ALIGNING ECONOMICS PROGRAMS WITH AACSB ACCREDITATION PROCESSES

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ABSTRACT

A challenge facing business schools, and of particular interest here, economics programs in business schools, is that of aligning programs to be consistent with the assessment expectations for AACSB accreditation. In the process of defining expectations and measuring achievements, a torrent of new vocabulary, processes, and expectations on faculty have been imposed. Many faculty members feel overwhelmed and resentful about the process and requirements. However, what can await a school and/or program at the end of the process is a unified, articulable view of program learning goals, how the program seeks to achieve the goals, and whether the goals are being met. The authors present a systematic process by which an economics program was successfully aligned with AACSB processes and standards, and examples of assessment plans, reports, and outcomes are provided. Excellence in student learning is the goal the authors share with others in their profession, and aligning programs as described here can create an opportunity to determine where quality learning is already happening, and where changes may be needed in order to achieve this level of excellence. It is hopeful that by describing the requirements and implementation processes of an assessment plan, this can serve as a model for others who engage in the process.

INTRODUCTION

Beginning and sustaining program level assessment can be a daunting task. Economics programs in AACSB accredited business schools often are either required or requested to have robust assessment programs in place to demonstrate continuous improvement processes. In many ways, these expectations take schools in a very useful, but simultaneously, overwhelming direction. They drill down to what a program is meant to be and if that program is achieving what it seeks to achieve. In the process of defining expectations and measuring achievements, a torrent of new vocabulary, processes, and expectations on faculty have been imposed. The key to success is to clearly understand expectations, and to develop achievable assessment and reporting processes. The purpose of this paper is to identify expectations and provide actual examples of successful accreditation processes at a recently reaccredited AACSB business school.

AACSB standards clearly define the broad steps required of an assessment program, and state that the assessment process must be faculty driven. According to the AACSB Assessment Resource Center,

> *"The standards call for schools to define learning goals, assess student achievement for these goals, and utilize what is learned through assessment to continually improve their curricular programs."*
>
> *"Faculty involvement in, and ownership of, the assurance of learning process is critical. Faculty are expected to be actively involved in all stages of the assessment process including defining goals, curriculum alignment, developing appropriate measures, implementing course-embedded measures, and, improving the school's curriculum." (AACSB Assessment Resource Center, 2011)*

The implications of these standards are that there must be clarity in what the school seeks to do, how it continually seeks excellence, and that this cannot be a delegated job to one or two individuals or faculty members. The economics program assessment processes described in this paper provides concrete examples and documents from which other programs can use to build their own mission-based assessment process.

DEFINING LEARNING GOALS FOR THE PROGRAM

AACSB expectations with respect to learning goals are that:

1. Learning goals should link to the mission; thus, learning goals will differ from school to school.
2. Learning goals translate the more general statement of the school's mission into the specific educational accomplishments expected of its graduates.
3. Learning goals must be defined for each program. Departmental goals and/or course goals (which are not required by AACSB) are not a substitute for program goals.
4. Learning goals must include both general and management-specific knowledge and skills.
5. Four to ten goals should be developed for each program. Schools are not required (or even encouraged) to develop and assess learning goals for all of the knowledge and skills areas listed in [AACSB] Standards 15–21. (AACSB Assessment Resource Center, 2011)

Therefore, the first step in the assessment process is the establishment/definition of the learning goals for the program. By requirement, the learning goals for any program need to reflect the mission of the school. This can be a lengthy process – not because a program is unaware of what it seeks to be or because articulating that is hard, but rather the challenge can come in the need for levels of concurrence of learning goals across the institution. For example,

the BA in Economics program—which is the model here—is one of two undergraduate programs (the other being a BSBA) in the Helzberg School of Management at Rockhurst University. The university has a mission, the Helzberg School of Management has a mission and learning goals in the BA in Economics program need to be consistent with all of them.

The Helzberg School of Management's approach to this process was to begin with the establishment of general learning goals with an eye to one program (BSBA), gain faculty approval, and then extend the process to other programs in the school (BA in Economics, MBA, and Executive MBA). A small group of faculty members representing the various disciplines in the school met to define learning goals for the undergraduate business school BSBA degree. An eye on this one program helped move the process forward as it was less abstract than trying to establish the goals for all programs at once. Drafts were shared with the faculty at large. Input was received on the goals themselves and whether they captured what needed to be generalized for the entire school. After revisions and a faculty vote, six learning goals were decided on for the BSBA. These were then generalized for the entire Helzberg School of Management. The six learning goals of the Helzberg School of Management fall under the themes of: Leadership; Ethical Behavior and Corporate Social Responsibility; Business Skills and Knowledge; International/Global; Information Analysis and Application; and Communication. These fundamental learning goals became the starting point for other programs—including economics—to establish theirs while retaining concurrence within the entire university.

