



Massachusetts Department of Higher Education

Phase One Report from the Working Group on Student Learning Outcomes and Assessment

JULY 2010

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Working Group on Student Learning Outcomes and Assessment was established by Commissioner Freeland in January, 2010 to bring together public campus presidents, provosts, faculty members, students, institutional research/assessment directors and a member of the Board of Higher Education in a collaborative deliberation about one of the components of the Vision Project--student learning outcomes and assessment. The Vision Project calls for Massachusetts to “produce the best educated citizenry and workforce in the nation” and establishes student learning achievement as one of the seven outcome areas in which the Commonwealth will strive for leadership. The Commissioner asked the Working Group to examine national best practices and current status on Massachusetts public higher education campuses in two phases of work--the first to focus on campus programs for learning outcomes assessment and the second to focus at the state level on issues of public accountability, comparability and transparency.

The Working Group has met seven times since January, 2010 and has completed Phase One of its work. As requested by the Commissioner we have:

- reviewed national literature, research and best practice on campus-based learning outcomes and assessment,
- reviewed the results of a DHE Survey of campus programs sent to public campus provosts in December, 2009 and designed for comparability with a national survey prepared by the National Institute on Student Learning Outcomes and Assessment,
- considered the report of the Commissioner’s Advisory Group on Undergraduate Education (CAGUE),
- considered the Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP) initiative of the American Association of Colleges and Universities, and
- considered approaches to assessment that value our system of diverse institutions and that contribute to reductions in performance gaps over time among different ethnic/racial, economic and gender groups.

We have met with Commissioner Freeland and submitted a Phase One report. This executive summary covers some of our conclusions and recommendations in abbreviated form. The full Phase One report and appendices will be available on the DHE website by September 2010. A Phase II Report will be available at the conclusion of our work in December 2010.

Major Findings

- Momentum toward greater public disclosure and accountability by colleges and universities and state higher education systems for student learning has been building for several years.
- There is a great deal of consistency between learning outcomes and assessment programs in Massachusetts and patterns throughout the country.
- Most public colleges and universities in Massachusetts have in place a common set of learning outcomes that apply to all undergraduate students, as well as learning outcomes for specific programs. Most Massachusetts public colleges and universities include Communication, Quantitative Reasoning and Critical Thinking among their institutional-level learning outcomes.
- There are substantial similarities among the learning outcomes in place at Massachusetts public colleges and universities, New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) accreditation standards, CAGUE recommendations, and the LEAP “Essential Learning Outcomes.”
- Massachusetts public institutions of higher education have developed student learning outcomes assessment programs that include many of the key components of exemplary assessment programs identified in the literature.
- NEASC standards, guidelines, and data requirements have exerted a strong influence on the approaches that Massachusetts public colleges and universities have taken to program and institutional learning outcomes assessment. Institutional assessment of student learning outcomes is typically done either for institutional program review or for self-studies for accreditation.
- Good assessment of student learning outcomes in Massachusetts derives from the faculty. The level of faculty involvement in assessment is a key indicator of a successful assessment program. Faculty must be responsible for the development of learning outcomes and involved in designing, scoring, analyzing, reporting, and using assessment data with strong support from administrators and an assessment office. Faculty time, effort, and commitment needed for assessment programs to be successful must be recognized and faculty responsibilities must be adjusted and rewarded accordingly.
- It is entirely unlikely that the outcomes measured by Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency (CAAP), the Measure of Academic

Proficiency and Progress (MAPP), or the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) will correlate well with intended learning outcomes articulated locally by the faculty of a given college or university campus. That is, these tests are unlikely to have content validity. If standardized tests are adopted as a common measure across institutions they will supplant the richer, more robust, more evolved, and more useful local assessments that are currently being employed.

- The lack of a sufficiently developed culture of assessment is cited by many public higher education institutions' provosts as a weakness. Assessment is not a one-time event; it must be seen and supported as an ongoing, iterative, cascading process if it is to result in the desired program improvements and better student learning.
- There is a need for more leadership, better coordinated efforts, and access to top notch assessment experts to support the development of top tier assessment programs on Massachusetts campuses.

Recommendations

The Working Group on Student Learning Outcomes and Assessment understands both the desire to create a more centralized and systemic approach to student outcomes and assessment as well as the need to maintain decentralized and campus-centered control over student learning. Within the nuances and complexities of that reality, our Working Group:

1. Sees potential value in aligning our state system of higher education with the LEAP framework, including the ability to benefit from assessment frameworks and practices developed by other LEAP states and institutions, the possibility of applying the LEAP framework to increase the achievements of underserved students, and the potential for making comparisons with other LEAP states in the future.

We recognize that the identification of learning outcomes is a responsibility of the faculty and recommend that the identification, implementation and assessment of field specific learning outcomes should remain the responsibility of faculty at individual colleges and universities. We recommend that Massachusetts consider becoming a "LEAP state," but only after having consulted with the faculty of Massachusetts public colleges and universities regarding their opinions of the same.

2. Recommends that individual campuses continue their efforts to develop assessment programs and strategies that clearly reflect their mission, academic programs and co-curricular offerings. Planning at all levels of each institution is necessary and critical in determining the student learning outcomes expected and optimal strategies for assessment. Assessment should occur at the course,

program and campus levels to maximize data collection and continued improvement.

3. Recommends that each campus review its capacity to provide the leadership, expertise, assessment instruments and support to faculty and staff engaged in campus-based assessment activities and to achieve system-wide assessment goals. This capacity should be improved, if necessary, as funds become available. Campuses are also encouraged to consider taking a regionalized approach to assessment and/or the requisite professional development for faculty and staff as a way to reduce program costs and to increase the accessibility of assessment expertise and opportunities for faculty collaboration.

4. Is strong in its opposition to any high stakes standardized assessment instrument for all students in the Commonwealth's higher education system. It is imperative that any approach to the assessment of student learning be sensitive to and understanding of students, communities and missions of the three sectors of public higher education in Massachusetts.

5. Values the concepts presented in *Creating a Culture of Evidence, An Evidenced Based Approach to Accountability for Student Learning Outcomes*, (Millett, Payne, Dwyer, Stickler and Alexiou, 2009) as a holistic, cost efficient process to create and maintain the culture of evidence necessary to improve student learning outcomes on campus. The Working Group encourages each public higher education campus to review the model, or similar models, and consider its implementation on their campus.

6. Recommends that the DHE identify sources and create funds to support both experimental approaches and assessment initiatives at the system and campus level that document the link between assessment results and program improvements.

7. Recommends that the colleges/universities, in collaboration with the DHE, engage a high-profile assessment consultant (guru) to provide vision, expertise, and leadership to system-wide student learning outcome assessment and that each campus identify a point-person for assessment to work with the consultant and other institutional representatives. The consultants work would include individual campus consultations on assessment, tailored to the campus needs, and convening meetings of campus-based assessment staff and representatives of DHE for sharing best practices and challenges and developing common assessment data that can be used to provide evidence of the achievements of public higher education across the Commonwealth. The consultant's work would extend one to two years, with ongoing work the responsibility of campus representatives and DHE staff.

8. Recommends that the repertoire of campus assessment approaches include the capability of analyzing the achievement of comparable learning outcomes

among different ethnic/racial, economic and gender groups and encourages campus efforts to narrow performance gaps. DHE should play a helpful role in support of this objective by providing consultative assistance as well as templates and tools for ways to disaggregate and analyze data so that performance gap analysis becomes a part of ongoing institutional research activity on each campus. Given the high costs involved in achieving sufficient sample size to allow for disaggregated analysis, system-wide and segmentally-coordinated approaches make fiscal sense.

9. Recommends increasing the collaborative spirit between DHE and NEASC with regards to the assessment of student learning.

10. Sees value for the Commonwealth and for individual campuses from the use of NSSE and CCSSEE assessment tools and consortial arrangements within the framework of multiple assessment approaches and recommends further examination of the possibilities during Phase II activities of the Working Group on Student Learning Outcomes and Assessment.

INTRODUCTION

The Vision Project: A Public Agenda for Higher Education in Massachusetts initiated by Commissioner of Higher Education Richard Freeland is intended to provide a means of focusing the work of the Department of Higher Education (DHE) and unifying the work of public campuses around a set of educational outcomes chosen to support a bold vision: "**Massachusetts will produce the best-educated citizenry and workforce in the nation.**" Approved in final form by the Board of Higher Education (BHE) at its May 4, 2010 meeting, the Vision Project (The Project) sets an important public agenda for higher education and represents a commitment by all public campuses to producing nationally leading educational results at a time when the need for well-educated citizens and a well-prepared workforce is critical for the future of the Commonwealth. The Project will also signal a willingness to continue to be transparent and accountable by establishing specific, measurable outcomes that allow us to compare our progress, at aggregate levels, with peer institutions and with other states and nations.

The Working Group on Student Learning Outcomes and Assessment (the Working Group) brings together presidents, provosts, faculty members, institutional research or assessment directors, a BHE member, and students from state and community colleges and universities in Massachusetts for an in-depth and collaborative examination of our work on establishing and assessing student learning outcomes. The effort to more clearly understand and demonstrate what students know and are able to exhibit as a result of their college experiences has become a national movement, and has become an increasingly important focus of regional accreditation, because of widespread recognition that a college education is more important than ever before. The DHE believes it is time to examine current policies and progress in this area on our public campuses and across the country to be sure we are attending to the challenges of assessment in the most useful way possible. The Working Group's ultimate purpose is to identify ways to add strength and capacity to campus and system-level assessment efforts as one means of improving the quality of student learning in public colleges and universities throughout the Commonwealth.

