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REVIEW REPORT
on the
ASSESSMENT CENTRE

November, 2003

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Assessment Centre Review Committee found the Assessment Centre to be highly regarded by clients and the UCC community. Those individuals who were interviewed, or surveyed, about the Centre stressed the dedication of the Centre's staff. Also noted were the wide variety of tests that were available, the opportunity to administer exams for other educational and professional institutions, and the Centre's evaluation process in determining appropriate testing tools. The Committee also acknowledges the importance of a well functioning Assessment Centre in placing students in appropriate programs, and therefore increasing student retention rates at UCC. While the Centre is seen as operating well, there are still areas where improvements can be made.

All of the data collected pointed to the need for improvements in the area of accessibility. The Committee suggests that the institution rethink the location of the Centre and attempt to physically bring all areas of Student Services as near to one another as possible. It was also felt that using existing resources more efficiently could address some of the accessibility issues. These efficiencies could be achieved by: altering operating times, securing consistent computer lab time, subsidizing assessment fees, and improving the coordination of staff hours.

Regarding the Website, recommendations stress simplifying the site, increasing the number of links to related sites, and adding forms that can be downloaded.

The Committee notes that there are gaps in the information that is available, and to whom that information is targeted. Brochure development, further outreach, and the creation of a flowchart for students are seen as solutions to these information gaps.

Finally the lack of a learning specialist at the Centre is seen as an issue of concern. While the Committee acknowledges the high cost of such a specialist, it encourages UCC to continue to explore opportunities to add such expertise to the services offered to UCC students.

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ASSESSMENT CENTRE REVIEW
COMMITTEE MEMBERS

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CHRONOLOGY OF THE REVIEW OF THE ASSESSMENT CENTRE

The review of the Assessment Centre was launched on April 8, 2003, with a preliminary meeting between Cindy James, Assessment Centre Coordinator, Institutional Research and Planning Department Analysts, Dorys Crespin-Mueller and Michaline Novak, and Alastair Watt, Director, Institutional Research and Planning. Further meetings with Cindy James were held on April 16th and 30th to discuss program review procedures and questionnaire design.

Stakeholders in the Academic Advising Program were surveyed on the following dates:

Assessment Centre Clients:	May 5 th , 2003
UCC Departments	May 7 th , 2003

Reminders were mailed to non-responding clients and UCC Departments on May 20th. Most UCC Departments had responded by July 9th. The Office of Institutional Research attempted to contact non-responding former clients by phone from June 5th to July 2nd. Non-responding UCC Departments were contacted by e-mail on May 23rd.

The cut-off date for all responses was July 9th. Information binders were sent to members of the Assessment Centre Evaluation Committee on September 3rd and that committee met to analyze the data and form its recommendations on September 26th.

PROGRAM BACKGROUND

Following a period of decline in service, UCC chose not to replace the coordinator of assessment when he retired in the mid 1990's. The service had a low profile, was not well used and had become isolated from educational programs. For a couple of years thereafter, the service limped along, supported by a full time clerk and eventually by some part time work from professional staff.

By 1996 it had become clear that this approach was neither appropriate nor effective. Accordingly, the divisional dean struck an internal task group and engaged Service Growth Consultants to undertake an extensive review of service needs, campus opinion, and perception among users and providers of assessment services. The overall process was broadly consultative, involving feedback opportunities at several stages.

The SGC report was tabled in May 1997 and formed the basis of the redesigned Assessment Centre. Their recommendations addressed mandate, reporting relationship, management and staffing, services to clients, funding and performance measurement. Some of the changes included: establishing the Assessment Centre as a discrete unit, reporting to the Dean and with its own mission and mandate; affirming the need for professional staff with experience and training in assessment, who would provide and manage the service and who would be supported by clerical staff. The report is explicit about the need to engage professional staff who could work with faculty closely, cooperatively and with credibility in such matters as the selection of assessment tools, and the interpretation of results in the context of a given program; expertise and communication skills were key. The development of clear, consistent and confidential processes for the conduct of assessments and the sharing of results was also a priority.

These and other recommendations of the report were incorporated into a newly designed Assessment Centre, which is, in the main, the model currently operating.

