

Meta-assessment Analysis Report for the College of
Sciences

Please return the completed report back to the Office of Academic

Planning and Assessment by **May 30, 2014.**

Section 1: Purpose and Introduction

Meta-assessment is an important tool for helping ensure that all programs at Sam Houston State University are engaging in a meaningful and effective continuous improvement assessment process. Continuous improvement assessment is an important best-practice in higher education as it helps programs determine whether key objectives are being met, identify areas for improvement, and develop actions for implementing changes that will have a positive effect on the student learning environment. Meaningful and effective assessment is also the corner stone of many discipline-specific accreditations, as well as University accreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges.

In Fall 2013, the Director of Assessment formed an ad-hoc committee of faculty and College administrators from the Colleges of Business Administration, Criminal Justice, Education, Fine Arts and Mass Communication, Health Sciences, Humanities and Social Sciences, and Sciences. Using a locally developed rubric (Appendix A) the ad-hoc Meta-assessment Committee evaluated 2012-2013 assessment plans for the 135 academic degree programs documented within the Online Assessment Tracking Database. Each unit assessment plan was independently evaluated by two anonymous reviewers; one from within and one from outside the College from which the assessment plan originated.

The results from the meta-assessment review have been used in multiple ways. First, completed rubrics were distributed to the departments and programs to serve as formative feedback for use in continually improving unit-level assessment plans. Second, college-level data were analyzed by the College to identify the general strengths and weaknesses within their units' annual assessment processes. This information has been used by the College to determine what training, resources, and strategies are necessary to address any general weaknesses identified within its units' annual programmatic assessment efforts. A summary of the College's findings are provided within this report.

Section 2: Plan for Distributing Completed Rubrics to Units

Detail the College's plan for sharing the completed meta-assessment rubrics with its departments and programs.

The completed rubrics, along with a spreadsheet showing the ratings received for each program and each category within the program (Goals, Objectives, etc...) were submitted to the two members of the Meta-assessment Committee in the College of Sciences (COS) (Dr. Marcus Gillespie and Dr. Chad Hargrave) by Jeff Roberts, the Director of Assessment at SHSU. Dr. Gillespie and Dr. Hargrave then met with Dean to discuss both the results and procedures for disseminating the information to the Department Chairs within the college. It was agreed that the most efficient method for doing this was to send the rubrics, with ratings, to each Chair and then to have one or more of us meet with each Chair individually. The meetings took place over approximately two weeks in early May and each meeting lasted about 45 minutes. During the meeting, the strengths and weaknesses, if any, were discussed as well as ideas for improving the assessment process. The meetings were positive and constructive, and the Chairs appreciated the opportunity to be made aware of options available to them for improving their assessment process in their departments, as well as obtaining clarification regarding the University's and SACS' expectations concerning assessment.

Section 3: Feedback and Suggestions for Improvement of the Meta-assessment Rubric and Process

Please describe the process by which feedback was collected from the College on the meta-assessment process. Provide any suggestions for the improvement of the meta-assessment rubric and process.

Most, if not all, of the Chairs said that the rubric was appropriate and useful – none had any concerns about it. The only comment had to do with the fact that some rubrics were completed without any comments; but, it is the comments which are most useful. So, in future reviews, raters should provide at least some comments on a form, especially if something was exceptionally strong or weak.

Some of the raters gave inconsistent scores. In most cases, that is normal in that any two people may interpret information differently. However, in some cases, the scores were quite different (1 and 3) and, in such cases, the Chairs did not know how to interpret the feedback. One possible solution was that a 3rd rater and, more specifically, someone from the Office of Assessment, make a determination. This level of inconsistency also suggests that the raters may need additional training – perhaps using actual examples from this cycle. This could lead to the improvement of the meta-assessment process.

One issue that was discussed concerned the procedures by which an overall score was determined. This question arose because, in at least one program evaluation, most of the categories in the rubric had been rated high, with five Exemplary scores and one Acceptable score; but, the plan received a rating of “Developing”. This does not seem like a valid overall score and so, perhaps a procedure should be developed for assigning the *Overall* score.

As mentioned previously, some of the Chairs said that the instructions they have received over the course of the years is inconsistent; e.g., “keep things general” vs. “be specific”. So, clarification should be provided.

Finally, one Chair requested that feedback from the Meta-Assessment Committee be done sooner, and perhaps incrementally, rather than waiting near the end of the cycle. In short, by staggering the feedback, or presenting it earlier, the Chairs would have more time to address the concerns – especially when the entries were “fresh on their minds”. Although this issue was not raised by other Chairs, it is almost certainly a recommendation with which most would agree.

