

PEARL:
Program Excellence through Assessment,
Research and Learning

A collaborative project

Colorado State University

And the



Developed for PEARL by Jeremy Penn and Jessica Jonson
Office of Undergraduate Studies
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Updated: Fall, 2009



The University of Nebraska–Lincoln does not discriminate based on gender, age, disability, race, color, religion, marital status, veteran’s status, national or ethnic origin, or sexual orientation.

Introduction

Program Excellence through Assessment, Research, and Learning (PEARL) is an on-line environment that supports and tracks the planning and implementation of assessment processes that programs use to gather evidence about student learning. The intended goal of this process is to use the evidence in decisions regarding the improvement of our educational programs.

All of UNL's undergraduate colleges, and the Division of Student Affairs and Office of Undergraduate Studies, use the PEARL software to aggregate and report assessment results.

The following colleges and groups participate in the full PEARL cycle as shown on page 7:

- The College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources
- The College of Education and Human Sciences
- The College of Journalism and Mass Communications
- The Division of Student Affairs
- The Office of Undergraduate Studies

PEARL History

The software used by PEARL began development at Florida Atlantic University. Development of the software, called PRISM, continued under the direction of Dr. Kim Bender at Colorado State University.

In the summer of 2004 a visitation team made up of members from the College of Education and Human Sciences (CEHS), the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources (CASNR), and the Office of the Dean of Undergraduate Studies visited Colorado State University and received a demonstration of PRISM.

In 2005 Colorado State University and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln reached a partnership agreement. PRISM was brought to UNL and was named PEARL.

In the fall of 2005 undergraduate academic programs from CEHS and CASNR began using PEARL in the assessment of student learning outcomes.

The College of Journalism and Mass Communications and the Hixson-Lied College of Fine and Performing Arts joined PEARL in 2006 and completed their first full PEARL cycle in the fall of 2008.

The Division of Student Affairs joined PEARL in 2007 and will complete their first PEARL cycle in 2009.

PEARL Participants

PEARL participants are organized into 5 categories as shown in Figure 1.

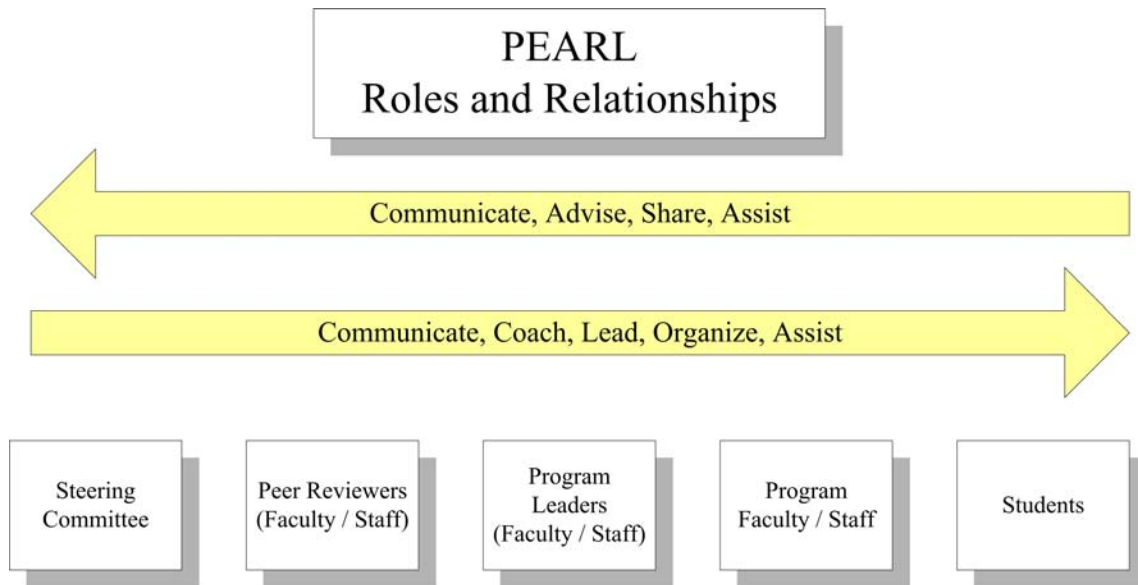


Figure 1: PEARL Roles and Relationships

The figure was intentionally drawn horizontally instead of vertically to represent PEARL’s ‘grass-roots’ approach instead of a ‘top-down’ approach.

