

ACADEMY APPLICATION

DRAKE UNIVERSITY

DES MOINES, IA

JUNE 30, 2006

Name of Institution

City, State

Application Date

Preferred Point of Entry to the Academy:

- Fall 2006
- Spring 2007
- Summer 2007

The Drake University Profile

Drake University is a private, masters' level institution with approximately 3000 undergraduates and 2000 graduate students enrolled in six schools and colleges (Arts and Sciences, Business and Public Administration, Education, Journalism and Mass Communication, Pharmacy, and Law). Known for its academic excellence, Drake highly values teaching and learning. Excellence in teaching is the key element in our promotion and tenure process, but at the same time our faculty maintains a high level of scholarship. We have an excellent student academic profile, with an average ACT score of 26 for our entering first year students. We have a well-articulated mission statement which values innovative programs that engage students in learning, inside and outside the classroom and laboratories. Drake seeks creative means to integrate the liberal arts with professional studies and is an active member of the Associated New American Colleges and the Association of American Colleges and Universities. We are initiating new programs that address the issue of liberal studies and civic engagement that will form the theme for AAC&U's annual meeting in January 2007. With the collaboration of the Higher Learning Commission's Academy for the Assessment of Student Learning we will develop measures for the learning outcomes established in these initiatives. Working with the Academy we can provide a valuable model for a number of other private or comprehensive universities.

Recent Efforts

- 1. What is your "assessment story"? Evaluate your past and present efforts. (Include here things such as your accomplishments, issues, barriers, results, strategies.)**

Drake's "assessment story" of the past 10 years is one of progress and challenges. The University has long recognized the importance of assessing student learning and "evidence-based" decision-making. We have had assessment plans in place for more than 10 years. In practice, however, the systematic implementation of the plans, the collection of data and use of assessment information has been irregular across campus.

For over a decade, we regularly have collected and used indirect assessment data related to our students' educational accomplishments and satisfaction. The Drake Student Satisfaction Survey, developed in the early 1990s, has been routinely administered to collect data on student attitudes, perceptions related to Drake Curriculum (general education) outcomes as well as student perceptions and satisfaction with many other campus programs and activities. Student engagement and performance also have been assessed through regular participation in several nationally benchmarked surveys including NSSE (every year since its inception), FSSE, Noel Levitz Student Satisfaction Survey, and the CIRP.

Drake also has long expected faculty to collect and use course assessment information. All Drake schools and colleges require student evaluations of courses and most require peer review of teaching. Several professional programs (in some cases prompted by their accrediting bodies) have worked hard to develop direct measures of student learning. All programs in the arts and sciences have had assessment plans for the major in place for several years, but systematic implementation has been uneven and/or did not directly assess student learning. Recently all curricular programs have developed statements of learning outcomes that provide the basis for future assessment efforts. This summer, as in recent summers, the University is sponsoring a number of faculty workshops designed to help faculty develop and use innovative teaching pedagogies, better integrate stated student-learning outcomes into their classes, and develop better assessment techniques. In other words, there is significant progress in developing direct measures of student learning in the academic major.

Historically, the major challenge Drake University has faced is to assess student learning in the general education program. One major reason for this situation was that each college and school had its own set of general education requirements. Several developments have provided the opportunity to address this situation. First, in 1998, the Drake Curriculum, a general education program for all undergraduates, was implemented. Now all students have to complete the same set of requirements. Second, the Drake University Board of Trustees adopted a revised mission statement in 2002. The new mission statement meant that we had to ask whether our academic programs were producing what was promised. This began a process of mission explication, that is, taking the key terms in the mission statement and identifying the associated student learning outcomes. The Mission Explication was completed by the end of the fall semester of 2004. By elaborating student-learning outcomes contained in the mission statement, we are more clearly communicating the mission to all constituencies, have increased understanding of how curricular and co-curricular activities relate to various learning outcomes, and have made the student-learning outcomes contained in the mission statement more amenable to measurement.

