The 5th year anniversary of the implementation of Achievement-Centered Education (ACE) marks an opportunity to celebrate UNL faculty members’ commitment to improving undergraduate education. This report spotlights how faculty collaboration and commitment to ACE assessment have improved curriculum, teaching, and student learning at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Nationally recognized, ACE provides a common academic foundation reflecting what faculty members believe 21st century UNL undergraduates ought to know. Students of all majors and career aspirations complete 30 hours of 10 ACE learning outcomes. ACE courses provide UNL students a breadth of learning, complementing the deep learning gained in their major degree programs. Achieving the 10 outcomes prepares students to address the needs of a complex, diverse and globalized society.
Faculty assessment of student learning in ACE courses

A key feature of the ACE program is faculty commitment to assessing student learning. Each instructor is responsible for including the ACE outcome language in the course syllabus and for collecting sample student work that can be used to assess students’ achievement of the outcome. Departments assess ACE courses on a multi-year cycle. The following chart shows the 694 ACE courses that have been assessed thus far, representing nearly every department on campus.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year 1</th>
<th>Year 2</th>
<th>Year 3</th>
<th>Year 4*</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1, 2, 3</td>
<td>4, 6, 7</td>
<td>5, 9</td>
<td>8, 10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courses Involved</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Year 4 (Reports to be submitted fall 2014)
** Includes courses that are certified for two outcomes.

Honoring the diversity of student work across ACE courses means that assessment of students’ learning is also diverse and context specific. ACE courses represent a wide range of disciplines, and departments understand best how to assess student progress toward learning related to ACE outcomes. ACE assessment allows departments to determine what assessment questions are important to them. Some departments use standardized national tests (Chemistry), others use rubrics to review portfolios or capstone projects (English; Teaching, Learning & Teacher Education), some have department or external review boards of presentations (Advertising & Public Relations, Engineering, Architecture) and still others use exams (Statistics, Psychology).

Regardless of the form of assessment, the overall goal is the same: continual improvement of student learning in ACE courses. ACE assessment helps faculty determine whether students are mastering ACE outcomes and achieving articulated expectations. ACE assessment is designed to sponsor ongoing faculty conversations about teaching and learning. The examples in this brochure illustrate how assessment can be such a catalyst.

UNL faculty leading change nationally

“UNL should be proud of its leadership role in rethinking and repositioning general education.” Carol Geary Schneider, President, Association of American Colleges and Universities

---

**Faculty observations**

Political Science faculty helped students develop better analytical tools.

“We realized we might have more of an emphasis problem than a content problem for POLS 100. Instructors could more effectively connect the research they discuss to analyses of current politics to help students develop the necessary analytical tools to understand the American political system. The Undergraduate Committee brings the results of ACE assessment to a full faculty meeting, where we discuss the findings.” Beth Theiss-Morse, Political Science

Chemistry faculty are creating sustainable assessment processes to yield meaningful data.

“Based on faculty feedback as a whole [from the first ACE 4 assessment efforts], we plan on investigating new versions of lab practicals as a future assessment for ACE 4. Specifically, we believe the lab practical is the most valid method of addressing most aspects of ACE 4, but we need to revise and/or design a method for administering the lab practical that would not be so burdensome with regard to time and effort.” Eric Malina, Chemistry

English faculty discovered that assessment inspires new questions about student learning.

“Within the composition program, we learned how much teachers benefit from the opportunity to reflect on student work across courses—that is, to see beyond the individual classroom. While our data indicate that most of our students are performing at a proficient level, our collective reading of three years’ worth of portfolios showed us that their experiences in composition classes are often quite different from section to section. We wondered whether students might benefit from more shared experiences in their courses; this reminded us that assessment not only answers questions but sparks new ones. We want them to understand that teaching and learning are iterative processes requiring ongoing reflection and revision.” Shari Stenberg, English

---

ACE Report 2014
What faculty learned about their courses and majors

• About 25% of the ways in which faculty used assessment related to improving teaching within their individual ACE courses. Some faculty identified the need to revise or change individual assignments to better address ACE outcomes. Some identified a need to change evaluation methods to better assess student learning.

