Feedback for the 2011-2012 Annual Assessment Report
Department of Environmental Studies

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October 2012
California State University, Sacramento
To: Dean, College of Social Sciences and Interdisciplinary Studies  
Chair, Department of Environmental Studies

From: Office of Academic Program Assessment (OAPA)

Date: Oct. 2012

Subject: Feedback for the 2011-2012 Annual Assessment Report

CC: Office of Academic Affairs

The 2011-2012 annual assessment reports are based on the learning outcome assessment template prepared by the Office of Academic Affairs in support of the IPP (Instructional Program Priorities) process in 2012. This memo offers a summary of the documentation provided by the Department, a description of the assessment strategies used to assess program learning outcomes, and feedback for improving assessment practices in the future.

We have used appropriate WASC (Western Associate of Schools and Colleges) rubrics for guidance on effective practices in several areas, including the quality of the learning outcomes, assessment plans, methods/data/analysis, program review, and the use of assessment data for curriculum improvement, academic planning, and budgeting. This report and the following appendices can be used to help a department, a program, or a college to determine the extent to which such an assessment system is in place and what additional components or processes may need to be developed or improved for the programs in the department:

- Appendix 1: WASC “Rubric for Assessing the Quality of Academic Program Learning Outcomes”
- Appendix 2a: WASC “Rubric for Assessing the Use of Capstone Experience for Assessing Program Learning Outcomes”
- Appendix 2b: WASC “Rubric for Assessing the Use of Portfolio for Assessing Program Learning Outcomes”
- Appendix 3: Background Information for Academic Program Assessment and Review
- Appendix 4: Sacramento State Baccalaureate Learning Goals for the 21st Century & AAC&U’s 15 VALUE Rubrics
- Appendix 5: Relevant Verbs in Defining Learning Outcomes
- Appendix 6: Future Considerations for Program Review and Assessment
- Appendix 7: WASC: “Rubric for Assessing the Integration of Student Learning Assessment into Program Reviews”
- Appendix 8: Glossary

Lastly, we would like to recognize and thank Dr. Don Taylor (Interim Assistant Vice President, Academic Programs and Global Engagement), Janett Torset and Korin Vallejo for their assistance in this assessment review process.

If you have any questions about the content of this report or the assessment of your academic program, please contact Dr. Amy Liu (amyliuus@yahoo.com), Director of the Office of Academic Program Assessment.
Executive Summary

In general, the Department of Environmental Studies has nice momentum in creating program learning outcomes, using pre- and post-test methods to determine if students are achieving course learning outcomes, and examining and discussing the data to improve the courses in the program.

As the Department moves forward, we encourage it to:
1. Clarify the specific learning outcomes for the BA, BS, and minor programs (i.e. we are not sure how the learning outcomes have different expectations for each of the programs) and how those differences are assessed;
2. Further develop methods of assessing program-level learning outcomes as opposed to course-level learning outcomes (or clarification of the process);
3. Consider an assessment of the senior thesis requirement as a summative program assessment;
4. Devise methods of data collection to assess achievement of learning outcomes in the minor program;
5. Clarify consistency of rubrics across assessment; and
6. Devise methods of data collection to assess achievement of learning outcomes from external constituents (e.g. alumni, employers, etc.).
This report focuses on the key assessment questions in bold below.

1. **Have formal program (not course) learning outcomes been developed and/or assessed for all the programs in the department?**

The Department of Environmental Studies reported the same four program learning outcomes for the BA and BS programs, and the minor program. Programs are in the “emerging” to “developed” stages in program assessment, in which there are reasonable outcomes listed but it is not clear how the expectations are different for each program.

Based on the information in the reports, it is unclear how the learning outcomes are different for each of the three programs. It appears that there is a list of eight learning outcomes, and then information about their assessment in specific courses. It is unclear how the learning outcomes are assessed at the program-level and if there are different expectations for each program. More explanation would help clarify.

Using pre- and post-test assessments is an excellent way to determine if courses are helping students achieve the learning outcomes in each course, yet it is unclear how students at the program-level are achieving the learning outcomes. It seems the learning outcomes are course objectives and more information in how this information is aggregated and compiled at the program-level would help clarify.

To date (when the Department handed in their assessment report to the Provost in early 2012), no formal program assessment or data collection has been conducted separately for each of the undergraduate programs or the minor program. It seems that the assessment committee has only developed and implemented assessment of the undergraduate program as a whole, and differentiation of each program would be useful in the future.

**Table 1: Department Assessment Status**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Assessment Plan</th>
<th>Program Learning Outcomes</th>
<th>Data Collected</th>
<th>Data Used</th>
<th>Fall 2011 Enrollment</th>
<th>External Accreditation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BA Environmental Studies</td>
<td>Developed &amp; updated</td>
<td>Developed &amp; assessed</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BS Environmental Studies</td>
<td>Developed &amp; updated</td>
<td>Developed &amp; assessed</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total BA/BS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>189</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor</td>
<td>Somewhat developed</td>
<td>Somewhat developed &amp; assessed</td>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total Department</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td><strong>199</strong></td>
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</table>
2. What is the quality of these outcomes based on the WASC “Rubric for Assessing the Quality of Academic Program Learning Outcomes” (Appendix 1)?

Based on the criteria in Appendix 1, the undergraduate programs are between the “emerging” and “developed” stages.