The Working Group was asked to address its charge in two phases:

- During **Phase One**, which occurred during the spring 2010 semester, the Working Group reviewed the national literature, research and best practices on campus-based learning

outcomes and assessment. It also collected information on current programs of learning outcomes and assessment among public campuses in Massachusetts, and reviewed these in the context of what it learned about best practices nationally. The Working Group considered the recently issued recommendations of the Commissioner's Advisory Group on Undergraduate Education (CAGUE) with respect to learning outcomes. The basic goal of Phase One was to make sure that every public campus has a well-developed assessment program closely linked to its mission and curriculum.

- **Phase Two** of the project, which will occur during the fall 2010 semester, will involve a review of studies, reports and recommendations by national and state higher education organizations on how student learning assessment can be most usefully linked to statewide planning and policy, performance measurement, public accountability, and comparative ranking systems. Based on this review, the Working Group has been asked to recommend how best to develop a system-wide learning assessment effort, building on campus-level programs, that enables us to compare the academic achievements of students in Massachusetts with their peers in other states. The goals of Phase Two are to allow for public accountability at the system level regarding student learning and to contribute to the Vision Project, which seeks to ensure we in public higher education are doing all we can to produce the nation's best educated citizenry and workforce.

For **Phase One** of our work we were asked to:

- review descriptions of campus-level programs for student learning outcomes and assessment and “consider the total mix of programs as a reflection of system strengths and weaknesses in the area of assessment of student learning”;
- review studies, reports and recommendations by national and state higher education organizations that focus on student learning outcomes, campus-based assessment programs, nationally normed tests of student learning and other assessment measures;
- consider the report of the CAGUE, and the comments on the CAGUE Report sent to Commissioner Freeland by college presidents;

- consider the Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) initiative; and weigh approaches to assessment that value our system of institutional diversity and contribute to reductions in performance gaps over time among different ethnic/racial, economic and gender groups.

Our **Phase One** report was to include analysis and commentary on:

- overall strengths and weaknesses of campus learning outcomes and assessment programs.
- approaches for building on our strengths even in an era of drastically constrained resources. Are there possibilities for collaborative activity and/or for highlighting model programs and best practices that would be helpful to campuses and could be promoted by DHE?
- reactions to the student learning outcomes outlined in the CAGUE Report and your sense of the fit between these outcomes and those in use on the campuses.
- reactions to the learning outcomes developed as part of the LEAP program and our sense of the fit between these outcomes and those in use on the campuses. Should Massachusetts become a LEAP state?

The Working Group has done its best to respond to the charge and is pleased to submit this Phase One report.

Our Approach

The Working Group met seven times beginning in January 2010; and members have spent many additional hours reading materials from the literature, studying the results of the DHE Institutional Survey of Student Learning Outcomes and Assessment Programs (DHE Survey) completed by campus provosts, examining CAGUE and LEAP documents, and participating in drafting groups for various sections of our report. During our meetings we focused our discussions on learning outcomes, assessment approaches, campus programs best practices, and implications for performance gaps. In our examination of the DHE Survey results and presidents' commentary on CAGUE, we studied documents that masked the identity of specific institutions and focused at the segmental level of community colleges and state colleges.

Representatives from UMASS were part of our Working Group from the beginning, but we reviewed DHE Survey results for UMASS later in the spring after the University officially joined the Vision Project. Our overall observations

and conclusions apply, therefore, to all of the public sectors of higher education in Massachusetts.

The DHE Survey and National Institute for Learning Outcomes and Assessment (NILOA) Survey

The Working Group used information about campus programs and practices for learning outcomes and assessment that was derived from the DHE Survey sent to chief academic officers by DHE in late December 2009. Many of the items in that DHE Survey were patterned on a national survey on the same subject developed by Stanley Ikenberry and George Kuh and distributed in fall 2009 by the National Institute of Learning Outcomes and Assessment. This approach allowed us to compare patterns and practices in Massachusetts public higher education with experiences elsewhere. Examination of findings from both surveys shows that there is a great deal of consistency between learning outcomes and assessment programs in Massachusetts and patterns throughout the country. Massachusetts DHE Survey findings appear in their entirety in Appendix A and in relevant sections in this report. National NILOA comparisons appear in relevant sections throughout this report and the full NILOA report is available online. Both surveys form the basis for many of our observations and conclusions. (A second national NILOA survey has just been sent to campus provosts.)

It is important to note, however, that development of a nationally comparable instrument brought important limitations to the DHE Survey as well. While it provided a broad picture of campus programs, it did not contain as much information as we would have liked in many areas. For example, the questions on assessment measures do not ask for detail about campus-wide and program specific measures, nor did they allow us to understand, beyond a very general level, how assessment results are used on campuses. Additionally, there appeared to be some confusion about some of the items. For example, there were widely varying responses to a question asking for estimated annual expenditures for assessment (leaving out faculty expenditures), leaving the Working Group without a clear picture in this area. As another example, some campuses responded positively to the question asking if they had campus-wide learning outcomes, even if they had learning outcomes only for general education programs; while other campuses responded negatively to the same question because they had campus-wide learning outcomes only for general education programs. These different interpretations affect the accuracy of the data presented in this report. As a result of these factors, the Working Group feels uncomfortable making judgments about the overall quality of campus-based learning outcomes and assessment programs. We were impressed by the level of activity in this area on many campuses but were not able to form nuanced judgments about quality.

Judgments of Quality

There is another, perhaps more important, reason for our hesitation about judging the quality of learning outcomes and assessment programs. Each public institution in the Commonwealth; whether a community college, state college, or the University of Massachusetts; has a distinctive mission and an array of programs and services that suit a distinctive student body. Learning outcomes and assessment programs are designed with the uniqueness of the institution in mind while still conforming to the standards and expectations of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC). Judgments about the quality of these programs require a much more detailed campus-by-campus examination than was afforded by the DHE Survey. Where we felt that the information permitted us to do it, we have made judgments about overall strengths and weaknesses by segment of public higher education.

The Report's Organization and Structure

This report contains a chapter for each of the major topic areas we discussed over the course of the spring: the need for learning outcomes; learning outcomes at Massachusetts public colleges and universities; assessment programs at our colleges and universities; and exemplary student learning outcomes and assessment programs and processes. Within these chapters, all the items in our charge including CAGUE, LEAP, assessment approaches for closing performance gaps, and commentary from the literature are addressed. A final chapter draws from earlier chapters and lists our major recommendations on how to achieve best practices in student learning outcomes and assessment and opportunities for campuses and DHE to work collaboratively. These will be amplified by our work during Phase Two, so the Working Group considers this very much a work in progress.

The Literature

In the course of our examination, the Working Group read a great many materials—reports and recommendations of national organizations, research studies, and scholarly articles. We have listed these materials in Appendix B and will draw upon them as needed throughout this report, but it is not our intention to provide a literature review in this Report. We will start, however, with some brief comments on the Spellings Commission because that Commission propelled much of the current movement toward learning outcomes and assessment in higher education; with a description of NEASC, the regional accrediting body because NEASC has had, and will continue to have, an enormous influence on campus programs and policies related to learning outcomes assessment; and with a description of Liberal Education & America's Promise (LEAP) because LEAP has been influential to our thinking and recommendations.

CHAPTER I: THE NEED FOR LEARNING OUTCOMES

The Spellings Report

In 2005, Margaret Spellings, Secretary of the United States Department of Education (DOE), established the Commission on the Future of Higher Education, a group tasked with creating a national strategy for higher education. The report, frequently referred to as the “Spellings Report,” was issued in the fall of 2006. Among the recommendations included in the report were: to establish a federal database to monitor students’ academic progress; to provide incentives to institutions that publically reported student learning outcomes including the use of mandatory standardized tests; and to pursue significant changes to the accrediting processes including an emphasis on measuring learning outcomes. Since the release of the report, during which the Higher Education Act of 2008 (HEA) was passed, these recommendations have largely been ignored. Secretary Spellings herself stepped back from the suggestion of mandatory use of standardized tests stating that more research was needed and that one size would not fit all.

A lasting effect of the Spellings Report is the national focus on accountability. The HEA placed the responsibility for accountability in the hands of the institutions, giving "colleges the authority to set the terms of their own academic evaluations." The momentum, however, may have led to the creation of the Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA), jointly developed by the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities and the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, with funding provided by the Lumina Foundation.

A component of the VSA is the establishment and assessment of student learning outcomes. The “College Portrait” presents institutions’ accomplishments through two assessment approaches. First, institutions provide institution-specific descriptors of students’ achievement of outcomes including program assessments and professional licensure exams. Second, institutions choose to administer one of three standardized tests developed to measure broad cognitive skills. The results of the latter are not being reported at this time as institutions are determining the validity of these measures and how to use the data generated by the standardized tests.

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Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP)

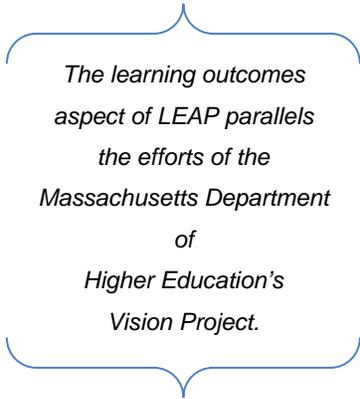
The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) launched a decade-long initiative in 2005 – Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP): Excellence for Everyone as a Nation Goes to College. This was an initiative designed to promote the value of a liberal education, to engage the

public in questions about what matters most in higher education, and to create “a set of essential learning outcomes and guiding principles for a twenty-first century college education.”

The initial work published in *College Learning for the New Global Century* focused on the essential aims, learning outcomes, guiding principles, and the commitments our society needs to make to ensure that future generations are prepared to provide the necessary leadership for our country.

The learning outcomes aspect of LEAP parallels the efforts of the DHE’s Vision Project. LEAP is working in partnership with several states to connect the proposed learner outcomes with student achievement. The evidence-based approach encourages the sharing of best practices about assessing student outcomes and how to use that information to improve student learning and achievement.

