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# Ferris State University TracDat Users Guide

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*Office of Academic Affairs*

In all of my travels, I have been struck by the level of interest in this movement and also by the power of small changes that begin to add up in truly consequential ways. The challenge for campus leaders now is to make a firmer place for such changes, to tap into and sustain the groundswell of interest, and give it institutional shape. This is not simply the right thing to do; it's the smart thing . . . the scholarship of teaching and learning brings real benefits for students, signals institutional commitments to learning, helps meet calls for accountability, and provides authentic classroom-based evidence to meet new accreditation standards.

--Lee Shulman, Stanford, CA, August 2005 in [The Advancement of Learning](#)

Revised November 2008

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## System Overview

The TracDat system, a software package from Nuventive, is designed to organize assessment data at the course, program, department, college, and university levels. TracDat is used by more than 200 colleges and universities throughout the nation, including Western Michigan University in Michigan.

According to their promotional literature:

*The application allows assessment plans from course level to institution level to be easily coordinated. Uniform, pre-formatted, yet flexible, reports that address critical aspects of the assessment cycle can be quickly generated. Information relevant to assessment at all levels of the organization can be efficiently stored and accessed through the web-based application. When used in conjunction with a pre-planned social structure designed to consume assessment information at the various institutional levels, TracDat has the capability to significantly enhance the sustainability and utility of the assessment process.*

Learn more about TracDat at <http://www.nuventive.com>. At this site, there are also links to case studies of other institutions, the Nuventive newsletter, and other assessment papers.

## Goals of the Implementation

1. Create a repository for conserving assessment information
2. Stimulate cross-discipline sharing of learning and institutional effectiveness outcomes
3. Focus unit-level efforts on specifying and monitoring assessment outcomes
4. Encourage course-, program-, and institutional-level learning enhancements
5. Streamline reporting requirements for academic units

## User Permissions

All users must be approved by the College dean or his/her designee to use the TracDat system. Some users may have report-only capabilities. A security form is available on the Ferris Academic Affairs website for securing required permissions.

(<http://www.ferris.edu/htmls/administration/academicaffairs/assessment/TracDat/security-access-form.pdf>) You may also find this form by going to Academic Affairs, Assessment at FSU, Assessment Support.

In general, faculty and coordinators/chairs will have access to the data in only their program areas. Department heads, department chairs, coordinators, and deans will have access to both produce reports and enter data for any programs within their areas. In general, associate or assistant deans, deans, and administrative support personnel within the Deans' offices will have permission to produce reports and enter and update data for college-level reports. Over time, it is expected that Colleges will extend view-only rights to other colleges that could benefit from having the information, such as to inform others about university success in general education areas.

**User** – A user is a person who may enter information. The level at which they may enter will vary according to their approved access level. All users may also run reports for their approved “levels.”

**Reports Only** – Some individuals may have report-only capabilities and not be able to enter or change data in the TracDat system. This level of approval is anticipated for some clerical or support personnel in

the Colleges who may be asked to produce reports for faculty, administrators, or committees, such as the College assessment committee.

**Administrator – College Level** - One individual will be provided with “administrator” level access to everything within their College, so that college-level information may be updated. This individual will be charged with keeping Assessment Unit information up to date. There will likely be additional features in this role, such as possibly adding reporting units for the College and/or adding additional access for personnel within the College. The role of college-level administrators will continue to be refined.

**System Administrator.** The Office of Academic Affairs will be responsible for adding all users to the system and keeping the official files of security access forms. In addition, new assessment units may only be added at the University level. At present, Maureen Milzarski will serve as the administrator, and Kim Wilber will serve as back-up administrator. This individual will be responsible for assuring that the system is kept up-to-date with program changes and will link the required programs to various reports. Restricting university-level additions to one office is intended to eliminate unnecessary redundancy in the system.

**E-mail-only** individuals would be those who need to supply data to the TracDat system but will be invited to go to a link to enter the required information and not be regular users of the system. The e-mail only option is not expected until later in the 2008-09 academic year.

