

PEARL:  
Program Excellence through Assessment,  
Research and Learning

A collaborative project

Colorado State University  
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 Hixson-Lied College of Fine and Performing Arts  
The Office of Undergraduate Studies  
And



Developed for PEARL by Jeremy Penn and Jessica Jonson  
Office of Undergraduate Studies  
University of Nebraska-Lincoln  
Updated: Spring, 2008



---

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 the use of this evidence in decisions on how to improve our educational programs.

The current participating groups include:

- Colorado State University
- 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 Hixson-Lied College of Fine and Performing Arts
- 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, the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources 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 will complete 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.

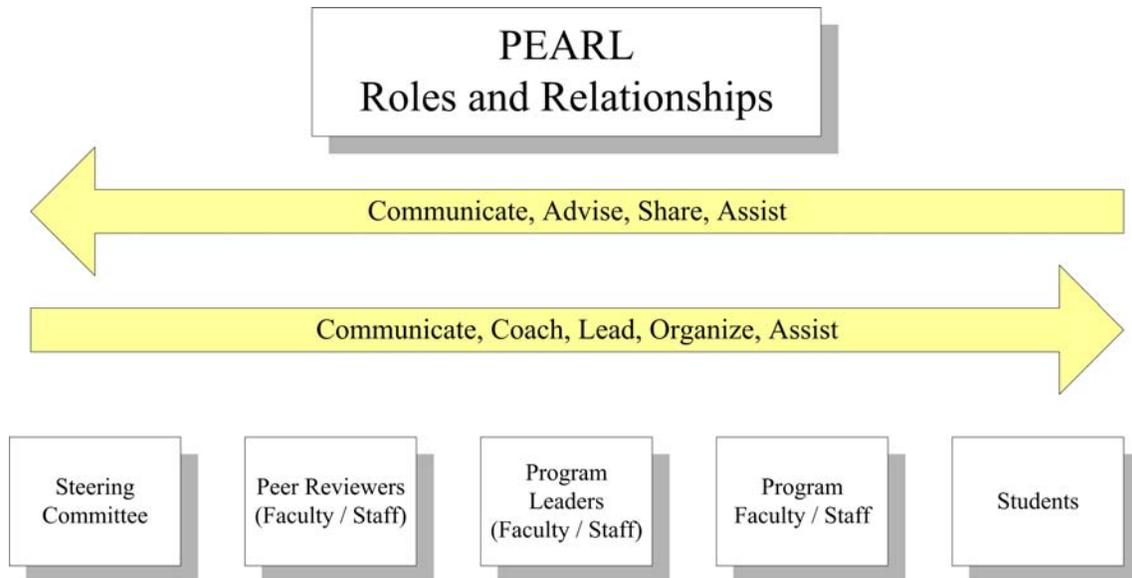


Figure 1: PEARL Roles and Relationships

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 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.

The list of persons at UNL who have participated in PEARL is shown below.

<b>Steering Committee Members</b>	<b>Peer Reviewers</b>	<b>Program Leaders</b>
Bob Fought (HLCFPA, 2006 - )	Stan Brown (HLCFPA)	John Barbuto (CASNR)
Susan Fritz (CASNR, 2004 – 2006)	Brent Cejda (CEHS)	Lloyd Bell (CASNR)
Frauke Hachtmann (CJMC, 2008 - )	David Fowler (CEHS)	Charlyne Berens (CJMC)
Laura Hardin (CASNR, 2006 - 2007)	Shelley Fuller (HLCFPA)	Richard Bischoff (CEHS)
Fayrene Hamouz (CEHS, 2004 – 2005)	Dann Husmann (CASNR)	Dennis Brink (CASNR)
Jessica Jonson (OUS, 2004 - )	David Jackson (CASNR)	Trudy Burge (CJMC)
Linda Major (DSA, 2007 - )	Michael James (CEHS)	Tim Carr (CEHS)
John Markwell (CASNR, 2007 - )	Julie Johnson (CEHS)	Susan Churchill (CEHS)
Nancy Mitchell (CJMC, 2006 - 2008)	Steve Jones (CASNR)	Pat Crews (CEHS)
Jeremy Penn (OUS, 2004 - )	Phyllis Larsen (CJMC)	Rochelle Dalla (CEHS)
Jim Walter (CEHS, 2004 - )	Luis Peon-Casanova (CJMC)	Edward Daly (CEHS)
	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 (HLCPA)
	Linda Young (CEHS)	David Gosselin (CASNR)
	Michael Zeece (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 level is shown in Figure 2.

