**2011 CHEA Award for Outstanding Institutional Practice
in Student Learning Outcomes**

Application

*Applications that do not conform to format and length will not be considered by the award committee. Applications should provide full information in response to each award criterion, with minimal reliance
on links to other documents.*

Institution	Washington State University

Category	Institution-wide	XX	Program		Major	

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Council for Higher Education Accreditation

Section 3: Application Summary

Washington State University has established a federated system of student learning outcomes assessment that recognizes successful learning outcomes are the yield of a systematic collaboration among a *team* of faculty, students, and external stakeholders who, in each unique context, identify and share a purpose. Each team determines outcomes, measures, and standards of competency. Teams assume responsibility for determining necessary actions *responsive* to program goals and enriching of student learning experiences. WSU monitors 100% of its undergraduate programs with the four dimensions of its system's criteria: Team and System; Goals and Measures; Evidence and Action; and Leadership. Learn more at UniversityPortfolio.wsu.edu/2009-2010

1. Articulation and Evidence of Outcomes

Learning Outcomes Development and Public Commitment

Washington State University's faculty senate is now reviewing key refinements on the 6 institutional Learning Goals of the baccalaureate that were initially developed and launched in 2007 by faculty in WSU's Teaching Academy in collaboration with WSU's assessment professionals.

The refinements reflect aspects of the institution's experiences with the assessment of learning outcomes. The refinements also reflect a growing understanding of assessment that needs to be *responsive* to profoundly changing contexts and that holds, therefore, that high standards are not the same as standardization (Wiggins, 1992).

Learning Outcomes Communication—Evidence and Competency

The broadcast communication of WSU's learning outcomes is achieved through standard channels including WSU's web, announcements related to the current faculty senate review process, through the general education committee (currently re-envisioning the program in response to the goals), and as they are adapted and reflected on course syllabi.

The more salient communication, however, is inextricably intertwined with the WSU institutional federated assessment system, which is the innovative subject of this award application.

The WSU federated system holds that an educational program's learning outcomes are not simply, as Ewell has described them, "charming abstractions." They are, rather, the yield of a systematic collaboration among a TEAM of faculty, students, and external stakeholders who in each community and context identify and share a purpose. Each team determines outcomes, measures, and what rigor or level of performance is necessary to assure appropriateness and utility of the assessment. Each team assumes responsibility for following up and determining necessary actions that are *responsive* to program goals and, in particular, for enriching student learning experiences.

Since the 4 dimensions of outcomes assessment—Team and System; Goals and Measures; Evidence and Action; and Leadership—are essential, we assess those dimension in 100% of WSU's undergraduate programs.

The deeper and more **useful means of the communication** of student learning outcomes, in other words, is embedded in the collaboration among WSU program faculty *and* professional, faculty peer, and student stakeholders.

Learning outcomes are not an end but an indicator of the current state of a program's shared purpose and the quality and coherence of their collaboration toward achieving that purpose. (A single instructor in isolation can impact a student's learning; a team of educators and partners working in concert can enrich the learning of a community.) To improve learning outcomes, it follows, it is necessary to improve the collaboration—the systematic engagement of faculty, students, and stakeholders who define, teach, learn and work with those who achieve those outcomes.

To accomplish this ambitious agenda, WSU created the Office of Assessment and Innovation in 2009 and charged the unit with the task of establishing an institutional learning-centered assessment system that honors the vital expertise and dedication of WSU's faculty. Such a system must be flexible, recognizing that goals need to be assessed in ways that are meaningful and useful to those positioned to make changes and improvements. Critical and *creative reasoning* in psychology, for instance, is not the same as critical and *creative reasoning* in fine arts or math or chemical engineering. To adequately honor, as Vygotsky charged, the *learning* and the learner, WSU has established a system of learning outcomes assessment that respects the expertise of faculty and stakeholders appropriate for each program, supporting their autonomy required to succeed and, at the same time, implementing an approach that nests each program's outcomes within the larger institution.

