Vignettes for the Guiding Principles for the Assessment of Student Learning
Vignettes for Faculty and Academic Units

This document includes the Guiding Principles for the Assessment of Student Learning and vignettes for each Guiding Principle. The vignettes show examples in which the Guiding Principles are used to guide assessment work. Note, the same vignette may have been used to demonstrate multiple principles. Also, some vignettes are similar, but have been modified to address a specific principle.

**Principle 1: Guided by mission. Assessment of student learning is guided by UNC's mission (including UNC’s vision, values, purposes, and goals) and the missions of individual programs.**

Vignette: An academic program hires a new faculty member who proposes that a new course be added to the required core courses and one of the electives will be removed. The new faculty member made the proposal because she had taught that course at her previous institution. The department holds a meeting to discuss the possible new course. During the meeting, the faculty members review the mission of the department to determine if the new course aligns with the mission of the program. The department faculty members decide that the new course doesn't align with the core mission so they decide not to add the new course.

**Principle 2: Institutionally Supported. Assessment is most effective when the university provides resources for assessment activities, such as professional development, financial support, technology, and mechanisms for sharing assessment data.**

Vignette: The Assessment Office periodically collects faculty feedback on their needs and concerns related to assessment. This feedback is used to determine programing and support for faculty. When faculty said that they were uncertain about how to design program-level assessment plans, the Assessment Office created a faculty development program to provide faculty with the knowledge and skills to design program-level assessment plans. The Assessment Office also identified faculty assessment fellows to serve as mentors and coaches to help programs with their assessment needs.

**Principle 3: Improve teaching and learning. The primary goal of assessment of student learning is for faculty and staff to improve teaching and learning at the course and program levels.**

Vignette: As part of the department's program assessment plan, an academic department has been collecting students' scores on a research paper that the students complete in a senior seminar class. The faculty members meet yearly to review and discuss the students' scores on the research papers and to decide how the program is doing in preparing students to conduct research. The faculty members have found that students consistently struggle to identify and summarize relevant literature for the literature review sections of the research paper. The program curriculum map shows that two courses, one at the 100-level and one at the 200-level, have units focused on developing students' skills to locate and summarize literature. The faculty members teaching those two courses meet and decide that more time could be devoted to developing the
literature review skills. The faculty members adjust the course content and schedules for the two courses for the following semesters. The program continues to collect and analyze student research paper in the senior seminar class. The faculty members find that after two years the first group of students who took the revised 100-level and 200-level courses take the senior seminar class. Those students' skills to identify and summarize relevant literature for the literature review sections are improved over previous students. The program successfully used program-level student data to improve student learning.

**Principle 4: Use of results. Assessment of student learning results are valuable for highlighting excellence; improving teaching and learning; making evidence-based decisions; and informing planning, policy, and resource decisions.**

Vignette: For several years, as part of the department's program assessment plan, an academic department has been collecting students' scores on a research paper that the students complete in a senior seminar class. The faculty members meet yearly to review and discuss the students' scores on the research papers and to decide how the program is doing in preparing students to conduct research. The faculty members have found that students consistently struggle to articulate a clear research question, so they created a plan to modify a couple of courses to provide a stronger emphasis on how to write a research question.

**Principle 5: Faculty/staff driven. Assessment of student learning is most effective when it is owned and driven by the faculty and staff in a program/unit.**

Vignette: Ten years ago, the previous department chair created a program-level assessment plan by adopting a plan from a similar department at another university. That department chair collected data for about 3 years and then left for a position at another university. When the new department chair started, the faculty members worked as a team to review and revise the program-level assessment plan so that it was meaningful to all of the faculty members. The faculty members now meet regularly to review assessment data.

**Principle 6: Student involvement. Students serve as a primary stakeholder in assessment of student learning. As a student-centered institution, UNC strives to find opportunities to involve students in assessment of student learning efforts.**

Vignette: For several years, as part of the department's program assessment plan, an academic department has been collecting students' scores on a research paper that the students complete in a senior seminar class. The faculty members meet yearly to review and discuss the students' scores on the research papers and to decide how the program is doing in preparing students to conduct research. The faculty members have found that students consistently struggle to articulate a clear research question, so they recently held a few focus group meetings with students. They shared the results with students and asked students to provide feedback on what the program might do to improve students' skills in articulating research questions. The students provided several recommendations and worked with the faculty to create a plan to modify a couple of courses to provide a stronger emphasis on how to write a research question.
Principle 7: Collaborative effort. Assessment is most effective as a community effort involving faculty, staff, students, administrators, and the community. Assessment fosters more systemic improvement of teaching and learning when representatives from across the educational community are involved in assessment activities.