The arrows at the top of the figure represent the relationship between each of the different roles. Moving from left to right on the diagram, the relationship requires communicating the vision for PEARL, coaching in the techniques of PEARL, leading the direction for PEARL, organizing meetings and events, and assisting in completing the work of PEARL.

Moving from right to left on the diagram the relationship requires communicating your work in PEARL, advising ways to improve PEARL, sharing your work in PEARL and assisting in completing the work of PEARL.

PEARL Steering Committee: Individuals from this group communicate with program leaders and peer reviewers, and provide the overall vision and leadership for PEARL. Primarily they use the system to track programs’ progress through the assessment process.

Peer Reviewers: The peer reviewers work closely with both the PEARL Steering Committee and the PEARL program leaders. The peer reviewers provide feedback and coaching to the program leaders on their PEARL plans, and also provide suggestions to the Steering Committee on ways to improve the PEARL process.

Program Leaders: Program leaders provide the program-level leadership needed to ensure the forward progress of the PEARL process within their program.

Program faculty or staff. Program faculty and staff have little direct interaction with the PEARL software but are still active by supporting the program leaders in identifying student learning outcomes, selecting assessment measures, gathering assessment evidence, and making program improvements.

Below are listed just a few of the individuals at UNL who have participated in PEARL:

Steering Committee Members	Peer Reviewers	Program Leaders
Kelly Dick (OUS, 2009-)	Stan Brown (HLCFPA)	John Barbuto (CASNR)
Bob Fought (HLCFPA, 2006 - 2009)	Brent Cejda (CEHS)	Lloyd Bell (CASNR)
Susan Fritz (CASNR, 2004 – 2006)	David Fowler (CEHS)	Charlyne Berens (CJMC)
Frauke Hachtmann (CJMC, 2008 -)	Shelley Fuller (HLCFPA)	Richard Bischoff (CEHS)
Laura Hardin (CASNR, 2006 - 2007)	Dann Husmann (CASNR)	Dennis Brink (CASNR)
Fayrene Hamouz (CEHS, 2004 – 2005)	David Jackson (CASNR)	Trudy Burge (CJMC)
Jessica Jonson (OUS, 2004 -)	Michael James (CEHS)	Tim Carr (CEHS)
Linda Major (DSA, 2007 -)	Julie Johnson (CEHS)	Susan Churchill (CEHS)
John Markwell (CASNR, 2007 -)	Steve Jones (CASNR)	Pat Crews (CEHS)
Nancy Mitchell (CJMC, 2006 - 2008)	Phyllis Larsen (CJMC)	Rochelle Dalla (CEHS)
Jeremy Penn (OUS, 2004 - 2009)	Luis Peon-Casanova (CJMC)	Edward Daly (CEHS)
Jim Walter (CEHS, 2004 -)	Marilyn Scheffler (CEHS)	Stephen Danielson (CASNR)
	Madhavan Soundararajan (CASNR)	Jason Ellis (CASNR)
	Betty Walter-Shea (CASNR)	Rich Endacott (HLCFPA)
	Dan Walters (CASNR)	Ed Forde (HLCFPA)
	Curt Weller (CASNR)	John Foster (CASNR)
	Bob Woody (HLCFPA)	Rhonda Fuelberth (HLCFPA)
	Linda Young (CEHS)	David Gosselin (CASNR)
	Michael Zece (CASNR)	Frauke Hachtmann (CJMC)
		Fayrene Hamouz (CEHS)
		Tiffany Heng-Moss (CASNR)
		David Jackson (CASNR)
		Julie Johnson (CEHS)
		John Lammel (CEHS)
		Bill Latta (CEHS)
		Margaret Latta (CEHS)
		John Markwell (CASNR)
		Dennis McCallister (CASNR)
		Rodney Moxley (CASNR)
		James Partridge (CASNR)
		Helen Raikes (CEHS)
		Terry Riordan (CASNR)
		Jeff Rudy (CEHS)
		Walter Schacht (CASNR)
		Marilyn Scheffler (CEHS)
		Rosalee Swartz (CASNR)
		Curtis Weller (CASNR)
		Linda Young (CEHS)

Level of Assessment

The relationship between assessment at the course, program, and institutional levels is shown in Figure 2.

