Governors, legislators, and citizens are holding higher education system accountable. Some see that the system has not been transparent, and they question whether the higher education institutions are providing the broad intellectual skills that are expected. For this reason, learning outcomes-based assessment that demonstrates achievement of educational goals is now considered to be a key part of university functioning and not an extra, unfunded burden borne by faculty members and administrators. Departments across the country are forced to do annual assessment activities per their institution’s processes, but, on the bright side, departments can use the processes as a tool for improving program effectiveness. The student learning outcomes assessment program at CSUDH follows national norms that provide a structure for departments to do this kind of evaluation. The annual requirement to submit assessment reports allows programs to grow, to change, and to develop in response to data that are collected from students. An ideal application of outcomes-based assessment functions as applied research in education.

Specifically, the outputs of a program undergoing assessment (i.e., whether program learning outcomes are achieved) should be evaluated with respect to the inputs to the program (e.g., students with certain levels of writing skills), while the program environment (e.g., the specific curriculum) is analyzed to see how it changes the relationship between the inputs and the outputs.

I hope that this newsletter goes part of the way toward you gaining useful information about the assessment process, whatever your role in higher education or the community might be.
Assessment Methodology Tips

Most academic programs at CSUDH have finalized their learning outcomes and posted them on their websites. After educational objectives have been established, programs should next select and construct methods for measuring the achievement of the outcomes. Programs that are currently using relatively weak measures of assessment can gradually improve their measures over time through the annual assessment cycle. This ought to improve learning in the programs because changes to the program will be made using better, cleaner data assessing learning.

“Direct” measures assess performance or the products of performance (for example, GRE scores or other standardized tests) and appropriately assess the outcomes of learning, but tend be harder to implement and to evaluate than “indirect” methods. For cognitive learning outcomes, a direct measure will assess a cognitive skill as it is expressed during performance. Further, instruction that improves performance on the direct measure will also improve performance on other tasks that require that cognitive skill. The alternative forms of measuring performance that are indirect—for example, self-reported gains in learning—are valid and can serve as proxies for direct measures that are based on performance, but might not be as sensitive as direct measures to changes in learning. Gains scores can be helpful for very specific learning outcomes that are unique to a particular program, but not so much for institutional outcomes (also posted on the DH website). In the latter case, these scores might not differentiate among three potential causes of college learning: maturation, college attendance, and within-college experiences.

Inside... CSUDH Assessment Laboratory

Welcome to the Assessment Laboratory!

The CSUDH Assessment Laboratory was founded in Fall 2014 by Dr. Mark Carrier (Psychology) with the intent of providing students with research opportunities and exposure to a “high-impact practice” before graduation. There are several projects ongoing in the laboratory and students are actively performing tasks in different disciplines. When students join the laboratory, they will be provided with skills and knowledge that help them participate in campus assessment of learning. This semester, five of the Assessment Lab teams presented their projects at Student Research Day for the first time. Two teams were awarded 1st and 2nd place winners of their sessions.
Anthropology offers a major and a minor at CSUDH. The faculty members are internationally known teacher-scholars, dedicated to providing students with rigorous, hands-on training. The department has five full-time faculty, an administrative coordinator, a half-time student assistant and three part-time instructors. The assessment process created the opportunity for the faculty to discuss and focus on the changes that need to occur as result of doing the competency analyses. However, the department lacks a support mechanism for doing the assessment report; this puts the burden on a few persons. Dr. Needham suggests that the University assessment process be streamlined, the report template be redesigned in a user-friendly format and the system be enhanced in way to let the user know when there has been a change or update from the previous year.

Dr. Needham appreciates the workshops that were given throughout the Fall semester, and Dr. Mark Carrier’s personal counseling during the generation of the report. I noticed Dr. Needham’s technique relating to organizing and managing the data for the report that tracked which SLOs were evaluated each year. This sounds very basic but it has great significance in keeping records and transferring information for next year’s report.

Dr. Needham is willing to share her experience with other departments and she promised to brainstorm on future improvements to the SLO assessment process.

I thank Dr. Susan Needham for her time and sharing her story with us!
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HELPFUL AND USEFUL RESOURCES

“ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING”  
This page contains the University’s Institutional Learning Outcomes.  
(http://www4.csudh.edu/academic-affairs/student-learning/)

“REPORTS & SUMMARIES”  
This page shows how to gain access to the assessment reports organization page for CSUDH. The page also contains the deadline and templates for the assessment report.  
(http://www4.csudh.edu/academic-affairs/student-learning/sloa/index)

“UNIVERSITY STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE”  
This page contains the names and contact information for the USLOAC members. The members can answer your questions and provide guidance on putting together your assessment report.  
(http://www4.csudh.edu/academic-affairs/student-learning/committee/index)

“ASSESSMENT RESOURCES AND TOOLS”  
This page contains a lot of information about putting together your reports.  
(http://www4.csudh.edu/academic-affairs/student-learning/resources/index)

“GRADUATE WRITING EXAMINATION (GWE)”  
This page shows a breakdown of GWE scores on campus by program.  
(http://www4.csudh.edu/irap/assessment/gwe/index)

“STUDENT ENROLLMENT BY MAJOR”  
This page gives the counts of how many students are enrolled in each college and then the top 10 undergraduate programs by enrollment, as well as the top 10 graduate/post-baccalaureate programs.  
(http://www4.csudh.edu/irap/campusprofile/major/index)

“STUDENT ENROLLMENT BY MAJOR”  
This page gives the breakdown of lower-division, upper-division, and graduate students enrolled by program. (http://www4.csudh.edu/irap/enrollment/major/index)

“DEGREES GRANTED”  
This page shows the number of degrees conferred by college, as well the top 10 undergraduate programs and the top 10 graduate programs. (http://www4.csudh.edu/irap/campusprofile/degree/index)

“DEGREES”  
This page contains several tables relating to the number of degrees conferred by program over a 5-year period. (http://www4.csudh.edu/irap/degrees/profile/index)