

Message from Provost Michael Kotlikoff

Teaching at Cornell is in the midst of a transformation, with faculty applying the latest research on pedagogy and using innovative technologies to excite and engage students. Consistent with President Pollack's institutional priorities, we seek to support a culture of 'educational verve' in all that we do. President Pollack has encouraged investment in new, evidence-based approaches to teaching and learning, and she has promoted the exploration of technologies that encourage students to develop critical thinking, creativity, problem-solving and teamwork skills that prepare them for the necessary work of educated global citizens. Faculty members in every college at Cornell are making both small and large shifts to do this – giving students a more active role in their own learning and building community in their classrooms.

In pursuing these aims, reflected in learning goals at the institutional level, it is essential that we consider how to systematize the assessment of student learning across the university. New approaches and corresponding shifts in the classroom require investment, both in time and resources. Based on surveys of faculty and students, the costs are worth it; the changes, transformative. In course evaluations and focus groups, students say the new approaches are improving and deepening learning and the connections they feel with their instructors, each other and with the content, often profoundly impacting the course of their lives. But our commitment to assessment extends beyond this feedback.

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?

The continuation of our emphasis on assessment is important for the future success of our students and aligns with what is expected by our accrediting body, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education. More importantly, a systematic program of assessment helps us continue to build upon the many ways in which our faculty and programs currently engage in deliberate goal-setting and evaluation and extend our ability to improve student learning.

The Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education Lisa Nishii and an Assessment Project Manager, Katherine Edmondson (Assistant Dean in the College of Veterinary Medicine), lead the **Core Assessment Committee** to further institutionalize assessment practices at Cornell. The Committee comprises representation from each of the seven undergraduate colleges, the Graduate and professional Schools, 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. Lisa Nishii serves as the chair of this committee, which does not conduct assessment, but works 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 is on that guidance, and is aimed to achieve that end. The Core Assessment Committee reports to me through Lisa Nishii. You can expect to hear more from this committee about next steps in your area, as we further institutionalize assessment efforts and demonstrate our commitment to student learning and educational verve.