All Things Assessment at KU is edited by Dr. Gil Clary, and members of the Advisory Board are Dr. David Beougher, Dr. Mahfuzul Khondaker, Dr. Michelle Kiec, Dr. John McCarthy, Professor Krista Prock, and Dr. Carole Wells. Suggestions for articles, announcements, and feedback of any sort are welcomed and appreciated.

Editor’s note. This academic year’s volume of the Assessment newsletter is devoted to assessments related to Kutztown University’s General Education program. The feature article of this issue is a report of Professor Krista Prock’s and Dr. Patricia Norred Derr’s contributions to and participation at the Association of American College & Universities’ conference on General Education and Assessment. In addition, several colleges provide an update of assessment work in those colleges.

Kutztown University at AAC&U’s General Education & Assessment Conference
Krista Prock (Rohrbach Library) and Patricia Norred Derr (History)

Kutztown University had the poster, “Implementing and Assessing General Education at Kutztown University of Pennsylvania: The Devil is in the Details,” accepted for the 2015 Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U) General Education and Assessment Conference. We - Dr. Patricia Derr, chair of the General Education Committee, and Professor Krista Prock, chair of the General Education Assessment Committee, traveled to Kansas City February 19 – 21 (alongside two snowstorms) for the conference and to present the Implementing and Assessing General Education at Kutztown poster.

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Our poster session, which shared details about our University’s experience with implementing the new General Education program and its assessment, was well-received. We were kept busy with questions for the entire hour of the poster
session. The handouts were quickly depleted, taken by peers who were beginning to develop some of the materials KU had spent a great deal of time creating and refining: rubrics, promotional materials, and standards. The competency standards and approval process were the subject of many conversations around the poster. Most questions came from faculty and administrators at colleges and universities who are now at the point that KU was during Spring 2010 – a recently approved general education reform and implementation and assessment as the next steps.

As the chair of the General Education Assessment Committee, I (KP) sometimes fall into the trap of negative thinking, wondering when KU will have a true program of general education assessment. It is so easy to forget about the many great things we have accomplished as we face the things we have remaining to do. Since 2010, GEAC has created rubrics for each domain of general education and developed a process for collecting data about student performance in those domain areas. The GEC created definitions for each of the competency areas and designed criteria for courses to earn a competency, and an approval process to award the competencies. GEAC also collected data for three years and made some initial recommendations regarding the general education goals and domains, and how they can be better aligned with the competencies.

At the conference, many speakers stressed the need for faculty to take ownership of general education, and especially faculty who teach capstone courses. Many colleges and universities are developing assignments that are based on real world scenarios, which makes the assignment more attractive and meaningful to students. If these assignments are associated with a capstone course, they may be more likely to touch on several different aspects of general education.

Peggy Maki was one keynote speaker. Her talk focused on a recent poll which compared employers’ judgments about graduates’ skills with the university’s view of what students were capable of doing. In making the university view coincide with the employer view, Maki suggested that students must own their own learning. She reiterated that we must start at the end. What do we want our students to know when they graduate? Then, we work backward, tracking student progress along the way. To do so, however, will require that faculty have many interdisciplinary conversations.

One clear idea that came from a discussion about transfer students is that communication with the community colleges is essential. Rather than focus on courses or credits, it was suggested that schools should focus on skills. Working with community colleges on developing common assessment tools was also recommended.

At some colleges and universities, those who help create the general education model, approve courses, and assess the results are given scholarly credit for those activities. That is, this type of work counts as scholarly growth. It is generally held among this group of people that this endeavor takes an enormous amount of time and should be valued highly in tenure and promotion.

Many of the colleges and universities who presented at the conference have a dedicated curriculum of general education courses and many are using e-portfolios for general education assessment. Students will either take a specific set of common general education courses, or choose from a limited number of courses. In the case of e-portfolios, students collect work samples in an e-portfolio and a sample of student work is assessed by a select group of people, which makes achieving inter-rater reliability easier.

Having attended this conference with many people at various stages of the general education reform process, we believe that KU has made great progress over the past five years. In fact, we find that we are now in a position to serve as a model for many colleges and universities who are at the beginning of the implementation process.
The College of Business has two initial accreditation visits this spring. The Department of Business Administration had its Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) peer review team visit in March. Sport Management and Leadership Studies will have their Commission on Sport Management Accreditation (COSMA) peer review team visit in April. It took a sustained effort on the part of faculty, students, staff, and the administration to come to this point. So what have we learned from the accreditation processes?

Some of you might remember the Diana Ross song “Do you know where you’re going to?” For me, those lyrics sum up the accreditation process and the peer review team visit. Accreditation does not end with the visit. Rather it is the first stage in a continuous improvement culture that becomes part of our everyday fabric of educating students. “Do you know where you’re going to?” The accreditation process, the self-evaluation report, the preparation for the visit, and finally the visit force us to examine where we are going and how we are going to sustain the momentum. Accreditation provides us with the opportunity to ask ourselves questions such as: how do we compare with peer institutions? How does our mission align with the larger institutional mission? Is our mission distinctive? How do we make decisions? Do we have culture of continuous improvement? What do students learn in our program? How do they learn it? And what are our expectations? Do our intellectual and professional contributions have an impact on what we teach in the classroom?

Finally and most importantly a successful accreditation visit and decision says to external stakeholders that we offer our students a “quality” program as judged by an external review team. Accreditation and its standards provide us with the framework to continuously improve and know where we are going.

The LAS Assessment Committee has continued its pursuit of usable and relevant data related to student success. Building on last year’s work, members of the committee have developed both qualitative and quantitative instruments focused on understanding student resiliency and factors that contribute to why students persist and graduate as opposed to looking at why they leave. These instruments have gone through the IRB approval process and will be administered during the spring term. Surveys have significant commonality in an attempt to compare data from myriad student populations. Additional efforts seek to further understand the relationship of student involvement and student engagement in their persistence. Analysis of results is anticipated to add to our understanding of what practices at KU are high impact and enhance student success.

Accreditation provides a time of self-reflection and renewal for academic programs. This semester, the College of Visual and Performing Arts is being evaluated for their 10-year reaccreditation with the National Association of Schools of Music (NASM) and National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD), the national bodies that accredit our music, art, and design programs. Faculty engaged in reflective assessment of curricula, facilities, student recruitment, goals, learning outcomes, and health/safety initiatives. In addition to writing a self-study, teams from NASM and NASAD visited campus to record their findings, and engage in dialogue with faculty, staff, and administrators. Throughout the reaccreditation cycle, programs are encouraged to reflect on the national standards and to use assessment to plan for the future.