UCF UNIVERSITY-WIDE SYSTEM FOR ASSESSING STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

Dr. Julia Pet-Armacost, Assistant Vice President for Information, Planning, and Assessment at UCF will be presenting "UCF University-wide System for Assessing Student Learning Outcomes." In her presentation, she will address the following questions: What are student learning outcomes? Why do universities assess student learning? What programs at UCF are required to conduct assessment? How do different programs assess student learning? How is testing currently used in assessing student learning? How does UCF's system for program assessment hold programs accountable for assessing student learning?

Assessing student learning outcomes is a critical element in our educational system. Assessment provides the basic means of identifying whether students are learning what is intended, and gives the insights to allow us to change the way that we teach in order to improve student learning. Assessment is the basis for continuous improvement. At the course level, assessment drives changes in teaching approaches within individual classrooms. At the institutional level, assessment drives changes in the curriculum to ensure that the curriculum provides graduates with the abilities that they need to succeed in their professions.

Assessment provides a basis for accountability—the obligation to be answerable for one's actions. Accountability for students drives the overall evaluation and assignment of grades for courses. Accountability for an institution drives the need for a comprehensive assessment system that ensures that program learning outcomes are achieved.

UCF and other SUS institutions have established assessment systems that are driven to improve program offerings. The systems vary by institution. Some are structured to focus extensively on program learning outcomes. Others include administrative functions in addition to all academic programs. Some are integrated into strategic and annual planning systems. Despite the differences in structure, a core element is the focus on program learning outcomes and continuous improvement.

The UCF Program Assessment system is a very comprehensive system that includes all academic programs and administrative functions that support the development of students. The foundation of UCF's system is a requirement for an annual submission of an assessment plan for the coming year, and a report of the results from the analysis of the previous year's assessment results (including a description of planned program changes and the effects of previous changes that had been implemented). A standard reporting format is used that is web-based in order to provide easy access. The heart of the process is the requirement for each program to identify the program learning outcomes that are desired, identify appropriate methods for assessing performance on each outcome or objective, and setting "stretch" targets for the performance measures. The methods for assessing learning outcomes vary by program, including, for example, use of portfolios, performance appraisals, exam results (local and national), and surveys of students, alumni, and employers. With almost 200 different academic programs, use of any one method is insufficient to assess the learning outcomes for the programs. In all cases, programs are required to select the most appropriate methods and use more than one method for assessing learning.

The quality of UCF's assessment process is assured by a 100% inspection of the assessment plans and results by divisional review committees (each college and seven major administrative

divisions). These divisional reviews are monitored by the University Assessment Committee who reports to the President annually on the state of assessment at the university. In addition, the institution provides survey support and extensive training on conducting assessment to academic programs through the Operational Excellence and Assessment Support office.

The UCF Program Assessment system forces a continuous review of what is happening with the students and how well they are learning. Moreover, it provides a mechanism for isolating weak areas and motivating changes in curricular design and delivery. The program assessment system provides the means of assessing **us**. In that sense, the assessment of the quality of the assessment system forms a natural institutional accountability device.

The presentation on the UCF University-wide System for Assessing Student Learning Outcomes will highlight these issues, provide illustrations of specific program learning outcomes and related measures (tests, surveys, portfolios, projects, etc.), and briefly describe the system that makes it all happen at UCF.

About the Presenter:

Dr. Pet-Armacost has spent 19 years as a faculty member at the University of Virginia and the University of Central Florida (UCF). At UCF, she was the former Coordinator of Assessment for the College of Engineering and Computer Science and the ABET Coordinator for the Department of Industrial Engineering and Management Systems where she is a tenured Associate Professor. She is currently the Assistant Vice President for Information, Planning, and Assessment and coordinates the activities of the Operational Excellence and Assessment Support office, the University Analysis and Planning Support office, and the Institutional Research office. She has conducted numerous presentations and workshops on assessment at conferences for a variety of professional societies and organizations (e.g., AAHE, ASEE, AIR, SAIR, FAIR, BAP, and SACS) and most recently has been an invited speaker at the 2003 SACCR conference, the Best Assessment Processes VI (2004) conference, and at the 2004 Undergraduate Assessment Conference.