

# A WINDOW ON ASSESSMENT



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CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SACRAMENTO OFFICE OF ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

## Self-Assessment and Self-Study: The Road to Self-Assurance

Terry Underwood, Faculty Assessment Coordinator



TERRY UNDERWOOD

“This situation is changing at Sac State—a slow turning from the inside out.”

In the inaugural issue of this newsletter (Spring 2008), Jackie Donath, Chair of the Department of Humanities and Religious Studies, wrote about “The Promise of Self-Study.” Professor Donath asked a question that still resonates in on-going campus discussions about assessment and program review: “In a university committed to the success of all students, how can we meet the increasing pressures for accountability while remaining true to the foundational values of our departmental culture?” Clearly, according to Donath, the answer does not lie in traditional program review: “The result was self-studies and program reviews in which time (and paper) was frittered away filling in blanks, providing information of dubious meaningfulness to anyone, and which often only tangentially discussed student learning in meaningful or direct ways.” Donath pointed to the work of the Program Review Oversight Committee (PROC) in redesigning the nature and purpose of program review as a way to balance accountability and departmental culture on the fulcrum of student learning.

This issue of “A Window on Assessment” provides an update on PROC’s pilot project and offers information about what has been done, where we are, and where we are headed in terms of program review. Jeff Brodd, Kimo Ah Yun, and Ben Amata are active and committed members of PROC who have been instrumental in paving the way for a shift from an often meaningless program review protocol to a process firmly grounded in inquiry into student learning. Dianne Hyson, Chair of the Department of Family and Consumer Sciences, has firsthand experience with the new program review procedures and gives us a close-up look at what PROC’s work has meant to her and to her department. Finally, Jeff Mason, Dean of the College of Arts and Letters, offers a play in one scene to illuminate the ways in which our deans have been called upon to

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perform the delicate balancing act of being true to departmental culture vs. responding to pressures for accountability.

Since the 1980s, attention to program review has intensified, and external pressure has grown to change program reviews from justifying a program and arguing for more resources to serious studying of the connections between program resources and student learning. Bresciani (2006) traced these pressures to growing concerns about the quality of American higher education, heightened importance of a college degree for economic viability, fragmentation among institutions that purportedly offer the same degrees, and the perception that institutions want to serve only the best students, not all students. Historically, not much has been said in self studies about what and how well students are learning in relation to resource allocation, and not much has been done to document educational effectiveness, partly because measuring student learning in a transparent and credible way is hard. This situation is changing at Sac State—a slow turning from the inside out.

Bresciani, M. (2006). Outcomes-based academic and curricular review. Stylus Publishing, LLC.

# Making the Making of Magic: a play in one scene

By Jeffrey Mason, Dean of the College of Arts and Letters



JEFFREY MASON

**TIME:** The present.

**PLACE:** The office of ALBUS DUMBLEDORE, Headmaster of the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.

*(At rise, DUMBLEDORE sits alone, gazing into a crystal ball for a few moments before sitting back in HIS chair with a sigh. There is a knock at the door.)*

**Dumbledore:** Enter!

*(MINERVA McGONAGALL enters carrying a stack of materials that includes both ancient texts with brass corner bindings and shining new reports in polished leather.)*

**McGonagall:** Good afternoon!

**Dumbledore:** Ah—you found them?

**McGonagall:** Oh, yes. Took me most of the morning, but here they are. Annual reports back to the very beginning, when the school was founded, all the way to the one we wrote last year.