The Department has a set of learning outcomes that focus on the key knowledge, skills, and values taught in the undergraduate programs. National disciplinary standards have been considered and relevant institution-wide skills have also been included for both the undergraduate and minor program. The undergraduate learning outcomes are assessable, indicating how students can demonstrate their learning. It is commendable that faculty has agreed on explicit common assignments to ensure consistency across courses in the program and we look forward to seeing results from common assessments in the future.

However, it appears that the learning outcomes have yet to be differentiated across the two major programs and the minor. We would suggest clearly articulating the differences in student learning that are expected in each of these three programs. For example, are there differences in depth of coverage for different outcomes in the BA and BS programs? Clearly articulating expectations for each of the outcomes will clarify exactly how students can demonstrate their learning.

We also are not sure whether there is an agreement on the criteria for each of the learning outcomes in the programs. For example, do all faculty agree on the expectations for communication skills? More information is needed here to really understand the criteria.

Refer to AAC&U’s 15 VALUE rubrics as needed (Appendix 4).

3. Are the program learning outcomes aligned closely with the University Baccalaureate Learning Goals (UBLG)?

Yes. The undergraduate program learning outcomes are aligned closely with the University Baccalaureate Learning Goals.

4. What methods are used to collect the data for EACH of the learning outcomes? Is the data collected of high quality (valid and reliable)?

In the most updated assessment report, all BA / BS learning outcomes are assessed using assignments in specific courses. We commend the Department on its recent effort to standardize course-level assessments in multi-section courses. However, it is unclear how the results inform program-level achievement of the learning outcomes. The description in the report seems to indicate that the results are course-level results, evidence of achievement of learning outcomes in the course. Thus, more information is needed to help the readers to better understand the connection of the results to achievement of program-level learning outcomes. Another consideration is what percentage of students should meet expectations for the learning outcome in order to consider these outcomes met at the program level. Does the department consider a learning outcome met if 70% or 80% of students meet expectations? Providing objective criteria
will help to focus the Department on elements of the program where change is needed. This will be important given the current resource constraints on faculty in the department. It does sound like the data is reliable and valid. More information is needed to explain the reliability and extent of the rubrics.

While the Department is currently assessing outcome D through the use of an exit survey and reflective essay that students include in a portfolio, we would suggest also assessing the senior thesis assignments as part of a capstone assessment. We suggest that the department consider a random sampling of thesis assignments each year to assess not only outcome D, but this may also be used as a summative assessment of several other learning outcomes in the department. The AAC&U VALUE rubrics may be a good starting point for developing a rubric by which this can be achieved. In particular, we suggest looking at the Inquiry and Analysis, Critical Thinking and Written Communication rubrics. Not all of these elements would have to be assessed in each year, but assessment of just one of these dimensions each year over a three year period would provide valuable summative data on student achievement of the departmental learning outcomes. Furthermore, it may not be necessary to sample ALL thesis projects. A random sampling may be sufficient.

Refer to WASC rubrics as needed (Appendix 2a = Capstone, key assignments, or papers; Appendix 2b = Portfolio).

5. Has the program used alumni surveys to collect data to assess the longer-term effects of the program learning outcomes? Are the methods/results reliable and/or valid?

Based on the information in the reports, the Department uses exit surveys to examine student perceptions of achievement of each of the departmental learning outcomes. However, it does not appear that any data are collected in a formalized manner from alumni.

It appears that this may be an area of opportunity in which the Department can pursue systematic data collection through the office of Institutional Research. We are not sure what kind of data is collected and thus need more information to be more confident about whether the results from alumni can be representative of opinions of all the alumni. Readers needed more information in this report or in the appendix, including items such as population size, sample size, sampling methods, and response rate to provide more information.

6. How have the findings from the learning outcomes assessment been utilized to revise or maintain elements of the curriculum?

Data from the course-embedded assessment is collected, discussed by faculty, analyzed, and used to improve the courses in the program. It appears that most faculty from the department are working together to make sure students will have opportunity to develop their environmental studies skills and achieve the learning outcomes in each of the courses in the undergraduate program. It would be beneficial for faculty to examine if there are broader issues outside of course improvement that might help improve the program as a result of their data collection. For example, if the expectation is that 80% of students should achieve each learning outcome, data from outcome 3 suggest that quantitative reasoning should receive more attention and be
integrated at different points within the curriculum in order for students to better develop these skills throughout the curriculum.
Appendix 1: WASC “Rubric for Assessing the Quality of Academic Program Learning Outcomes”
http://www.aacu.org/value/index.cfm

