**October 2010 Assessment Report Feedback–Center for Sustainability & the Environment**

**Assessment Committee Contact**: Scott Hendrix, Academic Skills Center

*\*Note*: Assessment report/feedback was reviewed/provided by Vicki Baker, Mark Bollman, and Scott Hendrix

As you note at the start of the CSE May 2010 report, your update focuses on—and is organized according to—the goals of the Center, as outlined in step 4 of the CSE assessment plan submitted in November 2009.

In addition, your report is noteworthy for the varied types of assessment instruments/methods employed by CSE to collect information and data about student outcomes: two student surveys, an assessment of outcomes in ENVN 201 (based on student essays), and compilation of information on alumni.

**Specific comments referring to NEW assessment report sections or information/data follow:**

Goal 1: Help students identify careers relating to the environment (p. 1-4)

Table 1 (Summary of specificity of career goals) [p. 1-2] provides a great deal of helpful information about student focus and career goals within CSE, but the labeling for the table is not quite clear—not easy to read with certainty about accuracy or relevance. The major concern that needs clarified (I think) is the relationship between the number key (1-3) and where the numbers appear on the grid; this revision is probably a fairly easy fix for someone who knows the intended referential relationships, etc. (something to work on revising/clarifying for *future* reporting).

The rest of the data and discussion for Goal 1 provides additional helpful, clear, and valuable information about CSE student learning and career goals; in addition, discussion about the findings seems both accurate and helpful for future program planning (as suggested in your discussion).

Goal 2a: Depth of Knowledge (p. 4-5)

As noted for Table 1 above, similar concerns arise for Table 2 (appended to CSE report): the table seems to provide helpful information about student perceptions of significant learning components and events within CSE—major and CSE courses, field trips, internships, etc.—but the labeling for the table is difficult to quickly and easily comprehend with any certainty about accuracy of reading and interpreting (something to work on revising/clarifying for *future* reporting).

*The two assessment sections above present indirect measures of student learning, since the data/information derives from student responses to surveys and open-ended questions; this focus contrasts with the following data and discussion in the May 2010 update, which presents direct measures of student learning within CSE.*

Goal 2b: Interdisciplinary Perspective (p. 5-7)

Very effective presentation and discussion of data/information from ENV 201 student essays: the discussion preceding Table 4 sets up the data and analysis that follows; the table and analysis are both easy to follow and understand.

Additional discussion of these findings—as direct measures of student learning embedded within a key component of CSE—would seem warranted *at some future time*, both in terms of reporting on student learning outcomes within the program, and as evidence of the ways that such student data works back into CSE course, field experience, and program planning (as you suggest at several points in your May 2010 update—and especially in your concluding Actions section).

Goals 2c and 2d: Development of group and leadership skills (p. 7-8)

Similar comments as for Goal 2b above: a good deal of helpful information and discussion is presented here, including a blend of indirect (student surveys) and direct (faculty assessment of student group performance) student learning outcomes.

And, as with Goal 2b above, further discussion of these findings—from key measures of student learning embedded within CSE—would seem warranted *at some future time*, both in terms of reporting on student learning outcomes within the program, and as evidence of the ways that such student data works back into CSE course, field experience, and program planning.

As before, our thanks to CSE faculty, students, and staff for the time, energy, and collaborative labor that went into assessment efforts within the program, including the drafting and revising of CSE assessment reports.

Please contact your Assessment Committee liaison if you have follow-up questions, comments, or concerns.

**NOTE**: for your reference, fall 2009 Assessment Committee feedback is copied below.

**Assessment Report Feedback – Environmental Institute--August 2009**

**Assessment Committee Contact**: Scott Hendrix, Academic Skills Center

*\*Note*: Assessment report/feedback was reviewed/provided by Vicki Baker, Mark Bollman, and Scott Hendrix

Overall, your program assessment plan is an effectively detailed document that provides helpful presentation of program goals, key program components that connect back to these goals, and some helpful discussion about methods and instruments you plan to use for assessing the extent to which specific program components are helping students meet EI learning goals/outcomes.

The feedback below is intended to help you reconsider and/or revise and update your assessment plans, as needed, as you move through the next steps of the assessment process.

*Step 1: Mission*

Your mission statement seems clear and cohesive, focused on student learning and outcomes within the EI program, and includes appropriate connections of theory to practice for students. In addition, your program mission seems in line with overall college goals for developing student awareness of (and work toward) sustainability and global issues.

