

A WINDOW ON ASSESSMENT



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CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SACRAMENTO OFFICE OF ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

Making Annual Program Assessment and the Reports Easier to Understand and Use

By Amy Liu, Interim University Faculty Assessment Coordinator



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Academic program assessment and review at Sacramento State is an ongoing process that facilitates continuous program improvement and includes the following four different but related areas (<http://webapps2.csus.edu/assessment/>):

- **Assessment Plans:** Each program needs to develop a program assessment plan which contains the following elements: program goals and/or expected learning outcomes for students, methods for assessing progress toward these learning outcomes, and a time table for assessing each of the learning outcomes. This plan should be updated yearly or as frequently as needed.
- **Three Different Levels of Assessment (course, program and university):** Each program should engage in its own in-house assessment on a regular basis. This type of assessment may reflect both university goals as well as the unique needs of a particular program. Such assessment can also include course evaluations.
- **Program Review:** Each department undertakes an extensive program review every six years. As part of the program review process, departments are asked to use annual program assessment data to evaluate how well students are meeting program learning expectations and university learning goals.
- **Annual Program Assessment Report:** On an annual basis, programs are asked to provide Academic Affairs with a report on program assessment activities that have occurred during the past academic year. These reports should identify learning goals and/or objectives that were targeted for program assessment, measures used to evaluate progress toward those goals, what the results of these measures tell the department about its program, and changes made or planned

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Fall 2011 | Issue 8

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in response to the results. Departments are not expected to assess progress on all goals or objectives each year. Rather the purpose of annual assessments is to develop a re-occurring assessment cycle that will facilitate continuous review of the program and progress toward identified learning outcomes. Annual program assessment and the reports provide a solid foundation and data for the six year program review at Sacramento State.

For sometime now, each department/program at Sacramento State has been required to submit an annual assessment report (AAR) by July 1 to the Office of Academic Affairs. In the last two academic years, significant progress has been made in the submission and the quality of the annual assessment efforts and the reports. Almost all the departments turned in their AAR by the July 1st 2011 deadline. More departments followed the AAR submission format, and more faculty members are involved in the assessment process and the direct evaluation of student work.

However, many of our annual assessment reports were based on course assessment rather than pro-

gram assessment. Few provided the explicit connections between the program's learning outcomes and the university's learning goals.

Some departments assessed one learning outcome for the year, but did not mention how this learning outcome was related to the overall department assessment plan or to the state, national, and international standards/trends.

Many reports also failed to provide specific and/or adequate information about data collection, analysis (including explicit instructions for the assignments or portfolio), or criteria used to evaluate or collect the data (such as rubrics, survey questions, or any other data collection instruments or assignments), so it is hard for the audiences to understand how the data was collected, analyzed, and presented.

Some reports did not allow readers to follow or objectively evaluate the quality of the results and the conclusions of the annual assessment efforts because the data was not clearly summarized.

Many programs did not use program review and assessment results to review or update the department curriculum and course offerings, improve student learning and success, or make many other important short-term and long-term decisions in the department and the college.

Thus, many annual assessment efforts are very hard for our students and faculty in the program, the college, and the university to understand and/or to use. In fact, many of these annual assessment efforts are conducted because the departments are required to

do so, not because they want to use quality assessment data to make informed decisions, including improving student learning and success. What's missing in most of the annual assessment efforts at Sacramento State is faculty involvement and buy-in; annual assessment efforts are treated as if they have little to do with syllabi, student learning and success, and student advising and mentoring.

Deep budget cuts make it even harder for faculty and departments to keep annual assessment a top priority when the majority of the faculty members in our departments have not seen or experienced the direct connection between their teaching and the program assessment, program review, WASC accreditation, and student retention and success. But even with these challenges, it is important that we maintain our efforts to assess what our students are taking away as a reflection of our core mission.

How can we keep assessment meaningful and manageable during these unprecedented and tough economic times? How can we use program review and assessment to re-focus on our core mission and reduce our workload?

In this edition of the newsletter, we showcase the efforts of two departments and one college who have made impressive strides to capture and understand student takeaways from their programs even in the face of these challenges. You can find their annual assessment reports on our website. The following are the comments for their annual assessment reports. This, along with the original reports, will help you better understand their assessment efforts.

Comments about the Annual Assessment Report from Geography

<http://www.csus.edu/Programassessment/Assessment%20Reports/10-11/10-11%20Geography.pdf>



This annual assessment report provides a good example of focusing on program assessment and using quality assessment data to improve student learning.

