EASTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY
Application for 2014 CHEA Award
for Outstanding Institutional Practice in Student Learning Outcomes

EKU’s award application submitted to the Council for Higher Education Accreditation, October 2013

Application Summary

When we talk at Eastern Kentucky University about student learning outcomes, the conversation involves not just a handful of top administrators, but the entire campus community. Specific learning outcomes are embedded throughout the University’s Strategic Plan, college plans, program plans, general education and accreditation efforts and tracked with the latest technology. But the best evidence of our commitment is when faculty members come together in their own academic areas for an annual day-long, campus-wide Assurance of Learning Day, which allows them to reflect and brainstorm with colleagues about program strengths and weaknesses, learning outcomes and changes that might enhance learning.

Evidence that EKU Develops and Applies Expectations of Student Learning Outcomes

Development and Public Commitment to Student Learning Outcomes at University Level

Eastern Kentucky University has moved forward intentionally and systematically to develop, implement, and evaluate specific student learning outcomes across all 150 academic programs at the undergraduate and graduate levels. The President and Provost have been active and consistent public advocates for a shared University vision to graduate students who can think critically and communicate effectively.

In 2005-2006 EKU reformed its General Education Program to include student learning outcomes focused on critical thinking and communication. In 2006—2007 EKU developed a Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) to develop informed, critical and creative thinkers who communicate effectively, which was publically endorsed by SACS in 2007. The Paul & Elder Model was adopted as the common language for teaching and talking about critical thinking, and dual emphases were placed on student learning and faculty/staff professional development to promote that learning. New/revised courses and initiatives were developed, including writing intensive courses, service learning courses, and student success seminars, all of which have student learning outcomes explicitly targeting critical thinking and communication. Systematic efforts were made to reach all students through freshmen seminars, general education, and discipline-specific courses.

Early QEP efforts, targeting undergraduate programs (n = 103), spread to EKU’s Graduate School whose leaders developed and embedded in all programs (n=47) six student learning outcomes focused on critical thinking/communication. In 2009 EKU’s Faculty Senate and Board of Regents approved a new university-wide syllabus policy that requires student learning outcomes that focus on critical thinking, and establishes parameters for those outcomes,
including action verbs that express what students will learn and demonstrate in the course. These combined efforts, along with the unswerving public statements from EKU’s President and Provost, led to a culture change that was driven by the strategic planning process and reflected in a revised 2011 University Mission Statement and Strategic Plan. In 2012 EKU created an annual Assurance of Learning Day, which is now part of the academic calendar, giving additional credence and visibility to our campus-wide initiative.

**EKU’s Mission and Strategic Plan.** In 2011 the EKU Mission Statement was changed to “as a comprehensive public institution, [EKU] prepares students to lead productive, responsible, and enriched lives. To accomplish this mission, the University emphasizes Student Success, Regional Stewardship, and Critical and Creative Thinking and Effective Communication.” In addition, strategic plan goals state that every academic program must have student learning outcomes for critical/creative thinking and communication. Finally, the plan requires direct assessment of these outcomes at the programmatic level. These changes to the University’s Mission and Strategic Plan demonstrate EKU’s public commitment to a core set of student learning outcomes in every academic program on campus, and its willingness for SACS to scrutinize progress toward these outcomes.

**Program Specific Outcomes.** Faculty in each academic program create program-specific student learning outcomes focused on the critical/creative thinking and communication goals identified in EKU’s Strategic Plan. These outcomes are an essential part of each program-level strategic plan and are explicitly aligned with the University’s Strategic Plan.

**Course-Level Outcomes.** In fall 2009 EKU’s Faculty Senate and Board of Regents approved a new syllabus policy that requires a “student learning outcomes” section, and establishes parameters for those outcomes, including (a) Action verbs that express what students will learn and demonstrate in the course; (b) Outcomes appropriate to course level; (c) Outcomes that are measurable; and (d) Common core outcomes for all sections of the same course. All curriculum committees assure that syllabi contain appropriate student learning outcomes when new courses or course revisions are proposed, and chairs review syllabi every semester.

