The Office of Planning and Assessment reports its weekly activities and contributions toward Texas Tech University’s institutional effectiveness efforts. This week’s report will focus specifically on information provided at the LEAP Texas Annual Forum and planning preparations for the Assessment Collaborative. In addition, this week’s report also documents OPA’s first-ever launch of the Assessment Faculty Peer Review Collaborative.

LEAP Texas Annual Forum

LEAP Texas is the Texas organization of the LEAP (Liberal Education and Tomorrow’s Promise) initiative and is “a collaborative of more than 60 higher education institutions with the capacity to reach more than 750,000 students... It is a collection of institutions with common issues and shared purpose.”

LEAP Texas is committed to:
- Upholding the commitment of faculty across our various institutions— to provide a strong educational foundation for an increasingly diverse student body—one that prepares them for work and citizenship in the twenty-first century, well aligned with stated goals of employers;
- Adhering to the required Texas Core Curriculum for Higher Education, facilitating rigor and transferability, within a context of innovation;
- Responding to the increasing national focus on student learning outcomes, and
- Applying the scholarship of teaching and learning.

The work of LEAP Texas is focused on three key areas:
- Leveraging the newly redesigned Texas Core Curriculum for Higher Education (largely informed by the LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes) for the overall improvement in undergraduate education.
- Creating a capacity for large-scale, inter-institutional collaboration in robust and authentic assessment.
- Embedding high-impact practices in the undergraduate curriculum.

A representative from OPA attended the most recent LEAP Texas Annual Forum held at UTSA on February 22-23. Because of Texas Tech’s commitment to institutional effectiveness, the following information items are relevant to the ongoing IE work within OPA.

The LEAP Challenge

The forum began with a keynote presentation from Dr. Carol Geary Schneider, President of the
Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U). This dynamic presentation focused significantly on the role of liberal education throughout the academy. She addressed the two dominant narratives for administrators and assessment professionals about student success. First, student success is defined too narrowly as persistence and earned student credit hours. Second, student success is defined in terms of competencies needed for a volatile and complex world. LEAP promotes the latter initiative through a specific framework:

- **The goal** - students practice and achievement of essential learning outcomes;
- **The means** - students work on problems, questions, projects, high-impact practices, and staged intentionality across the curriculum, and
- **Students' signature work** - students work on projects and problems that matter to them AND beyond the academy.

Speaking more broadly, Dr. Schneider spoke to the three purposes of higher education from the perspective of AAC&U:

1. Education is for the fuller realization of democracy in every phase of living;
2. Education is directly and explicitly for international understanding and cooperation, and
3. Education is for the application of creative imagination and trained intelligence to the solution of social problems and the administration of public affairs.

The challenge, according to Dr. Schneider is, “Changing our programs into ‘guided learning pathways’ that are consciously and collaboratively designed to help students practice, achieve, and demonstrate through assignments and their signature work projects that they have achieved the essential learning outcomes AND are prepared to tackle those unscripted problems that are the key to career, community, and personal success.” The concept of *guided pathways* may be an emerging concept for many in higher education. Guided pathways can be conceptualized as a six part framework:

1. Define and map the essential learning outcome
2. Sequence programs, courses, and assignments to guide persistence and learning
3. High touch/ high tech supports, on ramps, and systems
4. Build high impact practices into the pathways
5. Make applied learning projects expected
6. Authentic assessments

Dr. Kate McConnell, the Senior Director of Research and Assessment for AAC&U also spoke at LEAP Texas, but addressed the assessment activity of LEAP initiatives more specifically. Dr. McConnell’s message was not to take away from the importance of accreditation compliance, but was insistent that the meaning of assessment be protected. Compliance may be an impetus for change, but cannot sustain it. To ensure that assessment is fully embraced by the institution it must be driven by a value that is shared by all: student success.

**OPA’s Opportunities**

The forum addressed many issues that spoke to opportunities for OPA as a department taking on greater institutional effectiveness leadership, preparing for a Monitoring Report, and striving to promote best practice assessment. For example, it was suggested that assessment offices work more collaboratively with teaching centers to position assessment as a pedagogical activity.