Each program then articulated their corresponding program level learning goal that reflected the nuances, depth, and focus of these goals for each particular program. This gave a unified focus through the school while developing the particular profile of each program.

The Helzberg School of Management was at the forefront of this process in the larger university. Their learning goals were created with the mission statements of the Helzberg School and Rockhurst University in view, but the goals also then served as a starting point for when, several years later, the entire university began the process of establishing university level learning goals. The result was concurrence throughout the institution. Table 1 shows this concurrence from the university through the business school to the economics program.

Although these goals have been established, they remain dynamic documents. Reexamination of the Helzberg School of Management learning goals is undertaken both systematically and in an ad hoc manner as questions or needs are presented. A recent example of this was found in the executive MBA program where revision of some learning goals was made to better reflect the desired outcomes of the program. After approval by the appropriate program committee, the revisions were presented and voted upon by the entire faculty. As such, the learning goals retain a vibrancy and progression that is so necessary for continuous improvement, and it allows the business school to respond as necessary to changes in environmental and strategic factors.

Table 1: LEARNING GOAL CONCURRENCE ACROSS UNIVERSITY AND ECONOMICS PROGRAM		
Rockhurst University	**Helzberg School of Management**	**BA, Economics**
Leadership *The commitment to develop the gifts and talents of self and others to make a positive difference in the world*	Leadership *Demonstrate the pursuit of personal excellence while helping others develop to their full potential*	Leadership and Public Policy • *Demonstrate leadership skills through formulation and evaluation of beneficial public policy* • *Demonstrate leadership skills through educating others about public policy*
Ethics and social justice *The commitment to create a more just world and to live with integrity, humility, tolerance, and empathy*	Ethical Behavior and Corporate Social Responsibility *Analyze ethical and corporate social responsibility issues in context and implement appropriate action(s)*	Ethics and Social Justice • *Distinguish and apply both positive and normative economic tools to define and debate economic issues and policy.* • *Recognize and analyze issues relating to personal ethics and social justice to propose and defend courses of action to create a more just world.*
Academic knowledge *The capacity to assimilate and apply a broad range of skills, knowledge, and abilities to a chosen field of study*	Business Skills and Knowledge *Explain, integrate and apply foundational business knowledge and skills to effectively lead and manage organizations*	Economics Skills and Knowledge • *Define, describe, demonstrate, and apply intermediate level economic theory.* • *Apply scientific method to develop new knowledge*
International and cultural understanding *The appreciation of cultural differences and commonalities, and the ability to interact with sensitivity and alertness as citizens of the world*	International/Global *Demonstrate the achievement of a global perspective that encourages participation in the complex, integrated world-wide business community*	International/Global *Integrate relevant cultural, social, political, historical, geographic, and environmental factors into the analysis and debate of economic issues and courses of action.*
Critical and creative thinking *The ability to search for knowledge, investigate questions, and apply information systems in a discerning and innovative manner*	Information Analysis and Application *Identify, access, analyze and synthesize appropriate business information*	Critical Thinking and Information analysis/application *Identify, access, and analyze relevant quantitative and qualitative information to evaluate economic issues/problems, to develop forecasts, and to select and evaluate appropriate courses of action*
Communication *The ability to communicate effectively in a variety of contexts and with awareness of purpose and audience*	Communication *Communicate effectively, and create an environment where effective communication can occur*	Communication *Produce and deliver effective written products and oral presentations in a variety of contexts using effective technologies*
Self formation *The discovery and cultivation of spiritual, physical, social and emotional well-being*	It was an explicit decision that this learning goal is primarily achieved and assessed through the extra-curricular areas of the university.	