**General Education Program Outcomes.** EKU’s student learning goals for the General Education Program target critical/creative thinking or communication. Courses are required to address a prescribed subset of these goals, develop course-specific learning outcomes that align with the goals, seek approval from the University GE Committee for these learning outcomes, and include the GE goals and the core set of approved learning outcomes on all syllabi for all sections of a course. The University GE Committee reviews and provides feedback about student learning outcomes and syllabi for all GE courses when courses are proposed/revised, and via a yearly review of GE syllabi. Additionally, The Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE) reviews and publicizes GE student learning outcomes for all Kentucky State institutions.

**First-Year Student Success Seminars.** At EKU all freshmen are required to complete a Student Success Seminar, which includes student learning outcomes for critical thinking.
Elder Model of Critical Thinking is included in the required textbook for the course and lesson plans are shared with faculty via required professional development sessions.

**Communication of Expected Evidence for Outcomes**

To gather evidence of expected outcomes EKU uses both nationally-recognized and faculty-developed assessment measures. Numerous professional development documents, videos, and activities are provided to help faculty/staff understand the expected outcomes, and how to effectively use the measures and subsequent data to improve learning.

*University-Level Outcomes.* Several direct measures of student learning are used at the University level: The Critical Thinking Assessment Test (CAT), the critical thinking version of the Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency (CAAP), and the written essay version of the CAAP. Administration and results of these tests are publicized via electronic communications and websites. To date, 128 faculty/staff have participated in scoring the CAT exam and these scoring sessions also serve as professional development. Cross-discipline faculty teams discuss student responses, enhance their understanding of what the University counts as evidence that critical thinking outcomes are achieved, and share teaching strategies to target specific student learning outcomes.

*University Rubrics.* University-level rubrics for Critical/Creative Thinking and Communication were developed by cross-discipline faculty teams in 2006. The rubric criteria are based on Bloom’s Taxonomy, which align with the action verbs required for student learning outcomes as stated in the EKU Syllabus Policy, and the language used in GE Goals and the related GE-course outcomes. After QEP Implementation the rubrics were revised, by faculty request, to incorporate language of the Paul & Elder Model. Faculty are trained to use these rubrics to evaluate student learning at the program level. Additionally, faculty used the University Rubrics as the foundation for GE-area-specific rubrics that are used to evaluate course-level student learning for the GE Program.

*Program-Level Outcomes.* EKU’s Strategic Plan requires the evaluation of student learning outcomes at the program level. EKU calls this process “Assurance of Learning.” Every program is expected to develop its own strategic plan that includes a process of assuring student learning of program-specific critical/creative thinking and communication skills. Program faculty choose the student work samples that are the most relevant direct measures of student learning at the programmatic level, e.g., capstone projects, research papers, and program-specific or national examinations. Clear expectations and guidance for assurance-of-learning processes, including accepted evidence for outcomes, are communicated via the Provost, deans, chairs, professional development activities, videos, and website documents.

*General Education Outcomes.* Faculty teams develop assessment instruments, appropriate for the course type and level, for every GE course. Student learning is evaluated with direct measures. Clear expectations for student learning, as well as guidance for data collection and data interpretation, are communicated via on-demand consultations with the GE Assessment Coordinator, professional development activities, and website documents.
**Regular Collection and Interpretation of Outcomes Evidence**

The University and all academic programs use TracDat software to store strategic plans and evidence of student learning outcomes. Program plans are linked to college- and University-level plans so that deans, Institutional Effectiveness personnel, and the Provost have access to every program’s data and faculty interpretation and use of those data.

**Assurance of Learning Day.** One day each fall classes are cancelled and faculty meet to examine and interpret their programs’ evidence of outcomes. Although faculty spend more than one day per year on this process, Assurance of Learning Day is a “gift of time” that allows teams of faculty to meet for an extended period of time without disruptions. Resources and workshops are offered to assist faculty with creating student learning outcomes, curriculum maps, identifying evidence of direct student learning, evaluating outcomes, and using the data to improve student learning.

**Progress Reports on Student Learning.** Faculty leaders in all academic programs report annually on the progress of assuring student learning at the program level. TracDat reports are prepared at the program/department level, and reviewed by Institutional Effectiveness Personnel and the college Dean, who provides feedback to chairs and faculty. Particular emphasis is placed on faculty documenting how they have used the results to improve student learning.

