

Report on Assessment in Online Degrees

Provost's Task Force, Spring 2014

Contents

1. Executive Summary
2. Context
3. Recommendations
4. Suggested Actions
5. Next Steps
6. Appendices
 - A. Inventory of Program Assessment in Online Degrees: Summary 2014
 - B. Strengths and Challenges in Program Assessment in Online Degrees at WSU
 - C. Provost's Charge; Task Force Outcomes and Activities

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Provost's Task Force Report on Assessment in Online Degrees, Spring 2014

1. Executive Summary

The task force inventoried program assessment practices in WSU's 15 degrees offered online¹; inventory results and task force discussion created a snapshot of current strengths and challenges. Results are suggestive, rather than definitive.

Strengths: Most degrees offered online have student learning outcomes, assessment plans, curriculum maps, direct and indirect measures. All degrees have the same student learning outcomes for online and on campus degree programs (if any), and most have published SLOs. Overall, most online degree programs report they are *developing* or *refining* their assessment data collection, systems and practices (as do most WSU degrees, regardless of location).

Challenges and Areas for Attention: Few online degree programs report that assessment roles are clearly defined (3 out of 15); about one-third of the programs report that assessment data is collected and reviewed on a regular schedule, and one-third said they use assessment for decision-making in their online program.

Noted: Assessment practices in online degrees appear to vary considerably. Attention may be needed to increase program-level assessment of student learning in some online degrees, distinct from course level assessment. There is wide variation in whether or how online instructors participate in program assessment or discuss or use assessment results. Similarly, programs vary in the extent to which they collect and analyze assessment data. While most programs reported collecting a direct measure, the inventory did not provide details of the measures, such as whether faculty use rubrics or grades, or if student performance is assessed near the end of the degree.

The inventory results and discussion (see appendices) guided the task force's recommendations and suggested actions. Recommendations include ways to develop sustainable assessment systems and expectations in the departments and academic units, to share good practices, and to value and incentivize teaching online. Several recommendations address infrastructure or initiatives at the institutional level, such as leveraging WSU technology updates for assessment, tracking graduates, and coordinating publication of student learning outcomes. Finally, the task force offered recommendations to further the university's culture of assessment.

The task force developed possible next steps which the Provost's Office might use to prioritize and implement suggested actions, coordinating among colleges and other stakeholders. The appendices provide summaries of the inventory results and of strengths and challenges identified by the task force.

2. Context

WSU's accreditor, the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU), reaffirmed the university's accreditation in 2013, with a recommendation to "ensure that student learning outcome information from online programs and courses are consistently included in assessment processes." The related Peer-Evaluation Report noted that "Information on whether assessment includes learning outcomes information for students taking online programs or courses appears to be undocumented and unknown."

To help WSU address this recommendation, Provost Bernardo sent a memo to all deans, campus vice chancellors, associate deans, chairs and assessment leads for online degrees forming a one-semester task force to review assessment in online programs. The charge of the group was to inventory how online programs are assessing student learning, share strong practices and successes, identify any gaps, and provide a brief report with recommendations and results.

This report will be shared with the Provost, the Liaison Council, the Graduate Advisory Council, and Global Campus.

¹ In this report, *degrees* refers to undergraduate degrees and to graduate degree programs. Six graduate programs are new or new online, with no or few graduates. See appendix A, Inventory of Program Assessment in Online Degrees, for the list of degrees that participated.

3. Recommendations

Assessment Systems and Practices in Departments and Academic Units

1. **Develop Sustainable Assessment Systems and Expectations.** Clarify expectations, roles and infrastructure in each department regarding assessment practices in and including their online degree and instructors who teach online.
2. **Use Online Directors.** Ensure that each degree offered online has a faculty responsible for coordinating assessment. Departmental oversight of online degrees is essential to ensure quality, consistency and adequate preparation to offer classes. Not all programs have an online director or similar oversight person, and assessment is inconsistent.
3. **Share and Deepen Good Practices.** Give assessment sustained attention to mature and produce useful results. Essential elements of assessment are in place in most online degrees (student learning outcomes, assessment plans, curriculum maps, direct and indirect measures – see *Summary of Assessment Inventory Results*) and are coordinated with on campus program assessment.
4. **Value and Incentivize Teaching Online.** Recognize that teaching online is not less work, less skillful or less professional. In fact, there can be new skills to learn in order to teach well online.

