The Provost’s Advisory Group on the SUNY Assessment Initiative included individuals reflecting the perspectives of the System office, faculty, assessment coordinators, and chief academic officers. The group was charged by the System Provost as follows:

The SUNY Board of Trustees, under its Reengineering SUNY initiative, is seeking to streamline and simplify functions and processes throughout the State University. Given this context, the expectations of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, and the recent resolutions adopted by the University Faculty Senate and the Faculty Council of Community Colleges, the Provost’s Advisory Group shall advise the University Provost on ways in which the SUNY Assessment Initiative could be streamlined. Where appropriate, the group shall make specific recommendations with respect to Trustee policy that could facilitate such streamlining.

In addressing the charge, the Advisory Group considered the need, effectiveness, cost, challenges, and ways there might be streamlining for a number of issues related to the current requirements or components of the SUNY Assessment Initiative.

The results of the deliberations are presented below in three parts. First, a number of prefatory notes to provide the context are offered. Second, a set of design principles are outlined, developed to guide the creation of recommendations for streamlining in the SUNY Assessment Initiative. Last, those principles are applied to recommendations on five issues reflecting the current implementation of the SUNY Assessment Initiative.

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Preface

It is important to note that we took up questions of assessment in the context of the updated external accreditation environment in which all campuses function. While it is recognized that institutional quality and effectiveness are measured, in part, by student learning and, in part, by the quality of the institutional learning environment, the focus here was on the assessment of student learning outcomes. The Advisory Group encourages SUNY to broaden its assessment initiative to include, in addition to the assessment of student learning, the assessment of the institutional learning environment (institutional effectiveness).

In considering questions of assessment, the Advisory Group recognizes that sustainable processes for ongoing academic improvement are responsibilities of faculty and staff, of campuses, and of the larger system. These responsibilities are not limited to external accreditation (but are critically defined by that). These responsibilities are addressed in the
context of BOTH campus and system mission. Further, while each SUNY campus configures the responsibility for assessment in ways that are unique to the roles and resources of that campus, it is essential for each campus to have a clear delineation of assessment responsibility as a member of the SUNY System.

The Advisory Group also specifically reiterates and reaffirms the elements of the 1998 Report of the Provost’s Advisory Task Force on the Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes, namely that the purpose of assessment is for excellence and improvement in programs, pedagogy and student learning, not for the evaluation or comparison of persons, programs, or institutions.

Design Principles

In addressing the charge, the Advisory Group identified a set of design principles to use in developing ways in which the SUNY Assessment Initiative could be streamlined. These design principles are presented below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Design Principle #1:</th>
<th>System should play primarily a facilitative rather than a regulatory role—serving as a resource to assist campuses in designing and achieving their assessment goals. With much appreciation for the leadership over the last decade, campuses are now at a point where they can, and must, take over specific responsibilities for the design, implementation, and review of assessment activities that support their mission and context and that address their accreditation needs.</th>
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<tr>
<td>Design Principle #2:</td>
<td>The ownership of assessment by faculty and campus leadership is critical. Assessment must be meaningful to disciplines and programs, relevant to teaching and learning, and contribute to educational excellence.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Design Principle #3:</td>
<td>Meaningful benefits of engaging in assessment should be more readily apparent than they currently are, and resources should be committed to the recommendations that emerge from assessment results.</td>
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</table>
Design Principle #4: **The creation of SUNY Gen Ed requirements marked a significant advance in defining general education across the SUNY system.** The implementation of these requirements and the assessment of the attainment of the desired learning outcomes have proved challenging. The implementation of these requirements have created instructional and staffing issues on campus that have compromised educational quality, and have also inhibited student transfer and inter-campus mobility in a manner at odds with the intention. Further, the system-driven uniformity has constrained effective program development, and generated little campus engagement in the process of assessment to help reach the Gen Ed goals. It is time to streamline the General Education requirements.

Design Principle #5: **The requirements of external accreditation have changed considerably over the past decade, so that assessment required now by external accreditors documents substantive and meaningful adherence to standards of continuous quality assurance.** Where SUNY was once a vanguard in assessment, current SUNY assessment processes now largely duplicate these external accreditation requirements.

Design Principle #6: **An effective assessment process should reflect the diversity of campuses, their missions, their needs, and their constraints, within the overall mission of the State University of New York.**

**Recommendations for Streamlining the SUNY Assessment Initiative**

The Advisory Group applied the design principles presented above to how streamlining might be accomplished for five issues concerning the current SUNY Assessment Initiative. The deliberations in this resulted in the following recommendations:

1. **Recommend that the System Provost distribute the draft Design Principles generated by the Advisory Group for stakeholder comment and input.**

**Issue #1: (Campus-based Assessment)** Currently, to implement Trustee policy on assessment, the Provost asks campuses to develop and implement multi-year plans for assessing and enhancing student outcomes and programs in general education, the campus
academic environment (using NSSE and CCSSE) and the undergraduate major. This requirement is consistent with (though not identical to) the assessment expectations of the Regents, Middle States and programmatic accrediting agencies (e.g., NCATE, ABET).

Recommended Actions

2. Recommend that the System Provost charge an advisory group to draft for Board of Trustees consideration an amendment to the Board 2004 resolution that would eliminate duplication of SUNY requirements and procedures in assessment and develop an updated system-wide assessment role. The resulting draft would be distributed for stakeholder comment and input.

3. Recommend that the System Provost commission the re-design of the SUNY Assessment Initiative to reflect the Design Principles presented by this Advisory Group. Include in the redesign process an evaluation of how SUNY resources can be best allocated for campus-based assessment purposes.

