

BUILDING AN ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK: A FAST TRACK APPROACH

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INTRODUCTION

The demands for assessment are here and are not expected to lessen any time in the near future. The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business International (AACSB International) is placing a high priority on assessment along with other professional accreditation agencies. The message from the accrediting body for business schools is quite clear: “The output of business schools is not teaching; it is student learning” (AACSB, 2005). The agency suggests that we shift focus from “what we teach” to “what they have learned.” We can make this shift by having an assessment plan to gather data on student learning and to use this data to improve student learning.

The purpose of this paper is describe how the faculty members at one business school developed an assessment of learning (AOL) framework during the summer of 2005 and implemented the plan during the academic year of 2005-2006. The critical project was necessary to bring the school into compliance with the AACSB standards on assessment. The first part of the paper provides a brief literature review. The second part of the paper presents the organizational structure and the model framework of general goals, specific outcomes, and course mapping developed for each of six degree programs.

SETTING THE ASSESSMENT STAGE

The AACSB has adopted the definition of assessment by Palomba and Banta (1999, p. 4): *Assessment is the systematic collection, review, and use of information about educational programs undertaken for the purpose of improving student learning and development.*

To understand the process of assessment, the faculty members found it helpful to review the literature in the following areas: AACSB expectations; effective characteristics of assessment; guidelines, organization and planning for assessment; faculty involvement; goals and objectives of learning; measurement methods and approaches for data collection; curricula examination; the reporting and use assessment results, and the importance of assessing assessment.

AACSB Expectations Regarding Assessment

The AACSB adopted “Eligibility Procedures and Standards for Business Accreditation” for AACSB International. Of the 21 standards, “The Assurance of Learning Standards” (standards 15-21) acknowledge assessment of student learning as a part of the curriculum management process. The AACSB (2005) standards call for schools to define learning goals linked to mission, assess student achievement for these goals for each program, and utilize the assessment information to continually improve their curricular programs. Faculty involvement in the AOL process is critical.

Schools accredited by the AACSB were expected to begin planning for assessment in the 2003-2004 academic year. AACSB International (2005) has asked schools to follow a specific transition period:

1. 2003-2004. In the first two years of the standards, schools were expected to define learning goals, translate goals into specific objectives, and align their curriculum to meet the goals.
2. By year 3 (2005), schools were expected to have developed measurements for each specific goal, and begun collecting performance data on at least some of the measures.
3. By year 5 (2007), schools should have a complete Assurance of Learning process in place, including feedback of the assessment data into the curriculum review process.

In addition to reviewing the AACSB expectations regarding assessment, the faculty studied the following areas of assessment literature:

1. Characteristics of effective assessment (Banta, 2002).
2. Guidelines, organization, and planning (Palomba & Banta, 1999; Palomba & Banta, 2001; Malgeri, 2005; Nichols, 1995).
3. Faculty involvement (Palomba & Banta, 1999).
4. Articulating goals and learning objectives (Palomba & Banta, 1999; Erwin, 1991; Bloom, 1956; AACSB, 2000; Palomba & Banta, 2001).
5. Selecting measurement methods and approaches (Palomba & Banta, 2001; Palomba & Banta, 1999; Huba & Freed, 2000; Banta et al., 1996; Walvrod, 2004).
6. Examining curricula (Palomba & Banta, 1999).
7. Reporting and using assessment results (Ewell, 1994; Palomba & Banta, 2001; Palomba & Banta, 1999).
8. Assessing assessment (Romberg, 1990).

ASSESSMENT MODEL FOR THE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS

In 2000, the AACSB adopted Assurance of Learning standards. The standards call for accredited schools of business to assess student learning and to use the findings to improve their curricular programs. In the summer of 2005, urgent action was required to address the issue of assessment of student learning for the school of business to maintain accreditation with AACSB. In the first two years of the AACSB standards (2003-2004), the school of business faculty had not developed their assessment model. In the fall semester of 2005, the faculty had to meet expectations for each degree program: define learning goals, translate goals into specific objectives, and align curricula to meet the goals, develop measurements, and start collecting performance data on some measures. The task involved putting two years of work into several months.

