

Ferris State University

Assessment Within the Division of Student Affairs – A Brief History

Assessment in General

The forerunners to what is now recognized as “the assessment movement” included studies of curricular and pedagogical reform and new research into the efficacy of new teaching methods and techniques (Ewell, 2002, p. 3). “On the verge of assessment’s emergence in the late 1970s, a trio of volumes was especially influential: Astin’s *Four Critical Years* (1977) established the metaphor ‘value added’ and promoted the use of longitudinal studies to examine next effects, Bowen’s *Investment in Learning* (1977) helped establish a public policy context for assessment by emphasizing the societal returns on investment associated with higher education, and Pace’s *Measuring the Outcomes of College* (1979) emphasized the role of college environments and actual student behaviors (Ewell, 2002, p.4).

By the mid 1980s and into the 1990s it was evident that mounting budget constraints within most colleges and universities, increasing accreditation standards, and a growing focus on standardized testing in the K-12 arena, were increasing the pressure within higher education to conduct and sustain quality assessment programs. As the cost of a college education continued to rise, assessment and accountability became increasingly important, in part because colleges and universities were under pressure to demonstrate their effectiveness. Today colleges and universities are being asked to improve the quality of students’ overall collegiate experience, inside *and* outside of the classroom, even though fiscal and human resources at many institutions are declining.

In recent years within Student Affairs at FSU, we have learned to use assessment data to improve what we do, and how we do it. We have also used assessment data to determine if we should continue certain services, programs and activities as we are increasingly being asked to do “more with less.” But it wasn’t always this way.

Early Assessment Efforts within Student Affairs

“Since the late 1980s, the U.S. Department of Education has ordered accreditors to require institutions [of higher learning] to carry out assessment (Chronicle of Higher Education, October 27, 2006, p. A9).” Nevertheless, assessment efforts in the **Division of Student Affairs** at FSU prior to 2002 were inconsistent and narrow in scope. Most consisted of rudimentary customer satisfaction surveys, occasional collections of student activities participation data, and anecdotal impressions based on the feelings or intuition of staff members. Few assessment activities were documented and the results of assessment activities were seldom recorded. Little assessment data was archived. There was no shared sense that assessment was necessary or important at the departmental or divisional level.

There was no coordinated or systematic attempt to develop and maintain a comprehensive assessment program within Student Affairs. There was no apparent attempt to develop a “culture of assessment” within Student Affairs.

Early in 2002, Dan Burcham, the Vice President of Student Affairs recognized the importance of a comprehensive program of assessment. In order to invigorate the process, he asked Mike Cairns to chair a **Student Affairs Assessment Committee** with members from every department in the Division.

Ultimately, for the assessment to be optimally effective, the process must be institutionalized, and essentially embedded in the University’s culture. The impetus for beginning a comprehensive program of assessment may originate from accreditation agencies, or a governmental mandate, but the drive ideally ought to be an internal one. Many colleges and universities have standing committees on **Student Affairs** assessment to ensure that all units in the Division carry out the activity with zeal and consistency.

Assessment Year One: (2002-2003)

In April of 2002, an **Assessment Committee** was formed for the **Student Affairs Division**. The members of the committee included staff from several departments in the Student Affairs Division, as well as Ferris representatives from Colleges and other Divisions. The guiding goal for the process was how we can best show how **Student Affairs** contributes to major institutional goals of recruiting, retaining, and educating students. Original members included:

- **Mike Cairns**, Associate Vice President, Student Affairs/Chair, Student Affairs Assessment Committee
- **Kristen Salomonson**, Assistant Dean, Enrollment Services/Director, Institutional Research and Testing
- **Penny Bouman**, Manager, Institutional Research and Testing
- **Carla Erlewine**, Associate Director, Financial Aid/Operations
- **Raymond Gant**, Director, Minority Student Affairs, Special Assistant to the President/Multicultural Affairs
- **Matt Klein**, Interim Dean, College of Arts and Sciences
- **Joan Totten**, Academic Department Head, Developmental Programs and Curriculum, University College
- **Craig Westman**, Associate Dean of Enrollment Services/Director of Admissions and Records

Vital to developing the assessment process was to make explicit connections between Ferris Board of Trustee Goals, Student Affairs Divisional Goals, and Department Goals. In the best scenario, all three levels of goals should be consistent with one another, with Department Goals feeding Divisional Goals, and Divisional Goals feeding Board Goals. Ultimately, assessment serves three salient purposes.

- First, assessment may function to monitor the degree of linkage between Department Goals, Divisional Goals, and Board Goals. This ensures that the all areas of the University are working toward consistent ends.
- Second, assessment may function to determine how successful departments, divisions, and the University are in achieving their identified goals.
- And finally, assessment may function to inform the Institution on potential future goals.