Infrastructure at the Institutional Level for Assessment

5. **Increase Nimbleness.** Ensure infrastructure and systems so online courses and programs are nimble and responsive, keep up to date, and compete nationally for students. (75% of the market is currently for-profit institutions which tend to respond quickly.) Online programs need to quickly respond to student experience; problems can be invisible for a while and negative student comments can live on forever on the internet.
6. **Leverage WSU Technology Updates for Assessment.** Leverage strengths and good practices of a new course evaluation system and the new LMS to provide additional useful assessments of teaching and learning, including timely information to use to make adjustments or interventions during the semester, rather than after it's over.
7. **Track Graduates at University Level.** Apply university resources to track its graduates -- where they end up working or studying. Every degree needs this crucial, overarching assessment data. Departments are not resourced to do this, cannot begin to keep an accurate data base, and with a university-wide effort much more could be accomplished. This data would give departments much needed information about the value of their curriculum and degree, which could be used for recruiting, retention, and curricular updates, and satisfy accreditation requirements.
8. **Coordinate Publication of Student Learning Outcomes.** Establish one place at the university where current SLOs for each degree can be listed and linked to by other units, coordinating with campuses, departments, Global Campus, advising, catalog, students, faculty, and staff.

Institutional Culture of Assessment

9. **Broaden Institutional Support for Assessment.** Demonstrate WSU's commitment to assessment through its strategic priorities, administrative actions, and material support for online and on campus degree programs. University administrators have a vital role to play in program assessment. They provide direction and earnest support for assessment so faculty and staff understand how assessment contributes to the core values and mission of the university. Leadership should explicitly encourage diverse units to coordinate -- see other recommendations.
10. **Value and Incentivize Assessment in Online Degrees.** It takes sustained investment and attention to collect, analyze, and interpret data about student learning that is useful for departments. Assessment can demonstrate the value of a WSU online degree in a competitive market, crucial for the long-term viability of online programs.

4. Suggested Actions

The suggested actions that follow each recommendation a) offer a number of ways the recommendation could be achieved; and b) should be adjusted and applied based on the unique context and needs of each program to support effective assessment of student learning. *It is not intended that any particular program undertake all suggested actions. For many suggestions, coordinated approaches involving a number of units would likely yield better returns.*

Assessment Systems and Practices in the Departments and Academic Units

1. **Develop Sustainable Assessment Systems and Expectations.** Clarify expectations, roles and infrastructure in each department regarding assessment practices in and including their online degree and instructors who teach online.

Suggested Actions:

- a. Schedule dedicated time for teaching faculty to meet and discuss the program including: program outcomes, assessment results, and opportunities for program improvement.
 - b. Clarify ways that instructors who teach online can participate in discussion of assessment
 - c. Help instructors better understand program-level assessment and participate in using the data. Where applicable, involve adjunct instructors, TA Coordinators, and TAs in assessment discussions and processes.
 - d. Leverage distance technology if needed to connect distributed faculty, chair, etc.
 - e. Develop systems and expectations of sharing assessment questions and results so that the data collected is also used. As necessary, clarify roles, including that of faculty, chair/director, etc. and assessment archive.
 - f. Include faculty with teaching responsibility, as well as adjuncts, in course-level and program-level assessment so assessment results can be used to improve the program.
 - g. Encourage the use of curriculum maps to identify how and where students are expected to learn core knowledge and skills in online programs.
 - h. Develop a steering committee or advisory group with teaching faculty and other stakeholders to review assessment data and guide the program.
2. **Use Online Directors.** Ensure that each degree offered online has a faculty responsible for coordinating assessment. Departmental oversight of online degrees is essential to ensure quality, consistency and adequate preparation to offer classes. Not all programs have an online director or similar oversight person, and assessment is inconsistent.

