

June 1, 2009

Dr. Carol F. Venable, Assessment Coordinator
Dr. Sharon Lightener, Chair
Charles W. Lamden School of Accountancy
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Dear Professors Venable and Lightner:

If your department is typical, it is likely you have heard such comments as the following during recent weeks and months: *“Given the budget crisis, we’ll probably be teaching more students with fewer faculty members. So, it’s time we just forgot this whole assessment business – who can afford the time, or the resources?”* Indeed, it does appear more than justified to approach our financial crisis by “circling the wagons,” steadfastly agreeing to continue only with the most essential aspects of the program.

One problem, of course, is how to decide where to make cuts. Which classes can effectively be taught in large theater classrooms? Which classes can be taught using distance technology, or infused with a distance component (a hybrid course)? Which parts of our curriculum are working effectively, and which parts could be ordered differently—for greater effectiveness? To answer such questions requires a perception of the whole, an understanding of the overall architecture of the curriculum, and then data—evidence—in order to answer questions of effectiveness, and value. Put another way, making important curricular and pedagogical decisions in the absence of evidence is akin to confirming a research hypothesis—without ever conducting the inquiry.

For these reasons, the goal of the Student Learning Outcomes Committee is to assist departments and programs in the process of making tough decisions, by helping them to focus on questions of value. Because we understand the issue of time and resources, we are also trying to improve our own processes as well, to find ways to help departments assess student learning more effectively. To this end, we will introduce a simplified assessment manual by summer, and we will continue to explore possible software applications that might lead us to more parsimonious approaches. In it our sincere hope that you will see us an ally in the process of making difficult choices.

Committee Response to Your 2008-2009 Annual Assessment Report

The committee applauds the outstanding efforts reflected in these detailed, comprehensive, and multifaceted reports, as well as the leadership they reflect to other departments in approaching assessment issues. There are enough ideas, examples, and concrete results here to keep several committees busy—and enough data to provide excellent guidance in future decision making. The reports evidence genuine intellectual curiosity about the state of the degree program, student satisfaction and achievement, and relevance to community needs. The assessment activities described go far beyond last year’s committee recommendations and continue to reflect a mature recognition of the benefits of systematic multi-year assessment. They demonstrate strong

technical competence in designing and implementing assessment instrumentation and use of appropriate analytics.

We note, in particular, the flexibility of the assessment team in implementing assessment of such new program components as Accounting Information Systems, as well as the clarity with which it describes changes to the programs resulting from analysis of assessment data. Also notable are innovations derived from assessment findings, such as incorporating assessment rubrics in the orientation provided to students about how to approach assignments and evaluations.

These very significant, labor-intensive efforts led the committee to ask whether this effort can be continued at its current pace and/or whether some effort should be redirected to consolidating assessment implementation and making it more sustainable through greater use of automation and through routinization of policies and procedures so that future efforts can be delegated to multiple faculty members and staff support personnel? (Please note that this question is raised by reviewers as “food for thought,” and in no way constitutes a recommendation or directive.) For example, given the SOA’s strengths in accountancy information systems and its general orientation towards broad assessment/accountability, the committee wonders whether the assessment team, director, and school faculty could consider ways to identify the functions (variables, indicators, methods, analytic frame-works, data displays) that might serve as a core, and which could be automated and managed more routinely and be sustainable for 7-10 years.

Once again, we applaud the continuation of School of Accountancy’s robust and energetic assessment efforts, and we encourage the school both to share its methods with colleagues in the School of Business Administration and to explore how those methods might be automated across departments.

Very well done, indeed!

Highest regards,

Chris Frost

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