



Overview

INSTITUTION:

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

PROFILE:

Western Michigan University, with its main campus located in Kalamazoo, Michigan and eight branch campuses throughout the state, offers 141 undergraduate programs, 71 graduate and 29 doctoral programs to more than 26,000 students.

CHALLENGE:

To establish an institution-wide assessment initiative to demonstrate institutional improvement and student achievement, and develop a central clearinghouse to support assessment.

SOLUTION:

WMU chose SunGard Higher Education's Enterprise Assessment Solution by Nuventive to document, demonstrate and communicate achievement of student and institutional performance goals at all levels.

Western Michigan University Deploys Enterprise Assessment Solution to Demonstrate Evidence of Continuous Improvement

"The Enterprise Assessment Solution from SunGard Higher Education and Nuventive is an exciting new way of analyzing, presenting and reviewing the progress of our assessment initiatives and it has caught the imagination of numerous faculty and staff."

-Katharine Cummings, PhD, Associate Dean of the College of Education

Western Michigan University (WMU) is a nationally recognized research university and is listed as one of the nation's top-100 public universities in U.S. News & World Report's annual ranking of American colleges and universities. Leading educational institutions like Western Michigan are increasingly expected to demonstrate the value of their programs and show continuous improvement of the institution and the achievements of its students.

In order to demonstrate this achievement and satisfy the accountability requirements set by various constituencies, WMU decided to establish an institution-wide assessment initiative that would improve their processes for managing program improvement across the extended enterprise of students, faculty and administration.

Impetus for the Initiative at WMU

Western Michigan's decision was in part initiated as a result of a review by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools in 2000. Feedback from this review indicated that although assessment was occurring in many areas of the university, there was no central clearinghouse to support the process or the use of the resulting assessment data. The Higher Learning Commission review stated that WMU needed to do more to institutionalize the assessment processes on campus.

Western Michigan turned to SunGard Higher Education to select the Enterprise Assessment Solution by Nuventive. TracDat, an enterprise planning and assessment solution is at the heart of the Nuventive Enterprise Assessment Solution and is designed to replace the difficult and often disconnected process of institutional assessment with an effective methodology that establishes a common understanding of the process and terminology and provides a basis for implementing a continuous improvement model. "TracDat was

BENEFITS:

- √ Systematic approach establishes a common understanding and language
- √ Define and align goals among all levels of the institution and external accrediting agencies
- √ Robust reporting
- √ Real time visibility into the assessment process
- √ Supporting documents and evidence linked to the plan
- √ Integrate new strategies for continuous improvement
- √ Monitor and report on progress
- √ Students demonstrate evidence of progressive learning and competency by building and managing a structured repository of artifacts
- √ Faculty and staff retrieve student artifacts and other relevant evidence to document achievement of stated learning and performance outcomes

selected because it provides the framework and structure to not only maintain the assessment plans, but also serve as an overall assessment solution for the institution,” said Katharine Cummings, PhD, Associate Dean of the College of Education. “TracDat supports a university-wide assessment strategy and it provides the flexibility for all departments in a diverse institution to use the same methodology.”

The Importance of Faculty Involvement

“Faculty involvement in assessment is essential,” continued Dr. Cummings, “but we recognized that many faculty members were not assessment experts and would benefit from a system to help them organize and manage the plans, processes, results and uses of assessment results.” Because the College of Education engages in assessment and the study of assessment processes as a natural part of their professional effort, the approach of TracDat and the related data fields were familiar to most faculty in the college. Within a few months of the introduction of TracDat on campus, all departments of the College of Education had entered their plans. Implementation across the institution was supported by the knowledge base developed by this initial group. Faculty leaders in Education were used as informal consultants to assist other departments as they began using TracDat. Annual assessment reports from colleges to the provost were developed using the standard reporting feature in TracDat, which further encouraged departmental implementation.

A focused visit from The Higher Learning Commission praised the progress that Western Michigan made in its institutional assessment and recognized the benefit of using a standard solution across the institution to support assessment. “The challenge for any institutional assessment process is the notion of sustaining the efforts even when the catalyst, such as external accreditation is gone,” said Dr. Cummings. “An important strength of TracDat is its focus on the results of assessment and the use of the data.” Each year, or in some cases each semester, the departmental assessment committees review the results of the assessments of student learning and enter their findings into TracDat. They are prompted to provide strategies for any problem areas and in the next assessment cycle can provide information on whether the proposed strategies improved the results. These outcomes can be documented in TracDat by attaching supporting evidence, such as spreadsheets, tables, or other documents including samples of student learning evidence from iWebfolio.

iWebfolio Enhances the Assessment Effort

A key component of the Enterprise Assessment Solution deployed by WMU is iWebfolio. iWebfolio, an electronic portfolio solution, is designed to help students, faculty and staff prepare, manage, reflect, share and present the results of the student’s academic career

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as well as co-curricular and personal experiences. iWebfolio was implemented on a college-by-college basis, beginning with the College of Education. iWebfolio delivers significant value to organizations that need to acquire and present evidence of continuous improvement toward institutionally defined learning and performance outcomes. It helps improve collaboration and reflection between students, faculty and staff by providing support for narrative feedback and self-assessment.

In the past year, faculty have begun to use all components of the entire Enterprise Assessment Solution. Data is entered into TracDat and then sample portfolios are attached as evidence of student performance. The Office of Institutional Effectiveness has used iWebfolio to showcase assessment activities on campus. “The Enterprise Assessment Solution from SunGard Higher Education and Nuventive is an exciting new way of analyzing, presenting and reviewing the progress of our assessment initiatives and it has caught the imagination of numerous faculty and staff”, stated Dr. Cummings.

The Nuventive Enterprise Assessment Solution is the backbone of Western Michigan University’s Center for Electronic Portfolios and Assessment (CEPA), a state-of-the-art technology center recognized for excellence in the use of a university-wide assessment system.

2/2007

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