

# Northwest Missouri State University

## A Case Study on the Institutional Dynamics and Climate for Student Assessment and Academic Innovation



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## **I. Institutional Context**

### **A. Brief institutional description**

Northwest Missouri State University is a state assisted, four-year regional university located in Maryville, Missouri. Originally founded in 1905 as Missouri's Fifth District Normal School, it served to provide teachers throughout a nineteen county region in Northwest Missouri. During the next century, it endured programmatic additions and three major name changes, the last of which occurred in 1972 when the Board of Regents renamed the school Northwest Missouri State University. Northwest is governed by a state-appointed Board of Regents, and accredited by the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools.

Northwest's Vision and Statement of Mission are immersed in student-centered and learner-centered education. Eight Cultural Core Values drive the vision and mission, and are engrained in the lives of the students, faculty, and campus community. Northwest has distinguished itself among American universities in three areas: its electronic campus, its Culture of Quality, and its outstanding athletic programs. In 1987, Northwest installed the first comprehensive electronic campus in the nation by equipping every residence hall room and faculty office with a networked computer workstation. Currently, Northwest students have continuous access to the internet, e-mail, the library, over 200 databases and 100 instructional videos from the convenience of their residence hall rooms or in any of the twenty-seven specialized computer laboratories that supplement this system. The Culture of Quality program was also initiated in 1987 in an effort to strengthen all aspects of undergraduate education and to enrich campus living. Today, the program borrows from the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award criteria as a conceptual framework for discussing quality, and as an epitome for planning and agenda setting. Northwest's rich athletic history is decorated with myriad accomplishments on the playing field as well as in the classroom.

Three colleges house twenty-one academic departments at Northwest: The College of Arts and Sciences, the College of Education and Human Services and the College of Professional and Applied Studies. Degrees awarded include one-hundred bachelor's, thirty-two master's, three educational specialists and a cooperative doctoral program with the University of Missouri-Columbia. (Doctoral degrees are awarded by the University of Missouri-Columbia) In addition to the main campus, Northwest offers two online degree programs: a bachelor's degree in Accounting and a bachelor's degree in Business Management.

The student body at Northwest is comprised of students from twenty-nine states and twenty-seven countries, but draws its largest population from Missouri, southwest Iowa, southeast Nebraska, and northeast Kansas. Enrollment is just over 6000, with 5,300 undergraduates and 1,100 graduate students. Forty percent of all undergraduate students live in campus housing. Forty-six percent of the undergraduate population are first-generation college students and considered "traditional"; their median age is nineteen. Just over half, fifty-five percent, are female. The minority/international population is just under six percent. Racial demographics are shown below in comparison with the state composition. (State demographics derived from 1990 U. S. Census reports, Northwest undergraduate demographics derived from IPEDS database based on Fall enrollment, 1998)

Population	White	Black	Asian/Pacific Islander	Hispanic	American Indian or Alaskan Native
Northwest	94.3%	2.2%	0.5%	0.9%	0.2%
Missouri	87.7%	10.7%	0.8%	1.2%	0.4%

Table 1: Racial demographics of Northwest Missouri State University and Missouri.

The state of Missouri has a Coordinating Board for Higher Education that provides statewide planning for all public two and four year post-secondary institutions. Each institution has its own governing Board of Regents, appointed by the Governor for six-year, staggered terms. One-half of the members are Democrats and one-half are Republicans. The formal administrative structure within Northwest is perceptibly hierarchical in nature, controlled by the Board of Regents. The President reports directly to the Board, and has ten administrators reporting to him. These include: Executive Assistant to the President, Special Assistant to the President, Director for Athletics/Intramurals, Executive Director of Educational Consortium, Vice President Institutional Advancement, Vice President Information Systems, Provost, Vice President Finance and Support Services, Vice President Student Affairs, Vice President Communication and Marketing. The five Vice Presidents and Provost have a cadre of Directors and professionals reporting to them with various specialties.

Four key leadership teams support the organizational structure. They include the President’s Cabinet, comprised of all administrators named above, except for the Executive Director of Educational Consortium. The Cabinet is responsible for every facet of Northwest’s operations. The Dean’s Council is manned by the Provost, Associate Provost, six deans, and four directors and directs the development, delivery and improvement of instruction and learning. The Baldrige Category Council, with representation of faculty, staff and leadership, has sixteen members who set agendas for the President’s Cabinet and Dean’s Council based on feedback from self-studies and assessments. Lastly, the Strategic Planning Council includes all Cabinet members, college deans and representatives from leadership. They are responsible for implementing the Strategic Planning Process. (Since our visit the four leadership teams have combined as one to form the Strategic Planning Council)

## **B. College of Arts and Sciences**

The College of Arts and Sciences is composed of eleven departments and remains home to approximately seventy-five percent of Northwest’s general education courses. The college has the largest number of faculty members on campus, supporting a large proportion of undergraduate programs, in addition to a small number of graduate programs in teacher education, English and history. Arts and Sciences encompasses the departments of Art; Biological Sciences; Chemistry/Physics; English; Modern Languages; Geology/Geography; Political Science; History, Humanities and Philosophy; Mathematics and Statistics; Music; and Communication and Theatre Arts.

