

June 1, 2009

Dr. Lois B. Olson, Assessment Coordinator
Dr. George E. Belch, Chair
Department of Marketing
College of Business Administration

Dear Professors Olson and Belch:

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 department for yet another set of excellent annual reports. We are most appreciative for the leadership that Marketing and Accountancy provide to other programs within CBA, and across the university! We note in particular the comprehensive approach evidenced in these reports, the coherent multi-year planning, the extensive application of multiple and complementary instrumentation to a variety of concerns, and the technical strengths related to instrument design and data analysis. Simply put: extremely well done!

We do encourage the department to continue to implement its well developed plans and schedules. And as an aside, we suggest that you continue to look for ways (even at the expense of pursuing new evaluation questions) to routinize, streamline, and automate your core assessment functions so that they are:

- less labor-intensive,
- more cost-effective,
- sustainable over the next 5-7 years with minimal resources, and
- more easily delegated across faculty and staff.

In doing so, you participate in the ongoing work of our Student Learning Outcomes Committee, the members of which are also seeking ways to improve and to streamline assessment processes.

Highest regards,

Chris Frost

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