Rex Peebles, Assistant Commissioner for Workforce, Academic Affairs, and Research, Texas Higher
Education Coordinating Board, encouraged institutions to be prepared to move closer to more authentic, less standardized assessment for reporting to the state. Dr. McConnell also spoke repeatedly about the importance of braided-design that moves throughout the curriculum where liberal education and workforce training complement each other. And, the importance of electronic portfolios was increasingly emphasized. This authentic form of assessment not only captures signature work and the importance of co-curricular learning, but also avoids the trappings of simple pre-post testing measures. Finally, the forum was a reminder of the opportunities that exist within the Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP) to assist departments with the development of meaningful and unified student learning outcomes. Dr. McConnell also presented the following useful information:

What we (assessment professionals at large) need to do:
1. Reframe assessment as a pedagogical innovation
2. Leverage the learning sciences
3. Move beyond the mean
4. Visualize to make change
5. Model the learning

Four conditions for faculty engagement:
1. The goal of the innovation must be clearly communicated and consistent with faculty values and concerns
2. Faculty must have the opportunity to gain expertise with the innovation and explore their questions in a way that does not make inordinate demands on their time
3. Faculty should see rewards for their participation
4. Faculty must perceive an institutional commitment to provide on-going support for the innovation

3rd Annual LEAP Texas Forum / Presentations

For a full list of presentations and related PowerPoints, visit [http://leaptx.org/events/third-annual-forum/resources/](http://leaptx.org/events/third-annual-forum/resources/).

- The LEAP Challenge: Mapping Guided Learning Pathways to Deep Learning and Long-Term Student Success
- Connecting the Core Across Transfer Roundtable Session
- Inter-institutional Collaboration: Rolling up our sleeves!
- LEAP Projects in Wisconsin
- Promoting Equity in Higher Education
- Teaching, Learning, and Assessing Social Responsibility
- Texas Core Curriculum Success Stories at UTSA
- Texas and the Multi-state Collaborative
- VALUE-ing Student Learning in an Age of Accountability
OPA staff send the following invitation email to TTU faculty who currently serve on their college’s IE committee. Next week’s report will report on responses to this email.

Dear Esteemed TTU Faculty,

Since you currently serve on your college’s institutional effectiveness committee, the Office of Planning and Assessment invites you to volunteer for our first-ever Assessment Faculty Peer Review Collaborative. We would like you to evaluate assessment evidence at the degree program-level. The event will be held on Friday, March 25 in the Administration Building, Room 244. The day will be divided into two sessions: (1) Morning—8:30 a.m.-11:00 a.m. (Doughnuts and coffee will be provided.); or (2) Afternoon—1:30-4:00 p.m. (Cookies and coffee will be provided.). You are welcome to come-and-go as your schedule permits.

**Schedule**

**(Morning Session)**

8:30-9:00 – Introductions and Rubric Training

8:30-11:00 – Peer Reviews by Teams

**(Afternoon Session)**

1:30-2:00 – Introductions and Rubric Training

1:30-4:00 – Peer Reviews by Teams

**As a volunteer, what will I be expected to do?**

Approximately three faculty volunteers will be assigned a specific number of TracDat assessment plans to review. Faculty will review and evaluate academic program plans. As a member of a cross-disciplinary review team, you will be reviewing TracDat plans outside your own area. This does not require you to know those disciplines! Each team will use a rubric developed by OPA staff to evaluate the assessment plans. These rubrics reflect best practices in assessment and align seamlessly with TracDat. Reviews will be based on best assessment practices only and are not intended to replace other program review processes. Results will be communicated to degree program coordinators for each TracDat plan and will be compiled into an Executive Summary to be presented to Provost Schovanec.

**What to Bring**

You do not need to prepare anything in advance for the day of the Assessment Faculty Peer Review Collaborative. We will provide you with all of the materials you will need to review TracDat plans.

**Directions**

The Assessment Faculty Peer Review Collaborative will be held in the Administration Building, Room 244. Visitor parking is available in the R1 parking lot.
Thank you for considering this opportunity. Please let me know by Friday, March 4 if you can commit to either the morning session or afternoon session. Again, you are welcome to come-and-go as your schedule permits.

Your friend in assessment,

Jennifer