Refer to Appendix A for a sample of the user permission form.

## Logging in to TracDat

To facilitate logging into TracDat, the login page has been placed upon the Academic Affairs website. You will find it here:

<http://www.ferris.edu/htmls/administration/academicaffairs/assessment/support.htm>

Or, go to [www.ferris.edu](http://www.ferris.edu)→Academic Affairs→Assessment at Ferris→Assessment Support

You may also go to <http://fsutracd1.ferris.edu/tracdat> to gain access to the Ferris instance of this software.

When you get to the TracDat page, you will be prompted to enter a user ID and a password. These will be assigned to you initially utilizing your last name and first initial for both. All users should change the password promptly. In the future we expect that integration with other Ferris systems (Lotus Notes, Banner, etc.) will have been completed and your single log-in user name and password can be utilized. All users will be advised when this change is made.

To change your password, from the “Home” tab, click on the *Profile* and then the button at the bottom called *Change Password*.

## Definitions

**Assessment:** to advance the quality of student learning through careful elaboration of intended learning, meaningful measures of students’ learning achievements, and systematic collection of data that informs instructional and other improvements—at the level of courses, programs, colleges, and institutions. Assessment involves going beyond the evaluation of individual student performance. When the Higher

Learning Commission uses the term “assessment,” they intend the assessment of student learning outcomes (Teahen, 2008).

**Assessment Unit** – an assessment unit normally includes any academic or administrative departments within an institution that measures outcomes, objectives, or strategic goals. At Ferris, to date, we have placed each of the academic programs in the TracDat system. If you identify the need for additional Assessment Units, call the TracDat Administrator, Maureen Milzarski, or e-mail her at milzarski\_maureen@ferris.edu

**Reporting Unit** – Reporting units are aggregates of information about programs or areas for which various individuals or groups may intend to produce a report. Early examples of intended reporting units at Ferris will include departments (with more than one program); colleges; general education by outcome; general education overall; and Academic Affairs overall. Accreditation entities could also be a reporting unit. Use a reporting unit when there is a list of common elements within several programs and outcomes to report. The reporting unit will allow you to see the relationship between these common elements and outcomes.

Reporting units must be set up by the system administrator. She will also need to know which assessment units should be linked to each reporting unit. Establish a reporting unit only when you want to gather information from two or more assessment units into a single report.

## Tabs

There are presently seven (7) tabs at the top of the TracDat screen:

- Home
- Assessment Unit
- Plan
- *Course Assessment Plan (this is for later implementation)*
- Results (*referred to as Observations in the commercial TRACDAT guide*)
- Reports
- Documents

A brief description of each tab and how it is expected to be used at Ferris follows.

### Home Tab

At the Home tab, you may view the Summary, Calendar, and the Profile. At this tab, any assignments will also be visible. Assignments may be e-mails sent to Ferris stakeholders who are requested to supply specified information, such as an accreditation document; results of tests administered; analyses of program reviews; etc.

Links available from the Home Tab are these:

1. **Summary** – This page lists the number of outcomes, results, and more that exist at the assessment unit level – in addition to any pending assignments
2. **Calendar** – the Calendar displayed relates to due dates important for your unit and it may also contain college-level or University due dates, training opportunities, etc. This calendar does not link

with the LotusNotes or MyFSU calendars. Its use should be limited to assessment dates associated with the assessment unit.

- 3. Profile** – The profile includes places for your name, title, e-mail, description, telephone extension, etc. Only your name and e-mail are required. From the Profile page, there is a button at the bottom right of the page to click to **Change Password**. After changing your password, be sure to click **Save Changes**.

#### Assessment Unit Tab

Typically the assessment unit is a program – a primary unit for analysis and the level at which assessments are implemented. However, assessments will also occur at the course level (for both single-offering and multi-section courses).

The Help Guide in Tracdat summarizes the meaning of “assessment unit” this way:

“The assessment unit is the primary unit where assessment takes place. An assessment Unit is that Unit which has a plan and is being asked to document the results/status of that plan.”

