ASSESSMENT

Assessment Narrative

In the report of the SACS Visiting Committee, the members indicate that they found that the eight outcome goals of the original Transitional Programs Initiative "can be considered to be student learning outcome goals." They also approved of using pre- and post-tests and student surveys as direct measures. These continue to be part of the enhanced assessment plan with additions such as a second instrument for external measurement.

Enhanced Transition Programs

External Measurements

As part of the assessment of the Transition Programs, two standardized instruments will be used:

- Your First College Year (YFCY)
- National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE).

Beginning in spring 2007, the YFCY, a freshman survey, will be administered annually. In spring 2008, NSSE will be administered, documenting changes from the previous use of this instrument. At that time, the data identified one area of concern to be in the "Time Usage" category. The Transition Programs initiative responds, in part, to this issue. Thus, the NSSE will be a valuable tool in determining the extent to which students have increased their understanding and practice of such elements as time management, including preparing for their academic responsibilities. Both the NSSE and YFCY enable benchmarking of students within a nation-wide context. The goal is to meet or exceed the national average.

Internal Measurements

In addition to the two standardized instruments mentioned above, internal assessment strategies are planned. These include tracking student compliance with university policies and procedures, evaluating student academic records, creating and administering surveys, and conducting focus groups. In some instances, data reported annually in the unit plans will offer the opportunity for comparison/contrast of such aspects as usage of the Academic Support Center or the number of students fulfilling obligations to check in with their advisors on a regular basis. For a matrix of all QEP learning objectives and their assessment methods, see Table VI.

Required reports on the state-mandated Texas Success Initiative (TSI) provide baseline data for Learning Objective 3. Table VIII displays these data. For the coming years, the projection is that completion of the TSI obligation within one year will remain consistently above 30%. The current rate is 25.22% (204 students out of 809). An additional projection is that retention of first-time-in-college (FTIC), full-time, degree-seeking freshmen after one year will remain consistently above 70%. The baseline data for the previous 4 years indicate that the retention rate for the FTIC cohort described has ranged from 60.04% to 63.18%.

A schedule has been developed for assessing the acculturation of students as the new and expanded initiatives assist them in transitioning successfully into the university. This information is incorporated into the timeline found in Table III. For a matrix of all QEP learning objectives and their assessment methods, see Table VI. Below is an overview, organized by initiatives, of the major assessment methods supplementing the YFCY and NSSE.

Beginning with the 2006 pilot, assessment of the Freshman Summer Success Program is to be conducted annually. The assistant dean of University College has established a database of the initial student cohort, including information such as demographics, placement scores, (TSI) status, persistence, withdrawals, academic

standing (GPA), and number of courses completed. He will add students in each new cohort, tracking them throughout their UHD careers.

Additional assessment occurs within the first year of the cohort through self-reporting strategies. Pre- and post-tests on university policies and procedures are scheduled for the first and second semesters, linked to the follow-up activities. (See Appendix 2f for a sample of the pre- and post-tests.) Also planned for these two semesters are student focus groups. They will be conducted using the Student Engagement and Success (ISES) protocols.

The leaders of Welcome Week plan to distribute an online student survey immediately following Welcome Week in the fall and the spring of each year, beginning in 2006. In addition to evaluating the events held, the questions are geared to provide insights concerning activities to be incorporated in the future. One such question appeared originally on the QEP faculty survey. We will now be able to rank the importance of various options according to student as well as faculty audiences. Records will be kept on the number of students attending the study skills/time management workshops and other academic events. Also to be recorded is the number of professors linking one of their class assignments to a Welcome Week activity. The Welcome Week Council will monitor these data.

Re-orientation, projected to begin in 2008, will occur annually in the spring semester. It introduces an opportunity for assessment of the initial orientation experience, determining where conveyed information was or was not synthesized and retained. For instance, if students had difficulty planning their schedules for the second semester, revisions would be in order for the earlier orientation. A pre-test will be given at the beginning of the spring event, followed by a post-test at the conclusion of the program. A database of students attending the re-orientation will be established, enabling us to track their academic progress and to contact them for an online survey.

