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Resolution: USF Faculty Senate, February 18, 2004

The faculty of USF supports the Board of Governors in its desire to ensure that effective learning takes place in universities, and we are aware that no final decision has yet been made about how such learning outcomes will be measured.

However, one suggested approach is some form of standardized testing, which potentially could be used to measure the student performance of departments, disciplines, or campuses. The faculty of USF opposes any such standardized testing for the following reasons:

- There are abundant existing data on student performance. Entering, continuing, and completing a college education require assessments at every step. These assessments, which include external licensures and certifications, as well as grades in classes and on standardized exams, such as the GRE, provide a rich source of information. In addition, existing accountability measures, such as the outcomes -assessment plans required of every academic unit for SACS accreditation, could be used for this purpose without diverting much-needed resources.
- K-12 education focuses on basic academic skills and knowledge. A university education emphasizes the use of these skills to gain knowledge and understanding of specific subject matters. The more advanced the course, the more we are justified in assuming that essential skills have been mastered, and the focus is on intellectual processes, such as evaluating ideas, arguing logically, and synthesizing information. Beyond the introductory level, there is not, nor should there be, an easily-defined body of information that indisputably must be learned. A university education should be a voyage of discovery for students, in which they are exposed to challenging ideas in the classroom, lab, and library. American university education treasures diversity of ideas, innovation, and creativity, not the security of "sure things." We measure the development of these abilities in our students all the time, in their papers, research assignments, critical debate skills, and written or oral performance in their chosen fields.
- Adopting, or even experimenting with, standardized testing will require us to waste scarce resources compiling information that can never be comparable across departments and institutions, and that will have little practical value. We should use resources in the classroom, where they can be applied directly to improve learning.
- There is no demonstrated public demand for such initiatives. Two recent opinion polls (2003, Educational Testing Service; 2002, *Chronicle of Higher Education*) report very high levels of public confidence in higher education. Unless there is compelling evidence that shows existing assessment measures to be inadequate, why would it be necessary to replicate them at great cost to taxpayers?

Opposition to standardized testing does *not* represent resistance to accountability:

Thus, be it resolved that the USF Faculty Senate strongly opposes any proposed measures to institute further standardized testing at the university level, and we request that the USF administration endorse our opposition.