Transforming Learning at UW-Eau Claire
August 3, 2007

Preamble

A great strength of UW-Eau Claire is our focus on a broad, liberal arts-based education. Built upon this foundation is a range of programs that offer job-related skills for our graduates. This combination prepares our students well to enter the workforce. However, we are not content with this. As our Chancellor has emphasized, we would like graduates of UW-Eau Claire to be leaders in their workplaces, in their communities and beyond. Our best strategy for preparing leaders is to produce a graduating class of creative, adaptable, globally minded, lifelong learners. These are our ideal graduates.

The “Transforming Learning” work group has thought carefully about the challenge of producing the ideal graduate. We examined closely the ways in which teaching and learning are currently structured on our campus. We have been critical of educational traditions that limit the ability of our students to flourish as independent thinkers. As our discussions evolved we began to anticipate and embrace a paradigm shift in the educational culture of our campus. The elements of this shift include:

- Radical curricular reform
- Cultivation intentional educators
- Cultivation of intentional students

Radical curricular reform

Data gathered from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) as well as Higher Learning Commission (HLC) self-study surveys show that our students appreciate and benefit from the broad range of available courses. Faculty delivering these courses are regarded as well-qualified, talented and dedicated teachers. The NSSE and HLC data, along with those from the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement, also point out weaknesses in our curriculum:

- Our curriculum is fragmented and does not emphasize connections among disciplines.
- The existing GE program lacks coherence and is too complicated.
- University-wide curricular requirements, including GE along with foreign culture and cultural diversity, prescribe nearly all credits taken outside a student’s major.
- Opportunities for students to engage in critical reading, writing and thinking are inconsistent and are sometimes delayed until students reach upper-division courses.

We propose a restructuring and consolidation of current University-wide requirements to create a streamlined, simplified distribution system. The distribution system should explicitly support the new University learning goals and be singularly guided by them.

Our work group also proposes two ambitious curricular initiatives. The first is a two-course requirement of topical interdisciplinary colloquia. This will form the core of a revised GE curriculum. The second is an immersion experience. Both will be required of all students, including transfers.
**Interdisciplinary colloquia**

We propose the creation of two interdisciplinary, topical (a.k.a. “umbrella”) colloquium courses — one series for freshmen (“Gateway Colloquia”), and one for juniors and/or seniors (“Milestone Colloquia”). Both must be small, seminar-style courses (perhaps 15-20 students) that will allow for open discussion, ambitious assignments, and above all else — academic rigor. They will be explicitly interdisciplinary (often team-taught), and often focused on “big questions” facing our global society (as prescribed by the AAC&U).

Offerings under these headings would emphasize and instill the following skills and understandings:

- Rigorous reading — for understanding; for criticism
- In-depth questioning and critical reasoning
- Rigorous writing — for expression, for clarity, for learning
- Developing an ability to recognize and pose important questions
- Systematic critiquing and problem solving skills
- Making connections among varying disciplinary perspectives
- Developing an awareness of value systems

**Gateway Colloquia** would be focused on student engagement — preparing the students for their years at UW-Eau Claire by igniting their intellectual curiosity. These courses could replace FYE, or at the very least, integrate FYE and GE so that these efforts serve a common set of goals.

**Milestone Colloquia** would strive to cultivate the intellectual maturity in our students and prepare them for life-long learning and engaged citizenship.

**Immersion experience**

This requirement will immerse students in an extracurricular activity designed to foster true engagement and inspire critical thinking. The experience will provide time for in-depth analysis, interpretation and reflection.

Examples of an immersion experience:

- Study abroad semester with significant service component
- Domestic service project, such as VISTA or AmeriCorps
- Internship (including student teaching and student nursing)
- Collaborative student/faculty research project involving several months of laboratory or field work, followed by a semester or more of data compilation and analysis
- Service-Learning semester (e.g. Habitat for Humanity, Katrina relief)
- National Student Exchange with a significant service or research component

Characteristics of an immersion experience:

- One-on-one mentoring
- Significant analysis/interpretation/reflection component
- Critical thinking
- Problem solving
- Community engagement
- Professional presentation
- Challenges in unfamiliar contexts
Cultivation of intentional educators

Transformative education necessitates transforming the educators.

We cannot assume that new faculty will arrive furnished with the skills and dispositions of an “intentional educator” (see Appendix A for “Intentional Educator Components”). And though we believe current UW-Eau Claire faculty are well qualified in their specialties and eager to teach well, we cannot assume that enough have had the opportunity to develop teaching practices that are intentional. Existing programs support development of the intentional educator, but these programs are neither unified nor coordinated. We recommend three major initiatives necessary to foster a cultural shift at UW-Eau Claire to support and value intentional, transformative educators.

Administrative role for undergraduate education

First, we recommend a redefinition of administrative roles within the Provost’s Office to provide integration and coordination of key undergraduate initiatives and/or offices, such as Assessment of Student Learning, BITs, Faculty/Student Collaborative Research, FYE, General Education, NET, Service Learning, Study Abroad, and Writing Across the Disciplines. This redefined role might be the creation of a Dean for Undergraduate Studies, a redefined assistant provost position, and/or a reconfiguration of reporting lines. A key purpose of this redefined role is to expand high-level, visible leadership for teaching and learning (see Appendix A, “Intentional Educator Support Components” and Appendix B, “Building a Practice of Assessment: Lessons from an Institutional Journey” for additional information).

Intentional educator development programs

Second, we propose faculty development programs which focus specifically on fostering intentional educators and preparing faculty for teaching within the revised curriculum proposed earlier in this document.