Many of the student learning outcomes identified in the Mission Explication are to be achieved through the general education program. Currently, individual Drake Curriculum courses are assessed, however a plan for assessing whether stated student-learning outcomes identified in the Mission Explication are achieved has not been completed. While initial efforts in this direction have begun, much work is needed to develop a comprehensive assessment of student learning in the general education program.

Another challenge is to explicitly tie Student Life programming to the student learning outcomes identified in the Mission Explication. A number of the learning goals are explicitly endorsed by the Student Life division's mission statement. What is missing is a plan to assess whether the learning goals that are part of the mission are actually achieved. Once we develop that assessment plan and gather the data, a more cohesive mission centered experience for students can be created.

A final challenge is to build a pervasive culture of evidence. The University has attempted to close the loop by using assessment data in decision-making. A couple of recent examples of feedback and application of data are:

- In 2000, we engaged in a thorough review of all programs on campus (Program Review) in which each academic program was evaluated in terms of its essentiality to the university's mission, demand, cost-effectiveness (revenue vs. costs), and quality – measured by student placement and satisfaction, faculty expertise, defining features or indicators of curricular quality. This review resulted in program expansion, change and even elimination.
- When survey data (internal and NSSE) indicated a less than desired level of engagement among seniors, a task force collected additional information through focus groups with

seniors and examined national models of senior academic experience. In addition, a comparison of the Mission Explication with the stated expectations of the Drake Curriculum revealed deficiencies in the general education program. Faculty and staff study groups worked for a year on developing recommendations related to active learning, senior capstones, critical thinking, and engaged citizenship. Proposed reforms to the Drake Curriculum program were developed and recently were adopted by the Faculty Senate.

While we have aspired to develop a “culture of assessment,” that culture is not uniformly embraced across campus programs. Significant progress has been made but use of student learning data in curricular decision-making is not found consistently throughout the institution.

In summary, in spite of some accomplishments and awareness of where we should be with assessment of student learning, Drake University faces three continuing challenges. First, we need to develop and implement a comprehensive assessment plan for our general education program. Second, we need to assess the student learning associated with Student Life programs and tie these efforts more closely to the curricular experience. Third, we need to deepen the culture of evidence across campus.

Needs, Goals, and Desired Results

2. What are your most pressing needs that you expect to be addressed via your participation?

Our application to become part of the Academy for Assessment of Student Learning is driven by the factors cited above. With campus-wide participation in 2004 we identified the learning outcomes to be drawn from our university mission statement. We are now engaged in reviewing the general education curriculum and co-curricular programming to ensure that multiple options are provided to Drake students for achieving those outcomes. Development and refinement of those options must be informed by solid assessment data. In addition, we will undergo accreditation through the Higher Learning Commission in 2008. We want to be able to demonstrate substantive action on the assessment and achievement of these comprehensive mission outcomes. Thus we need the Academy to help us address the following needs:

- 1) We must expand and systematize the assessment of the Drake Curriculum. We need to:
 - a. Develop direct measures of student learning for important qualitative outcomes drawn from the explication of our mission. The mission calls for us to produce Drake graduates who have the knowledge and skills to live meaningful personal lives, achieve professional accomplishments, develop as responsible global citizens, and who have the ability to integrate their liberal and professional studies. Assessing such broad mission outcomes is a challenge. These measures must be adaptable across courses taught by faculty from five schools and colleges within the university.
 - b. Assess the impact of a sequence of courses and learning experiences rather than just that of individual courses. We plan to introduce broad concepts of critical thinking, effective writing, and engaged citizenship in our first year seminars, emphasize engaged citizenship in a sophomore level experience, and then return to both skills and larger questions of civic and social issues in the senior capstones. Our success will depend on our ability to measure levels of student achievement of outcomes and to adjust based on needs as they move through each stage.
 - c. Assess the Drake Curriculum-related outcomes of professional and major program courses that also count toward the Drake Curriculum. As at many schools, many of the courses that comprise the general education program also serve needs within majors and

other programs. Thus we must be able to measure development of outcomes in courses designed to meet two or more sets of goals.

