The Learning Outcomes Assessment Committee Annual Report for 2015

The Learning Outcomes Assessment Committee (LOAC) met four times as a full committee. Subcommittees were also formed, and they met as needed to address their charge. The members of LOAC were assigned to one or more of these subcommittees: General Education, Departments/Programs, Graduate Education, Institutional Research. Each subcommittee was asked to address the following questions over the course of the year:

1. What are the requirements for assessing student learning outcomes (NEASC, Tufts) in your area?

2. What assessment of learning outcomes in (general education, Department/Program majors, graduate programs, Institutional Research) is currently being conducted? How are the results being used to improve program, teaching, and learning?

3. Are the requirements for the assessment of student learning outcomes in (your specific area) being satisfied? If yes, explain. If no, please provide some analysis of the barriers to implementing an assessment program.

4. What documents/information did you gather to review?

5. What institutional procedures and resources are in place to support assessment in (in your area)?

6. What recommendations are you making and to whom are you making these recommendations? (This may include improving assessment, reporting, review, or use of assessment.)

The General Education subcommittee reviewed the report from NEASC and the expectations for the five year review Spring, 2018. The subcommittee developed a proposal that the faculty of Arts and Sciences adopt the Draft Learning Objectives for each Distribution Area for the purposes of continuing to develop projects to assess learning outcomes in general education. These projects would incorporate the recommendations made by the participants in the earlier Pilot Project for sustained coaching. The proposal was approved (on the second presentation, April 15, 2015) and a new assessment project will be initiated in conjunction with CELT. The subcommittee also performed an audit of the Foundation courses, and concluded: “Learning objectives have been developed for some but not all of the thematic curricular areas for Foundations” courses. There is no systematic approach to the assessment of student learning outcomes for the Foundations courses. Recommendations from the subcommittee include:

1. The university should develop a plan to recruit and coach faculty who teach students taking their courses to meet the distribution area requirements in
the assessment of student learning outcomes. Identify one person to coordinate recruitment and coaching of faculty.

2. Develop plans to communicate assessment related opportunities offered by various departments and groups at Tufts (CELT, OIR, Tisch Library). Provide accessible resources to faculty (update internal websites, provide resources, examples, success stories, etc).

3. Explore possible incentives to faculty to improve teaching and learning.


The Departments/Programs subcommittee collected and reviewed the reports on assessment included in Department/Program Annual Reports. They determined that in many reports, the information presented was not adequate to allow to review by LOAC. They developed a set of questions to present to Departments/Programs:

- How are you collecting data?
- Who is collecting the data?
- How detailed are your data?
- What does the process of data collection and review look like?

They will also seek further information regarding what support Departments/Programs need to gather assessment data next year.

The Graduate subcommittee reported that while there may be significant assessment occurring in graduate programs, the efforts are not being well documented and shared. They also noted that course objectives online are for the most part outdated. Continued efforts are needed to identify current assessment practices in graduate education and to develop strategies for enhancing those efforts and for documenting them. Recommendations from the Graduate subcommittee for next year include:

1. Sponsor a meeting for Graduate Programs and Policies Committee on best practices in assessment of student learning.

2. Graduate programs should use individual development plans (IDP’s) for all graduates (IDP’s include: self-assessment of current skills, interests, and strengths; a plan for developing skills to meet academic and professional goals; regular communication with advisor, mentors, supervisors about evolving goals and skills).

3. A complete updating of graduate program/department online learning objectives should be conducted.

The Institutional Research subcommittee reported on OIR evaluation, through surveys, of senior perspectives on their growth and learning in writing. While most students reported they had made gains in writing, IR was able to identify a subgroup of students who reported that their writing skills had not grown significantly during their education at Tufts. In exploring the characteristics of these students, they noted they were less likely to be “involved” in campus activities, less likely to be able
to ask a professor for a recommendation, and less likely to be engaged in their departments and campus life. OIR will develop a method for identifying students most at risk for “disengagement” and will communicate with the undergraduate Deans’ office to develop ways to support these students earlier in their education.

OIR plans to develop a set of questions for the 2015 Senior Survey to align with the quantitative learning objectives developed for the Distribution Areas.

The IR subcommittee several barriers to the successful use of “indirect data” in assessment of student learning:

1. OIR is not using longitudinal data sets to track the progress of specific student groups (e.g., first-generation students, STEM majors, etc) as effectively as they might, nor have they explored data analytic methods that would help document student achievement (e.g., multivariate, advanced data visualization). These techniques are time-intensive and should be used only to generate results that will be used.

2. OIR feels constrained by their limited role in crafting surveys to provide the best results (constituents of the Tufts community create and “own” the survey items). Thus the surveys are not kept to a reasonable length, or frequency.

3. Too little of the results generated by OIR are actually being used to improve teaching and programs.

The subcommittee recommended that a longitudinal approach be taken to collecting indirect data from surveys for the purposes of analyzing factors that contribute to students’ scholarly development.

In the coming year, the members of the OIR will work directly with one or more of the General Education, Departments/Programs, and Graduate subcommittees to promote better data collection and use of data in assessments of student learning.

**Members of the LOAC, 2014-2015:**
Harry Bernheim, Biology
Drusilla Brown, Economics
John Fyler, English
Fulton Gonzalez, Mathematics
David Hammer, Education
Heather Nathans, Drama and Dance
Donna Qualters, CELT
Susan Russinoff, Philosophy
Evan Simpson, Tisch Library
Donna Terkla, OIR

Ex-Officio Members:
Nancy Bauer, Dean of Academic Affairs
Barbara Brizuela, Dean of Academic Affairs
Lauren Conoscenti, OIR
Robert Cook, Dean of Graduate School, A & S
Rebecca Hatch, OIR
Sarah Herchel, Assistant Dean GSAS
Carmen Lowe, Dean
Katia Miller, OIR

Report submitted by Laura Rogers, Education, Convener