

CHAPTER 10—OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT AND INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

This chapter outlines the progress made in assessment of student learning and other outcomes and in institutional effectiveness at New School University since the mid-1990s, followed by a discussion of the steps taken to ensure continued progress. The status of assessment in the mid-1990s and initiatives undertaken in the late 1990s to enhance the availability and quality of institutional and assessment data will be presented first. This will be followed by a discussion of the development of a new outcomes assessment plan and a brief description of the student outcomes component. An evaluation of current outcomes assessment activities in view of this plan will ensue. The chapter will close with recommendations for future action.

Assessment at New School in the mid-1990s

In the mid-1990s, a number of outcomes assessment activities unfolded. In 1995-96, prompted in part by the need to comply with accreditation standards, each of the colleges developed a plan to assess student outcomes, faculty effectiveness and accomplishments, and program quality. In addition, as indicated in the interim report, the university was working toward developing measures for assessing the effectiveness of academic student services, diversity, administrative efficiency and governance.

In the following years, incremental progress was made at the schools and for the university. Some data were collected and used systematically. For instance, data on selectivity and yield rates were collected by each school and used to project future enrollment patterns, to track selectivity trends of each program and to plan recruitment. Also, data on retention and graduation rates of full-time freshmen were collected and reported in IPEDS and New York State surveys yearly. Schools monitored student academic success through such means as exams and end-of-program evaluations (e.g., thesis, dissertation, completion of capstone experience); evaluation of studio-based projects (Parsons), of music skills (Mannes, Jazz), and final-year repertory productions (Actors Studio). Further, schools evaluated the effectiveness and contributions of faculty members through the regular administration of student evaluations at the end of each course and through peer and/or dean evaluations. Finally, occasional program reviews by panels of external and internal evaluators were conducted.

Activities undertaken in the mid-1990s improved the ability to evaluate institutional effectiveness. However, extensive progress was impeded by a number of factors. Comparable data were not easy to obtain since schools maintained their own databases, using varying definitions. Standardization of data was also made difficult by the lack of interaction among databases (student, financial aid, human resources and finance) of the university administrative computing system. Moreover, the university lacked staff to support a systematic program of collection and dissemination of the data needed for assessment.

Late 1990s Data-Enhancement Initiatives

The situation changed in the late 1990s. New leadership initiated major changes that led to substantial improvements in institutional and assessment data, which, in turn, significantly enhanced the ability to assess student outcomes and institutional effectiveness. Among the major initiatives the university undertook to improve institutional data were the conversion to a new administrative data system (BANNER) and the creation of the Office of Institutional Research.

Administrative Data System (BANNER). The implementation of a new administrative data system, which is still ongoing, has improved the quality of institutional data. Standardization of definitions, integration of system components (e.g. student, financial aid), and information residing in one university-wide database allow quick retrieval of data, easy cross-college comparisons, and more complex analyses using data from different components. Full benefits of the system will be realized when ongoing work—e.g., implementation of Human Resources module, training in report-writing—is completed.

Office of Institutional Research. Fall 2000, the first Office of Institutional Research was established. This office has expanded the availability of institutional and policy-oriented institutional data, working closely with other university offices. It has also played an important role in the university effort to improve outcomes assessment and institutional effectiveness measurements.

Improvements in Institutional Data. The university's efforts in the past few years have resulted in greater availability of institutional data. Progress includes the production of the first *University Fact Book* in 2000-01, presenting important data not previously available from any single source. It is published annually, each new edition containing an expanded set of data. Another important development is the creation of Common Data Sets for each school with an undergraduate program and for the university overall. These databases contain information on admissions, enrollments, student services and activities, faculty resources, and other areas, and provide consistent data across divisions that are readily available from one source. Further, collaboration among university and college offices led to the improvement of current data on faculty and staff. The implementation of the human resources module of BANNER, in spring 2003, will greatly enhance data availability.

Progress has occurred in the availability of policy-related information, and discussions of policy issues by the university leadership are increasingly informed by data analyses. As the implementation of BANNER progresses, and as the capacity of the Office of Institutional Research increases, more policy-specific data and analyses will be produced and used to inform decisions. While the institutional data are much improved, more work needs to be done. Processes are in place to strengthen data on student retention and graduation, faculty and staff characteristics, utilization of the facilities and other areas.

