Assessment Council on Learning Outcomes Narrative Response to the Spring 2018 assessment report submitted by:

School: NB Core

1. Are learning goals clear and publicly 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

The New Brunswick Core Curriculum learning goals are publicly available in several locations, including in a “widely circulated” brochure, on the School of Arts and Sciences website, on the Advising and Academic Services web site, and on the Schedule of Classes and Degree Navigator. The learning goals are hierarchically aligned in that the Core Curriculum learning goals constitute the goals for specific courses.

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

Meets Current ACLO Standards

All syllabi for Core Curriculum courses are approved by Core Requirements Committee (CRC) only when they include course learning goals, which must match program learning goals. Syllabus templates are available on the SAS website, however, there does not appear to be a central repository of course syllabi for all core courses.

3. 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

The description of the program assessment structure and process is well developed and clear. The Core Curriculum is overseen by the Core Requirements Committee (CRC), which is made up of representatives from various schools and the SAS Associate Dean for Undergraduate Education. This committee meets approximately monthly. The committee certifies new courses for inclusion in the Core when the new courses include the learning goals and contain a plan to assess those goals. The CRC will be assisted by the recent addition of an Associate Director of Teaching, Learning, and Assessment.
4. 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**

The Core Curriculum learning goals are directly assessed through scoring embedded assignments and exams in each course using Core goal rubrics. The rubrics are available on the OUE website and list individual goals along with outstanding, good, satisfactory, and unsatisfactory boxes and criteria for each category. However, faculty are free to adopt other methods for assessing performance, as they prefer. Learning goals are to be assessed every time a course is concluded.

The report makes clear that the rubric tool of direct assessment is preferable to a standardized test as it locates responsibility for student growth in actual courses and is thus of most use to the institution. The report cites an AAC&U survey showing that rubrics are now used by most universities and colleges that assess cumulative learning outcomes.

5. 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?

**Meets Current ACLO Standards**

The benchmarks used for the assessment process are clearly described and established through comparison with other universities. The Core Curriculum reviewed the assessment literature and other peer institutions to determine that the appropriate benchmark is that two-thirds of students should meet each learning goal “at the satisfactory or better level.”

6. 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?

**Meets Current ACLO Standards**

The process of how assessment is implemented is clearly described and the discussion of how results are compiled is fully transparent. Each year, the CRC requests reports from a rotating sample of several hundred courses, representing one-third of all departments participating in the Core Curriculum. In 2017-2018, 85% of certified courses were reflected in that report – representing a decline from the previous year. The Core Curriculum narrative notes that this decline was due to two departments which did not prioritize producing the assessment reports. They have requested that these departments submit complete reports next year. The CRC aggregates these reports in an impressive chart showing several learning goals with the percentage of
students reaching the satisfactory level. The results show mastery ranges from 77% of students in some goals to 95% in other goals, meeting the national benchmark.

7. **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?**

**Meets Current ACLO Standards**

The CRC encourages faculty to suggest means of improvement to close the assessment loop. More than half of the 2017-2018 reports included faculty plans for improvement based on learning outcomes. These improvement methods are summarized in a variety of categories such as “revise homework,” “revise content,” and “revise prompts.” A specific example involved effort to increase student engagement in on-line courses, which often have higher withdrawal or failure rates than traditional courses. Instructors in various classes have combatted this problem by meeting with students early in the course via skype, using more sophisticated communication tools, and improving the quality of class discussions.

These changes sound like promising improvements to the selected courses. As more data is gathered, it would be helpful to present in these discussions evidence to show whether these changes result in significant improvement for either classroom retention or performance on specific learning goals.

8. **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 Current ACLO Standards**

In 2015 the SAS Faculty and Affiliates established the Committee for the Evaluation of the Core (CEC). The CEC reviewed the core by interviewing faculty, students, and others, and conducting surveys. In 2016 the CEC presented findings to Dean March, which included suggestions to revise and refine the Core. In 2017 the CRC took these findings and used them to revise the curriculum to reduce confusion and make learning outcomes more transparent. One of the changes that the CRC considered was the need to add diversity goals to the core curriculum and eliminate the information technology goal. This change will begin in 2019.

The report did not make clear how frequently the CEC will review learning goals for the core curriculum, or whether the review was a one-time event, given than it took one year to complete.
**General Comments:**

The New Brunswick Core Curriculum assessment process is well-structured to produce a sustainable assessment practice. The report demonstrates that the process continues to effectively solicit assessment reports from the many departments which offer core courses and use those reports for improvement. The rubrics developed to measure each learning goal provide an exceptional standard for direct assessment.

As the Core Curriculum completes more cycles of assessment, the ACLO is interested in learning more about how changes have been made to specific courses in response to the assessment. It would be interesting to know how the implemented changes affected the number of students achieving each benchmark for specified learning goals.

Another minor issue noted in this review are that there does not appear to be a central repository of core course syllabi which are readily available online. It would also be useful to know whether the review of learning goals conducted by the CEC was a one-time event, or whether this review will be ongoing following a set schedule.

**Summative Evaluation:** Meets Current ACLO Standards