LEAP advocates for seven Principles of Excellence, including number seven, “Assess Students’ Ability to Apply Learning to Complex Problems: Use Assessment to Deepen Learning and to Establish a Culture of Shared Purpose and Continuous Improvement.” There is strong support in this work for providing ongoing assessment of student learning through diagnostic, interim, and capstone efforts; and to use this information to continually improve educational experiences for students.



The learning outcomes aspect of LEAP parallels the efforts of the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education’s Vision Project.

However, LEAP cautions against a rush to establishing a standardized test for higher education for two reasons. First, the complexity of learning outcomes in the higher education experience would be very difficult to measure across the many disciplines. Second, while standardized tests may identify an area of weakness, they generally do not provide information on why the problem exists or suggest remedies for the concern. The alternative method of assessment promoted is curriculum-embedded assessment which provides more refined information on students’ efforts, faculty engagement on the students’ cumulative progress, and areas where the institution needs to focus for improvement.

The National Leadership Council for LEAP recommends that:

1. Assessments be linked to the essential learning outcomes identified in the report, *College Learning for the New Global Century*; that assessments be embedded at milestone points in the curriculum – including within students’ major fields – and that assessments be made part of the overall graduation requirement.

2. Each campus analyze its assessment findings to ensure that all groups of students are progressing successfully toward the expected learning goals.
3. Broad-based leadership be developed in order to create campus cultures marked by an unwavering focus on the quality of student learning, by an ethic of continuous improvement, and by structures and rewards that support faculty and staff leadership on these issues.

The New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) Commission on Institutions of Higher Education

The New England Association of Schools and Colleges, Inc. (NEASC), one of six regional accrediting bodies in the United States, is a voluntary, non-profit, self-governing organization having as its primary purpose the accreditation of educational institutions. Institutions of higher learning achieve accreditation from the New England Association by demonstrating they meet the Commission's Standards for Accreditation and comply with its policies. The Standards for Accreditation establish criteria for institutional quality. Each of the eleven Standards articulates a dimension of institutional quality. In applying the Standards, the Commission assesses and makes a determination about the effectiveness of the institution as a whole.

Self-regulation is an essential element in the success of accreditation. Thus, the Standards for Accreditation were developed through a lengthy, participatory process involving the membership in articulating the dimensions of quality required of institutions of higher education deserving of the public trust. Indeed the public as well was invited to participate in this process in recognition of the importance of higher education to the individual and collective well being of our citizenry and for our economy. Thus, the Standards represent the accrued wisdom of over 200 colleges and universities and interested others about the essential elements of institutional quality, and they offer a perspective that stresses the public purposes of higher education. The Commission continually evaluates the effectiveness of its Standards and its processes for applying them, and makes such changes as conditions warrant.

The NEASC accreditation process, approved by the Department of Education, represents the collective work of educators and the public.

(Segments of the Preamble to the Standards for Accreditation)

There are eleven standards included in the NEASC review and each is evaluated on the elements of planning, evaluation, and institutional effectiveness.

Assessment of all aspects of the operation of the institution is considered (academic, students, faculty, facilities, etc.) and specific evidence of achievement of goals is required.

The NEASC accreditation process, approved by the Department of Education (DOE), represents the collective work of educators and the public. Each institution is reviewed at least every ten years, and may be reviewed more frequently if deficiencies are identified. The National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity (NACIQI) has oversight of the accrediting standards. However, due to changes to the Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA) and an insufficient number of appointees from the United States House of Representatives, the group has not met since 2008.

NEASC, and other accrediting bodies in the United States, are encouraging stronger assessment measures. No specific recommendations have been made for institutional student learning outcomes or standardized testing to evaluate the achievement of outcomes.

The Commissioner’s Advisory Group on Undergraduate Education (CAGUE)

In 2009 Board of Higher Education Chair Charles F. Desmond appointed a diverse group of fourteen key state leaders in business, government, non-profit and community organizations, and higher education to serve on an advisory group. The group was charged with developing a list of learning outcomes that would apply to all students completing a baccalaureate degree.

Three categories of outcomes were identified: college-level fundamentals; integrative thinking; and civic, organizational, and career competencies. Each category had several specific outcomes further describing the expectations of a college graduate. The student learning outcomes identified are very similar to those presented by LEAP.

CAGUE also presented ten recommendations for next steps in the process of promoting improved outcomes in higher education in the Commonwealth. Several of those recommendations are being considered by this Working Group including an analysis of institutional student learning outcomes in Massachusetts public institutions of higher education; engaging in discussion regarding the adoption of a shared student learning outcomes framework across the Commonwealth; and considering participation in the LEAP Initiative.

The CAGUE student learning outcomes identified are very similar to those presented by LEAP.

Summary

The expectation for accountability by higher education institutions is found in our professional organizations, in our accrediting agencies, in our legislatures, and in our students and their parents. We are expected to be able to articulate what a student gains from a college education and provide evidence that those gains are occurring as a result of the academic and extracurricular activities in which our students engage.

How we are to measure these outcomes remains unclear. There has been significant progress on the identification of common student learning outcomes as evidenced by the work of LEAP, CAGUE, and many other groups. The art of how to measure the change in a student from matriculation to graduation is widely discussed, yet there is a lack of universal agreement on the best practices of assessment. A standardized test is attractive to some, in that there is a quantitative result and the presumption that scores on one testing can be compared to the scores on another testing. However, concerns regarding validity and reliability of the tests for the purpose of broad assessment are prevalent in the literature. Issues raised include the appropriateness of any one test for all students regardless of discipline or type of learning environment and how other variables factor into the results following two, four or more years of education. This concern with the validity and reliability of such tests should give us pause, and broad use of such instruments is premature.

Other approaches to assessment, including program assessment and curriculum-embedded assessment, have received greater acceptance and are being widely used to determine student achievements and to improve educational offerings. Identifying and sharing best practices in these aspects of assessment would be beneficial to improving student learning outcomes.

CHAPTER II: LEARNING OUTCOMES AT MASSACHUSETTS PUBLIC COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

In his charge to the Working Group, Commissioner Freeland asked us to review the current state of student learning outcomes assessment in the Commonwealth and best practice in assessment nationally. The DHE Survey of Massachusetts public institutions of higher education, patterned after the National Institute for Learning Outcomes and Assessment (NILOA) survey, was conducted and its results compiled to form a picture of the state of assessment in Massachusetts.

In 2009, NILOA published a study that found that, contrary to what many observers thought, the systematic gathering of information about undergraduate learning is commonplace in most colleges and universities across the country. Three quarters of institutions responding to a NILOA survey (more than 1,500 institutions) have in place a common set of learning outcomes that apply to all undergraduate students. Many more had learning outcomes for specific academic programs.



DHE Survey data indicate that Massachusetts public higher education takes its assessment efforts seriously, that quality assessment is going on in our institutions, and that assessments are typically campus-developed.

We have found the same to be true of public colleges and universities in Massachusetts.



In order to learn more about the status of institutional-level learning outcomes at public colleges and universities in the Commonwealth, Commissioner Freeland distributed a questionnaire to all fifteen community colleges, all nine state colleges and all four university campuses. The questionnaire asked each institution to describe the status of their learning outcomes assessment work at both the institutional level and program level, seeking such information as:

- Whether the institution has learning outcomes that apply to all undergraduates,
- A descriptive list of those learning outcomes,
- When the learning outcomes were established,
- Who was involved in creating the learning outcomes,
- How often the learning outcomes are reviewed,
- How the learning outcomes are reviewed,
- How each campus uses the results of their reviews,
- Whether the college has “field-specific” learning outcomes, and
- Samples of those outcomes from five different disciplines: Biology, Business, History, Psychology, and Allied Health.

The questionnaire was informal and not scientific, and responses suggest a varied understanding of terminology and institutional practices associated with learning outcomes and their assessment. With this in mind, the results indicated that nearly all of the community colleges (thirteen of fifteen), two-thirds of the state colleges (six of nine) and three-fourths of the university campuses (three of four) have a common set of student learning outcomes that apply to all undergraduate students. Of the institutions with established learning outcomes, more than half created them between five and ten years ago, while the rest developed them within the last five years. In most cases, the learning outcomes were created by a combination of both faculty and academic administrators.

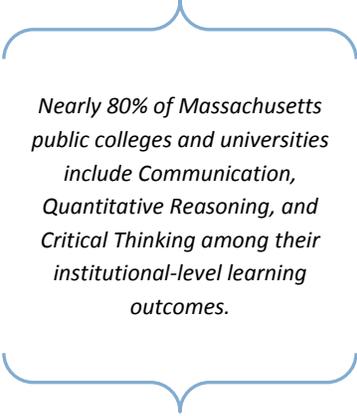
Most public colleges and universities in Massachusetts have in place a common set of learning outcomes that apply to all undergraduate students, as well as learning outcomes for specific programs.

While there is some variation among the institutions in the number of institutional-level learning outcomes used and the nomenclature, most can reasonably be described in a few common categories, as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of Institutional-Level Student Learning Outcomes

Learning Outcome	Community Colleges Using this Learning Outcome (N = 13 of 15)	State Colleges Using this Learning Outcome (N = 6 of 9)	University Campuses Using this Learning Outcome (N = 3 of 4)
<i>Written and Oral Communication</i>	100%	100%	100%
<i>Quantitative Reasoning</i>	100%	100%	100%
<i>Critical Thinking/Problem Solving</i>	100%	83%	100%
<i>Multicultural/Global Awareness</i>	77%	67%	100%
<i>Information Literacy</i>	77%	50%	100%
<i>Technological Literacy</i>	77%	50%	67%
<i>Ethical Practices</i>	62%	50%	100%
<i>Knowledge of Arts/Humanities, Social/Behavioral/Natural Sciences</i>	46%	83%	100%
<i>Civic Engagement</i>	46%	67%	67%
<i>Personal and Professional Development</i>	31%	50%	67%

As these results indicate, nearly 80% of the public higher education institutions in Massachusetts (22 of 28 institutions) report that they already include *Written and Oral Communication, Quantitative Reasoning, and Critical Thinking/Problem Solving* among learning outcomes that apply to all undergraduate students at their institution; and all but two of the learning outcomes (*Civic Engagement and Personal and Professional Development*) are employed by at least half of the institutions.