Outcomes Assessment and Institutional Effectiveness Data

In the past three years, the university undertook initiatives that improved its ability to assess student achievement and evaluate the effectiveness of educational and administrative programs and services. The self-study in preparation for the Middle States review provided the framework. The process included review and updating of missions and goals of the university and individual schools, and the evaluation of whether goals regarding student learning and

other expected outcomes are realized. The evaluation pointed to the need for a new outcomes assessment plan to effectively assess the extent to which the updated school and university goals are accomplished.

New Outcomes Assessment Plan

A new outcomes assessment plan was developed in 2001-02. It is based on an evaluation of the university's needs in view of the updated missions and goals and a review of MSCHE standards. The Steering Committee of the self-study served as the review group. Discussions were held with senior university and school officials, as well as with groups of faculty and staff. In addition, school and university documents developed over the last decade were evaluated. Since fall 2002, the university-wide Institutional Research Committee oversees the work on the finalization and implementation.

The plan is comprehensive, including components for evaluating student outcomes as well as effectiveness in other areas that will meet the needs of the university and its academic divisions in the years to come. (See Appendix H--Outcomes Assessment Plan.) It takes into account the diverse and decentralized character of the institution and provides for assessment of student achievements at both the school and university levels. It serves as the guide for evaluating the adequacy of current outcomes assessment data and for planning appropriately for the future. The primary focus will be student outcomes, particularly student learning and achievement. Eventually, assessment of other dimensions, already in existence to an extent, will receive greater attention. These include university administrative support services, curriculum and program effectiveness, and faculty effectiveness and accomplishments.

Student Outcomes Component of Assessment Plan

Guided by Model of Student Success. The plan for measuring student outcomes at New School University is guided by a model of outcomes assessment that includes factors research has shown to be influential in student success. Based on an extensive review of the literature as well as an examination of practices at leading institutions, a variant of the model developed at SUNY--Albany, a leader in outcomes research, was chosen for guiding student outcomes assessment at the university. (See Albany Outcomes Assessment Model in assessment exhibit.) In this model, which is based on the widely-used Tinto model of student retention, student educational and alumnae/i achievements are influenced by the personal traits and pre-college characteristics of students (gender, ethnicity, and academic ability) and by their college experiences. These include educational experiences (classroom experiences, contact with faculty members); social integration (relations with peers, co-curricular experiences), and institutional integration (financial aid, affinity of values). Outcomes assessment at the New School will be organized to shed light on the effectiveness of some of these factors. It will proceed incrementally, given the limited resources available. Full implementation of an assessment plan based on the model will be a long-term process. (Indeed, the original work at

Albany took over a decade to standardize, according to Dr. Fred Volkwein, who headed the process.)

Student Outcomes to be Measured. Selection of appropriate outcomes to measure presented a major challenge. Since the missions and goals of the eight schools and programs of the university vary widely, developing an assessment plan that allows university comparisons while reflecting the unique missions of the schools has been difficult. The solution reached was to adopt a partly decentralized plan. The plan gives schools the flexibility to set outcomes appropriate for their students but also contains a set of university outcomes important for all students, such as acquisition of knowledge and skills, which all schools must address in ways consistent with their mission. Specification of learning outcomes is an ongoing process and runs parallel to the process of updating university and school missions and goals as part of the self-study. Final missions and goals will be approved by the Board of Trustees in February 2003. Assessment of outcomes is an effort that will take institutional commitment sustained over many years. It will work only if the academic divisions and their faculties play an active role in defining what constitutes success for their students and if they view assessment as a tool for determining what works and whether changes are required.

The committee agreed that the following student outcomes are important for all students of the university and will be addressed by all schools:

- Learning and development. For undergraduate programs: in-depth learning in the field of study or area of concentration; general education knowledge and skills, including writing skills and information literacy; and personal and social development, including values and attitudes. For graduate programs: advanced knowledge in the field of study and advanced skills and methods of inquiry specific to the discipline; selected general education skills such as writing skills and information literacy; and values and attitudes.
- Student success/achievement. Timely progression through program, retention, and graduation.
- Alumnae/i success/achievements. Achievements after graduation (e.g., employment status, life-long education plans, additional education and degrees earned, career attainment). (See Outcomes Assessment Plan in Appendix H for detailed list of outcomes.)

Although all schools were asked to address these outcomes, they were encouraged to modify them and/or add others according to their mission. For instance, expected progress toward a degree is different for Lang or Parsons students attending full-time, for adults in the B.A. program of The New School who study on a part-time basis, and for graduate programs with varying enrollment patterns.