All current Ferris academic programs have been entered into the system. It is the responsibility of each College to assure that program names and their related information, such as sites, are regularly updated. Call or e-mail any changes to Maureen Milzarski.

#### Plan Tab

The Plan lists the intended learning outcomes for the assessment unit along with the measures that will be used to assess these outcomes. Especially at the program level, there would generally be more than one measure in use to assess the outcome. Good assessment systems are characterized by multiple measures. Further, direct measures of student learning are essential elements of a well-designed system. It is expected that there will be at least one direct measure for each major learning outcome at the program and course levels. This should reflect the current assessment plan both for the program and the courses, as they are implemented.

#### Results Tab

The results area is used to report the findings from assessments. They should be reported in summary form. Check out the Demo assessment unit where a sample is being developed. This example will continue to evolve as more is learned about utilizing TracDat. The Demo site will have as one of its goals the representation of model examples of learning outcomes, results, and action plans. Frequently, we expect that the detail supporting summary results will be included in an analytical document that will be attached as a document within the assessment unit.

#### Reports Tab

The Reports tab lists the reports that can be run for the program level being accessed. Over time, more custom reports will be prepared. At this stage, we are utilizing “stock” reports that were shipped with the TracDat software. A recent program enhancement enables users to prepare their own ad hoc reports. The guide for producing these reports is provided on the Academic Affairs website in the TracDat section under assessment support. A list of possible reports is included in the Appendix of this Users’ Guide.

TracDat is intended to not only to advance our documentation and utilization of assessment data, but as noted above, it is also planned to streamline reporting. Thus, the Yearly Administrative Reviews

(commonly referred to as YARs) will be eliminated. Important information from that document will be collected in other ways.

### Documents Tab

The documents tab will display any documents available to support the program, College, or other units. Some documents will be provided at the Institutional Level and be available to all programs. Other documents will be submitted by the College, department, program, or course. These documents can be anything that supports the assessment at that level. Examples may include rubrics utilized to assess particular outcomes or projects; guidelines for standards of the program; calendars for assessment activities within the program; detailed assessment reports that may be summarized within the results section; institutional research reports produced for program reviews; etc.

## **Course Assessment**

Course assessment will begin after the Program information has been entered – likely beginning in January 2009. Faculty and program leaders are encouraged to move ahead as ready. Refer to the implementation timeline available on the website for guidance about minimum expectations. At this stage, the emphasis within the Colleges and programs should be to assure that all courses and programs have well specified learning outcomes and strategies for both assessing and documenting the results of assessments at the course and program levels. Early attention will be focused upon General Education courses, since these are effectively university-side outcomes.

Assistance will be available from the Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning for the development of course-level or program-level outcomes and associated measures. By the beginning of Spring semester, 2009, assessment mentors in each of the Colleges will also be prepared to assist with writing learning outcomes.

### General Education and Multi-Section Courses

It is suggested that all courses contained within general education become an early priority for entry. Multi-section courses are a second priority. Because general education is an institution-wide priority, it will become a primary focus of the visiting HLC accreditation team in 2010-11. It will be desirable to have multiple years of reports concerning these learning outcomes and our success in achieving them. Colleges are encouraged to provide a master course syllabus that is consistent with the UCC-approved description for the course. As the course entry is rolled out, we will review whether the actual UCC form is the appropriate source of this standard information.

## **Implementation Schedule/Timeline**

Refer to the Academic Affairs website for a current schedule of implementation.

<http://www.ferris.edu/htmls/administration/academicaffairs/assessment/TracDat/timeline.pdf>

The goal is to have all program assessment plans entered by the end of fall semester 2008, so that efforts can be directed toward both entering program-level results and entering course-level assessment plans during the spring of 2009.

## **Reporting**

Once implemented, it is intended that all program-level updates will be completed by July 1 of each academic year, and reports will be produced for reporting units during the month of July annually.

Feedback to programs concerning areas needing clarification or elaboration will be provided by August 15 of each academic year.