- d. Incorporate technology to aid us in the first two goals. Drake has improved use of technology on campus including making all classrooms wireless and widespread use of Blackboard, a common course management system. We need to explore means to use this technology to facilitate data collection and analysis.
- 2) We must develop structures and culture that build on the premise that achieving our mission outcomes depends both on curricular and co-curricular learning. We need to:
 - a. Develop better integration of Student Life staff members as partners in supporting the student-learning experience, systematize a program of assessment and to enhance a culture of innovation and evidence.
 - b. Routinely involve Student Life and other staff members in discussions of our mission documents and of student-learning outcomes.
 - c. Develop a culture that openly and consciously values the contributions that staff members make to student learning.
 - d. Support staff development to ensure that staff members develop skills and knowledge necessary to become full and effective participants in supporting student learning.
 - 3) We must develop a campus “culture of evidence” and “culture of innovation” that will support and sustain implementation of a full assessment of student learning both among faculty and staff. We need to:
 - a. Build assessment into regular assignments and weave it seamlessly into co-curricular learning experiences so that is seen as valuable by students yet does not substantially increase workload for faculty and staff.
 - b. Demonstrate to faculty that well articulated outcomes provide a road map for students and enhance learning.
 - c. Determine the proper structure for sustaining a culture of innovation in learning and assessment at a small university.

3. What specific goals and benefits do you want to accomplish through the Academy?

As stated above, Drake needs to expand and systematize assessment of the Drake Curriculum, develop better integration of Student Life staff members as partners in supporting the student-learning experience, and develop cultures of assessment and innovation. Drake’s ultimate need is to enhance student learning through effectively planning a sequence of learning experiences that motivate students to achieve these key mission outcomes: meaningful personal lives, professional accomplishments, responsible global citizenship, collaborative learning, and the integration of their liberal arts and professional studies. Through HLC Academy participation Drake hopes to develop a model of ongoing assessment and feedback that can be used to guide development of curricular and co-curricular learning.

To achieve our goals, we have identified three specific action steps related to three Drake Curriculum initiatives that will serve as the core of our work with the Assessment Academy. In spring 2006 the Drake University Curriculum Committee and the Faculty Senate approved revisions in the Critical Thinking, Engaged Citizen, and Senior Capstone portions of the Drake Curriculum. At the same time our Center for Global Citizenship received a grant to revise a number of courses that add ethical dimensions to global citizenship courses. Implementation of these changes must be accompanied by regular assessment that provides feedback on effectiveness with which learning outcomes are being achieved.

Thus, our action steps (noting specific goals) are to:

- 1) Develop a process for assessing critical thinking – understood as rational argumentation – across a variety of courses in the Drake Curriculum. Our tentative plan is to develop a common rubric that can then be applied to a random selection of student projects and papers. But we also wish to explore the possibility of portfolios or of special critical thinking exercises carried out in the senior year. Timeline: Begin implementation in the first year of the academy.
- 2) Develop an instrument(s) to assess the impact of a Sophomore-Year Experience focused on Engaged Citizenship. We are transforming a category in our curriculum from lecture-based introductory level courses into highly interactive inquiry-based courses at the sophomore level. At the same time, a number of courses will add an ethical component and some will add experiential learning. The courses in general will need to demonstrate that they meet these outcomes:

“Drake students learn to participate effectively in democratic processes...In a sophomore level course, students have the opportunity to bring diverse disciplines to bear in further developing the skills, knowledge, and dispositions that will lead them to be active stewards working for the common good of local, national, and global communities. This requirement is fulfilled through coursework that challenges students to critically reflect upon the social, economic or political institutions and issues that shape the choices they face as citizens. Instructors will provide students with opportunities to model democratic practices or public engagement through participatory activities organized in the classroom and/or community.”

