

Message from Provost Kent Fuchs

Cornell is engaged in an historic period of institutional self-examination. Part of this self-examination involves assessing how well we are educating our students. At this juncture, it is essential that we consider how to systematize the assessment of student learning across the university. In this context, “assessment” is a short-hand phrase for a four-stage process:

- **Articulate learning goals:** How do we define a successful student?
- **Align programs with goals:** How well do program or course offerings align with larger goals?
- **Collect systematic evidence:** How would we know if students meet our definition of success?
- **Use the information to improve:** How do we use what we have learned to improve the program?

In part, the call for assessment is in anticipation of Cornell’s re-accreditation through Middle States Association Commission on Higher Education in 2011. More importantly, however, a systematic program of student learning assessment will help us build upon the many ways in which our faculty and programs currently engage in self-conscious goal-setting and evaluation and extend our ability to improve student learning.

To further institutionalize assessment practices at Cornell, the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education Laura Brown and I have appointed an Assessment Project Manager, Katherine Edmondson (Assistant Dean in the College of Veterinary Medicine), and a **Core Assessment Committee** with representation from each of the seven undergraduate colleges, the Graduate School, the Law School, the College of Veterinary Medicine, the Center for Teaching Excellence, and Institutional Research & Planning. A list of Committee members and their contact information may be found at: www.cornell.edu/provost/assessment/resources.cfm. Laura Brown serves as the chair of this committee, which will not conduct assessment, but will work with colleges, programs, and faculty and under the management of Katherine Edmondson to support the spread of effective assessment practices across the entire university. More specifically, the committee is charged with:

- Communicating expectations for assessment to academic deans, directors, and department chairs, as appropriate
- Working with the colleges to develop effective assessment structures and processes at the college level
- Identifying resources and processes necessary to support assessment activities at the university level
- Reviewing reports that document the assessment cycle within majors/programs and provide constructive feedback to ensure that all units meet appropriate expectations for assessment

Assessment is a tool used by and for programs and faculty to guide their own self-improvement. Our emphasis will be on that guidance and will be aimed to achieve that end. The Core Assessment Committee reports to me through Laura Brown. You can expect to hear more from this committee about next steps in your area.