We anticipate having the interactive web site launched by 2010. The pre-orientation section will require students to complete information modules, including a quiz, before attending the orientation. After completing the quizzes successfully, the student can register then for the orientation or receive an access code for an online orientation option, if eligible. This approach seeks to ensure that a basic knowledge of processes has been acquired. Simulations using gaming strategies will be developed, allowing for increased interactivity and for assessment of the students' "college knowledge." Self-reporting strategies include focus groups and an online student survey.

Responsibility for assessment of transitional programs is shared mainly by the dean and assistant dean of University College. The assistant dean collects, mines, and analyzes data relevant to these initiatives. Moreover, he ensures appropriate administration of the YFCY and NSSE occurs. The dean collaborates with the assistant director of Information and Orientation on the pre- and post-tests as well as self-reporting strategies such as surveys and focus groups. Ultimately, the dean writes the annual assessment report for the transition programs, submitting it to the QEP Director and QEP Council.

Active Learning Interventions

A comprehensive variety of direct and indirect measures and instruments will be used to assess the learning outcomes most correlated with the Active Learning Interventions Initiative (outcomes 5 through 11, according to Table II: QEP Learning Outcomes). The first three of these outcomes (5 through 7) pertain to the level of student engagement in the learning process. The primary assessment of these three outcomes will therefore be the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), to be administered in Spring 2008. Baseline data from the previous administration of NSSE at UHD are contained in Appendix 1b. Our target is to raise UHD student responses to national norms for peer institutions on those aspects of the survey pertaining to active learning.

NSSE, however, is administered to a sample of the general student body, which may obscure some of the progress in student engagement that the QEP is intended to foster. While certain components of the Active Learning Interventions Initiative are designed to have campus-wide impact, most resources are focused on specific courses, in particular the three bottleneck courses identified in the plan, or those courses that may be the subject of Curriculum Development Grants. Moreover, NSSE will be administered only once, relatively early, during the life of the QEP. Hence, we will also create a questionnaire to be administered as a supplement to the standard student course evaluation process that contains questions about student engagement, mirroring selected NSSE questions. A sample questionnaire is contained in Appendix 2b. These questionnaires will be administered to all bottleneck course sections on a preliminary basis in Fall 2006, in order to refine the questionnaire and gather baseline data. The revised questionnaires will then be administered on a routine basis beginning in Spring 2007 to all bottleneck course sections. They will also be administered to a representative sample of sections of courses which are the subject of Curriculum Development Grants. Thus, data regarding outcomes 5 through 7 can be collected and reviewed on an ongoing basis throughout the life of the plan and may contribute to dynamic revisions. Course evaluation questionnaires will be scored and tabulated using the optical mark recognition system purchased in Summer 2006 (see Table VII: Yearly Budget). Summary results will be reported for each Spring term during the plan.

Learning outcomes 8 through 10 pertain to the basic learning objectives of the selected bottleneck courses and offer a somewhat more difficult assessment challenge. This challenge is complicated by the natural differences in grading instruments and procedures traditionally used by the three disciplines represented by the bottleneck courses. On the other hand, each of these courses has a single, clearly identifiable “major” assessment instrument that can be used to directly measure learning outcomes. For Eng 1302-Freshman Composition II, this major assessment is a college-level research paper that constitutes a large fraction of the overall course grade. For Math 1301-College Algebra, the major assessment is a comprehensive, departmental, multiple-choice final exam that constitutes 1/3 of the course grade. Finally, for Hist 1305-U.S. History I, the major assessment is a final exam that may be only partially comprehensive or partially objective, and that varies by instructor.

