

Academic Program Assessment Plan

Graduate Programs

Hasan School of Business

CSU-Pueblo

Identification

This is the assessment plan for graduate programs at the Hasan School of Business (HSB) at Colorado State University – Pueblo (CSU-Pueblo). The plan was developed by HSB faculty during 2010. The contact entity for this plan is the HSB's Assurance of Learning (AoL) Committee. The HSB's graduate programs comprise a Master's of Business Administration (MBA) offered in Pueblo and Colorado Springs.

Mission, Goals and Student Learning Outcomes

What is the mission of the department and how does it relate to the school's mission?

The mission of the Hasan School of Business at Colorado State University – Pueblo is to provide quality undergraduate and graduate business education for a diverse student population through our strong professional focus on contemporary business practices. Our educational programs prepare students to assume team member and leadership roles in business by developing their skills in communication and critical thinking, and instilling in them awareness of the global economy and ethical behavior.

The intellectual pursuits of our faculty focus primarily on applied scholarship and instructional development. Our outreach activities—developed in partnership with the community—serve to enhance the quality of life and economic well-being in southeastern Colorado.

The HSB's mission reflects not only the role of the HSB within the University community, but also the expectations for HSB as the provider of quality management education for our region. The HSB and CSU-Pueblo are committed to the pursuit of continuous improvement. Both the University's and the HSB's missions are reflected in their respective strategic plans.

The current version of the HSB Mission, in conjunction with the CSU-Pueblo Mission, illustrates how the institution has evolved to provide degree programs that serve the region. The HSB Mission emphasizes teaching and developing business students, conducting research appropriate for our institution type, and serving the community in ways that will enhance the economic well-being of citizens of southeastern Colorado.

What are the student learning outcomes and how do they relate to the program's mission?

The HSB currently has five learning outcomes for its graduate students. Specifically, these are that they will be able to

- communicate effectively;
- analyze problems, identify relevant issues and craft solutions;

- develop solutions for global business issues;
- evaluate ethical situations and offer appropriate recommendations; and
- critically analyze knowledge claims

Although we will continue to monitor whether our learning outcomes are what is needed to achieve our mission, our current thinking is that the goals support what we are trying to achieve in terms of developing students' skills in communication and critical thinking and instilling in them awareness of the global economy and ethical behavior.

Are learning outcomes written as observable skills and abilities?

All of the HSB's graduate learning outcomes are observable.

Are the outcomes discrete and non-overlapping?

The graduate learning outcomes are sufficiently orthogonal. The learning outcomes also are sufficiently discrete because they do not encompass lists of multiple or disparate skills and knowledge.

Are the outcomes limited in number to five or six but not more than eight?

The HSB currently has five graduate learning outcomes. We believe these are currently sufficient.

What are the performance criteria?

When assessing student performance on a particular learning outcome, we rate whether the student—on the artifact we are evaluating—exceeded, met, or did not meet the learning sub-goals being assessed with that artifact. The actual criteria for evaluating the level of performance (e.g., exceeds, meets, does not meet expectations) are specified in a rubric.

What level of performance is expected of students for each criterion?

For each criterion, we expect that at least 80 percent of our graduate students will meet or exceed expectations.

How are the learning outcomes communicated to department faculty and students, and to the community?

A primary way of communicating our learning outcomes is on the HSB website. Once at our website, the learning outcomes are easily accessible by clicking on "graduate programs" and then on "assurance of learning." The HSB's learning outcomes assessment is described in the CSU-Pueblo Catalog. In addition, our learning outcomes are discussed with and approved by the HSB Board of Advisors. Some faculty are incorporating a discussion of how their courses relate to program learning outcomes into their syllabi. A more comprehensive option could be listing on the syllabus and discussing with students the learning outcomes addressed in each course. We also could introduce students to the HSB's learning outcomes during their orientation, an option we are investigating.

Curriculum

Do the courses and their objectives, in aggregate, meet the outcomes for the program?

