


April 30, 2014

TO: Andrew Hoff
Interim Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

FROM: Angel A. Sanchez, Director 
Office of Institutional Effectiveness (OIE)

SUBJECT: 2013 Summary of the Learning Assessment Team Activities (LAT), Annual Assessment Report and Student Outcomes Assessment Plan (SOAP) Reviews

The following is a summary of the activities of the LAT, as well as other university assessment activities during my first year as Fresno State's director of the Office of Institutional Effectiveness. The activities reported here are for the period of March 2013 to February 2014. This report also provides an overview of some of the key areas of discussion of the LAT, including emergent ideas to improve the assessment review processes.

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT REPORTS

The current Academic Affairs policy stipulates that each program must have a SOAP (see Attachment A, *Policy on Student Outcomes Assessment Data and Information*). In addition, at least one of the SOAP activities must be implemented each year. The assessment activity must be documented and reported each spring in the Assessment portion of the Colleges' Annual Report to the Provost. As a guide for summing up assessment activities, programs are required to answer the following questions: 1) *What learning outcomes did you assess this year?*, 2) *What instruments did you use to assess them (If this does not align with the outcomes and activities detailed in the timeline of the SOAP, please provide an explanation of this discrepancy)?*, 3) *What did you discover from these data (Where possible, indicate the relative strengths and weaknesses in student performance on the outcomes)?*, and 4) *What changes did you make as a result of the findings?* The findings are to be used by program faculty members to improve student learning through modified curricula and instruction.

SOAPS

While the LAT reviewed all spring 2013 program assessment reports in summer 2013, only those SOAPS that were revised and submitted to OIE after February 2013 were rated. The reason for the cutoff is that in fall 2012, the university contracted with an external consultant, Dr. Carol Gittens of Santa Clara University, to review, rate, and provide a feedback report of all existing SOAPS at the time. Dr. Gittens submitted a summary of her findings in spring 2013 (*SOAP Evaluation and WASC Readiness, May 16, 2013*, Gittens Educational Consulting, Santa Clara, CA). All SOAPS are posted on [OIE's website](#).

THE REVIEW PROCESS

Reviews of the SOAPS and assessment reports were conducted by the LAT on July 16-17, 2013. Members of the LAT include me, OIE Director, as well as the following faculty members: Cricket Barakzai, Nora Chapman, Monica Fusich; Linda Hauser; Debbie Kemp; Andrew Lawson, and Fran Pomaville with staff support provided by OIE's Marie Tongson-Fernandez. It should be noted that both Debbie Kemp and Monica Fusich have since resigned from their LAT posts.

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THE RESULTS

As in previous years, the annual assessment reports were rated on a scale of 0-4 (*see Attachments B-1 and B-2 for copies of the rubrics*) A summary rating by college and by individual program was provided to the Provost, Deans, Associate Deans, Chairs and Assessment Coordinators (*see attachment C*) The same stakeholders were invited to the annual 'Fall 2013 Assessment Coordinators' Meeting' held November 8, 2013, to discuss the findings from the latest reviews. The summary tables show assessment is improving for undergraduate programs, including specification, measurement, and "closing the loop." The tables also indicate the unevenness of program progress.

While not as advanced in assessment as the undergraduate programs, the graduate programs are also making progress in establishing standards, specifications, measurable indicators, and "closing the loop." In sum, the assessment of learning as documented in the annual assessment report to the Provost is evidence of progress and improvement.

LAT ACTIVITIES

The LAT members discussed the reviews and ideas on improving the rating process during and after the summer review sessions. The LAT members also attended the various assessment of learning committee meetings that were held throughout the year

Formed in 2009, the LAT provides an important internal feedback loop to the university community regarding the assessment process as it aims to strengthen and promote outcomes assessment across the campus community While the LAT is active in facilitating the sharing of resources, best practices, expertise, and assessment experiences, each department is also actively engaged, through the designated Program Assessment Coordinator, to execute the department's student learning outcomes assessment plan. (Most colleges have an appointed College Assessment Coordinator who also provides support to the program assessment coordinator.) The university-wide Assessment of Learning Committee also oversees the assessment activities. And it is through these concerted efforts that assessment will continue to flourish across the campus community and raise the overall quality of assessment.

OTHER UNIVERSITY ASSESSMENT ACTIVITIES

In a related yet separate activity regarding the SOAP and assessment process, my staff and I engaged in one-on-one meetings with department chairs and assessment coordinators from the College of Arts and Humanities, College of Health and Human Sciences and the Lyle College of Engineering. The colleges' respective Deans and Associate deans made the request to have such meetings to discuss their programs achievements, issues, and concerns. These meetings were held in fall 2013 and at the beginning of the spring 2014 semester

EMERGENT AREAS & IDEAS FOR PLANNING CHANGE

The university's commitment to improve instruction and student learning by employing measurable outcomes and evidence is on the right track. Even so, the internal and external review of the SOAPs and Annual Assessment processes have resulted in the identification of some deficiencies that could be improved. The following challenges are called to attention:

- 1) A continuous challenge is to maintain faculty interest. While it is common to find a participating interest in assessment among new or junior faculty, it is also common to find a lack of participating interest among senior, tenured faculty The reason is obvious—probationary, junior faculty, tend to receive the bulk of assessment committee assignments for the department.

