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Introduction to TracDat
at Austin College:
Getting started

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Why TracDat?

TracDat was purchased as an archive and assessment system for the college. We intentionally waited until we had completed our last Reaffirmation of Accreditation in 2009 before beginning the “roll-out.” There are numerous advantages of TracDat:

1. Previously, assessment information was sent to the Office of Institutional Research and saved on a server to which the campus community had no access. TracDat is accessible from any computer on campus (once Laura Whitfill has set up credentials).

2. Before TracDat, when staff left the college, we often lost whole repositories of information that were on personal hard drives, in paper files, etc. TracDat has a document repository that ensures that important documents are safely stored (as a pdf, Excel, doc, or rtf file). TracDat also can work with Datatel making it easier for data from Datatel to be stored and reported through TracDat.

3. Many important outcomes at the college involve efforts that cut across a range of programs. Examples include the Presidents’ Climate Commitment, the mission and the Strategic Plan, general education outcomes, and such new initiatives as “visual literacy.” TracDat enables coding of assessment information so that it can be aggregated into a report drawing from multiple reporting units.

4. We are experiencing increased pressure from our Board of Trustees as well as from staff in Institutional Enrollment and Institutional Advancement to better document outcomes of an Austin College education. While nationally, accreditation has driven much initial work in assessment, it is clear that demands for accountability, transparency, and accuracy are coming from prospective students (and their parents), donors, funding agencies, etc.
What happens next?

Karen Nelson (knelson@austincollege.edu) has been working with vice presidents and program directors to set up the basic template with the help of Error! Reference source not found. (lwhitfill@austincollege.edu). Laura has then added mission statements into each assessment unit. Karen has then added documents from the institutional research server (primarily Assessment and Evaluation Reports and Annual Planning Reports). The following presents a brief orientation to a typical TracDat reporting unit.

1. When you log into TracDat the first page you see will be your Assessment Unit. There are tabs you can click on. The General tab will have the unit name, the mission statement (if one has been provided) and the Assessment Contact. Notice that beneath the tabs is the series of steps you took to reach a current page. You can always see how you ended up where you are.

2. If you click on the Faculty/Staff tab you see those people who have been authorized by Laura Whitfill to see your material. The list will include administrators (currently Karen Nelson, Laura Whitfill, and Judy Wheaton), your vice president, your divisional dean and any other colleagues who should be able to access your information. While you can log in to TracDat from any computer on campus, like Webhopper, your unique college log-in restricts your access and restricts others from accessing your information.

3. For some programs (mostly service programs) there is an Activities tab next to the Faculty/Staff tab. This tab enables you to assign a particular activity that is part of your assessment effort. This may be especially helpful in documenting routine activities that ultimately contribute to your assessment (e.g., tracking and/or usage data). For educational programs and some others, there is a Courses tab that should list all of the courses offered by your program; these courses constitute the basis for the curriculum mapping activity.

4. The next tab is your Plan. Note that there are edit, copy and delete tabs to the right and tabs at the bottom of the page that allow you to add information or save new information. There are likely to be several “Intended outcomes” each with a shorthand
name and a lengthier statement (usually one you previously provided).

5. Most programs establish between 3 and 7 Intended Outcomes. Outcomes can be “Program Outcomes” or “Student Learning Outcomes.” While it may seem counterintuitive, outcomes are framed in the present, not the future tense. Educational programs must establish student learning outcomes (SLOs), usually one related to the content of the discipline or field and others related to general education outcomes, the mission or strategic plan of the college, stipulations of external accrediting bodies, and other initiatives. Administrative and Educational Support Services most often focus on how their work supports the mission and strategic plan of the college.

6. After Intended outcomes, the Means of Assessment tab takes you to a new page. You will see an outcome and its shorthand and longer statement. The first time you enter information, you go to the bottom of the page and click on “Add New Assessment Method.” Once you click on it, a range of options are provided as drop-downs. They have been designated “Direct” or “Indirect” because the current SACS standard is that at least one assessment method for student learning outcomes must be direct -- in that the assessment is not of a perception or evaluation by the student but a product or performance of the student. The methods listed are:
   a. Alumni/ae survey (Indirect)
   b. Course evaluation data (Indirect)
   c. Exit interview (Indirect)
   d. External program review (Indirect)
   e. Focus group (Indirect)
   f. Internal program review (Indirect)
   g. Interview data (Indirect)
   h. Juried performance (Direct)
   i. Locally developed survey data (Indirect)
   j. National survey data (Indirect)
   k. Objective test scores (Direct)
   l. Other
   m. Participation data (Indirect)
   n. Portfolio analysis (Direct)
   o. Rubric-scored assignment/performance (Direct)
   p. Tracking data (other) (Indirect or Direct)
q. Transcript analysis (Indirect)
r. Usage data (Indirect)
SACS now assumes that each outcome will be assessed over multiple years using multiple methods. There are boxes beneath the assessment category for you to explain further what you are doing, a criterion if you have one and your plan to establish a criterion if you don’t have one, and the schedule. Note there is a box checked active that indicates that this continues to be an outcome that you pursue.

7. By late fall 2011, Educational Programs will find not only their courses, but also Bulletin copy, course syllabi, and course history reports loaded into TracDat. All programs will be able to link to strategic plan goals and subgoals as assigned by vice presidents, SACS Fifth Year Review standards and requirements, etc. The goal is, by late 2012, to have the TracDat system functional and serving as a replacement for traditional Annual Planning Reports and triennial Assessment and Evaluation Reports.

8. On the original Plan page, there are also tabs for Educational Programs to related courses. The Related Courses link enables you to do curriculum mapping. If you have done curriculum mapping before, click the box to the top left of the course list and it will open up the curriculum map for every course. The task for the program is to determine for each intended outcome where the outcome is introduced, where it is reinforced and where it is assessed. There are other more sophisticated ways to do curriculum mapping. All programs have a link from the Plan page to Related Goals. The mission is always there, general education outcomes are there for all educational programs, and aspects of the strategic plan can be linked as well.

9. The Results tab enables you to provide results of your assessment. When you click on Add a Result at the bottom of the page, it asks for the date, the result, improvement made (as a result of assessment), related document, and assessment cycle. This enables you to provide a brief summary, with links to supporting documents – rubric, senior exit interview questions, longer result summaries, etc.

10. The Reports tab provides links to four different kinds of report: the assessment plan, the four-column unit assessment report, the
curriculum map and the documents list. Over time, additional kinds of report will be developed.

11. The Documents tab has much information previously stored on the Institutional Research server that is now available to you. You can also add folders and documents as needed.

Please feel free to contact Karen Nelson or Laura Whitfill for additional assistance.