Reviewer Comments V.1 (LSSU responses in bold)

What are some strengths of this project/Academy work? Why are these strengths?

Sandra Harris notes that technology is being used to facilitate the development of a university-wide system for collecting, disseminating, and implementing assessment results. Centralizing the data collection effort could improve the use of data collected around the university.

Jim Sherohman adds that the materials used for the assessment training are very good, and the assessment website contains many useful resources.

We believe that Tracdat, a relational database designed to capture, collate and aggregate assessment data in all forms from across the university, will provide this. Fundamentally it is the centralized data collection warehouse, also providing standardized reporting tools which present the results of assessment data in a form useable for informed decision making.

What remains unclear or what questions do you still have about this work to assess and improve student learning?

Sandra observes that it is not clear how you will link technology to student learning. It is also not clear how you will use information from the faculty satisfaction survey to assess student learning. The faculty survey provides a good method for assessing the effectiveness of your project. However, because the project is intended to positively impact student learning, the survey should also gather data on how the assessment process affects learning. To determine the success of your project, you also will "*obtain measures of use through training records, audits of course and program activity, as well as attendance at meetings and conferences.*" These efforts should also collect data on how the assessment process has impacted student learning.

Jim agrees with Susan that it is important to retain a focus on student learning throughout the project. He also asks the following questions:

Did you set the goal for participation in the data system at 80% to make sure it was attainable, or is this what you actually hope to achieve? Are the other desired results attainable if you only have 80% participation? Won't lack of participation by some individuals hamper decision-making at the program, school, and institution levels? What incentive do instructors have to participate in the data system?
You are starting with course-level assessment, then moving to program-level assessment. Does this indicate that you will be encouraging the use of course-embedded assessment at the program level, or is this implementation plan intended simply to familiarize faculty members with the data system before it is implemented at the program level?
Will program assessment efforts continue during the first two years of the project, or will they be placed on hold due to the emphasis on course-level assessment? Will the transition from a course-level to a program focus occur gradually or abruptly?
What level of participation in the assessment training have you had from faculty? What feedback are you receiving from those who attend the training and those who don't? Do those who don't attend have other opportunities for guidance and feedback from the Academy team?

Sandra's comments are correct, it is important that our focus is on student learning, increased student achievement, etc. In retrospect, we agree that training records and attendance at meetings will not likely indicate any direct impact on student learning. The faculty indicate the two key obstacles they face in the heightened focus on formalized assessment are TIME and resources. We may need to refocus our survey to bring the impact on student learning to the forefront of the questions. We envision that through entering outcomes and findings into Tracdat faculty will have moments of self-realization and enlightenment. Indeed early reports confirm this as faculty report that the attention to assessment has helped them see how to better write and assess the student learning outcomes for their classes. Jim correctly notes the 80% figure, but that goal was for 80% of course assessment planning to have been migrated onto Tracdat, the faculty are

still individually responsible to assess student learning. The goal was set short of 100% in acknowledgement that the university has many courses that have not been taught in recent years, and unless schools move to eliminate those courses assessment of student learning in those courses will be problematic. Finally, there is an underlying issue of faculty resistance to a perception of new responsibilities and demands. Frequently noted are the limitations of time and the financial resources needed to implement the 'new' assessment demands. In all, we believe 80% is a pretty realistic goal.

Jim also correctly notes in the narrative an intention to begin with course-level assessment and move to program level. Program level outcomes were in place prior to the Academy Project, and assessment efforts are underway. For example, our General Education Committee has completed three consecutive years using the ETS proficiency exams in parallel with course-level assessment. Cross-disciplinary assessment activities, such as general education, will be greatly facilitated by having access to course-level assessment data on the relevant outcomes. Our present focus is on transitioning the assessment activities onto Tracdat, and in the process refining the outcomes and measures as defined by the units. We do not want program-level assessment efforts to stall during the formalizing of the course-assessment (again migrating to Tracdat while simultaneously refining and strengthening the outcomes and measures.) To the fullest extent possible all college, school, and program learning outcomes were pre-entered into Tracdat so that faculty could immediately link their course outcomes to program outcomes. A common refrain during work sessions related to curriculum mapping has been "how will we know which course outcomes connect to program outcomes?" This highlights the need for greater faculty dialog in the scope and sequence of their curriculum – and it is a dialog that naturally flows from the process of migrating assessment into the Tracdat framework. Faculty are encouraged to review and edit their outcomes 'on the fly' when they recognize they are overly broad, detailed or immeasurable.

