WASHINGTON COLLEGE
FIRST COLLEGE CHARTERED IN THE NEW NATION

May 10, 2013

To: Department Chairs, Major and Minor Program Directors
From: Emily Chamlee-Wright, Provost
Subject: Annual Departmental Assessment Reports

Dear Colleagues,

At a recent chair's meeting I promised that I would try to 1) minimize assessment responsibilities that were not making good use of your time and 2) ensure that the assessment activities *we do* pursue are actually meaningful and help us improve the things that really matter for our students. Delivering on this promise will require a long-term commitment on my part, but I have a few ideas that I hope will get us started.

First, some common vocabulary will be useful. For a long time we have conflated **Student Learning Outcomes Assessment** (which we need to update annually) and **Department Program Assessment and Planning** (which is important, but not necessary to do every year). Believing in the power of acronyms, lets call the former SLOA and the latter DPAD. All year you guys have been developing your plans for SLOA. (For your reference, I have included a "Framework of Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Plan" in Appendix I below.)

Now that you have collected the data, all you need to do is analyze it, report it, and recommend changes or next steps based on that analysis. While we need you to do this every year, the good news is that you already have done the heavy lifting by creating the structure for the data you will collect and analyze year to year.[1] The only additional piece of information we will need annually is SCE assignments for individual faculty within the department. Maria will solicit these in a separate note to chairs. Over the summer we will be looking for ways we might make this simpler as well.

So, what about Department Program Assessment and Planning (DPAP)? In the past, the Provost has asked you to do *program* assessment and planning every year, and we really do not need to do this. Program assessment covers things other than direct student learning outcomes, like "What has happened to enrollment growth in the department?" "What is the state of the major in terms of our curricular offerings?" "Are important

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[1] If you are finding the analysis too onerous, you are probably making it harder than it needs to be. Martin, Dale and I can offer suggestions to streamline things going forward.

changes in the field being reflected in our current course offerings?" "How can we make our major more exciting to prospective majors?" Don't get me wrong; these are all really good questions. But they do not need to be assessed every year. Thus, I am proposing that *no departments or programs* offer a DPAP this year. Beginning in 2014, I will ask one-third of the departments and programs to submit a DPAP, the second third in 2015, the third third in 2016, then we repeat the process on a three-year cycle.

(But wait, it gets better!) The tri-annual DPAP report will be an opportunity for the department to reflect on the programmatic strengths and challenges of the previous three years and to set a plan for moving forward. But going forward, you will no longer be asked to gather and report on data that is kept or generated in the Provost's Office, the Office of Institutional Research, or the Registrar's Office. Instead, *we will be gathering the data and putting it in a usable form for you*. You will likely *reference* these data to address questions like, "what is the state of our major?" but you will no longer be responsible for keeping or digging up the data. Below are some of the data we will regularly compile and report in a user-friendly format:

1. Department-by-department list of all approved program/curricular changes that had to go through the Curriculum Committee
2. Department-by-department staffing changes, leaves, overloads, and adjuncts
3. Department-by-department trends in declared majors and minors, trends in the number of graduates, course enrollments, and credits taught. Where appropriate, we will offer both absolute figures and on a "per FTE" basis.
4. Courses that have not been taught for five years or more
5. The number of for-credit internships by department
6. The number of SCEs by department per year

I hope you agree that these changes represent an improvement over past practice. Looking forward to seeing you at graduation. Here's wishing you a rejuvenating and productive summer.

Sincerely,
Emily Chamlee-Wright
Provost & Dean of the College

Appendix I
Framework for Student Learning Outcomes Assessment (SLOA) Plans

1. Department mission statement & learning goals
2. Measurable objectives (each addressing one or more learning goals)
3. Course matrix indicating in which courses the goals of the department are addressed
4. Concrete direct assessment measures. Note: the data can be qualitative, but a systematic way needs to be found to capture the assessment in a quantitative form, for example, by using the something like AAC&U's VALUE Rubrics or some adaptation of rubrics like these.
5. Assessment Report
   - Summary of the department's recent changes that have responded to previous assessment (i.e., how have you "closed the loop" on previous assessment efforts).
   - Presentation of student learning outcomes data (as they relate to department's learning goals and objectives) from present academic year
   - Analysis of student learning outcomes data as they relate to recent changes
   - Recommendations arising from this year's assessment of student learning outcomes

Note: As long as the department thinks it has their mission, learning goals, and objectives right, #1 and #2 above are not likely to change from year to year, and #3 will only change if the department adds/deletes courses or changes the learning goals within ongoing courses. It's likely that #4 will always need some tweaking, but we should be able to refine our approach with each iteration. The assessment report (#5) is the only area that will require the collection and analysis of new data.