This section presents a description of the school's efforts to organize for assessment and to develop a model framework of general goals, specific outcomes, and course mapping. The following topics are discussed: reporting overview, guidelines, organization, the 2005-2006 plan, goals framework, and methods.

Assessment Reporting Overview

Each discipline and degree program in the school of business is expected to have an assessment plan to collect evidence of student learning. This activity is considered a part of curriculum management. The findings of the assessment process are to be used to develop, review, or revise the curriculum. In addition, each discipline and degree program is expected to report their assessment activities, the findings of the assessment, and program changes that are implemented as a result of assessment. The overall framework for the assessment of student learning is established and maintained by a representative body of faculty members. The faculty members of each discipline/degree program are to be involved in carrying out the planned activities:

1. Articulate student learning goals and learning outcomes based on the mission of the school.
2. Map learning goals and outcomes to program requirements (core courses).
3. Map learning outcomes to methods used to collect assessment evidence.
4. Articulate target expectations for the evidence.
5. Articulate the plan and timeline for collecting evidence.
6. Collect, analyze, interpret, and report assessment findings.
7. Use results of assessment as the basis for curriculum realignment.

The assessment reports are to be prepared at the program level. Each academic discipline and degree program will submit a separate report for each program that offers a bachelor's or master's degree in the department. Over a three-year period, it is expected that every core course in every degree program will have passed under the view of the assessment of student learning.

Guidelines for Assessment of Student Learning

The following set of guidelines for the assessment of student learning were adopted by the faculty of the school of business:

1. The purpose of assessment is improvement of educational programs. According to AACSB's "Curriculum Content and Evaluation Standard (AACSB, 2000), business schools are to systematically review their degree programs to assess effectiveness. Program revisions should "reflect new objectives and incorporate improvements based on contemporary theory and practice" (p. 20). Palomba and Palomba suggest that for purposes of accreditation, business schools must "develop credible processes for assessment of learning, carry out effective assessment activities, and use assessment information to improve their programs" (Palomba and Palomba, 1999).
2. Assessment of student learning and development will be a collaborative process involving faculty, staff, and students (Palomba and Banta, 1999, p. 21).
3. Assessment will be guided by the institution's mission (Palomba and Banta, 1999, p. 21).
4. Successful assessment programs: (a) identify assessment procedures to address all learning goals; (b) use efficient procedures such as sampling student work and drawing on university-wide data where appropriate; (c) include multiple measures; (d) describe the people, committees, and processes involved; and (e) contain plans for using assessment information. (N. Palomba and C. Palomba, 1999)
5. The faculty members for each academic degree program are responsible for the: (a) identification of goals and learning objectives; (b) selection of measures; (c) use of assessment feedback to modify the academic programs; and (d) reporting on assurance of learning activities.
6. Assurance of learning will not be used to make comparisons among faculty members, departments, programs, or other units within the university.
7. Assurance of learning will not be used for faculty or staff evaluation (Palomba and Banta, 1999, p. 21).
8. Assurance of learning is a systematic, ongoing, long-term process of continuous improvement.
9. The assessment process will itself be evaluated (Palomba and Banta, 1999, p. 21).

Organizational Structure for Assessment

The organizational structure for assessment in the School of Business includes several levels: The Curriculum and Assessment (CA) Committee at the school level, a Curriculum and Assessment Committee for each discipline/program, and assessment teams for each core course.

