

# Assessment of Student Learning

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## A Perspective on Regional Accreditation

By *Rollin Abernethy, Associate Provost*

This January marked a milestone in the university's self-study process with the delivery of its completed self-study in print. The final document is approximately 200 pages long, which is actually fairly succinct for a self-study from an institution such as UW. The self-study is a thematic self-study focusing on enriching the learning experience at the university. Learning is defined broadly in this context and applies to students, faculty, staff, and the community.

Let it not be said that engaging in self-study is an easy process. We certainly had our setbacks especially as we tried to merge the thematic nature of the self-study with our existing university planning processes and with the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) criteria and core components for which the self-study must provide evidence of fulfillment. I believe the extra thought and work required to incorporate these various elements into one document was worth it in the end. The self-study demonstrates the substantial advance UW has made to provide enhanced opportunities for learning over the past decade. UW has reason to be very proud of its work thus far.

The self-study is comprised of 12 chapters along with a request for change in affiliation with the commission regarding distance education programs and a set of appendices. In addition to this comprehensive self-study, we have

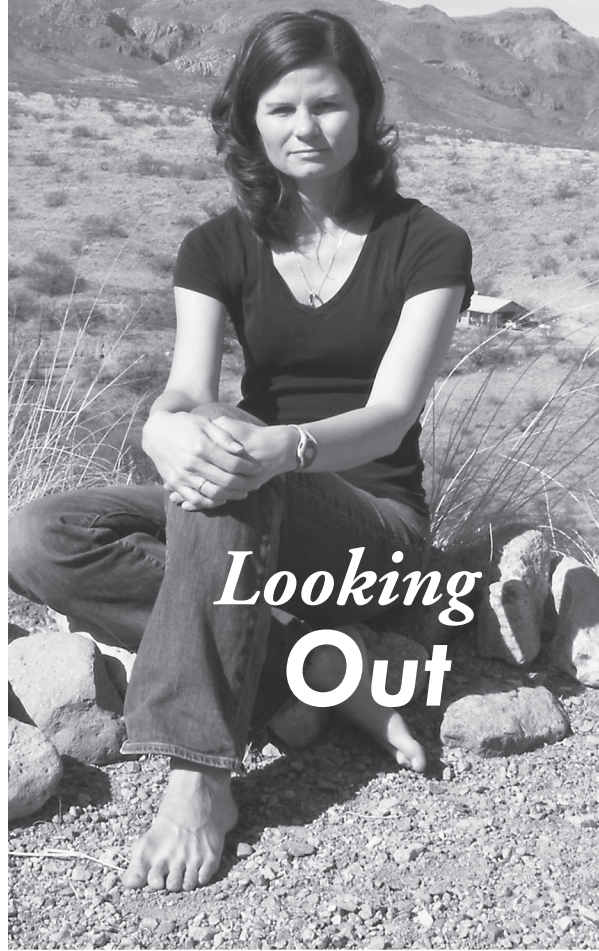


Rollin Abernethy

created a Web site that contains additional documentation to support statements made in the self-study and provide further evidence of the institution meeting various requirements for reaccreditation. This self-study is very different compared to the self-study completed in 2000 in that it is evaluative in nature and much more data-driven.

Collectively our materials will be reviewed by an 11 member consultant evaluator team in advance of the actual site visit that will take place from March 1 to 3, 2010. While much work has already been done, there is still work to do to prepare for the visit. We are still compiling further supporting documentation that will be available online and in a resource room for

# From the Inside



## Looking Out

Erika in Rio Rico, Arizona over winter break.

Last semester was mostly consumed by the self-study process. In addition to my time being devoted to this task, the University Assessment Coordinators spent a significant amount of time discussing issues related to assessment and the self-study. Now that the self-study process is winding down, it is time to be back to regular assessment business. With that being said, the accreditation process is not yet over so I encourage you to acquaint yourself with what has happened up until this point and what we can all expect in the next few weeks. Rollin Abernethy's article provides a nice summary of this.

In the last newsletter, I spoke about the university receiving the results of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE), and Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA). These reports are here and have been posted on the assessment Web site.

In addition, Dean Walter charged the Data Analysis and Special Projects Subcommittee of the Enrollment Management Council to develop a short summary and analysis of the NSSE and FSSE results. Since the results are rather lengthy, the goal was to create something more succinct that would appeal to faculty and staff. Dean Walter posted these reports on the faculty list serve in December and January. They are also available on the assessment Web site in case you missed them. I am working on some further analyses on the CLA results which I plan to present in a session at the upcoming Higher Learning Commission's annual meeting in Chicago in April. Also, I also will be hosting some brown bag discussions at the ECTL in the future for those of you interested in discussing some of the results from these projects.

The other piece of news is that we plan on transitioning this assessment newsletter to an online format only beginning this fall. This decision is a result of many factors in the end, but was prompted for reconsideration with printing prices increasing fairly substantially this year. In the end, I hope the redesigned newsletter will be timelier. We will begin next year with the goal of producing two newsletters, but will consider publishing more once we have the new process worked out. If you have any input on the current newsletter or have ideas for the new online version, please let me know. We are very open to suggestions at this point.