At the beginning of the assessment report, this department has described clearly its assessment process and the explicit connections among the program learning goals, learning outcomes, means of assessment, assessment measures, and the assessment cycles.

This department has done an excellent job organizing the results of the assessment report by student learning outcomes (research questions) rather than key assignments (a senior project in the capstone class) or other data collection efforts (such as the

quiz, graduating senior interview, or alumni survey), presenting data in tables, analyzing the results, and interpreting the findings for one learning outcome at a time using different classes, different methods of data collection, and different sources of data.

This department has done an excellent job proposing possible changes at the end of June when the department finishes its data collection and analysis.

At the August retreat, this department focuses on reflecting on the assessment results and using the assessment data to improve student learning and implement changes.

All of these efforts have made it much easier for the faculty, the students, and the general public to understand this assessment report and appreciate the department effort to use assessment data to improve student learning and the undergraduate program.

The department's proposal to use the assessment data to follow individual students has the potential to improve student retention and success.

After making a few minor changes discussed below, this report can be an excellent example for other departments in the university:

Comments about the Annual Assessment Report from Chemistry

<http://www.csus.edu/Programassessment/Assessment%20Reports/10-11/10-11%20Chemistry.pdf>

This annual assessment report focuses on program assessment rather than course assessment and offers a good example of data presentation, analysis, and interpretation.

The department has made use of modified Option I to organize its assessment report. Moreover, Chemistry has provided concise and relevant background information about the department, its program, and the program assessment at the beginning of the assessment report, especially its learning outcomes.

This department has used two methods to assess the undergraduate program: a national exam in three core courses and poster projects in 6 core courses; both are good program assessment practices.

Chemistry has provided specific information about data collection and analysis so faculty, students, and the general public can understand how the data is collected, analyzed, and presented and can **OBJECTIVELY AND INDEPENDENTLY** evaluate the quality of the data and the conclusions of the assessment effort.

This department has done an excellent job presenting data in tables, analyzing the results, and interpret-

- Create a table to explicitly link how the six learning goals match the eight learning outcomes, and how they are explicitly related to the university BA/BS learning goals and/or any state or national standards.
- In the assessment report or the attachment, include explicit instructions for the senior project and the rubric used to evaluate the project so faculty, students, and the general public can understand how the data is collected, analyzed, and presented and can evaluate **OBJECTIVELY AND INDEPENDENTLY** the quality of the data and the conclusions of the assessment. Include the instruction and the rubric for the senior project in the syllabi of the capstone class and post them on the department website so all the students, faculty, and the public can be made aware of them. These changes will help further improve the reliability and validity of the assessment effort.
- Give examples of questions from the quiz and make a connection to clearly show how these quiz questions gage each of the student learning outcomes.

ing the findings for the program rather than just for the classes where the assessment data were collected. Chemistry has also presented clearly, in tables, how the department learning outcomes are related to the national standards.



All of the above efforts make it much easier for the faculty, students, and the general public to understand the assessment report and appreciate the department efforts to use assessment data to improve students learning and the undergraduate program.

After making a few minor changes discussed below, this assessment report can be used by other departments as an excellent example of modified Option I for the university annual assessment reporting:

The learning goals and the rubric for the poster projects need to be modified to match exactly the five learning outcomes. Create a matrix or a table that shows the explicit connection among the three components (learning outcomes, goals, and the rubric).

- Create another table to show how the department learning outcomes/goals are related to the university learning outcomes and/or the standards of the American Chemistry Society.

- Include explicit instructions for the poster assignments in the six core courses and create more explicit criteria in the rubric that will be used to evaluate or collect the data. Look into borrowing more in-depth rubrics such as the VALUE rubrics when evaluating student work. Take these explicit criteria and adjust them to fit the program.
- Include the instructions and the rubric in the syllabi of all the core courses and post them on the department website so all the students, faculty, and the public can be made aware of them. These changes will help further improve the reliability and validity of the assessment effort.
- Give examples of questions from the exam and make a connection to clearly show how these questions gauge the student learning outcomes.

Comments about the Annual Assessment Report from the College of Business Administration

<http://webapps2.csus.edu/assessment/Reports/10-11/10%20Collegeof%20Business%20Administration.pdf>

The College of Business Administration provides a good example for using assessment data to improve student learning and for those departments/programs that are under self-study, program review, or outside accreditation.