Voting members of the Curriculum and Assessment (CA) Committee for the School of Business include one full-time faculty member from each of the respective academic disciplines and the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs. Non-voting members include: (1) Director of Graduate Business Programs, (2) Director of Undergraduate Business Services, (3) the Assessment Coordinator for the School of Business, and (4) a representative from the business community. Each elected member of the CA Committee serves for a minimum of two (2) consecutive academic years. These members are elected by popular vote of full-time faculty members in their respective academic units. The chairperson of the CA Committee is elected annually (at the start of the academic year) by popular vote of the voting members of the CA Committee.

Assessment responsibilities of the Curriculum and Assessment (CA) Committee are to:

1. Plan assessment activities for the School of Business;
2. Provide oversight to the discipline/program CA committees for the collection of data, analysis, and reporting of assessment findings;
3. Review discipline/program assessment reports;
4. Report overall School of Business assessment results to the School of Business faculty and administrators; and

5. Recommend curricular changes to the degree programs and modifications to the assessment process to the School of Business faculty and administrators.

The CA Committee's curriculum responsibilities include evaluating and coordinating curriculum-related activities and recommending to the School of Business faculty and administrators proposals for implementing new program curricula. In addition, the committee is charged with making recommendations to the School of Business faculty and administrators to modify existing curricula in accordance with stakeholder and pedagogical requirements and results of assessment recommendations.

Each academic discipline/program will establish a Curriculum and Assessment Committee. The discipline/program representative to the School CA Committee will serve as the chair of the discipline/program CA Committee. Also at the discipline/program level, an assessment team is assigned to each core course. This team consists of at least two members: one member of the discipline/program CA Committee and one faculty member with primary teaching responsibility of the course.

Assessment Plan: Fall 2005 and Spring 2006

For the Fall Semester of 2005, specific responsibilities were assigned to the following: (1) the CA Committee for the School of Business, (2) the discipline/program CA committees, (3) the core course assessment teams, and (4) individual faculty members. Dates for the completion of activities were established.

The responsibilities of the CA Committee for the School of Business are:

1. Adopt **guidelines** for the assessment process (9/15/05).
2. Revise the school **mission statement** (9/15/05).
3. Establish the discipline/program CA committees (9/15/05).
4. Adopt **general student learning goals and learning outcomes** (10/1/05).
5. Adopt **discipline-specific student learning goals and learning outcomes** using feedback from the discipline CA committee (10/1/05).
6. Adopt the **mapping** of student learning goals and learning outcomes to program requirements for each degree program (10/1/05).
7. Prepare a master **timeline** for implementation of the assessment process for all core courses in the School of Business (10/1/05).
8. Coordinate activities with the discipline/program CA committees.
9. Review assessment reports submitted by discipline/program CA committees. (Due 1/1/06).
10. Report overall School of Business **assessment results** to the School of Business faculty and administrators. (Due 2/1/06).
11. Recommend **curricular changes** to the degree programs and **changes to the assessment process** (based on assessment findings) to the School of Business faculty and administrators.
12. Arrange for **archiving** assessment degree plans, data, reports, curricular revisions, and samples of student work. These items should be retained for six (6) years.

The responsibilities of the discipline/program CA committees are:

1. Establish the core course assessment teams by 9/15/05.
2. Complete curricula review/audit by faculty and prepare a discipline composite to be submitted to the School CA Committee by 9/15/05.
3. Review and revise the general and discipline-specific learning goals and outcomes. Submit revisions to the School CA Committee by 10/1/05.
4. Link learning goals and outcomes to program requirements (mapping) by 10/1/05.
5. Coordinate the following activities with the core course assessment teams:
 - a. Targeting sections of core courses for assessment.

- b. Selecting methods/techniques for data collection.
- c. Establishing timelines for core course data collection.
6. Provide oversight for data collection performed by core course assessment teams. Data collection is to be completed by 11/1/05.
7. Collect, analyze, and interpret assessment findings. Report to the school CA Committee by 1/1/06:
 - a. Assessment results.
 - b. Curriculum recommendations based on the assessment results.
 - c. Recommendations to improve the assessment process.
8. Implement approved curricular changes to the degree programs.