ASSESSING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT OF LEARNING GOALS

After program level learning goals are established, the next step is to assess whether students have achieved the learning goals by the end of their program. AACSB's specific expectations for assessment of student learning are that:

1. Student performance on learning goals must be assessed systematically and routinely. No one approach to assurance of learning is prescribed. Assessment programs should include direct measures of learning. Course grades are not program assessment measures.
2. Program assessment does not require that every student be assessed. Sampling is acceptable as long as an appropriate and representative sampling methodology is utilized. (AACSB Assessment Resource Center, 2011)

The authors find that the assessment of student learning step, more than the others, troubles and intimidates faculty members. DeMoranville notes three broad reasons faculty members resist assessment requirements. First, faculty members are too busy with current responsibilities in teaching, service, and scholarship and therefore have little time for activities they view as busy work. Second, they question the true value to be gained through assessment with the high costs of additional work accruing to the faculty and the potential benefits of better learning accruing to the students. Lastly, they are concerned about potential limitations on their ability to design and deliver courses as they desire. (DeMoranville, 2010, pp.24-25) Perhaps this is why Lederman noted that a 2009 survey by the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment found that "campus leaders considered involving faculty in assessment to be one of their greatest challenges." (Lederman, 2011) Responses the authors have received to the need to plan and perform assessment range from an unwillingness to learn a new system and take on new responsibilities, to nervousness of being placed under the microscope in teaching. Concerns must be understood, and an assessment process designed that is manageable, can provide meaningful information about achievement of student learning, and will continue to allow faculty members to design and deliver their courses in ways they believe are appropriate.

Creating the Assessment Plan

Creating the assessment plan begins with setting a timetable for assessing program level learning goals. A multi-year plan that rotates the assessment of one or two goals per year makes it very achievable. For Economics at Rockhurst University, the plan was created by looking at the entire curriculum, selecting courses (based on existing course learning objectives) in which it made sense to assess the program learning goals, and spreading these assessments out over time. The plan avoids assessment overload in one particular course, and it allows for the establishment of baseline and end-of-program assessment in a systematic way. For example, according to the plan, data for ethical analysis is collected from the Developing World course, analyzed and reported to the economics faculty members in year one. Any recommendations for changes made in courses tied to assessment are approved in that academic year. In year two of that learning goal's assessment cycle, any recommended changes are implemented in the course(s) where changes were recommended and approved. In year 3, data collection, analysis, and recommendations will happen again to determine whether standards were met after changes were

implemented. The staggering of different goals to be assessed in different years greatly simplifies the assessment process. Note that this approach is entirely consistent with AACSB expectations:

> *"AACSB standards specify "a systematic process" only. Each goal does not have to be assessed every year, but a systematic process is needed to insure all goals are assessed to support meaningful curricular change and development. Normally, each goal should be evaluated at least twice over a five year AACSB review cycle." (AACSB, 2007, p 15)*

Assessment Methodologies

Once the rotation plan has been established, an appropriate assessment methodology for each learning goal needs to be determined. Although methodologies may include indirect techniques such as surveys, interviews and focus groups, they must include direct measures of student learning such as assignment artifacts or assessment exams. Assessment at Rockhurst University is based primarily on the direct assessment methodology of course embedded assessment. This is a university wide emphasis, so it clearly fits into the organizational culture and satisfies accreditation expectations. Course embedded assessment uses existing course assignments, activities, papers, and/or exam elements to directly assess student learning.

According to McConnell et al., a well-designed course embedded assessment methodology identifies student artifact that provide evidence of the learning goal, and matches it with an appropriate measurement technique that allows faculty members to determine whether a learning standard has been achieved. Table 2 below describes common course-embedded artifacts and the related measurement techniques that a faculty member might use. (McConnell, Hoover, and Miller, 2008)

Table 2: Artifacts and Measurement

Course-Embedded Artifacts	Measurement Techniques
Multiple choice exam questions related to a particular learning goal	Percent correct, analysis of incorrect responses
Short-answer exam questions, essays, research papers	Level of achievement rubrics
Oral presentations	Oral presentation rubric
Case study reports	Case study rubric
Lab performance	Skills checklist

In the economics program, all of these techniques to capture student learning—with the exception of skills checklists for lab performance—have been used. For ease of use and consistency in data comparison, standardized rubrics for a number of the program learning goals were created, tested, and adopted. Rubrics are useful any time students are making a non-objective response because they clarify the dimensions to be graded and provide scales or descriptors of student performance (McConnell et al., 2008). The common rubrics used by the economics faculty are for the learning goals of communication (both oral and written), ethics, global, critical thinking, and information analysis/ application. An example of the standardized

critical thinking and information analysis/application rubric for Economics is included in Table 3 below for reference.

