

Assessment of Student Learning at SCSU – 1997-2006

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Introduction

Assessment at SCSU has its formal origin in an assessment task force report prepared in 1988. Subsequently a proposal on institutional assessment (an assessment plan) was finished in 1993 and accepted by NCA in November 1994. From the beginning assessment at SCSU has been faculty led and owned. Part-time (50% reassigned time) faculty assessment directors were hired in the late 1980s until 1998. The emphasis was primarily on indirect assessment.

During the mid-1990s the emphasis shifted from primarily indirect to direct measures of student learning, and from classroom to program assessment. Indirect assessment still plays an important role in assessing student learning in conjunction with direct measurement of student learning outcomes. The faculty assessment director became a full time position (100% reassigned time) in 1999. During most years there has been an active and productive University Assessment Committee consisting of the University Assessment Director, assessment coordinators from each college and some units, and at least two administrators.

Organization and Development

Since the last accreditation visit in January 1997, there has been a full time (100% reassigned time since 1999) faculty University Assessment Director and at least a part-time staff in the University Assessment Office for most years. Having a full time faculty Assessment Director has ensured that assessment is faculty led, faculty owned, and faculty generated. In addition, a fixed-term replacement is provided for the Assessment Director's department. There is an active University Assessment Committee consisting of assessment coordinators from each college and some units (e.g., Learning Resources and Technology Services), a representative from on-line learning and the BES program, and at least two administrators. Each college also has an assessment committee led by the college assessment coordinator.

The academic distinction part of the SCSU strategic plan, which includes a large assessment component, was completed and approved in fall 2005 ([strategic planning - academic PIs.pdf](#)). Performance indicators (PIs) were developed that provide guidance for furthering assessment activities on campus.

A progress report focused on assessment, prepared by Dr. Sharon Cogdill was submitted to the Higher Learning Commission in 2004, and accepted by the commission in early 2005.

Support has been provided for several key campus assessment personnel to attend national assessment meetings. For example, since 1998 a number of faculty have attended the Indiana University – Purdue University Assessment Institute.

During most years, internal grants have been available for faculty to carry out assessment activities. The budget for these grants has ranged from approximately \$30,000-55,000.

Workshops and seminars, both locally developed and from outside experts, have regularly been available to faculty and staff. For example, during the 2000 Faculty Workshop Day the keynote address was given by Mary Ellen Weimer (author of *Improving College Teaching* and *Teaching Tools*, and editor of *The Teaching Professor*). In addition, she also conducted workshops on teaching and assessment. A workshop on embedded assessment techniques led by Larry Kelley (executive director of the Consortium for Assessment and Planning Support, Auburn, Alabama) took place in January 2005. In spring 2006, an assessment strand consisting of four separate workshops/roundtable discussions occurred during the University's Faculty Forum Day.

Strengths and accomplishments

In 2000, slightly over half of the undergraduate academic programs had identified student learning outcomes. By spring 2006 approximately 93% had identified learning outcomes (or were in the process of doing so). As of spring 2006 approximately 91%, 88% and 78% of the undergraduate academic programs had assessment plans, used direct assessment tools (often in conjunction with indirect methods) and were using data for program improvement (or were in the process of doing so), respectively.

Approximately 77% of the graduate programs have developed student learning outcomes (or were in the process of doing so) by spring 2006. As of spring 2006 approximately 67%, 65% and 40% of the graduate academic programs had assessment plans, used direct assessment tools and were using data for program improvement (or were in the process of doing so), respectively.

The University Assessment Directors have created cross-committee communication. For example, the University Assessment Director serves on the Strategic Planning and General Education committees, and the General Education Committee chair serves as a liaison on the University Assessment Committee. Thus, communication is maintained across committees to facilitate discussions and actions, and to ensure that various campus efforts are not duplicated.

A major revision of the general education program is occurring and the development of an assessment plan is a major part of this process. A mission statement has been completed and accepted by the Faculty Senate, general learning goals are being developed, and a Faculty Forum Day workshop was held in April 2006 to begin translating goals into assessable student learning outcomes.