- Develop a working definition of what it means to be an intentional educator at UW-Eau Claire (see Appendix A).
- Implement a ten-month contract for first-year faculty. During the month before the conventional contract period begins; convene a “faculty college” that moves new faculty toward the goal of becoming intentional educators.
- Provide curriculum and pedagogy grants for updating existing courses or developing new courses that meet the criteria for being intentional and for developing “interdisciplinary colloquia.” Faculty could apply for reassignment time for curriculum development or for a summer grant.
- Provide “interdisciplinary colloquia” workshops to prepare faculty to teach in transformational learning structures (e.g., teaching writing, reading, and critical thinking in the context of integrated course content).
- Encourage departments and units to give incentives to faculty and staff to become intentional educators. Departments and units should explicitly address intentional educator characteristics in their personnel evaluation plans.
**UW-Eau Claire culture of assessment**

An intentional educator uses assessment to improve student learning; therefore, we propose building a culture at UW-Eau Claire in which everyone takes responsibility for assessment. We must have processes in place to determine how well students are achieving our learning outcomes and given the findings, what actions are necessary to improve student learning.

Toward this end, we recommend the following:

- Complete the revision of the baccalaureate goals and learning outcomes. Align these with UW-Eau Claire’s mission, with a proposed completion date of the beginning of spring semester 2008.
- Develop and institute mechanisms for using assessment data to make improvements at department, program, and institutional levels (for examples of “closing the loop” at the department and program level see Appendix C, “Classroom-based Assessment” and Appendix D, “Sustaining Assessment Momentum between Site Team Visits”).
- Provide workshops on assessment of student learning for individual faculty, departments, and programs (e.g., developing outcomes for student learning; assessing student learning; using assessment findings).

**Cultivation of intentional students**

We see the intentional learner as a student who

- Takes responsibility for his/her own learning, both in and out of the classroom
- Plans classroom and co-curricular activities that complement each other
- Reflects on the differences the learning experiences have made

Although our university has multiple strengths in academics and student life, a continued challenge is to integrate learning in coursework and co-curricular experiences. The university also needs an integrated approach to advising, supporting, and challenging students. Meeting these objectives will help students become more engaged and intentional in planning and assessing their learning experiences.

**Synthesized learning plans**

To cultivate intentional learners, we propose that students create their own synthesized learning plans. The goal of the synthesized learning plan is to have UW-Eau Claire students become more forward-looking and strategic when it comes to their own education. Students can expect to be supported by faculty, staff, and each other in creating their individual plans.

By the fall of 2008 a pilot group of students will be able to use an online electronic portal system to help create their plans. The system will be developed by faculty, students, and student support services. By orientation of 2009 a finalized version of the electronic portal will be in place for all students. A working title for this program is PASSPORT (Personal, Adaptable, Scholarly, and Strategic Plan Of Reflective Transitions) to Success.
Goals/Outcomes of the PASSPORT to Success:

- Students will develop personal learning plans that integrate their curricular and co-curricular experiences.
  The customized plan will be based on university learning goals. It will synthesize academic/student life with post-graduation goals. Students will demonstrate this synthesis by making key curricular and co-curricular decisions.

- Students will reflect on the progress of their own learning in the context of the whole university.
  As part of the reflection, students will connect the academic and student life components of their university experiences. They will also revise their learning plans based on these experiences.

- Students will engage in academic and student life opportunities with future education and career plans in mind.
  Students should be able to identify connections between their university experiences and future plans. To clarify these connections, students will regularly review and revise their PASSPORT. They will also create resume-type documents in preparation for their careers after the university.

It is essential to emphasize that PASSPORT is not simply another hoop for students to jump through. Rather, it is meant to be their primary tool for tracking their progress and reaching their end goal. This is a tool that advisers and others would use in conjunction with students to help all students take responsibility for and customize their educational experiences at UW-Eau Claire. Streamlining PASSPORT with continuing and future initiatives, such as the web portfolio, interdisciplinary colloquia, and immersion experience, will legitimize the purpose and the place of the program in the re-developed baccalaureate degree.

Obtaining resources

To obtain resources for staffing these ambitious curricular offerings, professional development programs, and potential changes to campus infrastructure, we propose to submit a campus-wide “DIN” request, with the intent of bolstering liberal arts education at UW-Eau Claire. Compelling arguments for the “DIN”:

- A national reputation for UW-Eau Claire: we are poised to become the best comprehensive liberal arts institution of the nation — providing an education on par with the nation’s elite liberal arts colleges, but accessible to ALL qualified students. The only barrier is the constraint of resources.
- AAC&U survey data clearly show that above all else, employers want liberal arts graduates (especially those with research experience). Thus, this initiative would build on existing strengths, bolster the overall employability of our graduates, and also serve local economic development efforts.
Intentional Educator Components

- Learner-centered
- Outcomes-based
- Evidence-based
- Appropriate technology use
- Useful assessment
- “Closes the loop”

Intentional Pedagogy

Intentional Mentoring

Intentional Scholarship

Intentional Educator

Intentional Educator Support Components

- Sustained structures for professional development
- Strong leadership
- Roles and rewards consistently reflect both teaching and scholarship
- Known expectations, clearly communicated
- Sufficient resources

Admin Support

Teaching and Learning Support

Scholarship Support

- Research consultation and mentoring
- Student/faculty collaborations
- Internal funding
- External funding
- UW-System support and liaison

- Advising
- Service Learning
- FYE
- Student/faculty collaborations
- Peers/colleagues

- Scholarship informs teaching
- Discipline-based scholarship
- Scholarship of T&L
- Faculty/Student Collaborative Scholarship as a teaching tool
Appendix B

A Collection of Papers on Self-Study and Institutional Improvement

2006

Volume 3

The Future-Focused Organization:
Focusing on the Effectiveness of Teaching and Learning

Susan E. Van Kollenburg, Editor

The papers included in this collection offer the viewpoints of their authors. The Commission highly recommends them for study and for the advice they contain, but none represent official Commission directions, rules, or policies.