Plan of Action. The Assessment Committee decided to begin with the task of conducting a systematic review of all the existing assessment activities in the Student Affairs Division. A series of One-to-One meetings were conducted with Mike Cairns and Kristen Salomonson and each Director in the Student Affairs Division. The interviews consisted of sharing the charge and activities of the Committee, collecting information on existing assessment activities, and discussing plans for improvements and additions to each Department's assessment efforts.

Summary of Assessment Efforts: 2002-2003

The tasks completed were:

- Reviewed existing assessment data.
- Shared the importance and rationale of assessment with all Divisional personnel.
- Examined and refine Divisional goals.
- Created an Assessment Report that chronicled existing activities within the Division.

The major findings were as follows:

- No significant buy-in into the assessment process.
- No budget specifically set aside for assessment activities.
- No officially designated person responsible for heading up our overall assessment efforts at the departmental and division levels.
- No detailed assessment plan, including a specific timeline, for each department or the division.

The recommendations for 2003-2004 included:

- Chronicle what we have done with our 3 primary Divisional Goals:
 - (#9) “Continue communication and collaborations with faculty, staff, and administrators campus-wide to meet the educational goals of the University.”
 - (#11) “Provide quality service, which includes personal, timely attention to our constituents.”
 - (#12) “Effectively recruit and retain students.”

- Develop a broad-based, planning management model with outcomes assessment *integrated* into the overall process. Make changes based on assessment data.
 - Demonstrate this planning management model will be a work in progress.
 - Demonstrate this planning management model will build upon the strengths of previous efforts.

- Develop a prioritized presentation of proposed efforts for the upcoming year for the President and other stakeholders.

- Frame Student Affairs assessment within an institutional context.
 - We need to demonstrate how Student Affairs contributes to the University Strategic Directions such as
 - Recruitment
 - Retention
 - Student Learning

- Determine the extent to which our divisional goals relate to the University Strategic Directions.
 - How do we support the University Strategic Directions?
 - How do our divisional goals connect to the UAP process?

- Determine the extent to which our departmental goals support our divisional goals.

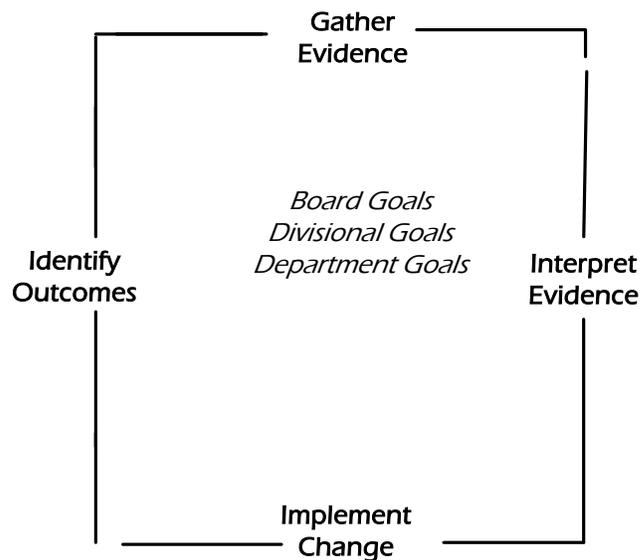
- Develop systematic assessment activities to measure if departmental and divisional goals have been reached.
 - What have our successes been?
 - What are areas of concern?
 - What goals do we have for the future?

- Student Affairs annual reports need to be structured to include outcomes assessment data.

- Determine how Student Affairs annual reports fit into our overall planning management model.
- Determine the role and responsibilities of the Student Affairs Assessment Committee.
 - Should the committee engage in oversight activities such as suggesting assessment practices and critiquing annual reports?
- Periodically reinforce the cyclical nature of the assessment process:
 - Goals → Activities → Assessment → Goals → etc.

Model of Assessment Process 2002-2003

**Major Elements of Ferris State
Student Affairs Division
Assessment Cycle**



Assessment Year Two: (2003-2004)

This year there were many significant alterations and improvements in Student Affairs Assessment. Many of the recommendations put forth by the committee the year before were implemented.

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Plan of Action. The Assessment Committee developed a new model of Student Affairs Assessment that linked the University's Board Strategic Goals with Student Affairs Divisional and Departmental Goals. We focused on assessment activities related to our three most important Divisional Goals. Mike Cairns and Kristen Salomonson coordinated a series of two meetings with each Director in the Student Affairs Division to provide information about the assessment process, answer questions, and to reinforce the importance of the process.

Summary of Assessment Efforts: 2003-2004

The tasks completed were:

- Assessment Process was strongly linked to Board and Divisional Goals.
- Developed a standardized Work plan and Assessment Report Document for the Division.
- Introduced an Assessment Fund to reward worthy projects.
- Increased the number of assessment activities and the sophistication of the measurements.
- Presented the results of our Assessment Process at the University Planning Session.

