Chapter I: INTRODUCTION

Assessment has been a fundamental characteristic of Truman State University for several decades. One of the conclusions of the North Central Team Evaluation Report in 1995 was "Northeast (Truman) is a leader in the national movement toward assessment of student learning and achievement. And, it is an intensely self-regarding university that looks for ways to improve itself, including continuous improvement of its assessment programs." (p. 33) The rationale behind assessment is that the university should not only make a difference in various aspects of students' lives, but it should also be able to demonstrate that it has made a difference. This latter aspect is also important in demonstrating accountability to students, faculty, administrators, and also to Truman's external constituents: the legislature, the Coordinating Board for Higher Education, the governor's office, and the public at large.

Unfortunately, assessment is not an easy task to do well, and much of academe at large is somewhat skeptical about its legitimacy. Any one instrument has its flaws and limitations. For that reason, we at Truman believe in multiple measures and multiple instruments to look at the university experience. We use tests, surveys of current and former students, interviews of students, portfolios of student work, etc., to view the work of the university from different perspectives. Often the use of several instruments can make up for the limitations of another. The use of such multiple measures is known as triangulation (See Chapter IV, Appendix). Sometimes no certainty emerges on particular questions. But to the results of the instruments we add our personal knowledge of the university and sometimes the judgment of outsiders. Sometimes we refine our instruments in hope of getting a better picture. Ultimately, assessment does not give perfect truth but provides important evidence and thus can raise questions that may need to be addressed.

This assessment report, because of its length, is divided into three volumes. The first volume gives a broad overview of what assessment is about at Truman, how it started, and how it has progressed. Also included is a brief overview of some of the different assessment instruments used at the university.

The second volume of the report contains recent results of these assessment instruments. Many of the reports in this volume are summaries of longer reports. This volume's function is to give a brief overview of where Truman is in regard to the results of present assessment instruments. The university has recently adopted a new University Master Plan. Included are excerpts that set goals for the institution. Many of these goals can and will be assessed in various ways. The plan also sets some goals for the assessment process itself and reaffirms the importance of assessment for the institution. Finally, there is a short chapter from the general editor recommending some "agenda" items for work for the University Assessment Committee.

The third volume, by far the largest of the three, contains some of the more lengthy reports in their entirety. It also contains complete data from some of the instruments

(particularly the first year student CIRP survey, surveys of current and graduating students, alumni surveys, and a faculty survey). This document, because of its size, may not get the same level of distribution, but will still be widely available.

Those reading the chapters on particular assessment instruments will notice that while there is much information on the university as a whole, there is little on particular divisions and disciplines. The "Overview of Assessment Instruments" does indicate whether such information is available. Often this data is necessary and useful information for divisions and disciplines, but over the years the university has adopted a policy of not sharing all of each other's particular assessment data: our purpose with assessment is to improve but not through what may be emotional and perhaps unnecessary comparisons involving different groups. Comparisons may be badly flawed because of the different types of instruments involved. Such division and discipline information is provided to them directly.

One assessment committee member involved with assessment for over twenty years, views the fundamental guiding principles of assessment here at Truman to be:

1. Focus of mission--student learning.
2. Multiple measures--"triangulation."
3. Focus on improvement.
4. Assessment not to be used "punitively."
5. Assessment to be used in a "trusting" atmosphere.
6. Substantial faculty ownership of the interpretation of results.
7. Gradual implementation.
8. Integrity of the degree.
9. Demonstration of accountability.

We sincerely thank the many groups and individuals who contributed to this report.