**General Education Assessment.** Since 2006 all GE course have been evaluated for evidence of student learning, including critical thinking and communication, every two years. Faculty prepare reports that include data for each course and, most importantly, how those data will be used to improve student learning in the future. Each department receives written feedback about their data and use of data from the GE Assessment Coordinator.

**Evidence that Institution-Wide Outcomes are Successfully Met**

**Achievement of Student Learning Outcomes at University and Program Levels**

To gather evidence of expected outcomes EKU uses both nationally-recognized and faculty-developed assessment measures. Cross-discipline faculty teams establish expectations for student achievement of University and program level outcomes. Expectations for University-level outcomes are included in EKU’s Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), and published in University, General Education, and QEP strategic plans recorded in TracDat. Expectations for student learning in each academic program are published in the programs’ strategic plans, recorded in TracDat, and linked to relevant college- and University-level outcomes. Faculty evaluate student learning based on a priori expectations that are explicitly stated in the strategic plans.

**University-Level Measures.** **Critical Thinking Assessment Test (CAT).** EKU’s criteria for the CAT Test are (a) critical thinking will improve from freshman to senior year (longitudinal data); (b)
Seniors’ scores will be higher than freshmen’s (cohort comparisons); (c) Seniors’ scores will improve over time (cohort comparisons). The CAT Test has been given to samples of students every year since 2007. Students who complete both pre and post tests are chosen for scoring, along with a random sample of other students. Results show that critical thinking improved significantly from freshmen to senior year (longitudinal data 2008—2012), and seniors scored significantly higher than first-year students (cohort data 2007-2012). Seniors’ scores, however, show variability over time. Thus, two of the three criteria have been met, thus far.

Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency (CAAP). EKU’s criteria for the CAAP are (a) Seniors will score at or above the expected mean based upon their entering ACT scores; (b) the gain scores from freshman to senior year will be at or above expected levels. Students in randomly selected courses (stratified sampling) completed the CAAP Critical Thinking Module in 2009-10 and 2011-2012, and the Writing Module in 2010-11. For critical thinking, in 2009-10 seniors scored lower than expected by .45 standard deviations (SD), but student learning gains from freshmen to senior was at the expected level based on ACT, and in 2011-12, seniors scored lower than expected by .52 SD, but student learning gains from freshmen to senior were again at the expected level based on ACT. For writing, seniors scored higher than expected by .63 SD, and student learning gains from freshmen to senior were above the expected level based on ACT. Thus, three of the four criteria have been met.

National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). The NSSE survey was completed on a voluntary basis (native students: 2007, 09, 11; transfer students: 2010, 11, 12). Ten items measure student perceptions of issues related to critical thinking/communication. EKU’s criteria are (a) seniors will have more positive scores than freshmen; (b) seniors will have more positive scores over time; (c) native seniors will have more positive scores than transfer students at the time of transfer to EKU; (d) the difference between native seniors’ and transfer students’ scores will increase over time. Results show that (a) for all years seniors had more positive scores than freshmen; (b) In 2009 seniors’ scores were more positive than in 2007, but leveled off in 2011; (c) For all years, native seniors had more positive scores than transfer students; (d) In 2011 the difference between native seniors’ and transfers’ scores was greater than in 2010, but leveled off in 2012. On two items EKU seniors have consistently scored significantly higher than seniors at benchmark institutions: “During the current school year, how much has your coursework emphasized making judgments about the value of information, arguments, or methods?” and “to what extend has your experiences at this institution contributed to your knowledge, skills, and personal development in writing clearly and effectively?” Success with regard to desired outcomes has been encouraging, but partial, thus far.

