UNIVERSITY OF ROCHESTER
Warner School of Education Assessment Plan:
Executive Summary

Mission Statement

At the Warner Graduate School of Education and Human Development, we believe that education can transform lives and make the world more just and humane. This vision informs our teaching, research and service as a research school of education.

Program Goals

PREPARE practitioners and researchers who are knowledgeable, reflective, skilled and caring educators, who can make a difference in individual lives as well as their fields, and who are leaders and agents of change;

GENERATE and disseminate knowledge leading to new understandings of education and human development, on which more effective educational policies and practices can be grounded;

COLLABORATE – across disciplines, professions and constituencies – to promote change that can significantly improve education and support positive human development.

Our diverse work in each of these domains is informed by the following underlying beliefs: the improvement of education is in pursuit of social justice; development and learning shape and are shaped by the contexts in which they occur; the complexity of educational problems requires an interdisciplinary and collaborative approach; and best practices are grounded in research and theory, just as useful theory and research are informed by practice.

Assessment at the Warner School

At the Warner School, we believe that assessment is a critical component of student learning. Courses are carefully designed formative and summative assessments specific to the learning goals set for the course. Warner programs have developed an assessment system that includes the articulation of a conceptual framework and targeted proficiencies, as well as major summative assessments of students’ achievement of these proficiencies by graduation. Assessment data are systematically collected and analyzed as part of our commitment to maintain and continue to improve the high quality of all of our programs.
Warner Assessment Principles and Practices

To ensure that Warner students are evaluated fairly, accurately, consistently, and free of bias:

- Assessment is aligned with course goals and overall program standards.
- Multiple assessments are used, at different points in courses.
- We provide multiple ways for candidates to demonstrate their proficiencies, by employing multiple forms of assessments across the program – including various kinds of performance assessments, self-evaluations, expert opinions based on long-term observations, surveys, portfolios, etc., as shown by the different types of assessment (as documented in each main program assessment system document).
- Assessment involves multiple evaluators, including a combination of internal evaluators (candidates, Warner faculty, university supervisors) and external evaluators (site-supervisors, employers) (as documented in each main program assessment system document)
- With the exception of doctoral candidates (where assessment is more individualized and holistic, and feedback is provided in detailed narrative form for each individual), each “key assessment” is evaluated using program-wide rubrics which reflect the proficiencies we have set as our targets for candidates in each program, which in turn are in line with professional, state, and institutional standards.
- Most “main assignments” in a core (i.e., required) course are also evaluated using a rubric, which is provided in advance to candidates in order to communicate the instructor’s expectations and to ensure that grading is consistent.
- Candidates are given the opportunity to redo most of their assignments to ensure that they achieve mastery.
- Each course syllabus identifies how the grade for the course will be determined, explicitly providing the “weight” assigned to specific assignments and criteria.
- As assignments are given throughout each course, the course instructor can use the information thus gathered to both (a) provide timely feedback to candidates about their progress in the course and take specific actions when needed, and (b) make immediate adjustments in his/her teaching to maximize candidates’ learning opportunities.
- Every time a course is offered, it has been our faculty’s practice to review and revise the course activities, readings and other assignments, and assessment rubrics, based on past performances.
- Final course grades of one F or two C’s will cause candidate’s withdrawal from the program.
- Once a year, each program area conducts a review of the progress if each of their doctoral candidates; candidates who are not showing good progress receive a letter from their advisor and program chair articulating the specific concerns raised as well as conditions that need to be met in order to continue in the program. Candidates who fail to meet these conditions within the specified time period are involuntarily withdrawn from the program.

Assessment Data Collection, Analysis, and Use at Warner

Assessment at the Warner school is a significant part of the culture and our routine. The majority of degrees/programs have formal assessment systems structured to be consistent with the requirements by our major professional accreditations (NCATE and CACREP) and NYS teaching and counseling certification requirements. At the core Warner’s assessment system has four main components: a conceptual framework; targeted proficiencies; how targeted proficiencies are addressed; and major summative assessments. The relatively few programs/ tracks that do not fall under an accreditation association or state certification jurisdiction and have strategies to build/maintain assessment processes utilizing models derived from these core processes.
Data Collection, Analysis, and Reporting Processes

Student Assessment Data – Formative:

• Data collection: Students’ assessment data from formative assessments taken as part of their coursework are collected by the course instructor at specific points in each course, as indicated in each course syllabus. These assessment data, however, are not collected nor recorded centrally.

• Data analysis, reporting and use: Assessment data are analyzed by the course instructor – both on an individual basis to provide feedback to each student and plan remediation if needed, and by looking at results across the class to identify trends that may suggest the need for modifications in the course design or delivery. Assessment results are promptly communicated to each student so that s/he can benefit from the feedback to inform learning. In most cases, students who do not perform satisfactorily in a formative assessment are given the opportunity to revise/redo and resubmit the assignment, so as to gain and demonstrate mastery on the content assessed.