The major findings were as follows:

- Directors increased their level of participation in Assessment but still were reluctant to broaden their approach to cover a wider range of their operations and services.
- There was little interest in the Assessment fund. In fact no one submitted materials to be considered for the funding.

- Directors felt the Work plan and Assessment Report format needed to be simplified and refined.

The recommendations for 2004-2005 included:

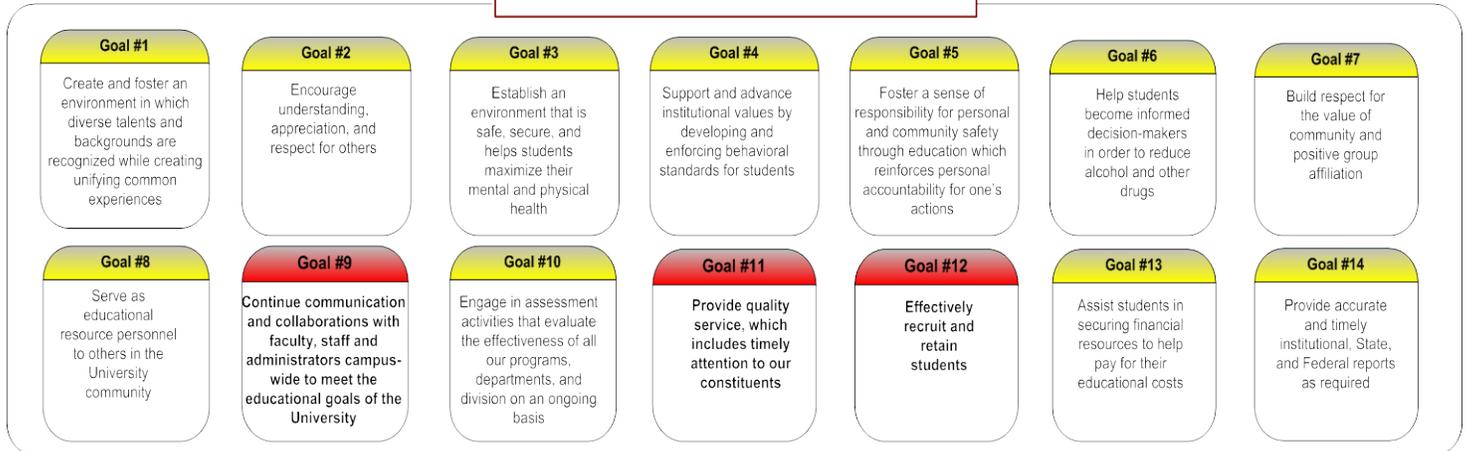
- Work to more fully integrate the Assessment process into the activities of all of those in the Division.
 - Continue the twice yearly meetings with Directors and invite additional staff to attend to communicate the importance of the process to a wider audience.
 - Begin year-end sessions with the Vice President, Mike Cairns, Kristen Salomonson, and each Director to discuss their assessment results, and provide a plan of their activities for the upcoming year.
- More carefully chronicle what changes are occurring as a result of assessment findings.
- Explore different formats for the Work plan and Assessment Report. The format needs to be simplified to decrease the effort needed to complete it.

Model of Assessment Process 2003-2004

Attachment 1 Ferris State University Board Strategic Directions



Ferris State University Student Affairs Division Goals



Department Activities

Assessment Activities

Assessment Year Three: (2004-2005)

The level of quality of our Assessment program advanced in 2004-2005 for many reasons. One of the most critical tasks was to develop a new way to standardize and simplify our Assessment Report format. A member of the Assessment Committee, Penny Bouman, attended a conference centering on information for optimizing Assessment practices in Student Affairs. As a laboratory experience during the conference session, a piece of software was distributed entitled, “*Ten-Step Matrix Assessment for Student Affairs*”. The program provided a step-by-step procedure for directors and staff to develop a standardized assessment report for any sponsored activity or service of any department. Mike Cairns and Kristen Salomonson conducted a series of meeting with each department in Student Affairs to discuss the implementation of the software. In the main, directors were pleased with the idea of creating a simplified, standard report form to guide their assessment efforts.

To ease the transition to the new format, all Student Affairs Directors and selected staff were invited to one-on-one training sessions to learn about the software and to work with Kristen Salomonson on developing an assessment plan for one of their main activities or services. The scope of the sessions was widened to include additional staff that each Director selected from their area in order to broaden knowledge base and interest in Assessment among more members of the Student Affairs Division. The training sessions were approximately two hours in length, granting each Director/Staff Member the opportunity to complete all ten steps in the process so that they would have a solid example on which to base additional assessment reports. The number of additional assessment reports was left intentionally open. Directors were advised to select from the most critical activities and services in their areas.