General Education Program. Faculty-developed scoring rubrics based on the University’s Critical/Creative Thinking and Communication Rubrics are used to evaluate random samples of students’ work in every GE course (≈ 170 courses) every two years. EKU’s criterion for student learning is that at least 85% of students will achieve the GE learning outcomes in each course. Data aggregated across four years for all courses provide evidence for overall learning in each area of the GE Program. For 2006-2010 (two assessments per course) a range of 70—91% of students achieved critical thinking learning outcomes across the 11 GE areas; 80% achieved the
outcomes for written communication, and 86% for oral communication. Overall, the criterion for critical thinking was met in 3/11 GE areas, and was weakest in written communication, natural sciences, and mathematics. For 2010--2012 (one assessment per course) a range of 68-98% of students achieved critical thinking learning outcomes across the 11 GE areas; 85% the outcomes for written communication, and 88% for oral communication. Overall, the criterion for critical thinking was met in 7/11 GE areas, and was weakest in natural sciences and social science.

Program Specific Outcomes. Expectations for student achievement in academic programs are included in each program’s strategic plan, along with processes for collecting and evaluating outcome data. Sophistication of program plans varies depending on factors such as age of program, accreditation standards, assessment knowledge of faculty, and program leadership. The goal is that every program has a plan that includes evaluation of students’ critical/creative thinking and communication based on student work produced in the senior year. Assurance of learning plans are developed by faculty teams via the following process: First, faculty customize the University Critical/Creative Thinking and Communication Rubrics to align with their program’s goals. For example, Psychology faculty determined that the “analysis” criterion on the University Rubric would be applied to students’ analyses of research methodology in journal articles. Second, faculty choose/create an appropriate student assignment through which the desired knowledge/skills can be demonstrated, e.g., capstone paper, research project, or oral presentations. Third, faculty revise/write instructions for students, making sure that students are aware of the criteria on which their work will be evaluated. Fourth, faculty pilot test the assignment, collect student work, pilot-test the rubrics in team scoring sessions, and revise assignments, instructions, and/or rubrics, as needed. At that point the assurance of learning plan is fully implemented, faculty teams score students’ work, analyze the outcomes, and, most importantly, discuss how to use the outcome data to improve student learning. At last count, 80.5% of academic programs were actively evaluating critical/creative thinking skills and 77.4% were actively evaluating communication skills. EKU leaders are encouraged by these numbers although they also realize that many programs need to improve their assurance of learning plans. EKU leaders will continue to keep sustained focus on assurance of learning and efforts to educate, provide feedback and guidance, and hold program leaders accountable for making progress.

Documentation of Data
EKU uses TracDat software to store strategic plans, outcomes reports, interpretation of outcomes, and use of results to improve student learning. TracDat allows faculty to update and revise documentation as plans change, new outcome evidence is obtained, and/or new initiatives are created as a result of those outcomes. TracDat is used at the program, department, college, and University levels, and information is updated at least annually. A priori criteria for student learning are included in strategic plans, as well as analyses of which expectations were and were not met. EKU’s primary focus is not on meeting criteria but on using data for continual improvement. Whether or not results are achieved based on a priori criteria, it is essential that faculty understand how to use the outcome data for continuous
program improvement. Thus, essential to the required documentation is an explanation of how data are used to improve learning.

**Supplemental information about institutional effectiveness**

*Nationally-Recognized Assessment Measures: Digging Deeper.* ACT scores and transfer status are taken into consideration when reporting results of the CAAP exam. EKU entering students’ ACT scores range from 13 – 30+; thus, adjustment based on ACT allows for more reasonable interpretations of the results. CAAP data adjusted for ACT scores are reported above. With regard to transfer status CAAP Critical Thinking scores were not significantly different for transfer versus native students in either of the two administrations of the exam. However, for the Writing Module native students scored significantly higher than transfer students. Additionally, comparisons among the colleges/departments are conducted when examining the results of the CAAP and CAT exams. The 2011 administration of the CAAP Essay Writing module evidenced significant differences in students’ essay writing skills between colleges. For the CAT exam means by department are available, but due to small sample sizes in most departments these data have not been emphasized. However, some departments have begun to monitor data trends in order to evaluate the effectiveness of their increased intentional focus on teaching for critical thinking. The CAT exam has the potential to provide a rich source of departmental-level information about students’ critical thinking skills over time.