These curricular outcomes will be integrated with Student Life programming in residence halls and other co-curricular programming each spring that will center on the key concept of global citizenship. The Academy team will need to develop methods of assessment that capture such qualitative outcomes as inclination for engaged citizenship and active stewardship and that measure this learning in experiences that occur outside the classroom as well as in the newly developed courses. We wish to determine whether students will integrate the knowledge in the way that is intended. Timeline: Begin implementation in the second year of the academy.

- 3) Departments have been charged to incorporate into the senior capstones a summation of both the Drake Curriculum experience and the major experience. Major programs are required to provide seniors with a culminating experience that not only marks their ability to apply disciplinary knowledge but that also *“intentionally addresses three elements: experiential learning, reflection, and the integration of general education abilities with disciplinary knowledge and skills.”* We will be exploring models of assessment that can identify the use of the skills taught in the Drake Curriculum at the level of the senior capstone. Timeline: begin implementation in the third year of the academy.

These specific action steps will contribute to development of a long-term plan for regular assessment of Drake Curriculum learning outcomes in the. The Drake Curriculum Analysis and Planning Committee, which will begin operation in fall 2006, has been charged with developing the overall plan to assess the key outcomes of the Drake Curriculum. By tying curricular and co-curricular activities in assessment, we hope to encourage constituents to think more integratively about outcomes. The processes and products related to development of the Drake Curriculum assessment plan will provide model assessment practices for all programs at the University. We also hope that our plan can serve as a model for other complex institutions – i.e. masters level institutions that have several colleges and schools.

4. How do you perceive your goals and desired results will contribute to student learning?

All of our goals and desired results focus on better preparing ourselves to use assessment to improve the Drake student learning experience. Through our work with the Academy we will be positioned to develop and implement assessment that will allow us continually to monitor the extent to which students are achieving our stated learning goals, and thus to monitor the quality of the Drake student learning experience.

Drake will use assessment data gathered with models developed with the Academy to propose and monitor curriculum revisions that effectively accomplish key mission related learning outcomes.

- 1) Our work with the Assessment Academy will be used primarily to improve student achievement related to the learning outcomes drawn from our mission explication. We will particularly assess those outcomes that state that Drake graduates will:
 - a. Think critically with an ability to conduct a reasoned analysis and evaluation of arguments, as well as to raise ethical questions that lead beyond factual knowledge to informed choices.
 - b. Understand the impact that our nation and its cultures have on the larger global community.
 - c. Engage in strategies to promote inter-cultural communication and conflict resolution.
 - d. Assume responsibility for the common good of local, national, and global communities.
 - e. Fulfill their responsibilities as citizens in a participatory democracy.
- 2) The assessment data we gather will help us judge whether our blend of curricular and co-curricular programming actually results in an effective learning experience for our students. The Drake Curriculum and Analysis Committee is charged to use the data to propose Drake Curriculum revisions and improvements, as appropriate, to the University Curriculum Committee.
- 3) The data will enable us to better sequence learning experiences to build during the four years.

Thus, improved assessment will result in data that will allow continuous improvement of programs. Specifically, we will be able to improve our current initiatives in critical thinking, engaged citizenship, and in integrating general education outcomes into the senior capstones of our majors.

Commitment, Leadership, and Capacity

5. What evidence demonstrates your commitment to and capacity for assessment of student learning? (Include here things such as evidence of presidential and academic commitment to full participation plans for involving the people and groups to accomplish your goals, financial and other resource support, inclusion of the broader institutional community.)

