

June 15, 2007

Dr. Beth Chung-Herrera, Management Assessment Coordinator
Dr. Gangaram Singh, Chair
Department of Management

Dear Drs. Chung-Herrera and Singh:

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

BS, Management

We appreciate the detailed listing of outcomes and the effort to link them to instrumentation embedded in specific courses and assignments. We also appreciate the effort to provide specific statistics on pass and fail rates in selected courses. Assessment plans also need to attend to overall effectiveness of the program in meeting program-level learning outcomes, however. Could you also consider how such integrative experiences as capstone courses or comprehensive exams might be employed to measure outcomes that integrate what students have learned across specific courses? Are there desirable capabilities that students can only develop by integrating learning outcomes achieved in multiple courses, and does the program as a whole help them to accomplish these integrated capabilities?

As with the MS programs discussed below, some learning outcomes use verbs such as “understand” in ways that make the outcomes immeasurable without further discussion.

MSBA, Management; MSBA in Human Resource Management, and MSBA, Entrepreneurship

While it is unfortunate that these MSBA programs have not submitted assessment plans in the past, the establishment of committees and agreements on major learning outcomes are important steps. We encourage department faculty to confer with faculty in other departments, such as the Department of Marketing, the School of Accountancy and the MBA program, which have made more progress in program assessment. We also recommend that you consult with the CBA Assessment Coordinator, Dr. Kathy Krentler, to review the efforts of programs with more developed assessment plans.

The general plans for these programs list courses associated with each major goal. However, it is important to remember that embedding assessment measures within existing assignments at the course level cannot entirely substitute for more global measures that measure the success of the program as a whole. Such measures might be integrated with capstone courses and/or a comprehensive exam.

Clarity of Learning Outcomes

Many of the learning outcomes associated with these plans describe intended outcomes fairly clearly and describe student capabilities in terms that can be measured; for example, BS, Management, IV-2: *Describe and analyze strategic business problems from a general management perspective, integrating functional areas.*

However, we also note that across all the management assessment plans, more than a few learning outcomes are vague about expectations and employ the catchall phrases “understand” or “demonstrate understanding.” For example, outcomes listed for Goal II (MSBA in Management) merely indicate that students will “understand” lists of topics, rather than indicating that students will be able to critique, analyze, apply, synthesize, transform, solve, formulate recommendations, and so on. Certainly “understanding” cannot be divorced from such capabilities, but would it be possible to translate generic calls for “understanding” into more carefully specified learning outcomes?

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

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C: Dr. Kathleen Krentler, CBA Assessment Coordinator
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