Student Assessment Data – Major Summative Assessments:

• Data collection: Major summative assessments used to make decisions at key transition points and/or required for accreditation are either embedded in specific required courses or collected at major transition points. These assessment data are collected by the faculty member responsible for that course or decision point, and also handed in to a designated staff member in Warner’s Office of Student Services who inputs them in our unit-wide Assessment Database.

• Data analysis, reporting and use: As in the case of formative assessments, whenever a major summative assessment is part of a course, the course instructor will review the results and communicate them promptly to the student so that s/he can benefit from the feedback to inform learning and/or progress in the program. In addition, the information provided by these data is also used by the student’s advisor and other program faculty to inform the decision associated to the related transition point. Assessment data from each major summative assessment is recorded in the unit-wide Assessment Database, which has been designed to generate reports for each key assessment that summarize the scores received with respect to each rubric (reporting both the average scores and the number of students who received a specific score for each rubric); reports can be generated by academic year, cumulative over time, and for different sub-sets of students. These reports are made available to program faculty and administrators to inform their annual program review, and whenever needed for the compilation of accreditation reports; however, these reports can also be easily generated at short notice and thus can be provided to any faculty who requests them at any time.

Student Assessment Data – Alumni and Employer Surveys:

• Data collection: We have chosen to administer alumni and employer surveys every 3-5 years to ensure greater and more thoughtful responses. To ensure higher response rates, we have used a combination of electronic data collection (mostly for alumni) and mailing of the surveys (for employers).

• Data analysis, reporting and use: Electronic surveys are sent via e-mail using Survey Monkey, which then automatically provides summaries of the data similar to the reports generated by our Assessment Database (i.e., reporting both the average scores and the number of students who received a specific score for each rubric, as well as response rates). Results from mailed surveys are instead entered by a staff member in a spreadsheet designed to generate the same type of reports. Survey results, as soon as available, are distributed to program faculty and appropriate administrators. These data can be used, along with other information, to inform annual program reviews as well as to compile information for accreditation and other reports as needed.
**Unit Assessment Data – Individual Courses:**

- **Data collection:** Course syllabi are collected at the beginning of each semester. Course evaluations are collected at the end of each course using a form that is the same for all Warner courses. Currently the form is administered in hard copy to ensure a high return rate; in order to maximize the possibility of honest and unbiased responses, course evaluation forms are distributed in one of the last sessions of the course, filled in anonymously in class (but not in the presence of the instructor), and collected by a classmate who turns them in directly to the Office of Student Services. We are working towards electronic submission of course evaluations in the future, which will also involve a revised course evaluation form.

- **Data analysis, reporting and use:** At Warner, course syllabi are turned in to the Office of Student Services where they are available for review; each course syllabus is posted on the Warner Intranet so that it can be more easily accessible to all faculty and administrators. Warner course evaluation forms are copied and shared with the course instructor (after all course grades have been turned in), his/her chair, and the Associate Dean (because of the small number of students in each of our courses, so far we have not found it necessary to further compile these data on a regular basis, although we plan to do so once we move to electronic submission); each chair examines course syllabi and course evaluations as part of the yearly evaluation of the faculty they supervise, as well as to make decisions about re-hiring specific adjunct instructors.

**Unit Assessment Data – Instructional Programs:**

- **Data collection:** Course syllabi and course evaluations are collected each time a course is taught (see details above). We also use summary reports of students’ assessment data at key transition points, as generated by our assessment database. Additionally, chairs informally collect (and try to act on) feedback shared spontaneously by faculty, students and staff.

- **Data analysis, reporting and use:** So far, these data have been used to both make minor modifications in courses and assessments (mostly in response to problems identified in anecdotal feedback and course evaluations) and in the context of major program reviews initiated as a result of accreditation or new regulations from NYS requiring re-registration of specific programs. Every department holds an annual meeting where all the data listed above is examined by the faculty to identify the potential need for program changes. If a need for major program change is identified, a task force is constituted and charged to review the program and make recommendations; these recommendations will be reviewed by the appropriate school-wide committee and finally discussed and approved by the entire faculty.
How Assessment Data is Shared with Students, Faculty, and Other Stakeholders.

- Each Student has immediate access to his/her assessment data.

- The course instructor has access to each student’s assessment data collected in the course, as well as the summary produced by our database, and to the course evaluations.

- Faculty in each program have access to summaries of assessment data for all Students in the program, as well as aggregate results of alumni and employer surveys – which are provided to them at specific times, or upon request.

- The Program Chair and the Associate Dean of Graduate Studies have access to all course evaluations.

- Summaries of student assessments are shared in official program reports, as required by guidelines for program reviews.