Table 3: Critical Thinking and information Analysis / Application Rubric

Learning Objective	1 - Exceptional	2 - Superior	3 - Commendable	4 - Rudimentary	5 - Minimal
Identify	Demonstrates a clear/accurate and comprehensive understanding of data collection process and statistical theories and concepts.	Demonstrates an adequate understanding of data collection process and statistical theories and concepts.	Demonstrates a general understanding of data collection process and statistical theories and concepts.	Demonstrates an incomplete understanding of either the data collection process or statistical theories and concepts.	Demonstrates incomplete or mostly incorrect understanding of data collection process and statistical theories and concepts.
Access	Presents a concise and correct explanation for choosing particular techniques and models to fit and forecast the data.	Presents a correct explanation for choosing particular techniques and models to fit and forecast data.	Presents an acceptable explanation for choosing particular techniques and models to fit and forecast data.	Presents a limited and partially incorrect explanation for choosing particular techniques and models to fit and forecast data.	Presents no or completely incorrect explanation for choosing particular techniques and models to fit and forecast data.
Analyze	Excellent use of statistical evidence and prior knowledge (of topic) to compare models' performance and to make recommendations for future forecasts.	Comparisons and recommendations are based on appropriate and correct statistical evidence and prior knowledge.	Comparisons and recommendations are based on mostly appropriate or correct statistical evidence and prior knowledge.	Comparisons and recommendations incomplete and/or selection of preferred model are based on inappropriate or incorrect statistical evidence and prior knowledge.	No attempt to compare models' performance and/or to make recommendations for future forecasts.

The advantage of developing standardized rubrics for program learning goals is found in the process of its creation and application. The creation of a rubric involves faculty collectively discussing and determining which dimensions and scales are important for their program, and expressing them in a concise and communicable way. The result is cohesion among faculty on student achievement expectations. Some might voice concern that there may be elements that one individually faculty member values highly that does not make the final rubric, but in practice, this is not a problem. For assessment purposes, an instructor who is gathering data for an assessment must use the common rubric dimensions *at a minimum*. Additional dimensions geared toward a particularly desired outcome(s) in a course or an assignment can easily be added to the rubric, but only those designated for assessment need be part of the formal data analysis and recommendation process. This flexibility preserves great freedom for the faculty member

while providing essential assessment information to determine whether program learning goals are being met.

In the data collection and analysis phase, rubric use is also very helpful because the standardized rubric makes the essential connection between learning goals and assessment results (Ammons and Mills, 2005). A standardized rubric can be used for student assignments in multiple courses, and it allows comparisons between baseline course assignments and end-of-program assignments. For example, the information analysis / application rubric shown in Table 3 can be used in a sophomore level statistics course to determine a baseline level for incoming student performance, and then again in a capstone course for an end-of-program assessment of student learning.

USING ASSESSMENT RESULTS

The final step in program assessment involves feeding conclusions and recommendations that flow from the assessment data back into the program for continuous improvement. The purpose of assessment is not the gathering of data or the creation of more work for the faculty member; it is to identify an act on areas that need improvement or attention. This view is emphasized by Banta who states,

Outcomes assessment is simply not worth doing unless it is used to enhance the students learning experience—by improving instruction in a single class, the structure or sequencing of a curriculum, or the process of offering student services that complement coursework." (Banta, 2005, p. 38)

AACSB has the specific expectations that:

1. Assessment results must be analyzed, disseminated, and utilized by the faculty toward curriculum planning.
2. For initial accreditation and accreditation maintenance purposes, schools will be expected to define their learning goals conceptually and operationally, discuss how they are addressed in the curriculum, and demonstrate levels of student achievement for each goal. Schools also will be expected to show how assessment results subsequently impacted their curriculum planning. (AACSB Assessment Resource Center, 2011)

This step of applying changes to the curriculum for improvement is what AACSB calls 'closing the loop' on a round of the assessment process. In the authors' last AACSB site visit, the visitation team stressed the expectation that institutions not only assess, but make recommendations and act on the recommendations. The loop is not considered to be closed in a learning goal assessment until any recommended changes are implemented. As the cycles are repeated over time, the faculty can not only determine whether changes implemented produced the desired outcome, but also if there are additional areas in need of improvement.

Assessment Reports

Documenting and tracking the assessment plan requires simple reporting and archiving. In the economics program, assessment reports are created whenever a program learning goal is assessed. The report summarizes the relevant data collection information (learning goal, where assessment took place, results, and recommendations), includes the faculty member's recommendations for improvement, and indicates where the electronic copy of the report and archived artifacts of student learning can be found. The Helzberg School of Management has found that the most efficient way to maintain these required archives is in electronic form on a dedicated drive.