**Dumbledore:** I see. Of course, the requirements from the Ministry of Magic have changed.

**McGonagall:** And we must comply.

**Dumbledore:** No young magician may graduate from Hogwarts without meeting the Ministry's standards.

**McGonagall:** I'm afraid not everyone on the faculty quite...

**Dumbledore:** ...agrees?

**McGonagall:** Well, perhaps they don't fully understand. Some have been here so very long.

**Dumbledore:** Ah, yes. I've invited one of your special favorites to join us today.

**McGonagall:** You don't mean...

**Dumbledore:** And here he is.

*(An ancient GHOST, translucent but dusty, even a bit moldy, emerges from the opposite wall. CUTHBERT BINNS has been on the Hogwarts faculty longer than anyone can remember. HE fell asleep in front of the fireplace one evening, and the next morning, HE got up and went to class but left HIS body lying in the chair.)*

**Dumbledore:** Good afternoon, Professor Binns.

**Binns:** Ah? Oh, yes, good day, good day.

**McGonagall:** See here, Binns. We're writing the assessment report for the Ministry.

**Binns:** No such thing in my day. Trusted us, they did.

*(HE tries to sit in a chair but discovers that HE simply passes through the seat, so HE resigns himself to floating just a few inches above the floor.)*

**McGonagall:** And they still do, Binns, but we have a responsibility.

**Binns:** Professor ... historian ... magician ... All meant something.

**Dumbledore:** And still do.

**Binns:** Respect! I tell you, just yesterday, I was discoursing on the history of dragons' tears, and I happened to look up from my notes to find that the entire class had fallen asleep. Astonishing!

**McGonagall:** Perhaps they were bored?

**Binns:** Impossible!

**McGonagall:** Now see here, Binns ...

*(There is a knock on the door.)*

**Dumbledore:** Ah, yes—our other visitor has arrived. Enter!

*(The door flies open, revealing DOLORES UMBRIDGE, a professor obsessed with enforcing the rules, often through extraordinary measures, who bears a disquieting resemblance to a toad.)*

**Dumbledore:** Good afternoon, Dolores.

**Umbridge:** A likely story! *(SHE scuttles over to DUMBLEDORE, stabbing an accusing finger in his face.)* You can't fool me, Albus! Oh, excuse me—Headmaster Dumbledore! We'll see about that!

**Dumbledore:** May I offer you a cup of tea, Professor?

**Umbridge:** I know every move you're making! Even the ones you haven't thought of yet!

**McGonagall:** Really!

**Umbridge:** That's enough out of you, Minerva. Gryffindor isn't all it's cracked up to be, so you mind your manners! (SHE rounds on DUMBLEDORE.) You are systematically misinterpreting the Ministry's directives as part of your conspiracy to dominate the faculty!

**Dumbledore:** Am I?

**Umbridge:** You're increasing our workload and infringing on our academic freedom. (SHE leans in and almost whispers.) I know you'd like to replace me with a new Dark Arts teacher. Well, I'd like to see you try!

**McGonagall:** There's no one darker than you, Dolores.

**Umbridge:** The Ministry never dreamed that the Hogwarts faculty would be wasting their time with all this assessment nonsense! Time we could be spending teaching! Or defending this school against You-Know-Who!

**Binns:** Assessment? Oh, that. But really, Albus, I assess my students every day.

**Dumbledore:** Of course you do, Professor.

**Binns:** Tests, papers, oral presentations. Final exams! No one gets out of my class unless I say so.

**McGonagall:** Just as I always suspected.

**Binns:** Why, I even asked them to offer suggestions once—you know, on what they thought of the class. That was just last year. Or was it the year before? Never could find those evaluations...

**Umbridge:** It's busy work, nothing more. You might as well line up the entire faculty and confiscate their wands. You'd do just as well replacing us with mudbloods.

**Binns:** After all, Albus, we give grades, don't we? What else is there?

**Umbridge:** And just look at those reports! (SHE gestures contemptuously at the stacks sitting on the desk.) Who's going to read them? Hmmm?

**Dumbledore:** Cuthbert, of course you give grades. I'm well aware of that. And thank you.

**Umbridge:** Then what do you want?!?

**McGonagall:** We're not assessing students!

**Binns:** We're not?

**Dumbledore:** Well, not individually. We're assessing the program—the school. The Hogwarts education. Everything we stand for.

**Binns:** Something wrong with it?

**Dumbledore:** I pray not. But we bear a great responsibility. Every young magician passes through these halls. They depend upon us.