We answer this question by reviewing our curriculum map using a two-step process. First, we look for gaps in the map (i.e., goals that are not addressed in at least one course). Second, we examine the levels at which each goal is addressed (i.e., "introduced, developing, and mastery). It must be determined if there are sufficient opportunities through which students can build related skills.

During 2010 the HSB conducted a thorough curriculum-mapping process and review of the resulting map. At the graduate level, there are no gaps. In other words, all 'core' MBA courses are represented as potential artifact gathering areas. We determined that there are at least several courses in the curriculum where the goals are addressed at either the "developing" or "mastery" level. However, we noticed there are perhaps insufficient opportunities for students to build their oral communication skills. Although our assessment results indicate that building students' writing skills is currently a higher priority, oral communication is being considered in future assessment planning and learning-improvement discussions.

Does the curriculum provide opportunities for students to demonstrate they have learned the program outcomes?

The HSB's graduate curriculum map indicates that faculty require students to demonstrate each of the learning goals and sub-goals in our core courses. Artifacts of student learning include exams, papers, presentations, and case studies. These artifacts give students opportunities to continue to build and demonstrate skills throughout the curriculum.

Assessment Methods

What assessment methods will be used to measure each of the learning outcomes?

The HSB primarily uses a direct-assessment approach. Artifacts of student work pertinent to a particular learning outcome are collected, and these artifacts are evaluated by faculty external to the course in which the artifact was collected to determine students' level of mastery. Only individual student's work is assessed (i.e., not group projects). Each learning outcome has been broken down into sub-skills, or "measurable objectives," that are components of the overall learning objective. Students' level of mastery is assessed using rubrics which have been developed for this purpose. To ensure inter-rater reliability, we are implementing processes whereby raters meet before and after artifacts are assessed. In addition, for follow-up (loop-closing) activities on subsequent artifact evaluation, the same raters will be utilized, when possible, for consistency and reliability.

Are descriptions of the assessment processes clear and detailed?

Creating clarity for the overall assessment process and where the HSB stands on each learning outcome has been a challenge. Faculty have developed a variety of documents that make the process much clearer. For example, for each learning outcome, we now have a summary document (i.e., dashboard) encapsulating what we have learned about student performance, actions taken to address shortcomings, and results of those interventions. We have created a new

curriculum map that clearly communicates the level of exposure students receive relative to each learning outcome in our core courses.

Are the assessment processes explicitly linked to the student learning outcomes?

All of the HSB's assessment processes are explicitly linked to the student learning outcomes, with the exception of the Educational Testing Service (ETS) Major Field Test (MFT). The administration of the MFT, and whether it should be continued, is a topic worthy of discussion by faculty and the HSB AoL Committee. The MFT provides insight into our students' knowledge of nine core business subjects. The results can be compared to external benchmarks (scores from other business schools). The MFT, however, is not currently being used to full potential, and its use and whether it should be continued is being considered. Administering the MFT, coaxing students to take it seriously, and expending funds for this purpose may be a diversion of attention and resources from higher-priority activities. Faculty may want to identify which of the HSB's learning outcomes are evaluated by the MFT. If (a) few are, and (b) we are not doing much with MFT results (i.e., if we are not systematically addressing shortcomings), then perhaps a conversation about discontinuing its use (and expense) would be worthwhile as the HSB's assessment processes continue to mature. It may be that the MFT can be tied to learning goals and provide more information than HSB is collecting or using. It is possible that faculty some of the reports available from ETS could assist our AoL efforts. Our current preference is to use the data in a substantive way, or to stop paying for and administering the test. If the information it provides *is* worthwhile, there are opportunities to improve understanding and "ownership" of the MFT.

Are the means of assessment commensurate with the available resources?

Keeping assessment to a maintainable level of effort while achieving clear insight into what our students are learning (and not learning) is our goal. Assessment work does, at times, contribute to role conflict and role overload for faculty members because time spent on assessment detracts from that available for other important demands (e.g., research). We are working diligently to develop ways to streamline our assessment processes, making them more efficient, and also to spread assessment work more evenly rather than engaging in spurts of activity prior to accreditation visits.