This publication is part of a set of four volumes:

Volume 1: The Future-Focused Organization: Organizational Distinctiveness and Effectiveness
- Mission, Vision, and Core Values
- Institutional Change: Shifting Where You Need to Go
- Valuing the Diversity of Individuals
- Using New Planning Strategies
- Increasing Effectiveness Through Collaboration

- Engagement and Service Learning
- Understanding and Supporting All Types of Learners
- Creating and Supporting Effective Learning Environments
- Strengthening Online Learning

Volume 3: The Future-Focused Organization: Focusing on the Effectiveness of Teaching and Learning
- Assessing and Improving Student Learning: Lessons Learned
- Sharing Responsibility for Assessment of Student Learning
- Tools and Strategies for Assessing and Improving Student Learning
- Assessing and/or Reforming General Education
- Strengthening Effective Teaching

Volume 4: The Future-Focused Organization: Quality Assurance, Quality Improvement
- Quality Improvement in Higher Education
- Maintaining Affiliation through AQIP
- PEAK Self-Study and Evaluation

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Building a Practice of Assessment: Lessons from an Institutional Journey

Thomas Paradis and Karen Pugliesi

Colleges and universities face many challenges in their efforts to build commitment to and effective practices for assessment of student learning. This paper shares lessons learned from a nine-year journey at one institution. We start with a brief description of the current context. We follow with an analytic account of our journey, with an emphasis on strategic suggestions for other institutions engaged in efforts to build or strengthen assessment of student learning.

An Institutional Journey

Over the past nine years, Northern Arizona University has developed a stronger institutional infrastructure and organizational culture promoting assessment of student learning. Indicators of our success in this endeavor include:

- increased priority for assessment of student learning outcomes by the administration
- increased allocation of resources, including personnel for assessment of student learning
- increased faculty involvement in assessment of student learning
- increased collaboration between student affairs and academic affairs with respect to assessment of student learning
- increased awareness and communication about value and importance of assessment of student learning

These developments have been founded on four interrelated strategies:

1. Leadership: Vice Provost for Undergraduate Studies and Director of Academic Assessment
2. Faculty Responsibility: University Assessment Committee
3. Support Structures: Office of Academic Assessment and E-Learning Center and Faculty Development Program
4. Policies: Degree Program Assessment and Program Review Policies

Leadership for assessment of student learning is straddled through NAU’s central administrative, academic, and faculty governance structures. The vice provost for undergraduate studies has primary responsibility for assessment of student learning. Two administrative units are critical in carrying out this responsibility: the Office of Academic Assessment (OAA) and the E-Learning Center. These units are complemented by a strong, faculty-led University Assessment Committee. The Faculty Development Program and library are also important components of the university’s infrastructure for assessment.

The Office of Academic Assessment is led by the director of academic assessment, who is the liaison with the University Assessment Committee. The director of E-Learning collaborates with the OAA and the University Assessment Committee to promote and support assessment of student learning in online courses and programs. Both the OAA and the E-Learning Center have professional staff with expertise in assessment of student learning.

The assessment efforts of faculty are guided and supported most directly by the Office of Academic Assessment and the University Assessment Committee, which collaborate in providing support for institutional assessment of student learning.

The Office of Academic Assessment promotes assessment of student learning through faculty training, technical consultation to faculty and academic units, development of assessment strategies and tools, support for scholarship about teaching and learning, and guidance for formulation of student learning outcomes. The goals of the office are to strengthen both course-embedded and programmatic assessment of student learning. OAA also serves as the clearinghouse for all formal assessment of student learning in the university’s general education, degree, and certificate programs.

The University Assessment Committee is a standing committee of the faculty senate. The committee, in collaboration with the Office of Academic Assessment, provides training for faculty in development of assessment plans and engages with departments throughout the university to promote the use of evidence regarding student learning in curricular review and decision making. Resources provided
to academic programs include template guides for design of assessment plans and preparation of reports, a rubric documenting the expectations for assessment plans, an annual workshop for programs writing or revising plans, and visits with program faculty and leadership.

Assessment of student learning in degree programs is also supported by the Faculty Development Program, which provides resources and training for faculty related to course design, curriculum, teaching, and assessment of student learning. The campus faculty development calendar is a result of collaboration between the Faculty Development Program, Office of Academic Assessment, and E-Learning Center.

The university has robust systems in place to ensure and support assessment of student learning in degree programs and general education. These systems are buttressed by two key policies that require assessment of student learning in degree programs: Assessment of Student Learning and Academic Program Review. Together these policies require that degree programs identify student learning outcomes and engage in ongoing assessment of student learning.

The Assessment of Student Learning policy requires that all degree programs identify student learning outcomes and develop a plan for their assessment. Responsibility for identification of learning outcomes and assessment for degree programs resides with faculty in academic units. In the case of general education, the Liberal Studies Committee is responsible for the identification and assessment of student learning outcomes on behalf of the university faculty. Degree program assessment plans are submitted to the Office of Academic Assessment and reviewed with a standard rubric by the University Assessment Committee. Annual reports of assessment of student learning are submitted to the Office of Academic Assessment. All plans and reports are posted on the office’s Web site. Periodic academic program review examines assessment practices and cumulative evidence of student learning generated through implementation of degree program assessment plans. The academic program review process promotes curricular improvement through assessment of student learning and external consultation.

Nine years ago, Northern Arizona University lacked a culture and organizational supports to promote assessment of student learning. Our journey from where we were to where we are now offers a number of lessons for building a practice of assessment.

**Getting Started: Strategic Use of Self-Study**

The timing of Northern Arizona University’s last comprehensive review was fortuitous. In the mid-1990s the national dialogue about assessment was gaining momentum. In that context, our faculty saw that institutional self-study was an opportunity for broad-based evaluation of assessment practices in relation to national norms, external expectations, and internal values/goals. The self-study highlighted our need to strengthen institutional focus on student learning and assessment practices.

The self-study succeeded in gaining the attention of institutional leadership and, ultimately, launched the university on its journey to develop a culture and infrastructure promoting assessment of student learning as a core strategy for ensuring quality and excellence. Along with the increasing focus of program-level accreditation bodies on assessment of student learning, the self-study and comprehensive review underscored the need for institutional investment of resources to support assessment efforts. In short, university leadership made strategic use of the self-study to move Northern Arizona University toward becoming a learning-focused institution.