Assessment reports are presented at economics departmental meetings where all faculty members determine what the final recommendations will be and what, if any, changes are to be made to the assessed course or other courses in the program. An example of such a report is found in Table 4 below. The following year, the changes are applied and the courses await the next round of assessment.

Annual Reports and Cumulative Assessment Plan Reports

Although the loop of assessment is closed for a learning goal once assessment results are discussed and any changes are implemented, documentation of the assessment plan is essential, especially for AACSB and regional accreditation bodies.

In the last AACSB site visit rotation, the Helzberg School of Management instituted a summary annual reporting process to assure that it captured all assessment activities in each program, and to also keep track of the accumulated assessment activities per learning goal. This way, major comprehensive assessment reports do not need to be created for site visits or self-studies, but rather the current state of assessment in every program is updated and documented each year.

Program chairs prepare an annual assessment report summarizing all of the program assessments, discussions, changes, and pending plans. An example of the annual assessment report for Economics can be found in Table 5. As Table 5 shows, the annual report details the learning goals assessed in the year, the observations and discussions, and the recommendations and interventions. The distinction between the Assessment Report in Table 4 and the Annual Report in Table 5 is that Assessment Reports are prepared by individual faculty members performing course-embedded assessment for a single learning goal, and the Annual Report is prepared by the program chair, and it documents the departmental discussions and decisions about all learning goals assessed in the academic year.

The final step is to add to a Cumulative Assessment Plan Report (standardized across all programs in the Helzberg School of Management) that accumulates all of the varied assessment loops for a program over time. A sample of the table for the BA in Economics is found in Table

6. Just looking at the table can be daunting, but once created, all that need be done to the table each year is adding the few new lines of assessment information under learning goals that have been assessed. When it comes time to contribute assessment information to accrediting bodies such as AACSB or a regional accrediting body, the documents are up-to-date and assessment of learning goals and cycles can easily be viewed and shared.

Table 4: Sample Learning Goal Assessment Report

ASSESSMENT REPORT
Ethics and Social Justice
Laura Fitzpatrick

GOAL	DATA	ANALYSIS	OBSERVATIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS
Ethics and social justice Recognize and analyze issues relating to personal ethics and social justice to propose and defend courses of action to create a more just world.	EC3400-DEVELOPING WORLD Econ majors, core SRII students (business overlap), Global Studies, junior/senior 5 page case concentrating on economic policy, ethics, and CSR Potentially first case in ethical analysis	1. Students had most difficulty with the performance dimension that required stakeholder analysis and implication of courses of action. 2. Students had least difficulty with the performance dimension that required the recommendation and support of a course of action 3. Student performance percentages are available on attached rubric templates	1. Rubric worked well for exercise. 2. Achievement standards should target 90% acceptable performance or above on each of the four performance dimensions. 3. Document more explicit ethics related learning objectives. Course did not include a learning objective solely tied to ethics although it was a measurable component of the course and was even inferred in existing learning objectives. 4. Explicitly introduce stakeholder analysis exercises

Note: In this space, one would indicate where the supporting data analysis and the archives of student work can be found.

Table 5 : Annual Assessment Progress Report

Program: BA, Economics
Program Coordinator: Prof. Laura Fitzpatrick
Inclusive dates:

Overview
Assessment this year included data collection, analysis, and recommendations in global/international and rubric development, piloting, and recommendations in critical thinking and information analysis/application. Scheduled rubric development or modification in economic skills and knowledge and in leadership and public policy has not yet been completed. There is additional global/international assessment that has yet to be completed as well.

Data Analysis: Global/International

The preliminary review of the existing **'**global/international' assessment data was discussed in the BA in Economics Curriculum and Assessment Committee (BACAC) meeting on August 17, 2011 and the initial recommendation was adopted. Highlights of those recommendations are listed below while the full report and corresponding artifacts can be found on the HSASSESS drive, program assessment, BA, EC3400 F10 L Fitzpatrick.

The global analysis rubric segment was reviewed and approved by the BACAC committee for use in Undergraduate program assessment. The BACAC determined that 85 % of students scoring acceptable or above would be the targeted achievement level for each performance dimension of the above rubric.