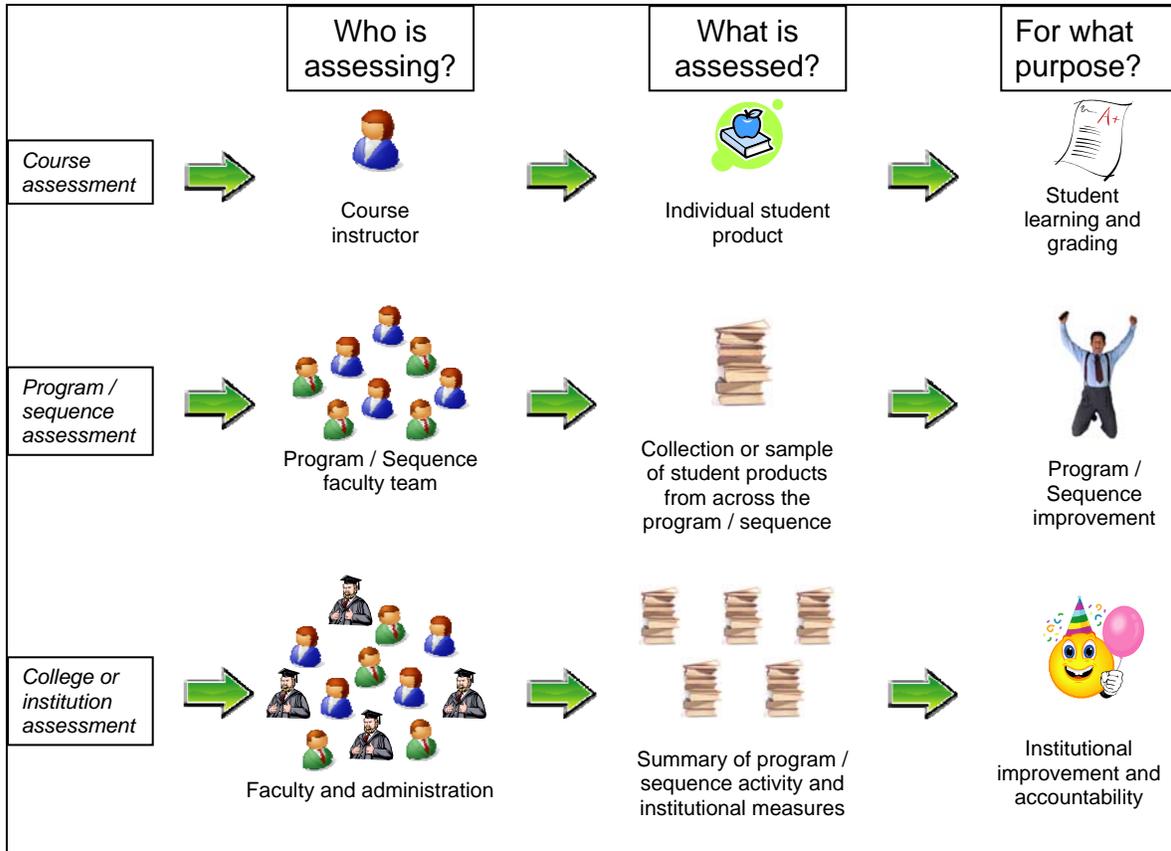


Figure 2: Course vs. Program vs. Institutional Assessment.

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.