Interpretation of Evidence—Ongoing and Responsive

The assessment of each program's assessment is ongoing—annually—for each program, though programs now designate their own dates for updating reports within that timeframe. The focus of the *institutional* assessment is on the *system* within each program. Demographic projections in Washington, like elsewhere, suggest student populations at WSU will be increasingly diverse. The job outlook is constantly changing. The civic needs of the state require an ever more complex, global world view. The focus on the systems approach to assessment therefore is not to do ever better with the same measures or rely exclusively upon cross-institutional comparisons of problematic validity and diminishing utility, but to gather and interpret evidence in ways that are responsive to the protean contexts of education.

The WSU Federated System Explicated

WSU's model involves asking all programs to report on their assessment work and then assesses those reports with *WSU's Guide to Effective Student Learning Outcomes Assessment* [http://tinyurl.com/WSURubric]. In its first year, WSU's Office of Assessment and Innovation assessed all fifty-eight undergraduate program reports twice, providing formative feedback and consulting to help improve assessment practices. In addition, WSU has effectively engaged several external reviewers in the first year to refine (and validate) the process and instruments. As the process moves forward in ways concentric with the assessment work within programs, more programs will include stakeholders in the process of review of program reports. (For an example of the award winning harvesting approach we employ, see: http://tinyurl.com/WSUNUTNAward)

WSU Learning Goals--The Six Goals of the Baccalaureate

WSU has developed and made public six goals: 1. Critical and Creative Thinking; 2. Quantitative and Symbolic Reasoning; 3. Information Literacy; 4. Communication; 5. Self in Society; and 6. Specialty expertise.

WSU's Guide to Effective Assessment

The Office of Assessment and Innovation has developed 4 dimensions of assessment that include:

- Dimension 1 of WSU's Guide to Effective Student Learning Outcomes Assessment anticipates programs will engage stakeholders to document their public commitment to specific student outcomes. This approach promotes independent review of learning goals and outcomes, evidence analysis, and, when appropriate and invited, curricular decisions. The design affords each program the opportunity to define its own specific student learning outcomes and employ the rigor of its professional community of practice, whether it is practicing artists, alumni, employers, or disciplinary colleagues at other agencies and institutions.

- Dimension 2 of WSU's Guide to Effective Student Learning Outcomes Assessment requires programs to develop goals, learning outcomes, direct and indirect measures of those outcomes. The Guide expects programs to frame outcomes in ways and in number that are observable and manageable, and to assure that outcomes are contextualized in the curriculum and reflect the national conversation on teaching and learning in the discipline. The dimension also challenges programs to include stakeholders in the process in ways that clearly communicate the program's measures and the extent to which they provide evidence that outcomes will be achieved.

- Dimension 3 of the WSU's criteria guides programs to annually (regularly) report or summarize evidence drawn from representative samples of student work and to analyze and interpret evidence of outcomes in collaboration with all relevant stakeholders. Programs are expected to develop action plans guided by evidence, SoTL, and stakeholder input. The WSU system recognizes and rewards programs that are responsive to shifting contexts and that use assessment to evaluate and refine their systems and practices. Finally, WSU's institutional system of assessment recognizes that assessment, properly understood and practiced, is inextricable from good, research-based teaching and learning practice. Finally, OAI collects and aggregates programs' evidence of outcomes achievement into an institutional picture of student learning, see **Figure # 1** in section 2.