In the College of Arts and Sciences the Dean of Arts and Science has primary responsibility for all general education programs; most of the departments in Arts and Sciences as well as a few programs located in the other two colleges. Department heads report directly to the Dean, and

respective faculty members work under the leadership of the Department heads. Collectively, all administrators and faculty in the College of Arts and Sciences report to the Provost.

Assessment activities in the College of Arts and Sciences are led by the Dean of Arts and Sciences, who visits with each department three times a year to review summative assessment data provided by the Office of Assessment, Information and Analysis. The primary components of the data used include performance measures on Academic Profile exams, Major Field exams and Praxis exams. Also included are results from externally reviewed student portfolios, and department gathered student opinionnaires. Any formative feedback is mainly used by individual faculty members to measure aspects of their classroom learning environment.

Two main support units exist to assist faculty and students with teaching and learning innovations. The Talent Development Center was first established with appropriation funds from the Governor in the mid 1980s. Initially major components of the Talent Development Center included tutoring services and supplemental instruction, the Student Athlete Success Program, professional development for faculty, and assessment activities. Assessment was fairly new at that time, and did not necessarily take preference over the other programs. However, as assessment became a priority for Northwest, the Talent Development Center took a more active role in assessment activities. Today, in addition to serving as a central location for student assessment activities, it continues the tradition of offering tutoring services to students including supplemental instruction, the Student Athlete Success Program, in addition to help with study skills, time management and preparation for major exams.

The Center for Information Technology in Education, or CITE, formally structured late in the 1997-1998 academic year, was created with a two-fold purpose. First was an effort to answer questions about the wealth of technological advances found in online courses and teaching tools. The second goal was to help Northwest faculty use the technology in their classrooms. CITE is solely funded through Mission Enhancement state funds earmarked for development in instructional technology. Paralleling the 1987 initiative of the placement of computer terminals in all dorm rooms for students (since replaced with client serve PCs), the Mission Enhancement funds provide notebook computers for all faculty members. CITE assists faculty through its Faculty Technology Support Services, and provides access to software programs in the Faculty Technology Lab.

## **II. Institutional Approach to Undergraduate Student Assessment**

### **A. Overview of History/Development of Northwest's Approach to Student Assessment**

Northwest has deep roots in the notion of quality improvement facilitated by its last change in leadership. When Dr. Dean Hubbard joined Northwest as its new President in 1984, he brought his beliefs in the "Culture of Quality", an impetus for a vision of an institution based on quality principles. President Hubbard's interest in quality improvement began in the early 1980s, and was further fueled by his participation in the Crosby Institute in Quality in 1980. Symbolically, Hubbard was the first educator to attend the Institute. As expected, Dr. Hubbard's initial attempts at fusing business derived quality principles into an educational setting were perceived as controversial, and met with great resistance. However, with a nation wide increase in

institutional accountability, and a statewide shift to performance funding, quality principles have become a way of life for all at Northwest in the last decade and a half.

In the late 1980s, when Governor Ashcroft declared state mandates for assessment in all public institutions, the Council on Public Higher Education (composed of Presidents from all four year institutions in Missouri) asked Dr. Hubbard to meet with the Governor to discuss an appropriate framework for assessment. The results of that meeting marked the beginning of a positive relationship between the state and Northwest regarding assessment practices. In fact, when the Governor decided to launch its “Funding for Results” program based on performance funding, the criteria embraced many of the same principles.

Northwest’s quality system focuses on the needs of students and a learning centered education evidenced through its school wide strategic planning system. Since approved by the Board of Regents in 1992, Northwest has been using the Malcolm Baldrige Quality Award Criteria as an ongoing assessment framework, which in turn serves as an integral piece in the strategic planning system. Originally created to fit a business model, Northwest adapted the Baldrige criteria to better suit their educational goals while merging state mandates and quality indicators. Each year the Strategic Planning Process is updated to accommodate changing needs and expectations among stakeholders. Since 1995, Northwest has been submitting applications for Baldrige type quality awards and using the feedback to improve its systems. Northwest won the Missouri Quality Award in 1997, and participated as a pilot for the Malcolm Baldrige Quality Award while developing education criteria.

There are three leadership teams who are fundamental to the university wide, quality oriented academic management approach. They are the Strategic Planning Council, the Baldrige Category Council, and the President’s Cabinet. Collectively they help drive the three phases of the planning process, which guides the academic direction and performance of the institution. Each phase has a set time frame and concludes with a retreat to review progress and determine future directions.

Phase I, Review and Analysis, takes place from August to January and focuses on the review of foundational statements, analysis of external and internal environmental scans, and evaluation of current Strategic Initiative (SI) plans. Phase I also serves as an analysis of overall organization performance, which can be observed through data provided by the Office of Assessment, Information and Analysis. Phase I is completed at the January retreat. Phase II, Initiative Identification, spans from January through April. During this phase SI proposals are developed based on outcomes from the January retreat. Four months later, at the April retreat, all proposals are heard, and the President and his Cabinet ultimately decide which SIs will be pursued. All approved SIs are then assigned to specific Cabinet members for primary responsibility. Phase III, Action Planning and Development, continues the process from April through August during which cross-functional teams use the Seven Step Planning Process to develop action plans to support major objectives, also known as Key Quality Indicators, for each of the SIs. Completion of Phase III occurs at the August Cabinet retreat where Cabinet members report on the deployment process for each SI, including the action plans, goals, resource requirements, measures, current status, and long-term performance objectives. A final approval for the SIs is then given and action plans are formalized.

