

November 26, 2021

University of New England
University Assessment Committee (UAC)
c/o Jennifer Mandel, Ph.D.

Re: Response to the 2020-2021 University Assessment Report

Dear Dr. Mandel (Jen) and members of the UAC;

The purpose of this correspondence is to provide a formal response to the UAC *Report on the Status of Assessment and Quality of Educational Effectiveness* at the University of New England (UNE) for academic year 2020-2021. The UAC's findings were delivered to a well-attended University wide meeting on November 16, 2021, which included a robust follow-up discussion between the university community and committee members. This dynamic and vibrant process illustrates the culture and practice of assessment for educational quality improvement is well embedded at UNE.

The 2020-2021 assessment report is comprehensive and thoughtfully constructed. I am pleased with the strong ongoing engagement of academic and co-curricular divisions in reporting assessment of student learning for their units. The quantification and synthesis of data which the UAC provides is invaluable, and your report details ongoing outcomes effectiveness endeavors across the University. The annual report additionally weaves insights and recommendations from prior years into current work, thereby illustrating the continuous and iterative nature of the outcomes assessment process.

There is no doubt that the pandemic continues to impact teaching, learning, and assessment of student experiences/outcomes. Your report richly captures the myriad of pandemic-related disruptions experienced by academic programs, colleges, co-curricular units, and divisions. In addition to educational challenges, your report highlights how modifications to instruction and/or assessment gave rise to unexpected opportunities, including educational creativity and instructional ingenuity. Even with this backdrop, colleges, programs, and co-curricular units continued to advance quality improvement initiatives, taking action based upon data and evidence.

The UAC's recommendations are clear, well focused and serve to advance the culture and practice of assessment across the University. Below are my responses to the final recommendations presented in your report.

Recommendation 1. I agree with this recommendation. Expanding the process of systematic assessment to co-curricular units such as Varsity Athletics, WCHP service learning, and Centers/Institutes reflects engagement of a significant proportion of the student body. Extending assessment to these student bodies reflects a balanced distribution of learning outcomes between undergraduate and graduate learners. I encourage the UAC to select and focus on one or two of these supporting units for integration into the co-curricular learning outcomes process for academic year 2021–2022.

Recommendation 2. I agree with this recommendation. The UAC provides invaluable outcomes assessment guidance to academic programs, colleges, co-curricular units, and divisions. An enhanced repository of resources and best practice guidelines affords ongoing faculty and professional staff development to support authentic and evidenced-based assessment practices.

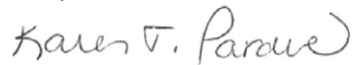
Recommendation 3. I agree with this recommendation. The UAC formally began quantifying and synthesizing assessment data in 2015–2016. Over the last seven years, the committee and associated assessment processes have continued to evolve and mature. An update to the UAC handbook, including a statement of mission and vision, is therefore appropriate and timely.

Recommendation 4. I agree with this recommendation. We have learned time and again that students are over-surveyed, as evidenced by their own self-report and retrospective identification of surveys that have been distributed. While unintentional, extensive surveys render survey fatigue and potentially diminished participation in major institutional assessments (e.g. National Survey of Student Engagement-NSSE). It is noteworthy that this current assessment report indicates significantly fewer programs reported using surveys as indirect assessment measures. I encourage the UAC to continue to coordinate with the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment (OIRA) in establishing a standard for a reasonable survey use across the University.

The appendix provides further detail addressing the processes for outcomes assessment and educational effectiveness across the five colleges and select divisions the University. These summaries highlight that one approach does not uniformly ‘work for all’ as units are highly variable in their orientation (e.g. hold disciplinary accreditation, are non-accredited, are co-curricular). The appendix narratives reveal that colleges and divisions have each developed their own tailored approaches to ensure robust procedures for data collection and analysis. Numerous programs additionally engage in national benchmarking through disciplinary examinations and standards, and use the outcomes of these assessments for educational/curricular improvement.

I want to thank the UAC for your leadership in promoting a dynamic learning outcomes assessment process at UNE. Your commitment to this work has been steadfast and enduring; and has engendered an institutional culture committed to both the process of assessment as well as continuous educational quality improvement. Sustained membership and robust participation across the colleges, programs, co-curricular units and divisions is evidence of your influence throughout the University. This work directly impacts the institutional mission promoting student success and preparing graduates to thrive in a rapidly changing world. I look forward to working with you and colleagues throughout the university to continue advancing this important endeavor.

Sincerely,



Karen T. Pardue, Ph.D, RN
Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs
University of New England