

# Using Data and Outcomes Assessment to Nurture an Intentional Learning Environment

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At a technological university like WPI, many faculty might have difficulty with a phrase like “intentional learning environment.” Yet as engineers and scientists, they are used to gathering, interpreting, and using data to solve problems—including the problem of how to help students learn more effectively.

This presentation will review how WPI began using data on student performance on capstone projects twenty years ago, to improve undergraduate learning. Driven in part by the insistence of professional engineering accrediting that institutions use outcomes assessment for continuous program improvement, WPI has developed a comprehensive learning outcomes data system. Data gathered include the CIRP, EBI, and NSSE nationally-normed surveys and WPI-developed assessment tools for alumni/ae and for both course- and project-based WPI degree requirement. The widespread involvement of WPI faculty and staff in developing these tools helped significantly to create the current culture in which outcomes assessment at WPI has shifted from being the responsibility of the administration only to one shared with the faculty.

This presentation will discuss how administrators, faculty, staff, and students came to agree that the time spent in assessment is worthwhile in terms of assuring continuous improvement in teaching and learning. Specific emphasis will cover three topics:

- establishing in spring 2003 a standing academic committee to oversee outcomes assessment.
- creation of a public Web site ([www.wpi.edu/Academics/Outcomes](http://www.wpi.edu/Academics/Outcomes)) used to post the results of assessment work—including identifying weaknesses and how they were being addressed—to ensure internal and external transparency for assessment work.
- current initiatives based on outcomes data and assessment to make the WPI first-year program a more “intentional learning environment” (even though we probably would not use that phrase!)