Central to the Strategic Planning Process is the Seven Step Planning Process adapted from the Baldrige. The Seven Step Planning Process is designed as Northwest’s operational planning tool used by both academic departments and co-curricular units to design new initiatives. Adhering to the Seven Step Planning Process allows Northwest to perform an annual comprehensive review and analysis as well as facilitate future planning and programmatic needs. Concurrently, it meets many of the external process improvement requirements for programs such as Funding for Results, Regional and Specialized Accreditation and the Baldrige Assessment Framework.

The Seven Step Planning Process process, as summarized in Table 2, begins by identifying main program objectives called Key Quality Indicators (KQIs). The Key Quality Indicators are identified through various survey methods to reveal perceptions of the customers. Those objectives deemed “most important” to the customers become the program’s primary Key Quality Indicators. Once established, strategies are designed to deliver programs by defining Goals and related Critical Success Factors (CSFs). At least one measure or multiple indicators are defined for each Critical Success Factor to track performance in an assessment strategy. Program designs are then strengthened by establishing baselines, tracking industry trends, and making competitive comparisons with similar programs and institutions. Benchmarking is also encouraged when found that other programs deliver a significantly higher performance than current programs at Northwest. Lastly, stretch goals and future performance targets are set, while resource needs are requested to meet the Key Quality Indicators. These new goals help form the basis for the development and validation of new Key Quality Indicators as the process continues.

<b>Seven Step Planning Process</b>	
Step 1:	Define Key Quality Indicators (KQIs)
Step 2:	Validate KQIs
Step 3:	Establish Goals and Develop a Deployment Strategy
Step 4:	Formulate an Assessment Strategy to Track Performance
Step 5:	Establish Baselines, Track Trends and Do Competitive Comparisons
Step 6:	Benchmarking
Step 7:	Set Performance Targets and/or Stretch Goals

Table 2: The Seven Step Planning Process

<b>University Key Quality Indicators</b>	
<b>Instructional KQIs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communications Competencies</li> <li>• Critical/Creative Thinking and Problem Solving Competencies</li> <li>• Computer Competencies</li> <li>• Self-Directed Learning Competencies</li> <li>• Competence in a Discipline</li> <li>• Personal/Social Competencies</li> <li>• Team Work/Team Leading Competencies</li> <li>• Multicultural Competencies</li> <li>• Cultural Enrichment</li> </ul>
<b>Culture of Quality Commitment to Service (Process KQIs)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Treating you with respect, fairness, and honesty.</li> <li>• Performing our tasks with competence and skill.</li> <li>• Communicating clearly and courteously the services provided.</li> <li>• Listening actively to your requests, comments, and concerns.</li> <li>• Being flexible and open to new ideas.</li> <li>• Providing what we agree to deliver in a timely manner.</li> <li>• Maintaining a safe and orderly, healthy, well-functioning and attractive campus.</li> </ul>

Table 3: University Key Quality Indicators

The primary link between the Seven Step Planning Process and student assessment is shown in the Annual Report. Each year all academic departments and co-curricular units take part in the Annual Report process. This process contains three sections, the first of which encompasses a mission review, discussion of trends impacting the future, and a statement of vision. The second section includes an analysis and review of the department’s Seven Step Planning Process, and the third section includes specification of future performance targets, action plans, and alignments with University initiatives and directions. Much of the data used for the academic unit annual reports is derived from student performance and student experience data. Once completed, the Annual Report is reviewed by the President’s Cabinet, who provides feedback to department and unit leaders. Every five years the academic departments participate in a state mandated review process, similar in nature to the Annual Review. All recommendations are then passed to the Board of Regents and the Coordinating Board for Higher Education for review.

**B. Type of Student Performance Data Collected**

Northwest collects several types of performance data from their students. They assess in areas of cognitive and affective learning, as well as college and post college experiences. Numerous instruments are used at various times throughout the student’s career utilizing both quantitative and qualitative methods. Initial data is gathered during student recruitment where student profile information is collected regarding ACT data, high school grade point average and high school class rank. Throughout the students’ tenure at Northwest, a battery of cognitive measures is taken

including proverbial course examinations, a general education assessment, major field assessment, certification exams, Praxis exams and portfolio analysis.