**Strategies for Building and Sustaining a Genuine Culture of Assessment**

**Focus on the Intrinsic Value of Assessment**

Although external leverage can be a useful stimulus, it is important to rapidly shift focus from external compliance to the intrinsic values of assessing student learning. With little internal precedent for meaningful assessments, early efforts by administrative and faculty leaders at Northern Arizona University to implement degree program assessment requirements met with resistance among faculty members and chairs. The perception that assessment was an external mandate was an impetus to action, but at the same time had the unfortunate consequence of orienting efforts to compliance. Consequently, initial assessment efforts were hurried and did not make apparent the potential benefits for student learning. It was clear that generating a true culture of assessment would require years.

Assessment that is oriented to compliance rather than student learning is less likely to be meaningful and to be used for program improvement. In early phases of an effort to build assessment practices, a careful balance should be established between attending to external expectations for accountability and addressing faculty goals for academic quality. At the same time, it is advisable to consider how to build organizational momentum that will sustain efforts over time.

Our initial efforts to secure assessment plans for all degree programs met with mixed results in the short run, but paved the way to later successes. Some academic units submitted book-sized plans in lifee-size binders, while others hesitated to do anything, expecting the fad to soon disappear. In between were a series of manageable and thoughtful assessment plans that eventually served as
models. Most initial plans were hastily created by academic chairs with little or no faculty input. Still, the first wave of plans served as a significant first step toward program-level assessment at Northern Arizona University.

Seven years after the initial call for degree program assessment plans, Northern Arizona University leaders are still working to shift the focus from accreditation to student learning. An important crossroads has been reached, however. In that more of the faculty and academic units are engaged in assessment because they have found it useful. The Higher Learning Commission’s shift to promotion of less prescriptive and more creative and sustainable assessment processes, empowers (and challenges) our faculty to develop assessment strategies that are workable and meaningful.

**Engagement of Faculty**

The engagement of faculty is vital to growing a commitment to assessment. Assessment efforts that are viewed and implemented as faculty-driven will generate more intrinsic motivation than those perceived as top-down. Given an especially strong value of faculty governance at Northern Arizona University, direct faculty engagement and decision making has been all the more important. In place since 1999, the University Assessment Committee (UAC) is responsible for generating assessment-related policies. Viewed as one of the more enthusiastic and productive faculty committees, the UAC reviews program assessment plans and provides helpful guidance and feedback to academic units. Consisting of faculty members, the group can easily determine the viability and manageability of assessment plans, often recommending that plans be simplified rather than enhanced to achieve their maximum potential.

**Organizational Leadership**

The Office of Academic Assessment (OAA) provides administrative assistance and guidance to the UAC. OAA staff members provide regular consultations with individual chairs or at departmental faculty meetings. Attendees are typically informed about the progress of academic assessment in higher education and the importance of making their own assessment efforts useful and manageable. The consultant’s enthusiasm is often contagious. The OAA director has recently left meetings with faculty members describing assessment as “exciting” or “worthwhile”—words we rarely heard five years earlier. In turn, it is important to listen carefully to the faculty’s ideas and concerns and to address them with respect and honesty. Concerns about the purposes and methods of assessment are addressed most effectively through dialogue that provides an opportunity to respond directly to specific concerns of faculty in particular programs. Further, a director who also serves (or served) as a faculty member has the potential to gain easier credibility with his or her peers. The professor-as-administrator can develop a strong rapport as one who directly understands faculty issues and concerns.

Along with faculty engagement, the involvement of academic unit leadership—deans and chairs—is critical. Chairs and deans provide immediate leadership around curriculum, program development, and program quality. These intermediate leaders also have important roles in establishing expectations for faculty and criteria for evaluating faculty performance. Promotion and support of assessment by deans and chairs as a core faculty responsibility and strategy for assuring quality of programs creates a context in which assessment will acquire greater meaning and salience among faculty. Conversely, leadership that does not embrace assessment can allow apathy or disinterest in assessment to persist.

At Northern Arizona University the OAA collaborated with the six academic deans to share the status of program assessment plans and reports within their respective colleges. This effort has led to an increase in departmental interest and engagement with assessment. Many units initiated reviews of their assessment plans and the processes through which assessment results are considered for curricular improvement.

**Infrastructure and Resources**

Northern Arizona University’s basic assessment infrastructure was in place by 2002 with the creation of the OAA and the hiring of its first director and an additional assessment specialist. By 2005, the OAA employed six individuals, including three graduate and undergraduate student employees. The search was underway in early 2006 for an additional full-time staff member devoted to analysis and reporting of degree program assessment data collection, promised to be an additional resource for academic units implementing assessment plans.

Until recently, institutional investments in assessment had been primarily directed to the development of a central support structure (the OAA). While this was essential, faculty were inclined to discount centralized resources and perceive a lack of funding for assessment. Our experience suggests that some decentralized support for assessment is a powerful complement to a central infrastructure.

In 2005, the OAA was provided funds to launch a mini-grant initiative that provided funds to thirty-five academic units to revise and resubmit their assessment plans or to collect and analyze program assessment data. Many plans still dated to before 2001 and, in not a few cases, had been completely ignored or forgotten. Participation in the mini-grant program was voluntary, and departments could use the funds as they wished—for instance, as summer stipends, hiring a GA, or travel funds for the faculty. The grant project further funded a full-day visit by assessment expert Linda Suskis and the distribution of her recent book, *Assessing Student Learning* (2004).
to all grant participants. This effort has clearly energized assessment efforts throughout NAU, and numerous department chairs have applauded the program.

The development of an infrastructure to guide and support assessment was critical to our progress. Faculty may have limited expertise about or experience with assessment. At the same time, academic units are likely to feel that they have limited resources and energy to devote to assessment. Expert consultation and material assistance to academic units address the key challenges that faculties face in the implementation of assessment of student learning.

Collaboration among Service and Organizational Units

Assisting the OAA with promoting assessment are several other service and organizational units at NAU, making collaborative efforts essential. The OAA staff has forged strong cooperative relationships with the Faculty Development Office, the E-Learning Center, Cline Library, and the Office of Student Affairs. For instance, Student Affairs has led and organized an annual NAU Assessment Fair since 2003. The OAA provides both funding and personnel to assist with the effort, which typically involves thirty to fifty poster displays and presentations for one afternoon in the spring. More recently, Student Affairs has solicited the OAA’s assistance with generating a future assessment plan model for its inclusive service units.