The responsibilities of the core course assessment teams are:

1. Develop course goals and outcomes for core courses by 10/1/05.
2. Identify sections of targeted core courses for assessment and submit to discipline CA committee for approval by 10/1/05.
3. Select or develop methods/techniques that assess learning achievement and submit these to discipline/program CA committee for approval by 10/1/05.
4. Develop plans and timelines for data collection and submit to discipline/program CA committee for approval by 10/1/05.
5. Collect data in targeted course sections.
6. Submit data to discipline/program CA committee by 11/1/05.
7. Make recommendations to improve the assessment process. Report to the discipline/program CA committee by 11/1/05.
8. Retain samples of student work for inspection: tests, projects, papers, etc. These items should be retained for a period of six (6) years.

The responsibilities of each faculty member in the School of Business are:

1. Be involved in the assessment of student learning process.
2. Complete the curricula review/audit.
3. Revise each course syllabus to:
 - a. Use the common format as prescribed by the School of Business.
 - b. State program learning goals and outcomes.
 - c. State course discipline-specific goals and outcomes.
 - d. Prepare a common syllabus for multiple sections of core courses.
4. Link and reference the following in course content, assignments, and tests:
 - a. Program goals and learning outcomes.
 - b. Discipline-specific goals and outcomes.

The schedule for assessment activities for Spring 2006 was established as follows:

1. Core course assessment teams: Collect assessment data for targeted core courses by 4/1/06.
2. Discipline CA Committee: Analyze, interpret, and report assessment findings to school CA Committee by 5/1/06.
3. School CA Committee: Review program assessment reports, request revisions, and submit completed reports by 6/1/06.

Learning Goals, Outcomes, and Mapping to Business Core

A framework of general goals, specific outcomes, and mapping was developed for each of six degree programs: Bachelor of Arts Degree in Business Administration (BBA), Bachelor of Arts Degree in Accounting, Master of Arts Degree in Accounting, Bachelor of Arts/Master of Arts Dual Degree in Accounting, Master of Business Administration Degree, and Master of Business Administration Degree for Working Professionals.

Define Learning Goals

General learning goals are broad in nature and therefore difficult to measure. These goals describe the desired characteristics of the business school graduates. There are a number of

examples of general learning goals provided by the AACSB. Keeping the mission statement of the School of Business in mind, we identified a common set of learning goals for the undergraduate degree programs and a slightly different set of goals for the graduate programs. We selected the following general learning goals for the undergraduate degree programs, including the BBA:

1. Communication. Business majors will be literate and capable of communicating well in both oral and written documents.
2. Critical thinking. Business majors will think critically, abstractly, and logically to evaluate and solve business problems.
3. Ethics. Business majors will possess ethical values and be able to evaluate the ethical and social impact of business decisions.
4. Interaction. Business majors will possess effective interpersonal and leadership skills.
5. Perspectives. Business majors will understand and consider the effects of forces external to the organization in business decision making.
6. Technology. Business majors will identify, evaluate, and use information technology to enhance personal and organizational productivity.

In addition to identifying these general learning goals for the degree programs, we identified general learning goals for each of the following disciplines: accounting, decision science, economics, finance, management, and marketing.

Identify Specific Learning Outcomes

Specific learning outcomes stem directly from the general learning goals and are the targets of assessment. The specific learning outcomes describe particular actions that the graduates will be able to do—therefore, the use of verbs in the statements. In most cases, we limited the number of specific learning outcomes to three for each general learning goal. Three specific learning outcomes were identified for the general learning goal of communication in the BBA degree: 1.1 Present, discuss, and defend views effectively through written and spoken language; 1.2 Listen effectively; and 1.3 Locate, obtain, organize, report, and use information from human, print, and electronic sources.

Map Specific Learning Outcomes to Core Courses

After identifying the general learning goals and the specific learning outcomes, the next step was to map these outcomes to the curriculum. We chose to map (or trace) the learning outcomes to the business core courses. Since all business students are required to take the core courses, this provides a measure of comprehensive coverage.