In 2002, faced again with budgetary challenges and the demise of the soft funding which had been supplementing the small base budget allocated to the Assessment Centre, the Centre was asked to develop a business plan to support transition to a partial cost recovery model. The plan included the Vision and Mission statements of the Centre, an environmental scan, an analysis of potential operational efficiencies, and identification of additional revenue sources. It was accepted by the UCC Executive, and implemented in July 2002.

Since that time, the Centre has been successful in contributing a significant portion of its costs, and has expanded service – both by working closely with programs and faculty to address entry assessment needs and by becoming an approved testing centre for an ever increasing variety of external assessments.

TABULAR SUMMARY OF QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES **ASSESSMENT CENTRE REVIEW**

Recipient	# Sent	# Completed & Returned	% Returned
Former clients:	175	77	45%* (net)
Other UCC Departments	46	35	76%
TOTAL	221	112	51%*

**(Note: The number of returned envelopes is subtracted from the number sent to attain the % returned.)*

Returned Envelopes:
Former Clients = 3

Total Non Respondents* = 109
**Does not include returns*

ANALYSIS – ASSESSMENT CENTRE QUESTIONNAIRES

UCC Departments:

Forty-six surveys were distributed across UCC departments and 35 were returned, for a 76% return rate. More than half of the total respondents were program lead instructors or chairs (54.1%). Counsellors and advisors were especially well-represented, with seven counsellors and five academic advisors responding. The questionnaire was not designed to reveal respondents' locations.

In analyzing the questionnaire results, the following criteria were used. Ratings of 4.00 or above were considered good to excellent; ratings of 3.50 – 3.99, satisfactory to good; ratings of 3.00 to 3.49, were considered cause for concern; and ratings below 3.00 were indicators of a serious problem. The questionnaire comprised 15 questions which could be rated on a Likert-type scale where 5 = "strongly agree" and 1 = "strongly disagree". Eleven responses were above 4.00, one was satisfactory, and three responses were below 3.5. The lowest rating was 3.23--in response to the question "The Assessment Centre site on the UCC homepage is easy to find." It is difficult to know if this is a fair comment on the Assessment Centre site, or a reflection of other problems such as varying levels of computer literacy. The other low ratings (3.39 – hours of operation) and (3.43 – fees) echoed comments made by student respondents.

Written comments were included when two or more respondents commented on the same issue. Respondents to the departmental surveys stressed their appreciation for the skills and positive attitudes displayed by staff in the Assessment Centre. They also identified several areas of concern:

- accessibility
 - hours of operation
 - consistency of access during posted hours of operation
 - adequate staff levels to ensure that the Centre is open
 - opportunities for evening and/or weekend assessment
- location
 - distance from other services on Student Street (Kamloops)
 - soundproofing of current assessment space (Kamloops)
 - reorganization of space to minimize interruptions and distractions to students involved in testing (Kamloops and Williams Lake)
- fees
 - impact of fee increases on advising procedures (e.g. advisors are now using other methods of assessing students for appropriate placement)
 - paying to rewrite an assessment or portions of a test
 - non-repatriation of fees to the source of work: regions administer the test but all the fees come to the Assessment Centre
- provision of a Learning Specialist
 - the lack of a trained educational psychologist is seen as a major gap in service
- information flow
 - respondents pointed out the difficulties involved in clarifying who is available, what type of assessments can be done, and where students should go for assistance "I have found this to be a mystifying part of UCC..."
 - there appear to be difficulties around students receiving test results promptly, and results being misdirected.

Former clients

One hundred and seventy-five (175) surveys were distributed and seventy-seven (77) student surveys were returned, for a 44% return rate. The demographics of this group demonstrate which UCC programs and students are the predominate users of the service. Almost half of the respondents (48.1%) represented the Trades/Vocational sector. This may account for the fact that 74% of the respondents were male, and 42.9%

were between the ages of 18-24. The client profile which emerges from this survey is of a young man who is participating in a trades or vocational program. The Assessment Centre appears to serve individuals who are willing to come to the Kamloops campus to participate in services, with 79.3% of respondents indicating that they had written tests here. UCC's Williams Lake campus and regional offices accounted for only 3.9% of respondents with the remainder being tested at non-UCC locations.