Faculty Development

A further pivotal step came with the creation of a newly structured Faculty Development Program in 2001. This office has enhanced the richness of dialogue between NAU faculty and the national education scene with sponsored guest speakers and faculty workshops. The office’s limited resources and personnel led to collaborative efforts with OAA and E-Learning to produce and present various workshops. Nearly all workshops organized by the OAA, including specialized topics such as rubric creation, classroom assessment techniques, and degree program assessment, are co-sponsored and placed on the master schedule for Faculty Development each semester. Various workshops are co-sponsored with E-Learning as well, including a periodic workshop on classroom assessment techniques.

In 2005, the collaborative efforts among these units reached a new level of cooperation. Dubbed the Collaborative Outreach Project by the OAA, an initial meeting between OAA and Cline Library staff forged the beginnings of a coordinated plan to visit academic units. Six service units and committees participated in this ongoing project, including the OAA, Faculty Development, Cline Library, E-Learning, the University Assessment Committee, and the Liberal Studies Committee. In brief, three staff members representing several of these units schedule forty-five-minute sessions at department meetings to provide teaching and learning resources through a single-page handout and an associated central Web site featuring all six service and organizational units. The site can be found at http://www.nau.edu/teacheasupport/.

A further effort has begun among these same units to produce a printed, four-page newsletter featuring information on effective teaching, learning, and assessment. More important than the efficiency gained by sharing resources, these collaborative efforts send a clear message that academic assessment is an important component of the larger processes of teaching and learning, rather than merely an “add-on” to what faculty are already accomplishing.

Integrate Assessment In Academic Policies and Processes

Weaving assessment practices into existing academic policies and processes is likewise prudent. Since 1998, the process of curriculum development and revision at NAU has seen an expansion of assessment requirements. All course syllabi, both for online and in-class courses, require specific learning outcomes and methods to assess those outcomes. Further, curriculum processes are now formally linked to assessment of student learning. New program proposals must include student learning outcomes. And, program change proposals now document how program-level assessment results inform curricular revision.

Degree program assessment reports are also incorporated into period program reviews. This fact has encouraged departments to create effective assessment plans that can be incorporated into the full seven-year review required by NAU. Sending the message that assessment should be built into a program’s future goals and plans, Programs with that have specialized accreditation, such as Business Administration or Nursing, may substitute their own accreditors’ assessment requirements for those of NAU. In this way, degree-program assessment plans and annual reports are integrated into the structure for program review.

Link Assessment to Important Institutional Values and Goals

Assessment should further become a practice reflective of institutional identity and one that embodies important faculty values. This lesson translated into an assessment process at NAU that promotes above all a focus on quality undergraduate education and bottom-up of faculty-driven initiatives. When program assessment plans, for example, become valued as a way to generate useful information about student learning and curriculum development, the faculty is more likely to believe in its value. There is evidence that this shift of focus from the initial accreditation push to intrinsic motivation is continuing to occur at NAU. The key is to produce assessment practices and expectations that assist faculty with what they are already accomplishing.
Learn and Move on from Failures

As the institutional journey into academic assessment unfolds, it is prudent to expect a variety of clear successes, occasional setbacks, and outright failures. Notwithstanding the impressive gains in knowledge about assessment in higher education in recent decades, this is not an exact science, nor will it ever be. Assessment is iterative and based on continuous action research methods. It is possible to learn from the experiences of other institutions. However, there exists no formula for formalizing academic assessment into institutional culture and planning. That said, it is vital to not be overcome with frustration from the occasional setback. An ambitious attempt in 2002 to institute an electronic portfolio to assess liberal studies failed for lack of sufficient resources, technology, and infrastructure necessary to analyze and report the data. Little university-wide attention was paid to its failure, however, which in hindsight enabled us to move on quickly with more realistic approaches. Our current, more low-tech approach involves the creation and voluntary use of rubrics to assess liberal studies skills with a variety of existing course projects. This pilot is ongoing and will be expanded following its initial run. With rapid improvements in e-portfolio technology, NAU may eventually travel this road again, having learned from the past.

Celebrate and Build on Accomplishments

Celebration of accomplishments will help set the foundation for future building of effective assessment practices. NAU has celebrated two successful focused visits, in 2002 and 2003. The latter was pursuant to a request for institutional change for online educational programs. Although the focus was on online programs, the reviewers considered the institutional structures that promote assessment. Their evaluation affirmed the directions we have staked out and acknowledged our collective accomplishments. The report was distributed widely and provoked dialogue about how to enhance what we have in place that is working well.

Faculty should receive consistent and clear messages about the positive uses for academic assessment and how it will assist them with their own fundamental goals of education. Any reward or recognition structure should celebrate successful assessment practices and results related to degree program plans and reports, making it clear that any negative findings will not be used punitively to punish academic units. Instead, faculty should be recognized for application of assessment findings to identify and build on strengths in efforts to improve programs.

Managing Expectations: What to Expect Along the Way

It is important to keep in mind that it takes time to build effective assessment practices. Be prepared for a long, slow journey with variable rates of progress. Along the way, incremental developments may be punctuated by more dramatic ones. However, the small steps may be the most important. Subtle changes in the thinking and practices of faculty can add up to substantial shifts in processes through which curricula are developed and strengthened. It is critical that an environment be cultivated that encourages faculty to take small steps. Flexibility and patience are imperative as faculty find their way. As with any learning process, stalls are to be expected, especially in the face of disruptions or distractions (e.g., budget problems, reorganization).

Progress in development of strong assessment practices will be scaled to support and infrastructure. Assessment of student learning depends on the efforts of a university's key human resources: faculty. Faculty members have multiple and increasing responsibilities, which in some settings make for a very demanding workload. Assessment strategies that require extraordinary energy and commitment are not sustainable. Faculty and academic units need support to develop and sustain meaningful assessment practices. The rate and scope of the development of infrastructures for assessment activities will set the pace of the journey.

