April 29, 2015

Subject: Student Learning Outcomes

Dear members of the FCC and the Faculty Senate,

We write to provide a CLA administration perspective on your April 30, 2015 docket item 24 on Student Learning Outcomes.

First and foremost, the administration of CLA supports the assessment of student learning. The Higher Learning Commission will require an assessment of student learning during this accreditation cycle for the University, but beyond this requirement, we believe that such assessment should be part of our standard practice as educators. We further believe that nearly all faculty share that view, and any divergence arises largely from the issue of how to assess learning.

In preparation for accreditation, the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education notified each college that it would be required to provide assessments of its students' learning for the accreditation process, and colleges were given broad freedom in how to do the assessment. In CLA, it was the predecessors in our roles who participated in discussions leading to the assessment procedures we describe below, but we believe that we have characterized the process accurately.

The assessment procedures for CLA were developed in consultation with an ad hoc group of five faculty members from across the college representing arts, humanities, and social sciences. Once the framework of the learning assessment procedures was agreed upon, each department nominated a faculty member to facilitate the implementation.

Given the time frame for development, the existence of the undergraduate SLOs for the Twin Cities campus, and the diversity of academic programs across the college, CLA opted to assess learning based on those SLOs. CLA departments, and departments outside of CLA that administer majors in CLA, are asked to assess student learning on Twin Cities campus undergraduate SLOs of their choice in three courses per major, two mid-level required courses of their choice and the senior capstone course, with at least four SLOs assessed per major. The college also assesses student learning on SLOs in the First Year Experience course. The actual form of the assessment was left to departments, and the forms of assessment in use vary widely.

Majors in CLA have used this “study students in three courses” approach during the first two rounds of learning assessment. However, CLA departments have the option of developing their own learning outcomes and their own outcome assessment framework. A few CLA departments are moving in this direction, but none has yet established an alternative to our standard assessment process.
Before closing, we want to reiterate that the College of Liberal Arts deeply values student learning and is dedicated to the best outcomes for its students. In order to know whether we are achieving those best outcomes, we must evaluate the results of what we do, and the assessment of learning via the Student Learning Outcomes is one aspect of that evaluation. Many faculty members from across CLA have worked hard to make assessment of learning a success.

Sincerely,

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Dean, CLA

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