

December 10, 2007

Ronald L. Baker
Deputy Executive Director
Northwest Commission on Colleges
and Universities
8060 165th Avenue NE, Suite 100
Redmond, WA 98052

Dear Dr. Baker:

I wish to briefly respond to the Focused Interim Report dated October 11, 2007. It was a pleasure to host Jane Baillargeon, and we appreciate the commitment and thoughtfulness that she put into her evaluation. Ms. Baillargeon conducted a thorough review of our documents related to assessment, and met with key participants in our assessment efforts. Her behavior was professional, thoughtful and thorough.

I am particularly pleased with Ms. Baillargeon's evaluation of University Studies, which she described "as having a very rich plan for assessing the teaching and learning environment." We also appreciate the commendation our Assessment Integration and Support Team (ASSIST) received as a "truly innovative approach to providing assessment support," while we also note her concern that neither it nor the faculty in residence are enough in themselves to close the feedback loop. Lastly, we agree with her depiction of the Institutional Assessment Council (IAC), which was established last year to provide a university-wide reporting mechanism regarding assessment.

We also agree with her concluding recommendations, that although the university through the IAC has made progress, we need to "continue to work toward clearly defined and systematic assessment in all programs" to ensure continuity, which includes graduate education. It is clear that Portland State is in the middle of a newly focused and energized assessment process that includes greater emphasis on clarity, consistence, feedback, and reporting. At this point in time, we have not accomplished all of our goals in these areas, but believe that we now have the mechanisms in place to sustain our progress in institution-wide assessment.

Ronald L. Baker
December 10, 2007
Page Two

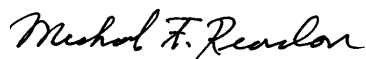
Learning Outcomes and Graduate Assessment

A major step forward has been the clarification of institutional learning goals for all students. IAC is currently developing pilot projects for the current academic year that will focus on methods for linking general education goals and outcomes to the disciplines and closing the feedback loop for students and faculty across the campus. General education and disciplinary learning goals and outcomes, including those for graduate programs, are articulated publicly through the Departmental Profiles section of the Institutional Portfolio, through course syllabi, and by departmental communications with students. It is clear that some units could be doing a better job. Nonetheless, we demonstrated in the 2005 report that 85% of our departments and programs had assessment plans in place and were actively conducting assessments. This academic year the IAC is working to bring the remaining programs on board, with the help of ASSIST.

We recognize the challenges for assessment at the graduate level for programs that are not subject to specialized accreditation. But, many graduate programs at Portland State do respond to specialized accrediting bodies specifically focused on graduate education, or which have a component designed specifically for graduate programs. In addition, we have not made a distinction between undergraduate and graduate assessment, so all departments have been asked to carry out assessment in their undergraduate and graduate programs with the same rigor, as reflected in the Departmental Profiles. Our assessment initiatives ensure that assessment of graduate programs is ongoing in departments, whether or not they are subject to specialized accreditation. In light of Ms. Baillargeon's comments, we will ask the Dean of Graduate Studies to play a larger role in our assessment efforts (See Baillargeon, p. 3) and will bring together all senior administrators with assessment responsibilities to coordinate efforts.

We are making considerable efforts in the area of assessment, as Ms. Baillargeon's report notes. We have appointed an Institutional Assessment Council to serve as the oversight and reporting mechanism recommended in the 2005 evaluation report. This group has articulated a set of undergraduate learning goals that will be used in several pilot projects with departments and programs during the current academic year, and has begun evaluating software to facilitate university-wide reporting of assessment. The IAC is also formulated clear protocols for assessment across the curriculum. In response to this report, we will continue our work to ensure consistency across all departments. We appreciate the opportunity to have an external observer provide a peer review of our efforts.

Sincerely,



Michael F. Reardon
Interim President