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criterion</th>
<th>Initial</th>
<th>Emerging</th>
<th>Developed</th>
<th>Highly Developed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Comprehensive List</td>
<td>The list of outcomes is problematic: e.g., very incomplete, overly detailed, inappropriate, disorganized. It may include only discipline-specific learning, ignoring relevant institution-wide learning. The list may confuse learning processes (e.g., doing an internship) with learning outcomes (e.g., application of theory to real-world problems).</td>
<td>The list includes reasonable outcomes but does not specify expectations for the program as a whole. Relevant institution-wide learning outcomes and/or national disciplinary standards may be ignored. Distinctions between expectations for undergraduate and graduate programs may be unclear.</td>
<td>The list is a well-organized set of reasonable outcomes that focus on the key knowledge, skills, and values students learn in the program. It includes relevant institution-wide outcomes (e.g., communication or critical thinking skills). Outcomes are appropriate for the level (undergraduate vs. graduate); national disciplinary standards have been considered.</td>
<td>The list is reasonable, appropriate, and comprehensive, with clear distinctions between undergraduate and graduate expectations, if applicable. National disciplinary standards have been considered. Faculty have agreed on explicit criteria for assessing students’ level of mastery of each outcome.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Assessable Outcomes</td>
<td>Outcomes statements do not identify what students can do to demonstrate learning. “Statements understand scientific method” do not specify how understanding can be demonstrated and assessed.</td>
<td>Most of the outcomes indicate how students can demonstrate their learning.</td>
<td>Each outcome describes how students can demonstrate learning, e.g., “Graduates can write reports in APA style” or “Graduates can make original contributions to biological knowledge.”</td>
<td>Outcomes describe how students can demonstrate their learning. Faculty have agreed on explicit criteria statements such as rubrics, and have identified example of student performance at varying levels of each outcome.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Alignment</td>
<td>There is no clear relationship between the outcomes and the curriculum that students experience.</td>
<td>Students appear to be given reasonable opportunities to develop the outcomes in the required curriculum.</td>
<td>The curriculum is designed to provide opportunities for students to learn and to develop increasing sophistication with respect to each outcome. This design may be summarized in a curriculum map.</td>
<td>Pedagogy, grading, the curriculum, relevant student support services, and co-curriculum are explicitly and intentionally aligned with each outcome. Curriculum map indicates increasing levels of proficiency.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Assessment Planning</td>
<td>There is no formal plan for assessing each outcome.</td>
<td>The program relies on short-term planning, such as selecting which outcome(s) to assess in current year.</td>
<td>The program has a reasonable, multi-year assessment plan that identifies when each outcome will be assessed. The plan may explicitly include analysis and implementation of improvements.</td>
<td>The program has a fully-articulated, sustainable, multi-year assessment plan that describes when and how each outcome will be assessed and how improvements based on findings will be implemented. The plan is routinely examined and revised, as needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The Student Experience</td>
<td>Students know little or nothing about the overall outcomes of the program. Communication of outcomes to students, e.g. in syllabi or catalog, is spotty or nonexistent.</td>
<td>Students have some knowledge of program outcomes. Communication is occasional and informal, left to individual faculty or advisors.</td>
<td>Students have a good grasp of program outcomes. They may use them to guide their own learning. Outcomes are included in most syllabi and are readily available in the catalog, on the web page, and elsewhere.</td>
<td>Students are well-acquainted with program outcomes and may participate in creation and use of rubrics. They are skilled at self-assessing in relation to the outcome levels of performance. Program policy calls for inclusion of outcomes in all course syllabi, and they are readily available in other program documents.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix 2a: WASC “Rubric for Assessing the Use of Capstone Experience For Assessing Program Learning Outcomes”

(This rubric can be used with any key assignment, project, or paper)