Evaluation of Adequacy of Existing Student Outcomes Assessment Data

An evaluation of current student outcomes assessment activities in view of the new plan was undertaken. It revealed that a considerable amount of outcomes data on student learning and achievement are currently gathered by the schools and by the university from several constituencies: students, alumni, faculty, and administrators. Both direct (grades, retention rates) and indirect (student self-reported enhancement of knowledge and social skills as a result of university experiences) measures of success are used. (See Appendix H.) The evaluation also

pointed to areas where improvements are needed. Processes are already underway to enhance gathering and utilization of assessment data and plans are in place to improve data collection in other areas in the future. Results of the examination are discussed in more detail below.

Student Learning

Learning in the Field of Study. Assessment of student learning in the field of study is conducted primarily by the departments or, in some cases, by the schools. In addition, the university collects survey data on student and alumni/ae evaluation of their degree programs. Assessment occurs at different stages of the students' career.

School-based Assessment. Assessment of student skills and preparation upon entry is extensive and varies by college. For instance, Mannes and Jazz focus on musical skills, assessed through auditions; Parsons examines a portfolio of original artwork, a home exam (assigned original artwork) and SAT or TOEFL scores; and Lang looks primarily at academic achievement in high school. The results are used for advising and programming support services. Schools monitor student academic progress. Methods vary, including successful completion of courses based on evaluation of classroom exams, assigned (Lang, Parsons, Jazz); frequent class critiques in all Parsons studio courses; and sophomore jury performance examination by a faculty panel in Jazz. The Graduate Faculty relies on traditional methods such as passing the Master's exams, Ph.D. qualifying exams, Ph.D. oral exams, and completed doctoral internships as indicators of student progress and Milano examines grades in advanced courses and seminars and completion of the Policy Lab. End-of-program evaluations are carried out to ensure that students have acquired in-depth knowledge in their field. Again, means of evaluation vary widely, from school to school and from department to department. For instance, acceptance of Master's theses and successful defense of Ph.D. theses are the Graduate Faculty's means of assessing student learning. Parsons students' mastery of knowledge in their field of study is ensured by successful completion of the capstone senior studio experience (thesis, exhibition, etc.) Similarly, Lang students must complete a senior seminar. Mannes and Jazz students are evaluated at senior recitals and Actors Studio students' mastery of their craft is evaluated at the Senior Repertory presentation. |

University-level Assessment. In addition to the direct measurements of student learning, the institution obtains indirect evidence through the use of surveys, local as well as national. Two alumnae/i surveys conducted fall 1999 and fall 2000 of alumni/ae who graduated in 1997 and 1998, respectively, provided valuable information on the former students' evaluation of their degree programs, which led to some improvements. For example, alumnae/i's low rating of academic advising contributed to Lang College's strengthening in that area.

Assessment of General Education and Personal Development.

School-based Assessments. While schools with undergraduate programs emphasize different general education skills, depending on their mission, all have goals regarding effective writing and information literacy. As Appendix H suggests, assessment methods vary, including successful completion of general education courses, evaluation of writing portfolios by a committee, and completion of internships.

University-wide Assessment. A number of university surveys are administered to gather information on acquisition of knowledge and skills in general education and personal development. Data are gathered from traditional undergraduate students upon entry through the ACE/HERI CIRP Freshman Survey. Conducted in fall 2000 and fall 2002, the survey will be administered annually henceforth. It provides information on student characteristics such as values and attitudes, goals and aspirations, and educational and career plans. Findings are used by the Office of Student Services to program appropriate co-curricular activities. Analyses by school are shared with the deans to supplement their understanding of their own students for planning purposes. Data are also used in policy discussions. For instance, CIRP findings were used by the dean of Lang College to strengthen her successful request for additional full-time faculty lines.

End of First Year. At the end of the freshman year, traditional undergraduate students are surveyed to measure the impact of the freshman year and their satisfaction with their education. The instrument used is the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), administered by the University of Indiana. It provides information on students' engagement in effective educational practices, such as level of challenge, active learning, and student-faculty interaction. The survey will be administered biennially in the future.

All Enrolled Students. (Undergraduate and Graduate students) Beginning in 2002-2003, an annual locally developed Student Satisfaction survey is administered to all enrolled students to measure their satisfaction with university services, their educational program, and other experiences. Lang College students were surveyed in fall 2002; students in other schools will be surveyed in spring 2003. Results will be used to make improvements in the services provided.