- Dimension 4 of WSU's institutional assessment rubric recognizes that program leadership is an essential component of a robust and responsive system. It expects leaders to establish long-term support that endorses a culture of ongoing, effective assessment and to provide faculty resources for professional development related to assessment. At the highest levels of performance, WSU's institutional system of assessment identifies program leadership that engage in a continual cycle of inquiry to refine program practices and that demonstrate programs will communicate their assessment purposes publically and situate their assessment in the national discussion of teaching and learning. WSU expects programs to demonstrate that assessment is mirror as well as lens—that it reflects our curricula and pedagogy and not just student performance absent the contexts we create to foster those outcomes.
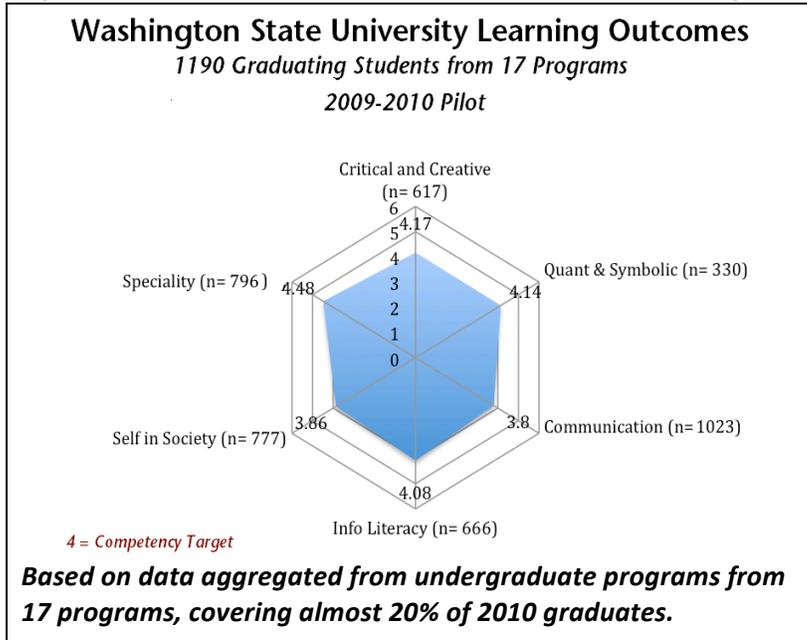
WSU's institutional system of assessment is both formative and summative. A key aspect of the effort is to provide sophisticated feedback to programs to help them improve their assessment practice. WSU also publically shares each program's reports, scores and feedback, with the intention that programs can learn from one another.

2. Success with Regard to Outcomes

Learning Outcomes Achievement

WSU's federated system of assessment provides a mechanism to <u>determine whether student learning outcomes have been achieved</u> at **all** levels of the institution, from the individual courses to the program, college and university. The process anticipates programs will conduct direct assessment of student work at strategic and representative places in the curriculum. The process also anticipates that programs will map those outcomes measured from capstone settings to university goals. For background on gathering and rolling up data from an assignment to the level of the university, see http://tinyurl.com/WSURollup

Figure #1: Institutional Performance on The WSU 6 Learning Goals

Washington State University Learning Outcomes
1190 Graduating Students from 17 Programs
2009-2010 Pilot

Critical and Creative (n= 617): 4.17
Quant & Symbolic (n= 330): 4.14
Communication (n=1023): 3.8
Info Literacy (n= 666): 4.08
Self in Society (n= 777): 3.86
Speciality (n= 796): 4.48

4 = Competency Target

Based on data aggregated from undergraduate programs from 17 programs, covering almost 20% of 2010 graduates.

In WSU's system for open, adaptive, dynamic assessment for learning, competency levels are anchored in the community of practice of each program. Measures are identified or developed by each program in collaboration with stakeholders. The assessment of student work or performance is subject to independent review and the reliability of that review is monitored to address the validity of the assessment. Programs' outcomes that meet this rigor are then transformed and promoted to provide a measure of institutional performance. Each program is afforded the opportunity to meet these criteria in ways appropriate to the discipline and community, but each is also expected to contribute to WSU's learning outcomes and participate in a process of reflection.

Similar data is available at the program level for reflection and to inform program action plans. In that context, the data may be an aggregate of several direct measures.

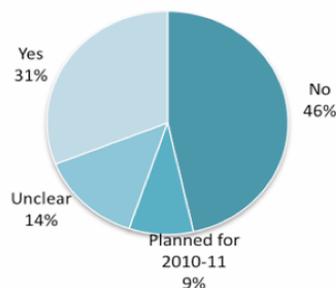**Documenting and Verifying Levels of Achievement**

1. WSU's federated system of assessment honors the diversity of each WSU program. <u>Documenting actual achievement levels of students</u> is accomplished by anchoring performance scores in collaboration with independent stakeholders. Programs identify an anchor score as an indicator of competency. Scores are then transformed to correspond to a 6 point institutional scale. The anchor scores in each program are calibrated so that a 4 is indicative of performance at professional entry level competency in professional and para-professional programs, graduate school readiness in others. Figure #2 below illustrates WSU's progress in this aspect of the approach.