Nearly 80% of Massachusetts public colleges and universities include Communication, Quantitative Reasoning, and Critical Thinking among their institutional-level learning outcomes.

Additionally, all fifteen community colleges, all nine state colleges, and all four university campuses have learning outcomes that are specific to fields of study. While the questionnaire only sampled five disciplines (Biology, Business, History, Psychology, and Allied Health programs), it is evident from the responses that Massachusetts colleges have spent considerable time and effort on establishing detailed learning outcomes for their students in these academic disciplines.

Alignment of Learning Outcomes

A number of influences have contributed to, and continue to shape, institutional-level learning outcomes at Massachusetts public institutions of higher education. Most importantly, these learning outcomes are an expression of what the faculty at each institution believe well-educated students should know and be able to exhibit when completing a course of study at their institution. Additionally, learning outcomes are influenced by such factors as:

- the unique mission of the institution,
- whether the institution is a two-year or four-year institution,
- regional and discipline-specific accreditation standards,
- national organizations promoting a specific teaching or learning philosophy, and/or
- relationships between community colleges and the four-year institutions that are transfer destinations for their students.

The Working Group reviewed whether and how the institutional-level learning outcomes at Massachusetts public institutions of higher education aligned with the NEASC standards for regional accreditation purposes; with the CAGUE recommendations for purposes of developing a well-educated citizenry and

workforce in the state; and with LEAP's "Essential Learning Outcomes" as an indicator of national best practices in learning outcomes assessment.

The New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC)

All of the public higher education institutions in Massachusetts are accredited by NEASC. At least every ten years, each college or university prepares a self-study describing how it fulfills essential criteria across eleven different standards, including specific standards and criteria related to academic programming and the assessment of student learning outcomes. Teams of external reviewers, selected by NEASC after consultation with colleges, conduct formal visits to campuses to review evidence that standards are met. The team issues a report that leads to a decision by NEASC about accreditation.

The current institutional-level learning outcomes in place at 75% of Massachusetts public colleges and universities, described above, have been influenced in many ways by NEASC standards, but it is clear that the majority of campus statements relate most directly to Section 4.18 of the "Academic Program" standard:

Graduates successfully completing an undergraduate program demonstrate competence in written and oral communication in English; the ability for scientific and quantitative reasoning, for critical analysis and logical thinking; and the capability for continuing learning, including the skills of information literacy. They also demonstrate knowledge and understanding of scientific, historical, and social phenomena, and a knowledge and appreciation of the aesthetic and ethical dimensions of humankind.

The attributes described in this standard relate directly to the first three learning outcomes in Table 1, as well as indirectly to the other learning outcomes listed in Table 1.

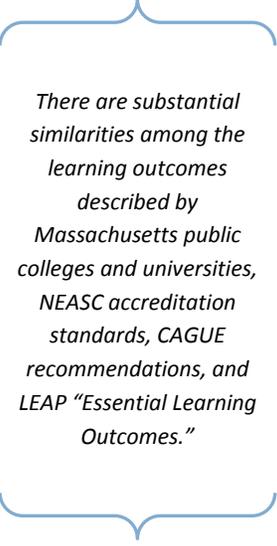
Since the NEASC standards change over time, and each college or university may complete an institutional self-study only once every ten years, it is possible that those few Massachusetts public institutions of higher education that reported not having learning outcomes in place that apply to all undergraduate students will have adopted them by the time of their next reaccreditation self-study. It is also possible that campuses with learning outcomes in place will re-visit their outcomes as part of their self study preparation and ongoing processes of program review.

The Commissioner’s Advisory Group on Undergraduate Education (CAGUE)

CAGUE developed a list of “essential knowledge areas and skills that all students should acquire during their undergraduate careers” that includes:

College-Level Fundamentals

- *Written and Oral Communication*
- *Quantitative Skills*
- *Technological/Information Science Facility*
- *Breadth of Knowledge About the Physical and Natural Worlds*
- *Breadth of Knowledge About Human Cultures*
- *Knowledge in Depth/Interdisciplinary Knowledge*
- *Integrative Thinking*
- *Critical Thinking and Informed Decision-Making*
- *Creativity and Innovation*
- *Problem Solving*
- *Systems Thinking*



There are substantial similarities among the learning outcomes described by Massachusetts public colleges and universities, NEASC accreditation standards, CAGUE recommendations, and LEAP “Essential Learning Outcomes.”

Civic, Organizational, and Career Competencies

- *Relevance of Education/Lifelong Learning*
- *Civic and Social Responsibility*
- *Personal Responsibility*
- *Workplace Skills*
- *Teamwork/Collaboration*

Our Working Group appreciates the efforts of the distinguished CAGUE group on behalf of public higher education. It has been very helpful for us to know the views of business, government, and community leaders on student learning outcomes for public higher education institutions. We appreciate that “the pursuit of broader outcomes should not belong to higher education alone... [that it is] up to employers, civic and religious organizations, and communities and families to reinforce them. Moreover, a similar focus on learning outcomes at the high school level should support and be supported by higher education’s efforts such

that high school graduates are prepared to meet college-level learning expectations.” (CAGUE report, page 3.)

We compared the list of CAGUE’s essential knowledge areas and skills with data from the campuses and find that there is considerable overlap among the most common institutional-level learning outcomes, and many of the recommendations in the CAGUE report. The most obvious similarities are across the first three learning outcomes in Table 1 above, and the CAGUE report’s “College-Level Fundamentals” and “Integrative Thinking,” where communication skills, quantitative reasoning, and critical thinking again emerge as priorities.

Several other categories in the CAGUE report, such as “Knowledge About Human Cultures” and “Relevance of Education/Lifelong Learning” find their matches in existing college and university learning outcome categories such as “Multicultural/Global Awareness” and “Personal and Professional Development.”

A few of the CAGUE report’s Civic, Organizational, and Career Competencies such as “Teamwork/Collaboration,” “Personal Responsibility,” and “Workplace Skills” do not seem to have direct matches among the public colleges’ and universities’ institutional-level learning outcomes.

It is important to note that while the names of these categories align closely or exactly, the description each individual institution gives to them may vary widely in their learning outcomes statements from the description in the CAGUE report.

In December 2009, Commissioner Freeland forwarded the CAGUE report to the presidents of community and state colleges and asked for their comments on the suggested learning outcomes and other recommendations contained in the CAGUE report. He then asked the Working Group to review the presidents’ comments as part of our overall review of learning outcomes and assessment. We found many of the CAGUE recommendations and much of the presidents’ commentary focused on matters of campus implementation which are beyond the scope of our inquiry and experience and have elected not to comment on them in this report. We did consider, however, the presidents’ comments on the CAGUE Learning Outcomes. We were impressed by their careful consideration of the CAGUE learning outcomes, and by the analysis of the CAGUE outcomes, provided by the presidents, and believe that this shows, for most campuses, the kind of leadership that the literature has noted as essential to a “culture of evidence” on campus. We also agree with many of the presidents that learning outcomes such as problem-solving, civic competencies, personal responsibility and teamwork, and collaboration, while desirable, are very difficult to align to

curriculum and to assess. We believe that more faculty work is needed in these areas before they can be stated as clear expectations for all students.

Our Working Group also discussed whether the CAGUE essential knowledge areas and skills should be used as a shared student learning outcomes framework across the Commonwealth. While we believe that a shared framework would be helpful, we suggest that the LEAP learning outcomes become the framework of choice. There is considerable similarity between CAGUE and LEAP frameworks but LEAP offers the advantages of extensive adoption by campuses in other states and of ongoing research and faculty development work to assist with curricular alignment, rubric development, roadmap development, and related issues.

Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP)

The learning outcomes described in the Association of American Colleges and Universities' 2007 (AAC&U) report, *College Learning for the New Global Century*, are:

Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Physical and Natural World

- Through study in the sciences and mathematics, social sciences, humanities, histories, languages, and the arts

Intellectual and Practical Skills, Including

- Inquiry and analysis
- Critical and creative thinking
- Written and oral communication
- Quantitative literacy
- Information literacy
- Teamwork and problem solving

Personal and Social Responsibility, Including

- Civic knowledge and engagement—local and global
- Intercultural knowledge and competence
- Ethical reasoning and action
- Foundations and skills for lifelong learning

Integrative and Applied Learning, Including

- Synthesis and advanced accomplishment across general and specialized studies

As with the NEASC standards and the recommendations of the CAGUE report, there are many similarities among the learning outcomes described by Massachusetts public colleges and universities, and the “Essential Learning Outcomes” recommended by LEAP. Communication skills, quantitative and information literacy, intercultural knowledge, critical and creative thinking, ethical reasoning, and the appreciation of lifelong learning weave their way through both AAC&U’s 2007 report and the learning outcomes already established at most of the public colleges and universities in the Commonwealth.

Key Points

1. Momentum toward greater public disclosure and accountability by colleges and universities and state higher education systems for student learning outcomes has been building for several years.
2. The approach that Massachusetts public colleges and universities have taken to program and institutional learning outcomes assessment has been influenced by NEASC accreditation requirements.
3. Most public colleges and universities in Massachusetts have in place a common set of learning outcomes that apply to all undergraduate students, as well as learning outcomes for specific programs.
4. There are substantial similarities among the learning outcomes in place at Massachusetts public colleges and universities, NEASC accreditation standards, CAGUE recommendations, and LEAP “Essential Learning Outcomes”.