As with any organizational change, some individuals will not come along. There will always be skeptics and resisters. Acceptance of that reality is a key strategic insight. Strive for a critical mass and avoid great investments of energy with low prospects for success. New members and influential individuals should be high priorities.

Effective assessment cannot be built with formulaic strategies. Each institution must find their way in a manner that is fitting with organizational structure and culture. Finding the right path will inevitably require redirections along the way. Even the most carefully developed plans produce unanticipated outcomes, as building the practice of assessment is a process of learning and innovation. Along the way, it is important to recognize what is not working and to not hesitate to abandon it. Expect and learn from failures, but do not dwell on them.

Conclusion

If assessment of student learning is to be a core strategy for advancing the quality of higher education, assessment practices must be integrated into a broad range of institutional processes. Superimposing assessment requirements onto existing operations is not likely to result in a genuine embrace and utilization of assessment. Our experience at one institution suggests that working slowly and deliberately along multiple fronts to build a robust organizational infrastructure and cultivate a culture of evidence around academic programming can pay off substantially in the long run.
References


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Appendix C

Classroom Embedded Assessment:  
A Tool for Fostering Intentional Teaching at UW-Eau Claire

Adapted from Barbara Walvoord’s “Building Assessment on the Grading Process”

Sustaining Assessment Momentum Between Site Team Visits

Karla J. Sanders and Robert F. Edmunds

Most academics involved in the assessment of student learning have struggled with maintaining interest in assessment after a successful site visit. The declining interest in assessment practices that may arise at certain points in the accreditation cycle can be ameliorated by implementing a systematic process and professional development plan that reinforces the importance of sustaining assessment programs.

Eastern Illinois University and Marshall University have taken the Higher Learning Commission’s Levels of Implementation and adapted its checklist for program use to create a system for collecting and using student learning data at the program level. The tools developed by these institutions have enabled each university to discuss best practices in assessment at the program level, to track progress in a systematic way, and to guide faculty toward strategies for improving their plans and ultimately, student learning. These systems also allow each university to sustain interest in assessment practices between site team visits by making assessment and the information it provides relevant to the professional lives of faculty.

In each section below, we will offer information on how our two universities have addressed assessment of student learning and, ultimately, how we sustain assessment momentum between site team visits.

Establishing Best Practices and Providing Feedback at the Program Level

Eastern Illinois University is a four-year public institution that began mandatory program assessment for its major and minor programs (graduate and undergraduate) in 2000 (following a 1999 site team report that indicated it had “lost its early edge in assessment”). Taking its cue from the Levels of Implementation document developed by The Higher Learning Commission, Eastern developed its own primary trait analysis (PTA) for the departmental assessment program. This PTA includes five categories of assessment components with three levels for each component (the actual tool is available at www.eiu.edu/~assess under the assessment in the major section).

1. Learning Objectives
   - Level 1—Learning objective identified
   - Level 2—Learning objectives identified; they describe student behaviors; they are program, not class or course, objectives; they are clear
   - Level 3—Comprehensive learning objectives identified; objectives are appropriate in number; they describe student behaviors; they are program, not class or course, objectives; they are clear and measurable; they support Eastern’s educational goals; they span multiple learning domains; they correlate with program goals

2. Assessment Measures
   - Level 1—Measures identified
   - Level 2—Measures identified; measures relate to learning objectives; they include direct measures of student learning; they are multiple
   - Level 3—Measures identified; measures relate to learning objectives; they emphasize direct measures of student learning; they are multiple; they include direct and indirect measures of learning; they focus on real-world tasks; they stress higher order learning; they are integrated in the curriculum; they allow performance to be gauged over time

3. Expectations
   - Level 1—Some expectations identified; expectations may be vague or lacking in specificity
   - Level 2—Performance expectations/standards established; they are specific; they describe desired outcomes for all measures
   - Level 3—Performance expectations/standards established; they are specific; they describe desired outcomes for all measures; they describe indirect and direct measures; they can be tracked over time; expectations are reevaluated regularly
4. Results
   - Level 1—Data collected for at least some objectives
   - Level 2—Data collected for all objectives; data analyzed in a routine and systematic manner; data compared over time; program implications for results are discussed and inform faculty/program choices
   - Level 3—Data collected for all objectives; data analyzed in a routine and systematic manner; data compared over time; program implications for results are discussed and inform faculty/program choices; results reported annually and in self-studies and program reviews; changes made based on previous results are analyzed, assessed, and documented

5. Feedback Loop
   - Level 1—Data are not interpreted or used; assessment is largely the responsibility of the department chair
   - Level 2—Data are being collected, interpreted, and used by faculty to improve student learning; data are being shared with other appropriate constituents; data are considered in departmental planning and budgeting processes
   - Level 3—Data are being collected, interpreted, and used by faculty to improve student learning; data are being shared with other appropriate constituents; data are considered in departmental planning and budgeting processes; the improvement of student learning is central to the department; assessment is part of the culture of the department

When Eastern’s program began, faculty involved with student learning outcomes assessment were encouraged to use the above PIA tool as a self-check to ascertain the level of assessment they had attained—much in the same way the university-wide assessment committee employed the tool from the HLC. However, many faculty members with little or no training in employing a PIA tool had difficulty using the instrument or making the connection between the best practices incorporated in the tool and what the department was doing, or planned to do, to assess student learning.

In the face of this confusion or disinterest, the director of the Center for Academic Support and Achievement, who was charged with overseeing assessment and aiding departments in their assessment process, developed an annual feedback report that not only responded to their plan but also incorporated the levels outlined on the PIA tool. This report form allows departments to receive narrative feedback in the form of the director’s comments and gives faculty a standard by which all assessment programs are evaluated. With the level of attainment assigned by the director and shared with the university community, faculty and chairs began to take the instrument seriously and to understand the concepts it conveys. The information provided on the annual summaries offers the director the necessary information for tracking the measurements that each program employs as well as the results and how the results are used. The response form and the checklist also provide department chairs, deans, and vice presidents a way to track their programs’ progress with assessment and data for the institution to share with its constituents—especially accrediting agencies and the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE).

