Message from the Director of the Office of Academic Program Assessment (OAPA)

Dr. Amy Liu, Professor, Director, Office of Academic Program Assessment

Assessment is an integral part of our commitment to student learning and student success, and an integrated part of the mission and strategic planning of this university. We hope this newsletter will assist our university and various academic units (programs, departments, and colleges) by providing information about assessment activities, consultants, and resources in the Office of Academic Program Assessment (OAPA) at Sacramento State.

OAPA provides leadership, support, coordination, and feedback for the annual assessment of student learning outcomes for all degree programs at each degree level (baccalaureate, master, and doctorate) and assists with strengthening the assessment component for the periodic review of academic programs (Program Review). OAPA also serves as a campus-wide resource for improving the culture of assessment. The office is a division of the Office of Academic Affairs with administrative oversight provided by Dr. Don Taylor, Assistant Vice President (interim), Academic Programs and Global Engagement.

OAPA works closely with several campus units and leaders including the Provost’s Advisory Committee on Assessment (PACA), the Program Review Oversight Committee (PROC), the Committee for Writing Across the Curriculum (CWAC), deans, department chairs, program directors, the Office of Institutional Research (OIR), the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL), and the Academic Technology and Creative Services (ATCS) Center; it facilitates various initiatives that result in high quality and sustainable assessment practices for an institution-wide understanding of student learning. In all of these activities, OAPA strives to promote a culture of evidence-based decision-making and continuous learning and improvement at Sacramento State.

As colleges, departments, programs, and faculty members continue their annual assessment efforts, this office encourages them to:

1. Evaluate whether their program learning outcomes (PLOs) - together with assignments, standards of performance at graduation, and other data - demonstrate the meaning, quality, integrity and uniqueness of their degree programs.

2. Explicitly integrate all the assessment efforts in the academic unit, including direct assessment, indirect assessment (such as exit surveys), and/or student reflections or transcript analysis. This helps faculty collect key social, demographic and curricular data about the students, so the program will have a better understanding of students’ learning and success.

3. Use high quality assessment data for: (a) curriculum, budgeting, or strategic planning at the department, college, or university level and (b) improving student learning and student success.

4. Conduct follow-up assessments to see if changes have significantly improved student learning and student success.

5. Use curriculum maps, rubrics (such as VALUE rubrics), and backward design to explicitly demonstrate where learning, assessment, and improvement take place for EACH PLO.

To achieve these goals, we strongly encourage colleges, departments, programs, and individuals to use the expertise and resources at OAPA as they design or revise their annual assessments and program review. We can help the university, the departments/programs, and individual faculty design a high quality and sustainable assessment process and reduce their workload/stress in the long run at the same time.

We look forward to working with you!
OAPA Services and Workshops

OAPA has:
- provided training (workshops, faculty learning communities, and individual consultation) and detailed feedback to faculty and programs/departments/colleges on annual assessment reports, assessment design and implementation strategies
- explicitly linked annual assessment to program review
- developed assessment leaders and mentors
- coordinated the systematic collection of quality assessment data at the class, program, and university levels
- fostered the use of assessment results for continuous learning and improvement for students, faculty, academic units, and the university
- disseminated assessment data

OAPA is in the process of:
- developing and maintaining a system of tracking and monitoring assessment and accreditation activities
- developing faculty assessment leadership and/or mentoring programs
- developing a faculty assessment award program
- documenting student learning and achievement, program learning outcomes, and institutional effectiveness
- documenting the use of assessment data for continuous learning and improvement.

WASC 2017 Accreditation Tasks and Timeline

A note from Jackie Donath, Professor of Humanities and Religious Studies

The next WASC accreditation cycle for our campus ends in June 2017. Planning for our report and the organization of our Institutional Review committees is underway, and we'd like the campus community to be alert to the timeline for upcoming review:

- 2016/May-June: complete IRP (Institutional Review Process) that includes institutional report + exhibits, financial analysis, and R/G (Retention and Graduation) report.
- 2016/July-August: submit IRP to WASC
- 2016/October-November: off-site review team conference call
- 2017/January-February: off-site team response (“lines of inquiry”)
- 2017/April: campus visit (by the review team)
- 2017/June: commission action

The process for WASC accreditation has changed a bit since our last review and Academic Affairs will arrange opportunities for interested members of our community to be involved in the process of gathering evidence of our efforts to ensure student success, provide a degree of meaningful quality and integrity at all levels (BA, BS, MA, EDD, Doctorate in Physical Therapy), and ensure the sustainability of our enterprise. I would welcome input from anyone interested in joining our preparation for the WASC review.
Assessment Consultant Team at OAPA

The assessment consultant team at OAPA comprises four faculty members: Dr. Amy Liu from Sociology, Dr. Shannon Datwyler from Biology, Dr. Julian Heather from English, and Dr Elizabeth Strasser from Anthropology. Please see the short biographies for more details.