Figure #2: Stakeholder Engagement

Stakeholders Have Reviewed Goals/Outcomes
No 31%
Yes 47%
Planned for 2010-11 15%
Unclear 7%
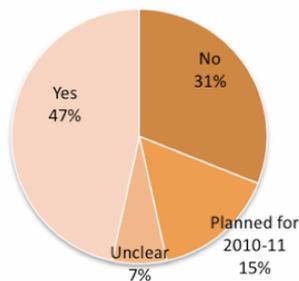
Stakeholders Have Reviewed Student Work
Yes 31%
No 46%
Unclear 14%
Planned for 2010-11 9%

Engaging external stakeholders in the verification of achievement is a key WSU goal. Increasingly, stakeholders have direct access to the processes where programs set goals/outcomes and direct opportunities to participate in assessing student work against those outcomes.

Based on data aggregated from 58 programs

Supplemental Evidence and Institutional Effectiveness

WSU supplements evidence of student achievement levels with information about other dimensions of institutional effectiveness. WSU programs use multiple measures to corroborate and understand findings. Measures range, depending upon the program, from alumni surveys and student evaluations, to pass and graduation rates. Regardless of measure, the key principle that shapes the WSU system is that outcomes are a reflection of the richness and coherence of the students' learning experiences. To that end, a measure that OAI encourages is the assessment of assignments. **Figure #3** below illustrates how assignment assessment has been used and is depicted.

Figure #3: Assignment Assessment and Associated Learning Outcomes

Assignment Assessment & Student Outcomes
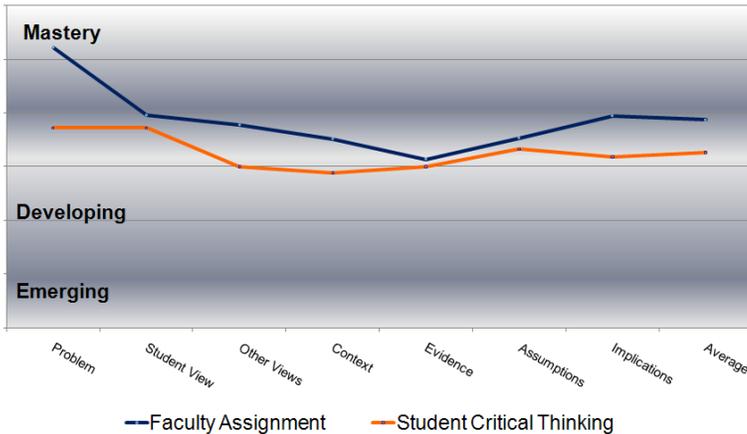
Programs are encouraged to assess the relationship of learning outcomes compared to the assignments embedded in curricula that afford those outcomes. In Figure #3, the top (dark) line is the measure of the assignment reviewed by faculty using the same criteria used to assess student work, modified to focus on the extent the assignment effectively evinces desired outcomes. Student performance tends to echo the assignment, which further suggests clear avenues for improving student learning by revising and aligning assignments for greater curricular consistency and coherence.

240 student papers & 23 assignments reviewed by 23 faculty. Rater reliability = 81%.

The centerpiece of the WSU Federated system, however, is the assessment of program assessment systems. Again, the principle assumption of the WSU model is that improvement of student learning requires *programmatic efforts that integrate and elevate teaching, learning, and assessment systematically*. Therefore, we assess each of WSU program's system on the four dimensions—**Team and System, Goals and Measures, Evidence and Action, and Leadership.**

Table #1: Assessment of Program Assessments Year One Benchmark

|	Team & System	Goals & Measures	Evidence & Action	Leadership
Number of Programs	58	58	58	58
Mean	2.38	2.56	2.05	2.06
Standard Deviation	1.06	1.04	1.00	1.11
Minimum	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5
Maximum	6.0	5.5	6.0	6.0
1st Quartile	1.5	2.0	1.5	1.0
Median	2.5	2.5	2.0	2.0
3rd Quartile	3.0	3.5	2.5	3.0
Mode	{2.0}	{2.0}	{2.0}	{1.0}
Inter-Rater Reliability (allowing 1 point difference)	79%	86%	74%	82%

The initial assessments of WSU's programs reviewed anonymously and reliably (see last line of the Table to the left) by assessment professionals range between initiating and developing categories on the Guide to Effective Assessment rubric. Additional analysis of these benchmark scores confirms that "Leadership" is the single best predictor of the robustness of a program's assessment system.

