

Minutes of the January 30 Meeting of the Undergraduate Council of the University Senate

Minutes prepared by Hanna Nekvasil, Chair

In virtual attendance: Hanna Nekvasil, chair, Erica Ayisa-Boahene, Kevin McDonnell, Deborah Serling, Madeline Turan, Kara Desanna, Diane Bello, Katherine Johnston, John Peter Gergen, Christine Pitocco. Jennifer Dellaposta, Debbie Zelizer, Sринi

- i) Minutes of Dec 19 were approved
- ii) Hanna updated the UGC on the progress made by the General Education Advisory Committee (GEAC) on developing a commentary on the 2019 SBC Assessment report. She had introduced the following to the committee for discussion:

DRAFT 1/19/23 GEAC Comments on

Assessment of the Stony Brook Curriculum 2019

Goal of the Assessment: "Throughout the project, our intent was to induce improvement in the curriculum." *Did the assessment permit this?*

Process Overview:

- Evidence was collected on 15 of the 19 learning objectives (62 of the 69 learning outcomes) among Demonstrate Versatility, Explore Interconnectedness, and Prepare for Life-Long Learning.
- The faculty committees developed 15 [unique SBC Evaluation Rubrics](#) to evaluate students, and based on these rubrics, received faculty evaluations of students.
Note: individual faculty designed and administered their assessment questions for their class and then used the rubric to transmit the results for tabulation.
- Instructors in the selected course sections used the [unique SBC Evaluation Rubrics](#) that the faculty working groups developed to evaluate their students on a five-point scale: Absent (1) Beginning (2), Developing (3), Accomplished (4) and Exemplary (5). The faculty chose a five-point scale for its intuitive alignment with the traditional ABCDF grading scheme.
- Instructors evaluated their students on each learning outcome (*secondary to whichever vehicle they used in their assessment, such as final project, final exam, specifically designed quiz, etc*), and had the option of selecting (0) for "did not attempt" to identify students who did not participate in the evaluation process. Results reflect achievement of each student as **measured** directly by faculty for each learning outcome of each SBC objective, (e.g., ARTS1, ARTS2, etc.), as well as the unweighted average of evaluations among all learning outcomes within the specific SBC objective (e.g., ARTS average), and the unweighted average of evaluations for all objectives across all SBC (SBC average).

- Local measures included direct evaluations by faculty and indirect measures from course evaluations. A subset of graduating senior students, faculty, and staff was surveyed on the subject of the Stony Brook Curriculum.
- Additional indirect measures included those from the National Survey of Student Engagement and the SUNY Student Opinion Survey, as conducted among Students at Stony Brook University.

Overall positives:

- The committee collected a significant amount of data within a short time period.
- The prior approach was reasonably inclusive, relying upon faculty members (who have the most comprehensive knowledge of their courses) to design, conduct, and report results of assessment of student achievement of SBC learning goals.
- The approach was properly keyed to the stated learning outcomes of the SBC.
- this work was highly valuable for our reaccreditation process, as one component of MSCHE Standard V expects “organized and systematic assessments, conducted by faculty and/or appropriate professionals.”

Concerns:

Overarching concern: The assessment did not provide data usable for improving the SBC curriculum.

- Since each instructor designed her/his own assessment vehicle and then used the SBC course assessment rubric, the data obtained from that rubric cannot be compared across courses with the same fundamental learning objective (e.g., GLO) or across different fundamental learning objectives.
- Courses specifically designed for the SBC curriculum and courses designed for technical content and only peripherally assigned an SBC fundamental learning objective were assessed in the same manner, yet the overall instructional goals were very different for the course types.
- Instructors of courses not specifically designed for the SBC could not use class performance as an indication of whether the student mastered the relevant SBC learning goals. This placed a large workload on the instructor at significant cost to develop an assessment vehicle specifically for the SBC learning goals. The faculty, asked to assess Gen Ed LOs were primarily faculty with little experience with assessment in the context of accreditation. Yet, they were asked to design their own assessment measures, then translate those measures to the 5 categories in the rubric. We should not underestimate the conceptual difficulty and ambiguity of that task, and the need to clarify expectations and goals. It also led to logistical grading problems, such as what to do if a student fulfilled the SBC learning goals but failed the technical part of the course.
How can we separate out achieving learning goals for the SBC category from mastery of the technical material? If the instructor used the students’ understanding of the course’s technical material for the course grade ALSO used

the course performance to fill out the SNW rubric, the overall performance of the students may be very poor with many below acceptable (since grades in fundamental science classes are commonly poor). This can lead to invalid, unactionable, findings

- Throughout the document, direct evaluations by faculty and indirect measures from course evaluations were juxtaposed, making it appear that they could be compared. Indirect measures from student course evaluations may not correlate with instructors evaluation. Questions such as “how much did you learn in the course” cannot be used to improve the course unless student knowledge of the material is assessed *prior* to taking the course. For example: A Spanish-speaking student in a Spanish language class may indicate that no learning took place, even as the instructor indicated that the student performed exemplary. Furthermore, student course evaluations assess whether students *perceive* mastery of a learning objective. This addresses perceptions of the *value* of their education. It is questionable whether these perceptions have any value for assessment. Course evaluation questions regarding learning goals raise the concern, “do the students remember the learning goals”? require that the students remember the learning goals.
- Where in the process of Gen Ed assessment is there room for the inclusion of qualitative evaluations of the LOs? Qualitative observations may be important for determining priorities in direct assessment measures.

Recommendations:

- Next generation SBC:
 - Only courses designed to satisfy specific SBC learning objectives should be directly assessed. For these courses, student grades would be used for the assessment rubric. These data can be obtained by the assessment team directly from the class grade roster on Brightspace with no additional effort by the instructor. Conversion to the use of grades would increase sample size while reducing faculty effort.
 - Achievement of learning goals could be streamlined to a 2 levels (Satisfactory or Not).
 - The subset of SBC designed courses assessed should be random rather than selected by a committee.
 - Courses designed primarily for technical information would no longer have a SBC designation (e.g., CHE131). Instead, some subset of SBC learning objectives could be met based purely on program completion – not tied to a specific course. For example, all graduating students with a science major will be marked as having completed SNW. This committee or the UGC would canvass departments to indicate which learning goals their students automatically satisfy as they proceed through their programs (e.g., if psychology requires statistics of each student, then regardless of the level of statistics class their majors take, each student

major will have completed the QPS requirement upon successfully satisfying the major requirements).

- A SBC curriculum committee should be set up to ensure that for new SBC courses the course learning objectives match the SBC category learning objectives. (A good match means that course grades can be used to indicate student attainment of the SBC learning outcomes.) This committee would also oversee equality of course rigor among courses of the same category and compare grade distributions in existing courses. Perhaps all faculty who teach a course in a Gen Ed category should meet and share their practices once a year in an effort toward uniformity.
- Continuation of current course assessment:
 - Focus on courses that were designed specifically to meet specific SBC learning goals and use the course grades to indicate learning goal achievement.

iii.) Discussion focused on the recommendations, particularly that course grades be usable for assessment if the SBC courses were specifically designed such that course learning goals were those of the SBC learning objectives.

Debbie Zelizer noted that although Middle States Guidelines were not specific about Gen Ed Assessment, she believed that grades cannot be used for this assessment but rather a separate vehicle specifically designed to evaluate attainment of the learning outcomes of the relevant fundamental learning objective must be used.

Hanna indicated that perhaps the best way to move forward on this commentary is to include a suggested path forward on both cases (a) where a special assessment must be developed and (ii) when grades can be used for specially designed courses. She would post this for discussion of the next meeting,