Date: March 19, 2012
To: Deans, Department Chairs, Subject Area Directors and Assessment Liaisons
From: Willard Gingerich, Provost & Vice President

Subject: Phase V of Learning Outcomes Assessment Plan for Middle States: The Periodic Review Report

As you are aware, the past several years have been devoted to creating routine and systematic assessments of student learning across curricula in accordance with guidelines stipulated by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE). Currently, both Graduate and Undergraduate level programs should be completed in the Assessment Database and moving toward approval.

Data collection for all Bachelor’s and Master’s programs should now commence and continue each semester. All Bachelor’s and Master’s level programs must be approved with data collected and entered into the Provost’s Assessment Database for all learning goals by May 14th, 2012. All Doctoral plans must be approved and entered into the Provost’s Assessment Database by May 14th, 2012. Data collection for Doctoral Programs will begin Fall 2012.

AY 2009-2010 focused primarily on the development and submission of Assessment plans for Undergraduate programs and AY 2010-2011 focused on the development and submission of Assessment plans for Graduate programs. This academic year 2011-2012, our institutional focus is on the preparation and submission of the Middle States Periodic Review Report that will document our university-wide assessment strategies, plans, data collection, and use of data. A draft of this report is expected to be circulated to the community at large by April 15, 2012, with the final version due to the Middle States Commission on Higher Education on June 1, 2012. Preparations for the report necessitate close collaboration among the Academic and Administrative units of the University. This input is coming from entities including, but not limited to, the Committee on University Effectiveness (CUE), the University Senate, the Academic Deans, Departmental Assessment Liaisons, the General Education Committee, Faculty Members and Staff.

The Purpose of Assessment

In order to meet accreditation standards for the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, an institution must demonstrate its excellence and effectiveness in a variety of ways. The most recent MSCHE standards (2002) have incorporated and emphasized the assessment of student learning as key to demonstrating an institutional commitment to educational effectiveness. Specifically, in order to meet standards for reaccreditation, we need to systematically evaluate student learning and use this data to inform curriculum planning. For many degree programs on our campus and on campuses across the country, assessment of student learning across a curriculum represents a significant change over what has been required in the past.
A second significant change is the type of evidence that Middle States and many other accrediting bodies now require: direct evidence\(^1\) of student achievement on the learning goals that the degree program faculty identify.

While accreditation makes assessment a mandate, it should be something that we embrace wholeheartedly. In our roles as educators, what can be more important than knowing what our students have learned? Although we have a strong awareness of learning at the course level, evaluating learning across the curriculum is a new focus for many programs. Assessment of what our students actually learn through our academic programs, through their Gen Ed and major sequences, provides us with valuable feedback data we can use in returning to the classroom with better focus. Further, it provides us with the confidence that we are, in fact, stimulating the learning we expect.

**MSU Requirement for Assessment of Student Learning for Degree Programs**

All degree, certificate and minor programs (both undergraduate and graduate) must submit an assessment plan including learning goals, measures, assessment tools, assessment schedule, and plan to use data for improvement.

**Undergraduate Program Deadlines and Expectations**

Data collection for at least two learning goals within approved undergraduate assessment plans began in Fall 2010. AY 2010-2011 data should now be in the Assessment Database. During the course of AY 2011-2012, all undergraduate programs must collect data for all remaining learning goals which must be submitted via the Assessment Database no later than **May 14, 2012**.

**Graduate Program Deadlines and Expectations:**

Graduate program Assessment Plans and assessment tools should now be in the Assessment Database for approval. Program directors and/or department chairpersons are continually notified on the status of their plans and the need for modification. Data collection began in Fall 2011 and will continue in Spring 2012. This data should be compiled and submitted to the Provost’s Office via the Assessment Database no later than **May 14, 2012**.

**Assessment and Five-year External Reviews**

Assessment of learning will also continue to be incorporated into the Five-year External Review Committee (FERC) process (formerly known as Visiting Committees). The following schedule moves toward a steady-state process in which the plan and its outcomes are incorporated and reviewed twice in each Five-year External Review (FERC) cycle. Departments scheduled for Five-year External Reviews in Academic Year 2011-2012 will need to include their assessment plan with instruments, data for all learning goals, and a modification plan including a schedule for proposed activities in their self-study report. Furthermore, the FERC will be expected to ask questions about the assessment of student learning, and how it will inform curriculum planning in the future. *(The Departmental*

\(^{1}\)“Student learning assessment should yield direct – clear, visible, and convincing – evidence of student learning, that is, student work products that could only be produced by direct practice of the competency the student is considered to have learned. Tangible examples of student learning, such as completed tests, assignments, projects, portfolios, licensure examinations, and field experience evaluations, are direct evidence of student learning. Indirect evidence, including retention, graduation, and placement rates and surveys of students and alumni, can be vital to understanding the teaching-learning process and student success (or lack thereof), but such information alone is insufficient evidence of student learning unless accompanied by direct evidence. Grades alone are indirect evidence, as a skeptic might claim that high grades are solely the result of lax standards. But the assignments and evaluations that form the basis for grades can be direct evidence if they are accompanied by clear evaluation criteria that have a demonstrable relationship to key learning goals.” *Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education. Eligibility Requirements and Standards for Accreditation.* Middle States Commission on Higher Education. Page 68.
Self Study Preparation Guide and the Charge to the Five-year External Review Committee documents have been revised to reflect this change. Departments scheduled for review in AY 2012-2013, must provide assessment data for all learning goals, including the discussion of modification actions and activities in response to the assessment. In AY 2013-14 and moving forward, student progress on all learning goals will be assessed, and evidence provided of its use to improve curriculum. These expectations are summarized in the table below.

**Minimum Expectations for Assessment in Five-Year External Reviews**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AY</th>
<th>Departmental self-study assessment requirements</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2011-2012</td>
<td>Assessment of all learning goals completed. Modification plan including schedule for proposed activities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2012-2013</td>
<td>Assessment of all learning goals completed with the subsequent modification actions and activities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2013-2014</td>
<td>From this year forward, departments must assess each learning goal twice in the five-year cycle, and report on modification actions and results from these actions.</td>
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**Further Assistance with Assessment Plans and Data Collection**

In an effort to continually support faculty in the assessment endeavor, my office will continue to host workshops geared toward 1) **Assessment Plan Entry/Revision**, 2) **Development of Assessment Tools(Rubrics)**, and 3) **Data Collection and Analysis**. These workshops will be offered on a rotating basis throughout Spring and Summer 2012. All sessions will be announced by e-mail and individual appointments can also be made with assessment staff by calling Ms. Irina Koroleva of our office at extension 3114.

As a reminder, all assessment plans, assessment instruments, and collected data must be entered into the MSU Assessment Database. The database is **Internet accessible and can be accessed both on and off-campus via the following link**: https://midstates-assessment.montclair.edu/programAssessment/Security/SignIn.aspx

Additional instructional resources, templates, and examples can be found at the “Assessment Circle” Blackboard Community.

Continued assistance with assessment plans and implementation is available through the Provost’s Office. Please contact Associate Provost for Academic Programs and Assessment, Dr. Joanne Coté-Bonacci, who is available for consulting appointments at your convenience. Dr. Coté-Bonacci can be reached via e-mail (bonannoj@mail.montclair.edu), by calling extension 6234, or by calling Irina Koroleva at extension 3114.