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- 2) In addition, with full teaching loads to manage and being fully engaged in the retention, tenure and promotion (RTP) process, it may be necessary to consider some form of incentive or changes in the reward structure to add value to the assessment activity. It was suggested that rewarding faculty (particularly junior faculty) for participating in assessment could be either monetary, assigned time, or recognition awards to make assessment a higher priority (personnel files, RTP, etc.). Without any reward structure to incentivize and encourage faculty members, assessment is burdensome on an already heavy workload.
- 3) Another challenge is the need to encourage collaboration between colleges, departments, and program levels and promote vertical integration of assessment activities. Specifically, a repeated suggestion was to involve Deans more in the oversight of the assessment process in their colleges. It was suggested Deans could facilitate regular assessment meetings and encourage cross department/program collaboration.
- 4) Assessment training is also an issue. It has been suggested to make training available to assessment coordinators whether in the form of an “Assessment 101” format or individual one-on-one training. To this end, the more experienced assessment coordinators from the colleges could provide the training. The experienced assessment coordinators could also serve as an ongoing resource to the new or inexperienced coordinators. Again, the faculty member should be recognized and/or rewarded in some fashion for the valuable contribution to the university assessment process.
- 5) It is observed that student tracking surveys, alumni surveys, and employer surveys are unevenly practiced across the colleges and departments. These surveys—that provide indirect measures—are important surveys for capturing various aspects of student engagement, learning, and satisfaction and its relationship to graduation outcomes.
- 6) A minor challenge is that a few programs still lack the use of benchmarks or use of rubrics in measuring outcomes. However, a greater problem pertains to small departments’ lack of capacity to concentrate time and resources to assessment activities. Small programs may be able only to dedicate one faculty member, or the department chair to perform the annual assessment work. Due to these burdens, meeting timely deadlines becomes difficult, and the quality of assessment suffers.

SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATIONS

It is suggested the next level of improvement could involve a more decentralized structure with a more attentive feedback process. This means changing the structure so that ownership of the planning and assessment process is closer to the departments and colleges. An important change would be to improve communications with the departments and colleges. More precisely, instead of LAT/OIE presiding over the colleges together, it is advisable to deploy a college-level LAT within each college. In this way the college LAT will have more one-to-one engagement with OIE and the university-wide LAT regarding SOAP and assessment activities. Second, college learning assessment teams may be organized to work within their own college on sharing best practices and collaborating on SOAP and Assessment activities, and basically vying together for the best interests of the student and college. This means OIE would be more actively involved “1-1” with each of the college assessment coordinators. It is also important to streamline the assessment activities of accreditation, academic program review, and program assessment, so not to overly burden departments and faculty assessment coordinators. In matters where the department is small, OIE could collaborate in a much closer capacity with the smaller departments on SOAP and assessment activities as needed.

NEXT STEPS

- The annual review of program assessment reports, as well as any new and revised SOAPs, will start again this summer 2014
- Continue one-on-one consultation on assessment with colleges/departments/programs.

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Attachment A

Policy on Student Outcomes Assessment Data and Information California State University, Fresno

PREAMBLE: Student outcomes assessment is an increasingly important element in academic program review; five-year assessment plans are being developed by a number of departments and programs, and annual assessment measurements of selected learning objectives are being scheduled.

"The faculty has the primary responsibility for such fundamental areas as curriculum, subject matter and methods of instruction. ..." [Article I, Section 6, of The Constitution for the Academic Assembly of California State University, Fresno, page 127-2 of the Academic Policy Manual] and "The faculty should have primary responsibility for establishing the criteria for assessment and the methods for implementing it." [AAUP statement "Mandated Assessment Educational Outcomes" June 1991]

PURPOSE: The guiding purpose in the implementation of student outcomes assessment at California State University, Fresno is improved student learning through modified curricula and instruction.

In support of this purpose, outcomes assessment of student learning will take place at the department and program level (including the GB Program, Honors Program, etc.), where data (i.e., quantitative and qualitative observations) and information (i.e., interpretation of the data) can be used most judiciously and effectively to effect change in curricula and instruction. Student outcome assessment activities are intended to be formative, rather than summative, in nature

POLICY: Data and information generated by outcomes assessment activities will remain under the control of the unit initiating the assessment.

Data and information derived from department-or program-developed student outcomes assessment activities shall not be required for personnel evaluations without the permission of the individual faculty member involved.

Outcomes assessment data and information generated by the assessing unit shall not be required for purposes of resource allocation to schools, departments, and programs. Assessing units may be required from time to time to report on assessment activities completed and the impact of those activities on their programs.