[http://www.aacu.org/value/index.cfm](http://www.aacu.org/value/index.cfm)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criterion</th>
<th>Initial</th>
<th>Emerging</th>
<th>Developed</th>
<th>Highly Developed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relevant Outcomes and Lines of Evidence Identified</strong></td>
<td>It is not clear which program outcomes will be assessed in the capstone course.</td>
<td>The relevant outcomes are indentified, e.g., ability to integrate knowledge to solve complex problems; however, concrete plans for collecting evidence for each outcome have not been developed.</td>
<td>Relevant outcomes are identified. Concrete plans for collecting evidence for each outcome are agreed upon and used routinely by faculty who staff the capstone course.</td>
<td>Relevant evidence is collected; faculty have agreed on explicit criteria statements, e.g., rubrics, and have identified examples of student performances at varying levels of mastery for each relevant outcome.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Valid Results</strong></td>
<td>It is not clear that potentially valid evidence for each relevant outcome is collected and/or individual faculty use idiosyncratic criteria to assess student work or performances.</td>
<td>Faculty have reached general agreement on the types of evidence to be collected for each outcome; they have discussed relevant criteria for assessing each outcome but these are not yet fully defined.</td>
<td>Faculty have agreed on concrete plans for collecting relevant evidence for each outcome. Explicit criteria, e.g., rubrics, have been developed to assess the level of student attainment of each outcome.</td>
<td>Assessment criteria, such as rubrics, have been pilot-tested and refined over time; they usually are shared with students. Feedback from external reviewers has lead to refinements in the assessment process, and the department uses external benchmarking data.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reliable Results</strong></td>
<td>Those who review student work are not calibrated to apply assessment criteria in the same way; there are not checks for inter-rater reliability.</td>
<td>Reviewers are calibrated to apply assessment criteria in the same way or faculty routinely check for inter-rater reliability.</td>
<td>Reviewers are calibrated to apply assessment criteria in the same way, and faculty routinely check for inter-rater reliability.</td>
<td>Reviewers are calibrated, and faculty routinely find assessment data have high inter-rater reliability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Results are Used</strong></td>
<td>Results for each outcome may or may not be are collected. They are not discussed among faculty.</td>
<td>Results for each outcome are collected and may be discussed by the faculty, but results have not been used to improve the program.</td>
<td>Results for each outcome are collected, discussed by faculty, analyzed, and used to improve the program.</td>
<td>Faculty routinely discuss results, plan needed changes, secure necessary resources, and implement changes. They may collaborate with others, such as librarians or Student Affairs professional, to improve results. Follow-up studies confirm that changes have improved learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Student Experience</strong></td>
<td>Students know little or nothing about the purpose of the capstone or outcomes to be assed. It is just another course or requirement.</td>
<td>Students have some knowledge of the purpose and outcomes of the capstones. Communications is occasional, informal, left to individual faculty or advisors.</td>
<td>Students have a good grasp of purpose and outcomes of the capstone and embrace it as a learning opportunity. Information is readily available in advising guides, etc.</td>
<td>Students are well-acquainted with purpose and outcomes of the capstones and embrace it. They may participate in refining the experience, outcomes, and rubrics. Information is readily available.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criterion</td>
<td>Initial</td>
<td>Emerging</td>
<td>Developed</td>
<td>Highly Developed</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarification of Students’ Task</td>
<td>Instructions to students for portfolio development provide insufficient detail for them to know what faculty expect. Instructions may not identify outcomes to be addressed in the portfolio.</td>
<td>Students receive some written instructions for their portfolios, but they still have problems determining what is required of them and/or why they are compiling a portfolio.</td>
<td>Students receive written instructions that describe faculty expectations in detail and include the purpose of the portfolio, types of evidence to include, role of the reflective essay (if required), and format of the finished product.</td>
<td>Students in the program understand the portfolio requirement and the rationale for it, and they view the portfolio as helping them develop self-assessment skills. Faculty may monitor the developing portfolio to provide formative feedback and/or advise individual students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid Results</td>
<td>It is not clear that valid evidence for each relevant outcome is collected and/or individual reviewers use idiosyncratic criteria to assess student work.</td>
<td>Appropriate evidence is collected for each outcome, and faculty have discussed relevant criteria for assessing each outcome.</td>
<td>Appropriate evidence is collected for each outcome; faculty use explicit criteria, such as agreed-upon rubrics, to assess student attainment of each outcome. Rubrics are usually shared with students.</td>
<td>Assessment criteria, e.g., in the form of rubrics, have been pilot-tested and refined over time; they are shared with students, and student may have helped develop them. Feedback from external reviewers has led to refinements in the assessment process. The department also uses external benchmarking data.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliable Results</td>
<td>Those who review student work are not calibrated to apply assessment criteria in the same way; there are not checks for inter-rater reliability.</td>
<td>Reviewers are calibrated to apply assessment criteria in the same way or faculty routinely check for inter-rater reliability.</td>
<td>Reviewers are calibrated to apply assessment criteria in the same way, and faculty routinely check for inter-rater reliability.</td>
<td>Reviewers are calibrated, and faculty routinely find assessment data have high inter-rater reliability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Results are Used</td>
<td>Results for each outcome may or may not be collected. They are not discussed among faculty.</td>
<td>Results for each outcome are collected and may be discussed by the faculty, but results have not been used to improve the program.</td>
<td>Results for each outcome are collected, discussed by faculty, analyzed, and used to improve the program.</td>
<td>Faculty routinely discuss results, plan needed changes, secure necessary resources, and implement changes. They may collaborate with others, such as librarians or Student Affairs professional, to improve results. Follow-up studies confirm that changes have improved learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If e-portfolios Are Used</td>
<td>There is no technical support for students or faculty to learn the software or to deal with problems.</td>
<td>There is informal or minimal formal support for students and faculty.</td>
<td>Formal technical support is readily available and proactively assists in learning the software and solving problems.</td>
<td>Support is readily available, proactive, and effective. Tech support personnel may also participate in refining the overall portfolio process.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 3: Background Information for Academic Program Assessment and Review

Ideally, academic program assessment and review at Sacramento State should be an ongoing process that facilitates continuous program improvement and includes the following areas:

**Assessment Plan:** Each program needs to develop a program assessment plan which contains the following elements: program goals and learning outcomes, methods for assessing progress toward these outcomes, and a timetable. This plan should be updated annually or as frequently as needed.

**Annual Program Assessment Report:** Program learning outcomes (PLOs) should be directly aligned with course learning outcomes (CLOs) and the University Baccalaureate Learning Goals (UBLGs). Programs are asked to provide the Office of Academic Affairs with an annual report (annual assessment report - AAR) on program assessment activities that occurred during the past academic year. These reports should identify learning goals and outcomes that were targeted for program assessment, measures used to evaluate progress toward those outcomes, data and analysis, and changes made or planned in response to the results. Annual program assessment and the assessment reports provide a solid foundation and data for the six year program review at Sacramento State.

**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 outcomes and university learning goals.

Thus, each department in our university should have in place a system for collecting and using evidence to improve student learning. So far, not all departments have established program learning outcomes and/or approaches to assess learning for all degree programs; it is essential to make these expectations explicit. This will help departments and colleges to assure that every degree program has or will have in place a quality assurance system for assessing and tracking student learning, and use this information to improve their respective programs. Importantly, departments should also present learning expectations, data, findings, and analysis in a way that is easy to understand and/or to use by the faculty, students, administration, the general public, accreditation agencies, and policy-makers.

