Executive Summary

CUTLA Activities in Support of Faculty Training Regarding Assessment of Student Learning, ALCs and ALPs, and Development of Instructional Strategies

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The Center for University Teaching, Learning, and Assessment (CUTLA) facilitates the efforts of faculty and academic units to develop and sustain practices that promote the highest quality of teaching and learning. To achieve this mission, the Center has adopted the following goals:

- Promote the development of effective teaching strategies by providing workshops and other activities that enhance teaching expertise
- Support the exploration of new approaches to teaching and learning
- Assist in the development and use of assessment evidence to evaluate new and existing teaching strategies and curricula
- Encourage the scholarship of teaching and learning
- Communicate to internal and external audiences on the efforts of faculty at the University of West Florida to provide high quality teaching and learning

The Center advocates for the position that the proper role of assessment in a university culture is to serve as the mechanism by which faculty can identify strengths and weaknesses in academic programs. Good assessment practices enable faculty to preserve effective aspects of curriculum and instructional strategies and discover areas where curriculum reform or adoption of innovative teaching strategies might improve student learning. Assessment also provides the evidence by which these changes can be evaluated. Thus, development of skill with assessment practices provides a set of tools by which faculty can engage in development of their teaching strategies and evaluate the effectiveness of their curriculum. As such, good assessment practices are the heart of a faculty development program.

Although CUTLA does not directly generate FTE or other revenue, the work of the Center is essential for maintaining the good standing of the University with SACS accreditation as well as the good standing of departments with discipline-based accrediting bodies. The ability of FTE-generating units to continue their work would be severely compromised if their accreditation status were put in jeopardy.

The University of West Florida was given a two-year monitoring period following the SACS site visit in which it was required to establish compliance with SACS accreditation standards related to the establishment of a meaningful and ongoing process of assessment and use of assessment for continuous improvement of programs. CUTLA identified two goals as primary priorities for its activities during this period: (1) develop faculty expertise with assessment methods and (2) provide administrative support to ensure that effective assessments were completed in a timely fashion. These extensive efforts are documented in materials presented in the Overview and in the Annual Reports for CUTLA sections of the notebook of documentation. Both of these sections detail CUTLA efforts to bring UWF into compliance with SACS accreditation standards related to assessment. Following submission of the Second Monitoring Report to SACS in Fall 2007, CUTLA adopted a broader focus on faculty development while maintaining a high level of support for the continued implementation of high-quality assessment practices. Dr. Michael Johnson, the SACS liaison for the State of Florida informally notified Dr. Barbara Lyman during the SACS Annual Meeting in New Orleans (Dec 8-11) that the SACS Commission on Colleges finds that we have now successfully addressed the final two of the original six recommendations of the Visiting Committee. Formal notification of the Commission's decision will be made in a letter from SACS in January 2008.

The work of the Center is interwoven with the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), which includes significant efforts to provide faculty development related to the use of active learning strategies and the promotion of student engagement. The Director of CUTLA also serves as a Co-Director of the QEP. Many programs sponsored by CUTLA are co-sponsored by the QEP. Administrative support of QEP programs is provided through the work of CUTLA staff. The Fellows program at CUTLA is funded
through the QEP. The Mentoring Fellows developed initiatives that focus on faculty development in general (e.g., the New Faculty and Adjunct Faculty Orientations and Faculty Friday series). The Instructional Strategies and Assessment Fellow works with the Director to develop initiatives that focus on faculty development of assessment skill and new instructional strategies that promote active learning and student engagement, which are directly connected to the theme of the Quality Enhancement Plan. These initiatives include organization of mini-conferences (Best Practices in Active Learning and Student Engagement, hosted in spring 2007 and fall 2007, Best Practices for Assessment and Curricular Reform, scheduled for spring 2008), a series of brown bag and roundtable discussions, facilitation of a Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Interest Group, and coordination of workshops provided by external consultants (Barbara Walvoord and Peggy Maki).

Much effort has been devoted to transforming the CUTLA web site into a useful resource on assessment and instructional practices. As demonstrated by usage statistics, this effort produced dramatic increases in the amount of activity on the CUTLA web site. The current monthly averages for the CUTLA site are 16,952 hits/month from 2,433 unique visitors. These data are based on the period following the June 2007 launch of the newly-organized site, built with the new UWF templates. In 2004, when the original CUTLA web site was launched, the monthly average for these two indexes was 1,897 hits/month from 175 unique visitors. Review of data on document downloads indicates that the materials from workshops on student learning outcomes and assessment and TIP Sheets on assessment are frequently downloaded. In addition, the frequency of ALC and ALP document downloads each month indicates that students and faculty access these documents from the CUTLA site.

The Center plays a role in the development of policies and procedures and other administrative changes that support the development of Academic Learning Compacts and Academic Learning Plans, the appropriate description and inclusion of student learning outcomes in the Curriculum Change Request review process, and the development of TIP Sheets and workshops for development of faculty expertise with student learning outcomes and assessment. The Center identifies suitable external consultants and organizes and promotes their workshops on campus. Materials from these workshops are posted to the CUTLA web site.

The Center provides support to individual departments and colleges for their work toward discipline-based accreditation (e.g., the College of Business and the School of Allied Health Sciences) and curriculum reform (e.g., Academic Foundations/General Studies, a faculty learning community for the examination of the Ed.D., examination of the multicultural requirement at UWF). In addition, the Director participates in several task forces and committees concerned with issues related to instructional quality and academic integrity.

CUTLA provides service to the community by inviting faculty from Pensacola Junior College and Okaloosa Walton College to all CUTLA workshops and mini-conferences. The Center actively disseminates its work on a national basis by making presentations at conferences such as the International Assessment and Retention Conference (NASPA), the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), the Council of Applied Master's Programs in Psychology (CAMPP), the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), and the Virginia Assessment Group (VAG).

In summary, the Center for University Teaching, Learning, and Assessment is engaged in a large number of initiatives that promote each of the goals associated with its mission. This work has made important contributions toward preserving the academic standing of the University in the larger academic community though accreditation processes. The Center also contributes to the ongoing development of a culture of assessment, scholarly inquiry into effective teaching practices, and commitment to continuous improvement of student learning. This work is vital to the University mission to be “the best regional comprehensive university in America” and the University strategic priorities to “inspire and achieve the highest levels of student learning, creativity, and success that encourage the development of individual potential in students, faculty, and staff,” “create and deliver the highest quality of educational, research, and service programs that meet the needs of the communities we serve,” and “provide excellent educational, student, and administrative support services and facilities.”