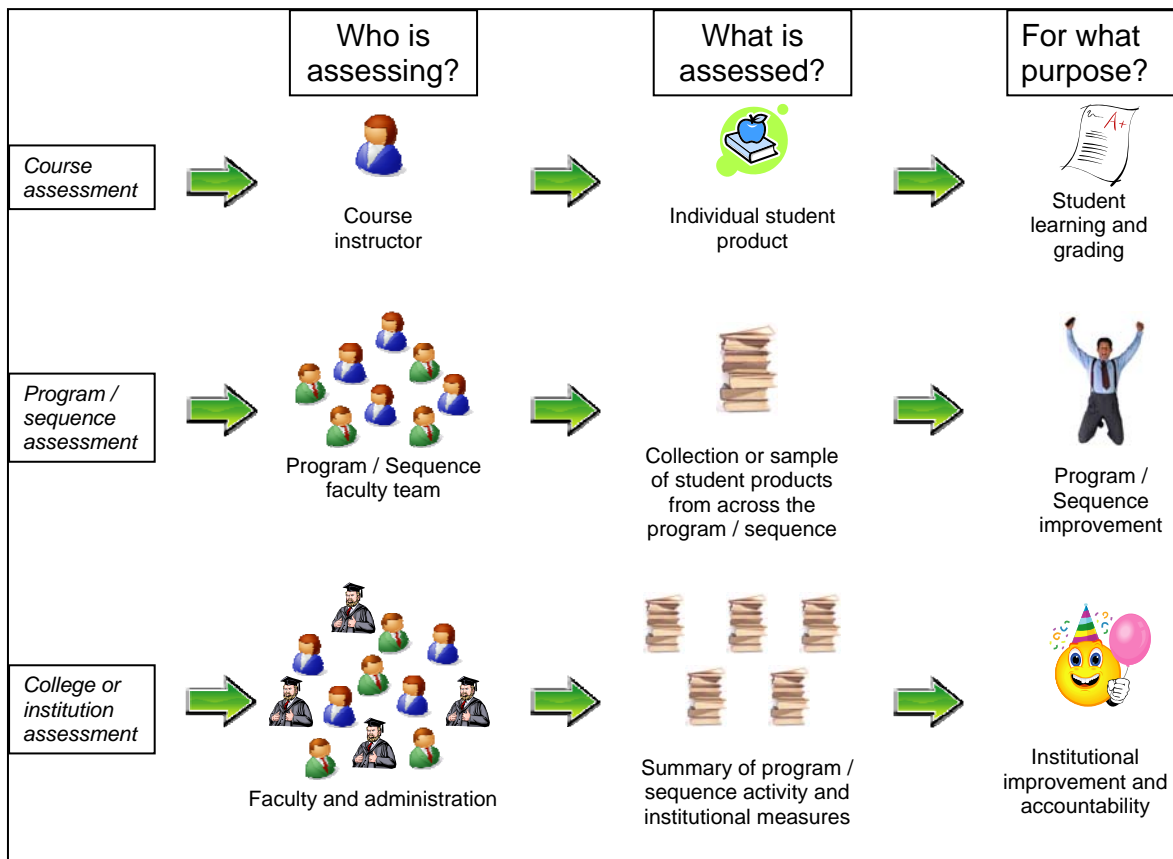


Figure 2: Course vs. Program vs. Institutional Assessment.

Each row in Figure 2 represents a different level of assessment – assessment within an individual course, within a program, or within an institution. Each column asks an important assessment question – Who is assessing? What is assessed? For what purpose?

In course assessment, a single instructor examines a student’s paper or product for the purposes of student grading and improving student learning.

In program or sequence assessment, a group of faculty members look across a program of study by collecting a sample of student products for the purpose of improving the program or sequence.

In institutional assessment, a group of faculty members and administrators examine summaries of program assessment and gather institutional-level data for the purposes of institutional improvement and accountability.