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1 Adapted from the information at [http://webapps2.csus.edu/assessment/](http://webapps2.csus.edu/assessment/)
Appendix 4: Sacramento State Baccalaureate Learning Goals for the 21st Century & AAC&U’s 15 VALUE Rubrics

1. Competence in the Disciplines: The ability to demonstrate the competencies and values listed below in at least one major field of study and to demonstrate informed understandings of other fields, drawing on the knowledge and skills of disciplines outside the major.

2. Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Physical and Natural World through study in the sciences and mathematics, social sciences, humanities, histories, languages, and the arts. Focused by engagement with big questions, contemporary and enduring.

3. Intellectual and Practical Skills, Including: inquiry and analysis, critical, philosophical, and creative thinking, written and oral communication, quantitative literacy, information literacy, teamwork and problem solving, practiced extensively, across the curriculum, in the context of progressively more challenging problems, projects, and standards for performance.
   3.1 Inquiry and analysis (First VALUE rubric)
   3.2 Critical thinking (Second VALUE rubric)
   3.3 Creative thinking (Third VALUE rubric)
   3.4 Written communication (Fourth VALUE rubric)
   3.5 Oral communication (Fifth VALUE rubric)
   3.6 Reading (Sixth VALUE rubric)
   3.7 Quantitative literacy (Seventh VALUE rubric)
   3.8 Information literacy (Eighth VALUE rubric)
   3.9 Teamwork (Ninth VALUE rubric)
   3.10 Problem solving (Tenth VALUE rubric)

4. Personal and Social Responsibility (Values), including: civic knowledge and engagement—local and global, intercultural knowledge and competence*, ethical reasoning and action, foundations and skills for lifelong learning anchored through active involvement with diverse communities and real-world challenges.
   4.1 Civic knowledge and engagement—local and global (Eleventh VALUE rubric)
   4.2 Intercultural knowledge and competence (Twelfth VALUE rubric)
   4.3 Ethical reasoning (Thirteenth VALUE rubric)
   4.4 Foundations and skills for lifelong learning (Fourteenth VALUE rubric)

5. Integrative Learning **, including: synthesis and advanced accomplishment across general and specialized studies.
   a. Integrative and applied learning (Fifteenth VALUE rubric)
   All of the above are demonstrated through the application of knowledge, skills, and responsibilities (values) to new settings and complex problems.

*Understanding of and respect for those who are different from oneself and the ability to work collaboratively with those who come from diverse cultural backgrounds.

** Interdisciplinary learning, learning communities, capstone or senior studies in the General Education program and/or in the major connecting learning goals with the content and practices of the educational programs including GE, departmental majors, the co-curriculum and assessments.
### Appendix 5: Relevant Verbs in Defining Learning Outcomes
(Based on Bloom’s Taxonomy)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge</th>
<th>Comprehension</th>
<th>Application</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
<th>Synthesis</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Apply</td>
<td>Analyze</td>
<td>Arrange</td>
<td>Appraise</td>
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<td>Collect</td>
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<td>Categorize</td>
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Appendix 6: Future Considerations for Programs Review & Assessment

In the future, please keep the following questions in mind when the unit (program, department, or the college) reflects on assessing student learning outcomes and improving the programs:

1) What are your program learning outcomes: what should your graduates know, value, and be able to do (at or near the time of graduation)? What are the explicit criteria or rubric to use in assessing a particular program learning outcome? What are the standards of performance for each outcome? Have the programs achieved the learning outcomes: the standards? Is each outcome assessable?

2) Is an assessment plan for each unit (program, department, or college) in place? Is the curriculum map developed? Does the plan clarify when, how, and how often each outcome will be assessed and used? Will all outcomes be assessed over a reasonable period of time, such as within a six-year program review cycle? Is the plan sustainable in terms of human, fiscal, and other resources? Is the assessment plan revised as needed?

3) What are the data, findings and analyses for EACH program learning outcome? What is the quality of the data: how reliable and valid is the data? Other than GPA, what data/evidences are used to determine whether your graduates have achieved the stated outcomes for the degree (BA/BS or MA/MS)? If two or more pieces of assessment data are used for each outcome, is the data consistent or contradictory?

4) Who is going to use the data? Are the data, findings, or analyses clearly presented so that they are easy to understand and/or use? Is the data used only for the course or for the program where the data is collected, or do you want the data to be used broadly for the curriculum, budgeting, or strategic planning at the department, the college, or the university?

5) Has the program conducted follow-up assessment to evaluate the effectiveness of program changes made based on assessment data? If yes, how effective are those changes to improve student learning and success? If no, what’s your plan to assess the effectiveness of those changes?

6) Are students aware of these learning outcomes? Do they often use them to assess the learning outcomes themselves? Where are the program learning outcomes published for view, e.g., across programs, with students, in the course syllabus, the department websites or catalogs? Are they widely shared?

7) Are the program learning outcomes in the annual assessment report aligned closely with the most updated assessment plan and with the missions of the university and the department/college?

