

## University embraces assessment

St. Cloud State University is developing a “culture” of assessment, said Sandra Johnson, the College of Science and Engineering’s assessment director. Launched in 2004 as preparation for the university’s 2007 North Central Accreditation visit, the assessment process may be carving itself a permanent place in the university’s culture.

“We’ve found that assessment is good for us,” said Johnson, an associate professor of mathematics and a member of the Department of Mathematics since 1978.

A data-driven process for monitoring and improving student learning, assessment has taken hold across the university. A matrix that displays each college’s progress in establishing the process shows that faculty across the university are engaged in establishing the five major components of assessment: a mission statement and learning goals, criteria and outcome measures to determine if the learning goals have been met, a plan for collecting data on the learning outcomes, collecting and interpreting these data, and using the research results to make changes that improve student learning.

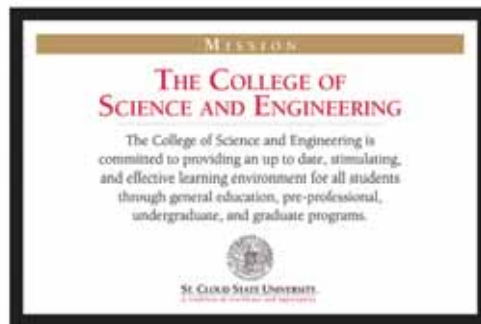
“They’ve begun operating in a data-driven mode, not just an intuitive mode,” Johnson said of faculty across the university. According to the matrix, the College of Science and Engineering has fully established four of the five major components and are working on the last component: using the research results to make changes that improve student learning. Johnson refers to this final step as “closing the loop.”

A member of each department of the College of Science and Engineering serves on the assessment committee, and Johnson said she has learned that some departments “were really good at assessment already.” She explained that this may be a result of their efforts to meet the requirements of individual agencies that accredit such departments as engineering, nursing and computer science.

“We have really wonderful people in each department who are taking the lead,” Johnson said. These leaders were able to get the process started — to “get every single program to write down what they want their students to know and be able to do,” she added.

From that first step, the journey began: “They’re all gathering data now,” Johnson said.

Not that it has been easy. For example, the amount of thinking, meeting, talking, writing, scratching out and rewriting that went into each department’s effort to develop or refine its mission statement can hardly be exaggerated, she said.



But the result is 12 succinct statements that are now displayed in poster form on the walls or hallways in each department. In addition, each department now displays its goals and learning outcomes in numerous venues, including the Web. (For more information about assessment in the College of Science and Engineering, visit [stcloudstate.edu/cose/accreditations.asp](http://stcloudstate.edu/cose/accreditations.asp))

While Johnson is highly complimentary of the college’s assessment efforts thus far, she said she is excited to begin engaging students as informed contributors to the process and to see the assessment process built into the syllabus of each course.

For more information regarding university assessment, please go online to <http://www.stcloudstate.edu/assessment/>.