In addition to cognitive measures, data is collected to ascertain special needs or expectations of current students. This information is largely gathered by three methods: locally developed surveys, national surveys and listening posts. Three of the four locally developed surveys are collectively given to all students. The Freshman Survey is given during orientation and contains topics ranging from academic preparation to needs for individual counseling. The data is collected, analyzed and given to the Deans Council and department chairs for designing new programs or revising programs and services as needed. The Freshman Seminar Survey collects information on the role of the Seminar in orienting students to campus life and on changing needs for educational programs and services. This data is collected and analyzed by Freshman Seminar instructors and used by the Director of Freshman Seminar to improve future sessions. The Junior Class Survey measures satisfaction information from experienced students. The results are given to individual units for interpretation and action. The fourth locally developed survey is in the form of Student Opinionnaires on Teaching. These are collected in individual classes, and provide direct feedback on teaching and course effectiveness. Opinionnaires are mainly used by faculty members and chairs for process improvement, but are also viewed in aggregate by the Deans and Provost.

National surveys administered to incoming freshman students include the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) survey, the Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory (Noel-Levitz) and the Student Developmental Tasks and Lifestyle Assessment (SDTLA). All are collected by the Office of Assessment, Information and Analysis and distributed to respective offices for analysis and interpretation. The data is then used to aid in recommendations for improvement in student support, programs, and facilities. The Alumni Outcomes Survey is also a national survey that provides comparative information on performance gaps for Northwest alumni against a national sample. It is administered three years after graduation.

Listening Posts were established to provide a formal feedback loop to convey student needs and expectations directly to faculty and administrators. They take form in a variety of ways including the senior seminar or capstone courses, student advisor sessions, the Student Senate, and comment cards. The qualitative data gathered through the listening posts, in addition to survey data regarding student needs and expectations are ultimately used to reinforce Key Quality Indicators, as well as assist in the development of the strategic plan.

All students are subjected to the array of surveys and assessment tools described above. The Undergraduate Catalog outlines the rationale behind Northwest's assessment practices, and provides a timetable for expected tests and surveys. Most field tests are given as part of specific courses, and to some extent, used as a portion of the student's course grade. Students are carefully tracked, and those who do not participate in scheduled assessment projects will not be able to pre-register or register for classes, or may not receive a final transcript until the obligation is completed. Following is a table describing the method of data collection, use, and timing of collection.

Method of Collection	Use	Frequency
Profile Information	Admittance and Placement	Admissions process
Course Examinations	Mastery of course material	Varies with every course
General Education Assessment	General Education competency	Senior year
Major Field Assessment	Measure major field competency	Senior year
C-BASE	Required for entry into Teacher Education	Sophomore
Certification Exam	Recommendation for certification	Senior year
Portfolio Analysis	Assurance of competency, self awareness	Freshman to Senior year
Freshman Survey	Academic preparation and reasons for selecting Northwest	Summer preceding enrollment
CIRP	Determine major national trends related to campus climate	Start of fall freshman year
SDTLA	Determine planning, support and development needs and understand where students are at risk	Mid-fall of 1 <sup>st</sup> trimester & Sample of Seniors in the Spring
Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory	Measure difference in expectations and satisfaction levels	End of 1 <sup>st</sup> trimester & Junior year
Junior Class Survey	Determine mid-career satisfaction	1 <sup>st</sup> term of Junior standing
Alumni Outcomes Survey	Gather comparison information on performance gaps against national sample	Three years after graduation
Student Opinionnaires of Teaching	Assist faculty in improving instruction as well as general education and department programs	End of courses

Table 4: Methods, Uses and Frequencies of student assessment tools.

### C. Types of Reports of student performance regularly produced and distributed

Student educational progress is grouped into three broad categories for analysis and dissemination: outcomes and performance, student and stakeholder satisfaction ratings and operational effectiveness. This data is distributed throughout campus via a networked system of linked spreadsheets called Dashboards and Profiles. Dashboards are tracking systems that indicate the degree to which a program or area is responding to its initiative. They notify when a program is significantly behind target, slightly behind target, on target, or ahead of target and contain primarily summative data. Profiles are a collection of trend data for the university. Dashboards and Profiles are created for all levels of leadership and are regularly reviewed to compare performance to targets and key benchmarks. The term Dashboard is used at the President's cabinet level, and the term Profile is used for parallel reports at levels other than the Cabinet. Data is entered into the system by respective department or unit heads, and aggregated by the Office of Assessment, Information and Analysis.

To compliment the summative data provided by Dashboards and Profiles, departments and units create separate formative measures to receive immediate feedback on instructional and programmatic functions. These measures are strictly used within the departments, and generally

do not appear on the Dashboard or Profile system. Both data systems, formative and summative, are compiled and critiqued in the Annual Report.

### **III. Institution-wide Support Patterns Guiding and Promoting Student Assessment**

#### **A. Vision, Mission and Purpose**

Northwest engages four foundational statements that drive its commitment to a learner-centered environment. They include a Vision, Mission, Cultural Core Values and Decision Drivers. Through the Vision, Northwest prioritizes its goals and defines the future: “Northwest will keep its student-centered ‘culture of quality’ vital by continually developing all individuals of the University community, by accommodating and celebrating diverse learners and ways of learning, and by practicing quality in all we do...” The institutional mission for Northwest reveals its commitment to assessment practices that elicits continual improvement in all aspects of the institution. It contends that, “The University is a national leader in applying information technology to improve learning processes and in promoting continuous quality improvement to enhance performance in all of its activities.” Supporting the mission are cultural core values, one of which establishes that Northwest “...is a learning organization, continually improving our University and ourselves”. The Decision Drivers form the basis of strategy development, and include setting priorities related to enrollment, student success, satisfaction (student, faculty and staff) and financial performance.