Finally, the ECTL will be hosting its spring colloquium on teaching on May 17–18, 2010. Stewart Ross, Director of the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning at Minnesota State University Mankato and team member at Dee Fink & Associates, will be the keynote speaker. His plenary talk is entitled "The Joy and Responsibility of Teaching Well." Dr. Ross will also host two workshops on integrated course design and classroom assessment techniques. More information will be available on the ECTL's Web site by mid March.

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to talk assessment once again. If you need help on your assessment of student learning projects or have questions about any university-wide assessment efforts, feel free to contact me at [ekprager@uwyo.edu](mailto:ekprager@uwyo.edu) or 766-2897.

*Erika K. Prager*

*University Assessment Specialist*

## A Perspective on Regional Accreditation Continued from page 1

the team while they visit UW. I suspect this work will be happening right up to the actual visit.

We are now turning our attention to how the university community as a whole can further participate in the remainder of the self-study process. For starters, I highly recommend familiarizing yourself with the report and Web site. Simply informing a wider number of people of the process itself and the conclusions made in the self-study will be helpful in demonstrating that the university community as a whole understands the important role of regional accreditation.

During the visit, a number of university faculty, staff, and students will have the opportunity to meet with members of the consultant evaluator team. The team will be seeking verification of university community awareness of programs and activities that support learning as outlined in the self-study. Ideally, every individual at UW perceives a role in creating an environment that supports learning or directly providing instruction to stimulate learning. Significant attention will undoubtedly be given to assessing our efforts to improve student learning

outcomes as a result of our course and program assessment plans.

Full accreditation by the HLC is our goal. Regional accreditation is the most widely recognized global hallmark for credibility and quality in higher education. Equally as important is the role accreditation plays in providing eligibility for federal student financial aid and numerous other federal funds. The intent of the HLC is to foster practices that support continuous improvement in the way institutions fulfill their stated missions. With our long-standing university planning processes and the evident outcomes from our plans, UW is well positioned to fulfill these expectations. But this is not the time to relax on past progress!

Your individual preparation and support during the upcoming reaccreditation site visit is greatly appreciated. I thank you in advance for your help in making it a success!

**For further information  
and to view the report, please go to  
[www.uwyo.edu/accreditation](http://www.uwyo.edu/accreditation)**

## Big Changes for the Assessment Newsletter

*By Erika Prager, University Assessment Specialist*

The Assessment Newsletter began in fall 2005 as a four page publication. After the inaugural edition, it was expanded to its current eight page format. Presently, the newsletter is printed in September and February and is distributed to all faculty and professional staff. The print version of the newsletter is also posted on the assessment Web site.

Over the last few years, the costs associated with producing and printing the newsletter have continued to rise causing the University Assessment Coordinators Committee to revisit the way in which the newsletter is produced and distributed. After much discussion, the committee decided to discontinue the newsletter in print format and move to an online only format beginning in fall 2010. In addition to an actual dollar savings, the committee believes this decision is more environmentally friendly as thousands of pages of paper will be saved.

The new online format is still in the design phase. But readers can expect a new look next fall. The newsletter will be available on the assessment Web site. Links to the newsletter and a reminder of the newsletter publication will be posted on the faculty and staff list serves. If you are not on the list serve or would like to be put on an email list to be notified of the newsletter, please contact Erika Prager at [ekprager@uwyo.edu](mailto:ekprager@uwyo.edu).

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We are on the Web!  
[www.uwyo.edu/assessment](http://www.uwyo.edu/assessment)

## Mark Your Calendar



### ECTL Spring Colloquium

*Monday, May 17 through Tuesday, May 18, 2010*

Two day event on teaching and learning. Keynote speaker is Stewart Ross, Director of the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning at Minnesota State University Mankato and team member at Dee Fink & Associates. Events include plenary talk and two workshops. The full schedule of events will be available on the ECTL's Web page in March ([www.uwyo.edu/ctl](http://www.uwyo.edu/ctl)).

*The University of Wyoming assessment newsletter is published each semester (Erika Prager, university assessment specialist, editor). Any editorial comments reflect the view of the editor and not necessarily the university. Send comments, questions, and/or suggestions to Erika at 766-2897 or [ekprager@uwyo.edu](mailto:ekprager@uwyo.edu). Past issues are available at [www.uwyo.edu/assessment/newsletter](http://www.uwyo.edu/assessment/newsletter). • Persons seeking admission, employment, or access to programs of the University of Wyoming shall be considered without regard to race, color, religion, sex, national origin, disability, age, veteran status, sexual orientation, or political belief. • If you would like more information about support for students with disabilities at UW or to receive this publication in alternative formats, please call University Disability Support Services at (307) 766-6189 or TTY (307) 766-3073. • Graphic design by Elizabeth Ono Rabel • 2010/2.3M/BG*

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