Office of the Provost

Date: February 5, 2003

To: Dr. John Rife, Head
Department of Social Work

From: Anita Lawson
Associate Provost UE/SAI

Re: Assessment Plan Review

Responding to a plan set forth in the Supplement to the SACS Self-Study for ongoing review and improvement of outcomes assessment plans in the degree programs, on January 30, 2003, the Dean’s Council accepted a new procedure that links a review of departmental assessment plans to departments’ fifth-year reviews. (This procedure is outlined in the document enclosed, “Assessment Plan Reporting Structure and Evaluative Criteria Appropriate for Use with Departmental Reviews.”) Because we initiated the 2002-03 review so late in the year, the pilot plan for the current academic year described in that document stipulates using the assessment information for departments/Schools that has already been made available as part of the SACS Assessment Database.

Since your department is conducting its fifth-year review this academic year, it is part of the pilot process. Enclosed is an “Assessment Plan Review, Spring 2003,” an evaluation by Academic Assessment Specialist John Willse of your department’s material in the SACS assessment database. To compare the review comments with the database information, go to http://sacs.uncc.edu/work/academic/assessinterface.asp

The review process will be refined in the upcoming years as other departments undergo fifth-year reviews. We now realize that the method for gathering information used in the SACS database can be improved, and in subsequent years we will work to make the questions more pertinent and directive than those which are reflected in the database. Also, if you have not updated the SACS database recently, you may find that the review has indicated deficits in some areas that your department has actually addressed. If this type of inaccuracy occurs, please contact Dr. Willse at jtwillse@uncc.edu or by phone (336-0395) with any supplemental information that you think will allow him to make a better judgment about your assessment practices.

Your Dean has also received a copy of this evaluation. According to the procedures endorsed by the deans, a plan to improve the assessment practices should be a part of the Memorandum of Understanding developed from the fifth-year review. This plan may include consultation with Dr. Willse and support from him. Please contact him at the email and phone if you wish his help.

Cc: Dean Laura Sims
Reporting “Student Learning Objectives”

Evaluative Criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All objectives:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Are student oriented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Are outcome/behaviorally oriented (that is, objectives focus on what students will be able to do rather than what students were taught)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Are sufficiently specific to convey the expectations for student success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Provide the distinctions between each degree program and degree level NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Indicate conditions under which behaviors are observable in a student*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✗</td>
<td>Indicate criteria for student success*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Departments meeting these criteria should receive commendations.

Notes:

1. Distinctions were not made between the two undergraduate concentrations. Any distinction would probably be minor. Only two additional courses are required for the school social work distinction. Perhaps in future reports, the department could indicate what additional objectives are met by those additional courses.
2. Conditions could be more explicitly defined on several of the objectives, but the department has clearly defined its expectations of students in regard to the practice of social work.
3. In the graduate section, some criteria of success are provided; however, these criteria are for departmental goals rather than success with individual student outcomes.

Narrative Explanation:

The department of Social Work has done and excellent job of defining its educational objectives. They have provided many exemplars of good student objectives that should be shared with other faculty members in the University. The only criterion not met by the department was to define what it considers the criteria of student success. This criterion may not always be appropriate when considering program level objectives and its absence here should not be seen as a shortfall. The department should be commended for its current presentation of objectives.
Department of Social Work Assessment Plan Review, Spring 2003

Department of Social Work Assessment Plan Review Based on Responses Found at:
http://sacs.uncg.edu/work/academic/assessinterface.asp

**Reporting “Assessment Methods”**

**Evaluative Criteria**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment methods:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Include indirect measures (student evaluations, surveys, cumulative GPA, external reviews)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Include some direct measures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Are described or examples are made available</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| ✗                   | Include a description of the intended student sample*  
  - When (e.g., during a capstone class)  
  - What students (e.g., graduating students) |
| ✗                   | Are explicitly linked to specific learning objectives* |
| ✗                   | Are given on a set schedule* |

* Departments meeting these criteria should receive commendations

**Notes:** 1. Assessments were listed and some were given a cursory description, but neither the direct nor the indirect measures were described in sufficient detail to provide insight into their utility or quality. SWK prepared the initial assessment report before these criteria were made available. As such, the omission of a full description is understandable. Please make additional information regarding the assessments available, if they exist.