CHAPTER III: ASSESSMENT PROGRAMS IN THE COMMONWEALTH

The DHE Survey of assessment data gathered by the Working Group demonstrates that Massachusetts public higher education takes its assessment efforts seriously, that good assessment is going on in our institutions, and that assessments are typically campus-developed.

Massachusetts public institutions of higher education depend on a model of multiple measures to determine the effectiveness of their academic and student programs.



Good assessment of student learning outcomes in Massachusetts derives from the assignments and assessment practices of the faculty.

Good assessment of student learning outcomes in Massachusetts derives from the assignments and assessment practices of the faculty. Best practice in higher education assessment has evolved from multiple choice tests to “authentic” assessment (e.g., essays about realistic situations with a standardized prompt) to genuinely authentic, course-embedded assessments (e.g., evaluation of samples or portfolios of students’ regular course work using standardized rubrics). Course-embedded assessment allows the institution to assess the quality of student work directly, and it also allows for program improvement by providing an opportunity to assess the quality of assignments given. Most importantly, course-embedded assessment allows faculty to retain full authority over all aspects of teaching and learning, from selection of intended learning outcomes to assessments at every level.

Impact of Accreditation Requirements

While the DHE Survey demonstrated that Massachusetts public institutions of higher education are engaged in a wide variety of learning outcomes assessments, a couple of important points remain unclear: the quality of the campus-based assessment efforts and the extent to which the results of assessment are being used to improve teaching and learning. Recent changes in the landscape of accreditation through the NEASC will lead to clarity in both of these areas.

Over the past few years, NEASC has clarified its expectations and standards in the area of student achievement and success and become more explicit about the kinds of evidence that colleges need to provide as part of the self-study process connected to re-accreditation. While NEASC continues to allow institutions to choose their own approach to assessing student learning and success, they have called for greater regularity in how institutions report their assessment methods and results. NEASC’s E-series forms ask institutions to be explicit about their basic approach to assessment (inventory of program

assessment, Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA), statement of claims and supporting evidence, and comparisons to peers) while its S-series provides a common format for institutions to present data on retention and graduation rates and other indicators of success. New Data-First spreadsheets have been developed by NEASC and are used for gathering data for each of the 11 standards for accreditation. Massachusetts campuses that have been under re-accreditation review over the past few years have used the new NEASC framework and tools and the remaining institutions will do so as they come up in NEASC's cycle for review.

These developments have had a powerful impact on campus approaches to student learning outcomes assessment and data collection. Campuses choose among the options in the E-series and gather data as required by Data-First and the S-series. While VSA is one of the options provided by the E-series, institutions that have not joined VSA and selected this option are not required to report results on such tests as Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency (CAAP), the Measure of Academic Proficiency and Progress (MAPP), or the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA). Most community and state college campuses link assessment activity to program review processes and elect to prepare an inventory of program assessment for NEASC.

Impact of Collective Bargaining Agreements

One reason that the NILOA-based survey did not adequately capture the diversity of assessments that are currently in use in Massachusetts is that it was standardized to the nation as a whole and does not take into account the uniqueness of assessing student learning outcomes in states that have faculty collective bargaining agreements. These agreements tend to constrain the types of assessments that are feasible, making standardized testing very difficult to implement. That is, in states with faculty collective bargaining agreements, faculty have an even higher expectation than elsewhere that they will control the academic process from selection of intended student learning outcomes to curricular design to selection of pedagogical approaches to assessment of outcomes at every level, and those higher expectations are codified into legally binding agreements. As Richard Shavelson has noted in *Measuring College Learning Responsibly*,

The level of genuine faculty involvement in assessment is the most important indicator of a successful assessment program. Faculty must be responsible for assessment and involved in designing, scoring, analyzing, reporting, and using assessment data with strong support from administrators and an assessment office.

While this is true in all colleges and universities, it is paramount in states with faculty collective bargaining agreements, where faculty are unlikely to agree to any change in contract that would impose an externally selected assessment of student learning that might or might not match locally selected, intended learning outcomes and that could be seen as an intrusive and inappropriate evaluation of faculty performance.

On the other hand, the collective bargaining environment in Massachusetts has provided a fertile seed bed for the creation of locally developed, course-embedded assessments. This is precisely the type of assessment that is most faithful to the teaching and learning process, and the format that is best practice in higher education assessment, as described above.

A Primer on Student Learning Outcomes Assessment in the Disciplines

Assessment of student learning outcomes has consistently occurred in institutions of higher education since the first classes were offered. Having students demonstrate their understanding of the materials being covered in the classroom is at the very core of the educational process. Whether we are looking at assessing the students' understanding of course materials in a single class or over a complete program of study, assessment has been applied by faculty since the early days of formal education. This subject-level or discipline-specific assessment is central to continuous program improvement assessment – a form of assessment which is focused on the fact that courses of study must be monitored to ensure that students are meeting criterion knowledge levels required for learned individuals.

Accrediting agencies in the subject areas have typically mined information from these course- and program-level assessments in their reviews of programs in institutions of higher education. These organizations require that faculty be engaged in the assessment of student knowledge, understanding and application of subject area information, and faculty members have embraced this level of assessment as a part of the educational process. Accreditation through such organizations as the National Council on the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), and the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA) have extensive student learning outcomes assessment requirements already in place for programs applying for accreditation. In short, faculty have long understood the



Faculty have long understood the need for student learning outcomes assessment, and there is a tradition of faculty support for learning outcomes assessment within the disciplines.



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A Primer on Institutional Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes

Institutional assessment of student learning outcomes in higher education is typically done either for institutional program review or for self-studies for accreditation. The assessments can be either direct or indirect measures.

Direct measures of assessment are those in which the products of student work are assessed in light of the student learning outcomes for the program. For example, assessments may be based on evidence from course work such as projects or specialized tests of knowledge or skill. Direct measures include the use of embedded assessments, portfolios, capstone courses, pre-test/post-test evaluations, and rubrics to evaluate individual student work progress in the program, outside of the classroom assessment process. Rubrics and portfolios have received considerable attention in recent years and have been the basis for national assessment studies.

RISING to the Challenge: Meaningful Assessment of Student Learning, a joint project of the Association of American Colleges and Universities, the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, and the Association for Public and Land-Grant Universities, identifies rubrics and portfolios as “best practices” in measuring student achievement. Standardized assessments such as CAAP, MAPP, and CLA are also examples of direct measures of student learning outcomes.



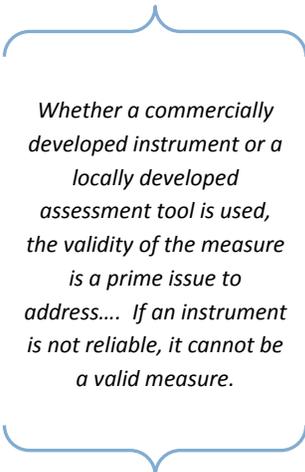
Institutional assessment of student learning outcomes in higher education is typically done either for institutional program review or for self-studies for accreditation.



Indirect measures of assessment are those in which students judge their own ability to achieve the learning outcomes. Indirect measures are not based directly on student academic work but rather on what students perceive about their own learning. Alumni may also be asked the extent to which the program prepared them to achieve learning outcomes. In another example, people in contact with the students, such as employers, may be asked to judge the effectiveness of program graduates. In all cases, the assessment is based on perception rather than direct demonstration. These indirect measures are typically in the form of surveys which can be administered to larger sample sizes than direct measures allow, which adds to the value of the results. Examples of indirect measures are the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE), and the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) survey of incoming college

students, which are frequently used as standardized assessments in Massachusetts.

Instrument validity is an important factor to consider in choosing an assessment tool. Validity is the degree to which an instrument measures what it purports to measure. There are several types of validity. For the purposes of a program-level assessment, probably the most important type is content validity.



Whether a commercially developed instrument or a locally developed assessment tool is used, the validity of the measure is a prime issue to address.... If an instrument is not reliable, it cannot be a valid measure.

This refers to the degree of overlap between the intended student learning outcomes and the items on the instrument. One question to ask is whether all of the intended student learning outcomes are covered on the instrument. A different version of this question is whether the proportion of items on the instrument mirrors the importance placed on that learning outcome within the program. For example, if a nationally standardized test is used as a measure of student learning outcomes, faculty members should consider whether all the intended learning outcomes are covered and also whether each one is given enough weight by the instrument. Whether a commercially developed instrument or a locally developed assessment tool is used, the validity of the measure is a prime issue to address.

Instrument reliability refers to the assessment's consistency. Test-retest reliability is a measure of the consistency of scores when the assessment is administered more than once. Internal reliability is a measure of the consistency of scores within the instrument (e.g., split-half reliability, which measures whether scores in the first half of the test are consistent with scores in the second half of the test). The type of reliability measure that is important in a given assessment will depend on the assessment itself. If an instrument is not reliable, it cannot be a valid measure. Therefore, it is important to learn the reliability of commercially purchased instruments or to establish the reliability of locally developed tools.

Some Issues with Standardized Tests in General (and with CAAP, MAPP, and CLA in Particular)

Care must be taken in two areas when reviewing standardized assessments for potential adoption. First, the content being measured on the test must align with the intended student learning outcomes of the institution. The intended learning outcomes guide the teaching and learning that are at the core of the academic enterprise; and also determine the assessment method selected. Any assessment instrument that does not align with the educational intentions of the institution cannot provide useful information either for accountability or for continuous improvement.

Second, derived scores for standardized assessments are available at individual and group (institution) levels. Score scales for the instrument provides comparative data at the level of reporting desired. All reporting of assessment results must reflect an understanding that group norms differ significantly from individual norm.

Standardized tests of learning outcomes in the disciplines are sometimes appropriate and effective especially if the discipline is narrowly defined and expected learning outcomes are widely agreed upon. Examples of these discipline-specific tests include the Major Field Tests (MFT) developed by Educational Testing Service covering such fields as biology, criminal justice, and undergraduate and graduate business programs.