8) Is each program learning outcome aligned closely with the curriculum, the key assignment, pedagogy, grading, the curriculum, the co-curriculum, or relevant student support services?
## Appendix 7: WASC: “Rubric for Assessing the Integration of Student Learning Assessment into Program Reviews”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criterion</th>
<th>Initial</th>
<th>Emerging</th>
<th>Developed</th>
<th>Highly developed</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Required Elements of the Self-Study</td>
<td>Program faculty may be required to provide a list of program-level student learning outcomes.</td>
<td>Faculty are required to provide the program’s student learning outcomes and summarize annual assessment findings.</td>
<td>Faculty are required to evaluate the program’s student learning outcomes, annual assessment findings, benchmarking results, subsequent changes, and evidence concerning the impact of these changes. They present a plan for the next cycle of assessment studies.</td>
<td>Faculty are required to evaluate the program’s student learning outcomes, annual assessment findings, benchmarking results, subsequent changes, and evidence concerning the impact of these changes. They present a plan for the next cycle of assessment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process of Review</td>
<td>Internal and external reviewers do not address evidence concerning the quality of student learning in the program other than grades.</td>
<td>Internal and external reviewers address indirect and possibly direct evidence of student learning in the program; they do so at the descriptive level, rather than providing an evaluation.</td>
<td>Internal and external reviewers analyze direct and indirect evidence of student learning in the program and offer evaluative feedback and suggestions for improvement. They have sufficient expertise to evaluate program efforts; departments use the feedback to improve their work.</td>
<td>Well-qualified internal and external reviewers evaluate the program’s learning outcomes, assessment plan, evidence, benchmarking results, and assessment impact. They give evaluative feedback and suggestions for improvement. The department uses the feedback to improve student learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning and Budgeting</td>
<td>The campus has not integrated program reviews into planning and budgeting processes.</td>
<td>The campus has attempted to integrate program reviews into planning and budgeting processes, but with limited success.</td>
<td>The campus generally integrates program reviews into planning and budgeting processes, but not through a formal process.</td>
<td>The campus systematically integrates program reviews into planning and budgeting processes, e.g., through negotiating formal action plans with mutually agreed-upon commitments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual Feedback on Assessment Efforts</td>
<td>No individual or committee on campus provides feedback to departments on the quality of their outcomes, assessment plans, assessment studies, impact, etc.</td>
<td>An individual or committee occasionally provides feedback on the quality of outcomes, assessment plans, assessment studies, etc.</td>
<td>A well-qualified individual or committee provides annual feedback on the quality of outcomes, assessment plans, assessment studies, etc. Departments use the feedback to improve their work.</td>
<td>A well-qualified individual or committee provides annual feedback on the quality of outcomes, assessment plans, assessment studies, benchmarking results, and assessment impact. Departments effectively use the feedback to improve student learning. Follow-up activities enjoy institutional support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Student Experience</td>
<td>Students are unaware of and uninvolved in program review.</td>
<td>Program review may include focus groups or conversations with students to follow up on results of surveys.</td>
<td>The internal and external reviewers examine samples of student work, e.g., sample papers, portfolios and capstone projects. Students may be invited to discuss what they learned and how they learned it.</td>
<td>Students are respected partners in the program review process. They may offer poster sessions on their work, demonstrate how they apply rubrics to self-assess, and/or provide their own evaluative feedback.</td>
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Appendix 8: Glossary

A glossary of terms used in this report and by WASC accreditation is provided below. As WASC points in its most updated Handbook of Accreditation:

“Many of these terms have multiple meanings and/or have been used in different ways by different associations, institutions, and individuals. The definitions that follow represent the way WASC typically uses these words for purposes of institutional review and reporting. If local usage differs significantly from the definitions below, the institutions should consider translating its terms for accreditation purposes to avoid misunderstanding on the part of the evaluation term, WASC staff, and others” (WASC Handbook of Accreditation 2012:39).

To avoid misunderstanding by WASC and confusion at Sacramento State, we have decided to use the same definitions from the most updated draft of WASC 2013 Handbook of Accreditation which can be located at http://www.wassenior.org/files/WASC%20Draft%202013%20Handbook%20of%20Acceditation_0.pdf

AAC&U - the Association of American Colleges and University. Washington-based national organization dedicated to promotion of liberal learning and its integration with professional and civic education.

Assessment (of student learning) - an ongoing, iterative process consisting of four basic steps: 1. defining learning outcomes; 2. choosing a method or approach and then using it to gather evidence of learning; 3. analyzing and interpreting the evidence; and 4. using this information to improve student learning.

Assessment Planning (Institutional) - the development of a design by which an institution sets goals and objectives and identifies the means to measure their accomplishment. Institutional planning may address educational programs, support services, the physical plant, budgets and finances, and other aspects of institutional operation and future development.

Accountability - in higher education, being answerable to the public, e.g., students, parents, policymakers, employers. Historically, accountability has focused on financial resources; emphasis now extends to students’ academic progress, including retention, acquisition of knowledge and skills, and degree completion.

Alignment - connections among functions or dimensions of an institution that support achievement of goals, e.g., among curriculum, pedagogy, and expected outcomes; or priorities, planning, and resource allocation.

Benchmark - a point of reference or standard of excellence in relation to which something can be compared and judged. A specific level of student performance may serve as the benchmark that students are expected to meet at a particular point in time or developmental level. Retention and graduation rates may also be benchmarked against those of peer institutions or national norms.
**Capstone** – a culminating project or experience, usually associated with undergraduates but also applicable to graduate education, that generally takes place in the student’s final year of study and requires review, synthesis, and application of what has been learned over the course of the student’s college experience. The result may be a product (e.g., original research, an innovative engineering design, an art exhibit) or a performance (e.g., a recital, an internship, student teaching). The capstone can provide evidence for assessment of a range of outcomes, e.g., core competencies, general education outcomes, and institution-level outcomes, as well as those for the major or graduate degree.