The figure to the right depicts the assessment of assessment by each of the four dimensions. The most challenging aspect of assessment at WSU after one year of the process has been translating evidence to action. Most "plans of action" in the first year of the WSU model have focused on assessment modifications or, occasionally, on adding or cutting courses. The goal of the process is ultimately enrichment of student learning opportunities, and to that end ongoing professional development will be essential.

Assessment of student learning outcomes is a powerful means to an end. It is not an end in itself.

Figure #4: Benchmark Progress on Assessment Systems

Review of WSU Learning Outcomes Assessment 2010
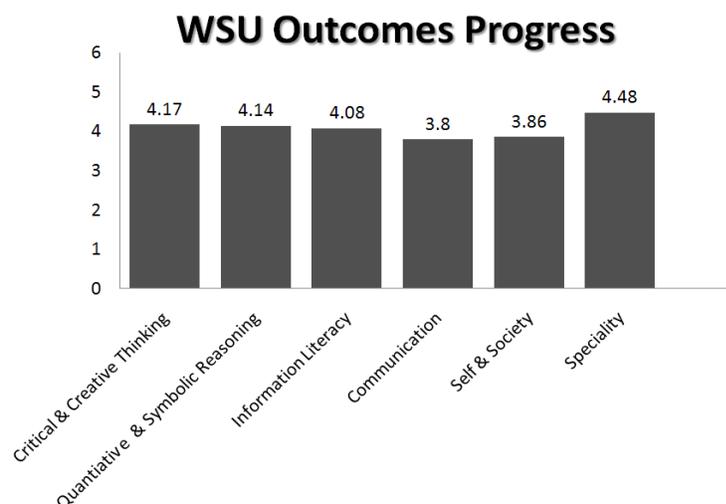Box covering 90 % of data (58 Programs)
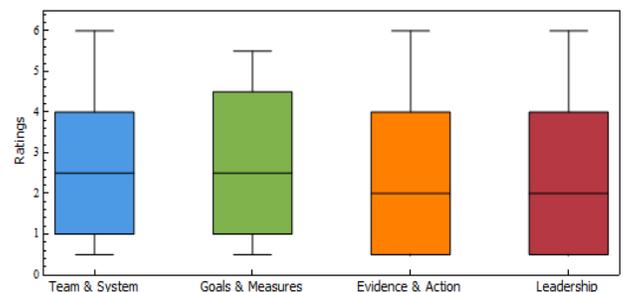
3. Information to the Public About Outcomes

Making Outcomes Visible to Public

Figure #5: Histogram of WSU Goals 2009-2010

Composite student learning outcomes are reported annually as described in the preceding pages (see Figure #1 preceding or as an alternate view in Figure #5 to the right), and the full reports of program assessment activities, student learning data and supporting documents are also available on the University's assessment portfolio site (http://universityportfolio.wsu.edu/2009-2010).

WSU Outcomes Progress

Critical & Creative Thinking: 4.17, Quantiative & Symbolic Reasoning: 4.14, Information Literacy: 4.08, Communication: 3.8, Self & Society: 3.86, Speciality: 4.48

Based on data aggregated from undergraduate programs from 17 programs, sample almost 20% of 2010 graduates.