Observations & analysis:
Students did meet the targeted competency level in all dimensions of the rubric. Actual achievement was 100%. Students are achieving targets in this area. The area of weakness in the course was not found in this goal but, rather, in the ability to apply different theoretical perspectives. This is currently an assessment focus for SR courses through the modal group.

Recommendations:
At this point, we are looking to gather more data to see if there is consistency across courses and we are initiating assessment of this goal at the introductory level. This should give us a better view of the goal throughout the program as well as potential areas of intervention.

Data Analysis: Critical Thinking and Information Analysis/Application

The preliminary review of the existing **'**Critical Thinking and Information Analysis/Application' assessment data was discussed in the BACAC meeting on August 17, 2011 and the initial recommendations were adopted. Highlights of those recommendations are listed below while the full report and corresponding artifacts can be found on the HSASSESS drive, program assessment, BA, EC4001 S11 X. Pham.

The critical thinking and information analysis/application rubric was adapted from that of the BSBA program to customize it to the BA program. This revised rubric was reviewed and approved by the BACAC committee for use in Undergraduate program assessment.

The BACAC determined that 85 % of students scoring acceptable or above would be the targeted achievement level for each performance dimension of the above rubric.

Observations & analysis:
Students did meet the targeted competency level in all dimensions of the rubric. Actual achievement was 92.3%.
Students performed better on the new topics introduced in the course than on those that required retention from topics in BUS2200. This should be addressed.
Students were relatively weaker on background knowledge of data sets they chose.
Technical problems (frequent crashes) with the Excel forecasting add on created a great deal of frustration and unnecessary challenges not related to subject matter for students.

Recommendations:
Some kind of retention focused efforts from BUS2200 would benefit students. Instructor has indicated a desire to focus on course interventions to increase understanding of background knowledge of data sets. Strong recommendation of alternative forecasting tool that will not be a distraction to learning. Something such as SPSS would also be marketable from a student perspective.

Interventions:

1. BACAC is currently brainstorming what approach would be best to help retention desired. Some options are use of a primer students retain, use of Livetext to create a resource bank of BUS2200 material that can be revisited, and additional review. The final decision will be made and made Fall 2011 for implementation in the next offering of the course, Spring 2012.
2. BACAC is investigating the cost and feasibility of an alternative forecasting tool to be used in the course. The final decision will be made and made Fall 2011 for implementation in the next offering of the course, Spring 2012.

Table 6: Sample of BA Summary Assessment Results Table

BA SUMMARY ASSESSMENT RESULTS

Learning Goal	Academic Year	Assessment and Results	Loops Closed
Ethical Behavior and Corporate Social Responsibility	AY 08/09	• Rubric developed and piloted in AC4750 and EC3400. Results indicated rubric needed enhanced descriptors on multiple dimensions.	Rubric modified and adopted by faculty. 1st loop closed.
	AY 09/10	• Assessment data collected in EC4940 and EC4200. In EC4940 students met 90% standards that had been set in two of four dimensions, and 70% and 80% in remaining dimensions. In EC4200 students met 90% in two and 85% and 80% in two others, but they were not the same low and high scoring dimensions across the courses. With varied results, the recommendation speaks to perhaps instructor specific adaptations in class to increase the achievement levels in weaker dimensions. Faculty started questioning whether 90% is the ideal we seek and whether it sets the proper level of achievement for acceptable performance for program assessment purposes. The recommendation is to examine this and potentially revise target achievements.	2nd loop closed with instructor changes in individual courses. Target competencies modified to 85% satisfactory or better.
	AY 10/11	• Change implementation year.	
Summary: Two loops closed. Third loop begins AY 11/12			

CONCLUSION

An integrated approach to program level learning assessment is no longer a choice that schools face. For myriad reasons, not the least being expectations from accrediting bodies, schools must engage in the process and develop systems that will work for them. Although universities at the early stages perceive the process to be overwhelming, a program need begin with only small steps. Ewell notes that,

> *"The prospect of starting an integrated program of learning assessment can seem overwhelming … but that shouldn't be an obstacle to getting started. Institutions that have built comprehensive, highly integrated, sell-documented systems of assessment have been developing their practices for years. They started with small steps, perhaps with only one course, and worked their way up to the whole." (Ewell, 2003, p.33)*

A framework and models of these beginning steps can be drawn from this paper. The essential conditions for success are that faculty concerns be understood, the assessment process and design is simple and achievable, the process provides meaningful information about student learning, and that most, if not all, faculty members are active participants in the assessment process and discussions.

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