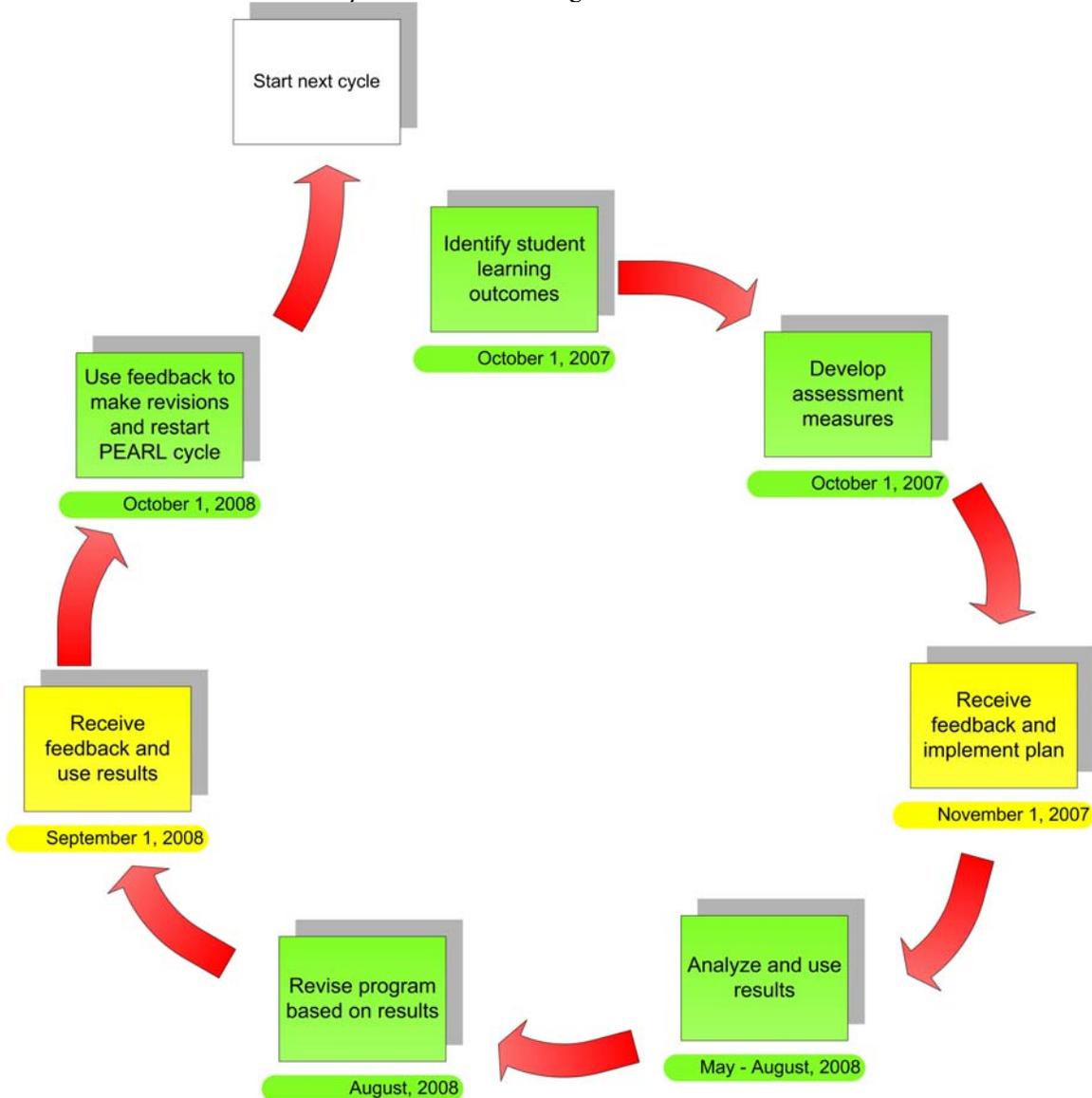


Figure 3: The PEARL cycle.

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 accreditators as needed, to develop and identify the learning outcomes for their program and 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 developed during the PEARL pilot here at UNL in 2005. The PEARL Rubric also 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 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 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.

The PEARL timeline is flexible and may be organized differently (e.g., a two-year cycle with reporting in May) in participating units.

## 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](#), University-wide assessment coordinator: (402) 472-3899,  
[jjonson2@unl.edu](mailto:jjonson2@unl.edu)

[Jeremy Penn](#), Assessment associate for PEARL: (402) 472-1905, [jpenn@unlnotes.unl.edu](mailto:jpenn@unlnotes.unl.edu)

#### *College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources*

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

#### *College of Education and Human Sciences*

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

#### *College of Journalism and Mass Communications*

[Frauke Hachtmann](#), Professor: (402) 472-9848, [fhachtmann1@unl.edu](mailto:fhachtmann1@unl.edu)

#### *Hixson-Lied College of Fine and Performing Arts*

[Dr. Bob Fought](#), Associate Dean: (402) 472-9339, [rfought1@unl.edu](mailto:rfought1@unl.edu)