**Umbridge:** As well they should.

**Dumbledore:** It's time to take stock—after all, Hogwarts was founded a very long time ago.

**McGonagall:** High time we stopped to look back.

**Dumbledore:** I'm sure your classes are going quite well, Dolores. And yours, Professor.

**Binns:** Then what's the...?

**McGonagall:** We've never tried to measure the experience as a whole.

**Umbridge:** The "experience"?!?!? It's a school!! The students take classes!!! If they pass those classes, they graduate!!!!

**Dumbledore:** Tell me, Professor, who's the best student you've seen in class this year?

**Umbridge:** The best? That's simple. Hermione Granger. Remarkable how she compensates for those Muggle parents. I suspect she's a changeling.

**Dumbledore:** Quite so. Do all students do as well as Miss Granger?

**Umbridge:** Of course not!

**McGonagall:** So it is possible to pass a course without actually meeting her standard of excellence!

*(Continued on page 4)*

# Making the Making of Magic: a play in one scene

(Continued from page 3)

**Binns:** Really, some of those boys! That Neville Longbottom—sometimes I wonder he can even find his robe in the morning.

**Dumbledore:** Just so. We administer examinations, of course—O.W.L.s and N.E.W.T.s. But in spite of your good efforts, both of you, not everyone earns an “Acceptable,” much as we all hope for better than that, and there’s even the odd “Troll” nearly every year. Most regrettable.

**Umbridge:** Someone isn’t maintaining appropriate standards!

**McGonagall:** There, you see?

**Dumbledore:** Well, let’s hope and suppose that every professor is conscientious, but the fact is, the whole isn’t always the sum of the parts.

**Binns:** I give grades, I tell you!

**Dumbledore:** My old friend, all we’re asking for is a bit of clarity. Set the goals, measure the students’ progress, add a page or two to the report. Nothing simpler.

**Binns:** You’ve seen my test scores.

**Dumbledore:** Yes, of course, but we’re looking for patterns and trends. We desire your guidance.

**McGonagall:** Perhaps if no one remembers the history of dragons’ tears, we might want to find some other way of explaining it.

**Binns:** Sleeping! Right in the middle of my lecture!

**McGonagall:** We might start with defining a few outcomes.

**Binns:** Snout buns?!?!?

**Dumbledore:** Outcomes. What do we want the students to take away from your History of Magic classes?

**Binns:** They’d better leave everything where they find it!

**McGonagall:** No, Professor—“takeaway.” It’s a Muggle term. What you have that you didn’t have before.

**Dumbledore:** Could you try writing out a few? Just

give them to me tomorrow.

**Umbridge:** You mean ...

**McGonagall:** What the students learn.

**Binns:** Well, that would be everything!

**Dumbledore:** Then perhaps you might explain where it all leads.

**Umbridge:** You’re interfering, Albus. Trying to control the curriculum. Always meddling...

**Dumbledore:** Not at all. I am here to serve.

**McGonagall:** Professor Binns, we are training magicians. When they’ve left Hogwarts, what has your class given them that they’ll use every day?

*(BINNS simply stares; the question has clearly never occurred to him.)*

**Dumbledore:** Well, just do your best, my friend. Show me something in the morning.

*(Still nonplussed, BINNS floats through the wall and disappears.)*

**McGonagall:** You’re too kind to him.

**Umbridge:** All right, all right! I’ll see what I can do. But I warn you—especially you, Minerva McGonagall—nothing will come of it! Nothing will change!

**Dumbledore:** Thank you, Professor.

**Umbridge:** Indeed! *(Glowing, UMBRIDGE flings open the door, scuttles into the corridor, and slams the door behind HER.)*

**McGonagall:** I don’t know why you put up with them.

**Dumbledore:** We must let people come along in their own time, in their own ways. No point in making demands they don’t wish to meet. Wait until they’re ready.

**McGonagall:** Well, I suppose.

**END OF PLAY**

# A View of Program Review from the Perspective of Family and Consumer Sciences

By Dianne Hyson, Chair, FACS

Many academic faculty approach the program review process with some trepidation, and the FACS department was no different. Most of us are familiar with the traditional program review format. We have spent at least part of the past several years wading through pages and pages of our previous program review report from 2002 as we worked toward implementing the many recommendations. It seemed impossible that six years had flown by and it was time for another review. Already?!