What are some critical things to which the institution should pay attention as it plans its work for the next six months?

Sandra makes the following observations:

If faculty are provided the technology without having been trained in developing learning outcomes, they may become frustrated with having to learn both systems at the same time. In order to obtain usable data it is important to have clearly articulated learning outcomes that can be measured. Therefore it is imperative that faculty know how to write effective learning outcomes. Perhaps it would be more effective to first train faculty on how to develop measurable learning outcomes, then train them in using the technology to enter the learning outcomes into the system.

There should be some emphasis on how the university plans to assess student learning relative to the developed learning outcomes. This plan should be clearly articulated and communicated. It may be that this is the place where technology would be utilized and emphasized most heavily. But there still needs to be some discussion of how student learning will be measured and how the university will determine if learning is improved as a result of the assessment process.

Overall it appears that the university is moving in the right direction to improve its assessment processes. It appears that the focus is on using technology in the assessment process. While technology can enhance the data collection, analysis, and dissemination efforts, it cannot promulgate a culture of assessment. This could occur through developing a strong university level assessment council where individuals across the university work collaboratively to develop a university level assessment plan. Fostering this collaboration could go a long way in terms of gaining faculty buy in and acceptance of the process. In addition, there could be an emphasis on developing faculty skill in understanding assessment, the role of assessment, and developing effective learning outcomes that can be clearly and quantitatively measure.

Jim agrees with Sandra that developing a culture of assessment requires much more than an effective data system. He adds the following comment: You plan to "standardize and systematize the collection of assessment data from across the university," starting with course-level assessment and moving on to program-level assessment. Does this mean that course-level information will be entered into TracDat first? How will you ensure that the course-level information entered into TracDat will be usable at the program level? Do most programs have well-defined learning outcomes and curriculum maps, such that program faculty know which program outcomes to include on their syllabi? How will findings from course-level assessment be aggregated at the program level? Learning to use TracDat and

entering the information will take some time. If faculty members later find that they need to change what they are doing to facilitate aggregation of findings, they may become disillusioned with the process.

We agree with the potential risk Sandra has identified, the pacing of any project needs to balance a perception of need, early measures of success, and realistic expectations that challenge but not discourage the participants. We recognize the need to refine and strengthen our statements of student learning outcomes. The process of recording assessment data in Tracdat is largely a copy/paste activity – but in the process of defining the assessment measures, targets and methods faculty often experience a 'discrepant event' where their perceptions of assessment reality are in direct conflict with the frameworks that they find constraining them. A faculty member who commits in their assessment plan to assessing multiple learning outcomes with a single average score on the final can then be engaged in a dialog about how that might not let them differentiate student learning on the three discrete outcomes, and what other options may exist to reach the desired goal. Concurrent with the work to formalize assessment processes through the structure of Tracdat, we are developing peer-level feedback systems for the review of outcomes, measures, and later how the findings related to student learning are used to advance the university. The Shared Governance Assessment Committee (SGAC), in place since the fall of 2011, is finalizing rubrics which will be used to both inform and guide faculty and administrative support units in refining and strengthening their outcomes and assessment processes. The SGAC is comprised of faculty, administration, students and academic services staff, the SGAC predates the Academy Team, but the two committees, sharing some common members, are working effectively to advance and champion assessment activities on campus.

Both Jim and Sandra refer to the potential for faculty disillusionment – a real risk. We recognize this risk but persist in our belief that meaningful change can occur through the process, and meaningful assessment of student learning can still occur with flawed statements of learning expectations. We feel it is more important to begin the assessment process rather than waiting to resolve all ambiguity. Tracdat will generate the roll-up aggregation of assessment data across all constituent subgroups into reports that consolidate the findings and evidence of student achievement, and document the actions resulting from that assessment. Changes or refinements in the outcome statements, measures or methods will not fundamentally change the structure of this report format so that a consistent level of reporting is possible even as changes proceed.

What are some other possibilities or resources that might contribute to the success of this project? For instance, can you suggest resources such as books, benchmarks, instruments, models, and processes?

