THE UNIVERSITY OF UTAH

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Ad Hoc Working Group on Undergraduate Learning Assessment

TEAM MEMBERS
Jim Agutter, Chair, School of Architecture
Ann Darling, Undergraduate Studies
Mark St. Andre, Undergraduate Studies
Troy D'Ambrosio, School of Business Centers
Joy Pierce, Communication
Veronica Valdez, Education, Cultural & Society
Monty Paret, Art History
Bob Kessler, School of Computing
Kathy Hajeb, Entrepreneurship & Strategy
Cary Lopez/Laura Snow, SVPAA Representatives

Dear Colleagues,

I am writing to ask you to participate in a working group to design an innovative method for evaluating undergraduate student learning. As you may know, we recently completed our year seven accreditation report and campus visit through the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities. We received recognition for the learning outcomes we strive to achieve with our students and the many processes we have implemented and are expanding that evaluate student learning, particularly in general education courses and in majors/program of study. We have made significant progress to date in these areas and continue to amplify, refine, and extent our efforts. To complement and complete this assessment agenda, we have been asked to *design and implement an overarching assessment of learning outcomes applicable to every U baccalaureate degree earner.*

Such an assessment would have several key features:

- Align closely with our university mission (see attached draft, approved by the Faculty Senate on January 4, 2016) and campus strategy (see www.utah.accreditation.edu and the President's dashboard http://www.obia.utah.edu/dm/universitystrategy/)
- Allow a "pre college vs post college" (or first year student to graduating senior) comparison and a standard scoring rubric, e.g., completed by incoming freshmen and graduating seniors and compared pre vs post for a random subset of the student population
- Be brief and straightforward to administer and evaluate on a large scale, with a scoring approach that is reliable
- Be innovative and fun (there are currently no significant models of this type of assessment, beyond several standardized measures, so we have an opportunity to be a creative path-breaker)

Informal brainstorming on this challenge has raised a couple of ideas. I mention them here not to constrain your thinking, but instead to give you some preliminary ideas.

- Asking a random sample of incoming freshman and a random sample of graduating seniors to record a three-minute video (made via cell phone or in a studio) in which they responded to a brief prompt. The prompt would need to be engaging, allow the student to incorporate some specific information, and be applicable both as students enter college and as they graduate (such as how they think their college interests/field of study/activities will allow them to have an impact throughout their lives). The scoring rubric would need to draw on some of our stated learning goals, such as verbal communication skill, synthesis of information, might (or might not) mention some other learning goals (such as diversity), and would allow an overall evaluation of sophistication in content and knowledge.
- Develop a game-based approach to evaluate small teams of students' ability to work together to solve a problem, synthesize information, communicate and apply learning to a real world issue (other LEAP learning outcomes could be incorporated). Evaluate the approach with a random sample of freshmen and a random sample of graduating seniors. This evaluation model could be conducted in a small group format.

It would be very helpful if your working group could:

- Think through an approach like that outlined above is feasible
- If it may be feasible, develop a draft scoring rubric, sample prompt question(s) or a game-based format (or another option), and pilot the ideas on a few freshman and a few seniors
- Summarize the strengths and limitations of the options or models you pilot
- Summarize what you've learned and how you recommend we proceed

To assist you, I've attached a draft of the mission statement recently approved by the Faculty Senate (now under consideration by the Trustees, Regents and USHE), which links to the campus strategy, President's dashboard, and recent year seven accreditation effort. In addition, the LEAP learning outcomes, as developed by AAC&U, are used as a framework for the U's general education program. These essential learning outcomes can be found here http://www.aacu.org/leap/essential-learning-outcomes

It will be ideal if you are able to provide preliminary recommendations by April 15, 2016. Jim Agutter has graciously agreed to chair your working group. We have not yet involved students to serve, but I hope that you will do so to enrich and inform your efforts. I will join your first meeting, and will be available to assist at any time. If you are not able to serve for any reason, please let me know ASAP. Thank you in advance for your thoughtful advice and assistance.

Sincerely,

Ruth Watkins

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Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs