

IMPLEMENTING LEARNING OBJECTIVES AND ASSESSMENT FOR CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT OF LEARNING: THE CASE OF THE MARKETING DEPARTMENT AT SAN JOSE STATE UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the establishment of learning objectives and planning for the implementation of assessment by the Marketing Department at San Jose State University. This was performed over a period of two years in preparation for the maintenance of AACSB accreditation by the college of business at San Jose State University scheduled for February 2006.

AACSB REQUIREMENTS

Accreditation by The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) is the hallmark of acceptance into the elite area of business school education. Only a small percentage of business schools achieve this accreditation. Many business schools continue to seek AACSB accreditation in hopes of improving the school's (1) curriculum, (2) image, (3) opportunities to obtain resources, and (4) ability to attract quality faculty (Andrews, Roe, Tate, and Yallapragada, 1994).

In 2003 the AACSB made major changes in both the accreditation standards and the process by which accreditation is granted. Miles, Hazeldine, and Munilla (2004) provide an excellent comprehensive overview and historic perspective on both the new standards and the implications for business faculty.

The revised standards make the individual business college's mission central to the accreditation process, as all performance metrics are now a function of the mission. In other words, the accreditation process will now be focused on the particular mission of each business school and its strategic planning process as well as the link of this mission to the overall mission statement of the university. "In order to earn accreditation, business schools must clearly establish a mission and corresponding strategic goals, and demonstrate progress and continuous improvement relative to those goals (Jerry E. Trapnell, Executive Vice President and Chief Accreditation Officer, AACSB International).

THE ROLE OF ASSESSMENT IN MAINTENANCE OF AACSB ACCREDITATION

One of the requirements of the revised strategic management standards is that each business school should have in place a continuous improvement system. This requires increased attention on learning objectives and assessment.

What exactly is meant by the term assessment? "Assessment is the systematic collection, review, and use of information about educational programs undertaken for the purpose of improving student learning and development" (Palomba and Banta, 1999 – as quoted in the AACSB Resource Center). Assessment is rapidly becoming more and more important in education, including higher education. For example, Professor Banta, Vice Chancellor for Planning and Institutional Improvement at Indiana University has stated: "Since the 1980s I've seen nothing but growth and interest in assessment and in the use of the information it provides. In 1979, Tennessee was the first state to provide performance funding for higher education. Now thirty states have funding of some sort for this purpose." (AACSB Resource Center)

SAN JOSE STATE UNIVERSITY: MAINTENANCE OF ACCREDITATION ACTIVITIES IN THE COLLEGE OF BUSINESS

The College of Business has been accredited by the AACSB for many years and during the academic year 2005-06 it will be reviewed for maintenance of accreditation under the new guidelines. This means that we must "get organized" and the faculty must collectively answer such questions as (1) what should our students learn in our program and each of its courses, (2) how will we assess what they have learned, and (3) what action will we take if we find out that they haven't learned it?

For the past several years the College of Business has been preparing for maintenance of AACSB accreditation. As the review for maintenance of

accreditation (2005-2006) neared, these efforts intensified.

Once it became clear that the accreditation requirements had been changed dramatically, an "Accreditation Czar" was appointed. She developed into our "accreditation expert" with a specialization in "assessment requirements for AACSB accreditation". This individual was given the charge of leading the efforts to make our College of Business faculty "AACSB Accreditation Assessment Literate". In addition, she also was a firm taskmaster trying to have everyone meet goals and deadlines.

According to the AACSB requirements, the assessment process must address the following questions:

1. What will our students learn in our program/course?
2. What are our expectations?
3. How will they learn it?
4. How will we know they have learned it?
5. What will we do if they have not learned it?

These questions should lead to the following actions:

1. Define learning goals and objectives
2. Align curriculum with goals
3. Identify instruments, measures, and standards
4. Collect, analyze, and disseminate data
5. Use data for continuous improvements

During the past decade a number of assessments have been conducted in the College of Business. These include:

(1) Assessment of Written Communication Skills

Students in the capstone course of the undergraduate Business Program who were expected to graduate in May 2000 were assigned to read a one-page article from a *U.S. News and World Report*; they were then asked to summarize the article and give their opinion of the topic (mandatory student fees). Seven experienced SJSU exam readers in the English Department scored the students' writing. It did not come as a surprise that the results were very discouraging. Although anecdotal evidence over the years pointed to the fact that many students had major problems in communicating effectively, we did not realize how bad the situation really was. On the positive side, the assessment provided specific information that could be used to improve the educational process, in part by more careful selection and enforcement of course prerequisites.

(2) Quantitative Skills Test

This test was conducted during the 2003-04 academic year. It provided data about the limited quantitative skills of many of our graduating students and also pointed the way for appropriate corrective action.

(3) Educational Testing Service Test

The Educational Testing Service (ETS) is a highly regarded organization engaged in assessment development and research. Its business tests are well known and used by many universities. During the 2001-02 academic year, about 500 of our graduating business students took the "ETS Major Field Test in Business". The average scores for our students were not statistically different from the scores obtained by students from 11 "Comparison Universities" and we were pleased with the results. However, what to do now? This assessment was expensive and assessment results did not allow us to learn much about specific weaknesses in our students because, among others factors, test question had to be kept strictly confidential. The results did not provide much specific information for the improvement of our educational efforts.

(4) Development of the CSU-BAT

After our assessment experience with the ETS test it was decided to develop a similar type of assessment instrument in cooperation with other Business Colleges that are part of the California State University system, a very large system with 23 campuses. This effort resulted in the CSU-BAT or California State University Business Assessment Test. It was felt that this test, although not necessarily intended to replace the ETS assessment test, could be useful as another way for us to assess the effectiveness of our educational programs. Faculty in the CSU system saw various advantages in the development of our own system wide test. Among the most important ones were:

1. Cost: It was felt that the ETS test, particularly when used for the large number of students we expect to assess in the future, would be very expensive.
2. Control: Having our own test would allow us to use and change the test as we thought desirable and improve the usefulness of the assessment results. Having more control over the test and the data tabulations could possibly lead to more actionable test results.

3. More appropriate "Comparison Universities". Institutions that are part of the same State system tend to face similar environmental challenges such as budgets, political and legal constraints, quality of entering students, etc. It therefore seems to make sense to conduct system wide assessments.

The development of a CSU assessment test does face many challenges. Among the major ones are:

1. Differences between the programs and curricula of the various California State Universities.
2. Issues of security.
3. Issues of validity.
4. Maintaining currency.

Much progress has already been made: to date, 16 campuses whose combined FTE (full time equivalent) enrollment account for more than 70% of the total CSU business FTE enrollment are using, pilot testing, or considering using the CSU-BAT.

During the 2005 spring semester students during their final semester before graduation in 13 Colleges of Business in the CSU System took the CSU-BAT assessment test. The number of students who took the test in each college varied significantly. The assessment test consisted of 80 questions and assessment scores (number of questions answered correctly) ranged from a high of 44.8 to a low of 35.9 with a mean score of 39.4. At San Jose State all 442 graduating undergraduate business students took the test.

While far from a perfect test of student knowledge, the CSU-BAT results enables one to get some indication of how an institution's students compare to those at other institutions. It also is useful to compare the CSU-BAT scores with the results of other tests such as the ETS.

Table 1 shows the percent of questions answered correctly by the San Jose State University students who took the CSU-BAT test, broken down by subject area. Also shown are the 2002 ETS test scores of the graduating San Jose State students in 2002. There seems to be a good correlation between the ETS and CSU-BAT scores in the Management, Accounting and Finance areas. However, the ETS scores for Business Law, Economics and Marketing were much lower than the scores on the CSU-BAT. Note: Statistics and MIS were not included in the 2002 ETS assessment.

The assessment results raise a number of important questions, such as:

1. Why did many students score so low on the Finance questions on both tests?
2. How can the gap between the CSU-BAT scores and the ETS scores for Business Law, Economics and Marketing be explained?

Having our own system wide assessment test should make it possible to do the research necessary to answer these questions.

ASSESSMENT EFFORTS IN THE MARKETING DEPARTMENT

During the past decade, some faculty in the Marketing Department became concerned about what marketing students were learning and retaining. The department is large (around 40 faculty) and many sections of some courses are typically offered and taught by different faculty members, including part-timers. For example, as many as a dozen sections of the Introductory Marketing Course are taught in a typical semester and from anecdotal feedback it became clear that after completion of the course many students lacked a good understanding of basic marketing concepts.

About 10 years ago, it was decided to do some simple assessments of students who had completed the "Introduction to Marketing" course. Since there were no learning objectives for the course, the question became "What to assess"? Initially it was decided to develop assessment questions based on the judgment of a few professors who had been teaching the course many times and shared the concern about student learning. The assessment results were generally disappointing. Students typically explained the poor results by statements such as: "this was not covered in our class", and/or "our text used different terminology".

Some actions that were taken in efforts to remedy this situation included:

1. Development of a list of "Critically important subjects" that all instructors of the course were asked to pay special attention to, and
2. Selection of a common text for all sections of the course.

Particularly the standardization of textbooks became a contentious issue and after a few years was abolished.

ASSESSMENT IN THE INTRODUCTION TO MARKETING COURSE

The "Introduction to Marketing" course is the foundation course in marketing for all business majors in our College of Business. As part of the new AACSB requirements the Marketing Faculty had to come up with Learning Objectives for this course. That was easier said than done. Many hours were spent to develop a consensus of what critical knowledge and skills students are expected to have learned in the course. The result was the establishment of Learning Objectives for the course (see Table 2). It should be noted that this process of discussion among faculty who had been teaching the course was itself very productive and in the past rarely took place.

Keep in mind that the appropriateness of course learning objectives depends on many factors including: (1) the nature of the institution and its mission; (2) the student body; and (3) the faculty

teaching the course. Equally important is to remember that these learning objectives can be changed at any time by the faculty.

CHALLENGES AND POTENTIAL PROBLEMS

Although the authors applaud the new AACSB accreditation process and requirements, one should not forget potential challenges/problems that may be associated with it. They include:

1. Additional resource requirements:
2. Resistance from some faculty members: Some faculty regard assessment as a tool by which administrators can infringe on their academic freedom and/or criticize their teaching.
3. Student participation
In our experiences with assessment we have found that student participation should not be taken for granted. Unless there is some student incentive for doing their best on the assessment, some students may not cooperate fully.

TABLE 1

CSU-BAT TEST SCORES COMPARED WITH 2002 ETS SCORES
Percent of questions answered correctly by subject area (N=442)

SUBJECT:	CSU-BAT	ETS
Management	51.3	51.3
Accounting	46.2	46.1
Business Law	47.7	37.8
Statistics	41.6	NA
Finance	37.8	37.8
Economics	45.1	38.2
Marketing	57.0	47.3
MIS	67.7	NA

TABLE 2

Introduction to Marketing: Course Content Objectives

1. Understand how the 4 Ps plus positioning interact and influence each other's effectiveness and change over the course of the Product Life Cycle.
2. Be able to explain how segmentation and differentiation are used and why they are important.
3. Understand differences and similarities of consumer markets and business-to-business markets.
4. Understand how the marketing environmental factors, including global differences influence the firm's ability to meet user needs.
5. Demonstrate the ability to analyze markets and identify appropriate segmentation criteria to discover promising market opportunities.

REFERENCES

Will be supplied upon request.