UNIVERSITY AT ALBANY’S RESPONSE TO THE CALL FOR OUR PLAN TO CARRY OUT “STRENGTHENED CAMPUS-BASED ASSESSMENT” (SCBA)

IT IS HEREBY PROPOSED THAT THE FOLLOWING BE ADOPTED:

1. That the attached proposal be approved by the University Senate.

2. That this proposal be forwarded to the President for final campus approval.

3. That, in compliance with the February 15th deadline established by the SUNY Provost, this proposal be delivered to the GEAR group for its review.

Rationale

On January 20, 2006, our campus received “Tips for Completing Plans for Strengthened Campus Based Assessment” from GEAR (the General Education Assessment Review Group). The following background to this mandate was included as a preface to that document:

“Forced in January 2001, the General Education Assessment Review Group (GEAR) is charged to provide ‘initial and ongoing review’ for SUNY campuses’ general education (GE) assessment plans. Beginning with the 2001-02 academic year, GEAR started its review of campuses’ original GE assessment plans, as part of the process referred to as “campus-based assessment.” All 57 SUNY campuses with GE programs now have GEAR-approved campus-based assessment plans in place, and many have completed one full cycle of GE assessment (i.e., they have collected assessment data on all 12 student learning outcome areas included in the SUNY GE Requirement).

In June 2004, the SUNY Board of Trustees passed a resolution requiring changes in SUNY-wide GE assessment, resulting in a process that is referred to as ‘strengthened campus-based assessment,’ or SCBA. Under this process, campuses are expected to use externally-referenced measures of their choice to assess three learning outcome areas: Mathematics, Critical Thinking [Reasoning], and Basic Communication [Written]. Institutions are also expected to assess students’ perceptions of the campus’ academic environment, more specifically, students’ engagement in academic activities. During the Fall 2004 semester, GEAR revised
its existing guidelines for campus-based GE assessment to incorporate the provisions in the Board of Trustees’ June 2004 resolution on SCBA. University Provost Peter D. Salins approved these revised guidelines in February 2005 and sent them to campuses, asking them to change their existing GE assessment plans according to these new guidelines and submit their SCBA assessment plans to his office. These plans are due to Provost Salins’ office by February 15, 2006.”

The SCBA Timeline and the University at Albany Campus Response

GEAR convened a “kick off conference” for SCBA April 27-28, 2005 in Syracuse. At that conference the discipline-based panels on Writing, Critical Thinking and Mathematics—groups convened for the first time in February 2005—presented their draft rubrics. Representatives from ETS and ACT presented draft versions of questions they had developed for exams in design to meet SCBA and map onto the SUNY-wide learning outcomes. Representatives from Indiana University’s National Survey of Student Engagement and its partner survey, Community College Survey of Student Engagement, were in attendance to discuss these instruments, which are designed to assess the broader academic environment.

On October 5, Provost Salins notified campuses that the deadline for campus responses to SCBA had been extended from its original November 15, 2005 to February 15, 2006. He indicated that SUNY System Administration had approved a SUNY version of the Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency (CAAP) exam from ACT for assessment of Critical Thinking and Basic Communication. Information about that instrument was made available to SUNY campuses via the ACT website in late October 2005.

A revised draft of the rubric recommended by the Discipline-Based Panel on Writing was made available on October 7, 2005. A draft of the rubric recommended by the Critical Thinking Panel was provided on October 6, 2005. The final draft of the Mathematics panel was submitted September 8, 2005. On October 22 2005, the Faculty Council of Community Colleges, at its fall plenary, approved the standards and rubrics developed by the three discipline-based panels. On October 27, 2005, the Executive Committee of the University Faculty Senate passed a resolution approving the standards and rubrics.

In Fall 2005, the University at Albany’s General Education Committee and the General Education Assessment Subcommittee reviewed the materials for SCBA and recommended that faculty representatives be convened to examine the options and recommend a campus response. Two advisory groups were established, a Critical Thinking and Writing group and a Mathematics and Statistics group. The groups met in the Fall of 2005 to examine the options and advise the General Education Committee, its Assessment Subcommittee and the Undergraduate Academic Council of their recommendations. The Assessment Subcommittee suggested the groups consider the instructional feedback potential, curricular impact, student learning and motivation, and administration in their evaluation of the options.

