to address the faculty of the College and to answer questions and respond to faculty concerns about outcomes assessment. A number of the members of the Assessment Committee also participated in this session. Her session was found both useful and informative to most of the faculty who attended it. That semester, the University also hosted Dr. Kenneth Pickering, a globally recognized figure active in assessment work throughout the British Commonwealth, to speak to the faculty about learning outcomes assessment. (See speaker information at Exhibit 6.) Whenever possible, the Academic Vice President and his staff publicly reminded the community to make assessment a faculty-centered approach that is open to and respectful of a wide range of assessment models and strategies rather than a directive that came from Administration exclusively seeking numeric data.

Following the initial request for assessment plans, every academic program was also requested to submit an inaugural Annual Assessment Report by August 2006 (samples at Exhibit 7). All have complied with this request and have submitted reports that provide relevant information about their respective assessment work and progress. As we anticipated, these reports vary in their nature, format, and quality. Some are outstanding, some are adequate, and some need continued attention. Overall, the Academic Vice President is pleased with the results. We consider these reports critically important in our efforts to institutionalize learning outcomes assessment by way of affording the faculty the much desired flexibility and patience to understand what is valuable and applicable specifically to them. We believe that with continued education, support, and experience, these reports will play an important role in program planning, improvement, and evaluation.
Assessment was a primary focus of the Fall 2006 Faculty Conference. The importance of understanding student learning outcomes to ensure that our students were receiving the best quality education Gonzaga University could provide was emphasized once again. To assist in further enhancing faculty competence in assessment and developing a culture of faculty commitment to assessment, Gonzaga hosted Dr. John Bean, Professor of English and Director of Writing at Seattle University and a nationally recognized expert in assessment, to deliver a presentation on “faculty-rich talk” to the faculty during fall semester, 2006. This visit provided faculty with a model for engaging in the kind of thoughtful conversation that allows them to focus on what is nearest and dearest to them: how to be more effective teachers, educational program planners, and carriers of the educational mission emphasized in the Gonzaga Mission Statement. The response to Dr. Bean by those faculty members who attended his presentations was extremely positive. His focus, on the correlation between the most effective teaching methods and student learning outcomes, inspired Dr. Christina (Tina) Geithner, Associate Professor of Exercise Science and Chair of the Assessment Committee, to ask the Faculty Senate to invite Professor Bean back to campus for the Spring Faculty conference in January 2007, so that all of the faculty could benefit from his extensive experience and expertise. More than 200 faculty members attended this presentation and, as a follow-up, Dr. Bean met with the Academic Deans to discuss how they could support faculty efforts on assessment. Dr. Bean’s model of “rich faculty talk” resonated powerfully with many faculty and contributed significantly to the faculty’s developing perception that assessment carries important benefits for them.

Additionally, on February 8, 2007, Gonzaga hosted Dr. John Webster, Director of Writing Assessment at the University of Washington to share his expertise and knowledge with our faculty, specifically on writing and assessment. More than 150 faculty attended Dr. Webster’s presentation. While Professor Webster’s presentation may have been too narrowly focused, it was nevertheless useful to many faculty members, as well as to a number of departments with whom he met individually (see Exhibit 6).

Dr. Webster’s presentation culminated in a conversation among our key faculty engaged in assessment, including Dr. Teresa Derrickson, the Director of our Center for Teaching and Advising (CTA). In this session, very constructive brainstorming informed our next steps on the integration of assessment training, education, and conversation through the CTA and other avenues. Specifically, we considered various models of how best to use our next opportunity for university-wide assessment work.

To emphasize the importance of assessment at Gonzaga and the administrative support for it, the AVP asked that morning classes be cancelled so that the faculty could
participate in Dr. Webster’s presentation. They were also given two hours to work on assessment in their own departments and schools. This dedicated time was provided at the request of various faculty members. Further, in an effort to institutionalize the importance of engaging in quality work on assessment, the Academic Vice President announced that Gonzaga would devote a morning each fall to provide the faculty a common time to further the integration of outcomes assessment into the faculty’s teaching and to continue to support the value of information achieved through outcomes assessment work in the context of institutional culture. October 3, 2007, has been identified in the fall schedule as the institution’s assessment morning.

For more than eighteen months, the Academic Vice President’s team has devoted regular time in its weekly meetings to address the progress of our outcomes assessment efforts. Given the role that assessment now plays at our institution, Gonzaga hired Mr. Daniel Bubb, Coordinator of Outcomes Assessment, to assist faculty with any and all assessment questions and needs that they may have, and to coordinate institutional goals and activities related to assessment. Mr. Bubb comes from Missouri Valley College, where he served as a faculty member and co-chaired a successful assessment process that was positively accepted by the regional accrediting agency (Resume at Exhibit 8). Mr. Bubb serves on the Assessment Committee of the Academic Council as an ex-officio member and reports directly to Jolanta Kozyra, Assistant Academic Vice President. In addition to creating this new position, Gonzaga’s administration has also committed financial resources for the College of Arts and Sciences and each of the Professional Schools to be dedicated specifically to assessment work (ref. Exhibit 9).