On the other hand, the standardized tests currently being used or considered for assessment of general education outcomes are inappropriate and ineffective in most cases, precisely because they attempt to test outcomes that are very broad and because the expected learning outcomes from general education are not widely agreed upon within the academy. It is entirely unlikely that the learning outcomes measured by CAAP, MAPP, or CLA will correlate well with the intended learning outcomes articulated locally by the faculty of a given college or university. That is, these tests are unlikely to have content validity.



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In addition, Trudy Banta points out (*Assessment Update*, March-April 2008) that CAAP, MAPP, and CLA were originally designed to identify students who were in need of individual intervention. They were not designed for institutional comparisons.

There is a further problem with these standardized tests, regarding sampling. CAAP, MAPP, and CLA rely on very small samples (100-200 students) of volunteer students. The number is too small to allow for appropriate representation of all demographics of students (students in various majors, for example, or students in different racial or ethnic groups). Further, the students who would voluntarily sit for these exams do not represent the whole student body, and absent some requirement for participation, they have no incentive to do well. In short, these standardized tests are not valid and reliable measures of student learning at individual institutions and would be particularly challenging when being considered for cross-institutional comparisons.

If standardized tests are adopted as a common measure across institutions they will supplant the richer, more robust, more evolved, and more useful local assessments that are currently being employed or developed.

Assessment of broad student learning outcomes requires large investments of institutional resources of time, attention, energy, and money. Therefore institutions are less likely to do outcomes assessment with both standardized tests and locally developed measures. If standardized tests are adopted as a common measure across institutions, the Working Group is concerned that they will supplant richer, more robust, more evolved, and more useful assessments that are currently being employed or developed at colleges and universities across Massachusetts.

Finally, there are some additional methodological concerns with standardized tests such as CAAP, MAPP, and CLA, which are summarized in Figure 1 below. The concerns in the left-hand column are those expressed by Trudy Banta and other assessment experts who have no financial interest in any of these tests. The responses in the right-hand column are from Richard Shavelson, the author of the CLA. This point-counterpoint is summarized from Shavelson’s book *Measuring College Learning Responsibly*. Since the purpose of Shavelson’s book is to promote and defend the CLA, the points presented here are principally about that instrument. The concerns relate to all of these standardized tests, however.

Figure 1: Point-Counterpoint regarding CLA

Banta et al. Concern	Shavelson Response
CLA and similar tests are basically measures of learning prior to college. There is a 0.9 correlation between CLA scores and SAT/ACT scores at the institution level. This high correlation means that these instruments do not provide a way to measure the value added of the college experience.	Analyzed at the individual level rather than the institution level, the correlation is closer to 0.5, and there is enough variation among campuses' CLA scores to say that this instrument measures college learning. <i>[Note: The focus of the Working Group charge is institution-level analysis.]</i>

Figure 1: Point-Counterpoint regarding CLA (continued)

Banta et al. Concern	Shavelson Response
Test-retest reliability data are missing for the CLA and content validity is not documented.	Test-retest analysis is expensive to do and less helpful than internal consistency reliability analysis. There is some evidence about the "content representativeness of CLA tasks." More work needs to be done to establish correlational validity.
In general value-added measures are unreliable.	The CLA uses both discrepancy and value-added scores which are "reasonably reliable."
Tests are not content-free, so they inevitably favor students in some disciplines over others who simply have not studied the same subjects.	CLA measures outcomes of multiple courses within the general education curriculum.
Students are not motivated to take these tests, so their performance does not necessarily reflect their learning.	Some colleges offer incentives to students to participate. Also, students who truly understand the purpose of the tests will have an intrinsic motivation to participate at their highest level.
Curricula are unique to campuses, and so comparing across campuses is unnecessary and inappropriate.	There is an inherent need for benchmarking in higher education.

Findings of the DHE Survey of Student Learning Outcomes and Assessment Programs

The principal findings of the DHE Survey are displayed in the following tables.

Table 2: Most Common Approaches for Campus-Wide Assessment

	Community Colleges (N = 15)	State Colleges (N = 9)	UMass Campuses (N = 3)
National student surveys	100%	78%	100%
Alumni surveys	93%	56%	
Locally developed student surveys or focus groups	67%	44%	67%
Student interviews or focus groups	53%		67%
Rubrics (published or locally developed) to assess student work	40%		

Table 3: Most Common Approaches for Discipline-Specific Assessment

	Community Colleges (N = 15)	State Colleges (N = 9)	UMass Campuses (N = 3)
Specialized or programmatic knowledge and skills measures	93%	89%	100%
External expert judgments of student performance	87%	78%	100%
Student portfolios	87%	78%	100%
Performance assessments other than grades	80%		100%
Employer surveys	80%	89%	100%
Rubrics (published or locally developed) to assess student work		78%	100%
Student interviews or focus groups		78%	67%
Employer interviews or focus groups		78%	100%
Locally developed student surveys or focus groups			67%
Alumni surveys			100%
Alumni interviews or focus groups			100%

Key Points

Five basic assumptions serve as guiding principles in the assessment process.

1. To achieve a high-quality education for all students, valid assessment data are needed to guide planning, teaching, and improvement. This means that the work students do in their courses and the co-curriculum is the best authentic representation of their learning.
2. Colleges and universities seek to foster and assess numerous essential learning outcomes beyond the three or four addressed by currently available national standardized tests.
3. Learning develops over time. It is non-linear and should become more complex and sophisticated as students move through their curricular and co-curricular educational pathways within and among institutions toward a degree or similar credential.
4. Good practice in assessment requires multiple assessments over time; well-planned strategies (e.g. electronic portfolios, rubrics, capstone course) provide opportunities to collect data from multiple assessments across a broad range of learning outcomes and modes for expressing learning, while guiding student learning and building reflective self-assessment capabilities.
5. Assessment of the student work using multiple strategies can inform programs and institutions on their progress in achieving expected goals for external reporting and, at the same time, provide faculty with information necessary to improve courses and pedagogy.

In addition to the five assumptions presented above, it is important that we recognize a consensus reached as a result of group deliberations. The Working Group spent a good deal of time discussing the respective roles and responsibilities of campuses, DHE, and NEASC in the area of learning outcomes and assessment. We start with the assumption that the essential responsibility for student learning outcomes and assessment resides at the campus level where students and faculty are engaged in teaching and learning, in courses and programs, in articulating and completing requirements that enable the awarding of certificates, degrees and transfer among institutions. Faculty members need to be deeply involved in the development of learning outcomes and in the development of assessment approaches and in the analysis of assessment results and planning for related program improvements. Campuses need

administrative structures and staffing to enable and support this work under strong, pro-active leadership from the college president and provost.

CHAPTER IV: EXEMPLARY STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES AND ASSESSMENT PROGRAMS AND PROCESSES

Although the characteristics of exemplary assessment programs vary widely, often as a reflection of institutional missions and goals, student populations, campus cultures, and assessment outlooks, in *Measuring College Learning Responsibly*, Richard Shavelson recently reported the following common components of exemplary student learning outcomes programs identified through an in-depth review of six nationally noted programs.

- While accreditation criteria and state policies with incentives are influential in the development of strong student learning outcomes assessment programs, visionary campus leadership from the president or provost and the director of assessment is essential. These exemplary programs have a visionary director of assessment whose view of assessment permeates the campus and a president, or provost, who sees assessment as part of their vision. The assessment director usually reports through the provost's office.
- The level of genuine faculty involvement in assessment is the most important indicator of a successful assessment program. Faculty must be responsible for assessment and involved in designing, scoring, analyzing, reporting, and using assessment data with strong support from administrators and an assessment office. The faculty time, effort, and commitment needed for assessment programs to be successful must be recognized and faculty responsibilities must be adjusted and rewarded accordingly.
- A set of measurable student learning outcomes must be identified, agreed upon, and made public through a process that includes stakeholders throughout the institution.
- Assessment must be useful in diagnosing strengths and weaknesses and provide the information necessary to identify possible courses of action for improvements and for the campuses to test them out empirically. Assessment data must be relevant for improving programs, teaching, and student learning.
- Manageable assessment programs figure out how to strike a balance between faculty involvement in the development of assessment instruments and the use of off-the-shelf assessment tools.

Creating a Culture of Evidence

In *“A Culture of Evidence: An Evidence Centered Approach to Accountability for Student Learning Outcomes”*, the third in a series of ETS sponsored reports that encourage college campuses to develop a culture of evidence, Catherine Millett, David Payne, Carol Dwyer, Leslie Stickler, and Jon Alexiou, focus on the development of assessment processes that support (1) a transparent system of accountability that is consistent with the current expectations of higher education stakeholders; (2) the cost effective use of institutional resources; and (3) a focus on the science of learning and pedagogy as a scholarly activity that creates and advances best practices that support student achievement. Like Shavelson, they emphasize the importance of a college-wide effort to identify a common set of student learning outcomes that reflect the college’s mission, student population, and what the college community hopes its student will achieve; the importance of faculty engagement; the need for strong administrative leadership; access to assessment expertise; and the need for assessment data to be useful to improve programs, teaching, and student learning.

Millett, Payne, Dwyer, Stickler, and Alexiou describe a public, on-going, iterative, cascading process intended to create a campus culture of evidence that is dependent on genuine faculty involvement at every step to be successful and includes the following steps:

1. Identify measurable institutional student learning outcomes and goals through a public process including internal and external stakeholders. The student learning outcomes must reflect what the college and its faculty hope that its students will achieve.
2. Conduct an audit of existing campus assessment methods to determine which ones continue to be useful to assess student achievement and provide useful information to improve student and program performance and which, if any, should be discontinued.
3. Identify gaps in the assessment program where there is a need to develop or acquire new assessment resources.
4. Refine the existing assessment program by retaining useful methods, retiring ineffective methods, and developing or acquiring new assessment tools as necessary.
5. Collect, analyze, and widely report assessment results to internal and external stakeholders.