When presented with the option of a pilot review format that focused on assessment, we were somewhat intimidated. However, we decided to use Option C based on what we initially perceived to be two obvious benefits; one, it was significantly more focused than the other options and two, the report could be shorter! We were also feeling somewhat empowered by our growing experience with assessing student learning outcomes and the open invitation to involve Terry Underwood and our college-based assessment coordinator, Amy Liu, in the review process.

Throughout the course of our self-study, however, we learned that the pilot approach provided many benefits beyond our initial expectations. First and foremost, the focused format was much more conducive to involving the entire faculty. The most important mission we share is to have students learn, and it made sense to all of us to tie our review of faculty, curriculum, resources, facilities etc. to that mission. Our faculty meetings to discuss the program review were not consumed by dividing up the once-onerous task of writing various sections of the report. Rather, we worked on a systematic review of our program mission

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and program learning outcomes. We took Terry and Amy up on their offer and asked them to join one of our meetings where they patiently answered questions and clarified some of the uncertainties we had about assessment relative to our review.

It was encouraging for the entire group to see how far we have come over the past six years and particularly in the last two years. It was easy to divide our review into a pre-2007 and post-2007 assessment era. Our earlier work was focused on student grades, exit surveys, and other indirect measures of assessment and lacked a co-coordinated direction. Our post-2007 plan, based on an overhaul including streamlining 30-plus learning outcomes to a more manageable six, is clearly more meaningful, and we have learned how to integrate direct assessment measures into work we are already doing.

We found it valuable to have our assessment plan reviewed by an internal review team and an external reviewer, a unique opportunity that would not occur without having an assessment-focused review. Our self-study addressed issues that would likely surface regardless of the program review format, but the forum to discuss these in the context of their impact on learning outcomes was a clear benefit. Option C also provides the opportunity to conduct a “focused inquiry” into any issue of concern that aligns with the mission of the university and is central to the function of the department.

The timing of the program review could not have been better for the FACS department as we were grappling with an issue of particular concern to all of us, and we were able to examine, reflect upon, and share this with the review team.

Looking back, the entire process was generally positive, and our department is already much better for it. Adopting Option C was a good choice for us, and I would recommend any department undergoing a review to consider this approach.



DIANNE HYSON

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# Program Review: Pilot Project Update

By Jeffrey Brodd; Ben Amata; and Kimo Ah Yun



JEFFREY BRODD;  
BEN AMATA; AND  
KIMO AH YUN

The traditional purpose of program review is periodically to assess the health of academic programs; to take stock of where goals are being met; and to analyze problems where they exist and recommend steps

toward finding solutions. While mandated by the Chancellor's Office, policy, process, and procedures are created and administered by campuses, except for those departments that are reviewed by outside accrediting bodies. Five years ago faculty concerns about program review policy at Sacramento State led to interest in exploring new ways to approach this mandate. The Program Review Oversight Committee (PROC), a subcommittee of the Faculty Senate's Curriculum Policies Committee, developed a pilot project to study an alternative approach that would shift program evaluation from being based on a long checklist of items to a more meaningful process through which departments are afforded the opportunity to reflect on their accomplishments and to find ways to enhance student learning. This article is in part an update on this pilot project.

As the pilot unfolded, it became increasingly clear to PROC that changes to program review needed to reflect the criteria applied by WASC (the Western Association of Schools & Colleges), our regional accrediting body responsible for accrediting

our university. Almost two decades ago WASC began to discuss changes to its standards, which had been descriptive in nature, to emphasize reflection on student learning outcomes and to support reflection with evidence drawn from good assessment. Our university, like others, has needed to adopt these principles and incorporate them into our program review practices.