What timetable will be implemented for each method, who is involved, and who is responsible for them?

We have developed a timetable to assess each of our learning objectives every two to three years. All faculty are involved in assessing student performance, drafting action plans and implementing the action plans. The assessment process is coordinated by the AoL Committee, which is composed of HSB faculty. Overall responsibility for assessment rests with the Dean.

Are multiple methods employed?

The HSB uses multiple methods to assess student learning. First and foremost, direct measurement is utilized whereby individual artifacts are gathered in various courses and then evaluated by faculty members who do not teach the courses. Actions are then designed in response to results and patterns. The MFT is also used as a measure of student learning, and it

gives us benchmark data we can use to compare ourselves to other business schools. There is potential to more fully utilize MFT data, as stated earlier. We also choose artifacts of student work in our courses to directly assess students' degree of mastery of our learning objectives.

Are sufficient direct measures of student learning utilized?

The HSB utilizes direct-assessment methods as a primary source of evaluation. Our judgments about whether students are meeting our learning objectives are based exclusively on faculty evaluations of artifacts of student work from our courses.

Can these methods also be used for accreditation purposes?

Because our accrediting agency, The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), requires rigorous assessment of student learning, the processes described in this Assessment Plan are helpful in maintaining the HSB's accreditation with the AACSB.

How are students involved in the assessment process?

Currently, student involvement in assessment processes is minimal, though we are implementing activities aimed at increasing student awareness. In addition, more of the HSB's faculty are discussing AACSB and AoL in respective courses to increase student awareness. Additionally, the HSB's learning objectives are approved by the Dean's Advisory Council (a group of our students). Another method for involving students we are considering is gathering feedback from students in each course or major about how well they perceive that student learning outcomes were addressed. The SALG (student assessment of their learning gains) may prove useful for this. The SALG Web site is a course-evaluation tool that allows instructors to gather learning-focused feedback from students.

Assessment Results

How are assessment results evaluated?

After assessing artifacts of student work using rubrics of the learning outcomes, the percentages of students exceeding, meeting, and not meeting each sub-goal of each learning objective are calculated. These results are then shared with faculty in meetings to discuss the results. Action plans to address any deficiencies are then discussed and, if appropriate, implemented.

How are faculty and students involved in interpreting and evaluating results, and developing strategies to improve the curriculum?

Once faculty have seen the overall results of the assessment process and the percentage of students meeting each sub-goal, a "sensemaking" process begins. Faculty discuss the results and provide examples that relate to what the overall numbers indicate. Once faculty have considered and discussed the assessment results, meetings are held to talk about root causes of sub-par performance on any outcomes and possible actions to address the shortcomings. We will begin to think about useful ways to involve students to help us interpret results and develop strategies to improve the curriculum.

Are the results used to help the department achieve its program outcomes?

In August 2009 the following addition was made to the HSB strategic plan: "Consistent with the focus on continued pursuit of excellence by CSU-Pueblo and HSB, the School of Business will continue to assess its graduate and undergraduate programs by determining whether students meet the declared learning goals. Based on these outcomes, HSB will make necessary changes in programs and refine assessment procedures as appropriate."

How are assessment results used to improve the curriculum and program?

Assessment has become a key activity in the HSB. The results of our assessment activities are discussed and used to guide our efforts to improve our admissions processes, our teaching, and our curriculum. For example, we determined that too many of our MBA students were not writing as well as we desired. This has led us to begin using the Graduate Management Admission Test's *Analytical Writing Assessment* (AWA) to assess incoming students' skills. Those who score below a certain level on the AWA are required to take an English course suitable for addressing their writing deficiencies.

Are the results being used for budgeting and strategic planning?

Although the results of the HSB's assessment processes are not yet used for budgeting or strategic planning, this will be changing. Assessment results will be used as an input into the next set of strategic plans (for 2012–2017). If funds are needed to address a learning outcome, this will be factored into future-year budgets (FY 11–12 and 12–13).