6. Use assessment data to identify successful programs and practices, necessary improvements to less successful programs and to determine which ineffective programs should be scaled back or discontinued. Create an implementation budget and plan to test the effectiveness of these changes in the next assessment cycle.
7. Maintain a culture of assessment by beginning the cycle again, using the knowledge gained through the first cycle to improve the articulation of student learning outcomes, the identification of appropriate assessment instruments, the depth of data analysis, and the range of programs and services assessed.

Millett, Payne, Dwyer, Stickler, and Alexiou argue that creating a culture of evidence and student learning assessment programs are large scale, complex undertakings that require strong leadership, genuine faculty involvement, and on-campus assessment and research expertise. Significant fiscal resources are necessary to acquire or develop assessment instruments, support faculty engagement, and to provide the professional development and access to external assessment experts necessary to make a significant impact on improving student achievement.

Student Learning Outcomes and Assessment in Massachusetts Community and State Colleges and Universities

The Working Group has carefully considered the exemplary assessment programs and processes previously described, data collected through the NILOA survey, information collected from Massachusetts public college and university provosts in the 2010 DHE Survey, and the comments from college presidents on the CAGUE report. Our comparisons of best practices and Massachusetts assessment practices are reported in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Assessment Best Practices and Massachusetts Public Higher Education

Assessment Best Practice	Massachusetts Public Institutions¹
The development of student learning outcomes assessment programs is driven more by accreditation and a commitment to improve than external pressures from government. (Source – NILOA Survey)	In Massachusetts, the NEASC 2005 accreditation standards was the most often cited impetus for the development of campus student learning outcomes assessment programs. (Source – DHE Survey)
Strong leadership from a president or provost and a director of assessment (Source – Shavelson)	Massachusetts college presidents report both their strong support for student learning outcomes assessment and their concern about funding to support its implementation. Only 36% of our community colleges, 33% of state colleges and 50% of the university campuses have a director of assessment. (Source - DHE Survey and Presidents' Comments)
Most exemplary assessment offices report through a provost's office. (Source – Shavelson)	Seventy-three percent (73%) of community colleges, 78% of state colleges and 75% of the university campuses reported that the primary responsibility for overseeing campus-wide learning outcomes and assessment lie with the provost's office completely or in combination with a faculty committee. (Source - DHE Survey)

¹ University campus information for Figure 2 is based on a UMASS President's Office telephone interview with the Provosts of four UMASS campuses. The percentages reported here are based therefore on an N of 4. In other tables in this report and in the Appendix, UMASS data is based on the three campuses responding to the survey, an N of 3.

Figure 2: Assessment Best Practices and Massachusetts Public Higher Education (continued)

Assessment Best Practice	Massachusetts Public Institutions
<p>Sufficient fiscal resources are necessary to conduct campus-based assessment initiatives that result in improved student learning outcomes. (Source – Shavelson, 2010; Millett, Payne, Dwyer et al, 2009) Nationally, however, colleges are conducting assessment programs “on a shoestring.” Eighty percent (80%) of community colleges and 70% of state colleges and universities across the country report that they have one or fewer full-time equivalents (FTE) devoted to assessment work.</p>	<p>In Massachusetts, 53% of community colleges and 56% of state colleges report that they have 1 or fewer FTE devoted to assessment work.² Fifty percent (50%) of the university campuses report 1-3 FTE devoted to assessment work. Although the questions included on the 2010 DHE Survey did not elicit reliable data about the allocation of resources for assessment on Massachusetts campuses, we do know that fiscal limitations have prompted many colleges and universities to incorporate assessment into the job description of an administrator with other responsibilities or provide “reassigned time” for a faculty member from an appropriate discipline to fulfill this critical role. (Source – NILOA Survey, DHE Survey and Presidents’ Comments)</p>
<p>Faculty must be responsible for assessment with strong support and expertise from administrators and an assessment office. (Source – Shavelson, 2010; Millett, Payne, Dwyer et al, 2009)</p>	<p>Faculty members play a strong role in learning outcomes and assessment on the community college (93%), state college (100%) and university (100%) campuses. Only 29% of our community colleges, 44% of our state colleges and 50% of the university campuses have an office for assessment to support their efforts. (Source DHE Survey)</p>
<p>A set of measurable student learning outcomes must be identified, agreed upon and made public through a college-wide process. Nationally, 75% of colleges have a common set of student learning outcomes that apply to all undergraduate students. (Source - NILOA Survey)</p>	<p>Eighty-seven percent (87%) of community colleges, 67% of state colleges and 75% of university campuses in Massachusetts have developed a common set of learning outcomes that apply to all undergraduate students. (Source - DHE Survey and Presidents’ Comments)</p>

² Massachusetts campuses were more likely than the NILOA colleges to have at least one FTE devoted to assessment. This may, in part, be due to the large number of very small colleges included in the NILOA survey that would be more likely to have no or a very small assessment staff.

Figure 2: Assessment Best Practices and Massachusetts Public Higher Education (continued)

Assessment Best Practice	Massachusetts Public Institutions
<p>Assessment must be useful in diagnosing strengths and weaknesses and useful to identify corrective actions and able to test them empirically. (Source – Shavelson, 2010; Millett, Payne, Dwyer et al, 2009) Nationally, the most common uses of student learning outcomes assessment data are (1) preparing self-studies for institutional accreditation, (2) informing strategic planning, (3) modifying the general education curriculum, (4) revising student learning outcomes, and (5) modifying student academic support services. (Source – NILOA Survey)</p>	<p>Massachusetts public colleges have used assessment data for the following purposes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • preparing self-studies for institutional accreditation – 73% of community colleges, 89% of state colleges and 75% of university campuses • informing Strategic Planning – 67% of community colleges, 56% of state colleges and 50% of university campuses • modifying the general education curriculum – 47% of community colleges, 89% of state colleges and 75% of university campuses • revising learning outcomes – 40% of community colleges, 78% of state colleges and 50% of university campuses • modifying student academic support services – 53% of community colleges, 44% of state colleges and 50% of university campuses • determining student readiness for college level coursework – 40% of community colleges and 56% of state colleges. (Source – DHE Survey)
<p>Faculty time, effort, and commitment must be recognized and faculty responsibilities must be adjusted and rewarded accordingly. (Source – Shavelson, 2010; Millett, Payne, Dwyer et al, 2009)</p>	<p>Faculty have been very engaged in assessment on most campuses, however, it is straining faculty workloads and institutional resources to provide the professional development, assessment expertise, assessment tools and staff to analyze, disseminate, and use assessment results for improvement. (Source - DHE Survey and Presidents' Comments)</p>

Massachusetts public colleges and universities have made substantial progress toward the development and expansion of student learning outcome assessment programs that reflect the best practices identified by Shavelson and others since

the introduction of the 2005 NEASC accreditation standards. Massachusetts college presidents endorse the concept of student learning outcomes assessment called for in the new NEASC standards, the CAGUE Report, and the DHE Vision Project. Most Massachusetts public colleges and universities have developed a common set of student learning outcomes that apply to all students, an assessment program that reports through the provost's office, and a track record of using assessment data for program improvement and planning. The faculty is involved in the assessment of student learning outcomes in almost all of the public higher education institutions responding to the survey.

Best Practices, Strengths and Weaknesses and What is Needed in Massachusetts

The 2010 DHE Survey went beyond the NILOA national survey and asked for information about best practices, strengths and weaknesses, and what is needed to fix weaknesses. It also asked what provosts thought would be the most helpful campus actions and DHE actions to develop effective student learning outcomes and assessment programs. The top responses for each segment are presented in the following tables.³

³ Responses for these tables report smaller numbers than earlier tables because survey items were open-ended rather than forced choice responses. Responses were grouped into categories and the categories with the largest responses are reported in the tables.

Table 4: Best Assessment Practices in Massachusetts

Best Practices on Massachusetts Public College Campuses	Community Colleges (N = 15)	State Colleges (N = 9)	Universities (N = 3) See note⁴
Linked to professional development	47%		
Embedded in program review	27%		
End of the year faculty presentations, public summit or workshops	20%		
Good assessment measures of various types (MAPP, LEAP, Portfolios)		89%	
Faculty development opportunities		44%	
Use of external experts		33%	
Greatest Strengths of Massachusetts Learning Outcomes and Assessment Programs	Community Colleges (N = 15)	State Colleges (N = 9)	Universities (N = 3)
Faculty involvement, control of process, leadership, commitment	60%	78%	67%
Institutional commitment	53%		
Effective assessment processes		78%	100%
Weaknesses of Massachusetts Learning Outcomes and Assessment Programs	Community Colleges (N = 15)	State Colleges (N = 9)	Universities (N = 3)
Lack of campus culture of assessment, or not sufficiently developed	67%	56%	100%
Not enough time for faculty to develop a process or do the work of assessment	40%		
Not enough resources of various kinds (money, expertise, inadequate data systems)	33%		67%
Inadequate review process		56%	
Lack of outcomes		56%	

⁴ Because of the small number of University campuses, percentages could be misleading. There were no common elements of best practices among University campuses. See Appendix for campus details.

Consistent use of assessment for improvement			67%
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What is Needed to Fix Weaknesses of Massachusetts Learning Outcome Assessment Programs	Community Colleges (N = 15)	State Colleges (N = 9)	Universities (N = 3)
More resources (fiscal, assessment, professionals, stipends, external evaluators)	67%	78%	67%
More professional development	60%		
More leadership, centralized effort, better link to planning	53%	67%	
Most Helpful Campus Actions Needed to Develop Effective Student Learning Outcomes and Assessment Programs	Community Colleges (N = 15)	State Colleges (N = 9)	Universities (N = 3)
Greater faculty engagement	73%		100%
Greater faculty or staff expertise in assessment methodology	73%	78%	67%
More financial resources	73%	89%	100%
Most Helpful Department of Higher Education Actions Necessary to Develop Effective Student Learning Outcome and Assessment Programs	Community Colleges (N = 15)	State Colleges (N = 9)	Universities (N = 3)
Efforts to achieve more state funding for campuses	73%	78%	67%
Conferences and workshops for faculty to share information and best practices	53%	56%	
Conferences and workshops for assessment and institutional research staff to share information about best practices		44%	
More information about practices elsewhere	33%	22%	
Help with identifying grant and other external funding support for assessment initiatives	33%		67%

An analysis of this data reveals interesting similarities and differences between the community college and state college/university segments of higher education.