For the three bottleneck courses, we have created separate learning outcomes survey forms that will be used to collect learning outcomes data (see Sample Section Surveys of Learning Outcomes for Bottleneck Courses, Appendix 2a). Instructors will be asked to complete and submit a form for each bottleneck section taught. The three surveys are similar in format and share various summary data requests, such as:

1. Number of students on online grade sheet
2. Number of students with at least one recorded grade (homework, quiz, test, etc.)
3. Number of students taking/submitting major assessment
4. Number of students who scored ‘50’ or less (or equivalent) on the major assessment
5. Number of students who passed the major assessment with ‘70’ or better (or equivalent)
6. Number of students who took/submitted the major assessment and received ‘F’ for the course
7. Average grade on the major assessment for the section (100 point scale)
8. Course grade distribution for the section

The final item on each survey will be used to collect outcomes data regarding the basic learning objectives selected for the course. For each of the selected objectives, instructors will be asked to report the number of officially enrolled students in the section who satisfactorily master the objective (which can in turn be used to compute a percentage). However, the courses will differ in the way this number is computed. To facilitate the counting process in Eng 1302, the English Composition Committee has agreed to adopt a common three-point

grading rubric assigning a score on the research paper to each student for each learning objective (1=Not satisfactory, 2=Satisfactory, 3=Excellent). Then it will be a straightforward matter for the instructor to count the number of students mastering each objective.

For Math 1301, each question on the comprehensive final exam will be mapped to one of the selected learning objectives. Initially, due to the limitations of the optical mark recognition equipment currently used to score Math 1301 exams, the number of students in a section mastering a particular objective will be estimated as follows. The total points awarded to all students for all questions corresponding to the given objective will be divided by the total points available for the corresponding questions (assuming everyone initially enrolled in the section has taken the final exam). To achieve an estimate of the number of students in the section mastering the objective, this ratio, which is necessarily between 0 and 1, will then be multiplied by the number of officially enrolled students in the section. In future years, as we gain experience using the more robust optical mark recognition system purchased in Summer 2006, we will be able to compute the number of students mastering a particular Math 1301 objective more accurately by examining each student's individual performance on the subset of questions mapped to that objective. We may then consider the student to have mastered the objective provided he or she meets a certain threshold score on those questions.

With respect to Hist 1305, testing is not departmentally designated, and content and grading methods vary. For this and other reasons, we have decided to delay by one year fully implementing the Active Learning Interventions Initiative and the Expanded SI Program in Hist 1305. Therefore, the assessment of learning outcomes in Hist 1305 will occur as a two-step process, both of which will function to establish baseline data against which to measure future changes in the program. (The current set of outcomes designated in Hist 1305 privileges the acquisition of factual knowledge over advances in critical thinking skills, such as sensitivity to context, the ability to make reasoned comparisons between events occurring in different times and places, and the ability to make careful generalizations based on factual evidence. The expected revised outcomes will better align with general education outcomes that these courses support in the core curriculum as well as with recent changes in the History degree curriculum that place greater emphasis on critical thinking skills.) In the first step, the designated lead teacher analyzed the final exams administered by all full-time faculty members, mapping questions asked in each exam to the current learning objectives in Spring 2006, with 70% or above of points possible on essay and short-answer questions or correct responses on multiple-choice questions constituting successful mastery of a learning objective. In the next step of the process, data will be reanalyzed following a remapping of questions to align with the updated set of learning objectives. Thereafter, section surveys of learning outcomes will be completed by course instructors as they are in Eng 1302 and Math 1301 sections.