TracDat comes with some pre-loaded reports. Other reports will be customized during the 2008-09 and subsequent academic years. Ad Hoc reports may be produced at the program level.

## Organization

As a new system at Ferris, we do not yet have all the plans in place for how best to implement TracDat. The initiative is being facilitated from the Office of Academic Affairs. In this office, the individuals most closely involved with the process are:

- System Administrator is Maureen Milzarski, Administrative Support to the Office of Academic Affairs, [milzarski\\_maureen@ferris.edu](mailto:milzarski_maureen@ferris.edu) and ext. 3532
- Backup System Administrator is Kim Wilber, Operations Analyst, [wilberk@ferris.edu](mailto:wilberk@ferris.edu), ext. 3857
- Project Manager is Roberta Teahen, Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs, [teahenr@ferris.edu](mailto:teahenr@ferris.edu), ext. 3805
- Project Liaison/Consultant is Robert von der Osten, Coordinator of Assessment. Robert is available to provide assistance to departments and individuals regarding appropriate utilization of TracDat.

A **TracDat Implementation Team** has been appointed. Current members include a dean, a department head, an associate dean, a program coordinator, and two from Academic Affairs. This group will develop and monitor implementation plans and provide overall planning. This group meets monthly and current members include: Ellen Haneline, Dean, College of Allied Health Sciences; Ron McKean, Associate Dean, College of Technology; Karen Strasser, Department Head, Biological Sciences; Fred Wyman, Coordinator of the Television and Media Production Program, COEHS; Robert von der Osten, Assessment Coordinator; Mike Ryan, FFA Representative; Kim Wilber, Backup System Administrator; Maureen Milzarski, System Administrator; and Robbie Teahen, Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs.

**TracDat Planning Team:** Most members of the group convened for the selection of TracDat will continue to provide guidance to its future development, and this group has been renamed the TracDat Planning Team. The charge of the group will be updated during fall 2008. It is anticipated that they will meet not more often than monthly to provide input. This group is much larger and includes all of the Implementation team members plus many others, including additional deans, faculty, an IT representative, and an additional associate dean.

Future: Power Users/Trainers' Group. During the fall, we anticipate identifying a group of "power users" who will help us further document procedures, advance the effective utilization of the tool, and provide coaching/training to other groups. More detail will follow on this potential development.

Your input is welcome throughout the process – especially in the first year – to assure that we build a system that reduces time involved with reporting and improves our ability to make sound instructional decisions at the level where they can be implemented.

## **Relationship to Academic and Administrative Program Reviews**

The ways in which TracDat will relate to the Academic Program Review (APR) and replace the Yearly Administrative Review (YAR) are still being developed. It is expected that the information essential from the YARS and that are useful to APR work will be produced from the system. It is also possible that documents utilized for the review process(es), such as those produced for programs by Institutional Research, will be placed in the documents repository associated with TracDat and specific programs.

## **Training**

Training will be available throughout the academic year. Watch University-Wide Notices and communications distributed through the Deans' and Chairs' Councils for more information. We also plan to bring in the Nuventive trainer for some advanced training in December 2008 and possibly later in the spring. It is not required that individuals participate in training before becoming users of the system.

One-on-one and small-group sessions will be accommodated. Please call or e-mail Maureen Milzarski (x3532) or Robbie Teahen (x3805 or teahenr@ferris.edu), and time will be arranged to work with you to get started or to keep progressing in the TracDat documentation of student learning and program outcomes.

## **HLC Expectations**

The Higher Learning Commission standards for accreditation and other specialized accreditation standards require that we have clearly identified learning outcomes and assessment systems that produce information about our success in achieving those outcomes as well as documentation of how the data has informed curricular improvements, budgeting, planning, and more. Good instructional practice also dictates that outcomes be clearly specified and assessments linked to measuring students' achievement of these outcomes.

These HLC criteria and core components are especially relevant in this regard.