The Critical Thinking and Writing group recommended campus-wide adoption of both the Critical Thinking rubric and the Writing rubric and their implementation into the assessment activities normally scheduled under the current campus General Education Assessment Plan. This group urged a serious reevaluation of our campus writing curriculum, particularly at the lower level, citing persistent concerns raised by University at Albany faculty about students’ preparation for college-level writing, concerns that mirror those voiced at universities nationwide. The implementation of the rubrics was viewed as a first step in more concerted attention to writing instruction and learning. The web-portfolio project planned for inclusion in the Honors College was endorsed by the group as advancing key instructional and learning benefits in writing; the group urged that this pedagogic tool be supported for incorporation more broadly in the General Education program. The following

The Mathematics and Statistics group will continue to deliberate before recommending a response. Our campus learning objectives reflect a complex array of mathematical, statistical, and logical reasoning associated with advanced mathematical skills. Moreover, the courses approved on this campus in Mathematics and Statistics are broad-based, encompassing a variety of quantitative and logical skills associated with advanced mathematical reasoning. The draft versions of the standardized exam questions that the group evaluated were judged to be remedial relative to our curriculum. As such, they would have little value for improving student learning or instruction and would certainly result in the loss of instructional time. The group raised concerns about the motivation of students to participate in an examination whose outcome was not incorporated into their final course grade. Accordingly, the group was alarmed by the loss of instructional control if an exam were required to be incorporated into the course grade simply to accommodate a formularized assessment mechanism. More information was requested regarding the flexibility in the timing and manner of the administration of the exam, and more detail about the exam itself is necessary before any final recommendation can be made.

The Vice Provost for Institutional Assessment and Diversity recommended to the General Education Committee that the campus adopt the National Survey of Student Engagement to assess the campus academic environment.

UNIVERSITY AT ALBANY’S ASSESSMENT PLAN FOR STRENGTHENED CAMPUS-BASED ASSESSMENT

1. The University at Albany learning objectives for the areas affected by Strengthened Campus Based Assessment have not changed:

   A. Basic Communication: Students will:
      1. Produce coherent texts within common college-level written forms;
      2. Demonstrate the ability to revise and improve such texts;
      3. Research a topic, develop an argument, and organize supporting details.

   B. Critical Thinking: Students will:
      1. Identify, analyze, and evaluate arguments as they occur in their own and other’s work;
      2. Develop well reasoned arguments.

   C. Mathematics: Students will demonstrate:
      1. Knowledge of concepts, terms, and symbols used to analyze data;
      2. An ability to formulate problems in abstract form amenable to mathematical, statistical, or logical analysis;
      3. An ability to perform appropriate operations to draw conclusions from data;
      4. An ability to interpret and communicate quantitative information.

2. Our process for evaluating and designating courses that fulfill campus learning objectives in these areas of our curriculum have not changed.

3. The University at Albany has chosen to adopt the SUNY-wide disciplinary rubrics to assess its learning objectives in critical thinking and writing. We will continue using course
embedded assessment in these two areas of our General Education program. We are postponing a decision on how to accommodate SCBA in the area of Mathematics and Statistics until we can preview the nationally-normed measures approved by GEAR. We will adopt the National Survey of Student Engagement to assess the campus academic environment.

In the areas of basic communication and critical thinking:

The rubrics for Basic Communication (writing) will be adopted campus wide in courses designated as satisfying our campus writing intensive requirement. All of the learning objectives reflected by the rubric will be assessed. University at Albany considers the critical thinking to be an infused competency. It is assessed in the context of our upper-level writing intensive courses; the expectation is that these courses are taken by students in their major as a capstone of their General Education program.

Beginning Fall 2006, the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) will hold workshops for instructors of writing intensive classes that introduce the rubric and develop ways of integrating and implementing it into established courses. New courses proposed for inclusion as fulfilling the campus writing intensive requirement will be advised of the rubrics and referred to CETL. The campus strongly recommends that instructors share the rubrics with students. The assessment of Basic Communication and Critical Thinking will occur as scheduled in Spring 2008. At that time we anticipate full campus adoption of the disciplinary-based rubrics.

