

June 15, 2007

Dr. Theo Addo, IDS Assessment Coordinator
Dr. Bruce Reinig, Chair
Dr. Helio Yang, Operations Management Coordinator
Department of Information and Decision Systems

Dear Drs. Addo, Reinig, and Yang:

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 under-taking 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

BSBA Information Systems Program

It appears that the Information Systems BSBA Assessment Plan that was developed in April 2004 has been rethought and reworked in the Assessment Plan that was submitted for 2007. The new assessment plan appears to provide direction for the future of the department and will be useful as the department moves forward with the BSBA program. It might be noted, however, that some components of the program's previous assessment efforts could prove valuable and we recommend that they be reviewed. For example, the department reported in October 2005 on a well-developed Alumni Advisory Board Survey. This indirect assessment measure (in addition to direct measures) might prove useful if modified to reflect the revised student learning outcomes for the program.

Regarding the revised assessment plan submitted in the most recent report: While the six identified student learning outcomes (SLOs) clearly describe content knowledge that is fundamental to the program, we encourage you to rethink the action verbs used in them. "Demonstrate a good understanding" is a phrase used in three of the six SLOs, yet it is largely immeasurable. Terms such as apply, list, identify, organize, explain, etc. would make for stronger, clearer, and more measurable SLOs. Dr. Brock Allen of the Center for Teaching & Learning has worked with the School of Accountancy in the College of Business (CBA) on the development of well-stated SLOs for their BSBA program. Further, Dr. Allen has worked with the IDS department to develop clear SLOs for your proposed PhD program. He and Kathy Krentler, the CBA Assessment Coordinator, may be able to help you in rewording the SLOs developed for the BSBA in Information Systems.

The 2007 report mentions that a timeline for goal assessment has yet to be developed, although it also reports on the implementation of an assessment effort for two of the six SLOs (#1 and #5). We strongly encourage you to develop a timeline for complete program assessment. Further, while it is not necessary to assess every SLO every year, we do encourage you to step up your assessment efforts for this program now that you have a clear and revised plan in place. With your expertise in operations and systems thinking, perhaps it is possible to develop a comprehensive system for program assessment that will provide continuous feedback.

We look forward to reading about your upcoming assessment efforts in next year's report. Please plan to finalize the assessment plan (with a timeline and possibly revised wording of your SLOs), continue your implementation of assessment measures and analysis, and begin the process of using the results of the efforts to inform program improvements.

MSBA Information Systems Program

We understand that your efforts in the past year have focused on the BSBA program's assessment plan revision. As you undertake efforts directed at the MSBA program, we would like to suggest the following: review the MSBA assessment plan dated April 2004 to determine how portions of it may still remain useful, consider the recommendations made earlier in this report regarding the wording of student learning outcomes, and use lessons learned in the development of SLOs for your proposed PhD program to inform your consideration of SLOs for the MSBA program. As mentioned previously, Dr. Brock Allen and Dr. Kathy Krentler may be useful resources to you in this regard.

We look forward to reading a complete revised assessment plan for your MSBA program in Information Systems next year.

MSBA, Operations Management

We believe that you have taken the right approach in surveying comparable degree programs and conducting a bench marking study. We encourage you to work with the CBA Assessment Coordinator, Dr. Kathy Krentler, to share this "focus on the front end" with other programs in the CBA that are also in the early developmental phases of their assessment planning.

We also think it is important to take a step back in considering the way your learning outcomes are formulated and your timeline for assessment is organized. At this point you have stated four major goals for the MSBA—two major topical areas, a general outcome regarding application of topical content knowledge to real world applications, and an outcome regarding communication of technical information. From here, it would be most helpful to develop more detailed outcome statements to guide course development and outcomes based assessment. Such efforts might be greatly assisted by extending your bench marking approach to encompass identification of learning outcomes established by other institutions. Have major professional associations in operations management developed performance standards for advanced professionals in OM? Have OM professional associations established guidelines for assessment or certification of such professionals? Are these suitable for adaptation by your department?

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>)

Highest regards,

Chris Frost

Christopher Frost, Ph.D.
Chair, Student Learning Outcomes Committee
Associate Dean of Undergraduate Studies

C: Dr. Kathleen Krentler, CBA Assessment Coordinator
Dr. Gail Naughton, Dean
Dr. James Lackritz, Associate Dean