#### **B. Regular Institution Wide Events Related to Student Assessment**

Aside from regular student participation in assessment, the administration and faculty are very active interpreting and responding to results garnered from the student responses. Formal announcements and meetings pervade the academic year and include bi-annual Presidential addresses which highlight and target strategic directions; a monthly Leadership Forum that reviews performance outcomes, new programs, and strategic implications; the University Chairs’ Council who meets twice monthly to discuss pertinent issues; new faculty and staff orientations that communicate the Vision, Mission, Cultural Core Values, and Decision Drivers; and Eggs and Issues breakfasts with President Hubbard to discuss University-related issues and strategic objectives.

#### **C. Planning and Coordination for Student Assessment**

The primary locus of support for student assessment resides in the Provost’s office. The Office of Assessment, Information and Analysis, reporting to the Provost, is responsible for all academic assessment planning and coordination. The office compiles and interprets institution wide assessment data and enters the information into the Dashboard and Profile tracking system. Program specific assessments are completed within each unit. This office also is charged with compiling application information for the Baldrige Award and the Missouri Quality Award. The Vice President for Student Affairs coordinates efforts from the co-curricular realm focusing on aligning student affairs with the academic mission of academic affairs. Another source for co-curricular support is a cross-functional team, the Student Success Task Force, composed of students, faculty, staff and senior leaders. The task force uses results from the CIRP, Noel-

Levitz, and retention studies to assist in the development of services to ensure a seamless living/learning environment.

Through the Seven Step Planning Process, all individual programs and units are responsible for their assessment activities. Generally speaking, there is a contact from each department who is responsible for the coordination of assessment efforts. Each department determines their own Critical Success Factors and formulates assessment strategies to monitor formative and summative measures and indicators. Through the Seven Step Planning Process, careful attention is given to ensure there are variable modes of assessment types, the assessment is completed at an appropriate time in the process, it is repeated on an appropriate cycle, and the results are used appropriately. The five principles of assessment that guide measurement systems throughout Northwest state that assessment should: preserve University program goals, maintain access to the University, allow unique and autonomous educational programs, build from data already available, and produce actionable information.

Two key groups in assessment planning are the Baldrige Category Council and the Faculty Senate Assessment Committee. The Baldrige Category Council, a sixteen-member group, contains members representing leadership, faculty and staff. Their main charge is to assist academic and administrative units to understand the concepts associated with the framework of the Seven Step Planning Process. In addition, the Baldrige Category Council facilitates agenda setting for the President's Cabinet and Deans Council based on self-study, analysis of results data, and review of feedback from assessments. The Faculty Senate Assessment Committee, composed of both senate and non-senate members, is heavily involved in targeting effective assessment mediums as well as curricula issues in response to student needs. Overall, they seek to improve the processes of teaching and learning through assessment practices.

#### **D. Support for Student Assessment**

When Northwest initially began its quality and student assessment efforts, support for student assessment was primarily from the upper administration. Currently, the primary leaders for assessment still are among the upper administration including the President, Provost, Vice President for Student Affairs and the College Deans, but support can also be found from faculty and staff. However, there is a good deal of skepticism and criticism from some faculty and departments who resent the information overload, complex committee demands and "jargonish" nature of the terminology. Most of the senior administrators are aware of these concerns and President Hubbard is careful to note that the involvement of the upper administration is an essential requisite for the continued support of faculty, staff and students. Assessment practices have fueled the Culture of Quality program established at Northwest in 1987, and are an important part of the outcome driven Seven Step Planning Process. Throughout the school, institutional Key Quality Indicators as well as Core Competencies are proudly displayed on the walls.

The addition of the Office of Assessment, Information and Analysis to handle all assessment and analysis indicates the strong level of support within the administration. While individual departments select appropriate assessment instruments, the Office of Assessment, Information and Analysis designs, processes and funds all activities. Other university wide support can be

found in the Faculty Senate Assessment Committee, as well as the Student Success Task Force, a group established to monitor student expectations and satisfaction levels. The administration has thoughtfully considered what is necessary to support a successful student assessment effort, and has provided the means to achieve that goal.

As mentioned earlier, Northwest has provided laptop computers for all faculty and administrators to aid in the ease of accessing assessment information from the electronic Dashboards and Profiles. Additionally, every on-campus dorm room has a computer in it. By creating a computer-supported environment, the administration feels it can help faculty, administrators and students to become involved in assessment efforts and use the student assessment data for quality improvement.

Financially, support for assessment processes was initially acquired by appropriations from the Governor to fund the Talent Development Center; one focus of which was assessment activities. Currently, with the addition of the Office of Assessment, Information and Analysis, funding is derived from two centrally located budgets housed in the aforementioned departments.

