

ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING OUTCOMES

FOR ADVANCED DEGREE PROGRAMS

One of the strategic imperatives of the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa's Strategic Plan¹ is to create a culture of evidence within which every academic program is measured on the basis of student learning outcomes. In addition, the March 2003 report by the WASC Special Visit team pointed to a specific deficiency in Mānoa's assessment efforts, i.e., "assessment in graduate education has not received as much emphasis as assessment at the undergraduate level²." This plan is intended to address this deficiency by providing a broad based approach to the assessment of advanced degree programs.

The plan to assess advanced degree programs is based on the principle that such assessments should be attached to the regular cycle of program reviews. Whether the review is conducted by the Council on Program Review or the Graduate Council, this review shall consist of an examination of the student learning outcomes including both those generic to all advanced degrees and those specific to the field of study.

In general, a student who has successfully completed the degree requirements should be able to:

- 1. Demonstrate a mastery of the methodology and techniques specific to the field of study;*
- 2. Communicate both orally and in writing at a high level of proficiency in the field of study;*
- 3. Conduct research or produce some other form of creative work; and/or*
- 4. Function as a professional in the discipline.*

For most degree programs, all of the above outcomes can be exhibited in the context of a thesis or dissertation. For all others there is some culminating work product, such as a paper or practicum, that similarly exhibits the students' learning. A reasonable sampling of these works or evaluations can be constituted by a program into an assessment portfolio. This portfolio will be provided as part of any program review involving advanced degrees. Often external accrediting bodies focus on the fourth point above. Discipline specific measures used for external accreditation are acceptable for such review.

The portfolio must consist of a sample of approximately 10%, but no fewer than 5 of all completed works over the five year period prior to the review. This sample should be representative of the range of quality of student output within each degree as well as a fair sample of the types of works completed by the graduates. The review team will examine the portfolio for evidence that the students have demonstrated the above outcomes and any others specific to the field of study and explicit in the program's objective statement.

The review team must make a specific finding based on the results of this assessment review. The team can find that the program is either satisfactory or unsatisfactory in meeting the required learning outcomes. This finding will then be the basis for the Council's recommendations. In cases of an unsatisfactory finding, a specific plan must be developed by the program to address any and all areas in which the learning outcomes are deficient.

¹ Mānoa strategic plan. See page 7

² Report of the WASC Special Visit Team, March 2003, page 10