Criterion 2: The organization's allocation of resources and its processes for evaluation and planning demonstrate its capacity to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its education, and respond to future challenges and opportunities.

2b: The organization's ongoing evaluation and assessment processes provide reliable evidence of institutional effectiveness that clearly informs strategies for continuous improvement. (*Ed. Note: When Commission documents refer to Assessment, they intend the assessment of student learning.*)

Criterion 3: The organization provides evidence of student learning and teaching effectiveness that demonstrates it is fulfilling its educational mission.

3a. The organization's goals for student learning outcomes are clearly stated for each educational program and make effective assessment possible.

Criterion 4: the organization promotes a life of learning for its faculty, administration, staff, and students by fostering and supporting inquiry, creativity, practice, and social responsibility in ways consistent with its mission.

4b. The organization demonstrates that acquisition of a breadth of knowledge and skills and the exercise of intellectual inquiry are integral to its educational programs.

4c. The organization assesses the usefulness of its curricula to students who will live and work in a global, diverse, and technological society.

Although meeting the Commission criteria is essential for achieving renewed accreditation, they are not the driving force between the implementation of TracDat. Our intent is that careful attention to student learning outcomes and planning for continuous improvement will result in an increasingly effective institution that can “prove” its quality to varied audiences. We also believe that if the process of analyzing and using data is more systematic, it will be more efficient in the use of the University’s human and financial resources.

## References

Huber, M.T. and Hutchings, P. (2005). The advancement of learning. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

<http://www.WIDS.org> for characteristics of good outcomes.

[www.ncahlc.org](http://www.ncahlc.org) for Criteria for Accreditation

**Appendix A – see Academic Affairs assessment website for current form**

**Appendix B - College, Program-Level, or Course-Level Learning Outcome Format**

(This information is required for each assessment plan. See later completed example)

**College/ Program/Course**\_\_\_\_\_

**Outcome Name:** *(Brief form – such as Critical Thinking or Problem-Solving)*

**Outcome Statement:** *(what the student will know or be able to do, value, etc.)*

**Assessment Method(s):** *(Especially for program or college-level outcomes, generally multiple measures are employed. It is important that learning outcomes be associated with direct measures of student learning.)*

**Criterion for Success:** *(What standards are set as targets for success levels; e.g., 80 percent of all students completing the portfolio will be rated at 3 or above on every component of the associated rubric.)*

**Results:** *(Succinctly summarize the data you have collected that provides evidence concerning success in achieving the outcome. E.g.: Of the 40 students who submitted portfolios for review during the 07-08 academic year, 30 (75%) were rated an average of 3 or above on a 5 point scale. The factor (or variable or criterion) receiving the lowest overall rating was in Writing.)*

**Actions Pending (if any):** *(Include here actions planned as a result of the findings. Example: A curriculum map will be produced to analyze the points within the curriculum where writing is reinforced and the standards associated with that writing will be examined. Faculty will also be offered professional development opportunities to provide higher levels of assistance with improving students' writing abilities in accordance with the standards of the profession. Curriculum review will be completed by September 15, 2008; professional development will be offered in October, 2008.)*

## Learning Outcomes Sample

College/ Program/Course \_\_\_\_\_ **Alternative Energy Technology** \_\_\_\_\_

**Outcome Name:**

**Outcome Name:** General Knowledge

**Outcome:** Students will be able to explain in technical detail the advantages, disadvantages, and functioning principles of alternative energy generating systems.

**Assessment Measures:**

1. Students will be able to answer 85% of the questions on a post test administered in the capstone.

**Criteria for Success:** 90% of seniors will meet the 85% correct answer expectation.

**Outcome Type:** Test – Internal.

**Time:** Annually.

**Results:** 80% of the students scored at expected levels on the test with the greatest number of errors involving geothermal energy production.

**Action:** Increase faculty development for faculty member who teaches course on Geothermal energy.

**Assessment Measures:**

- 2: Students will be able to answer questions from simulated clients in a capstone scored by a rubric.