**Narrative Explanation:**

The department indicated that it uses both direct and indirect methods of assessment, but there was little description provided. Descriptions of students used in the assessments and the manner in which assessments were intended to inform the department of the quality of the curriculum (e.g., which assessments address which objectives) were also not included in the report used for this evaluation. Given the quality of the student objectives, this department is well positioned to firmly link its departmental assessments to specific aspects of the curriculum. The department would be well served by taking advantage of this opportunity.
Department of Social Work Assessment Plan Review, Spring 2003

Department of Social Work Assessment Plan Review Based on Responses Found at:
http://sacs.uncg.edu/work/academic/assessinterface.asp

Reporting “Results”

Evaluative Criteria

Reporting of assessment results:

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>Are specific (the results from each assessment method are provided)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>Are interpreted in relation to the assessment itself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>Are interpreted in relation to a program of study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>Are interpreted in relation to specific program objectives*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>Includes full summaries (e.g., reports to or minutes from appropriate departmental meeting are made available)*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Departments meeting these criteria should receive commendations.

Notes:

1. SWK prepared the initial assessment report before these criteria were made available. As such, their omission is understandable. Please make information regarding these criteria available, if they exist.

Narrative Explanation:

The results of the indirect and direct assessments were not directly cited. That is, there was no mention of what the department found after administering the assessments.

Social Work uses portfolio assessment.

- How did students perform on this assessment (Criterion: Are interpreted in relation to the assessment itself)?
- What did student performances tell the department faculty about the quality of the program of study (Criterion: Are interpreted in relation to a program of study)?
- Which specific objectives did the faculty learn about by conducting this assessment (Criterion: Are interpreted in relation to specific program objectives*)?
Evaluative Criteria

Reports on the use of assessment should include:

| ✓ 1 | Decisions (e.g., to change or not change programs/courses) based on assessment |
| x 2 | Explanations of how assessment results informed decisions (some direct assessment results should be provided) |
| x 2 | Decisions are linked to specific assessment results |
| x  | Clear distinctions between department level and degree program level decisions* |
| x  | An explanation of which specific learning objectives are affected by decisions* |

* Departments meeting these criteria should receive commendations.

Notes:
1. SWK indicated that it uses assessment information for decision-making. Examples of changes were cited, but no link to assessments was provided.
2. There was no explanation of assessment results. SWK prepared the initial assessment report before the evaluative criteria were made available. As such, their omission is understandable. Please make information regarding these criteria available, if they exist.

Narrative Explanation:

SWK indicated that it used assessment results to make decisions, but there was insufficient specificity in the report to show what the results of their various assessments were or how they were used to make the decisions cited.
Assessment Plan Reporting Structure and Evaluative Criteria
Appropriate for Use with Departmental Reviews

Conceptual Framework

In departmental reviews, departments generally include information about how they monitor program effectiveness or how they hope to improve the educational experience of their students. However, reporting practices vary widely across departments and schools. The variation in how departments report their assessment information makes it difficult to glean a clear picture of assessment activities across the institution.

During the SACS self-study, the SACS institutional effectiveness committee performed an important service by establishing a standard format in which departments could report assessment activities for each degree program. The responses provided in that format have been organized into an academic assessment database located on the UNCG website at <http://sacs.uncg.edu/work/academic/assessinterface.asp>. This database will serve as a useful tool if it is kept current.

The SACS assessment database currently includes sections at the department level (assessment results and use of assessment data) and at the program level (objectives and assessment methods). The structure of this reporting is not ideal and will evolve. Optimally, each department will have a complete response for each distinct program. If programs are distinct, they should be examined separately. Departmental reviews in the 2002-2003 year will be used to conduct the pilot implementation of a new assessment reporting framework. During this pilot year, the structure of the existing SACS assessment database will be updated, and the process of evaluating assessment plans will be refined.

2002-2003 Pilot

The new assessment plan reporting structure will be piloted with the departments already scheduled for fifth-year review in the 2002-2003 academic year. These departments are: Anthropology, English, Library Science, Social Work, Exercise and Sport Science, Music, and Nursing.

The information for these departments will be taken directly from the database already compiled for the SACS self-study.