In analyzing the questionnaire results, the following criteria were used. Ratings of 4.00 or above were considered good to excellent; ratings of 3.50 – 3.99, satisfactory to good; ratings of 3.00 to 3.49, were considered cause for concern; and ratings below 3.00 were indicators of a serious problem. The questionnaire comprised 15 questions which could be rated on a Likert-type scale where 5 = "strongly agree" and 1 = "strongly disagree". Eight responses were above 4.00, four were satisfactory, and one response concerning fees charged was marginally below 3.5 (3.49). These results indicate that users of the Assessment Centre are satisfied with the services offered.

Written comments were included when two or more respondents commented on the same issue. Issues highlighted included fees, hours of operation and availability of staff at peak hours, characteristics of the location, website accessibility, and the processes for feedback to clients. Several respondents commented on their frustration in using computer-based testing because of limited computer skills, English-language use or a physical disability.

STRENGTHS OF THE ASSESSMENT CENTRE

The Review Committee has identified the following strengths in the Assessment Centre:

1. Staff Attributes

When departments responded to the question related to the major strengths of the Assessment Centre, the qualities exhibited by the staff involved were most frequently mentioned. These characteristics included:

- friendliness
- knowledgeability
- accommodation
- extraordinary helpfulness
- professionalism
- authenticity and caring
- responsiveness
- efficiency

Other strengths of the Assessment Centre are:

2. The assessment coordinator's thorough piloting of assessment tools, collecting and analyses of data, and the close working relationship with program faculty in interpreting results. The centre is a partner, with teaching faculty, in delivering high quality programs and the relationship is multi-faceted. Not only does the Centre strive to respond to faculty and program needs, it also provides an educational function, making faculty aware of new tools and helping them to understand the strengths and limitations of various assessment approaches.
3. The variety of tests available;
4. The growing opportunities to complete tests required for entrance to professional programs or completion of certification requirements;
5. Community outreach.
6. The Centre's ability to continue to provide a valued service despite the shift to a revenue generating model.

The staff of the Assessment Centre identified several administrative strengths:

7. continuous maintenance, renewal and updating unit goals
8. regular review of policies and procedures
9. maintenance of accurate assessment activity records.

AREAS OF THE ASSESSMENT CENTRE WHICH CAN BE IMPROVED (WITH RECOMMENDATIONS)

The Review Committee identified the following aspects of the Assessment Centre as being in need of improvement:

The Assessment Centre is a fundamental part of the core services available to prospective and current students. Based on the survey results and interviews conducted during the program review process, the following recommendations for further enhancement of the Assessment Centre are offered for the consideration of those involved in providing this service to the UCC community.

A. ACCESSIBILITY

All of the data collected pointed to the need for improvement to accessibility. Questionnaires and personal interviews stressed the need for expanded and consistent hours of operation, a reconsideration of the physical space used, and a critique of the fees charged, particularly to rewrite tests.

Recommendation A:1:

That hours be reconfigured in a manner that will increase consistency and flexibility. For example, the Centre might be closed on Monday with evening hours on Wednesday and a session offered on Saturday morning to address the needs of part-time students and those in the community.

ACTION: Coordinator, Assessment Centre

Recommendation A:2

That the Assessment Centre be relocated to an area closer to Student Street (Kamloops).
The institution (UCC) needs to develop a long-term plan that brings all aspects of student services together physically. While having the Assessment Centre separated from other services is a problem for the Assessment Centre, the main issue is student accessibility to services in general. The Assessment Centre's location is just one example of a locational issue that negatively impacts on student success and retention. For example, the Assessment Centre could be included in a "one stop shopping" site that could include Counselling, Academic Advising, Registration and Admissions. This approach would also allow for flexibility of coverage so the office would never be closed during regular hours of operation and there would be more than one person working in the evenings and on Saturday. It would also allow for a 'welcoming' reception area, not a closed door from the hallway into the Assessment Centre. In Williams Lake, consideration should be given to finding a space that is more soundproof and free of distractions.