PEARL Cycle

An overview of the PEARL cycle is shown in Figure 3. The PEARL timeline is flexible and may be organized differently (e.g., a two-year cycle with reporting in May) in participating units.

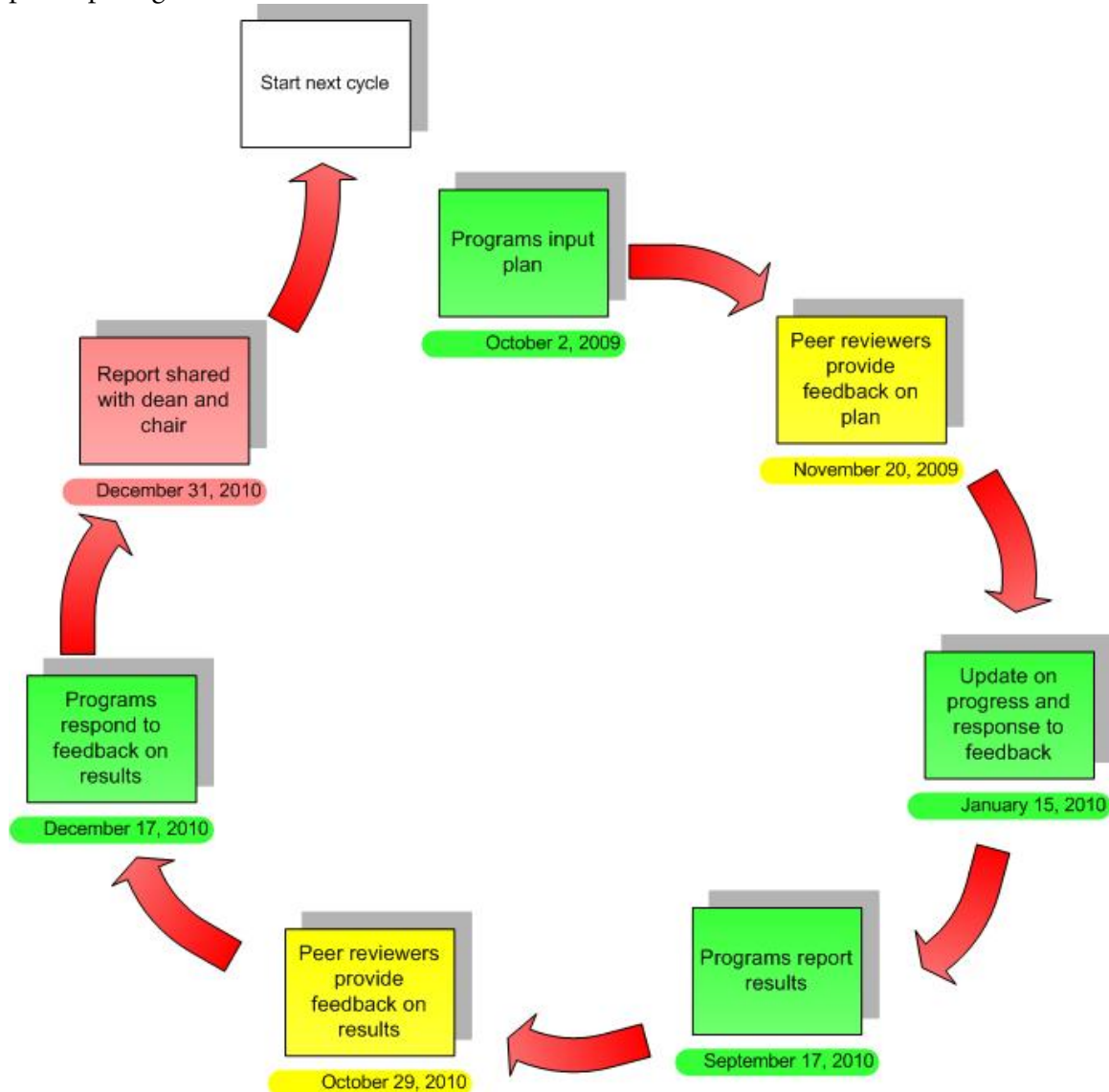


Figure 3. The PEARL cycle.