**Closing the Loop** - refers to the four-step assessment cycle (see “assessment of student learning”) and the need to complete the cycle in order to improve learning. “Completing the cycle” may be understood as 1. completing step 4; or 2. completing step 4 and then repeating the cycle to see whether the changes implemented have produced the desired result.

**Criterion-Referenced** - testing or assessment in which student performance is judged in relation to pre-established standards and not in relation to the performance of other students.

**Co-curricular Learning** - learning that takes place in activities and programs that are not part of the prescribed sequence of courses in an academic program.

**Culture of Evidence** – a habit of using evidence in assessment, decision making, planning, resource allocation, and other institutional processes that is embedded in and characteristic of an institution’s actions and practices.

**Curriculum Map** - a visual representation, usually in the form of a table or matrix, that shows the alignment of course outcomes with program learning outcomes. Well-crafted curriculum maps also show development of proficiency levels, for example using terminology such as “beginning,” “intermediate,” and “advanced” or “introduced,” “developed,” and “mastered.”

**Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP)** – a framework funded by the Lumina Foundation that describes the kinds of learning and levels of performance that may be expected of students who have earned an associate, baccalaureate, or master’s degree.

**Direct Method** - in assessment of student learning, a way of gathering evidence of learning directly, e.g., through scoring of actual student work or performances, rather than indirectly, e.g., through self-reports, surveys, etc. Direct evidence can be supplemented by indirect evidence and descriptive data.

**External Validation** - corroboration or confirmation through an outside source. External validation has two dimensions: 1. data from external sources may be used to confirm that something has been accurately judged and documented; and 2. external reviewers may be invited to examine the evidence. External validation can bring fresh perspectives and lend credibility. See also “external evaluator.”
Formative Assessment - assessment intended to provide feedback and support for improved performance as part of an ongoing learning process, whether at the student, program, or institution level. See also “summative assessment.”

Goal - 1. In assessment of student learning, a high-level, very general statement of learning expected of graduates, aligned with the institution’s mission, vision, and values (more specific learning outcomes are derived from goals); 2. A statement developed by an institution or program related to strategic planning, financial development, and other important issues.

High-Impact Practice (HIP): HIPs include first year seminars, common intellectual experiences, learning communities, writing-intensive courses, collaborative assignments, undergraduate research, diversity/global learning, service learning, internships, and capstone courses or projects. Research suggests that if students experience one or more HIPS in the course of their studies, they are more likely to persist, achieve higher levels of learning, and complete their degrees.

Indirect Method - in assessment of student learning, a way to capture evidence of learning in the form of opinions—for example, of students, employers, and alumni—by means of surveys, focus groups, exit interviews, etc. Indirect evidence is mediated by personal perceptions and experiences, and learning can only be inferred. Indirect evidence may be supplemented by descriptive data.

LEAP - Liberal Education and America’s Promise – a project of AAC&U, the LEAP outcomes (also known as Essential Learning Outcomes) total 12, grouped under the headings “Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Natural and Physical World,” “Intellectual and Practical Skills,” “Personal and Social Responsibility,” and “Integrative and Applied Learning.”

Mission - in higher education, an institution’s formally adopted statement of its fundamental reasons for existence, its shared purposes and values, and the students that it aims to serve. The mission is central to decisions about priorities and strategic objectives and provides a context for WASC decisions about quality and accreditation.

Norming - 1. in assessment of student learning, a process of training raters to evaluate student products and performances consistently, typically using criterion-referenced standards and rubrics; 2. in accreditation, can be applied to other reviewing and rating processes, e.g. institutional evaluation, Commission actions.

Norm-Referenced - testing or assessment in which student performance is judged in relation to the performance of a larger group of students, not measured against a pre-established standard.

Objective - in assessment of student learning, a concise statement of what the instructor (or program or institution) intends a student to learn (on some campuses, objectives then lead to development of learning outcomes); 2. Sometimes used interchangeably with “outcome,” but “outcome” has become the more common usage because of its more direct focus on the result (or “outcome”) for the student; 3. in institution- or program-level planning, more specific statements
derived from general goals; 4. in psychometrics, a test consisting of factual questions requiring short answers that can be reliably scored using an answer key, minimizing subjective judgments.

OAPA - Office of Academic Program Assessment at Sacramento State located in Library 67.

Outcome - in assessment of student learning, a concise statement of what the student should know or be able to do. Well-articulated learning outcomes describe how a student can demonstrate the desired outcome; verbs such as “understand” or “appreciate” are avoided in favor of observable actions, e.g., “identify,” “analyze.” Learning outcomes can be formulated for different levels of aggregation and analysis. Student learning outcomes are commonly abbreviated as SLOs, course learning outcomes as CLOs, program learning outcomes as PLOs, and institution-level outcomes as ILOs. 2. Other outcomes may address access, retention and graduation, and other indicators aligned with institutional mission and goals.

Persistence - like “retention,” refers to the rate at which students return to college from semester to semester and year to year, or “persist” in their education. Some educators interpret “retention” as putting the responsibility for degree completion on the institution, whereas “persistence” puts the responsibility on the student.