We continued to emphasize strong connections between the assessment process and the goals of the Departments, the Student Affairs Division, and the Institutional goals. Directors were asked to explicitly connect each of the activities or services they assessed to all three goal levels in their Assessment Reports. In Student Affairs we focused intently on three of our Divisional goals (Collaboration, Quality Service, and Recruiting/Retaining Students).

Plan of Action. The Assessment Committee developed a new model of Student Affairs Assessment that streamlined the process as well as illustrating the shift to the new reporting format. We continued the schedule of twice yearly meetings with Directors and for the first time invited additional staff to attend these sessions to communicate the importance of the process to a wider audience. In addition, there was an effort to forge a stronger linkage between the assessment and planning process. At the suggestion of an external Assessment Committee Member, Matthew Klein, a meeting with the Vice President, Mike Cairns, Kristen Salomonson, and each Director was conducted to discuss their assessment findings, annual report, and plans for the next year.

Summary of Assessment Efforts: 2004-2005

The tasks completed were:

- Assessment Process was strongly linked to the Annual Planning Process and included a meeting with the VP of Student Affairs examining how assessment results would shape the next year's activities.
- Implemented new software to standardize Assessment Reporting.
- Increased the number of activities each Department assessed.
- Experienced a growth in the sophistication of the assessment techniques utilized by Departments. These techniques include increased use of national and locally developed survey instruments, focus group sessions, better tracking student participation in activities/events.
- Continued to seek expert input to improve process. Mike Cairns and Kristen Salomonson attended the Assessment Institute in Indianapolis, IN.

The major findings were as follows:

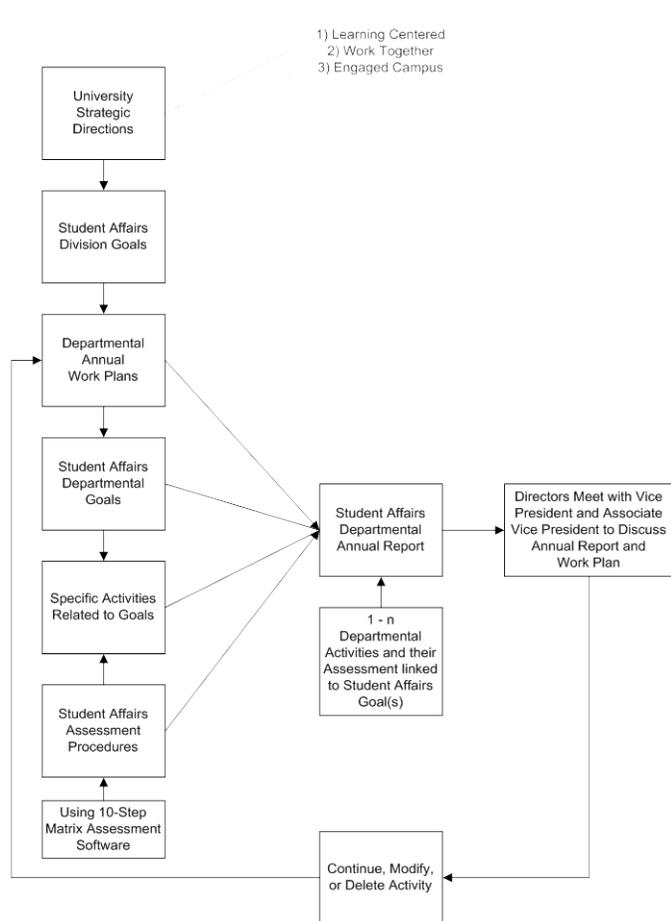
- Directors increased their commitment to the Assessment Process and were asked to devote more energy to completing assessment-related tasks. Each Director and other selected Staff Members learned and utilized a new piece of software to chronicle their activities and services.
- The Assessment Committee discussed that progress was good in terms of assessment becoming a routine practice in the Division. Positive developments included an increase in the use of assessment results to make improvements to existing activities and services, or to guide the development of new ones. The Student Affairs Division was acting more and more like a group of people who recognize the value of assessment.
- Despite the change to the 10-Step Software, the Directors felt the Assessment Report format still was cumbersome and difficult to complete.

The recommendations for 2005-2006 included:

- Call on Directors to assess a broader range of their activities in the next cycle.
 - Increase collaboration with the Institutional Research Office on developing assessment material, collecting data, and analyzing findings.
 - Continue to have year-end sessions with the Vice President, Mike Cairns, Kristen Salomonson, and each Director to discuss their assessment results, and provide a plan of their activities for the upcoming year.
- Continue to explore different formats for the Assessment Report. The format needs to be simplified to decrease the effort needed to complete it.