ACTION: VP, Administration & Finance; Director, Facilities; VP, Academic; and Dean, Student Development

Recommendation A:3

That the Assessment Centre explore ways to maintain access to a dedicated computer lab for consistent periods of time, including exam weeks. The current situation creates confusion and limits accessibility to the service.

ACTION: Coordinator, Assessment Centre; Registrar

Recommendation A:4

That the Assessment Centre Coordinator and the Dean of Student Development explore ways, in consultation with Financial Aid and Awards, to subsidize assessment fees for those students who demonstrate most need.

ACTION: Assessment Centre Coordinator; Dean, Student Development; Manager, Financial Aid and Awards.

Recommendation A:5

That the Assessment Centre Coordinator and Assessment Centre Clerk explore ways to carry out their duties while at the same time providing consistent accessibility for students. For example, they might stagger hours of work so that one person is available to cover the front desk while the other is engaged in assessments in a lab, or taking a break.

ACTION: Assessment Centre Coordinator and Clerk

B. WEBSITE

Increasingly, students and faculty turn to the institutional website as the first place for information. If the design of the website makes it difficult to find what is being searched for, the individual will frequently give up and go to another institution's website. If UCC wants to increase its public profile as an institution "with a difference", electronic accessibility is paramount.

Recommendation B:1

That the Assessment Centre website be made more user friendly, and therefore easier to navigate. For example, less text and more graphics could be used.

ACTION: Assessment Centre Coordinator; Internet and Web-Applications Coordinator.

Recommendation B:2

That the Assessment Centre website increase the number of links to related sites. For example, GED could be linked to a number of supportive academic sites. This measure would increase the usefulness of the Assessment Centre site to prospective and current students.

ACTION: Assessment Centre Coordinator; Internet and Web-Applications Coordinator.

Recommendation B:3

That the Assessment Centre offer forms (e.g. off-campus assessment forms) which can be downloaded, and the opportunity to register for testing online. Again, this recommendation would have the effect of making the Assessment Centre more responsive and accessible.

ACTION: Assessment Centre staff; Internet and Web-Applications Coordinator.

C. INFORMATION FLOW

Those who use the Assessment Centre appreciate its services and the professional, knowledgeable staff. However, there are gaps in the information that is available, and to whom that information is targeted.

Recommendation C:1

That the staff of the Assessment Centre develop a brochure that describes the tests available, hours of operation, and how the services of the Assessment Centre complement those available elsewhere on campus (e.g. Academic Advising, Counselling).

ACTION: Assessment Centre staff

Recommendation C:2

That the Assessment Centre Coordinator continue her outreach to deans, directors, chairs and faculty. This will ensure that all stakeholders at UCC are well-apprised of the services available.

ACTION: Assessment Centre Coordinator

Recommendation C:3

That the Assessment Centre work with the Registrar's Office, Counselling, Finance and Academic Advising to create a flowchart for students and other stakeholders that depicts the ways in which these units work together and the kind of information/services available from each one.

**ACTION: Assessment Centre staff; Public Relations; Registrar's Office; Counselling;
Finance; Academic Advising; Dean, Student Development**

D. LEARNING SPECIALIST

During the program review, it was identified that, historically, a Learning Specialist had been part of the Assessment Centre's service. The program review team recognizes that this specialist should be part of what students can access at UCC. However, it appears from the evidence presented to us that the learning specialist might be physically located alongside disability Services to improve student access.

Recommendation D:1

That UCC continue to explore opportunities to include a Learning Specialist as one of the services available to students.