The college uses assessment report format Option I to organize its report. In addition, at the beginning of the assessment report, the college has also provided concise background information about the college, its programs, and the program assessment plan;

which is done on a three year assessment cycle. This college has used direct and indirect measures to assess the four undergraduate and graduate programs: BSBA, MBA, EMBA, and MSA. The college specifies clearly a set of integrated learning goals and objectives for each of its four programs. This relevant information together with the organization of the report (Option I) makes it much easier for the readers to understand the assessment report.

The college also explains clearly that during this year, the first focus of the assessment is to create the improvement plan for each of the learning objectives that showed a need for improvement. Instead of talking about all improvement plans for all the learning objectives, the college strategically chooses to show how the college has created the improvement plan for one of the objectives: BSBA 2.1. This summary has made the annual assessment report much more manageable for the college to prepare.



Then the college goes on to discuss in more details the other two focuses for this year's assessment:

Discussing indirect and direct measure results at the graduate program retreats;

Revising the College Assessment Policy

All of the above strategies have made it much easier for the faculty, students, and the general public to understand the assessment report and to appreciate the college's efforts to use assessment data to improve students learning and its undergraduate and graduate programs.

After making the two minor changes discussed below, this assessment report can be used by other departments as an excellent example of modified Option I for the university annual assessment reporting:

- If the college is in the middle of a multi-year assessment cycle and is making references to previous data collection, such as survey results or rubrics used, please attach those items to the annual assessment report so the faculty, students and the general public can OBJECTIVELY AND INDEPENDENTLY evaluate the quality of the data and the conclusions of the assessment effort.



- Making abbreviations, such as BSBA 2.1., more explicit will help audiences follow the report more easily.

“ All of the above strategies have made it much easier for the faculty, students, and the general public to understand the assessment report . ”

Summary: Essential Information in the Annual Assessment Report

All the annual assessment reports should include the following information in order to make our annual assessment reports easy to understand and use.

- I. Introduction Section (this can be re-used every year, provided you don't make any major changes to learning goals or procedures, e.g., Section I of Geography Report or the first three pages of Chemistry Report):
 - State all the program learning goals and provide the background information for why the department/program has selected the particular learning outcome or outcomes to study this year.
 - Describe the standard process for conducting assessments for each program.
 - Provide a curriculum map.
- II. Full Description of the Learning Goal(s) Studied in the Current Cycle:
 - Learning goals examined this year.
 - Methods and criteria used (tools, number of students, response rate, and program rubrics, and sources of evidence).
- III. Description of Plans of Action Resulting from the Findings:
 - Data collected and findings.
 - Analysis and reflection.
 - Program and curricular changes being proposed.
 - Assessment process or tool changes being proposed.
 - Any other changes proposed.
- IV. Description and Impacts of Changes from the Previous Year's Assessment
- V. Description of Other Assessment Activities if Available
- VI. Description of Assessment Activities Planned for the Next Assessment Cycle



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Additional Resources

The following resources are also very helpful to make the annual assessment reports easy to understand and use.

“ How can we keep assessment meaningful and manageable during these unprecedented and tough economic times?

How can we use program review and assessment to re-focus on our core mission and reduce our workload?... ”

1. What criteria will be used to evaluate learning outcomes and their assessment?
The four WASC rubrics will be used to evaluate learning outcomes, the use of capstone classes and portfolios for assessment, and the use of assessment data for program review. These rubrics can be found at: http://www.apu.edu/wasc/pdfs/program_learning_outcomes_rubric.pdf
2. Fifteen VALUE (Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education) rubrics contain useful information for those departments/programs that need to develop or modify rubrics:

Intellectual and Practical Skills

- Inquiry and analysis
- Critical thinking
- Creative thinking
- Written communication
- Oral communication
- Reading
- Quantitative literacy
- Information literacy
- Teamwork
- Problem solving

Personal and Social Responsibility

- Civic knowledge and engagement—local and global
- Intercultural knowledge and competence
- Ethical reasoning
- Foundations and skills for lifelong learning

Integrative and Applied Learning

- Integrative and applied learning

These 15 rubrics can be found at: http://www.aacu.org/value/rubrics/index_p.cfm?CFID=33875969&CFTOKEN=42636068

3. The Degree Qualification Profile by the Lumina Foundation has provided a new framework to define Associate, Bachelor, and Master Degrees which could be very useful for departments that have both a bachelor and master degree program. This document can be found online at: http://www.luminafoundation.org/publications/The_Degree_Qualifications_Profile.pdf

4. How can you get help?

If you need any help with program assessment and/or the annual assessment reports, please contact the Office of Academic Program Assessment at (916) 278-2497 or visit our website: <http://www.csus.edu/Programassessment/>