

June 30, 2008

Dr. Sharon Lightner, Director, and Dr. Carol Venable
School of Accountancy

Dear Drs. Lightner and Venable:

The American Association for Higher Education developed a number of “Principles of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning.” With apology to David Letterman, I have adapted the list slightly, to structure those principles as a “Top Ten” list:

1. The assessment of student learning begins with educational values; it begins with and enacts a vision of the kinds of learning we most value for our students.
2. Learning is a complex process that entails not only what students know, but what they can do with what they know. It involves not only knowledge and abilities, but also values, attitudes and habits of mind that require thoughtful (and diverse) approaches to measurement.
3. Assessment works best when the programs it seeks to improve have clear, explicitly stated purposes. Assessment as a process leads a campus toward clarity about where to aim and what standards to apply.
4. Assessment requires attention to outcomes, but also and equally to the experiences that lead to those outcomes. To improve outcomes, faculty and administrators need to know about student experiences along the way—about the curricula, teaching and student effort that lead to particular outcomes.
5. Assessment works best when it is ongoing, not episodic. Improvement comes when assessment entails a linked series of activities that occur over time, and assessment strategies must be continually evaluated and refined in order to ensure success.
6. Assessment fosters wider improvement when representatives from across the educational community are involved. Student learning is a campus-wide responsibility, and assessment is a way of enacting that responsibility. Educational quality is a collective effort.
7. Assessment makes a difference when it begins with issues of relevance and illuminates questions that people really care about. To be useful, information collected must be connected to issues or questions that people value.
8. Assessment is most likely to lead to improvement when it is part of a larger set of conditions that promote change. Successful assessment is directed toward improvement, and its most important contribution comes on campuses where the quality of teaching and learning is visibly valued and worked at.
9. Through assessment, educators meet responsibilities to students and to the public; assessment provides a way to document outcomes and to inform constituents of the ways in which campus programs and services positively affect students, community and society.
10. Assessment is less about oversight and more about improving student learning. All assessment efforts need to be handled in a mutually supportive environment. It is essential for faculty to understand the importance and benefits of assessment and to recognize its intrinsic value.

Within the context of these assessment principles, I thank you for submitting your annual report. Members of the Student Learning Outcomes Committee have reviewed the report, and I convey their specific comments, suggestions, and questions by way of this letter (next page). It is my hope that you will perceive this review process in the same manner as do we: as a collaborative process, with the goal of enhancing student learning.

Committee Response to Your 2007-2008 Annual Assessment Report

First, I want to personally congratulate the School of Accountancy faculty and leadership for its acquisition of the Lamden Family Gift. Among other things, this award clearly expresses the confidence of the Lamden family in the quality of School of Accountancy programs.

The Committee applauds the practicality reflected in this year's report, as well as your continued implementation of your five year plan. We believe that your work continues to serve the university as an exemplar of sustainable, manageable approaches to assessment that yield useful data for program improvement. For example, your efforts this year reflect assessment activities that are guided by questions and issues that really matter to the School, such as early indicators of the success of its new AIS (Accountancy Information Systems) courses and the effectiveness of teaching assistance. We also note the clear evidence of faculty collaboration on assessment issues, as well as the indicators that faculty are able to employ assessment concepts and methods cooperatively and in an integrated fashion.

As in our review of last year's report, we note the value of a cumulative approach, one in which the instrumentation and analytics associated with each year's assessments are collected for ongoing use, so that by the end of 2011, you would have in hand a comprehensive evaluation system. As one suggestion, the Committee also believes that it might be useful to revise the five-year plan to incorporate measures of overall student perceptions of program quality, particularly issues that transcend individual course work, such as advising, course sequencing, preparation for careers, and the like.

In closing, may we say again that we commend you on your thoughtfulness and diligence regarding assessment of student learning. While it is clear that you have a robust process, the SLO Committee reviewers wish to leave you with a recommendation that underscores the overall effort. Specifically, we urge you to always keep in mind the purpose of your assessment efforts, which is to use what your findings to drive change that will strengthen your programs. In the parlance of the AACSB, your professional accrediting organization, "closing the loop" is ultimately the most critical measure of a successful assessment effort. In next year's report we will look forward to reading about detailed efforts to institute programmatic change in response to the findings that your assessment program has produced.

Highest regards,

Chris Frost

Christopher Frost, Ph.D.
Chair, Student Learning Outcomes Committee