Observations:

A. For SUNY’s facilitative role, one possibility would be for SUNY to provide opportunities for campuses to draw on the exemplars/best practices/success stories of other campuses. Ideas for other facilitative roles should be further developed. For instance,
   a. it would be helpful to convene discussions within disciplines, bringing together faculty from multiple campuses to share ideas about assessment in their major.

B. Areas of campus and sector diversity that need to be addressed across the system include:
   a. Use of CCSSE continues to present problems for the CC sector that need to be addressed.
   b. For assessment of major, the current guidelines may be out of line with the realities of the Community Colleges.

Issue #2: (GEAR Review and Approval) Currently, to implement Trustee policy for Strengthened Campus Based Assessment (SCBA), the Provost appoints the General Education Assessment Review (GEAR) Group, which:
   • advises the Provost on general education assessment, including acceptable “externally referenced” measures for the three SCBA student learning outcome areas (critical thinking, math and writing) and the appropriate uses of approved measures;
   • sets procedural and technical standards for campuses’ general education plans and uses of SCBA measures;
• reviews campuses’ general education assessment plans on a three-year cycle and advises the Provost on their approval (or the need for additional information or revision); and
• requests campuses’ Closing the Loop (CTL) reports on a three-year cycle and provides technical assistance to campuses.

Recommended Actions

4. Recommend that the System Provost consider ways to streamline the implementation of the SUNY Gen Ed requirements, as follows:

   a. A “GEAR” of some kind would be helpful in providing guidance and feedback, but would need to be re-configured to conform to the Design Principles presented here.

   b. This new group should not be restricted to Gen Ed, but would address assessment more broadly, as an assessment resource.

   c. This assessment resource group would transform into a more consultative body rather than serving to enforce compliance. This would include:
      i. Creating forms available to campuses as self-administered checklists, and
      ii. Providing feedback on request (such as on “Closing The Loop” reports)
      iii. Providing consultation on the interpretation of assessment requirements

   d. The functions of this assessment resource group must be supported by System. The funding of this body from central and/or campus resources should be discussed further.

Issue #3: (Reporting and Recordkeeping) Currently, for administrative and accountability purposes, the Provost asks campuses to report their schedules of completed and planned assessments in general education and the major on electronic forms and to maintain records of completed assessments for their own use and in case they are selected for a periodic audit.

Recommended Actions

5. Affirm that recording and recordkeeping is a responsibility of the campuses.

6. Recommend that recording and recordkeeping be conducted in compliance with the requirements of external accreditors.
7. Recommend that SUNY maintain a set of forms and materials that may be helpful as campuses prepare and maintain their accreditation records.

8. Recommend that campuses maintain materials and assessment calendars that can be available on request for System use.

9. Recommend the development of a list of information/documents that are needed for SUNY to meet its external reporting requirements.

Issue #4: (Contracting and Financial Support) Currently, to implement Trustee policy, the Provost provides contracting and financial support to campuses for the use of GEAR-approved SCBA measures (such as SUNY or local rubrics, ACT CAAP, CLA/CCLA pilot, NSSE and CCSSE).

Recommended Actions

10. Recommend that SUNY assist those campuses that wish to develop plans to address their needs to develop electronic assessment management systems.

11. Recommend that the purchasing power of SUNY be used whenever possible to assure that system-wide assessment needs are most economically addressed.

12. Recommend that System Administration's financial support for campuses' assessment activities be reconsidered, that the actual cost of assessment (including hidden costs) be estimated, and that sufficient resources be allocated to address these costs. Where specific funding is supplied by SUNY System Administration for campus assessment purposes, it is recommended that campuses be obligated to submit a request for funds to signify that the funds have been, or will be, used for eligible activities.

Issue #5: (Coordination) Currently, the Provost facilitates partnerships with AIRPO, Middle States, faculty governance and others to promote good practice in assessment within the University.

Recommended Actions

13. Affirm that coordination is the primary role for SUNY in facilitating campus-based assessment.

14. Recommend that SUNY strengthen its role in facilitating professional partnerships that assist campuses with expertise and examples of “what works.”
15. Recommend that SUNY continue and strengthen its presence in national policy dialogues.

\[\text{\footnotesize i Membership in the Provost’s Advisory Group on the SUNY Assessment Initiative included:}\]

Bill Baskin, Associate Provost, Purchase College
Elizabeth Bringsjord, Senior Assistant Provost, System Administration
Kathleen Ebert, Academic Assessment Chair and Professor of Mathematics and Statistics (and GEAR member), Alfred State College
Tina Good, President, Faculty Council of Community Colleges, and Faculty Coordinator for Assessment of the Major, and Associate Professor of English (and former GEAR Chair), Suffolk Community College
James Jensen, Professor and Director of Undergraduate Studies Civil, Structural and Environmental Engineering, University at Buffalo
Margaret Madden, Chief Academic Officer, SUNY Potsdam
Sean McKitrick, Assistant Provost for Institutional Research & Assessment, Binghamton University
Deborah Moeckel, Chief Academic and Student Affairs Officer, Cayuga Community College
Anne C. Myers, Chief Academic Officer, SUNY Cobleskill
Kenneth P. O’Brien, President, University Faculty Senate, and Associate Professor of History, SUNY Brockport
Kavita Pandit, Senior Vice Provost, System Administration
Susan Phillips, Chief Academic Officer, University at Albany (Chair)
Linda Sturges, Associate Professor of Mathematics and Chair of Faculty Assessment Committee, SUNY Maritime
Alalazu (Al) Ugoji, Assistant Dean, Academic Assessment & Institutional Effectiveness, Westchester Community College
Nancy Willie-Schiff, Assistant Provost, System Administration

\[\text{\footnotesize ii including but not limited to MSCHE}\]