University Writing Initiative. One of the Provost's priorities is writing quality. In 2001 the University Writing Center was created to provide tutoring to students and coordinate faculty development for improved writing.

Although many useful data on student learning and growth exist, their use in making policy decisions has been limited. New School University is still in the early stages of comprehensively obtaining information from students and using it effectively to guide policy decisions. The president has made data collection and analysis one of his priorities for the institution, which has led to increased efforts in this area in the past two years. An example of his use of research findings to make policy decisions is his current discussions with the dean of Parsons possible curriculum changes in a program that would enhance students' career preparation, based on findings of an alumni/ae survey.

Partly as a response to the president's emphasis on empirical data, outcomes research has increased at the school and university level. In collaboration with the Office of Institutional Research, school officials are developing surveys to gather information on students and alumni/ae that will be useful in adjusting current programs and services. Examples include a surveys developed by the Parsons Career Center, Lang college's internship director, and university Academic Computing Services. The addition of a staff member fall 2002 will enhance the availability and use of policy-specific data analyses in the future. The office will do custom-made analyses of data for targeted groups and point out how to use the data to make policy decisions. For example, CIRP data on why students go to college and for selecting New School University will be discussed with admissions officers and enrollment management officials with the aim to improve future marketing and recruitment efforts by using the CIRP

information on competitors. Furthermore, research findings will be disseminated to the University community by posting them on the office web site when it is constructed.

Other Student Outcomes

Timely Progression to Completion. A number of assessment activities have focused on the success of the university to retain and graduate its students in the past few years. Annual analyses of retention and graduation rates of full-time, first-year students are conducted for individual school and for university-wide cohorts. Some schools also collect data on the retention of their own students (Lang, Parsons, and Mannes), which are used primarily to estimate future enrollments. Moreover, a study undertaken in 2000 on retention of the 1994-99 new student cohorts yielded some information on populations other than freshmen. While these studies provided useful retention data, more comprehensive information is needed. Full-time, first-year students account for about half of all new students; data on undergraduate transfer students and graduate students are also needed. Also, different retention data must be used for different schools. For instance, measures other than retention, such as time to degree, are more appropriate for Milano and The New School students, who enroll on a part-time basis and often stop out before completing their degrees. Further, data are needed to assess the retention and graduation rates of sub-groups of students based on ethnicity, gender, age, and other characteristics. Fall 2002 the leadership made retention one of its priorities and steps are being taken to enhance retention data. They include a review of appropriate retention goals by the schools, the updating of the methodology for tracking retention, and the implementation of an annual student satisfaction survey to gather information on areas in need of improvement. Structures are being put in place to guide future data gathering and utilization.

Collection of good retention and graduation data is the only the first step. The university needs to conduct on-going research to determine the causes of attrition and use the findings to make changes that will improve it. Some schools already started collecting and using such information (Lang focus groups). At the university level, the annual Student Satisfaction survey, will provide valuable data. Focus group discussions will be conducted to obtain further, in-depth information on areas of importance to students, which can point to appropriate policy changes.

Post-graduation Accomplishments. Fall 1999 and fall 2000, the university administered surveys to former students who had graduated two years earlier. The surveys yielded some valuable information on the alumnae/i's current occupational and educational status, on evaluation of their degree program, and on satisfaction with various experiences at New School University. Some data on the success of alumni/ae were also collected through a survey of recent graduates of one program conducted in fall 2002. Milano, Mannes and Parsons occasionally conduct their own surveys of alumnae/i for various purposes. While these efforts represent a good start, considerably more work needs to be done in order to effectively evaluate the successes of New School University graduates. The university and the schools have begun a number of initiatives to achieve this. The university alumni office is updating the address database by the use of an address search firm and by several mailings to all alumni/ae yearly. The mailings include a brief survey form that will help the university assess its effectiveness in producing successful

graduates and gauge their overall satisfaction with their experience here. Some schools, for instance Parsons and Lang, are putting in place processes for obtaining information from their former students. The schools, the University Alumni Office, and the Office of Institutional Research work collaboratively on this project, enhancing its future success.