Assessment of general education, particularly the core, was a concern of the 1997 accreditation team visit. This was also addressed in the September 2004 progress report to HLC focused on assessment. Basically we have moved from little or no assessment of general education courses, or at the most indirect assessment, and now have several classes that regularly use direct measures of student learning. In addition, even the information gathered from indirect measures, was used to make some program improvements. For example, based on survey results the

Department of Speech Communication discovered that students had widely differing perceptions of what was being emphasized in multiple sections of the basic course. This led to a renewed commitment within the department to coordinate the course more closely among instructors. The following are some examples of general education assessment (mostly core classes) since the 1997 visit:

- ENGL 191 – During 2000-2002 the English Department developed an assessment project where they tested one principle of ENGL 191: that students develop skill in using texts to make a case. The project looked at six papers from each 191 section and developed a rubric for looking at what students were learning, then trained readers to use the rubric. The results showed that few students used other texts to make a case or advance their own rhetorical purposes with sophistication. Although students were coached in their attempts, they were still not quite fully competent in using others' texts in practice. Based on these results, in 2003-2004 the faculty significantly revised its training of graduate teaching assistants for 191 classes as well as in the writing center and made changes in the course itself and the way it is defined for the university. Recent discussion has been around assessing the new course, English 291, which is a 2-credit course for transfer students who fulfilled only part of the writing requirement at another institution.
- The Communication Studies Department has developed a plan and the instruments for assessing CMST 192, a university general education core course, and put that plan into action during spring 2005. Three instruments feature open-ended questions focusing on either interpersonal communication, small group communication or public speaking and serve as indirect measures of student learning. The fourth instrument is a direct measure of student learning in terms of public speaking. They distributed these instruments to 60% of our CMST 192 sections, which were randomly selected. They also distributed them to 100% of our “alternative delivery methods”, including our PSI (Personalized Self Instruction), ITV (Interactive TV) and self-paced options so that we can compare student learning results from these alternatives to those of our more conventionally taught classes. In 2006 the department completed analysis of their direct measure of student learning in the public speaking unit of CMST 192 (data collected spring 2005). That analysis showed that they are achieving the desired learning outcomes for the unit via all delivery methods for that course. They completed analysis for the indirect measure of the interpersonal unit for that course. It is unlikely that the analysis for the indirect measures of student learning for the small group and public speaking units will be completed by May 2006. Given the degree of difficulty in doing this analysis, they will be using direct measures for all three units of CMST 192 going forward. Communication Studies also completed analysis of their direct measure of student learning in the public speaking unit of CMST 192 (data collected spring 2005). That analysis showed that they are achieving the desired learning outcomes for the unit via all delivery methods for that course. They completed analysis for the indirect measure of the interpersonal unit for that course. It is unlikely that the analysis for the indirect measures of student learning for the small group and public speaking units will be completed by May 2006. Given the degree of difficulty in doing this analysis, they will be using direct measures for all three units of CMST 192 going forward. They also agreed to a set of student learning outcomes for CMST 192 as a department, and the assessment committee will submit a plan for utilizing direct

measures for assessing those outcomes to the department in spring 2006. They will collect data for assessment purposes in CMST 192 during 2006-2007.

- The Mathematics and Statistics Departments administered embedded questions in both MATH 193 and STAT 193 during spring semester 2005. Both departments include the assessment of these core three classes in their departmental assessment plans. The departments are in the process of designing new assessment tools and received a 2005 assessment grant for this purpose. They will be developing trial test questions in summer 2005 and will be field testing the questions in MATH 193 and STAT 193 during fall 2005.
- Dale Buske, Sandra Johnson and Shawn Triplett (Mathematics), and David Robinson (Statistics) received a 2005 assessment grant and completed the following:
 1. Developed test questions to measure the core learning outcomes as they apply to courses that fulfill the SCSU General Education core three requirement.
 2. Administered these questions to students enrolled in MATH 193, STAT 193, MATH 112, MATH 115, MATH 211 or MATH 221.
 3. Analyzed student responses.
 4. Are using data from analysis to recommend questions for future use and design additional direct measures.

Their assessment was based on two of the five Core Learning Outcomes:

1. *Students will identify and analyze problems in various contexts and will design solutions.*
2. *Students will learn to learn by employing various methods to obtain, classify, analyze, synthesize, and apply knowledge.*

Knowing that the content of these courses varies widely, they decided to define a type of question which could be asked using the content of each individual course. The description of the type of questions developed is:

Translate a problem described verbally or by tables, diagrams or graphs into symbolic language, solve the problem and interpret the result in the original context.

The questions were administered in pre and post tests. For each question, a scoring rubric was developed. Student responses were analyzed and compared.

Pre and post tests were administered to 724 math students and 215 statistics students. In every class, the average score improved from pre to post test. The committee concluded that the method was sound, but that questions needed to meet clearly stated criteria. The questions developed in the project will be improved and embedded in tests providing a direct measure of student learning in subsequent years. These measures will serve as models for developing further assessments in both departments, and may be used by other departments as well. The final result will be a set of questions, classified according to the five Core Learning Outcomes, with appropriate scoring rubrics and accompanying data.

