

**Montana State University  
College of Business**

**Student Learning Assessment Plan Activity and Results Update  
Spring 2006**

**Assessment Activities**

Lead by the Strategic Initiatives Committee, the College of Business faculty revisited the assessment plan. Substantial changes were introduced. Many operationalizations of learning constructs were redefined as were the tools and schedules for data collection. Attention was paid to the employment of both cognitive and attitudinal measures when appropriate. To facilitate benchmarking, nationally normed assessment instruments were adopted. Below is an overview of the assessment activities and results related to student learning outcomes.

**Student Learning**

**Critical Thinking**

Process:

The College adopted a new definition for and instrument to measure critical thinking. In prior years, the Perry Scale for Intellectual and Ethical Development had been utilized. The Perry Scale scores epistemological maturity on a scale which ranges from Simple Dualism to Relativism and Commitment. One criticism of the use of the scale was that the results did not provide readily actionable results to assist students and curriculum development efforts. For instance, no clear scores are provided for reasoning skills critical to problem solving and critical thinking such as induction and deduction.

In response, new construct definitions which better identified desired student characteristics (*e.g.*, such as the ability to perform inductive reasoning) were ratified. A search for more appropriate measures was instituted. Adopted was the California Critical Thinking Skills Test, a nationally normed test which evaluates students' skill at performing inductive and deductive reasoning processes as well as analysis, evaluation, and inference.

Results:

Data has been collected and will be analyzed during summer 2006.

## Communication Skills

### Process:

Standards coordination was revised between BUS 101, the business freshman seminar and BUS 201, the managerial communications course. Major changes in the tools and schedule for assessing communication skills were made. To promote the use of proper grammar, punctuation, and word choice, the Gregg Reference Manual was introduced as a required text in both BUS 101 and BUS 201 for the first time. Common citation standards between the two courses were also adopted.

To assess students' written communication skills, a new pre-test post-test methodology was employed. At the beginning of the semester, a pre-test of basic writing skills was given to all students enrolled in the course. Throughout the semester, worksheets which targeted common student writing problems were assigned. At the end of the semester, a post test was administered.

In BUS 201, Managerial Communications, students' written communication skills were again assessed. At the beginning of the course, the WorkKeys *Business Writing* Test was given. This nationally normed test requires standard business English, defined as writing that is direct, courteous, grammatically correct, and not overly casual. It measures the skill individuals use when they write an original response to a work-related situation. Components of the Business Writing skill include sentence structure, mechanics, grammar, word usage, tone and word choice, organization and focus, and development of ideas. At the end of the course, the test was administered again.

### Results:

Entry-level competencies are assessed in the Freshman Seminar course (Bus 101) and students needing remediation were identified and counseled to address those deficiencies. Speaking and writing skills were stressed in the Managerial Communications course (Bus 201) and assignments and standards are coordinated with the instructional team of Bus 101.

In BUS 101, preliminary evidence suggests that some improvement was measured in students' writing as post test measures trended upward. However, there were some issues with the administration/scoring strategy employed across sections. Scores from all associates (particularly on the post-test) and some

'modified' their grading schemes such that the awarded % right of completed questions only. Needless to say, these scores were not comparable to the % correct of all questions, so those scores were not entered.

Over 90% of students tested in BUS 201 scored at or above level 3. The data needs to be analyzed further to separate CoB students from students in other majors also enrolled in the course.

Characteristics of a level 3 writer are the following:

- The writing is clear with some errors
- Most of the sentences are complete, and some variety and complexity are attempted
- Few mechanical, grammatical, and word usage errors occur so that the response is adequately conveyed but may be repetitive; the spelling is generally correct
- Style and tone are generally consistent with standard business English; the writing may have somewhat casual language but does not contain slang or rude language
- Some organization is evident, but the writing may lose focus at some points; transitions are simple
- Ideas are adequately developed, but they may be limited in depth and thoroughness; supporting examples tend to be general and details are relevant, but they may be repetitive

## **Discipline-Specific Knowledge**

Process:

Discipline-specific competencies have been revisited and revised for all business core courses and most of the option level courses. It is anticipated that the competencies will be finished for the few upper division elective courses outstanding by fall 2006.