Portfolio - in assessment of student learning, a method of collecting student work so that the evidence can be reviewed in relation to specific learning outcomes. Most student portfolios also include a reflection on the learning process. Portfolios are highly adaptable: they may be developmental (showing progress from rough draft to finished product) or cumulative (i.e., students’ “best work”); and they may be assembled at the level of the individual student, program, or institution.

Program - 1. A systematic, usually sequential, grouping of courses that forms a considerable part, or all, of the requirements for a degree in a major or professional field; 2. sometimes refers to the total educational offering of an institution.

Program Review - a systematic process of examining the capacity, processes, and outcomes of a degree program or department in order to judge its quality and effectiveness and to support improvement. Historically, program review focused primarily on capacity and research output; more recently, educational outcomes and student success have been included. While student success and assessment of learning at the program level are an important part of program review, they should not be confused with the more encompassing process of program review.

Reliability - in psychometrics and assessment of student learning, the consistency and dependability of judgments and measurements. See also “validity.”

Retention - typically refers to the rate at which students return and re-enroll in college from semester to semester and year to year; retention rates from first to second year are of particular interest, since that is when the heaviest attrition is likely to occur.

Rigor - in education, refers both to a challenging curriculum and to the consistency or stringency with which high standards for student learning and performance are upheld.
Rubric – a tool for scoring student work or performances, typically in the form of a table or matrix, with criteria that describe the dimensions of the outcome down the left-hand vertical axis, and levels of performance across the horizontal axis. The work or performance may be given an overall score (holistic scoring), or criteria may be scored individually (analytic scoring). Rubrics are also used to communicate expectations to students. 2. WASC has developed a number of rubrics to assist teams and institutions in evaluating various aspects of their curriculum and assessment processes.

Signature Assignment - an embedded assessment method using an assignment—either the identical assignment or multiple assignments all constructed according to a common template—across multiple courses or sections of courses. A sample of students’ work products is then examined using a rubric to arrive at judgments about the quality of student learning across the course, program, or institution. Alternatively, a signature question may be embedded, for example, in final exams.

Standard - broadly refers to statements of expectations for student learning, which may include content standards, performance standards, and benchmarks. In the K-12 arena, standards generally describe content, but not level of mastery. In higher education, in contrast, standards generally refer to expected levels of mastery or proficiency. Not to be confused with standards of accreditation.

Standard of Performance - the degree of skill or proficiency with which a student demonstrates a learning outcome. WASC Standard 2, CFR 2.2a, requires institutions to report on their students’ levels of performance at or near the time of graduation in five core competencies: writing, oral communication, quantitative reasoning, critical thinking, and information literacy. Standards of performance are set by faculty and other educators on campus.

Standardized - a good practice meaning that a protocol or set of guidelines is consistently followed. For example, individuals may be trained in using scoring rubrics or conducting focus groups such that their activities are “standardized” to support the collection of reliable data. Commercially available tests are often referred to as “standardized tests,” and “standardized” has acquired negative connotations in some circles.

Standards of Accreditation - standards of accreditation are the principles used as a basis for judgment in accreditation reviews. WASC has four Standards that flow from three Core Commitments. They are used to guide institutions in assessing institutional performance, to identify areas needing improvement, and to serve as the basis for judgment of the institution by evaluation teams and the Senior College Commission.

Student-Centeredness - 1) a shift in perspective from teaching and inputs (e.g., assignments) to desired outcomes and what students actually learn; 2) an approach that places the student (the learner) at the center of the educational process by providing more curricular flexibility, more accessible services, a supportive campus climate, and so on.
**Student Success** – a phrase often used as shorthand for retention and degree completion. For WASC, student success includes quality of learning and rigor as well as retention and completion.

**Summative Assessment** - 1. assessment that occurs at the conclusion or end point of a course, program, or college experience to determine whether student learning outcomes have been achieved; 2. applied organizationally, the use of certain methods to evaluate the overall effectiveness of a program, an institution, or some element of the course of study. See also “formative assessment.”

**Sustainability** - ability of an educational institution to maintain effective functioning and improve over the long term. Assumes financial viability, but also availability of human capital and other resources, as well as vision, planning, and flexibility.

**Triangulation** - the use of multiple methods to generate more robust evidence and to see whether results converge or diverge.

**Validity** - in psychometrics and assessment of student learning, refers to how well a particular assessment method actually measures what it is intended to measure. Considerations include construct validity, content validity, and face validity. May also refer to consequences, i.e., whether an assessment has “consequential validity” and will support subsequent actions to improve learning. See also “reliability.”

**VALUE rubrics** - Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education; a set of fifteen rubrics developed by AAC&U in collaboration with hundreds of faculty to assess learning outcomes defined by the LEAP project. Institutions may download the rubrics at no cost and are encouraged to modify them to suit local needs.

**Value-added** - 1. in higher education, the contribution that institutions make to their students’ learning and development, documented from students’ entry to exit; 2. a WASC value, namely to promote an accreditation process that adds value to institutions and helps them to achieve their own goals.

**WASC** - “Western Association of Schools and Colleges” The three Commissions under the WASC umbrella: the Accrediting Commission for Schools (ACS); the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC); and the Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities (ACSCU), also referred to as the Senior College Commission. In the context of the 2013 *Handbook*, WASC refers to the Senior College Commission.