Suggested Actions:

- a. Each department offering a degree online – or a substantial number of classes online – should have a faculty as “Online Director” with resources (such as a RA) and workload incentive. Online Directors oversee the curriculum development and updating in the online environment, ensure communication about assessment and updates to courses across modes, and serve as the point person for Global Campus.
 - b. Online Directors should coordinate and communicate regularly with the assessment coordinator, if those responsibilities are led by different individuals.
3. **Share and Deepen Good Practices.** Give assessment sustained attention to mature and produce useful results. Essential elements of assessment are in place in most online degrees (student learning outcomes, assessment plans, curriculum maps, direct and indirect measures – see *Summary of Assessment Inventory Results*) and are coordinated with on campus program assessment. **Suggested Actions:**
- a. Identify ways for units with online degrees or substantial online offerings to share their good practices in assessment with others at WSU.
 - b. Share rubrics to assess students learning outcomes and gather assessment data for programs.
 - c. Work toward increased use of assessment data -- see other recommendations.
 - d. Systematically document assessment practices and use of assessment data in online programs
4. **Value and Incentivize Teaching Online.** Recognize that teaching online is not less work, less skillful or less professional. In fact, there can be new skills to learn in order to teach well online. **Suggested Actions:**

- a. Compensate online instruction so that faculty of all ranks will be able to teach. Currently, departments may lack resources to involve regular faculty in online courses; may be considered less prestigious by both faculty and TAs to teach online rather than on campus. Need to change culture, help both faculty and students understand the benefits of online environment.
- b. Add a measure of independence so that instructors can invest in online courses, rather than those courses being entirely pre-designed. (Example: CrimJ removed the preset discussion questions, so that each instructor writes and facilitates their own. In the on-campus context, courses are not given wholesale to instructors who cannot change anything).
- c. Ensure qualified instructors are proficient in using online teaching methods and technologies to teach online courses. Coordinate with the departments, the Graduate School, and Global Campus for TA training regarding online courses.
- d. Encourage or require online certification for instructors to teach online through WSU Global Campus, or increase compensation for anyone teaching online who is certified.

Infrastructure at the Institutional Level for Assessment

5. **Increase Nimbleness.** Ensure infrastructure and systems so online courses and programs are nimble and responsive, keep up to date, and compete nationally for students. (75% of the market is currently for-profit institutions which tend to respond quickly.) Online programs need to quickly respond to student experience; problems can be invisible for a while and negative student comments can live on forever on the internet. **Suggested Actions:**
 - a. Ensure Global Campus can support the nimbleness required to respond to assessment results.
 - b. Explore how to make online course design and curricular updates more flexible and responsive.
 - c. Work with Global Campus to design a dashboard of data about activity in online courses, as one way to monitor basic engagement and provide a warning system if activity is low or absent.
 - d. Develop more ways to get student feedback systematically, monitor course delivery and success.

6. **Leverage WSU Technology Updates for Assessment.** Leverage strengths and good practices of a new course evaluation system and the new LMS to provide additional useful assessments of teaching and learning, including timely information to use to make adjustments or interventions during the semester, rather than after it's over. **Suggested Actions:**
 - a. Explore specific ways to use the new LMS to collect assessment data and build that into ensuing course design and instruction.
 - b. Develop dashboards and use technology so WSU faculty can access existing data sources and incorporate assessment into online teaching and learning practices.
 - c. Increase use of midterm feedback surveys for input from students prior to end of the course, as well as course evaluations that can collect information about instruction and online learning experience.

7. **Track Graduates at University Level.** Apply university resources to track its graduates -- where they end up working or studying. Every degree needs this crucial, overarching assessment data. Departments are not resourced to do this, cannot begin to keep an accurate data base, and with a university-wide effort much more could be accomplished. This data would give departments much needed information about the value of their curriculum and degree, which could be used for recruiting, retention, and curricular updates, and satisfy accreditation requirements. **Suggested Actions:**
 - a. Articulate the importance of data integrity and tracking of graduates for continuous improvement, and explore ways to capture and maintain that data.
 - b. Alumni Association already automatically enrolls new graduates and gives them a free first year. When students get their first annual re-enrollment card, give them a second free year if they send their information on a short survey about occupation/industry/grad-or-professional-other education. Perhaps this could also be offered to cohorts, at their 5, 10, and 15 year anniversaries.