In conclusion, all of the Chairs were satisfied with the procedures used to disseminate the results, and with the meetings – all of which were every positive. They found the discussions to be useful and appreciated the feedback. They were glad to know that their OATDB entries and efforts at assessment were being acknowledged.

Section 4: Observed Strengths within College Assessment Plans

Detail the general strengths identified by the College after reviewing its units’ assessment plans. What general aspects of the annual assessment processes are units mastering? Are there any units that you would recommend serve as exemplary models?

The College of Sciences has 29 programs, including a General Studies program which is an interdisciplinary program housed within the College. In order to ascertain trends in the composite results, scores of 1, 2, or 3 were assigned to the rubric ratings of “Developing”, “Acceptable”, and “Exemplary”, respectively. In addition, if the two raters assigned different values to a category on the rubric, the average score was used. For example, if the scores were 2

and 3, a score of 2.5 was assigned; a score of 1.5 was assigned to scores of 1 and 2, and a score of 2 was assigned to scores of 1 and 3. To calculate the composite average score for each category, the score for each category was multiplied by the number of times the score was received, and these values were summed to obtain a total score. The total was then divided by 29 (the number of programs) to obtain the average.

The results of this procedure indicated that there was very little variation in the scores, which ranged from a high of 2.13 for the *Objectives*, to a low of 1.86 for *Actions*. Four categories - *Goals*, *Objectives*, *Indicators*, and *Criterion* - received scores greater than 2.0; whereas, *KPIs*, *Actions*, *Previous Plan for Improvement*, and *Future Plan for Improvement* received scores of less than 2.0. The modal score for those which received a score of 2.0 was 2.0 (2/2), whereas the modal score for those receiving less than 2.0 was 1.5 (2/1). It should be noted that the overall scores sometimes varied for individual programs within a given department.

These results suggest that, overall, the departments have done a good job of defining their goals, objectives, indicators and criteria for their assessment plan. In fact, four of the programs received an “Exemplary” rating for their *Goals* and *Indicators*, and three programs received this rating for their *Objectives* and *Criteria*. Given this, the College appears to be strong in these aspects of the assessment process.

Section 5: Observed Weaknesses within College Assessment Plans

Detail the general weaknesses identified by the College after reviewing its units' assessment plans. What general aspects of the annual assessment process are units specifically struggling with?

As discussed above, the programs are not as strong in the areas of *Actions* (1.86), *Previous Plan* (1.98), and *Future Plans* (1.88). As regards the *Actions* component of the process, some programs received lower scores because they were waiting to obtain additional data in order to have a better indicator of what the strengths and weaknesses are within their program. For example, in some cases, the sample size of students completing an assessment was very small (about 4-6), and so the Chairs did not feel that they could make informed decisions about a plan of action based on this small sample size. And in one case, no students were enrolled in the program and the department was considering discontinuing it. In other cases, the department focused more on revising the assessment instrument and/or the methods of administering it, rather than developing specific plans to address identified weaknesses. The same was true, in some cases, for developing future plans of action. As regards the category, *Previous Cycle for Continuous Improvement*, most departments did a satisfactory job of describing what had been done. (The composite score was 1.98).

One common problem in several of the programs concerned the *explanation* of the assessment process, rather than the process itself. During the course of our meetings, it was apparent that more was being done than was being conveyed in the short descriptions for each category. In addition, some programs were operating under constraints which limited what they could and could not do; and so, had the raters been aware of these constraints, the program would have received a higher rating. In short, had additional information and clarification been provided, many of the programs would have received higher ratings. Accordingly, some of the departments need to work on improving the discussions for each category. As an aside, the authors of the entries should have someone proofread the material for both clarity and grammar in order to reduce problems with both.

Another issue concerned the number of goals and/or objectives, or the direct relevance of these to the program. Based on previous cycles of OATDB entries, the Chairs had been told to limit their number of goals and objectives (but primarily goals) to two. As a result, some departments may not have entered information regarding their assessment activities because they thought they should limit what they entered.

In other cases, the objectives were of such a nature that they did not directly pertain to skills and knowledge needed by students in the program. For example, writing is obviously an important skill, and was listed as an objective by various programs; however, this skill is not a discipline-specific skill. In such cases, additional objectives of a discipline-specific nature should be added.

Lastly, some of the objectives may have been too broad in that they actually encompassed multiple objectives. For example, if an objective includes assessments of several different skills, and the result is reported as a single composite number, it is not possible to know in which areas students may need further assistance to master the material. Therefore, it would be best to disaggregate composite objectives into separate objectives, each of which could be assessed and acted upon.