In order to verify the feasibility of such an approach to gathering information regarding learning outcomes and collect some baseline data, in Spring 2006 we implemented draft versions of the learning outcomes survey forms for Eng 1302 and Math 1301. The data collected from this experiment are summarized in Table XII: Learning Outcomes Baseline Data for Initial Bottleneck Courses, Spring 2006. The experiment was a success, considering the survey was voluntary and we received a large number of responses. Unfortunately, since the common grading rubric for Eng 1302 was not yet determined, we were forced in Table XII to estimate the number of students mastering each learning objective as the number of students who scored a cumulative grade of 70 or better on the research paper. The number of students mastering each learning objective for Math 1301 was estimated according the description given earlier. Based on this data, we have set uniform targets, to be achieved over the life of the plan, of 60% of officially enrolled students mastering each Eng 1302 learning objective, and 50% of officially enrolled students mastering each Math 1301 learning objective. Summary results for bottleneck course learning outcomes will be reported for each Spring term during the plan.

Because of the wealth of data related to course grades and other demographic variables contained in the student records system, we will use such data as an indirect measure of learning outcomes for bottleneck courses (see Course Grade Outcomes Baseline Data in Appendices 1c and 1d). Two tables summarizing such data for each bottleneck course will be generated for each Fall semester. The first such table will contain a snapshot analysis of the course grade outcomes for officially enrolled students for the given semester, with the top line numbers being the C or better passing ratios. The table will also contain analyses of C or better passing ratios for various important subsets of students: those repeating the course versus those taking the course for the first time, as well as those who placed into the course or transferred prerequisites from another school, versus those who completed prerequisites at UHD. Table X shows baseline versions of the course grades outcomes data based on the Fall 2004 and Fall 2005 semesters (see Appendix 1c). Based on this data, we have set the following target, to be achieved over the life of the plan, of a C or better passing ratio consistently above 60% for Eng 1302. The historical average for this ratio is below 55%. The corresponding target for Math 1301 is a C or better passing ratio consistently above 45%. The historical average for this ratio is below 40%.

The second such table will contain analyses of the course grade outcomes for the cohorts of officially enrolled students enrolled in each bottleneck course during a particular Fall semester, tracked through selected subsequent courses in the same subject over a three year period. These data are therefore cumulative (i.e. a student may attempt the same course more than once during the time period). Again, the top line numbers are the C or better passing ratios for each bottleneck course and subsequent courses. The purpose of this table is to ensure that changes implemented in a bottleneck course as part of the QEP do not adversely affect student performance in subsequent courses. Table XI in Appendix 1d shows baseline versions of the course grades outcomes data for courses subsequent to Eng 1302 and Math 1301, with the Fall 2002 cohorts tracked through Fall 2005. Course grade outcomes data tables will be reported for each Fall term during the plan.

Expanded SI Program

Because the Expanded SI Program correlates to QEP learning outcomes 5 through 10, like the Active Learning Interventions Initiative, we will use most of the same measures and instruments to assess SI as described in the previous section. However, in order to get a more focused outlook on the efficacy of the SI program, and allow for ongoing constituent input into the program, we will also conduct surveys of student and faculty attitudes, perceptions, and opinions of SI in bottleneck course sections that offer an SI component. The student survey will be administered in each such section, while the faculty survey will be administered for selected sections (about 12 faculty members will be surveyed each year). A sample student SI assessment questionnaire is shown in Appendix 2c. A sample faculty SI feedback questionnaire is shown in Appendix 2d. Participating faculty will be paid a small stipend to provide detailed and thoughtful feedback on their SI experience. We hope to use such feedback to help adapt and modify the UHD SI model in ways that make SI more affordable and effective at UHD. Student evaluation questionnaires will be scored and tabulated using the optical mark recognition system purchased in Summer 2006.

The remaining QEP learning outcome related to SI is number 11, which concerns the effects of SI on the academic, teaching, and communication skills of SI leaders. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the positive impact of the SI experience on SI leaders is substantial and should not be overlooked. We will therefore administer an exit survey to SI leaders upon completion of their involvement with the program, examining their own perceptions of the effect of SI on the skills described above. The survey will also collect more objective data as well, such as the SI leader's GPA and career or graduate school plans. A sample SI leader assessment questionnaire is shown in Appendix 2e.