- c. Conduct institution-wide assessments such as: alumni surveys, employer surveys, and post-graduation studies to support online and face to face program assessment and reduce the administrative burden for individual programs.
8. **Coordinate Publication of Student Learning Outcomes.** Establish one place at the university where current SLOs for each degree can be listed and linked to by other units. **Suggested Actions:**
- a. Coordinate so that the current SLOs are available to the campus department, Global Campus, advising, catalog, students, faculty, and staff.
 - b. Provide student learning outcomes to students via several options including: program websites, student handbooks, orientation materials, and/or student annual review.

Institutional Culture of Assessment

9. **Broaden Institutional Support for Assessment.** Demonstrate WSU’s commitment to assessment through its strategic priorities, administrative actions, and material support for online and on campus degree programs. University administrators have a vital role to play in program assessment. They provide direction and earnest support for assessment so faculty and staff understand how assessment contributes to the core values and mission of the university. **Suggested Actions:**
- a. Leadership should explicitly encourage diverse units to coordinate, such as for tracking graduates, coordinating publication of SLOs, leveraging technology updates, and strengthening infrastructure for assessment.
10. **Value and Incentivize Assessment in Online Degrees.** It takes sustained investment and attention to collect, analyze, and interpret data about student learning that is useful for departments. Assessment can demonstrate the value of a WSU online degree in a competitive market, crucial for the long-term viability of online programs.
- Suggested Actions:**
- a. Departments should value assessment in annual review.
 - b. Assessment coordinators are often under pressure from multiple priorities and don’t see their assessment work valued compared to other duties (e.g., primary and secondary emphases are more important). For example, for clinical faculty, the role of “assessment coordinator” could be recognized as a secondary emphasis.
 - c. When possible, fund assessment through course release, additional month’s salary, etc.
 - d. Instructor participation is critical for useful assessment and should also be recognized.

5. Next Steps

In response to the Provost’s charge to this task force, below are potential next steps for the Provost’s Office to support and improve assessment in degrees offered online.

1. Review recommendations and prioritize them.
 - o Communicate with leadership and gather the particular stakeholders who need to be involved in different recommendations.
 - o Determine resources required to implement recommendations and suggested actions; articulate the benefit of online degrees and programs to the university.
2. Review and update related university procedures. Determine areas of responsibility and coordination.
3. Plan and prioritize ways to disseminate good practices and other resources for assessment and to recognize improvements.
4. Request periodic updates from colleges, departments, and other units on steps they have taken and where greater coordination might be needed. In addition, determine if a more formal report is needed from units that offer degrees online, particularly as the number of degrees and students increase in the future.

Appendix A. Inventory of Program Assessment in Online Degrees: Summary 2014

An inventory survey on practices and systems related to assessment of student learning was developed and then completed by a representative from each degree offered online. The inventory produced a rough snapshot of program-level assessment, summarized on two pages (A, Basic Elements, and B, Summary). The inventory itself was a pilot instrument, gathering data on a wide range of contexts and practices among graduate and undergraduate degrees offered online; results are suggestive rather than definitive.

A. Basic Elements of Assessment and Data Collection

WSU Graduate and Undergraduate Online Degrees (15), Spring 2014

Most WSU degrees offered online report having the basic elements of assessment in place and all programs are working on assessment of student learning.

Basic Elements of Assessment (Self-Reported, 2014) Degrees Offered Online	Undergraduate (6)	Graduate (9)	All (15)
Student Learning Outcomes for Degree	6	9	15
Assessment Plan	6	8	13
Curriculum Map	6	6	11
Direct Measure(s)	4	8	13
Indirect Measure(s)	6	8	14
Using Program Assessment Data for Online Degree	2	3	5

Self-Assessment of Data Collection (Self-Reported, 2014) Degrees Offered Online	Undergraduate (6)	Graduate (9)	All (15)
Regularly; using well-established assessment practices	1	0	1
Regularly; refining assessment practices over several years	0	4	4
Developing basic assessment practices; actively adjusting our processes after pilots	3	2	5
Beginning assessment practices; may still be piloting most measures	2	2	4
No assessment of student learning collected at the program level yet	0	1	1

Degrees completing the assessment inventory in 2014

Undergraduate (6): BA Business Administration, BA Criminal Justice, BA Human Development, BA Humanities, BA Social Sciences, BS Psychology