Model of Assessment Process 2004-2005

Student Affairs
Goals & Assessment
Plan



Assessment Year Four: (2005-2006)

Participation and enthusiasm for assessment in the Student Affairs Division continued to grow this year. Every Department was completing assessment projects on some of their critical activities and services. Questions about the value of assessment abated. In their place were queries about improving assessment techniques from all over the Division. Energized by the growing commitment to assessment, our focus in 2005-2006 centered on simplifying the process of assessment in myriad ways. The primary goal was to sustain our momentum and continue to strengthen the assessment process. As a result of feedback from nearly everyone in the Division, we sought to develop yet another Assessment Report format. While the “*Ten-Step Matrix Software*” was helpful in terms of laying out the many facets of the assessment process, Directors and Staff felt that they had learned all they could from it and wanted to spend more time developing assessments and utilizing the results in decision-making. If the Division was to reach its goal of increased assessment activity, the report process needed to be made more parsimonious. We opted for a set of three standard reports that were created as .pdf forms. The three forms included the Assessment Report, Annual Work Plan, and the Annual Report. Directors entered their content into the appropriate areas on the forms and e-mailed them to the Institutional Research Office. Not only was this process easier for the Directors, but it creates a searchable database that stores all the Division’s activities on an annual basis.

Another change that resulted in a simpler process was the introduction of standard survey instruments to assess activities and services. Several offices have developed a single survey format that is used to gather information on many similar programs and activities. The strategy is effective because less time is spent developing instruments and more effort can be devoted to assessing a broader array of activities and services. Examples of these surveys include ones from Student Leadership and Activities, Minority Student Affairs, Entertainment Unlimited, and Student Judicial Services.

In addition to streamlining local survey development, a number of areas in the Division conducted assessments in 2005-2006 using national survey instruments. This certainly saved time in developing surveys, but the real advantage resulted from the ability to benchmark with other institutions. Using the results we gained a more accurate picture of how we performed compared to similar universities. Examples of these national instruments included the National College Health Assessment, the National Survey of Student Engagement, and a survey on Fraternities and Sororities.

Finally, we continued to emphasize strong connections between the assessment process and the goals of the Departments, the Student Affairs Division, and the University’s Strategic Directions. The President asked the campus to focus on three main areas for the year: Working Together, being an Engaged Campus, and developing a Learning-Centered focus. Directors were asked to explicitly connect each of the activities or services they assessed to all three goal levels in their Assessment Reports.

Plan of Action. The Assessment Committee developed a new series of forms to simplify the Assessment Process. We continued the schedule of twice yearly meetings with Directors and selected Staff. The focus this year was on increasing the scope of assessment to include a greater number of and more variety to the assessment projects.

Summary of Assessment Efforts: 2005-2006

The tasks completed were:

- Assessment Process was linked to the University's Strategic Directions and to the Divisional Annual Planning Process.
- Implemented new forms to standardize Assessment Reporting, Work plan, and the Annual Report.
- Continued to increase the number of activities each Department assessed.
- Experienced more growth in the utilization of many assessment techniques.
- These techniques include increased use of national and locally developed survey instruments, focus group sessions, and increased use of web-delivered surveys.
- Mike Cairns and Kristen Salomonson presented at the Assessment Institute in Indianapolis, IN on Ferris State's Division of Student Affairs and its efforts to establish a program of assessment.