In conjunction with Academic Affairs, PROC is responsible for administering program review. It has known for some time that our cumbersome and burdensome program review process needed change. Self-studies tended to be descriptive rather than reflective, and often they failed to address substantive issues. In particular, the system failed to provide timely feedback concerning recommendations, thus failing to "close of the loop."

It came as no surprise to PROC when WASC validated these concerns in its latest accreditation review and encouraged PROC to carry on with the pilot. In 2007, the Faculty Senate approved PROC's pilot project to offer departments a choice among three models for producing the self-study

so that we can determine the best option for our program review process... So far, almost all departments have selected Option C which was modeled after CSU San Luis Obispo's process. This option asks departments to assess their learning outcomes as a means of gauging the health of their program, evaluating their assessment programs as a way to ensure their evidence is valid, and choosing an area of inquiry for analysis. All of the analysis and interpretations are to be linked to

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student learning, and supported with qualitative and/or quantitative evidence.

In PROC's estimation, the pilot has yielded a number of advantages. Departments are better able to examine and deal with substantive curricular issues. Moreover, self-studies demonstrate greater faculty engagement in reflecting on student outcomes and on the major concerns of the department. Reducing the number of questions asked of departments in creating their self-studies has resulted in a less burdensome process with a more highly focused reflection on the primary mission: teaching and learning and supporting those goals with evidence.

Some of the issues that departments have dealt with concern adequate preparation for graduates, failure rates for core courses, implementing rubrics for capstone courses, involving students in faculty research, the feasibility of a graduate program, aligning university baccalaureate goals with department learning goals, and aligning graduate licensing with adequately trained researchers.

Departmental response to the new model has been favorable. Various steps seem to have significantly increased faculty engagement: the Office of Institutional Research provides important departmental/college data; departments submit a self-study proposal in consultation with the college dean; and departments meet with the program review team prior to writing the self-study. Self-studies provide much greater and richer information about programs and therefore provide

the review team and the external consultant with the type of information needed to provided a more in depth review of the program.

The University's work with program review is by no means finished. WASC in their June 24, 2009, letter commended the University for its efforts so far: "program review has been a powerful engine for building campus community and improving programs." However, they recommend that further work needs to be done in integrating planning and budgeting with program review recommendations and funding. PROC is working on trying to shorten the time duration for program review. It is also currently gathering data for evaluating the pilot project in order to make recommendations to the Curriculum Policies Committee and ultimately the Faculty Senate on any policy and procedural changes for program review.

Quality program reviews and assessment efforts are critical to the health and improvement of our programs and to providing the best quality teaching and learning. In the words of Dr. Terry Underwood, Assessment Coordinator: "program review is the core of the WASC strategy, and assessment is the core of program review."

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## Last Minute Developments for the Archive

Just as this issue of *A Window on Assessment* was being finished, the Faculty Senate took a giant step forward in the journey toward improvements in program review. The Senate voted to adopt a revised set of Baccalaureate Learning Goals to organize and guide assessment work within and across academic programs, including General Education and all of the Majors.

gathered expertise from universities across the nation to write rubrics that help us operationalize these goals in ways that can inform instructional decisions, large and small.

As the faculty take steps to integrate all of our academic programs with the revised Baccalaureate Learning Goals, the Office of Academic Program Assessment in Library 67 offers a stand-

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*“...the (AACU) gathered expertise from universities across the nation to write rubrics that help us operationalize these goals in ways that can inform instructional decisions, large and small.”*

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As part of the revised set of learning goals, the Senate included references to the framing language of learning goals known nationally as the LEAP goals (Liberal Education and America's Promise). The LEAP goals are useful in themselves in that they provide a common language for talking about issues in curriculum, instruction, and assessment within and across institutions of higher education. But the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AACU) worked to make the LEAP goals even more useful when it

ing invitation to anyone—campus faculty, chairs, deans, faculty senators, students, community members, high school teachers, community college instructors—to arrange a time for meeting in order to discuss and unpack these rubrics. AACU named the project that resulted in the creation of these rubrics the “VALUE” project. In order for this value to be realized, we will all need to take the time to give them our consideration and to see where and how they can help us all.