How are results disseminated to faculty, students, advisory boards, and administrators?

As discussed earlier, faculty learn of assessment results in faculty meetings attended by all faculty as well as through other means (email, memos, etc.). The Assistant Provost of Assessment and Student Learning has been heavily involved in assisting with the HSB's assessment processes, so she is knowledgeable about the state of assessment practice in the HSB. We will continue to update her as more results are evaluated (i.e., more learning goals are assessed). We can improve the degree to which we provide feedback on assessment results to our boards and to our students.

Are students informed about their progress toward the learning outcomes?

Students are not directly informed about their progress toward learning outcomes in a consistent or systematic fashion. We see this as a positive transition we can make within the HSB. Our goal is to begin to shift students' awareness and perceptions relative to HSB's assessment activities. Currently, students think about their degree attainment from a "check off the boxes" mentality, meaning they concentrate on completing courses required in the curriculum of their particular degrees. What we aspire to achieve is for students to have two goals: (a) to complete the courses required for the degree they are seeking, and (b) to master the learning outcomes that must be achieved to graduate with a degree from the HSB. In other words, we want students to be at least as concerned with mastering important skills as they are about completing course work and attaining a certain GPA. We are aware that a few universities (e.g., Alverno College) have shifted to this approach, and we believe we can benefit from their "lessons learned." We expect that we

could begin planning for this “paradigm shift” in our approach and our students’ focus during the 2011–2012 academic year.

Continuous Processes

What processes are in place to ensure that the academic program assessment plan is periodically reviewed, evaluated, and updated when appropriate?

We have developed a comprehensive set of planning and tracking documents which describe when we will assess each of our learning outcomes, who will be involved, and what artifacts will be used.

Who is responsible for initiating and supporting the on-going process of program improvement?

While the HSB Dean is the cognizant manager of the HSB’s process of program improvement and is ultimately responsible, there is momentum within the HSB to shift this responsibility to the faculty members and create more ownership within the faculty. Because the HSB faculty and staff are heavily involved in and are primary implementers of improvement actions, the HSB assessment process is highly collaborative.

Who is responsible for ensuring that results from each year are the basis for action plans for the following year?

The HSB’s AoL Committee is responsible for overseeing that assessment results are followed up with appropriate actions. In terms of implementing the actions (i.e., closing the loop), the HSB’s Graduate Committee is responsible for helping direct any curriculum changes with appropriate faculty.

What are some of the HSB’s goals for the next few years regarding assessment, student learning, and process improvement?

The HSB’s AoL Committee believes that the following goals are worth pursuing:

- getting better at identifying root causes and contributing causes of student learning shortcomings (i.e., unmet outcomes);
- becoming more adept at taking focused, robust, appropriate action to address shortcomings (rather than “scattered” assortments of low-effect actions or time-consuming discussions of contributing causes over which we have little or no control);
- continuing to build faculty understanding of assessment processes and the value of those processes;
- formally incorporating assurance of learning contributions as an expected job duty that is specifically addressed as part of the annual performance review (APR) within the category *service*;
- continuing the transition we have begun toward a culture focused not only on inputs (what we teach, courses that must be completed), but also focused, to a large extent, on outcomes (student capabilities at graduation);
- continuing to refine assessment processes and documentation for greater efficiency, clarity, usefulness, and efficacy;
- experimenting with useful involvement of students in assessment processes;

- refining our rubrics to do a better job of capturing the essential and most meaningful differences between students who exceed, meet, and do not meet expectations on learning goals;
- pilot-testing the SALG (student assessment of their learning gains);
- improving the degree to which we provide feedback on assessment results to our boards and to our students;
- restructuring the orientation for graduate students to communicate our learning outcomes and expectations for students to demonstrate mastery relative to those outcomes; and
- determining a useful way to communicate to students which learning outcomes each course in our curriculum addresses.