

June 15, 2007

Dr. Mehdi Salehizadeh, Chair, Graduate Committee
Dr. David Ely, Director of Graduate Programs
College of Business Administration

Dear Drs. Salehizadeh and Ely:

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 Report

We appreciate the thoughtful and detailed report on progress in developing a comprehensive assessment system. The plan's well-stated learning outcomes are linked to a variety of assessment instruments, and include both direct and indirect measures. You have also examined mechanisms for student-faculty collaboration in the assessment process. The college appears well on its way towards developing a systematic approach.

The pilot study on portfolio evaluation appears promising, although the report is not entirely clear about how it might be carried forward. Will it and other elements described in the report be institutionalized, so that outcomes can be regularly monitored and data provided to illuminate the effectiveness of program interventions? Also, the MBA program may want to investigate specialized tools for assembling and evaluating portfolios so that it is not unnecessarily limited by the capabilities of BlackBoard.

We encourage you to work with the CBA Assessment Coordinator, Dr. Kathy Krentler, on ways to share your efforts with other CBA programs that have less developed assessment plans.

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>)

Highest regards,

Chris Frost

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

cc: Dr. Kathleen Krentler, CBA Assessment Coordinator