Other Evaluation Efforts

Faculty Effectiveness and Accomplishments. Evaluation of the effectiveness of full-time faculty takes place primarily within schools and, in some cases, within departments. It varies from school to school in form and rigor, particularly evaluation of part-time faculty. Student evaluations at the end of each course are universally used and provide useful data on faculty effectiveness. The information is used by deans and department chairs to improve student performance in the future and for making re-appointment and promotion decisions. Additional faculty evaluation practices include reviews by chairpersons or deans (Lang, Parsons, Actors Studio), end-of-year appointments with the dean (Lang), by peers (Milano, Graduate Faculty) and annual review of faculty productivity (Graduate Faculty). Information on accomplishments of particular faculty members is available to schools and it is used for re-appointment and promotion decisions. The information is not always kept systematically or in a form, such as a database, that can be shared with others easily. Part-time faculty are also evaluated by the schools or departments in which they teach. Procedures vary overall, and evaluation is less rigorous than evaluation of full-time faculty.

Quality of Academic Programs. Academic quality is evaluated and improved through the institutional accreditation by the Middle States Association, and program registration by the State of New York and the District of Columbia, and internal quality assurance reviews required of the colleges by the Provost's Office. In addition, the quality of one of the schools and of a number of programs is evaluated by national accrediting associations. Parsons School of Design is accredited by the National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD); the Clinical Psychology program at the Graduate Faculty by the American Psychological Association; the Architecture program at Parsons by the National Architectural Accrediting Board, and the Urban Policy Analysis and Management at Milano by the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration. A number of the graduate programs, such as Cultural Sociology at the Graduate Faculty, are ranked among the top in the country. The results of the 2001 National Survey of Student Engagement, which measures performance in effective educational practices, show that New School students outperform their peers nationwide.

University Academic Reviews. External reviews of standards and content of entire degree programs, by internal and external evaluators have been carried out occasionally. Changes are made based on the findings of the reviews. The university intends to conduct such reviews systematically in the future. It is also working to improve the review process by developing new policies.

University Academic Policies. Finally, the administration has been aware for several years that its academic policies are no longer adequate to the changed status of university qua university, its size and complexity. The self-study has surfaced several of the most important challenges, notably faculty titles and review process. Individual policies have been modified, case by case, but a systematic review is now underway by the newly formed Academic Policy Group, which consists of the academic deans for all schools. The group, which is chaired by the deputy provost and university registrar, is charged with policy review and formulation in critical areas like: faculty titles and the review and appointment process, new program approval policy, university minimum syllabi standards, and course evaluations.

Assessment of Administrative Services

In addition to assessment of academic outcomes, the university undertakes some assessments of administrative effectiveness. The alumnae/i surveys gathered information on the importance of and satisfaction with various university services. University and school officials obtain students feedback regarding their satisfaction with administrative services through occasional surveying, interviews and, in some cases, focus groups with students. For example, the Library staff in cooperation with IR conducted a survey of faculty, students, and staff in spring 2002 to evaluate their services and to measure the satisfaction of patrons. Results of these surveys, discussed in detail in the Library chapter of the self-study, have informed discussions regarding funding for the libraries and needed holdings of library materials. Effectiveness of administrative services is one the president's priorities and in 2002, a major initiative began to make improvements in this area. Changes in the administrative structure integrated various offices under one umbrella coordinating the effort to provide increasingly better services. Part of the effort is the annual administration of the student satisfaction survey described previously as a vehicle for obtaining useful information on areas in need of improvement. The university is also undertaking an assessment of staff satisfaction, as part of an effort to increase teamwork. Using focus groups and a survey of employees, the project aims to assess satisfaction of employees with various aspects of their work and identify existing successful collaborative efforts, in order to make changes that will make New School University an employer of choice.

Recommendations

1. The assessment plan with improved funding needs to be reviewed by the deans and the faculty and integrated into ongoing academic planning.
2. Faculty participation in the process must increase. The university and schools should put in place structures that include substantial faculty input and leadership. The creation of a University Assessment Committee, including faculty and administrators from schools and representatives from appropriate university offices (provost, student services, among others) is ideal. In the interim, the Institutional Research Committee should be modified to include assessment among its goals. The committee will oversee the university's activities in this area. Coordinated by the office and consisting of school administrators and faculty, this group will set priorities for university-wide assessment activities and determine "best practices" for assessment within schools and administrative units.
3. The university should continue to promote a culture of data-informed decision making. Existing assessment results should be communicated widely to university and school administrators, faculty and students. All new initiatives undertaken should include expected goals and a process of assessing whether the goals are met.
4. University assessment processes should be coordinated by the Office of Institutional Research.
5. Expansion and improvement of institutional data is needed: areas to receive immediate attention: retention and graduation rates of subgroups of students and faculty data. The Office of Institutional Research should be the "official" keeper of university data to ensure accuracy and consistency.