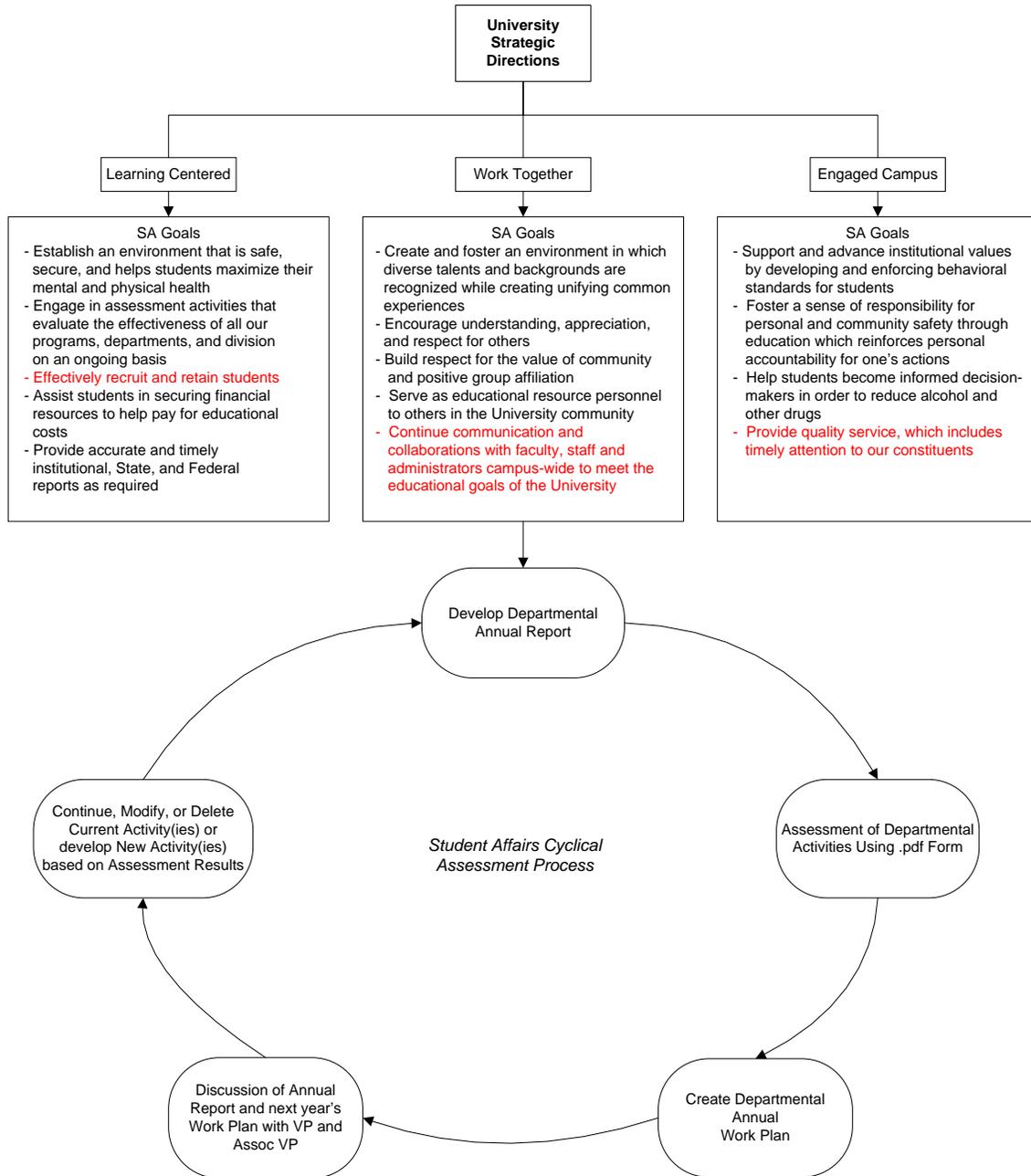
The major findings were as follows:

- Directors were pleased with the changes to the reporting process and embraced the new .pdf format. There was an increase in the number of activities and services each Director assessed.
- The routine nature of assessment meetings and activities was apparent. Positive developments included a thoughtful use of assessment results in making budget requests by Directors, and an increase in sharing results and best practices with colleagues.

The recommendations for 2006-2007 included:

- Call on Directors to assess student learning outcomes of their activities and services for the next cycle. The Higher Learning Commission accreditation standards clearly state that they are interested in evidence that activities in the Student Affairs Division have an impact on student learning.
- Expand communication of assessment results on the web and in the form of a newsletter to distribute to the campus chronicling our activities in the Student Affairs Division.

Student Affairs Assessment Overview



Assessment Year Five: (2006-2007)

A major shift in orientation occurred in our fifth year of the assessment cycle. During the previous four years each Department in the Division demonstrated great advancement with respect to their assessment efforts. While every Department was completing assessment projects on most of their critical activities, we recognized that there was an important component missing to our efforts. We had paid little attention to assessing student learning in the Student Affairs Division. There are three salient reasons why we deemed it critical to focus on student learning assessment this year. First, the Higher Learning Commission's accreditation criteria explicitly states that all areas of the University – including Student Affairs – must demonstrate how their efforts contribute to student learning. With our accreditation visit scheduled for 2010 we needed to begin gathering these data in earnest. Second, we wanted to focus on student learning outcomes in order to more explicitly align our efforts with that of Academic Affairs at Ferris. We wanted to more fully collaborate with the academic side to share our efforts and contributions to student learning, and to discover what they accomplished. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we believed that our Division was doing a great deal to contribute to student learning. We wanted to chronicle that information and see how we could improve our efforts in this area.

A major initiative in the student learning assessment vein is the development of a Division-wide Student Employee Learning Outcomes Survey. We wanted a mechanism to jump-start our efforts and thought there was fertile ground with respect to the over 300 student employees in our Division. While at a conference in June of last year, we learned of an institution that began their efforts to assess student learning outcomes by first looking at what their employees learned over the course of their job tenure. We adapted that strategy and developed a questionnaire for our student employees. Several areas were involved in designing the survey including Enrollment Services, Student Leadership and Activities, and Student Recreation. As a result, we will have comparative data on what our student employees are learning across Division. Our survey format allows us to gather information on many similar learning outcomes as well as gives each area a chance to add their own questions that are specific to their core functions.

