April 29, 2015

Dear Members of the FCC and the Faculty Senate,

We write to provide information about the use of SLOs for assessment in different colleges across the Twin Cities campus, and about how reporting on the assessment activities fits into accreditation.

While assessment activities have evolved within the colleges, and within the specific academic programs in those colleges, academic programs have always had responsibility for assessment of student learning. In 2013-14, the Twin Cities colleges were asked to coordinate assessment of learning activities within each college, and to prepare an annual report of such activities. Each college had the flexibility to determine the level at which assessment would occur (collegiate or departmental), what courses or other curricular programs would be assessed, and how they would be assessed. Most units chose to utilize the seven campus-wide undergraduate Student Learning Outcomes as part of their assessment of student learning, but none was required to do so. Units had the opportunity to develop and utilize their own processes for assessment of student learning and their own articulation of learning goals.

We wish to emphasize that it is the faculty responsible for academic programs who identify what outcomes or achievements of goals to assess, which courses to assess, and how to conduct the assessments. Administration has intentionally been hands-off on these matters, because the relevant expertise lies with the faculty and their academic programs.

At the conclusion of the 2013-14 academic year, over 90% of all undergraduate programs had submitted an assessment report. At assessment retreats in June of 2013, January of 2014, June of 2014, and January of 2015, representatives of the colleges met to share their assessment plans, their data, and what they have learned. They will meet again in June of 2015, and we anticipate annual assessment meetings thereafter, to share ideas, report on progress, and discuss strategies for the future.

The Twin Cities campus is undergoing its review for re-accreditation in 2015, and the collegiate reports of assessment efforts will be part of the information provided to the Higher Learning Commission to document how “the institution demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs.” These reports will be included as evidence to support the claim that we satisfy Criterion Four, Teaching and Learning:

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Evaluation and Improvement, and, more specifically, Core Component 4.B, “The institution demonstrates a commitment to educational achievement and improvement through ongoing assessment of student learning.” This component of the accreditation requirements includes these key points: “The institution has clearly stated goals for student learning and effective processes for assessment of student learning and achievement of learning goals,” and “The institution assesses achievement of the learning outcomes that it claims for its curricular and co-curricular programs,” and “The institution uses the information gained from assessment to improve student learning.

We have met with FCC and SCEP, as well as the CLA faculty and the CLA Assembly for open discussion of these matters. We support assessment of student learning, recognize the importance of documenting such assessments and using assessments to improve student learning. We also recognize the importance of accreditation and note again that assessment is a specific requirement of accreditation. We view assessment as an evolving activity and, after our accreditation in fall of 2015, we envision having a campus-wide discussion on student learning, Student Learning Outcomes, and the best ways to document our processes and learning results. We encourage SCEP to take up these discussions early in the fall.

Sincerely,

Karen Hanson
Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost

Robert B. McMaster
Vice Provost and Dean of Undergraduate Education