

June 15, 2007

Ms. Karen Courtney
Director of Executive Programs,
College of Business Administration

Dear Ms. Courtney:

National conversations about higher education, as well as WASC expectations, emphasize the importance of assessing student learning and using the results for program improvement. As you may know, assessment and student learning outcomes continue to figure prominently in current discussions about reform of higher education, including on-going negotiations between government agencies and various accreditation organizations. The intensity of the national conversation is but one of many indicators that point to increased scrutiny of university assessment. That said, the SDSU Student Learning Outcomes committee is most concerned with *the intrinsic value of the process*, one wherein the goal is “finding out if whether the students know and are able to do what you expect them to know and do.” This process necessarily begins, of course, by defining what we want our students to know and do. By earnestly undertaking the annual process, programs and departments can then identify precisely where and how to improve—so that student learning can be enhanced to meet the goals that faculty have established. The Annual Assessment Report at San Diego State University furthers this conversation by requiring the inclusion of evidence of student learning outcomes assessment and discussion of how the results are used for improving a program.

Put another way, the SDSU annual assessment reports are intended as a means to an important end, that is, as a process that adds value to programs and that is aligned with related evaluation efforts (WASC Accreditation, Academic Program Review, annual Academic Plans, and for some programs, professional accreditation). Although the Student Learning Outcomes committee provides a list of questions to help departments structure their report, we encourage departments and programs to respond in a manner that best aligns with their particular accreditation and academic review format and cycle. Some accrediting organizations, for example, already employ well-developed standards for evaluating program components and treat assessment as a critical part of accreditation. In such cases, we encourage programs to submit their annual reports in the same style and format as used for accreditation, *with one caveat*: If a respective professional accreditation process does not include measurement of student learning, then the program would need to do so independently. For programs and departments that do not undergo professional accreditation, we encourage you to align the annual reports with the institutional accreditation cycle and with your academic program review cycle. It is our fervent wish that the annual reports assist you in this endeavor, rather than become an additional burden on your faculty and staff.

Within this context, we thank you for submitting your annual assessment report. Members of the Student Learning Outcomes Committee have reviewed the report, using a review template that aligns with the annual report questions (when applicable), and we offer specific comments, suggestions, and questions by way of this letter.

Committee Response to Your 2006-2007 Annual Assessment Reports

We appreciate your updates on the Sports MBA (SMBA) and Executive MBA (EMBA) programs. Our records show the last assessment communication received for the Executive Management Program was sometime in 2000. The last review prepared by our committee regarding your program's assessment plan is dated August 2000 and was generally positive, so we are pleased to be back in communication and hopeful that your program is ready to move forward.

The reports you have submitted suggest that a general review of the purpose and nature of the university's assessment program would be helpful to you, using resources recommended by the CBA Assessment Coordinator, Kathy Krentler. Without clear statements of student learning outcomes for these programs, it will not be possible for you to move ahead with assessment planning or to prepare for the kind of outcomes-oriented accreditation that is likely in the relatively near future.

1. Both reports confuse grading of individual student performance with assessment of program effectiveness. Typical grading schemes do not index grades to learning outcomes and so are not helpful in determining the overall strengths and weaknesses of a program in achieving learning outcomes. A variety of techniques are available for indirect assessment (e.g., surveys of student perceptions and opinions), as well as direct assessment of student learning through exams and evaluations of work products. We highly encourage you to develop both direct and indirect assessment measures once you have clearly stated student learning outcomes for the two programs. Since the focus of program assessment is on program effectiveness rather than individual grading, it is usually quite acceptable to sample the student population rather than to collect assessment data on all students.
2. The relative newness of the SMBA program and the challenges you describe regarding student attrition suggest that a needs assessment for the program (to identify appropriate learning outcomes) might be combined with a reassessment of factors relating to the convenience, accessibility, and relevance of learning opportunities (for example, greater emphasis on internships, field work, and/or practitioner-oriented seminars). We highly encourage you to undertake this task in the near future.
3. You use the term "true Sports MBA curriculum" several times, which suggests that criteria have been recognized for distinguishing this type of program from other MBA programs. To the extent that sports business educators already employ learning outcomes as criteria for characterizing a "true" SMBA curriculum, such standards may assist you in defining the outcomes for your program and we encourage you to utilize these criteria in stating student learning outcomes for the program. On the other hand, if such standards have not been clearly articulated or agreed on, then your program may be in a position to offer leadership as you begin to clarify these for your own program.

By next year's report we look forward to clearly developed assessment plans for both the EMBA program and the SMBA program. These plans should include measurable student learning outcomes, a methodology for how those student learning outcomes will be assessed (that includes direct measures, indirect measures optional), and a timeline for the implementation of the plan.

In closing, the committee and I wish to convey our belief that the self-reflection that ensues from assessment is very valuable. The committee appreciates the time and effort that you and your department expend in examining student learning. We urge you to consider how these efforts can be aligned most effectively with accreditation and academic program review processes. We also wish to extend an invitation to a summer conference on assessment, developed by Dr. Marilee Bresciani and SDSU's Center for Educational Leadership, Innovation and Policy, *Evaluating Institutional Learning Centeredness*, to be held at the San Diego Marriott in Mission Valley, July 12-14, 2007. (<http://interwork.sdsu.edu/elip/assessment>)

And for a quick introduction to learning outcomes and assessment, please refer to the 2006 *SDSU Curriculum Guide* (<http://www.sdsu.edu/curriculumguide>), pp. 102-106.

Highest regards,

Chris Frost

Christopher Frost, Ph.D.
Chair, Student Learning Outcomes Committee
Associate Dean of Undergraduate Studies

C: Dr. Kathleen Krentler, CBA Assessment Coordinator
Dr. Gail Naughton, Dean
Dr. James Lackritz, Associate Dean