In the first step, “Identify student learning outcomes”, PEARL program leaders work together with the faculty or staff members in their program, and department chairs and accreditors as needed, to develop and identify the learning outcomes for their program. They also develop assessment measures that will be used to provide evidence on the achievement of those outcomes. Programs are asked to select about 3 student learning or development outcomes for each PEARL cycle. The program leader enters this information, called the “PEARL Plan,” into the PEARL software.

Next, the PEARL peer reviewers examine the PEARL Plan and provide coaching and feedback on ways the plan could be improved using the PEARL Rubric. The PEARL Rubric was originally developed during the PEARL pilot here at UNL (in 2005) and undergoes periodic revision and updating.

During the fall and spring semesters the program implements the plan and collects the assessment data. Programs do not need to wait for “approval” before implementing their plans, as the peer reviewers’ role is to provide coaching and suggestions for improvement, not approval.

At the end of the spring semester, programs finish their data collection and begin analyzing, interpreting, and sharing those data to identify potential program improvements.

Programs then develop their “PEARL Results” that describe their interpretations of the assessment evidence, how that evidence was shared, and changes and improvements made to the program. The program leaders enter this information into the PEARL software.

The peer reviewers then review the PEARL Results and provide coaching and feedback.

The PEARL cycle starts over again with program leaders and program faculty or staff members identifying learning outcomes and assessment measures (these can be the same as used in previous cycles if desired) and entering this information into the PEARL software.

PEARL Conference Presentations and Papers

Bender, K., & Jonson, J. L. (May, 2007). *Assessing student learning outcomes using assessment management software: Benefits, challenges, and lessons learned*. Paper presented at the 2007 USDA CSREES North Central Academic Program Section, Lincoln, NE. Hosted by the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources, UNL.

Jonson, J. L., Bender, K., Siller, T., & Mitchell, N. (April, 2007). *Use and impact of a quality enhancement system: A tale of two universities*. Paper presented at the 112th Annual Meeting of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, Chicago, IL.
[http://www.unl.edu/ous/faculty_resources/assessment/HLC_NCA_2007_\(5\).pdf](http://www.unl.edu/ous/faculty_resources/assessment/HLC_NCA_2007_(5).pdf)

Jonson, J. L., Bender, K., Siller, T., & Walter, J. (June, 2007). *Use and impact of a quality enhancement system: A tale of two universities*. Paper presented at the 47th Annual Association for Institutional Research Forum, Kansas City, MO.

Penn, J. D., Bender, K., & Mitchell, N. (January, 2008). *Using technology to build collective responsibility for improving student learning: Two universities collaborate to develop one organizational learning environment*. Paper presented at the 2008 Annual Meeting of the Association of American Colleges and Universities, Washington D.C.
<http://www.unl.edu/ous/pearl/AACU2008PennBenderMitchell.pdf>

Penn, J. D., Jonson, J. L., & Johnson, J. (April, 2008). *Developing shared criteria for peer review of program assessment plans*. Paper presented at the 113th Annual Meeting of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, Chicago, IL.

Penn, J. D., Jonson, J. L., Walter-Shea, E., & Young, L. (November, 2007). *Building faculty support for outcomes assessment through faculty development and the implementation of an online assessment management system*. Paper presented at the 2007 IUPUI Assessment Institute, Indianapolis, IN.
<http://www.unl.edu/ous/pearl/PennWalter-SheaYoung2007.pdf>

Contact Information

PEARL Steering Committee

Office of Undergraduate Studies

Dr. Jessica Jonson, Director of Institutional Assessment: (402) 472-3899, jjonson2@unl.edu

Kelly Dick, Program Assessment Coordinator: (402) 472-1905, kdick3@unl.edu

College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources

Dr. John Markwell, Associate Dean: (402) 472-2924, jmarkwell2@unl.edu

College of Education and Human Sciences

Dr. Jim Walter, Associate Dean: (402) 472-3392, lwalter1@unl.edu

College of Journalism and Mass Communications

Frauke Hachtmann, Associate Professor: (402) 472-9848, fhachtmann1@unl.edu

Division of Student Affairs

Linda Major, Assistant to the Vice Chancellor, Student Affairs: (402) 472-3755, lmajor1@unl.edu