1. WSU's system provides students and the public with information about major, program **and** institutional performance in terms of attainment of student learning outcomes. The WSU system does this with public reporting, but more importantly, again, by valuing and assessing how programs involve stakeholders on their assessment teams and with their assessment practices. In addition, WSU assesses how programs communicate their assessment practices and student learning outcomes. The WSU model values the sharing of institutional performance, however; the WSU model values as much or more the active engagement of community in the processes that create and use this information. Specifically, the WSU system advises programs to:
   - Engage multiple stakeholders in affirming, refining, and/or evaluating the program's assessment system.
   - Report results in ways that are transparent, engage participants in ongoing dialogue, and are accessible beyond the program.
   - Include stakeholders in reviewing assessment results and helping inform or guide next steps. (See **Figure #8** for evidence of this practice.)
   - View students as respected partners who use program criteria to self - and peer-assess in ways that feed back into curriculum. (See **Figure #7** as an example of this practice.)

2. WSU's system supplements learning outcomes information with additional evidence of the soundness of operation and overall effectiveness of the major, program or institution with respect to mission fulfillment in several ways:

   WSU's system strives to certify the efficacy of the assessment processes that its programs employ and sets goals for the quality of assessment work the university expects. Direct measures of student learning hold to principles of verifiable independent review and established standards of inter-rater reliability. WSU's system supplements its reports of student learning outcome information with additional evidence of the soundness of the assessment activities themselves.

   Specifically, WSU's Federated assessment system gathers program assessment reports and publishes them along with feedback and rubric based scores on the University's assessment portfolio site. That site contains:
   - WSU's system of assessment description
   - WSU progress at a glance on key system indicators
   - The ratings of 58 programs' assessment efforts
   - WSU's accomplishments on its learning outcomes
   - The program assessment reports and OAI feedback
   - The resource packet and rubric provided to programs
   - A chronicle of the project (unvarnished except where anonymity is warranted)

WSU's federated system anticipates that programs systematically measure demographics, graduation rates and other indirect information on programmatic effectiveness and consider these along with multiple credible direct and indirect measures that are designed to provide useful information about teaching and learning in the program in the process of developing their assessment purposes and plans.

An additional expectation of each program is that they will include in reports their contribution to WSU's institutional mission, or "core themes" as identified by the Northwest Commission of Colleges and Universities. Program's contribution to and alignment with the institutional mission (Section #2 in the *Guide to Effective Program Assessment* and **Figure #4** preceding, item #2) provides a measure of the <u>soundness of operation and overall effectiveness of the major, program or institution with respect to mission fulfillment</u>.

Figure #8 in the next section also provides a comparison of the evidence used to guide change. Note the identification of the measures that have been used, ranging from stakeholder feedback to changes guided by established or valid measures of performance. The public aspects of this provide substance for discussion and models for ongoing improvements.

Finally, **Figure #6** below is the image of a dynamic online display WSU employs to show outcomes by program and, in this case, how each program's assessment report fares on the four dimensions of *WSU's Guide to Effective Student Outcomes Assessment.* All programs can be viewed at the site, and college scores and other tables and figures are available for public viewing and for making comparisons.

Figure #6: View of Online Comparisons of WSU Program Assessment Systems
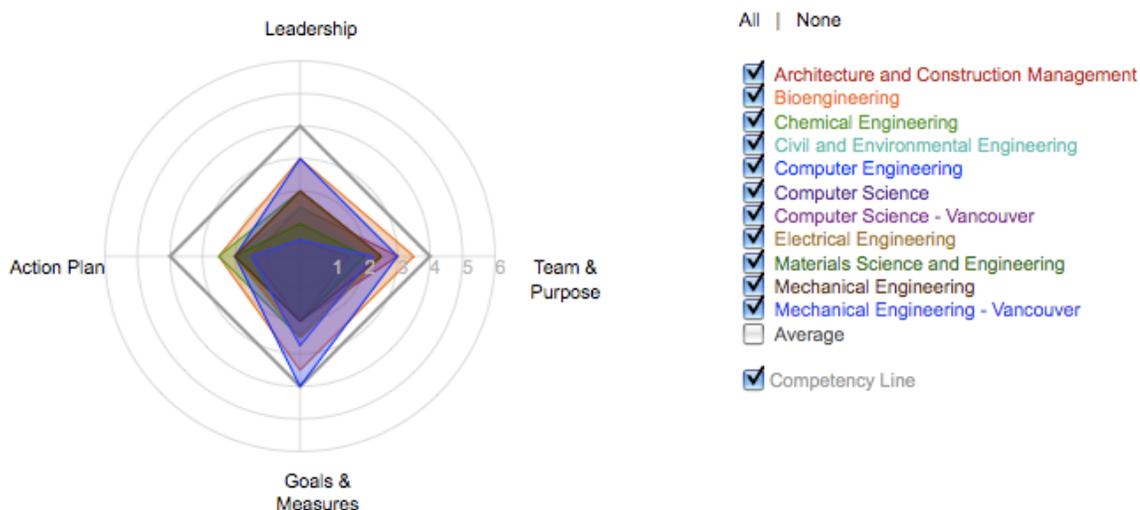
Figure #6 to the left shows scores on the Guide to Effective Student Outcomes Assessment rubric from several programs, providing a mechanism for comparison.