**Criteria:** 95% of students will receive a satisfactory or above in all categories.

**Outcome Type-** Capstone presentation

Time: Annually.

**Results:** 98% of the students received satisfactory in all categories.

**Type:** Inconclusive

**Action:** Review rating process and use external raters.

*Thanks to Robert von der Osten for supplying this example.*

## Appendix C

# Concrete Steps toward Making Outcomes and Assessment Efforts Meaningful

## Writing or revising a student learning outcome statement

### Important elements of the statement

The statement specifies what skill, behavior, or knowledge you want the students to have at the conclusion of the course.

The statement includes an action verb that is relatively easy to observe or measure. Ask yourself, "What action will be taken by the students that can be measured?" Examples of such action verbs are *compile, apply, compute, use, compare, rate, plan, and critique*. Examples of action verbs that are more difficult to observe or measure are *know, appreciate, learn, or understand*.

### The student experience

How will the students learn the concepts, skills, etc.? What will the students do? What will you do to help the students learn the concepts, skills, etc.? What products will the student produce to demonstrate his or her competencies?

## Measuring student learning

Are the products you've asked students to generate (e.g., exams, quizzes, performances, essays, work flow plans) likely to demonstrate best the students' competencies? Stated differently, are the means by which students demonstrate their knowledge, skills, or behaviors the best means by which to do this? How do you determine now whether or not students exhibit or possess the desired skill, behavior, or knowledge? What are the strengths of this measure over another measure? Is this measure inadequate in any way?

Describe another way to measure the outcome or competency. Strengths? Weaknesses? Are the two measures you described redundant? Complementary?

### The tasks ahead - Managing the workload

- Writing the remaining outcome statements
- Identify the means of assessment
- Linking all this to the course content and schedule
- Using the assessment data to improve your teaching and students' learning

-- Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning, August 2008

## Appendix E: Report Options

### Available Reports as of 9/2/08

|  |  |                     |
|--|--|---------------------|
| Assessment Impact by Course Objectives               | This report displays each course assessment plan along with the assessment results and action plans. This report is useful for presenting the impact of doing assessment on a particular course.   | <a href="#">run</a> |
| Assessment Impact by Unit Outcomes                   | This report shows each assessment unit's assessment plan along with the results and action plans. This report is useful for showing the impact doing assessment has had on an assessment unit.   | <a href="#">run</a> |
| Assessment Plan Unit Assessment Report - Four Column | This report shows each assessment unit's assessment plan. It does not show the results of each assessment. This report is useful for showing each unit's assessment plan.  | <a href="#">run</a> |
| Course Assessment Impact by Goals                    | This report shows each assessment unit's outcomes along with the results and any action plans in a four column report. This report is useful for showing the results for a specific unit.  | <a href="#">run</a> |
| Course Objectives Related to Goals                   | This report displays each of the selected unit's goals along with the assessment unit's course plan and results that support the goals. This report is useful for showing alignment between the goals and unit's course plan and assessment results. | <a href="#">run</a> |
| Course Related to Goals                              | This report shows the links between course level objectives and the goals of the selected unit. This report is useful to show which course objectives support unit goals.  | <a href="#">run</a> |
| Course Related to Unit Objectives                    | This report lists all the courses identified for a particular assessment unit which support the goals of the selected unit. This report is useful to show alignment between the goals at your institution and the courses taught.                    | <a href="#">run</a> |
| Unit List by Unit Type                               | This report lists all the courses which support the objectives of the selected unit. This report is useful to show courses are used to support an assessment unit's objectives.  | <a href="#">run</a> |
|  | This report shows all the units based on a unit type.  | <a href="#">run</a> |

Note 1: Ferris has substituted the use of "outcomes" for the Tracdat reference to "objectives."

Note 2: This is a representative list of reports that comes from TracDat. Additional custom reports will be produced.

Note 3: Units may produce their own custom reports by utilizing the AdHoc reporting feature available with the current version of TracDat. A guide to producing AdHoc reports is available on the website, and the link within TracDat is on the Reports tab.