#### **E. Evaluation of Institution's Student Assessment Process**

The Baldrige Award is used as Northwest's main evaluation of their assessment system focusing on information analysis and data management. No additional formal evaluation of the assessment process is currently in place. However there does exist an evaluation coordinated through the Provost's office that provides a critical analysis of the current data systems. As mentioned earlier, all individual departments and units take part in an Annual Review process, which is divided into three sections. The first section encompasses a mission review, discussion of trends impacting the future and a statement of vision. The second section includes an analysis and review of the department's Seven Step Planning Process, and the third section includes specification of future performance targets, action plans, and alignments with University initiatives and directions. Once completed, the Annual Report is reviewed by the President's Cabinet, who provides feedback to the department and unit leaders. Every five years the academic departments participate in a state mandated review process, similar in nature to the Annual Review. All recommendation for the five year review are passed to the Board of Regents and the Coordinating Board for Higher Education for further review.

In addition to the Annual Review, a second approach taken for evaluation is more broad-based, and consists of cross-functional teams, committees and task forces. These groups examine information on the current systems and suggest improvements for the future.

### **IV. External Influences**

#### **A. State Level**

In the late 1980's, the Coordinating Board for Higher Education issued a state mandate for assessment plans in all public institutions in a move to work towards performance funding. At that time, the Council on Public Higher Education (composed of presidents from all four-year institutions in Missouri) asked Dr. Hubbard to meet with the Governor and discuss an

appropriate framework for assessment. Thus began Northwest's involvement in the statewide effort to implement student assessment efforts in higher education. Eventually, the state went to a "Funding for Results" model in which 2-5 percent of the E&G budget rested upon national standardized normed performance measures. Northwest initially chose to use the Academic Profile for their general education program and major field tests (as appropriate) in addition to the PRAXIS exam for teacher certification, but has since adopted the Baldrige criteria in addition to these as a complete, ongoing assessment framework. Due to the cooperative approach between Northwest and the state's Coordinating Board, the state's role is not considered adversarial; the Coordinating Board is very proactive, but allows the institutions to maintain their autonomy.

## **B. Regional Accreditation**

In January of 1998, a team of evaluators from North Central Association visited Northwest's campus. The site visit was dubbed a "special emphasis review" due to the fact that in addition to the standard evaluation, the team was also to compare the NCA Criteria of Accreditation with the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award/Missouri Quality Award Criteria (MBNQA/MQA). The special emphasis evaluation is part of Northwest's comprehensive evaluation that will extend over the next few years. Prior to the 1998 visit, the last comprehensive review was in 1987-88, with focused institutional reviews in 1991 and 1993.

Within the NCA evaluation, it was noted that Northwest excelled in the area of assessment. Continuous quality improvement has made its mark on Northwest's campus and is evident in the multitude of techniques with which Northwest engages to assess student needs and satisfaction levels. Specific strengths pertaining to student performance noted in the evaluation included:

- The faculty and staff at Northwest do a commendable job in making students the focus of their attention and activities. Northwest is truly "learner centered" and is creating a student centered "culture of quality".
- The Culture of Quality permeates the activities of the campus.
- A cohesive leadership teams exists that takes pride in the institution and is committed to its success.
- Faculty dedication and interest in effective teaching and learner-centered achievement is evident in their collegial interactions, recognition programs, and curricula innovations.

Concerns noted by the team were few in comparison to the strengths. One concern, in particular, related to student performance measures:

- Lack of refinement and analysis of a vast array of data sets hinders planning processes and meaningful evaluation at many levels.

No formal recommendations were made regarding student assessment processes.

The influences of the NCA criteria coupled with the MBNQA criteria have a significant impact on Northwest's approach to student assessment.

In addition to accreditation from the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, Northwest is accredited by the following bodies:

- the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE)

- the Missouri State Board of Education and its Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE)
- the Association of Collegiate Business Schools and Programs (ACBSP)
- the American Chemical Society
- the American Dietetic Association Approved Didactic Program
- the Iowa Accredited Vocational Agriculture Education Program
- the Missouri Accredited Vocational Agricultural Education Program
- the Missouri Accredited Vocational Family and Consumer Sciences Education

### **C. Other External Influences**

The Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award has a huge influence on assessment practices at Northwest. In 1991, the Baldrige criteria was explored as an ongoing self-assessment framework to guide future quality efforts. Eventually, the Baldrige criteria was adopted, and framed to reflect their educational orientation. This provided a means to merge state mandates with quality indicators in one comprehensive system. Central to the system is the existence and use of the Seven Step Planning Process.

Northwest has developed many relationships with outside agencies including other primary, secondary and postsecondary education institutions, state government organizations (CBHE and State Legislators), and businesses. They remain active with the surrounding K-12 schools, which serve as a wonderful recruitment base; a means to collaborate with potential students on dual credit arrangements and a direct tap into the future needs of higher education. They collaborate with community colleges in the region and have cooperative agreements with all post-secondary colleges in the 19 county historic region as well as North Central Community College, Missouri Western State College and the University of Missouri-Columbia among others. In addition, Northwest is a member of the CQIN (Continuous Quality Improvement Network), working with other colleges and organizations who promote and support educational excellence through self-assessment and continuous improvement. Northwest belongs to the National Consortium for Continuous improvement (NCCI), which focuses on effective organizational practices and opportunities for educational initiatives. Other association memberships include: the American Association for Colleges for Teacher Education, Missouri Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, Teacher Education Council of State Colleges and Universities, and the National Association of Schools and Music.

