

TEN THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT LEARNING OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT AND MIDDLE STATES REACCREDITATION

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#ONE: Middle States reaccreditation is happening now.

Accreditation is higher education's peer review system of quality assurance. An accredited institution is eligible for federal funding, and its students are eligible for federal financial aid. Accreditation provides accountability, which has become an important national issue (see, for example, the report of the Spellings Commission on the Future of Higher Education <http://www.ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/hiedfuture/index.html>). The University takes the reaccreditation process very seriously.

#TWO: Evaluation is based on 14 standards.

The University of Maryland is reaccredited every ten years. The Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) (<http://www.msche.org/>) has developed 14 standards, called "Characteristics of Excellence," to guide to evaluation process. The first step in the process was the submission of a self-study by the University. This will be followed by a visit to campus by a team of higher education experts in early March. In June 2007, MSCHE will make a decision on reaccrediting the University.

#THREE: Learning Outcomes Assessment (LOA) is a key focus.

MSCHE pioneered the use of learning outcomes assessment planning as part of its focus on student learning. Standard 14 states that "Assessment of student learning demonstrates that...the institution's students have knowledge, skills and competencies..." Learning Outcomes Assessment begins when an instructor or program develops student learning outcomes – what a student should be able to know or do as a result of a course or program. These outcomes are then measured and analyzed, and the results of the assessment are used to improve the program or course. LOA is a feedback loop for improvement.

#FOUR: The Libraries have a LOA plan.

All degree-granting units (bachelors, masters, doctoral, minors, certificates) have prepared LOA plans. Dean Lowry decided that, since the Libraries have a significant teaching function, a LOA plan should be submitted for our information literacy programs. The Libraries LOA plan (<http://www.lib.umd.edu/UES/middlestates.html>) cannot capture all of the library instruction that happens within the Libraries. Instead, our plan concentrates on the general education/gateway programs administered by User Education Services. These include Library Day (ENGL 101), Library Safari (UNIV 100) and Gemstone (GEMS 100). Many subject librarians and curators are beginning to develop their own LOA plans.

#FIVE: The plan has five outcomes.

We are fortunate that the Association of College and Research Librarians (ACRL) developed information literacy competency standards in 2000: <http://www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlstandards/informationliteracycompetency.htm>. Our LOA plan has five outcomes derived from the ACRL standards. The plan was well received by the campus Learning Outcomes Assessment committee.

#SIX: Outcome #4 is being assessed this year.

Each campus unit has been asked to assess one outcome during the 2006-2007 academic year. The Libraries are using a variety of instruments and tools, and will be looking at assessment results as well as at the utility of these instruments. We are using team exercises from Library Safari (UNIV 100), project sheets from GEMS 100, and results from the 2003 SAILS assessment and the 2004 UM Student Survey.

#SEVEN: Results will be available by March 1st.

Summary results for this year's assessment will be made available to staff by March 1st. Please take a look at them when they become available.

#EIGHT: Middle States team visits UM on March 4-7.

Team members are free to visit any unit on campus and talk with staff. A Middle States evaluator could come into any campus library and ask about library programs and services – including learning outcomes assessment.

#NINE: Being familiar with the UM self-study and Libraries LOA plan is important.

The University's self-study gives a good snapshot of the Libraries in the context of the University. It can be found at <http://www.ms07.umd.edu/>. The Libraries LOA plan can be found at <http://www.lib.umd.edu/UES/middlestates.html>.

#TEN: Learning Outcomes Assessment is here to stay.

The Middle States reaccreditation process was the impetus for developing learning outcomes assessment plans on campus and the University is moving toward a "culture of assessment" that will continue to emphasize the assessment of student learning through definable and measurable outcomes. The Libraries have begun the process of infusing learning outcomes assessment throughout our complex instructional program in order to improve student learning.