

June 30, 2008

Dr. Gangaram Singh, Chair, and Dr. Beth Chung-Herrera  
Management

Dear Drs. Singh and Chung-Herra:

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 takes note of your efforts to rewrite degree-program learning outcome statements for improved clarity and measurability. We also appreciate your efforts to standardize the overall approach to assessment across the three degree programs, as well as your commitment to multi-year planning—a vantage that can help make assessment processes manageable and sustainable in terms of faculty workload.

That said, we do have serious concerns about the emphasis you continue to place on embedding assessment items in course exams and using course-based grading as the primary source for program-oriented assessment data, particularly in the BSBA program. These concerns echo those expressed in last year's letter.

*Assessment plans also need to attend to overall effectiveness of the program in meeting program-level learning outcomes...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?*

We strongly encourage you to look beyond graded course-level exams as the sole source of assessment data, and to consider options for development of an integrated instrument to be administered in a capstone course, or a senior course required of all majors.

Both of the MSBA programs could integrate assessment items with administration of the department's comprehensive exams. Please bear in mind that, because the purpose of program-level assessment is not to grade students, but to pinpoint areas for program improvement, it is not necessary to measure each and every student's performance. It is more cost-efficient to select a representative sample of student work products or exams to serve as indicators of program quality. These methods can then be combined with other approaches to program-level assessment, such as exit surveys, small-group interviews, and/or surveys of alums and employers.

In closing, we commend you on your thoughtfulness and diligence regarding assessment of student learning. While it is clear that you have a strong start, the SLO Committee reviewers wish to leave you with a recommendation that underscores the overall effort. We caution 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 your assessment results.

Highest regards,

*Chris Frost*

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Chair, Student Learning Outcomes Committee