Local businesses partnerships, typically formed as advisory councils between individual departments and businesses, provide internship opportunities for students, as well as potential employment. They also foster invaluable connections between academic and pragmatic expectations in the workforce.

## **V. Academic Management Policies and Practices**

### **A. Resource Allocation**

Around 1997, the department chairs were consulted about tying operating increases to student outcomes. Collectively, they did not feel monetary rewards were necessary for processes that should already be in place, and requested that a complicated model to reward based on student results not be created. Instead they proposed that funds be allocated as seed money to enhance student outcomes. Therefore Northwest does not allocate funds for faculty salaries, nor does it allocate funds to programs and units based on student assessment results.

As mentioned earlier, the state of Missouri advocates a “Performing for Results” system for all public institutions. This allocates 2-5 percent of the schools budget based on performance funding. The pool of money from the state is then divided among the academic departments mirroring student performance on outcome measures and how much the department is funded at the state level. Although this incentive fund is not a large pool, around \$35,000 for twenty-one departments, it can be used by the departments in any way they choose. In addition, campus level funding is available from the Coordinating Board. Around 1 percent of the E&G budget can be requested to use for improving teaching and learning. As the institutions budget increases, the request for money can increase appropriately. Following each year, the school must report to the state how the money was used, as well as results from the innovations.

### **B. Student Assessment Information Systems**

Northwest has a student information system that supports the assessment efforts. When the Director of Assessment, Information and Analysis needs a particular program written, he consults with the IS department, which designs the necessary system or software. The IS department plays primarily a support role. They write and develop software that can meet the needs of faculty and administrators. This is a key role since most of the assessment systems are developed in-house. Once the database and other software is written it then becomes the responsibility of the database custodian—the division or department that has requested that specific software developed.

### **C. Accessibility of Individual Student Data to Various Groups**

As mentioned previously, all of the faculty, administrators, and academic support staff have access to the student assessment indicators that are displayed through Dashboards or Profiles. The president’s cabinet members have dashboards that summarize their division. Faculty within each of those divisions can access any data specific to the division, their department, or program. The entire system is computerized and faculty and administrators are encouraged to use the computerized databases to view assessment data. Currently, students do not have access to assessment data. However, Northwest is working on a web-based system allowing students to gain access to their individual results, and eventually import them into their electronic portfolio.

#### **D. Distribution of Studies and Reports to Various Groups**

Distribution of reports in-house is mainly via the networked Dashboard and Profile system. Outside reports are generated for accreditation purposes, and for reports to the Coordinating Board.

#### **E. Student Policies**

Northwest takes student involvement in survey completion seriously, and requires everyone to participate. All students are subjected to the array of surveys and assessment tools. The Undergraduate Catalog outlines the rationale behind Northwest's assessment practices, and provides a timetable for expected tests and surveys. Freshman seminars are a major distribution point for freshman satisfaction surveys, and most field tests are given as part of specific courses. To some extent, they are used as a portion of the student's course grade. Students are carefully tracked, and those who do not participate in scheduled assessment projects will not be able to pre-register or register for classes, or may not receive a final transcript until the obligation is completed.

#### **F. Professional Development Opportunities for Faculty, Academic or Student Affairs Administrators or students**

Northwest provides on-site Planning and Development days for all faculty at the beginning of the fall and spring trimester. However, this is not specifically geared toward assessment issues. Instead it is used for overall quality education development. While there are professional development opportunities for faculty and academic or student affairs staff to learn more about student assessment, most of these must be initiated by the individual staff member. Funding comes from a variety of sources including the Funding for Results budget, a department or unit's operational budget, or Culture of Quality funding. Monies are available for instructional improvement, assessment, teleconferences, workshops, seminars, professional development and enhancement, multicultural training, quality training and more. These can be in any area in which the individual is interested. In addition, Northwest grants educational leaves with full benefits for faculty continuing education.

In addition to on-site training, Northwest funds teams to attend activities such as the American Association of Higher Education's (AAHE) Summer Quality Academy, assessment workshops at locations such as Alverno College, AAHE's national conferences on assessment, AAHE's state and regional conferences for department chair development, and the Continuous Quality Improvement Network (CQIN) Summer Institutes. Other than personal and professional development from participation in workshops, no specific incentives are provided for assessment training.

#### **G. Faculty Evaluation or Rewards for Promotion, Salary, or Other Recognition**

NMSU has not included, to date, any rewards for individual faculty based on their involvement in student assessment. There exist no formal policies or practices that reward involved faculty through promotion and tenure. Most administrators acknowledged that it has been an expectation

that all faculty are involved in institutional student assessment efforts. When asked about whether student assessment data was used in promotion and tenure decisions, the answer was “not directly”. One administrator mentioned that faculty who go under tenure or promotion review have as part of their portfolio student opinionnaires, their record of service, and their record of student support. Indirectly each of these three areas is impacted by a faculty member’s involvement in assessment. Thus, indirectly assessment is rewarded through promotion and tenure.