**Other Student Success Variables.** EKU tracks retention and graduation rates at the program, college, and University levels. Many academic programs monitor graduate school acceptance, national exam performance, and/or employment trends of their graduates. Additionally, program leaders can request custom reports about sub-populations of students in order to evaluate the effect of specific initiatives. Custom reports can include many variables collected by the University, e.g., gender, age, ACT, GPA, credits earned, etc. The ability for leaders to request customized data encourages faculty to create new initiatives that can be evaluated appropriately and kept, revised, or discarded as needed.

**Example: Student Learning Outcomes and Retention.** National and institutional data show that students who do not meet the student learning outcomes in courses (as evidenced by grades of D, F, or W(withdraw)) are at high risk for dropping out of college. However, course performance is the result of multiple academic and non-academic factors. If course performance is even partially predictive of retention then performance in critical gateway courses should be uniquely important. For EKU students, ENG 101 is the critical gateway course and our analyses indicate a strong negative correlation between D,F,W rates in this one course and retention. The next step is to conduct an ANCOVA to address the question: Does earning a D,F,W in ENG 100 predict retention regardless of performance in other courses? This analysis would provide evidence that meeting the student learning outcomes in this one course is uniquely linked to retention.

**Evidence that Students and Public are Informed of Institutional Outcomes**

*Information to Students and Public about Performance on Student Learning Outcomes*
University outcomes such as retention, graduation, and student performance in General Education are shared with the Board of Regents, the State Council on Postsecondary Education, and publicized on University and/or State websites. Additionally, some academic programs provide information about student performance via program brochures and websites, although accredited programs are more attentive than non-accredited programs about publicizing student learning outcomes. EKU’s accredited programs include Business (AACSB: Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business), Nursing (CCNE: Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education), Occupational Therapy (ACOTE: Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education), and Computer Science (ABET: Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology). Below are some specific examples of how University and program-level information is shared.

**SACS Accreditation Report.** One section of the most recent Fifth-Year SACS Report is the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) Progress Report, which includes information on student performance over a five-year period (2007-2012) on the CAT Exam, CAAP, NSSE, the GE Program, writing intensive courses, service learning courses, Student Success Seminars, Cooperative Education Program, and other programs focused on critical thinking/communication. The QEP Progress Report and SACS reviewers’ comments about the report are available to students and the public on the QEP website.

**University Strategic Plan Progress Reports.** The annual University Strategic Plan Progress reports are presented to the Faculty Senate, which is open to students and the public, and the Board of Regents, which has a student representative (Student Government President), and is also open to the public. Strategic Plan Progress Reports are also published on the website of the Office of Institutional Effectiveness.

**Program Level Outcomes.** Academic program level outcomes are reviewed by SACS and other accrediting bodies, where applicable. The following is a partial list of departments or programs that publicize their program’s student learning outcomes on departmental websites: the Department of Computer Science; all academic programs in the College of Education; the Masters of Public Health program; the School of Justice Studies; the Department of American Sign Language & Interpreter Education; and the School of Business Programs.

**General Education Program Reports.** Every two years data for student learning in the GE Program are reported along with faculty-prepared narratives about how data were used to improve student learning. Data and use of data are included in the University’s Strategic Plan Report, reviewed by the EKU Board of Regents, and published on the Website for the Office of Institutional Effectiveness. The GE reports are made public via the GE website and are reviewed at the State level by the Council on Postsecondary Education.

**Cooperative Education Employer Evaluations.** Employers evaluate students who participate in EKU’s nationally accredited Cooperative Education Program. Evaluations include multiple questions regarding the employers’ perceptions of students’ critical and creative thinking, and written and oral communication. Students also evaluate themselves on these same variables.
Thus, employers and students are aware of the student learning outcomes that are important to both employers and the University. Aggregated employer reports at the program, department, and University level are shared with internal constituents, the Cooperative Education accrediting agency, and employers (upon request).

Supplemental information

University Reports to State. EKU reports to the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE) on “Stronger By Degrees” metrics every year. Metrics include degrees conferred; Stem + H degrees; graduation gaps between low- versus mid/high-income students, academically prepared versus underprepared students, and minority versus majority students. EKU data are publicized on the CPE website as the University Performance Scorecard. A tremendous amount of supplemental data are published on EKU’s Office of Institutional Research website including survey results, testing results, fast facts, and other typical evidence of institutional soundness, such as retention and graduation rates.