Sandra suggests the following possibilities and resources:

Development of a university-wide assessment system is best accomplished when there is a clear process in place that guides the data collection efforts. It would be good to have a written, university-wide assessment plan that could be used to guide assessment activities at different levels in the university. Such a plan developed by a university-wide assessment council which includes representatives from the various stakeholders across the university would gather faculty participation and possibly garner support for the larger university-wide assessment effort.

When working to centralize the assessment effort, keep in mind the individual needs of particular colleges and schools, as there may be some unique assessment needs due to guidelines established by accrediting agencies. For instance, programs that seek specialized accrediting from agencies such as CACREP or NCATE may have assessment needs unique to their program affiliations. Therefore the university assessment plan would need to acknowledge and be flexible enough to accommodate those specialized assessment needs.

You may want to look at the Walden University Assessment Structure as a benchmark for establishing a solid basis in assessment.

Jim agrees that these are good suggestions, and he also adds this one:

What is the format for the training sessions? During the training do faculty members work on writing and revising the learning outcomes they are planning to use in their courses? How is feedback presented? What opportunities do faculty members have to follow up on the feedback? What incentive do they have to do so? Do findings from the baseline faculty survey suggest that faculty perceive the Academy project as addressing their needs, or do they see it

as "a solution in search of a problem"? Do you find that you need to adopt different approaches with different groups of faculty. As you implement the project, you will find it helpful to collect information on what works and doesn't work, why it works or doesn't work, what adjustments you attempt in order to make things work better, and the effects of those adjustments. The faculty surveys are a good idea, but you also should monitor the process on an ongoing basis.

The establishment, and refinement, of our University Assessment Plan (UAP) has indeed been a high priority. The UAP (http://www.lssu.edu/assessment/documents/B_Assessment-UniversityAssessmentPlan_2012_oct.pdf) has helped to define our assessment practices, and set a course for course, program, administrative unit and strategic planning assessment. We agree with our reviewers on the importance of establishing the University Assessment Plan and the actualization of our plan into meaningful evidence of the improvement of our student learning outcomes. The UAP represents the work of the Shared Governance Assessment Committee to work with the entire university community, both academics and administrative services.

We have held a range of faculty development workshops, and school-level training events, designed to assist and support faculty as they enter/review/adjust their course-level and program-level student learning outcomes. Faculty at the sessions typically begin by transferring their course outcomes off the syllabi and framing them as student-learning outcomes. Often the syllabus defines what the faculty member will present or deliver – not what the student will achieve or demonstrate. This becomes the pivotal dialog point as we move faculty toward a student-centered view of assessment. Using computer training laboratories we can display and critique the various components of the course assessment plans from the participants, and we stress that the accountability and oversight of assessment is a fundamental faculty professional responsibility. We stress that assessment isn't being done simply to satisfy administration or external accreditors, and that academic integrity held between peers is the first line of validation required to ensure that student learning outcomes are reasonable, effective and authentic.

These sessions have ranged in size from 1:1 personalized support up through hands-on computer-based sessions held with the full school faculty. More than just training, the preliminary sessions have most often been two-way dialogs where we have worked directly with the schools, programs and units to modify Tracdat structures to suit the assessment needs of the unit. For example, modifications to the seminar/senior capstone courses in biology connected these at the school level, not the individual level, to better match the assessment needs of the school. Through interactions with the Gen Ed committee and other programs, we are learning that assessment data entry can pose unique challenges and may require at least one extra step for courses that have multiple sections, including many sections taught by adjunct faculty. As we move forward we see we will need to provide better support and guidance for those multiple-section courses. This will become a focus as we conduct our year-one survey of faculty in the early spring 2013.

We have moved quickly away from an expectation that large-group training will be effective for implementation of assessment at the school or program level. There are clear and defining differences in the assessment needs of nursing, engineering and athletic training. There are lest defining, but still significant differences between the various academic units, and we have found it most beneficial to hold assessment support sessions at the smallest unit possible. Finally, in realization of the scheduling difficulties of faculty we have developed a series of assessment support resources. These are all posted to our Training website: http://www.lssu.edu/assessment/trainingworkshops.php and include enhanced multimedia video guides, graphical organizers, step-wise print resources, extensive screen-shot illustrated guides and examples from other institutions.