Graduate (9): MS in Agriculture, Master of Business Administration (MBA) and Executive Master of Business Administration, MA in Criminal Justice, PSM in Electrical Power Engineering, Master of Engineering and Technology Management, EdM in Education (Special Education), MA in Sport Management, PSM in Molecular Biosciences, MA in Strategic Communication

Notes regarding graduate degree programs:

- Six degree programs are new (or newly revised) programs with no or few graduates: EdM in Special Education, MA in Criminal Justice, MA in Sport Management and PSM in Molecular Biosciences, MA in Strategic Communication and one of those, PSM in Electrical Power Engineering, does not yet have students.
- Three degree programs are only offered online: PSM in Electrical Power Engineering, Masters of Engineering and Technology Management, MA in Strategic Communication

B. Summary of Inventory of Program Assessment in Online Degrees, 2014

Below is a summary of results from the assessment inventory, which provide a rough snapshot of the status of program assessment in degrees offered online and indicate areas for continued attention. As noted, inventory results are suggestive rather than definitive.

1. **Purposes for assessment.** The majority of online degrees report assessing student learning outcomes for continuous improvement of the program, to make generalizations about program effectiveness, and/or to provide accountability to the college/university. Some programs also report doing assessment to illuminate context for decision-making or to compare achievement of online and face-to-face students, leverage strengths of online environment.
2. **Publishing Student Learning Outcomes.**
 - The majority of degrees report publishing student learning outcomes for online degrees: on their website, in student handbooks, in advising and orientation materials, and/or in course syllabi; three programs have not yet published their student learning outcomes, although students are enrolled.
 - All degrees offered online and on campus report having the same student learning outcomes.
3. **Assessment Measures.** Degrees offered online report collecting a wide range of measures, both direct measure of student learning and indirect measures, within the past three years.
 - The inventory results do not indicate how programs are assessing their measures, for example, the extent to which they use rubrics or grades for assessment data, or assess the work of their seniors.
4. **Data Analysis.** Some programs have systems in place to analyze assessment data from students in online degrees.

Graduate degrees (9)

 - Two programs disaggregate online degree data for analysis, and three programs aggregate online degree data for analysis. Two programs do not include online degree data in their program assessment and three programs are new and have not collected assessment data yet.

Undergraduate degrees (6)

 - Four programs disaggregate online degree data for analysis and/or aggregate online degree data for analysis; two programs do not yet include online degree data in program assessment.
5. **Instructor Participation in Assessment.** Participation of online instructors in program assessment varies considerably.

Graduate degrees (9)

 - Six programs report that online instructors participate in scoring student work and/or discussing assessment results; five programs reported that online instructors collect student work and/or make decisions based on assessment.

Undergraduate degrees (6)

 - Four programs report that online instructors collect student work, and two programs reported that online instructors participate in scoring student work.
 - One program report that online instructors discuss assessment results, and one program reported that online instructors make decisions based on assessment.
6. **Assessment Systems and Practices.** Assessment practices in online degrees vary considerably.
 - Most online degrees report they are *developing* or *refining* their assessment data collection, systems and practices (as do most WSU degree programs, regardless of location).
7. **Areas for continued attention and improvement.**
 - One third of the programs report using assessment for decision-making in the online program.
 - One third of the programs report that assessment data is collected and reviewed on schedule; only half of the programs report that instructors who teach online participate in discussing assessment results.
 - Few programs report that assessment roles are clearly defined (3 out of 15).
 - Attention may be needed to increase program-level assessment, distinct from course level assessment.

C. Comments and observations from the inventory and related discussion

1. Departments report the following challenges when assessing online degrees and/or using assessment data to guide decisions in online programs:
 - Collecting and assessing student work takes a lot of effort, coordination, and time, especially when working across campuses and with faculty who may not be engaged in assessment.
 - Challenges for data collection include:
 - Developing assessment tools to measure student achievement in core courses for programs with online and on campus degrees.
 - Getting students to participate in exit surveys and assessment-related activities.
 - Working adults enrolled in online programs may be very busy, may be pursuing their degrees part-time, and may not respond to surveys.
 - Professionals in the field who teach online may not be familiar with academic assessment.
 - Expectations and infrastructure regarding assessment practice in online context are unclear or undocumented in a number of programs.
 - Do all degrees need some kind of senior exit level senior work to assess? (This question is before all programs, online and on campus.)