#### **H. Academic Planning or Review at Department, General Education, or Program Level**

Academic planning and review revolves around Annual Reviews and the Seven Step Planning Process. All departments take part in an Annual Review process with the Provost, in addition to a five year review with the state Coordinating Board. As part of the reviews, the assessment data collected is used to summarize the strengths and weaknesses of the department or program. These summaries are then discussed with faculty members. Some departments use professional standards as benchmarks, and may change a program, using the Seven Step Planning Process, based on the combination of changing professional standards and information collected from student assessments.

#### **VI. Department Innovative Uses of Student Assessment**

Northwest heavily supports innovation with technology. They were one of the first campuses to be completely networked with a computer in every residence hall room. In addition, all faculty members are provided with laptop computers. However, many faculty members expressed confusion between innovative practices, and normal technological advances when asked about innovative teaching. Whatever the view on innovation, the Center for Technology in Education (CITE) has a Faculty Technology Center that is a vast resource for faculty to use the latest technology to enhance their courses. From course management tools, to designing online courses, CITE is available for training, development and design of most any technologically advanced course or system. In addition to single course developments, students can complete their General Education program online, and two degree programs are offered solely online.

Besides on-line courses and programs, some departments use simulation-based assignments via computer simulations. Another electronic innovation involves web-based modular classes, which allows the student to proceed through coursework at his/her own pace. Many departments use newly developed electronic portfolios for assessing student’s learning.

Participants in the faculty focus group mentioned the following methods as being innovative ways of teaching or assessing student learning:

- Use of student presentations
- Portfolios
- Senior Papers
- Research projects
- Field Experience (geology)

- Mock trials and elections (political science)

Innovations used in the four focal departments interviewed (psychology, math, chemistry and English) reflect the widespread use of the CITE for technological assistance in the classroom. All departments incorporate some form of technology in the classroom for content presentation. Three of the departments, chemistry, math and psychology were currently providing at least one online course, with chemistry and psychology offering electronic labs for selected courses. In addition to electronic laboratory settings, the chemistry department also uses computer programs for interactive problem assignments and data collection. The math department cited small group work as a recent innovation, and the psychology department provides research opportunities for students. The English department makes use of online blackboard course services providing course syllabi as well as facilitating online bulletin board discussions.

## **VII. Uses and Impacts of Student Assessment**

### **A. Uses in Academic Decisions**

This area was cited by most as the weakness of the NMSU assessment process. While much data is collected, summarized, and to some degree analyzed, little is done with the information beyond some basic program planning and review. There appears to have been no use of assessment information in decisions regarding the mission or purpose of the institution, and very little use in programmatic and instructional changes. There has never been any resource allocation at the institutional level based on assessment data. And finally, faculty rewards or evaluations are only indirectly tied to assessment.

### **B. Internal Institutional Impacts**

There have been a couple negative internal impacts from Northwest's assessment practices. Many faculty members feel overwhelmed by the added duties or responsibility of taking on more student assessment activities without giving up anything else. Also, students are inundated with assessment tools, and some faculty expressed concern that students may start to feel burnt out by assessment. The one area that has positively been impacted by the student assessment efforts is the educational discussions. Faculty members are definitely talking about the administrative efforts to improve quality and use assessment as a means to identify areas of needed improvement, which faculty seemed to see assessment as a top-down approach at Northwest. Most with whom we spoke agreed it was necessary and benefited the institution.

### **C. External Impacts**

Although direct external impacts emerging in student assessment were difficult to separate from the institution's broader quality emphasis, it clearly has had an indirect positive affect in these areas: improved state relations and state funding supplements, positive recognition in accreditation, and some national visibility (but linked more to quality efforts than assessment per se). Other external impacts were not identified.

## **VIII. Assessment Culture/Climate**

### **A. Nature and Role of Assessment in Institution**

The overall culture and climate surrounding student assessment at Northwest is positive. It is seen as necessary for continual improvement and meeting state quality goals. The entire assessment process is very much intertwined with the quality oriented management approach and the strategic planning process. This process is a very formal system that includes seven steps and identifying key quality indicators. The administration has developed the system and supported the institutional efforts through adding positions and making assessment a priority. Though faculty view it as very much a top-down effort, and feel as if they are being ask to do more without giving up any commitments, they still see the issue of student assessment as a necessary agenda and overwhelmingly support it.

### **B. Meaning to Faculty and Student Role**

Students are assessed at every point in their career. Though we did not talk to any students, many faculty and staff said that students would probably say they are over assessed. They complete several surveys or assessment instruments a term which may be overbearing at times.

### **C. Role in Shaping Academic Patterns in the Institution**

The institutional effort has focused mostly on collecting data and summarizing it. The analysis and use of assessment data to improve curricular efforts has yet to materialize to any great extent. This is where there is the most room for improvement. Northwest needs to take advantage of the data it has and continues to collect, by analyzing the weak areas of student learning and use the data to bolster teaching and curricular efforts with innovative ventures.