Section 6: Strategies Needed to Address Identified Weaknesses

Detail the College's strategies for addressing the general weaknesses identified after reviewing its units' assessment plans.

Understanding the nature of any weaknesses that may exist within an assessment plan is the first step in addressing it. For this reason, the meta-assessment process is of significant importance in helping departments improve their assessment plans. As knowledge of the process grows, improvement will occur.

As regards specifics, some suggestions for improvement have been identified in the previous section; namely, disaggregating objectives, clarifying the assessment process by providing more information about the procedures and the constraints, making use of data when developing future plans for assessment, and adding more objectives if this will clarify and improve not only the OATDB entries, but the assessment process itself.

Some of the departments and programs which received high scores were able to make use of external indicators, such as standardized tests. So, when possible, departments may wish to pursue this option. In addition, those that did well had clearly defined and structured procedures for evaluating student performance, as well as rubrics for several measures. Other departments may wish to pursue these options as well.

Section 7: Training and Resources Needed to Implement the College's Improvement Strategy

Detail the types of training and resources that would assist the College with implementing its improvement strategies.

Some of the Chairs stated that knowledge of what other departments are doing successfully would be very beneficial. Therefore, if the university could provide a list of "Best Practices," this would greatly facilitate improvement of assessment.

In addition, some Chairs indicated that they had received conflicting information regarding the process over the past few years, and this had hindered their understanding of what

they needed to do in terms of both entering information into OATDB and improving their assessment procedures. During the course of the meetings, those of us on the Meta-Assessment Committee attempted to clarify, as much as we could, the current expectations. Much of the emphasis of this discussion was on the need to obtain actionable information – and to act on it. This contrasts with the very early work with OATDB which consisted largely of simply “entering something into the system.” So, there is an on-going culture shift toward genuine, meaningful assessment, and, therefore, any additional clarification from the university regarding expectations and procedures would be beneficial.

The Chairs almost unanimously felt that they lacked the time and administrative support (e.g. secretarial staff) to do a better job with assessment. Given their numerous responsibilities associated with running a department, assessment is rarely a top priority. This does not reflect opposition to assessment, or a failure to understand its potential benefits; but rather, a lack of time to devote to it. Consequently, if the university could provide additional assistance in terms of administrative support, coordination of information-gathering and data entry, this would be helpful. Perhaps the new Assessment system which the university will adopt this year will help with this issue.

During the meetings, we suggested that the Chairs allocate responsibilities for the assessment process to other members of the department, or committees within the department, to reduce the workload of the Chair. Some Chairs are already doing this, but others have tried to do virtually all of the work themselves. Given the growing requirement for assessment, this is not something that these Chairs can continue to do. They will have to allocate responsibility to others. Initially, this also requires time and perhaps suggestions could be provided to help facilitate the process.

Section 8: Proposed Plan for Implementing Meta-assessment Within the College

Based on a meeting with the Chairs and Dean, the following tentative assessment process will be implemented, subject to modification as needed.

1. Use the same rubric as that used by the University Meta-Assessment Committee
2. Have one member from each department serve on the College-level Meta-Assessment committee (7 raters plus the Associate Dean for Curriculum and Assessment for a total of 8). This ensures that at least one member of the department is involved in the process and can learn from the process and convey information back to his or her respective department.)
3. Have *three* raters evaluate each program plan. This task will be divided so that two of the raters will evaluate approximately 3-4 programs *outside* of their department. A third rater (departmental rater) will be from the department and will evaluate *all* of the programs within his or her department. The use of a third, departmental rater ensures that both the ADCI and the departmental rater have the same information when meeting with the Chair and it provides balance to the feedback given by the ADCI. Also, having a third rater ensures a ‘tie-breaker’ in instances involving different ratings assigned by raters; i.e., split decisions (1 and 2, or 2 and 3). If each rater assigns different overall scores (1, 2, and 3), then a 2 will be used as the score on the final report.

4. The Associate Dean of Curriculum and Instruction (ADCI) will coordinate the assignment of duties and will return completed rubrics to the Chairs. And, as previously indicated, both the ADCI and the departmental member that did the program evaluations in his or her department will meet with the Chairs.
5. The ADCI will prepare a summary report analogous to this report.
6. Schedule
 - A. Assessment data entry period closes in September of each year.
 - B. College MA committee evaluates the programs in October and November
 - C. Completed rubrics are due to the ADCI at the end of the fall semester
 - D. Feedback to Dean and Chairs occurs in January/February
 - E. Use feedback for next cycle

** Each department should, ideally, have one or more members of the department review the entries prior to the close of cycle for entering data.*

Appendix A
(Meta-assessment Rubric)