

June 1, 2009

Mr. Chris Graham, Executive Director, Specialized Programs and External Affairs
Dr. Nikhil Varaiya, Chair, Executive & Specialized Programs Committee
Dr. David Ely, Director of Graduate Programs
College of Business Administration

Dear Mr. Graham, Dr. Varaiya, and Dr. Ely:

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 appreciates the strides made in pursuing the EMBA’s newly created assessment plan. We agree that assessment by EMBA of the common goals for all MBA programs is not an unreasonable place to start in assessing the Executive MBA, and we note the inclusion of case/problem based assessments that seem appropriate for a master’s level degree.

In addition to these efforts, the committee strongly encourages the director and faculty of the program to move forward vigorously with assessment of student learning outcomes that distinguish the Executive MBA program from other MBA and MSBA programs at SDSU. What capacities do students acquire in this program, and in what ways does it adapt to the needs of its students that warrant designation as a separate master's level program?

The Student Learning Outcomes Committee appreciates your efforts, and we look forward to reading next year's report.

Highest regards,

Chris Frost

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