Dr. Amy Liu, OAPA Director

Amy Liu is a leading expert in assessment, program review, and curriculum design. As the director of OAPA since 2012, she has provided leadership and training about how to use program learning outcomes with standards of performance and quality assignments to demonstrate the meaning, quality, integrity and uniqueness of degree programs. As a recent graduate of the WASC Assessment Leadership Academy, she has used an integrated assessment strategy that combines direct assessment with exit surveys and transcript analysis to provide high quality data to improve student learning and success. Since 2007, Dr. Liu has been the Director of the Sociology Graduate Program and is responsible for recruiting and advising graduate students and for designing and assessing this program. She has also chaired three program review teams and served as an external consultant. As the Director of The Sacramento State Annual Survey of the Region (2002-2009), her research team interviewed about 9,000 residents in the Sacramento region, produced 54 reports, and conducted more than 100 media interviews.

Dr. Shannon Datwyler, OAPA Faculty Consultant

Shannon Datwyler has been a Faculty Consultant at OAPA since 2011. She became involved in assessment during a major curriculum revision in Biological Sciences. At the heart of the curriculum revision was a focus on using student learning outcomes to guide the coursework and experiences in the courses. In the last two years, she has led an effort to develop assessments focusing on core competencies in the Biological Sciences. She has also been involved in efforts to assess student reading in the introductory courses in Biological Sciences as part of a Faculty Inquiry Group and served on the program review team for Humanities and Religious Studies in 2006-2007. She has also served on the Biological Sciences curriculum committee for eight years and the Natural Sciences and Mathematics Curriculum and Resources Committee for four years.

Dr. Julian Heather, OAPA Faculty Consultant

Julian Heather became interested in assessment when he worked as a curriculum coordinator for an English program in Japan, with responsibility for programmatic assessment. He received his Ph.D. in Second Language Acquisition and Teaching (with a minor in Educational Psychology) from the University of Arizona. His dissertation investigated the use of technology in language assessment. Since arriving at Sacramento State, he has used his assessment expertise at many levels. In the English Department, he has served on the Assessment Committee; he has also developed and taught a graduate seminar on curriculum and assessment design for the second language classroom. At the university level, he regularly works with the Office of Global Studies on language requirements for international students; he has served on the program review team for the College of Continuing Education; and in Spring 2011, he was appointed as a Faculty Assessment Consultant with the Office of Academic Program Assessment.

Dr. Elizabeth Strasser, OAPA Faculty Consultant

Elizabeth Strasser from Anthropology began serving as a faculty consultant for the Office of Academic Program Assessment in Fall 2012. Among many other things she has been a department chair, served on the GE Course Review Subcommittee for 20 years and chaired that body for several years, been the GE faculty consultant for three years and in that capacity wrote the Report on Assessing Baccalaureate Learning Goals at Sacramento State as well as the GE Self-Study for the Faculty Senate’s GEGR Policy Committee, served for 10 years on her department’s undergraduate committee that advises majors, served on the Instructionally Related Activities Committee that distributes monies to student groups, serves as treasurer for the Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society and is currently the SSIS representative to the Academic Advising & Career Center.

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Faculty Learning Communities on Program Review and Assessment

Amy Liu, Director of Office of Academic Program Assessment (OAPA)
Lynn Tashiro, Director of Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL)

The Office of Academic Program Assessment, together with the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL), has written three grants that have facilitated two faculty learning communities (FLCs) on program review and assessment and will allow the university to offer a third one in 2014. These FLCs provide a structure and the time for faculty to engage in program review and assessment. Many faculty participants in the two assessment FLCs - including faculty from sociology, psychology, the GE Honor's Program, Criminal Justice, and GE Area B - have significantly redesigned their program assessment.

The Chancellor’s Office was really impressed by our first FLC, and invited a team of six faculty members to present a two hour workshop at the July 2013 CSU Institute for Teaching and Learning Summer Institute.