• ACE assessment helped departments recognize areas for improvement and enabled changes. Some departments identified the need to use common syllabi and expand teacher development to support continuity for student learning in ACE courses. Some departments that offer multi-section courses discovered that students were having uneven learning experiences across course sections. Some faculty used the opportunity to add or revise assignments that enabled students to more fully demonstrate their understanding of concepts and applications.

• ACE assessment stimulated department conversations about relationships between ACE courses and degree-program learning outcomes. Faculty in Communication Studies, Political Science, and Film Studies used ACE assessment to discuss how to sharpen the focus of assignments on learning outcomes. One report suggested learning could be improved by tying writing in the course to real world applications both in the course and in subsequent courses in the program. Some departments identified an opportunity to review the entire major to see where learning outcomes were reinforced in the course sequence.

The College of Engineering aligns ACE assessment with professional accreditation.

“All undergraduate programs but one in the College of Engineering are accredited by the Accreditation Board for Engineering & Technology (ABET). Construction Management is accredited by the American Council for Construction Education (ACCE). The ACE general education criteria complement the engineering accreditation criteria and provide assurance that each program and the institution meet or exceed the quality standards established by the profession. The results of periodic assessment will be used to identify the opportunities to continuously improve the program and help the College to be prepared for the next cycle of accreditation.” Sohrab Asgarpoor, Electrical Engineering

The College of Architecture conducts assessment with widespread faculty participation in course and program reviews.

“The College of Architecture utilizes the ACE assessments in both college-wide, and program-specific ‘end-of-semester’ course reviews. These course reviews are strategically organized to take either a broad assessment of curricular course development as students advance through the College of Architecture, or can be designed to look more specifically at core courses or a specific set of course sequences. The end-of-semester reviews in the College of Architecture require the involvement of all faculty in the college to attend, as specific faculty of various courses present course content, course objectives, and provide evidence to student learning outcomes. The intent of the course reviews is to both educate other faculty about what students have learned and identify areas of both strengths and weaknesses of both the course and specific student classes.” Lindsey Bahe, Interior Design
What faculty are learning about assessing student learning

- **The learning curve is sometimes steep.** Some faculty described ACE assessment as challenging because they didn’t have prior experience with developing assessment processes. They weren’t sure how to develop meaningful questions to investigate their students’ learning.

- **Initial assessment plans sometimes need revision.** Some faculty identified problems with initial processes (e.g., inadequate sampling or department rubrics). They noted the importance of being open to change during assessment processes.

- **Broad participation supports shared learning.** Some departments plan to reorganize assessment processes to involve more instructors. Reports indicated that individual efforts were not as robust compared to collective efforts in influencing and improving student learning.

- **Sharing best practices supports buy-in and trust.** Faculty involvement in designing, implementing and carrying out assessment fosters buy-in and trust that the findings are meaningful. Departments that shared best practices reported learning how to assess in new and better ways.

What UNL learned it could do to improve institutional assessment

- **Create more structured opportunities for sharing best practices.** Faculty who participated in ACE assessment indicated in surveys that they welcome learning from other faculty how to efficiently and effectively measure student learning. Examples have been added to the ACE website for faculty use.

- **Improve communication about ACE to faculty and students.** The ACE website has been revised, and 4-year plans and learning outcomes for all majors are now accessible in the Undergraduate Bulletin.

- **Simplify and clarify ACE recertification and assessment processes.** The UCC ACE subcommittee collaborated with the Faculty Senate to simplify and clarify recertification and assessment processes. Available at ace.unl.edu in the “recertification” tab.

- **Implement better assessment software for assessment reporting.** Academic Affairs is currently exploring assessment software to assist departments and colleges with simplified collection and reporting.

- **Align ACE assessment with other assessment reporting to streamline faculty work.** ACE recertification and assessment questions now align with department assessment reports and Higher Learning Commission institutional reaccreditation requirements to facilitate faculty work.