2. To assess online degrees in the future, some programs expressed interest to finding ways to:
 - Simplify, align, and integrate the assessment process (learning outcomes, assessment measures, data collection and analysis) for online and on campus degrees within related programs.
 - Identify key measures that can be standardized.
 - Make sure that direct and indirect measures are similar, if not the same, and be able to collect the data in an efficient and useful manner.
 - Develop assessment tools that help demonstrate student achievement and quality education.
 - Include working professionals in the review of final exam portfolio presentations.
 - Include exit surveys and other assessments in 702 course requirements (graduate programs).
 - Coordinate more closely with Global Campus to help collect a variety of assessment data on teaching and learning, and support strong teaching practices.
 - Get faculty who only teach online together for f2f discussions periodically, since that's hard to do, particularly if faculty are scattered geographically.
 - Get other useful assessment of teaching, such as midterm, in addition to end of term course evaluations.
 - Figure out what assessment data could be shared with Global Campus
 - Find ways for programs and faculty teaching online to share successful practices and strategies for assessment.
 - Clarify the differences and relationship between assessment of student learning in courses and program assessment.

Appendix B. Strengths and Challenges in Program Assessment in Online Degrees

Through discussion of the inventory results and their own experience with assessment, the task force members identified strengths and challenges in online program assessment at WSU.

Undergraduate Online Degrees: Strengths, Good Practices, Challenges, Areas for Attention, 2014

1. Elements of Program Assessment in Online Degrees/Context		
Discussion Topics	Strengths and Good Practices	Challenges and Areas for Attention
<p>Student Learning Outcomes for degree, Assessment Plan, Curriculum Map, Direct Measures (gathered within past three years), Indirect Measures (gathered within past three years)</p>	<p>All undergraduate degrees offered online have SLOs and Assessment Plans.</p> <p>Measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most programs have collected at least one or more direct measures (student work/performance) and indirect measures. • Programs collect a wide range of direct measures and of indirect measures. <p>Degrees offered online and on campus</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All undergraduate programs report having the same SLOs, assessment plan and curriculum map in as their on campus program. • In most programs, the same assessment measures are collected in their online and on campus program. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interest in getting other useful assessments of teaching, in addition to course evaluations; interested in midterm evaluations or more frequent feedback from students. • Online faces same challenges as on campus offerings in terms of getting response rates on surveys, ensuring assessment is useful. • Lots of data available in the online environment; how can we make better use of it in meaningful ways, not just a data dump? • Context, preparation, and oversight of TAs who teach substantial parts of online degrees vary considerably. • Where do online students get information, such as SLOs? Relationship between department's website and Global Campus website and advising is unclear. • Do all degrees need some kind of senior exit level senior work to assess? (Same question is before all programs, online and on campus.) • Unsure what the policies are about collecting student work, and related approval
2. Assessment System and Participation		
Discussion Topics	Strengths and Good Practices	Challenges and Areas for Attention
<p>Who participates in assessment and in what ways? How are instructors involved? Who discusses assessment?</p> <p>To what extent are systems in place to share, review, use and archive assessment activities, materials, data and results?</p>	<p>One program has established assessment practices and years of experience.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most undergraduate online programs place themselves as Beginning assessment practices or Developing their basic assessment practices; actively adjusting processes. • In some programs, online instructors collect student work but may not otherwise participate in assessment, particularly where TAs teach online classes or classes are taught by faculty in other departments. In this situation, the online instructors do not discuss or use assessment results. • Expectations and infrastructure regarding assessment practice in online context are unclear or undocumented in a number of programs. • Differences in delivery mode can impact logistics of assessment; online has both advantages and disadvantages. Examples: standardized national tests require f2f proctoring, some extra challenges and time; assessing online presentations. • What data could be shared with Global Campus? • Like on campus degrees, it's time-consuming to do assessment. • Developing rubrics and time to do assessment • How can online faculty and programs share resources and tips for teaching and assessment in the online environment? Build capacity and leverage strengths of online? • Challenges for General Studies degree on campus and online, as all faculty teach for other departments. • New practices – e.g, assessing cohorts?

