Executive Council on Assessment Narrative responses to the Spring 2017 assessment report submitted by:

School of Arts and Sciences

It should be stated at the outset that SAS has the most complex, the most thorough and the most effective and efficient assessment process in the University. The report itself is a pleasure to read, an exemplary presentation of an exemplary program.

Are learning goals clear and publically available? Are learning goals aligned; course learning goals aligned with program level learning goals, aligned with school learning goals, aligned with university learning goals?

Meets Current ACLO Standards

SAS departments and programs are expected to have learning goals established and available on departmental websites and the catalog. The department/program learning goals articulate with the University-level learning objectives, and the Core Curriculum learning goals. Of the 42 departments/programs in SAS, all have done meet the standard. This in itself is a major achievement, for which SAS should be proud.

Are course syllabi available online? Do they include course and program learning goals?

Meets Current ACLO Standards

SAS sets a high standard for course syllabi or course synopses and expanded course descriptions. Not only must the course and department or program goals be displayed on the syllabus or course synopsis, but just how the goals will be met through the course must also be explained. The syllabi and synopses must also be publically available. Though compliance is not perfect across all departments and programs to this standard, compliance is extensive, (85% with goals displayed, 78% with explanation of how goals are to be met.) Given the diversity of disciplines and the complexity of this process, this is an excellent outcome, and outshines that of other academic units.

Is there a description of the program assessment structure and process? Is there a standing faculty committee in place? How often does it meet?

Meets Current ACLO Standards

SAS has an extensive and detailed assessment structure and process. It has been in operation for some time, and shows only renewed energy and expertise. SAS has made a serious commitment of resources to the entire process, through
an associate dean with major responsibility for the entire assessment process, support staff (though at his writing one less due to retirement), and strong faculty engagement and commitment. Strong leadership by the associate dean insures that departments and programs continue to develop their own meaningful and sustainable assessment processes. The rating system used to measure progress in the departments and programs has been beneficial in urging departments to ‘move up the ladder’ and improve their work in this area.

**Is the discussion of assessment tools and methods most used by the program adequate? Did the report make clear why those tools and methods were used?**

**Meets Current ACLO Standards**

As one would expect, there are a vast array of assessment tools and methods on display throughout the SAS programs and departments. There are direct assessments, such as in History where a final paper is evaluated according to a rubric set up by the major program, to the use of questions embedded in course exams, as in Biological Sciences. SAS evaluates all department/program assessment on a number of characteristics, but in particular for this area, rating departments on their use of various assessment tools and methods is very useful, as is the awarding of ‘best practice’ status to some departments and programs for their particular applications of specific methods of assessment. We find it most impressive that 39/42 of the departments/programs use direct assessment methods. SAS even rates the assessment methods used by the departments and programs on the basis of ‘appropriate to the goals assessed’ and ‘designed to produce reliable results for program improvement’. This is a level of detail and specificity not often found in assessment processes in the University. Another example of SAS’s leadership in the area of learning outcome assessment.

**Are benchmarks or standards used to guide the assessment process made clear? Are they established by a professional assessment body or through comparison with peer programs?**

**Making Reasonable Progress**

A larger number of SAS programs, 28/42 are using benchmarking and defined standards. We aren’t told much detail in this area, but given the many programs offered, some dominated by quantitative methodologies and some with little quantitative work required at all, it is significant that so many have found a way to establish benchmarks and comparisons with peer or historical comparisons. There has also been a major effort to set rigorous standards for the ‘levels of performance’ for the program learning goals themselves, and the over 60% of departments have done that well.
Are successful implementations of assessments made clear? Is the discussion as to how the results are compiled adequate? Is at least one direct assessment measure of a program level goal discussed?

**Making Reasonable Progress**

We are given summary statistics about the extent of successful implementation of direct assessments, and those results are very impressive with 35 of 42 departments getting a high score in the rankings, at or above 2.5 out of 3.0. We have a few examples of direct assessments in the appendices, but the summary graphs and statistics make clear that the successful implementation of assessments, direct and indirect, are the norm in SAS.

Is there adequate discussion of the successful implementation of change in the curriculum or program under review, based on the results of particular assessments that have been conducted?

**Making Reasonable Progress**

We are told in the report that 40 of 42 departments/programs planned or implemented change in their courses, curricula or program requirements based on the evidence of assessment results. 26 of 42 departments made changes significant and meaningful enough to score highly on the dean’s ranking of performance in this area. There is no doubt that evidence-based change is the now the norm in SAS. The next step, of course, is to evaluate the changes that were made, to learn if they have worked out as expected. That part of the assessment process is taking time to investigate, but 13 departments reported improvements in student learning after evidenced changes were made.

Is the process used to review and update the relevance of the school’s learning goals and the program learning goals within the school clearly explained?

**Meets Reasonable Progress**

The process of revision and updating learning goals themselves requires some time to collect and evaluate information, and it is no surprise that few departments have done much review at this stage of assessment in SAS. What is impressive is that a number of departments have already updated their initially stated learning goals, 8 so far, with more beginning that process. This just shows that the structure of assessment within SAS is strong and coherent, and sustainable over time, and that time is required to make sensible and meaningful changes.
General Comments: The School of Arts and Sciences has been the leader in learning outcomes assessment in the University since the original assessment council was established in 2008-2009. It continues to be the leader and the role model for other schools in the university, especially those with a large number of very diverse disciplines within them. The success of SAS is sometimes most notable when reading the assessment reports of other units, who have built their own assessment processes upon the foundation established by SAS.

Creating an assessment report covering such a large set of departments and programs is a research project in itself. This report from SAS is exemplary. The cogent and useful rating system used with in SAS to evaluate department and program assessments makes it possible to present a large amount of meaningful information is tabular and graphical form, that makes it a pleasure to read the report. We see immediately the scope magnitude of the assessment effort in SAS, and its incredible success.

It is no easy task to assign a summative evaluation to a report of this scope. Yes, there are things that still need to be done or are in process. But, what matters most here is the strength and resiliency of the entire process of learning outcome assessment in SAS, and the system that has been built and continues to develop in this unit is the most impressive in the University, and the most meaningful to the largest number of students. It not only meets the standards for assessment, it sets them.

Summative Evaluation: *Meets Current ACLO Standards*