

June 30, 2008

Dr. Bruce Reinig, Chair; Dr. Y. Helio Yang, and Dr. Theo Addo
Information & Decision Systems

Dear Drs. Reinig, Yang, and Addo:

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 Report

The Student Learning Outcomes Committee was impressed by the strides IDS has made in addressing assessment issues and appreciates your responsiveness to last year's recommendations, particularly with regard to the BSBA and MSBA programs. We also appreciate your department's commitment to collegial retreats to address assessment issues and strategies. In particular, we note your efforts to measure selected learning outcomes, and we applaud your orderly, analytical approach, which relies on well-developed rubrics for assessing student work.

The Committee believes that the framework you have established for a constituency-oriented needs assessment, vetting student learning outcomes for the MSBA, is an excellent starting point for curriculum planning and prioritizing. We appreciate the effort you and your faculty have put into thinking through the content for this needs assessment instrument. We do encourage you to move forward with implementation of the survey and analysis of the results at your earliest convenience, given the potential importance of the results in shaping the future of the MSBA program.

I appreciate Dr. Yang's statement recognizing last year's recommendations regarding learning outcomes for the MSBA in Operations/Supply Chain Management (OSCM). However, the Committee believes that assessment planning for the OSCM would definitely benefit from application of the approach for the BSBA. The assessment approach for the BSBA includes rubrics that define the meaning of the ratings scale employed for the assessments of student work products. Without such definitions, it is very difficult for students, instructors, or evaluators to agree on what is "good," "satisfactory," and so on.

Many of the learning outcome statements for the OSCM are vague, that is, they use language that simply defers discussion of how students would actually demonstrate their knowledge or capacities. Terms such as "understand," "be familiar with," and "knowledge of when" are inconsistent with the guidelines for writing objectives (see: *SDSU Curriculum Guide*: http://www-rohan.sdsu.edu/~acserv/files/93106_Syllabi_SLO.pdf). Before devoting more effort to writing learning outcomes, I strongly encourage Dr. Yang to meet at his earliest convenience with Dr. Brock Allen, or Dr. Kathy Williams, co-directors of the Center for Teaching and Learning. My experience is that they can quickly get faculty members back on track in writing student learning outcomes that are both useful and meaningful. Also, it is important to keep in mind that assessment, unlike grading, does not need to measure the performance of every student. What is required is a reasonable sample from which the faculty can reasonably draw inferences regarding areas or aspects of the program that need improvement.

Finally, let me add that in spite of the weakness in the OCSM assessment plan, IDS appears quite ready to address "big picture" issues in the coming year (and beyond); indeed, your department seems poised to enlarge the scope and reach of its assessment process. As you do so, we urge 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 report(s) 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.
Chair, Student Learning Outcomes Committee