Other evaluative processes for personnel or program review and/or management decisions are not precluded by the policy on the use of student outcomes assessment data and information.

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Attachment B-1

Annual Report Rating					
	0	1	2	3	4
Alignment with SOAP (Questions #1 and #2)	Activities are not consistent with the SOAP and don't make sense		Activities are not exactly aligned with the SOAP but seem reasonable		Activities align with methods and timeline given in SOAP
Discovery from data (Question #3)	No clear evidence that data was compiled	No evidence that data was carefully analyzed and conclusions not clearly based on evidence	Clear evidence that data was analyzed, but conclusions not based on evidence	Some conclusions are drawn based on evidence	Report shows careful consideration of data and insight into strengths and weakness of student performance are identified
Changes Made (Question #4)	No response to conclusions that seem to require action		Possible action items were considered for conclusions presented		Appropriate action was taken based on the conclusions made

	0	1	2	3	4
Overall Engagement in Assessment Activity Rating	No assessment activity reported	Little assessment activity reported	Assessment activity reported, but no changes or planned changes made as a result of data or reported changes were unrelated to assessment findings.	Assessment activity reported along with relevant changes* made or planned	Assessment activity reported along with relevant change*s made or planned based on student performance as related to established benchmarks.

* note relevant changes include a decision not to change anything if the data support this conclusion.

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Attachment B-2

SOAP Rating					
	0	1	2	3	4
Required Elements	missing ≥3 elements	Missing 2 elements	Missing one element	NA	all required elements are included
Check all that are missing:	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Mission</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Goals and Learning Outcomes</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Curriculum Map</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Assessment Methods</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Direct Measures</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Alumni Survey</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Outcomes by Methods Matrix</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Timeline (does it specify dates or Year 1, 2, etc.?)</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Closing the Loop Process</i>				
Current	Out of date				Up to date with current timeline
Assessability of Outcomes	Most outcomes do not include measureable verbs		Some outcomes do not include measureable verbs or are unclear		All outcomes are clear and assessable with measureable verbs
Curriculum Map	no curriculum map		Curriculum map included but no levels of emphasis for each outcome indicated for each course		Curriculum map with levels of emphasis for each outcome indicated for each course
Variety of Methods	Only one method	A mixture of direct and indirect methods used with strong emphasis on indirect methods		A mixture of direct and indirect methods used	A mixture of direct and indirect methods used with strong emphasis on direct methods
Alignment of instruments/ methods with Outcomes	Methods not provided	Methods provided are unlikely to measure stated outcomes	Methods are unclear whether they align with outcomes	methods seem appropriate for almost all of the learning outcomes	Methods align well with stated outcomes and will provide quality data on achievement of outcomes
Defined standards	no standard methods such as a rubric for evaluating student work are used		Rubrics or standards for evaluating work are mentioned (but not included) but no benchmarks for student achievement are established	Rubrics or standards for evaluating work are mentioned (but not included) along with benchmarks for student achievement	Rubrics or standards for evaluating work are included along with benchmarks for student achievement
Process for Closing Loop	no process included		some process for closing the loop is described, but not clear if faculty reflection or change will result		a clear process for closing the loop which is likely to result in meaningful reflection and change

	0	1	2	3	4
Overall SOAP Rating	No SOAP	SOAP is posted, but is outdated/not current	SOAP is current, but does not contain all required elements	SOAP is current and contains all required elements	SOAP is current, contains all required elements and is of high quality with established benchmarks for student performance on outcomes.

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Attachment C

Table 1.1: Annual Report Rating by College (Undergraduate Programs)

College	2011	2012	2013
	Annual Report Rating Mean	Annual Report Rating Mean	Annual Report Rating Mean
College of Arts and Humanities	1.83	1.88	2.71
College of Health and Human Services	3.22	3.39	3.79
College of Science and Math	1.45	1.22	1.78
College of Social Sciences	1.77	1.07	3.04
Craig School of Business	2.83	2.83	3.88
Jordan College of Agricultural Sciences and Technology	1.53	1.30	2.98
Kremen School of Education & Human Development*	n/a	n/a	n/a
Lyles College of Engineering	2.50	2.95	2.83
Henry Madden Library	2.00	-	2.00
University Mean	1.97	1.83	2.82

*n/a, no undergraduate program

Table 2.1: Annual Report Rating by College (Graduate Programs)

College	2012*	2013
	Annual Report Rating Mean	Annual Report Rating Mean
College of Arts and Humanities	0.21	1.19
College of Health and Human Services	2.17	2.95
College of Science and Math	1.22	1.47
College of Social Sciences	0.75	2.50
Craig School of Business	2.33	4.00
Jordan College of Agricultural Sciences and Technology	2.00	2.50
Kremen School of Education & Human Development	1.79	2.33
Lyles College of Engineering	2.33	2.08
University Mean	1.48	2.09

*No data available for 2011

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