- Summaries of student assessments in all Major Summative Assessments and course evaluations for all required courses in NCATE programs have been prepared as exhibits, and thus are accessible to accreditors and for state review.

- Other stakeholders are given access to specific sub-sets of aggregate assessment data, as appropriate.

Information Technologies Used in Assessment

Because of the different nature, sources, and use of the assessment data described so far, Warner uses a combination of databases:

- All students’ demographic information, course grades, and other key academic information reported in the transcript have to be maintained in the university-wide ISIS system – which generates transcripts and reports for the entire university.

- The Warner School has developed a school-wide database (Central 360) that allows us to store and manipulate additional data that is important for internal reporting, planning and decision-making. Prospects and admissions information, students’ programs of study, and non-salary expenses for specific departments are among the data collected and stored in this school-wide information system.

- On the occasion of our last program and re-accreditation review, we developed a unit-wide Assessment Database specifically to record and report students’ assessment data for key assessments administered at key transition points. This database allows us to enter the scores of Warner students in each rubric for each key assessment, and to create reports that aggregate and disaggregate these data by program, academic year, and type of evaluator. Part of this database is also a list of Major Summative Assessments and the courses in which they are administered (so that instructors can be alerted to the need of using these assessments and agreed-upon scoring rubrics), and the ability to generate the list of students required to take that assessment in each given course and semester. As a way to check the accuracy of the data, the database can also generate reports that list the names and program codes of students whose assessment data have been entered in the system, as well as the name and role of the evaluator(s) who provided those scores for each assessment and academic year.
Use of Assessment Data for Improvement

Assessment data are used to motivate and inform improvement at a variety of levels – that is, individual students’ academic performance, individual faculty teaching performance, individual courses/clinical practice experiences, instructional programs, and the school as a whole.

Use of Assessment Data to Make Improvements at the Individual Student Level
Data collected from a specific assessment are immediately shared with the student; given the detailed rubrics used in each of the main assessments used within courses and at key transition points, and their direct relationship with standards and/or other proficiencies targeted by the program, this information provides immediate feedback to the student – as well as the instructor – about potential deficiencies that need remediation. In particular, students who received an insufficient score in a specific assessment, or who want to improve their score, are usually allowed to revise and resubmit that assessment (following certain guidelines and limitations). As instructors review the set of assessment data collected from all students in their course, this provides valuable information to identify potential weaknesses in the design of the course and suggest ways to improve future implementations of the course.

Use of Assessment Data to Make Improvements at the Individual Instructor Level
Similarly, because course evaluation data are shared with each instructor (and his/her chair) shortly after the semester is over, these data is used to improve the future design and delivery of the course – especially when considered in conjunction with the summaries of students’ performance in the Major Summative Assessments related to the course produced by our database. As the chair and the Associate Dean also receive copies of course evaluations every semester, if they notice any problem or consistent student dissatisfaction, the chair would set up a meeting with the course instructor to discuss the problem and come up with agreed-upon possible solutions, and then monitor the implementation of these decisions through on-going discussions.

Use of Assessment Data to Make Improvements at the Course/Clinical Practice Level
As described in the previous section, student assessment data, course evaluations, and when available, additional feedback gathered through instructor-developed surveys, are used by instructors to informally evaluate the quality of their course/internship design and teaching practices and make decisions about possible changes on an on-going basis. These decisions are the prerogative of the course instructor, provided that the proposed changes still comply with the basic course goals and official course descriptions agreed upon by the program faculty. When changes in course/internship goals or in the official course/internship description seem to be called for, however, the entire program faculty need to discuss and approve the proposed changes, and these program decisions need in turn to be examined by the Warner School Academic Policy Committee (APC) to ensure school-wide consistency in meeting professional, state, and institutional standards and quality expectations.

Use of Assessment Data to Make Improvements at the Instructional Program Level
Information gained from reports of students’ assessment data at key transition points, course syllabi and course evaluations, employer and graduate surveys, as well as anecdotal feedback received from students, staff and colleagues, and observations made by faculty in the program, are all used by program faculty and chair to identify whether any minor adjustments or major changes in the programs are called for. Minor adjustments (i.e., changes in specific assessments and/or courses) can be decided and implemented with the approval of the program faculty. If major changes seem to be called for, instead, a program review is initiated by establishing a task force that will review the entire program and make recommendations for improvement; the task force recommendations are discussed first at the department/program level, then brought to the attention of the appropriate school-wide
committee (Academic Policy Committee) for review, and finally discussed and approved by the full Warner faculty.

**Use of Assessment Data to Make Improvements at the School Level**

Each administrative office within Warner routinely uses assessment data and reports to make forecasts that help with planning, and to make decisions about how to best use our limited resources. Data related to key metrics identified in our respective strategic plans are used to monitor whether we are making progress as expected towards our strategic goals, and/or if changes in the plan are called for.