Marshall began its systematic review of program assessment in fall 1996. Each program developed an assessment plan and began preparing yearly assessment reviews. By 1998, a majority of the programs on Marshall’s campus had approved assessment plans in place and were preparing yearly reports. The assessment plans had been approved by the University Assessment Committee. When the NCA/HLC’s Cecilia López developed the Assessment Culture Matrix in 2000, we began using that terminology in the university’s review of the program assessment reports. The members of the University Assessment Committee, the deans, and many of the chairs of departments had attempted to rate their assessment efforts with the NCA/HLC guidelines. However, the results were disappointing.

In spring 2003, I attended the NCA conference and listened to Karla Sanders outline Eastern Illinois University’s approach to the efficacy of assessment at the program level. We adopted a portion of Eastern’s plan for use that spring with our assessment reviews; we chose to use three areas of Eastern’s PIA chart including, Learning Objectives, Measures, and the Feedback Loop.

### Marshall University Assessment Summary Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component/Outcome/Program Level</th>
<th>Student Outcome</th>
<th>Person or Office Responsible</th>
<th>Assessment Tool or Approach</th>
<th>Standards/Benchmarks</th>
<th>Results/Analysis</th>
<th>Action Taken</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Each yearly update and/or program self-study report is reviewed by up to three members of the University Assessment Committee and a response is prepared for the program. Responses to the programs are submitted through the office of the associate vice president for academic affairs and the appropriate college dean. With the aid of the Primary Traits Analysis of the Efficacy of Assessment at the Program Level, Marshall began to track the progress of a program in its assessment efforts over time.
The Office of Assessment conducted Yearly Assessment Report Writing workshops for faculty, program chairs, and deans. Additionally, members of the University Assessment Committee who review the reports routinely attend “norming” sessions to maintain some level of consistency in their analysis of yearly reports. Committee members review approximately ten reports each spring. Evaluations by the committee include a short narrative as well as completion of the Primary Traits Analysis.

Systematic Tracking of Progress

Not only do the programs outlined above offer ways in which Eastern and Marshall disseminate assessment best practices and provide feedback to the authors of the plans, but they also provide ways in which to track progress.

Each June, Eastern’s programs submit a summary of their assessment plan. Programs are given annual feedback by August based on their plan, and then the data from each plan are used to provide information for deans, department chairs, and assessment committees that can be used in planning assessment forums and workshops, which contribute to the effort to keep assessment work active between site visits.

The table below indicates the percentage of programs at Eastern reaching each level by year for the last four years of the assessment cycle. In this table, graduate and undergraduate programs have been listed together for each academic year (fall through spring semester), but for university use, these data are separated in annual reports by graduate or undergraduate programs and then by college.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Eastern Illinois University PTA for Departmental Assessment Program</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning Objectives</td>
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<tr>
<td>Level 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Level 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Level 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment Measures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feedback Loop</td>
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<tr>
<td>Level 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Level 3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As this table indicates, Eastern’s programs are making steady progress—especially in the percentage of programs that have achieved a Level 3 in learning objectives and assessment measures. We are also pleased to note the movement from the percentage of programs at Level 1 in the feedback loop to Level 2 in this category. The goal was to have the majority of programs at Level 2 by the time of the NCA site visit in 2005. Establishing expectations and collecting certain results have proved to be the most challenging for programs. While the above data suggest that many of our programs have room for improvement in their assessment of student learning, using PTA to track progress from year to year does show that the institution as a whole is making systematic progress. Deans and department chairs find the data useful in watching the progress of their programs; in fact, one chair gave the assessment committees in his department an annual goal of moving up one level in one category on each summary.

In addition to the annual summaries, every eight years, departments on a rolling basis undergo a program review required by IBHE, and the department’s assessment program is part of this review. This self-study is examined by the assistant vice president for academic
affairs who offers feedback, including an evaluation of assessment progress. The assistant VPAA and the CASA director have held individual and group meetings with representatives of departments to discuss assessment programs and the importance of making progress. Such meetings also contribute to the momentum of assessment practices.

The data from the annual summaries and program reviews are used to improve courses and curricula at the departmental and university-wide levels. Data are also incorporated into annual reports to the administration, the state, and ultimately, formed a basis for parts of the recent self-study (annual assessment reports are available at www.eiu.edu/~assess and the state and accrediting reports are available at www.eiu.edu/~acaffalil under the pull down menu topic accountability).

Systematic tracking is also part of the assessment system at Marshall. Each program produces a Yearly Assessment Update narrative accompanied by an Assessment of Student Outcomes Chart identifying its assessment efforts for the previous year. Programs are asked to review their program goals and outcomes. Each program measures one or more of its outcomes and provides an analysis of the evidence. Additionally, each program provides information on actions taken to help improve student academic achievement on that particular outcome (the feedback loop). Within a three- to four-year period of time, all program outcomes must be measured. With an October 1 deadline, program assessment reports are always a year out of sync with the annual reports. We felt that faculty involvement with the review process was essential and thus opted for up to three reviews of each yearly report. The results of those reviews are compiled and a formal response is written for each program during the summer.

When all of the reviews have been completed, Marshall’s Coordinator for Assessment compiles the results and adds his own assessment of the report. This past year the letter included a chart summarizing the efficacy of assessment efforts of each program during the previous four reporting periods. Thus, a program could see at a glance its assessment efforts over the past four years. Utilizing the PIA rubric, programs can trace the progress of their assessment efforts in each of the three areas: outcomes, measuring instruments, and the feedback loop. Most of the ninety-six programs at Marshall have developed a measurable set of outcomes and are using a variety of measuring instruments to determine student academic achievement. The goal is to have all programs performing at a minimum Level 2 (Making Progress Implementing Assessment Programs) with more than fifty percent of them operating at Level 3 (Maturing Stages of Continuous Improvement) at the end of the fifth year. At the end of the fourth year, we have approximately forty percent performing at Level 3. The figures in the accompanying chart indicate that we are nearing our goal. In 2001 slightly over seventeen percent of our programs rated at Level 3 with category scores between seven and nine. By 2004, the last reporting period, that number had jumped to slightly over forty percent. As well, we have reduced the number of programs at 0 or Level 1 from just over thirty-seven percent to just over sixteen percent. However, as you can see, we still have a few programs that haven’t fully complied with the process. The expectation is that during the 2004-2005 reporting period, all programs will respond with an assessment report and that more than fifty percent will be at Level 3.