Recently, Ms. Marny Lombard, a part-time journalist for Gonzaga University, published an article in “Spirit,” a newsletter for faculty and staff (presented as Exhibit 10). This piece outlined the improved assessment program and new initiatives implemented by the Assessment Committee, Coordinator of Outcomes Assessment, and the Academic Vice-President’s team. In her article, Ms. Lombard specifically noted the positive response by the faculty to the presentations by guest speakers John Bean and John Webster. She also interviewed Dr. Stephen Freedman, Mr. Bubb, Dr. Herzog, and Dr. Geithner, providing their respective perspectives about past initiatives the University has implemented and the new initiatives, showing the depth and expansion of the improved assessment program, and literally making assessment a front-page topic for everyone.

Most recently, Mr. Bubb attended the 7th Annual Assessment Conference hosted by Texas A&M University, returning with additional useful information and ideas about how to improve Gonzaga University’s assessment program, as well as how to make helpful connections with other colleges and universities (Exhibit 11). On February 23, 2007, as a delegate from the Academic Vice President’s area, Ms. Kozyra attended the
Northwest Commission’s annual meeting in Seattle to learn more about the accreditation process, and to ensure that the academic area of Gonzaga is knowledgeable and responsive to the Commission’s standards and expectations.

Since early February, Gonzaga University and Seattle University have begun an exciting collaboration on an assessment project in hopes of receiving a grant from the Teagle Foundation. This foundation funds colleges and universities working closely together to create new or what the foundation calls “fresh thinking” approaches to assessment while simultaneously encouraging faculty to become more engaged in assessment and student learning outcomes. Together, we are applying for a $25,000 grant that is renewable for three years, and ultimately we hope to compete for and receive a $300,000 annual grant. The specific focus our two Jesuit universities have chosen as our collaborative centerpiece is “social justice,” and we intend to collaborate in exploring how this core piece of our two mission statements is supported in our work and how well we are measuring it. As Jesuit institutions, we have a unique opportunity to clearly demonstrate how assessment can play an increasingly important role in the heart of the Jesuit educational system, supporting one of our foundational core beliefs: that our goal is the support of a larger culture that operates out of social justice This grant would help us to determine how well we are doing in this regard and how to improve our efforts, using outcomes assessment both to determine what this goal would look like in practical terms and how to measure our achievements. The Teagle Foundation is only the beginning of Gonzaga University’s grant seeking initiatives, however, as we intend to seek funding from other foundations to help us expand and enhance our University assessment program (see Exhibit 12).

It should be noted that the issue of Outcomes Assessment, and the development of an effective assessment program, has been a focus for our Board of Trustees as well. At every level of the institution, the importance of creating and sustaining effective assessment of educational outcomes is understood and supported.

Conclusion

The University is pleased with the meaningful progress that we have made since the Commission’s last visit to Gonzaga in Fall 2005. Not only do our assessment plans, reports, and other documents speak to the significant work that has gone on over the last two years in concrete and tangible efforts, but we have also made significant progress with regard to faculty participation, education, and commitment to assessment. The numerous assessment activities have increasingly been initiated, organized, and led by
faculty themselves rather than by the administration. We realize that the assessment process itself is a means to a goal, and not just a goal itself. Gonzaga’s process incorporates data from psychometric and discourse-based activity and will continue to be gathered, analyzed, and discussed to optimize results and their potential applications to the teaching-learning process.

The initiatives outlined in this report are some among many we are implementing to meet our short-term as well as our long-term goals. Some of the key initiatives that are currently in various stages of development include an assessment handbook, a flexible and user-friendly computer software (currently in the final stages of completion under the leadership of Dr. Stephen Zemke, faculty in the School of Engineering and Applied Science), a webpage for our entire assessment program accessible for viewing by other higher education institutions and the public, and the presentation of aspects of our assessment program at conferences. We are now well-equipped to bring and incorporate our assessment work into the next phase. Specifically, under the continued capable leadership of Dr. Geithner as Chair of the Assessment Committee, in the coming academic year and beyond we plan to work on assessment with regard to the core curriculum, and to tackle the challenging, but important, question of what makes our graduates unique.

Gonzaga University has made notable progress with respect to our institutional commitment to learning outcomes assessment as a critically important and valuable component of our dedication to academic excellence. Our ultimate goal is a program that exceeds the standard in assessment for other institutions our size and complexion.

We look forward to sharing further evidence of our work and achievements during the evaluator’s visit to our campus on April 25, 2007. This evidence will include our Annual Assessment Reports, relevant meeting minutes, internal working documents, speaker announcements, invitations to assessment workshops and conversations, and other relevant documents.
GONZAGA UNIVERSITY

SPRING 2007 FOCUSED INTERIM REPORT

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b) National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education

Exhibit 2… Blackboard site of University Assessment Web Forum

Exhibit 3… a) College/School Assessment Liaisons in Academic Year 2005-2006

b) Information Packet for Assessment Liaisons and Department Chairs

Exhibit 4… a) Academic Council Bylaws

b) Assessment Committee Operations/Procedures

c) Assessment Committee Members in Academic Year 2005-2006

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e) Monthly Assessment Outcomes Progress Report

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Exhibit 5… a) Assessment Plan Feedback Form (2005-2006)

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Exhibit 8… a) Curriculum Vita for Daniel Bubb, Coordinator of Outcomes Assessment

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Exhibit 10… a) Assessment Article in Gonzaga University’s “Spirit” Newsletter

Exhibit 11… a) Follow-Up Report on Daniel Bubb’s Attendance at the 7th Annual Texas A&M Assessment Conference

Exhibit 12… a) Teagle Foundation Grant Proposal Draft

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