- All segments support the development and assessment of student learning outcomes and have developed practices that encourage faculty involvement in the process, such as professional development and opportunities to present their assessment work to their colleagues. Sixty-seven percent (67%) of the university campuses, 78% of state colleges, and 60% of community colleges described faculty involvement as a significant strength of their assessment program.
- Although 60% of community colleges describe faculty engagement as a significant strength of their student learning outcomes assessment programs, 73% report that more faculty engagement and greater faculty and staff expertise in assessment methodology would strengthen their assessment programs. Similarly, 67% of university campuses describe faculty engagement as a significant strength while 100% report that more faculty engagement would strengthen their assessment program.
- The development of a culture of evidence is essential to the creation and maintenance of effective student learning outcomes assessment programs. Sixty-seven percent (67%) of community colleges, 56% of state colleges, and 100% of the university campuses reported that a “Culture of Assessment” is not sufficiently developed on their campus.
- Seventy-eight percent (78%) of state colleges reported the development of good assessment practices and measures as significant strengths, while 56% were concerned about insufficient assessment outcomes.
- Fifty-three percent (53%) of community colleges and 67% of state colleges identified more campus leadership, a more centralized effort, and a better link to strategic planning as important ways to strengthen campus-based assessment programs.
- The DHE has an important role in the development of effective campus-based student learning outcomes assessment programs. The most helpful actions that the DHE could take, as identified by campus provosts, are to secure more state funding for assessment (73% of community colleges, 78% of state colleges, and 67% of university campuses) and to support efforts to develop faculty and staff expertise in assessment methodology through conferences, workshops and other opportunities to share best practices across the system.

Key Points

- Massachusetts public institutions of higher education have developed student learning outcomes assessment programs that include many of the key components of exemplary assessment programs identified by Richard Shavelson since the adoption of the 2005 NEASC accreditation standards.
- The level of genuine faculty involvement in assessment is a key indicator of a successful assessment program. Faculty must be responsible for assessment and involved in designing, scoring, analyzing, reporting, and using assessment data with strong support from administrators and an assessment office. The faculty time, effort, and commitment needed for assessment programs to be successful must be recognized and faculty responsibilities must be adjusted and rewarded accordingly.
- The lack of a sufficiently developed culture of assessment is cited by many public higher education institutions as a weakness. Assessment is not a one-time event; it must be seen and supported as an ongoing, iterative, cascading process if it is to result in the desired program improvements and better student learning.
- The development of a culture of evidence in Massachusetts public colleges requires resources (1) to provide assessment expertise at the system and campus level and professional development for faculty and staff; (2) to support the development and acquisition of assessment tools; (3) to provide the assessment and research staff necessary to administer assessment instruments and to analyze and report assessment findings; and (4) to recognize and compensate faculty for their assessment work.
- There is a need for more leadership, better coordinated assessment efforts, and access to top notch assessment experts to support the development of top tier assessment programs on Massachusetts campuses.

Chapter V: Final Recommendations

The Working Group on Student Learning Outcomes and Assessment understands both the desire to create a more centralized and systemic approach to student learning outcomes and assessment as well as the need to maintain decentralized and campus-centered control over student learning. Within the nuances and complexities of that reality, our Working Group:

1. Finds considerable similarities among the various institutional learning outcomes already in place at Massachusetts public colleges and universities, and the “essential learning outcomes and guiding principles” expressed by LEAP. There is potential value in aligning our state system of higher education with the LEAP framework, including the ability to benefit from assessment frameworks and practices developed by other LEAP states and institutions, the possibility of applying the LEAP framework to increase the achievements of underserved students, and the potential for making comparisons with other LEAP states in the future.

At the same time, we recognize that the identification of learning outcomes for a single institution or system of institutions is a responsibility of the faculty. We recommend that Massachusetts consider becoming a “LEAP” state, but only after first having consulted with the faculty of Massachusetts public colleges and universities regarding their opinions of the same.

Further, we recognize that the identification, implementation, and assessment of field-specific learning outcomes remain the responsibility of faculty at individual colleges and universities.

2. Recommends that individual campuses continue their efforts to develop assessment programs and strategies that clearly reflect their mission, academic programs and co-curricular offerings. Planning at all levels of each institution is necessary and critical in determining the student learning outcomes expected and optimal strategies for assessment. Assessment should occur at the course, program and campus levels to maximize data collection and continue improvement.
3. Recommends that each campus review its capacity to provide the leadership, expertise, assessment instruments and support to faculty and staff engaged in campus-based assessment activities and to achieve system-wide assessment goals. This capacity should be improved, if necessary, as funds become available. Although the Massachusetts public higher education institutions have made significant progress in identifying and measuring the achievement of student learning outcomes, most assessment programs are

without the resources necessary to have the desired impact on improving student learning. Campuses are also encouraged to consider taking a regionalized approach to assessment and/or the requisite professional development for faculty and staff as a way to reduce program costs and to increase the accessibility of assessment expertise and opportunities for faculty collaboration.

4. Is strong in its opposition to any high stakes standardized assessment instruments for all students in the Commonwealth's higher education system. Compelling data reveal the basis of this opinion. No one standardized instrument improves learning for all students. Further, it is imperative that any approach to the assessment of student learning be sensitive to and understanding of students, communities and missions of the three sectors of public higher education in Massachusetts.
5. Values the concepts presented in *Creating a Culture of Evidence, An Evidenced Based Approach to Accountability for Student Learning Outcomes*, Millett, Payne, Dwyer, Stickler and Alexiou, as a holistic, cost efficient process. This work outlines a seven-step, public, on-going, iterative process to create and maintain the culture of evidence necessary to improve student learning outcomes on campus. The Working Group encourages each public higher education campus to review the model, or similar models, and consider its implementation on their campus.
6. Recommends that the DHE identify sources and create funds to support both experimental approaches and assessment initiatives at the system and campus level that document the link between assessment results and program improvements. Strong assessment programs that lead to improvement in student performance come at a cost.
7. Recommends that the public colleges/universities, in collaboration with the DHE, engage a high-profile assessment consultant (guru) to provide vision, expertise, and leadership to system-wide student learning outcome assessment.

We recommend that each campus identify a point-person for assessment. This may be a person whose sole responsibility is assessment, or an individual who has the responsibility for oversight of assessment in addition to other job responsibilities. One aspect of that person's role would be to work with the consultant and other institutional "point-persons."

The consultant's work would be in two segments. One aspect would be to conduct individual consultations on assessment with each campus, tailored to the campus needs.

The second aspect would be to convene campus-based assessment staff and representatives of DHE for the purpose of sharing best practices and challenges of assessment and developing common assessment data that can be used to provide evidence of the achievements of public higher education across the Commonwealth. Specific efforts would include collecting, analyzing and disseminating assessment data; facilitating regional assessment initiatives; and offering professional development opportunities throughout the system.

The initial work would extend one to two years. The expectation would be that the campus-based assessment staff would have developed the expertise to continue the work forward. The DHE staff would then assume the role of convener/facilitator for state-wide assessment.

8. Was asked to "weigh approaches to assessment that value our system of diverse institutions with diverse programs responsive to the learning aspirations and needs of diverse student bodies and that inform strategies that contribute to reductions in performance gaps among different groups." This is consistent with the Vision Project commitment for Massachusetts to become a national leader in achieving comparable learning outcomes among different ethnic/racial, economic and gender groups, We do not know from the DHE Survey how well campus assessment approaches respond to this need or provide the ability for analysis of results by race/ethnicity, economic status or gender but we believe that the repertoire of campus assessment approaches should include this capability. The Working Group supports campus efforts to create a culture of evidence in which faculty and staff engage in self study and analysis, informed by learning outcomes assessment, which leads to academic and program planning for narrowing performance gaps. DHE should play a helpful role in support of this objective. In a manner similar to what is done with the "Achieving the Dream" initiative and planned for "Complete College America," DHE could provide templates, structures and tools for ways to disaggregate and analyze data and provide consultative assistance to campuses so that they can be better, and more uniformly, positioned for performance gap analysis as part of ongoing institutional research activity. Since there are large costs involved in achieving sufficient sample size to allow for disaggregated analysis, system-wide and segmentally coordinated approaches makes fiscal sense.

9. Recommends increasing the collaborative spirit between DHE and NEASC with regards to the assessment of student learning.

10. Believes that the NSSE and CCSSE assessment tools can add value to a framework of assessment approaches. NSSE and CCSSE are approaches to student learning assessment that are now widely used in higher education. CCSSE is one of the few assessment tools focused exclusively on community college students. Both are surveys that ask students about their engagement with practices that have been found through research to be connected to student achievement and success in college. Recent research has provided some evidence that engagement with these practices is connected to student cognitive development. Many Massachusetts public campuses have used or are using NSSE or CCSSE surveys. Both NSSE and CCSSE allow colleges to form consortia. Consortia allow participating institutions to add additional questions to those on the core surveys. Reports would then include comparisons of student responses (for core and consortium questions) with the aggregate of other consortium members as well as with national benchmarks. The Working Group sees value for the Commonwealth and for individual campuses from NSSE and CCSSE consortia. Consortial participation has fiscal implications for campuses and the Commonwealth so it needs to be considered and prioritized alongside direct learning assessment measures and other resource needs.