Our faculty team included:
Samantha Hens – Anthropology
Mary Maguire – Criminal Justice
Sue Escobar – Criminal Justice
Lynn Tashiro -- Physics and Director of CTL
Amy Liu – Sociology and Director of University Assessment
Todd Migliaccio - Sociology

The evaluations from the Chancellor’s Office and the participating faculty were very good. They attest that our workshop was among the best planned and executed presentations of the conference.

This year’s FLC focuses on “University Level Assessment of Critical Thinking”. It engages multidisciplinary faculty teams in a collaborative process to assess our university’s critical learning outcomes. Faculty have built consensus on a set of tools that can be used to collect and analyze student work that will serve as direct evidence of critical thinking attained at graduation from our institution.

Participants have designed and are implementing a pilot assessment project to collect and examine student evidence of critical thinking. Working as a team, faculty members have aligned critical thinking outcomes to the University’s Baccalaureate Learning Goals and the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) Value Rubric for critical thinking. Faculty are in the process of collecting, assessing, and analyzing student work that can provide evidence of achieving critical thinking learning outcomes across programs, rather than within a specific course or program.

At halfway through the FLC the following deliverables have been collected:
• Course Syllabi at the beginning of the FLC
• Course Learning Outcomes at the beginning of the FLC
• Curriculum Map of Learning Outcomes
• Revised Critical Thinking Learning Outcome
• Signature Assignments at the beginning of the FLC
• Revised Signature Assignments
• Human Subjects IRB Application
• Rubric to Assess Signature Assignments

94% of the deliverables for the first half of the FLC have been submitted. Participants will use the curriculum map, key assignments, and assessment data to identify opportunities throughout the curriculum to improve students’ critical thinking skills across programs on campus.

What is more important is that in these learning committees, we are able to move the discussion of some of the key questions facing higher education to the top of the agenda:
Important Considerations for Program Review & Assessment

Adopted from Feedback for the 2012-2013 Annual Assessment Report, Office of Academic Program Assessment

In the past few years, we have made significant improvements to our annual assessments and reports. Quality feedback is critical for achieving this goal. To make our assessments and reports even better, four faculty assessment consultants with the help of two graduate students have been working hard this semester to provide detailed feedback for each assessment report submitted. Please keep the following questions in mind when you (program, department, or the college) assess student learning outcomes and improve the programs:

1. **What are your program learning outcomes (PLOs): what should your students know, value, and be able to do at graduation?** Are the PLOs aligned closely with the missions and vision of the university and the college/department/program? Is each program learning outcome aligned closely with the curriculum, the key assignment, pedagogy, grading, the co-curriculum, and/or relevant student support services?

2. **Is each PLO assessable?** What rubrics are used to assess a particular program learning outcome? What are the explicit criteria and standards of performance for each outcome? Have you achieved the learning outcomes: the standards of performance near or at graduation?

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/evidence 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. **Are these PLOs (together with the data and the standards of performance near or at graduation) able to demonstrate the meaning, quality, integrity and uniqueness of your degree program?**

5. **Who is going to use the data?** Are the data, findings, or analyses clearly presented so 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 is the data also used broadly for the curriculum, budgeting, or strategic planning at the department, the college, or the university?

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

7. **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 in improving student learning and success?** If no, what’s your plan to assess the effectiveness of those changes?

8. **Is there an assessment plan for each unit (program, department, or college)?** Have curriculum maps been developed? Does the plan clarify when, how, and how often each outcome will be assessed? 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? Will the assessment plan be revised as needed?

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- “What kinds of learning will actually prepare students to contribute and thrive, both in a turbulent economy and in a globally engaged democracy?
- What practices – both in the curriculum and off-campus sites for learning – best foster the intended competencies?
- How do we help students see the large aims of their education, and what would tell us best whether students have developed the ability to deal with unscripted, non-routine problems?” (Schneider, 2013:29).

In this way, we are able to truly foster and assess students’ cumulative and integrated learning (Ewell, 2013; Schneider, 2013).

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*Please see the two reports for more details.*

Faculty Learning Community Report 1
www.csus.edu/programassessment/WASC/FLC%20Reports/The%20first%20FLC%20report%20final.pdf

Faculty Learning Community Report 2
www.csus.edu/programassessment/WASC/FLC%20Reports/092413FLCinterimreportAssessment%20final.pdf
Assessment is an integral part of our commitment to student learning and student success, and an integrated part of the mission and strategic planning of this university....