

April 24, 2013

DEANS
DEPARTMENT CHAIRS
PROGRAM DIRECTORS

Dear Colleagues:

RE: Call for Degree Program Learning Outcomes

This call is for a campus-wide effort to establish a faculty-driven, program-centered, sustainable process for the assessment of student learning outcomes at both the undergraduate and graduate program levels. In particular, we ask now for the definition of program learning outcomes (PLOs), demonstration of how the required courses align with the PLOs, and creation of a plan for assessing the PLOs, by the end of Fall 2013. This process will require a collective effort of faculty in each program, and is best approached as a formalization of and an improvement on the already existing activities of faculty who evaluate student work to satisfy program requirements.

To assist faculty in this process, we are providing institutional support in the form of online materials including the *UCSC Guidelines for Developing and Measuring Program Learning Outcomes*, templates for a curriculum matrix and an assessment plan, examples from other institutions, and insights from our four pilot programs. You can find these and other materials at <http://academicaffairs.ucsc.edu/accreditation/>. Starting in May 2013 departments can contact our on-campus specialist Dr. Anna Sher (asher@ucsc.edu) for consultations. She will begin a series of workshops to assist faculty with the development of outcomes and assessment plans in Fall 2013.

As an institution of higher education, student learning is at the core of our mission and so is concern with improvement of educational effectiveness. In response to the nationwide movement to pursue these core goals with greater transparency, faculty across the UC system have articulated educational goals and have begun systematically evaluating student attainment of these goals as a means to continuously improve the curriculum, teaching, and advising. This focus on articulation and assessment of student learning outcomes is consistent with the standards of the campus accreditation agency, the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC). At this point, we are the only UC campus that has not yet defined PLOs.

Based on the experience of other UC campuses, we envision a two-phase process. The first phase, to be completed by the end of Fall Quarter 2013, involves articulating PLOs, demonstrating curricular alignment with the PLOs, and developing plans for assessing them. The second phase, beginning by Spring 2014, entails departments starting to implement their assessment plans.

Learning outcomes summarize the most important knowledge, skills, abilities and attitudes that students are expected to develop over the course of their studies. The program learning outcomes clearly communicate the faculty's expectations to students, provide a framework for faculty

evaluation of the curriculum based on empirical data, and help improve and measure the impact of implemented changes. This approach allows students to understand how the program curriculum is designed to help them develop skills and knowledge, help them identify their own strengths, weaknesses, and progress, and help prospective students select a program of study.

The program learning outcomes must be posted on the departmental website, and communicated to all students and advisers. The Committee on Educational Policy (CEP) recommends including them in the *UCSC General Catalog*. When clearly articulated and publicized, the program learning outcomes can help all students, especially those who do not have the benefit of familial experience with college such as our first generation students.

As a starting point, faculty may consider the program description that states the goals or mission of the program, a description of capstone-like experiences, and/or discipline-specific, published standards. While developing program learning outcomes, faculty are asked to check how student achievement of each outcome is supported by the curriculum and document this alignment in a curriculum matrix or table (a template is provided). This matrix is required for all undergraduate and master's programs, and encouraged for doctoral programs. The articulation of student competencies may provide faculty with valuable insights into (i) a cumulative impact they expect to have on student development of skills and knowledge, (ii) how well the existing curriculum supports these expectations, and (iii) how the curriculum can be improved.

While drafting the program learning outcomes, faculty are asked to develop an assessment plan to evaluate one learning outcome (or more) per year over the next six years with the expectation that all outcomes will be assessed at least once within an external program review cycle. The assessment is based on evaluating student performance as a group/cohort rather than tracking performance of individual students. The plan specifies what evidence will be collected and analyzed to demonstrate levels of student achievement. For example, already existing student work (capstone-like experience, qualifying exam) collected from a student cohort (or a sample of graduating students) may provide appropriate evidence for the program outcome assessment. At the same time, faculty may need to tailor their evaluation tools to specific outcomes because of the aggregate nature of course grades and standardized test scores. A template for an assessment plan is provided. We will also provide online materials such as the *UCSC Guidelines for Developing and Measuring Program Learning Outcomes* in May 2013, as well as workshops and consultations focusing on assessment starting in Fall 2013.

Our campus-wide goal is to introduce student learning outcomes-based practices in the most meaningful and useful way to faculty and students. For example, we emphasize that outcomes need to be stated in a way that is measurable because it improves the clarity of outcomes (to both students and faculty) and ensures a more effective assessment in the future. At the same time, as faculty engage in assessment, they may revise the program learning outcomes as needed.

Faculty contribution is essential to the success of this campus-wide effort and our re-accreditation in 2014-15 and in the subsequent years. We encourage you to provide departmental support to faculty who will take leadership in this process and to recognize their contribution as a valuable service to our students and the university as a whole. This contribution may also be

recognized as part of the teaching component in personnel reviews, similar to program development or major curricular restructuring.

To summarize, for each undergraduate, master's, and doctoral degree program the faculty are expected to:

- articulate program learning outcomes,
- demonstrate curricular alignment, and
- develop an assessment plan.

Please provide the department or program web url where your PLOs are published, the curriculum matrix, and assessment plan to my office no later than December 16, 2013.

Starting in Winter or Spring 2014, faculty are expected to begin implementing their assessment plan by developing evaluation tools and conducting data collection. At least one assessment study, focusing on one or more program learning outcomes in a given program, should be completed during the 2014-15 academic year, including analysis and interpretation of the results and development of recommendations.

I welcome any questions you may have at vpaa@ucsc.edu

Sincerely,



Herbert Lee

Vice Provost for Academic Affairs

Enclosures

Cc: Vice Chair Brenneis
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