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Subject: Progress in learning outcomes assessment

To: UC Santa Cruz Faculty

As we begin a new academic year, we write to update you on the progress in learning outcomes assessment and lay out a campus plan for the coming year. Learning outcomes facilitate continuous program improvement, communicate expectations to our students, and demonstrate attention to outcomes to external audiences. This year, all programs need to conduct assessment of outcomes.

With the emphasis on program improvement as the primary goal of learning assessment, we asked faculty to articulate key knowledge and skills they expect of their graduates (Program Learning Outcomes or PLOs), demonstrate how the curriculum supports student development of each PLO, and develop a multi-year assessment plan to collect evidence of student learning. We also encouraged faculty to begin their assessment in Spring 2014.

Thanks to many of you, we have made significant progress in achieving these goals. The vast majority of programs have articulated PLOs and used them to evaluate their curricula. Students and faculty can now find PLOs posted on the website of most programs. Online resources including *UCSC Guidelines for the Development and Assessment of PLOs*, electronic evaluation rubrics, and an annual report template are available on the campus assessment website <http://planning.ucsc.edu/irps/assessment/>.

A number of programs have designed and conducted their first studies of learning outcomes. We would especially like to acknowledge Julie Bettie (Sociology), Su-hua Wang (Psychology), Warren Sack (DANM), Peter Limbrick (Film and Digital Media), Elisabeth Cameron (HAVC), Ilan Benjamin (Chemistry), Noriko Aso (History), and John Bowin (Philosophy) who showed leadership in bringing faculty in their programs together to discuss critical issues, design comprehensive studies, and collect evidence based on original student work.

Our experience with PLO assessment last year was both encouraging and educational. Now we get to see how effective is our collective teaching as we move forward into assessment. It is our hope that this project will result in well-designed studies and evidence-based program improvements, developed by the strong community of faculty behind each program. We encourage each program to designate a faculty leader in PLO assessment who will work with their colleagues on designing and executing this year's assessment study and developing recommendations. We also want to encourage faculty to communicate across different departments, and to share what they have found to work well or not so well. As most undergraduate programs are assessing a single outcome each year, to facilitate collaboration in 2014-15 we encourage programs in Social Sciences, Humanities, and Arts to evaluate a PLO that relates to either critical thinking or communication skills, and programs in PSci and the School of Engineering to focus on quantitative reasoning. All program learning outcomes are important and programs will have different rotations in following years to facilitate continued cross-departmental collaboration.

Based on the last year's experience and feedback, we are trying to better publicize the support available to faculty. In addition to individualized help from our campus assessment specialist, Dr. Anna Sher, we will be organizing workgroups for faculty to develop additional expertise in PLO assessment.

On October 17 we will hold the first Assessment Symposium at UCSC organized in collaboration with UC Merced. There are two goals of the symposium for faculty. The first goal is to exchange ideas and practices regarding evidence-based program improvement. The second goal is to engage in a conversation about graduate student mentoring in assessment and pedagogy. Outcomes assessment is an important skill for us to teach our graduate students interested in academic careers, and graduate students are also invited to this symposium.

As we continue to make progress in assessment that is sustainable and meaningful to our faculty and students, we believe that we can succeed in ensuring that assessment is done for the benefit of the students and faculty, and not merely as an exercise in compliance.