### Efficacy of Assessment at Marshall University

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deferred Programs</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programs with New/Revised Plans</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programs not reporting</td>
<td>75.3%</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programs at Level 0</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programs at Level 1</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
<td>20.8%</td>
<td>29.5%</td>
<td>30.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programs at Level 2</td>
<td>34.4%</td>
<td>60.6%</td>
<td>34.7%</td>
<td>18.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programs at Level 3</td>
<td>60.6%</td>
<td>22.9%</td>
<td>18.9%</td>
<td>17.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While Marshall did not expand the chart to include the performance within each category, we have discovered generally that programs have done well on program objectives and measures, while closing the feedback loop appears to be the most elusive.

All public institutions of higher learning in the State of West Virginia are required to complete a five-year self-study. A significant part of that self-study is a review of the assessment efforts during the reporting period. Programs submit their previous five reviews and provide a narrative summary of the effects of their assessment efforts on student academic achievement. The program self-studies are reviewed by the Academic Planning Committee and the Graduate Council and then presented to the provost and the president who in turn recommends action by the Marshall University Board of Governors. The university has attempted to keep the reporting requirements by programs at a minimum, while ensuring that assessment activities continue and that a culture of assessment becomes part of the faculty and students’ academic experience.
Faculty Involvement and Improvement of Student Learning

While it has been a challenge to educate faculty concerning PTA and to engage them in the assessment process, most people at Eastern involved in assessment understand that the levels are more akin to where programs are in the process rather than a grade reflective of the quality of the work. Through meetings, written information, and workshops we strive to help faculty and chairs understand how to use the PTA tool, how to interpret the levels, and most importantly, how to incorporate best practices in assessment for the goal of improving student learning.

In addition to written feedback and one-on-one meetings among faculty and administrators involved in assessment activities, Eastern also publishes an assessment newsletter four times a year; includes data, reports, and resources on a Web site; and provides workshops throughout the academic year concentrating on assessment issues. Workshops include those given by faculty at the institution as well as those given by invited speakers. Past topics have included Using Class Assignments for Grading and for Departmental and General Education Assessment, Down-to-Earth Strategies for Departmental and General Education Assessment, Developing and Assessing Thinking Skills in the Classroom, Fostering and Assessing Students' Cognitive Skills, Tools, Techniques, and Tips for Assessment at the Department Level, Using PTA to Assess Students' Speaking Skills, and a workshop in assessing Electronic Writing Portfolios. We have invited speakers from across the country to deliver workshops. We also send a certain number of faculty involved in assessment to assessment institutes and conferences each year and ask that they share what they have learned with their department, the assessment committee, and sometimes the university community through written and oral reports or presentations.

In 2002, in an effort to provide additional incentive for programs making progress with the assessment of student learning, Eastern’s provost instituted the Provost’s Assessment Awards. Deans may nominate up to three programs for this annual award, and a team of faculty from the Committee for the Assessment of Student Learning (CASL) is composed of faculty from each of the four colleges and three administrators evaluates the nominations. Each fall three monetary awards are given to the top three programs: $2,500; $1,500, and $1,000. Programs are encouraged to use these monetary awards for faculty development activities, such as sending faculty members involved with assessment to conferences and workshops that would aid in their assessment work.

By funding faculty participation at external conferences, sponsoring our own workshops and forums, and rewarding excellence in assessment work, Eastern underscores the importance of maintaining and sustaining assessment work from year to year and not just right before a site visit. Sustaining this kind of momentum makes the assessment preparation for the site visit relatively smooth.

Marshall has made significant strides to involve faculty in the assessment process. The University Assessment Committee has more than twenty members, including faculty from each college and representatives from the faculty senate and graduate council. Administrative staff members include representatives from the Academic Affairs office, Student Affairs, Enrollment Management, and Institutional Research. The coordinator for Assessment is a half-time appointment.

The University Assessment Committee’s duties include overseeing the General Studies program, course syllabus review, program assessment activities, and student/alumni surveys. Regular meetings and workshops are held each semester with this committee. Members of the committee regularly review the activities of the General Education Committee, evaluate course syllabi, and review assessment reports.

The coordinator of the program regularly schedules workshops in cooperation with the Center for Teaching Excellence. Assessment workshops have been the focus of numerous faculty functions, especially at the beginning of each academic year. Course planning workshops are held each year. This fall a group of new faculty members met regularly to build course syllabi and plan for new or updated courses they will be teaching during the spring semester.

In the past five years, the coordinator has met with at least ten departments representing approximately twenty programs concerning assessment and the reporting of assessment information. At least five course syllabi workshops have been conducted for faculty. Each year the Center for Teaching Excellence has been able to award a grant for either a college, department, or faculty member to further the instructional or assessment activities of the program. Grants have been awarded in amounts from $500 to $5,000. Grant monies have been used to hire consultants, develop new curriculum, send faculty members to conferences, and plan new courses or programs. New faculty workshops have been conducted for the past few years with some emphasis on assessment activities.

Conclusion

Developing ways in which to engage faculty continuously in the assessment process aids in the sustainability of the assessment momentum that builds during preparation for a site visit. Establishing a plan for reporting on major and minor programs and providing annual feedback also illustrates the institution’s commitment to assessment and the information it provides about student learning. Successful programs also provide for faculty development in the area of assessment and reward success. Eastern Illinois University and Marshall University have developed systems and tools that work for their institutions.
References


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