This comparison serves as both quality assurance and a resource for programs to learn from one another's successes.

Assessment as Catalyst for Improvement

A critical if sometimes forgotten maxim of assessment is that people should not be held accountable for what they can't change. The federated systems approach situates responsibility for assessment within the unique educational contexts of those who have opportunity to make changes.

The WSU Federated System of Assessment provides a key qualification to the meaning of <u>success with regards to outcomes</u>. When framed *only* as a lens on student performance, assessment too often masks opportunities to reflect on the nuances (variables) and discrete characteristics of student performance that yield insights useful for guiding improvement in teaching practice. Common measures of throughput (pass rates and even grades) tend not to produce substance useful for promoting among faculty regular discussions and decision-making processes about the major, program or institution. Simplistic measures, further, tend to promote the separation of teaching and learning from assessment. The WSU system embodies the understanding that, if there is no reflection in the design of the assessment there will be little improvement from the results of the assessment.

WSU system of assessment takes a very public stance to its assessment process
- The assessment criteria need to be public (both the criteria programs use for assessing student learning outcomes and the criteria WSU uses to assess the effectiveness of the assessment of student learning outcomes.
- The assessment results are open to public examination and are verified in discussion with external stakeholders. This happens at both the program and university level
- Stakeholders are included, rather than excluded from the conversation

1. The WSU system of assessment <u>incorporates information about success with student learning outcomes into regular discussions and decision-making processes about the major, program and institution.</u> Moreover, the engagement of external stakeholders ensures the discussions extend beyond faculty meetings in isolation. The recognition of the need to elevate the discussion to the institutional level is also reflected in the establishment of the Office of Assessment and Innovation, with a particular nod to the "innovation" in recognition that assessment at WSU needs to extend beyond acts of compliance. Again, central to the innovation of the WSU Federated Model is the principle that effective education in the global context requires transcending the traditional boundaries of the classroom, program, and institution and into broader communities of practice.

Figure #7: Faculty, Industry, and Student Assessment Comparisons


Project Critical Thinking Ratings by Group
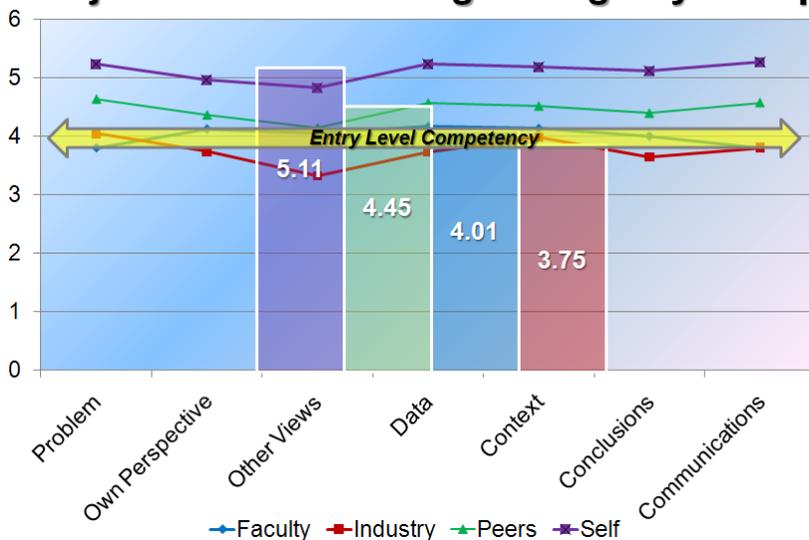
68 students on 14 teams peer & self assessed; 8 industry & 6 faculty members also rated student projects.