Evidence that Outcomes are Used to Improve Student Learning

Incorporating Information about Student Learning Outcomes into Decision-Making Processes

EKU’s primary focus is not solely on meeting criteria but on using data for continual improvement. Whether or not results are achieved based on a priori criteria, it is essential that faculty understand how to use the outcome data to continually improve student learning. Toward that end, University and program-level strategic plan reports, QEP reports, and GE reports include use-of-data information. Additionally, assurance of learning resources, workshops, and multiple professional development activities focus on helping faculty interpret and use outcome data. EKU’s philosophy is that achieving expected results may feel good temporarily, but it should lead to tough questions about “So what now?” Are the student learning outcomes focused on the “right” concepts? Are faculty expectations ambitious but attainable? Are the processes for measuring learning valid and rigorous? Are faculty evaluations of student work valid and reliable? EKU’s educational campaign for assurance of learning, feedback on annual progress reports, and GE course assessment push faculty to consider these questions, and more, when they analyze, interpret, and document outcome data.

Annual Assurance of Learning Day. EKU’s Assurance of Learning Day is an institutionalized method of ensuring faculty time to focus on student learning. Faculty devote the entire day to developing/refining program-specific student learning outcomes, creating curriculum maps, developing student work for evaluation, creating scoring rubrics, evaluating student work, and most importantly, discussing how outcomes will be used to improve student learning. These discussions drive revisions that faculty subsequently make to their strategic plans and curricula. Chairs and faculty report that this day gives them the opportunity to think deeply about their programs and to ensure that curricula decisions are evidence-based.

Sharing Information about Student Learning Outcomes Across Campus
University level outcomes. Outcomes are made public via various EKU websites. Additionally, a yearly QEP Newsletter highlights select outcomes and provides links to view entire reports. At least once per year select QEP news and links to full reports are publicized in The EKU Update a monthly online newsletter sent to all current and retired employees. GE Program data, and use of data to improve student learning, are shared with the CPE, who uses EKU data in aggregate with other Kentucky universities to make policy decisions. University level outcomes are also summarized in annual University Strategic Plan reports, shared with Faculty Senate, Board of Regents, CPE, SACS, and publicized on the web.

Program level outcomes. Program faculty regularly discuss student outcomes within their home departments, and some faculty share information about their programs’ outcomes via professional conferences, workshops, professional learning communities, and other professional development activities.

Using Information for Changes and Improvement

University Strategic Plan. In the early phases of QEP implementation new initiatives were designed to focus on critical/creative thinking and communication. Outcomes from those initiatives increased faculty awareness of student learning weaknesses and highlighted the need for a sustained institutional effort to improve student learning. This led the University to revise its Mission Statement and Strategic Plan to include the QEP as an explicit focus, and to have related goals for every program to have student learning outcomes focused on critical/creative thinking and communication.

Incorporation of Key Learning Outcomes into Academic Program Review. Academic Programs are required by the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE) to complete an extensive program review process every five years. The CPE process is detailed and prescribed; however, EKU added items to examine programs’ focus upon teaching methods and experiences that enhance critical/creative thinking and communication, and the programmatic ACCT requirements. The EKU program review process incorporates and mandates discussion about the program review information at the programmatic, departmental, college, and University levels prior to submission to CPE

Annual Progress Reports for EKU. Each academic program prepares an annual progress report detailing their student learning outcomes, evaluation methods, student achievement data, and use of data to improve student learning. How data are used to inform changes to curriculum, course content, and/or pedagogy is an integral part of these reports.

University Requirement: Applied Critical & Creative Thinking (ACCT). EKU’s sustained focus learning outcomes has led to increased faculty awareness of the importance of critical thinking for their students’ future success. In 2011 a team of faculty proposed, and EKU adopted, a new University requirement to challenge students to apply critical thinking skills beyond the classroom. Program faculty were given latitude to develop or choose courses/experiences that would most benefit their students, e.g., research project/internship/capstone course/study abroad. As of fall 2012 all baccalaureate programs had a 3-credit ACCT course/experience as a
curriculum requirement for the degree. Many programs include an evaluation of student work products from this course/ experience in their assurance of learning plans.