The President and Provost have been intimately involved in the self-study process and efforts to improve the assessment of student learning at Drake University. With regard to the self-study, President Maxwell serves on the Self-Study Steering Committee and chairs the Criterion One Committee. Shortly after arriving eight years ago, President Maxwell led the effort to revise the University Mission statement. Drawing upon suggestions derived at open meetings from faculty and staff members, he worked closely with the Provost and Dean of Arts and Sciences to prepare a Mission Explication that relates the mission to the learning goals in the curriculum and to co-curricular activities in the University

Provost Ron Troyer has been at Drake University for 26 years and chairs both the Self-Study Steering Committee and the Criterion 2 Committee. He served as co-chair of the group that developed the Drake Curriculum, has provided funding for summer faculty workshops to strengthen teaching, and has worked with the Associate Provost to develop the Drake Student Survey and to support Drake's participation in NSSE since 2000.

The Drake University team will consist of Ron Troyer (Provost), John Burney (Dean of Arts and Sciences and Professor of History), Lon Larson (Professor of Pharmacy and Director of the Drake Curriculum), Melissa Sturm-Smith (Assistant Dean of Students), Kathleen Richardson (Assistant Professor of Journalism) Mark Vitha (Associate professor of Chemistry), and Bruce Gilbert (Associate Professor of Librarianship). It is likely that a faculty member from either the School of Education or the College of Business and Public Administration will be added to the team.

Financial support will be provided from both an endowed faculty development fund and the Provost's operating budget. The Associate Provost (and Director of Institutional Research) will provide support on campus as members of the Academy Team work with academic units.

Continued involvement of the entire campus community is essential to the success of our Academy proposal. Full university participation has characterized our progress on assessment thus far. For instance, discussion for the 2005 explication of mission outcomes was initiated at a planning retreat involving 60 faculty, staff, and students, discussed in draft form at open forums, and the final draft was specifically approved by the Student Senate, All-Staff Council, Faculty Senate, and Board of Trustees.

Broad-based involvement for our next steps will be achieved in a variety of ways. First, the Drake HLC Academy team spans Student Life and the academic division, including faculty members from several colleges and schools within the University, and from the University Curriculum Committee. Second, team members will provide regular reports to and work with the University Curriculum Committee and the Council of Deans. Third, Drake University has long sponsored faculty and staff development workshops during the summer. New workshops designed to involve key faculty members and develop the assessment of student learning related to the HLC Academy Plan will be organized each summer. Finally, the team will make presentations at a variety of professional meetings about the initiatives and efforts at Drake University. This includes but is not limited to the Higher Learning Commission Annual Meeting and the Associated New American Colleges Summer Institute.

Competing Priorities

6. What other major institutional initiatives, pressing issues, current circumstances, or other priorities might interfere with your intended goals for and full participation in the Academy?

It requires some imagination to identify developments that might interfere with our goals and full participation in the Academy. The University has combined the self-study process with strategic planning for the past two years and recently has committed to intensifying the effort during the next five years. This is a commitment by the Board of Trustees, the President, faculty and staff members.

In light of this strong institutional commitment, the one imaginable but unexpected scenario is a change in key University personnel. However, with so many key personnel strongly committed to the project, we have been able to clearly state our outcomes in mission and strategic planning documents and institutionalized it in the charge to the Drake Curriculum Analysis and Planning Committee. We have tried honestly to consider other possibilities that could affect our participation, and have come

up only with the unlikely possibilities such as development of a financial crisis. Since enrollment has been stable for a number of years and the endowment is growing, such a scenario seems unlikely.

Drake has articulated strategic goals and pursued them consistently since our major all-university program review in 2000. Those goals include academic excellence, financial strength, retention of quality faculty and staff, diversity, and improved communication with the University's constituencies. Our major strategic efforts will only be enhanced by the development of an effective system to assess student learning in the Drake Curriculum and feed that information back into continuous improvement of our programs.

Conclusion

Drake University will contribute to the Academy for the Assessment of Student Learning our experience in developing mission driven learning outcomes and our ability to cross the lines between liberal arts and professional studies. The Academy will provide Drake with the tools to design direct assessment of student learning at the beginning of a significant general education revision and help us to link academic and student life assessment. The timing is right for Drake University to make a significant contribution to the development of an assessment program that will contribute to a culture of evidence on campus and provide models for other comprehensive universities.