In Figure #7 to the left, students self-assessed and peer assessed their team projects. Using the same criteria, industry professionals and faculty also assessed the work. Ratings were reliable within groups, but between groups the ratings of student projects differed in ways that sparked useful discussion among stakeholders with important implications for shaping future curricula. One key outcome of this particular example was increased engagement of industry profes-sionals in recasting the criteria. Confirming the primacy of know-ledge creation responsibilities of faculty has been critical and well received.

2. The WSU System <u>shares information about student learning outcomes</u> **and** about assessment practices across the institution. The WSU system is fully public, see the University's Portfolio to view the assessment reports [http://universityportfolio.wsu.edu/2009-2010], including outcomes data for the university and for all 58 undergraduate academic programs as well as the feedback OAI is providing to the programs on their assessment systems. In addition, the creation of the Office of Assessment and Innovation in 2009 was done in part to provide a central clearinghouse for exchanging best practices at WSU. The public report also features assessment highlights on the web and catalogs strategies used at WSU to share with programs that face similar challenges. For instance, two professional programs have recently come to understand that professional board examinations do not correspond to measures they have developed in house to address their own curricular concerns. OAI hosts meetings of key stakeholders in which they share strategies. In addition, OAI also uses ratings on the Guide to Effective Assessment to identify an institutional program assessment award presented for the first time in the spring of 2010 to the WSU Honors program and College of Veterinary Medicine.

3. WSU's system of assessment <u>uses information about student learning outcomes when making specific changes</u>. The third dimension of the Guide to Effective Student Learning Outcomes rubric focuses program attention on action plans that are guided by: the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, stakeholder input, and solid evidence that changes will lead to improvement.

   In addition to assessing the quantity of changes made based upon assessment, the WSU approach also assesses the nature of the evidence programs use to inform change, and that information is also made public. Over time, the approach should yield important insight into the kinds of measures and information that is most likely to produce positive gains in student learning.

 Figure #8: Information Types Used to Guide Change
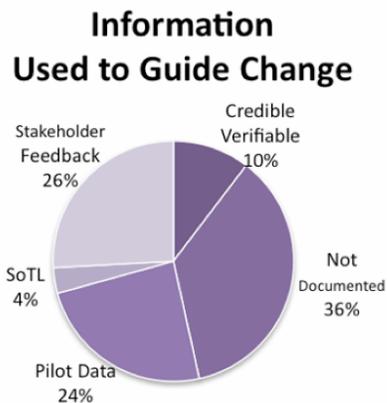
Figure #8 depicts the kinds of information WSU Programs used in the 2009-2010 cycle to inform or guide change. In the first year of the system, 26% capitalized on input from key stakeholders. 24% used data from pilot assessments, usually to refine the assessment itself. As a benchmark, 10% found utility useful for guiding changes from psychometrically valid assessments or peer reviews that documented reliable independent review.

4. <u>Ensuring that evidence of student learning outcomes is used to assure and improve the quality of the major, program or institution</u> is the linchpin of assessment and, we are discovering, more difficult than commonly understood. The WSU focus on each program's *Team and System* provides a critical step that promotes collaborative engagement focused on a shared purpose of improvement. A key finding from the 2009-2010 effort advances that purpose and provides additional evidence of the viability and utility of the WSU model. By assessing each program's Leadership, OAI has confirmed with evidence the predictive power of strong leadership. Program's that have leadership support for their assessment are more likely to close the loop (and have more robust Teams and coherent, cogent outcomes as well). Moreover, the affirmation of this finding has resulted in a new charge OAI is developing in collaboration with the WSU Executive Council in the provost's office. The assessment performance of each program and college will be included as part of each chair's and dean's annual review.

"Weighing the lamb doesn't fatten the lamb."
—Jonathan Kozel