In prior years, course-embedded assessments were the primary means by which discipline specific knowledge was measured. In order to better benchmark against other institutions, the College decided to move to a nationally normed measurement system. The College began the use of the Major Field Test (MFT) in Business, a nationally normed examination which is developed and scored by Educational Testing Services (ETS). ETS is the publisher of the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) and Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). The MFT in business is designed to measure the basic knowledge and understanding achieved by senior undergraduates matriculating in business curricula. The areas the test measures include: accounting, economics, management, quantitative business analysis, finance, marketing, legal and social environment, and international issues. The test includes 120 multiple-choice questions.

The results are normed against 109,932 business seniors taking the instrument at 513 institutions in 2003 – 2005. Data has been collected from all students completing BUS 474 for the class of AY 2005-2006.

Additionally, final exams, final papers, final projects, case studies, presentations, simulations, and competitions are used to stimulate student progress.

**Results:**

A full year of student data using the MFT for business has been collected. Students enrolled BUS 474 in the summer of 2005 scored at the 80%. In the Fall semester, students tested at the 90% level, and in the Spring at the 95% level. When one averages semester in the 05-06 academic year, CoB students scored at the 90% level of over 109, 932 students from 513 institutions nationwide who took the exam during the same time period. Further analysis is necessary to better understand the implications of the results.

**Information Technology**

**Process:**

A new methodology for assessing information technology skills is being piloted, the *ICT Literacy Assessment*. The instrument assesses students' ability to use technology as a tool to research, organize, evaluate, and communicate information. It also tests whether students have a fundamental understanding of the ethical/legal issues surrounding the access and use of information.

**Results:**

Data is not available at this time.

**Quantitative Analysis**

**Process:**

The MFT in business devotes several questions to students' comprehension and retention of quantitative analysis material.

**Results:**

Students scored an average of 90% as benchmarked against 109,932 students who also took the instrument.

## **Program Assessment**

Program assessment was conducted at various times throughout the past few semesters. Below is a summary of various reviews and the venues in which they took place.

### *Boards of Advisors*

In the spring of 2004, the National Board of Advisors conducted a curriculum review.

An Accounting Board of Advisors consisting of regional and national alums and employers was formed in 2004. The board has met each semester since fall 2004. The accounting program strategic plan was reviewed at the spring 2005 meeting.

### *Curriculum Committee*

In 2005, CoB faculty members began work on curriculum changes for the 2006-2008 graduate and undergraduate catalogs. Changes were submitted by October 2005.

### *Strategic Initiatives Committee*

The results of the spring 2005 Graduating Senior Exit were evaluated. With final approval of the faculty, the committee also developed three lists of schools against which the College would benchmark its programs. The lists included competitor, aspirants, and peer institutions. Preliminary results from the pre and post tests of written communication which took place in BUS 201 were reviewed.

### *Bracken Student Advisory Board*

In Fall 2005, the Bracken Student Advisory Board was formed. The board consists of primary officers of CoB student organizations including the marketing club, management/HR Club, finance club, international club, and Beta Alpha Psi/accounting club. The board has met monthly. During the March 2006 meeting, the students were provided the results of the Summer and Fall 2005 MFT results. BUS 201 content was critiqued.

### *Faculty Retreats*

All College faculty members, both tenure track and adjunct, were invited to and participated the annual fall and spring faculty retreats. The Fall 2005 faculty retreat focused on the assessment of learning and the College's upcoming accreditation in 2007-2008. The summer MFAT results were presented. At the spring 2006 Instructional Excellence

Retreat, course objectives were reviewed and faculty worked by discipline to update the core courses. Assignments were made to review option level courses. Results of the Fall MFT were presented to the faculty. Preliminary results from the pre-test assessment results for business writing were also presented to the faculty.

The first BUS 201 retreat took place during the summer 2005. For the first time, instructors engaged in a two day retreat to re-examine the content of the course and to redesign common syllabi and assignments. Results from the survey of CoB faculty members regarding the content of BUS 201 were also discussed.

### *Faculty Meetings*

In the March 22, 2006 faculty meeting, results from the Spring MFT were presented and discussed.

### *Admissions Requirements*

Students are expected to perform at least an 'average' level. Performance levels are monitored through both the College of Business 'C' policy as well as the minimum cumulative GPA requirement for admission to the College of Business. In response to an overwhelmingly large increase in demand for CoB majors which was detected in spring 2005, a new entrance gate was developed and will be in force fall 2006.