In this pilot year, the University’s Academic Assessment Specialist will provide feedback to departments regarding the assessment report section of the fifth-year review. Making improvements to the plans in a timely manner will be addressed in the Memorandum of Understanding at the end of the Assessment process. The Academic Assessment Specialist will act as a consultant to departments, helping them improve their academic assessment and reporting. Control of assessment will remain within the individual departments. Only guidance regarding the improvement of systems for monitoring effectiveness will be provided.
Assessment Report Structure

There are 4 areas that should be covered by an assessment report:

1. Learning Outcome Objectives
2. Assessment Methods
3. Results
4. Use of Assessments

Each distinct degree program should have an assessment report covering these 4 areas. Departments will facilitate review of their assessment plans if they provide clear information on each of these areas. The criteria by which the assessment plans will be evaluated are provided on the following pages. The criteria address each of these 4 reporting areas. An examination of the criteria should help clarify what information is expected in an assessment report.

Review of Assessment Plans

The goal of reviewing assessment plans is to provide useful formative feedback to departments. As such, providing guidance to departments to improve their assessment plans is more important than assigning an overall evaluation. By providing feedback with a simple checklist, we can both track the current state of assessment across the university (e.g., how many departments are using direct assessments) and provide individual departments with indications of areas in which they can improve (e.g., assessments should be linked to specific objectives).

While the primary purpose of evaluating departmental assessment plans is not to give overall evaluations, there is utility in being able to identify programs that are exemplars of best practice. In the checklists provided on the following pages, notation is provided that will allow for the identification of responses worthy of commendation.

Reporting “Student Learning Objectives”

General Reporting Suggestions
To avoid confusion, student learning objectives should be reported separately from other departmental objectives (e.g., research goals). Student outcomes should always be considered as serving a separate function from other departmental goals.
Evaluative Criteria
All objectives:
- Are student oriented
- Are outcome/behaviorally oriented (that is, objectives focus on what students will be able to do rather than what students were taught)
- Are sufficiently specific to convey the expectations for student success
- Provide the distinctions between each degree program and degree level
- Indicate conditions under which behaviors are observable in a student*
- Indicate criteria for student success*

* Departments meeting these criteria should receive commendations.

Reporting “Assessment Methods”

General Reporting Suggestions
Assessment methods should be both listed and described. There is too much variability in how methods can be employed for a simple listing of methods to provide a clear picture of how a department is assessing student learning. Full reporting in this area is important for putting the later reporting of results into a proper context.

Non-learning measures of departmental activity (e.g., enrollment statistics, credit hour production, faculty research/development) are not considered informative for the purposes of academic assessment. Indirect measures do provide useful information and are included on the checklist below. However, an assessment plan relying solely on indirect methods would be incomplete.

Evaluative Criteria
Assessment methods:
- Include indirect measures (student evaluations, surveys, cumulative GPA, external reviews)
- Include some direct measures
- Are described or examples are made available
- Include a description of the intended student sample*
  - When (e.g., during a capstone class)
  - What students (e.g., graduating students)
- Are explicitly linked to specific learning objectives*
- Are given on a set schedule*

* Departments meeting these criteria should receive commendations.
Reporting “Results”

General Reporting Suggestions
A complete reporting of assessment results should include both the specific assessment results (e.g., portfolio ratings) and the interpretation. While the criteria listed below may seem to require a lot of documentation, a department actively engaged in assessment should already be keeping these records.

Evaluative Criteria
Reporting of assessment results:
- Are specific (the results from each assessment method are provided)
- Are interpreted in relation to the assessment itself
- Are interpreted in relation to a program of study
- Are interpreted in relation to specific program objectives*
- Includes full summaries (e.g., reports to or minutes from appropriate departmental meeting are made available)*

* Departments meeting these criteria should receive commendations.

Reporting “Use of Assessment”

General Reporting Suggestions
This section is the culmination of the previous three. Departments should refer back to the previous three sections as appropriate. Full documentation of the use of assessment should not be limited to changes based on assessment results. Positive assessment results that suggest changes are not needed should be included in this section.

Evaluative Criteria
Reports on the use of assessment should include:
- Decisions (e.g., to change or not change programs/courses) based on assessment
- Explanations of how assessment results informed decisions (some direct assessment results should be provided)
- Decisions are linked to specific assessment results
- Clear distinctions between department level and degree program level decisions*
- An explanation of which specific learning objectives are affected by decisions*

* Departments meeting these criteria should receive commendations.