Another task accomplished this year was the reformation of the Student Affairs Assessment Committee. With our focus on student learning outcomes, we changed the constellation of its membership to include additional members from the academic side. Our membership now includes:

- **Mike Cairns**, Associate Vice President, Student Affairs/Chair, Student Affairs Assessment Committee
- **Kristen Salomonson**, Assistant Dean, Enrollment Services/Director, Institutional Research and Testing
- **Doug Haneline**, Academic Program Review Chair, Faculty in Language and Literature

- **Wendy Dodd**, Assistant Director, Student Recreation Center
- **Cindy Horn** Director Student Leadership and Activities
- **Matt Klein**, Dean, College of Arts and Sciences
- **Joan Totten**, Academic Department Head, Developmental Programs and Curriculum, University College
- **Mike Slocum**, Hall Director

In addition to local assessments we also continue to employ national survey instruments for benchmarking purposes. Using the results we gained a more accurate picture of how we performed compared to similar universities. This year we are conducting National College Health Assessment.

Finally, we continued to emphasize strong connections between the assessment process and the goals of the Departments, the Student Affairs Division, and the University. Mike Cairns and Kristen Salomonson were invited to join the University Assessment Committee. The President announced a comprehensive Strategic Planning initiative.

Plan of Action. The Assessment Committee stressed examination of student learning outcomes as the focus for the year. We continued the schedule of twice yearly meetings with Directors and selected Staff. Each Director was asked to develop an assessment history for their departments.

Summary of Assessment Efforts: 2006-2007 (Incomplete)

The tasks completed were:

- Assessment Process was strongly linked to student learning outcomes.
- Continued to increase the number of activities each Department assessed.
- Directors completed a history of assessment for their area.
- Experienced more growth in the utilization of many assessment techniques, particularly in the area of writing student learning outcomes.
- Mike Cairns and Kristen Salomonson presented at the International Assessment Conference in Phoenix, AZ on Ferris State's Division of Student Affairs and its efforts to establish a program of assessment.

The major findings were as follows:

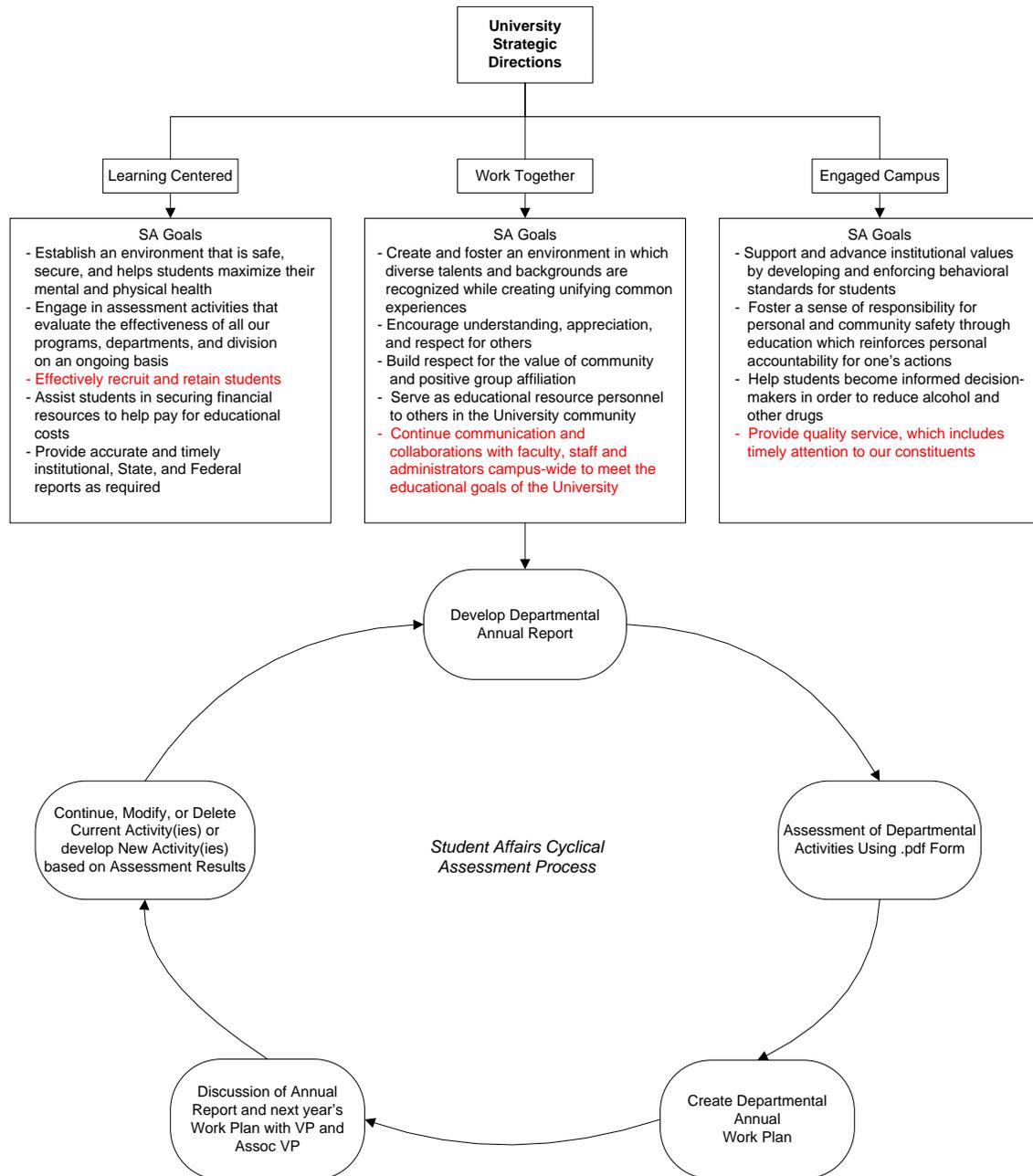
- Directors were pleased to be able to examine their activities and core processed to uncover what students are actually learning from their efforts.
- Our progress in the Student Affairs Division is solid. Several areas outside our Division noted that we had a comprehensive system of assessment in place.
- We feel well-prepared at this point in terms of how we are doing vis-à-vis the Higher Learning Commission criteria.