3. Using Assessment and General Challenges		
Discussion Topics	Strengths and Good Practices	Challenges and Areas for Attention
<p>Use of results, purposes</p> <p>Challenges in general, or specific to online</p>	<p>Uses reported</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Used assessment results from foundation course to make revisions to improve student learning in online and resident program. • Found need to introduce foundation classes better. • Revised SLOs <p>Other:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Global Campus offers an online instructor certificate. • One program pays more to online instructors who have completed that certificate. • Global Campus partners with departments and instructors on course design and delivery • Support to TAs: One program: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Provides three-week course for TAs to address key aspects of online instruction; o Has TA contract with expectations o Assigns the TA the same online class for 3 semesters, to gain experience and improve 	<p>Most programs have not yet used assessment results to inform changes in their online program.</p> <p>Other:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online contextual challenges: many students are working adults and very busy; many pursue degrees part-time, which can reduce the ease of connecting skills and knowledge through the curriculum. • Need to be quick and responsive to student experience; problems can be invisible for a while; negative student comments on Internet can live on forever. Need to get student feedback systematically, have ways to monitor course delivery and success, including effective assessment of teaching. • Online offerings may slip off the radar of the chairs and the budget. • In some programs, tenured faculty devalue the online programs and don't teach in it or the department lacks resources to involve regular faculty in online courses; need to change culture, build understanding of strengths of online • Anyone new to teaching online needs support to quickly succeed; TAs or inexperienced instructors need additional training and oversight. • Interest in sharing successful practices and strategies

Graduate Online Degree Programs: Strengths, Good Practices, Challenges, Areas for Attention, 2014:

1. Elements of Program Assessment in Online Degree Programs/Context		
Discussion Topics	Strengths and Good Practices	Challenges and Areas for Attention
<p>Student Learning Outcomes for degree program, Assessment Plan, Curriculum Map, Direct Measures gathered within past three years, Indirect Measures gathered within past three years</p>	<p>All graduate online degree programs have SLOs and Assessment Plans.</p> <p>Good practices include the use of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct and indirect assessments of internships and culminating experiences such as special projects and 702 credits. • Embedded assessments in online courses. • Faculty meetings with dedicated time to discuss assessment results and make program changes. • Input from external review boards on student projects and culminating experiences in the program. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are we assessing and why? • Are we trying to meet the needs of students or the needs of the program? • Is the program doing what it intended to do? • How do programs get data on post-graduation outcomes from students/from employers? • How do programs stay current with their discipline/meet market needs? • How do programs get resources to develop new courses/make improvements/update content after assessment happens? (The current system is too slow.) • What is important data (and what is not)?
2. Assessment System and Participation		
Discussion Topics	Strengths and Good Practices	Challenges and Areas for Attention
<p>Who participates in assessment and in what ways? How are instructors involved? Who discusses assessment? To what extent are systems in place to share, review, use and archive assessment activities, materials, data and results?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Steering committees, advisory boards, and extension directors had helped to assess student projects and internship experiences. • Dashboards and technology would potentially be helpful for tracking student outcomes (this is where the important stuff lives). • Several people expressed interest in the new LMS and capabilities it may offer for collecting data and assessing student learning outcomes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do programs include students and alumni as stakeholders in the assessment process? • How do we balance workloads for faculty who take on assessment as an extra responsibility? • The small number of faculty in some programs makes assessment difficult to sustain.
3. Using Assessment and General Challenges		
Discussion Topics	Strengths and Good Practices	Challenges and Areas for Attention
<p>Use of results, purposes Challenges in general, or specific to online</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online programs are assessed with/at the same level as f2f programs. • Online programs have the same content, instructors, and assessments as f2f programs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not all online courses use global campus contracts to enforce standards for instruction and course administration, • There are many ways to do assessment/makes my head spin, so many ideas are overwhelming. • What is the follow through after assessment? • How do we make assessment actionable? • Should we connect faculty annual reviews with assessment results? <p>Special Concerns</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty and staff realize the importance of doing assessment for NWCCU and professional accreditation, but they also want assessment for continuous improvement. • Assessment can help programs provide and refine blended courses for online and face to face students. • Faculty need to innovate when they develop online courses and programs for graduate students.

