

June 30, 2008

Dr. Tom Warschauer and Dr. Nikhil Varaiya
Finance

Dear Drs. Warschauer and Varaiya:

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 Reports

BSBA, Finance

The Student Learning Outcomes Committee is again impressed with the thoroughness with which you have laid out the learning outcomes for this program, linked them to specific courses, and scheduled assessment activities. Very well done, indeed! The maturity of last year's and this year's reports makes it possible for the reviewers to ask additional questions about future assessment options:

1. How will you measure global variables related to student perceptions and opinions about the quality and effectiveness of the program and its components? Perhaps this might be accomplished with an exit survey of graduating seniors?
2. What about the perceptions and opinions of recent alums and major employers?

BSBA, Financial Services

The Committee's response to this report is similar to that for the BSBA in Finance. Although the lists of student learning outcomes are not as lengthy and detailed, the report demonstrates an ability to target course-specific outcomes and assess the results quantitatively. We were impressed by the thoughtful discussion of the implications of the differences between performance on higher and lower order cognitive skills.

Please keep in mind that, although data used to assign grades must be administered to all students being graded, program-level assessment requires only that reasonable samples of student performance and opinions be acquired. What is important is not that every student be tested, but that the sampling be sufficiently valid and robust to allow for decisions (made with reasonable confidence) about how to improve the programs over time.

BSBA, Real Estate

As it did in last year's review, the committee acknowledges that the Real Estate BSBA program is still in its formative phases and that a more comprehensive approach to the program planning and assessment probably needs to await key faculty hires. We suggest, however, that this situation can be viewed as a "chicken and egg" problem, and that additional clarity about program goals might actually improve the ability of the program to recruit faculty.

The question, then, is this: What has been done to assess the needs of the RE program, as a way to build a foundation for orderly design and development of an effective curriculum? Presumably, some kind of needs analysis was conducted, and results were included in the degree program proposal approved fairly recently. How might that basic analysis be augmented?

The goals and learning outcomes attached to the report seem like a useful starting point (perhaps they should be considered tentative?). What were the sources or processes for specifying these outcomes? Were they vetted with the professional community and knowledgeable COBA faculty? Are they consistent with professional standards and legal requirements for "professional competence," and with business trends and outlooks?

The list would benefit from additional editing for consistency; the structure of the goals doesn't seem parallel. Goal 1, for example describes a goal of the program: "prepare graduates," whereas Goal 5 seems to describe a goal wherein students "learn the various aspects."

Some of the outcomes employ language that would require substantial additional discussion about meaning, intent, or assessment methods. For example, Learning Outcome 2.1, “Understand the physical, legal and economic aspects...” and Learning Outcome 5.3, “Demonstrate the understanding of both the discounted cash flow and direct capitalization models.” What do “understand” and “understanding” mean here? Identify or classify the models? Describe the aspects/models? Or apply them to solve problems or make recommendations? There can be quite a difference in outcomes here.

For a basic primer on writing learning outcome statements, please see the *SDSU Curriculum Guide*: http://www-rohan.sdsu.edu/~acserv/files/93-106_Syllabi_SLO.pdf

MSBA, Financial and Tax Planning

The Committee appreciates the well-formulated learning outcomes identified in this year’s report, and the diligence exercised in collecting targeted data from assessment items embedded in course-based assignments. We also appreciate that you are moving towards comprehensive and integrated assessment *systems*, which moves beyond a year-by-year piecemeal approach. Coupling this type of assessment with exit surveys of student perceptions and satisfactions with their learning experiences would provide your program with powerful tools for long term program improvement. Routinizing the administration of such instruments would allow for year-to-year comparisons and, the long run, might reduce faculty workload associated with assessments conducted on an ad hoc basis.

In our review of last year’s report, the Student Learning Outcomes Committee expressed interest in the possibility that you might use the CFPNE as a source of needs assessment data:

Overall, this availability of a nationally-vetted instrument may reduce the need for the department having to develop its own instrumentation in certain areas. Committee members are unclear about the current or future role of the CFPNE in the program’s future assessment, so this could be addressed in next year’s report.

We are still interested in this issue, and in how the Department views the relationship between its local assessments with national professional standards, and we believe that your Department is well positioned to move to a more systematic and integrated approach to program assessment. Very best wishes as you strive to do so.

In closing, we commend you on your thoughtfulness and diligence regarding assessment for all programs. While it is clear that you are well on your way, the SLO Committee reviewers wish to leave you with a recommendation that underscores the overall effort. We caution you to always keep in mind the purpose of your assessment efforts, which is to use what you have found 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 reports 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.
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