Recommendations for 2006-2007 Included:

- Call on Directors to continue to assess student learning outcomes of their activities.
- Expand communication of assessment results on the web by helping to create a University Assessment web presence.

Ongoing Assessment Efforts

Student Affairs Assessment Overview



Lessons Learned

Ferris State University Chronology of Assessment

- **1993** Fred Schwartz working on Assessment
- **March 14-18, 1998**
 - John Schuh and Lee Upcraft presented at an Assessment Institute Work Shop on assessment in Student Affairs.
- **January 1999**
 - Committee: Fred Schwartz
Carol Maki
Mike Cairns
Paul Sullivan
- **August 6, 1993**
 - Fred Schwartz sent out a survey
 - Purpose of survey was to start a process on improving assessment in management and the quality of things that we do.
- **July 1998**
 - Examined check list of things that Student Affairs needs to have in an approach to assessment.
- **July 1999**
 - Student Affairs Division Assessment for staff – the assessment asked what they thought about policies, management styles, working together, etc.
- **Prior to 2002** no unified centralized effort at organizing Student Affairs assessment.
- **January 2002**
 - Committee: Mike Cairns
Kristen Salomonson
Craig Westman
Michelle Burke
Raymond Gant
Matt Klein
Joan Totten
Penny Papo (Bowman)
 - First couple of months discussed what assessment meant and determined the role/mission of assessment.

- **April 2002** - Kristen Salomonson and Mike Cairns met with directors in Student Affairs to find out what they were doing to assess their events. Reviewed current assessment data and defined division goals.

- **2003-2004**
 - Used Cindy Greenwood's (Student Leadership and Activities) assessments to determine the best way to assess events.
 - Departments started a work plan. Used important events to assess. Only assessed a few events at first.
 - Directors meet with Kristen and Mike to explain their assessment results and turn in their annual report.

- **June 2004**
 - Penny Bouman attended an Assessment Conference and brought back a 10 step matrix software package.

- **September/October/November 2004-2005**
 - Used 10 step matrix software package to compile assessment information.
 - Discussed Goal 9, Goal 11 and Goal 12.
 - Student Affairs Goals - Collaboration/Quality Service/Recruit and Retain Students.
 - Determined if the assessments were tied to the goals. If they were what were the results?
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- **October 31, 2004** - Kristen Salomonson and Mike Cairns attended Assessment Institute in Indianapolis, Indiana.

- **2005**
 - Kristen Salomonson and Mike Cairns attended Assessment Institute in Indianapolis, Indiana and presented on assessment.

- **Fall 2005**
 - Kirsten Salomonson attended MIAIR and attended a presentation on Higher Learning Committees and Accreditation where they discussed new data requests.

- **2005-2006**
 - Work Plan
 - Assessment Report

- **June 2006**
 - Kristen Salomonson and Mike Cairns attended NASPA International Conference and presented in Phoenix, Arizona.

- **October 2006**
 - Mike Carins attending Assessment Institute in Indianapolis, Indiana.