Writing Intensive Courses. Multiple data sources suggested that student learning outcomes for communication were weak: student learning data across programs, GE Program outcomes, and some employer evaluations of students in Cooperative Education positions. A combination of these data and QEP goals led EKU to develop writing-intensive (W) courses, and to require students to take at least one. Faculty in many degree programs developed discipline-specific W courses, which are used to address weaknesses revealed through on-going programmatic assurance of learning processes.

University Student Success Seminars. QEP goals and university data showing poor retention of exploratory students spurred EKU to create a new Student Success Seminar for freshmen exploratory students (GSD 101). Additionally, university data showing poor retention of students who change majors frequently led EKU to require standardization of orientation courses for all students, regardless of major. Data showed that orientation to a specific major was not sufficient because changing majors is the norm. Thus, all seminars are now required to use the same EKU-specific textbook that focuses on EKU resources, the Paul & Elder Model of Critical Thinking, and strategies for success in college.

Using information about Institutional Outcomes. Retention and graduation rates by students’ entering and exiting major are reported to Deans and Chairs so that they may incorporate that information into curriculum planning. Other information, such as retention/graduation based on gender, race, learning communities, Honors’ Program, and special initiatives may be requested from Institutional Research via a simple web-based request form that all faculty can access. Access to these data is invaluable to faculty and administrators for planning new initiatives to address demonstrated areas of need and to evaluate those initiatives appropriately so they can be kept, revised, or discarded, based on evidence.

Example: Institutional Commitment to Improve Student Learning in Gateway Courses. Because meeting student learning outcomes in ENG 101 is strongly related to retention, EKU has recently added three new full-time faculty lines specifically for these courses, and has developed a “Writing Fellows Program” in which specially trained upper-division students will serve as writing coaches. This program includes a rigorous quasi-experimental evaluation plan to determine its effectiveness. Tutoring. Analyses of D,F,W rates led EKU to establish a coordinated tutoring model for the campus, putting additional resources in areas most challenging to students’ success. Future analyses of D,F,W rates will provide evidence of the effectiveness of this new tutoring model. Math Courses. Based on data showing students’ difficulties with meeting learning outcomes in developmental math courses, EKU substantially redesigned those courses. Recent evaluation data show significantly increased student success rates in those courses.

Example: Revision of Freshman Student Success Seminar. Student learning outcomes for GSD 101 include application of critical thinking concepts to career/major choices, and outcome
data highlighted areas of weakness. Institutional Research data showed that exploratory students, and students who change majors often, are at risk for dropping out. Career Services experts reported that exploratory students struggle to effectively use career development/readiness services. Data from these three sources led the University to radically revise GSD 101, such that one third of the course is now devoted to career/major exploration. Career Service experts and GSD personnel collaborated to design the curriculum, prepare lesson plans, train faculty, and develop outcome measures, which include declaration of major and remaining in that major. Outcome data from the pilot test in fall 2013 will be used to refine curriculum as needed.

Example: Psychology Program. Assurance of learning data in the Psychology Program showed student weaknesses in critically analyzing/synthesizing research and written communication. Additionally, data from Institutional Research indicated that over 50% of freshmen Psychology majors change to another major, and most students who ultimately graduate with a Psychology degree changed from another major or transferred to EKU; thus, the program’s freshman orientation course, which focused on careers in psychology, targeted the wrong population. Perception surveys given to graduating seniors reinforced these data as students consistently indicated that they wanted more information about careers. Based on outcomes from these three different sources, Psychology faculty dropped the discipline-specific orientation course and created a new course focused on information literacy, critical analysis/synthesis of research, writing in the discipline, and careers in Psychology. The new course is required after student complete GSD 101 (which includes major/career exploration), and introductory psychology courses that help students better understand the discipline. Subsequent outcome data suggest that the course has been effective in some areas, and these data have been used to make further changes to course content and pedagogy.

Authors:
Rose Perrine, Associate Dean University Programs
Stacey Street, Director Institutional Effectiveness
Jerry Wallace, Director Communications, University Relations
Janna Vice, Provost