Appendix C. Memo and Charge from Provost Daniel Bernardo; Task Force Outcomes; Activities



Office of the Provost

January 10, 2014

TO: Deans, Campus Vice Chancellors, Associate Deans, Chairs
and Assessment Leads for online degrees

FROM: Daniel J. Bernardo 
Interim Provost and Executive Vice President

SUBJECT: Assessment of Online Programs

When WSU's accreditation was reaffirmed in July 2013, the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU) gave the university a new recommendation — that is, a required action item — regarding assessment of student learning in online programs. Nationwide, this topic has been, and is expected to continue to be, a topic of concern.

- NWCCU Recommendation: WSU's academic programs must "ensure that student learning outcome information from online programs and courses are consistently included in assessment processes."
- The related peer evaluation report from spring 2013 noted that "Information on whether assessment includes learning outcomes information for students taking online programs or courses appears to be undocumented and unknown."

To move forward on this accreditation requirement a one-semester task force consisting of staff from the Office of Assessment of Teaching and Learning, the Graduate School, and the Global Campus will work with assessment leads in departments with online degrees. The group will inventory how online degree programs are assessing students, share strong practices and successes, identify any gaps, and help ensure that program assessment plans and annual reports incorporate online students and courses. The next annual assessment reports are due by June 1, 2014, from all academic programs.

The attached document outlines the charge to the group, expected outcomes, and membership list. Thank you in advance for supporting this important effort.

Task Force on Integrating Assessment of Online Programs into Regular Program Assessment (updated 1-8-2014)

Purpose: To move forward on the accreditation requirement to integrate assessment of online students, courses and programs into regular program assessment

Means: A task force that meets monthly in spring semester (Feb – April), to help ensure that program assessment plans and annual reports incorporate online students and courses.

Process:

- Task force to be appointed by the Provost, with representation from all programs that offer degrees online or plan to offer an online degree in the next year, Global Campus, ATL and the Graduate School (draft list on pg 2)
- Task force will work with ATL to develop an inventory of online assessment by WSU programs that can be connected with regular program assessment.
- ATL will take the lead on conducting the inventory, and will provide results to the task force for review and discussion.
- Task force members will share successful practices and ways to address bottlenecks for online assessment and integration with regular program assessment.

Outcomes:

- In April, the task force will submit a brief report regarding their recommendations and results from the inventory, to the Provost, the Liaison Council for Undergraduate Assessment, and the Graduate Advisory Council.
- The inventory will give a snapshot of current assessment of online students, courses, and degrees, and identify strengths and any areas for attention.
- Successful practices and approaches, as well as inventory results, will be a resource for all WSU programs, to support assessment in ways that are useful to widely different programs; the task force will suggest ways to best disseminate this resource (e.g., through ATL and the Graduate School, Global Campus, colleges, and/or other).
- Participation on the task force is intended to help programs with their annual assessment report, due on June 1, which must include online degrees.

Activities and Timeline Spr2014, Task Force on Assessment in Online Degrees

Tasks	People	Month / Date
a. Develop Inventory	Task Force input on draft– ATL, Grad Sch and Global Campus drafted and members gave feedback.	Feb and March March 3-5
b. Take Inventory	ATL administrates; TF members take inventory survey, one for each online degree	March 10-17 (thru March 26)
c. Collect strong practices & resources from own online program	TF members collect examples	Feb-March
d. Review and discuss Inventory results	ATL compiled results for TF discussion; Discussion notes distributed to members w/results on 4/4/14	March 28
e. Summarize Inventory	TF members	April 15 (Grad)
f. Share successful practices; identify resources and ways to address bottlenecks / constraints	TF members	April 18 (UG)
g. Develop recommendations for WSU and for dissemination of successful practices and approaches	TF members	Cont in May
h. Write Brief Report to give to Provost, Liaison Council, Graduate School, and Global Campus	TF members TF members	May 13 and May 21
i. Review and update as needed your degree program’s assessment plan; determine how online students and courses are included in program assessment; how results of assessment are shared with department leadership	TF members	Spring semester