*Step 2: Outcomes*

Your program goals/outcomes seem appropriate given your mission, and are effectively limited in number (though you might focus these into fewer major goals, as discussed just below).

However, your outcomes section is also unclearly aligned with your program components (in Step 3, following section), which creates some confusion about your assessment plan, for the following three reasons: 1) the goals/outcomes and program components are not in symmetrical order (e.g., student careers is listed first under outcomes, but presented last under program components); 2) the number of goals listed under this section does not match the number of goals listed under the following section; 3) some goals (e.g., develop leadership and group skills) are not clearly identified or located on the grid under Step 3.

Moving forward, you might simplify and clarify your assessment plan by using the language and goal categories from Step 3 as your program goals for Step 2 (with sub-goals as appropriate or needed). Likewise, listing your program goals and relevant program components in symmetrical order should help outside readers/reviewers (Assessment Committee, Accreditation Team, etc.) more easily understand and appreciate the important work of the EI within the liberal arts curriculum; finally, presenting this information in a clear and straightforward manner should also help clarify for current and prospective students the specific goals, outcomes, and learning opportunities available within the EI (so could be helpful as recruitment tool, etc.).

*Step 3: Program Components*

This section seems clear and mostly self-explanatory (aside from the referential concerns raised in the discussion of Step 2 above). The grid listing four program goals, program components, and how each goal is assessed for each component is quite helpful and effective as an organizing model (even for those areas where your assessment methods or instruments are still being developed—though see further discussion in following section).

*Step 4: Methods/Data*

The EI senior survey discussed in this section is certainly a valuable indirect measure of student learning; in addition, your suggested revisions to the survey (“new materials”) presented in the later half of the section (if I understand the information accurately) will provide both further indirect measure as well as some effective direct measure of student learning (especially the final problem/solution essay and scoring rubric). [*See bottom of this page for definitions and examples of direct and indirect measures/evidence*.]

However, the discussion here seems to be *only* about the senior survey (is that accurate?)—which is a confusing situation, given that the senior survey only shows up once on the Step 3 grid (under “connect theoretical to practical”). The expectation for this section was that discussion here would include the specific assessment methods and instruments listed on the Step 3 grid (in addition to the senior survey): field trip journals, E-house project and reading responses, internship papers, common grading rubrics that might help create a common assessment measure of these program components, etc. (all potential direct measures of student learning).

As noted regarding the symmetry of the earlier sections, it would be helpful for you to align your discussion of program components and assessment methods/instruments. Doing so should also help clarify (for yourselves and for external audiences) the relationships between your program goals and specific data or information (such as scoring rubrics, student responses from field trip journals, etc.) that you could/will use to confirm that students are actually meeting the goals you hope they achieve within the EI.

For your next round of assessment plan updating, please consider the comments, suggestions, and recommendations above, and incorporate these as feasible and appropriate. Overall, a good start toward developing and presenting an effective assessment plan for the program.

 Direct & Indirect Measures

In assessing student learning, there are direct and indirect sources of evidence. Direct evidence is clear and convincing information about student learning, such as: tests, examinations, papers, projects, assignments, field experience assessments, and portfolios. These are particularly strong sources of evidence especially when accompanied by articulated standards (such as a rubric). On the other hand, with indirect evidence there is room for other factors to affect the outcomes either positively or negatively. Examples of indirect evidence include: retention, graduation, and placement rates (may be impacted by economic conditions or college policies); surveys of students and alumni (may indicate feelings about college experience); grades (standards and even content may differ across instructors and institutions).

**Next Steps:**

In coordination with your Assessment Committee reviewers and their written and verbal feedback, please observe the following deadlines for your assessment cycle:

* September 15: Revisions to Steps 1-4 due (if necessary)
* October 1: Completion of Steps 5 & 6 using preliminary data
* November 2: Final Fall 2009 plans due

**Fall 2009** **Environmental Institute—November 2009 Update**  
1. Overall, the document is much easier to read, and is considerably more effective in presenting the student learning goals of EI, the program components and methods or instruments you use within the program to assess how students are doing in reaching the learning goals.  
  
2. The ENVN 206 data, discussion, and analysis in Step 5 is a great addition, very helpful and persuasive evidence of student learning--and clearly linked back to program learning goals as articulated in Step 2.  
  
At this point, I don't have any specific suggestions or concerns for this round of assessment.   
  
Thanks to you and your colleagues for your diligence and patience with this assessment planning and reporting process. And please contact me if you have follow-up questions or comments, etc.