After pre-registration in the Fall of 2007 we will sample courses that comprise roughly 25% of enrollments among the lower-level writing intensive offerings (to assess Basic Communication) and 20% of the upper-level writing intensive offerings (to assess Critical Thinking). Instructors whose student work will be evaluated as part of the assessment will meet before the semester commences; CETL will conduct training and norming sessions with this set of instructors to prepare them to implement the rubric. Instructors will submit their assessment plans in advance of the Spring 2008 semester. All members of this instructor pool will be invited to act as independent coders for each other at the end of the semester, for compensation by SUNY System Administration (similarly, we hope that System Administration compensates the University at Albany for the enhanced CETL instruction that training and norming sessions will require). If necessary, additional coders will be recruited from the broader pool of instructors of upper- and lower-level writing intensive courses and trained by CETL. At the end of the semester instructors in the assessment pool will provide examples of student work. They will also submit their assessment of the student work in light of the rubrics. Assessment coders will meet to independently score at least 20% of the student products submitted.

In the area of Mathematics and Statistics:

The Mathematics and Statistics advisory group could not recommend a campus response without additional information and evaluation, and particularly without the opportunity to review an instrument approved for SUNY-wide administration. Were we to repeat the cycle of assessment reflected in our 2002 General Education Assessment Plan, Mathematics and Statistics would be due for assessment in the 2006-2007 academic year. However, since the assessment instrument has not been decided yet, its assessment is now scheduled for the 2007-2008 (see 8 below). As we await final determination from SUNY regarding an approved nationally-normed instrument, the General Education Committee and the Mathematics and Statistics ad hoc advisory committee will continue to consider how all available options might be incorporated into our General Education Assessment Plan.
4. We expect that the adoption of the rubrics by the Faculty Council of Community Colleges and University Faculty Senate signals that these instruments can derive a standard of our student performance relative to other SUNY campuses. We will continue to employ the grade equivalents outlined in our campus General Assessment Plan.

5. Our current campus practice includes an internal assessment review of the methodologies, learning outcomes, and student perceptions of each of the assessed categories by the General Education Committee, the General Education Assessment Subcommittee, the Associate Dean for General Education and the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education. We continue the practice of sharing the results of this internal assessment with the faculty in whose courses students were assessed. As we begin our second three-year assessment cycle, our sampling procedure replaces faculty whose classes underwent assessment in the previous cycle. This serves the purpose of enlarging the conversation around implementation and assessment and engages more faculty in the development, implementation and assessment of General Education on the campus. The campus-wide implementation of the critical thinking and writing rubrics and their inclusion in the course proposal process will increase their pedagogic value beyond their implementation in scheduled assessments.

6. Institutional Research will take the lead on analyzing and reporting on the NSSE results, and will work cooperatively with the Director of Assessment, the Council on Academic Assessment, and the Undergraduate Academic Council’s General Education Assessment Subcommittee to relate NSSE findings to results emanating from the campus’s ongoing academic assessment processes. In conformance to GEAR’s suggestion, we will administer the NSSE every three years beginning in Spring 2007. Analysis of results and reports that assess the academic climate, including their relationship to academic assessment results, will be conducted over the subsequent summer and fall terms.

7. In Fall 2005, the General Education Committee and the General Education Assessment Subcommittee reported to the University at Albany’s Undergraduate Academic Council their activities in response to SCBA. In January 2006, the UAC agreed to forward the proposal reflected here to the University Senate for review and discussion before its submission to the GEAR group on behalf of SUNY System Administration. When we have received feedback we will revise the General Education Assessment Plan. Those revisions will receive full review from our governance structure.

8. The second full cycle of our General Education Assessment Plan includes a switch in the scheduled order of the U.S. Historical Perspectives area with Mathematics and Statistics:
   Fall 2005/Spring 2006: The Arts, Humanities, Natural Sciences, and Social Sciences
   Fall 2006/Spring 2007: Europe (Western Civilizations), Regions Beyond Europe (Other World Civilizations), U.S. Historical Perspectives (American History), Foreign Languages
   Fall 2007/Spring 2008: Mathematics and Statistics, Information Literacy (Information Management), Oral Discourse (Basic Communication), Writing Intensive (Basic Communication), Critical Thinking

9. In 2002, The General Education Committee reported to the Dean of Undergraduate Studies. It is now organized within the University’s governance structure and reports to the UAC. The Committee and the Council engage in regular review of the campus assessment process.