- Michelle Kukoleca Hammes (Political Science/Core 5 Director), Carolyn Hartz (Philosophy/Core 4 Director) and David H. Robinson (Math/Statistics) received a 2005 assessment grant to assess learning outcomes for the Core 3, 4 and 5 areas. To date, the General Education Program has had no systematic, continuing assessment. Their project seeks to rectify this by creating a comprehensive, sustainable, collaborative method of

assessing most of the Core areas with a single instrument. In fall 2005 they administered the instrument (essay) twice, once at the beginning of the semester and once at the end. It was also administered as a pretest in the spring of 2006 and will be administered as a post test at the end of the spring semester (These results are not available as of early May 2006). Each time it was given to two sections of Core 5, and counted for some of the students' grades in these sections. Embedding the assessment in a particular course and having the incentive of graded work enhances the completion rate as the assessment is conducted in future semesters. Compliance in the initial set was almost 100 percent.

- In addition to the above assessment incorporating PHIL 194, there has been assessment of this course for many years (pre- and post-test). Assessments of PHIL 194, Critical Reasoning, use pre- and post-tests to assess learning, and also analyze the effect of class size on test scores, the effect of including the assessment as part of student grade (to increase value of the test to students), and each individual question in the tests. The department has been assessing the Critical Reasoning course since 1998 using this method. Several class adjustments have been made based on these assessment data.
- The Racial Issues Colloquium (RIC), a group comprised of faculty teaching racial issues courses obtained an assessment mini-grant in order to support an on-going, longitudinal, cross-departmental assessment of Racial Issues courses. During the summer of 2003, the Colloquium held their annual summer seminar in which they developed a system of pre- and post surveys that instructors in collaborating departments would give to their students as a way to assess students' achievement of knowledge and attitudinal learning outcomes. The cooperating departments include: Ethnic Studies, Community Studies, History, Sociology, and Human Relations (in COE). They used the grant to hire a graduate assistant to carry out the rather complicated process (given the number of courses and instructors) of gathering all of the survey results, coding the data to ensure student and instructor privacy, and having statistical analyses done. One of their goals for the summer 2006 seminar will be to review these results and to reflect upon how they could be used to inform beneficial changes.
- A campus-wide assessment luncheon was conducted in 2006, bringing together over 60 faculty and staff to discuss the current status and future needs of assessment at SCSU.

Needs

There is a need for a permanent, and highly visible, office of University Assessment.

Discussions at the 2006 campus-wide assessment luncheon identified several take home messages: we need a common language/vocabulary of assessment; assessment needs greater visibility across campus; the administration needs to define assessment expectations outside of HLC; we need a timeline that supersedes any changes in faculty/administration/staff; we need to affect cultural shift. In addition, a survey of the luncheon participants yielded the following needs: greater student awareness of assessment; making decisions based on assessment data; including assessment in faculty job descriptions; and having adequate resources to conduct assessment.

The BES program has not developed an assessment plan. However, a meeting was held on 21 April 2006 to discuss the BES assessment plan. The following people were present at this meeting: Patty Aceves, Kay Sebastian, John Hoover (SPED), Neal Voelz (BIOL/ Univ. Assessment Director), Sandy Johnson (MATH, COSE Assessment Director), John Burgeson.

The group suggested the following:

Action Items:

- CCS must define its market and whom it serves.
 - a. Collect data from ISRS to determine demographics of BES students over past 5 years. Are there trends? What types of students are we serving? Who do we want/need to be serving?
 - b. Suggested that we interview several students or hold a focus group to talk about who these students are, what the BES means to them, and how it will serve their future purposes.
 - c. Gather data from current sources: NSSE, Alum surveys, Noel Levitz, ACT, etc.
- The BES orientation: The student should be creating a Program Rationale with measurable learning outcomes. We could create an orientation course that all students would work through to create the Program Rationale and learning outcomes.
- BES Advising: 300+ students is too many for one advisor. There should be someone overseeing the program and we should have faculty advisors in the student's major or area of interest (if self-select) who would act as their program advisor in creating the Program Rationale and learning outcomes. These advisors would need to be trained or knowledgeable in developing measurable outcomes. Program changes would need to be approved by the faculty advisor who would ensure that the course changes either did not adversely affect the student's program rationale, or would assist the student in updating their goals appropriately.
- BES Capstone Course: The BES self select major needs to be assessable. Students should be able to submit evidence that they have met their self-designed learning outcomes, possibly in the form of a portfolio or e-portfolio.
- Assessing the portfolio would again require either the original faculty advisor or possibly graduate students with knowledge in higher ed, assessment, advising, etc (ED students).
- BES Advisory Board: There should be an advisory board to provide input and feedback on the program. This board could consist of faculty, alumni, business leaders who hire our graduates, etc.

Written Assessment Plan:

- Outline Mission, Program Outcomes, Student Learning Outcomes
- For each outcome, define strengths, in progress, and needs.

- Write narrative, including evidence for each outcome.