ACTION: Dean, Student Development

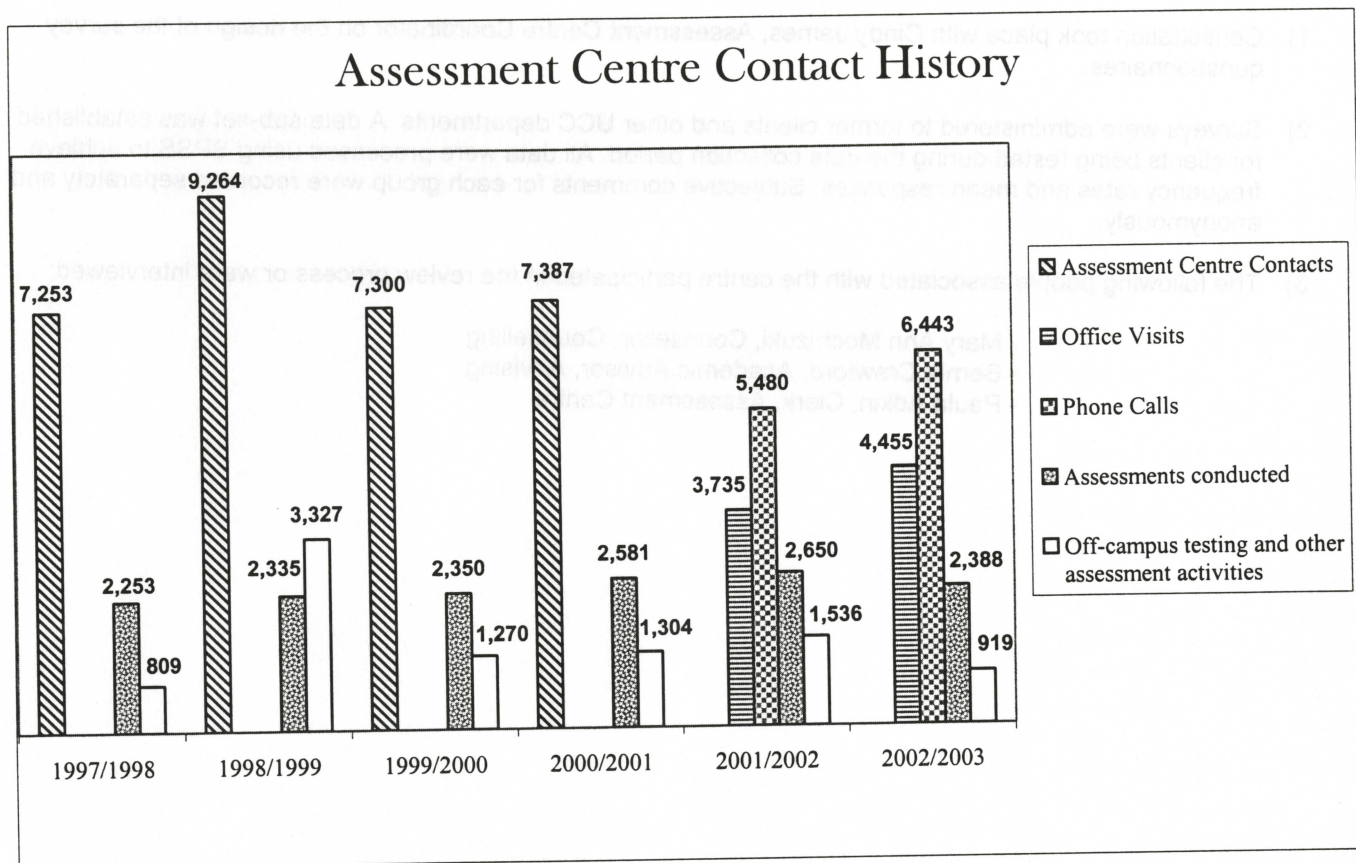
APPENDIX A **METHODOLOGY**

The data were collected in the following ways:

- 1) Consultation took place with Cindy James, Assessment Centre Coordinator on the design of the survey questionnaires.
- 2) Surveys were administered to former clients and other UCC departments. A data sub-set was established for clients being tested during the data collection period. All data were processed using SPSS to achieve frequency rates and mean responses. Subjective comments for each group were recorded separately and anonymously.
- 3) The following people associated with the centre participated in the review process or were interviewed:

- Mary Ann Mochizuki, Counsellor, Counselling
- Bernie Crawford, Academic Advisor, Advising
- Paula Adkin, Clerk, Assessment Centre

APPENDIX B ASSESSMENT CENTRE STATS



* Please note that the bar representing "Assessment Centre Contacts" in 1997/1998 to 2000/2001 is split into two categories for 2001/2002 to 2002/2003, namely "Office Visits" and "Phone Calls".