Vignette: For several years, as part of the department's program assessment plan, an academic department has been collecting students' scores on a research paper that the students complete in a senior seminar class. The faculty members meet two times a year to review and discuss the students' scores on the research papers and to decide how the program is doing in preparing students to conduct research. The faculty members have found that students consistently struggle to articulate a clear research question, so they have recently held a few focus group meetings with students. They shared the results with students and asked students to provide feedback on what the program might do to improve students' skills in articulating research questions. The students provided several recommendations and worked with the faculty to create a plan to modify a couple of courses to provide a stronger emphasis on how to write a research question.

Principle 8: Useful and meaningful. Assessment of student learning is most effective when it focuses on issues that faculty, staff, and students find meaningful and when it produces evidence that faculty, staff, and students find useful.

Vignette: For 10 years, an academic program has administered a multiple-choice survey to seniors to determine the extent to which students have learned key knowledge related to the major. The survey was created by the entire department. The faculty members created the survey to focus on the core concepts that they think students should know by the time they graduate. The faculty members have found the results from the survey helpful in making changes to the program curriculum.

Principle 9: Manageable and sustainable. Effective assessment is manageable and sustainable when it is designed to align with available human and financial resources.

Vignette: An academic department has 3 full-time faculty members. The program recently experienced a 40% increase in enrollment and majors. Faculty members have been teaching more sections and spending more time advising with the increase in students. Normally, the faculty members have each graduating senior create a portfolio of their work and the faculty members collect and score those portfolios to determine how well the students achieved program learning outcomes. However, as enrollment has increased, the faculty members realized that their practice of collecting portfolios from every student for program assessment isn't realistic because the department has the same number of faculty who are working with a larger number of students. The faculty members realize that they can get the same information about student learning by collecting portfolio data from a sample of students. The faculty members revise their assessment plan so that they collect portfolio data from a sample of students. Their revised plan allows them to continue to collect meaningful data about student learning and also accommodate the change in resources occurring as enrollment increases.
Principle 10: Assessment is ongoing. Assessment is most effective when it is an ongoing activity that is part of the regular operations of a program/unit, rather than a sporadic endeavor.

Vignette: Ten years ago, a department created a program-level assessment plan to evaluate how well students learn in the major. The plan calls for student data to be collected and analyzed each year and for faculty to evaluate the data to determine if the major and courses need changes. The faculty members review their assessment plan at the beginning of each year and plan when they will collect, analyze, and review student data. The thoughtful and regular planning has enabled the program to identify areas where students are excelling and areas where students need additional learning opportunities. They have adjusted some course content to improve student learning and have seen an increase in student retention due to these course adjustments.

Principle 11: Use of best practices. Assessment is most effective when best practices for assessing student learning guide the work.

Vignette: Ten years ago, a department created a program-level assessment plan to evaluate how well students learn in the major. The department is undergoing a review and revision of the assessment plan as several programmatic changes have occurred over the last ten years. To begin this process they have multiple conversations about the purpose of the program and what they want their graduating seniors to know and be able to do. They review their program-level student learning outcomes revise them based on their conversations. They then review and revise their curriculum map showing in which classes and venues students develop the skills and knowledge articulated in the learning outcomes. The revision of some of the learning outcomes leads the program to develop new assessment methods to assess student learning. The faculty share their revised assessment plan with students and make some adjustments based on student input. The faculty members review their assessment plan at the beginning of each year and plan when they will collect, analyze, and review student data. The thoughtful and regular planning has enabled the program to identify areas where students are excelling and areas where students need additional learning opportunities. They have adjusted some course content to improve student learning and have seen an increase in student retention due to these course adjustments.

Principle 12: Transparent. The UNC community is committed to being transparent to internal and external stakeholders about how assessment of student learning is conducted and how the results are used.

Vignette: One of the student learning outcomes in a department is that students will be able to conduct research. For the last five years, the department has been collecting students' scores on a research paper that the students complete in a senior seminar class. The department reports the overall scores in annual and five-year review reports. The dean and provost review the reports. The faculty members in the department meet once a year to discuss students' scores on the research papers and decide if they need to change how courses are taught. The department also holds focus group meetings with students to share the results with students and to get feedback on the results from students.