A review of the syllabi for all undergraduate and graduate core business courses in the School of Business gave the faculty an understanding of where they might expect students to acquire the required knowledge, skills, and attitudes as specified in the specific learning outcomes. A review of course requirements (assignments, projects, papers, etc.) allowed faculty to articulate course activities. For each specific learning outcome, we targeted two to five courses and articulated activities required by the courses. These courses and the related stated activities became our targets for assessment measurement—data collection.

Using the general learning goal of communication as an example in the BBA program, we can see that one specific learning outcome (1.3) is to: locate, obtain, organize, report, and use information from human, print, and electronic sources. Two courses that are candidates for measurement in the assessment process and their specific activities are:

CBUS 460 (Production/Operations Management). Students work in groups to plan, research, report, and present an investigation of operations management as it applies to small business in the economy.

CBUS 485 (Business Policy). Students work in groups doing research, analysis, and presentation focused on business policy.

Curriculum Map

Faculty members performed a curriculum audit. The exercise provided documentation to identify where in the curriculum the learning goals and specific outcomes are being addressed—a “curriculum map.” For this exercise, each faculty member completed a form for each course that they teach and identified the specific learning outcomes that are addressed by a major test, project, paper, etc. in his/her course. The collective responses were used to develop a visual “curriculum map” for each degree program. This is an excellent starting point for the understanding of the assessment process (Gainen and Locatelli, 1995, p. 116).

Approaches and Methods

There are a number of planning questions that need to be addressed when deciding on methods and approaches to use to collect assessment data. The faculty made the following decisions regarding the overall approach to data collection:

1. Levels for data collection. In addition to collecting assessment data at the university level, the faculty in the school of business collect data at the program level and course level.
2. Research strategies. The primary strategy is to be able to track and compare successive cohorts of students.
3. Identification of eligible participants. The following individuals are required to participate in assessment projects: degree-seeking students, students in a major, and graduating seniors.
4. Sampling. Faculty assess only a sample of students in an effort to keep costs of assessment under control. Focusing on core courses, a representative sample of course sections are targeted for assessment.

In making decisions regarding the selection of data collection methods, the faculty concentrated in three areas: tracking performance on professional licensing exams, commercially-available standardized testing, and course-embedded testing and activities. All of the chosen methods are direct measures. Faculty noted that indirect measures do not demonstrate knowledge or skills.

1. Licensing exams. The accounting department tracks the pass rate for accounting graduates taking the Certified Public Accounting Examination in the state of Georgia. These rates can be compared to the rates in other states at a point in time and the rates for our graduates can be compared from year to year.
2. Commercially-available standardized testing. The assessment plan calls for discipline-specific examinations to be given to students just prior to graduation to determine how well the students had mastered the major material.
3. Course-embedded testing and activities.
 - a. Common exams. Tests are developed to cover content across multiple sections of a single course.
 - b. Capstone course projects. The capstone experience in several majors includes a combination of written projects, case studies, research papers, oral presentations, and other kinds of performance. Common rubrics were developed to assess student performance.

In the future, as a part of the school’s comprehensive assessment plan, the faculty would like to include indirect measures. Students may be asked to provide their perceptions of what they have learned and experienced. Methods may include questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups. In addition, the faculty plan to administer surveys to alumni, faculty, and/or employers.

Conclusion

This paper describes the assessment of learning framework that one school of business faculty developed in two months and implemented for the academic year of 2005-2006. The framework includes six degree programs and development involved the definition of learning goals, translation of goals into specific objectives, alignment of curricula to meet goals, the selection of methods, and collection of some performance data. By 2007, the plan is for the

school of business to have a complete AOL process in place, including feedback of the assessment data into the curriculum review process. The authors are willing to provide copies of the degree program frameworks upon request.

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