

Chapter One

Achieving Our Core Institutional Purpose by

Understanding the Student Learning We Produce

Humboldt State University defines its purposes and establishes educational objectives aligned with its purposes and character. It has a clear and conscious sense of its essential values and character, its distinctive elements, its place in the higher education community, and its relationship to society at large. Through its purposes and educational objectives, the institution dedicates itself to higher learning, the search for truth, and the dissemination of knowledge. The institution functions with integrity and autonomy.

WASC Standard One

We will be stewards of learning to make a positive difference.

- HSU Vision

Humboldt State University has a longstanding tradition of valuing teaching and learning. We emphasize faculty-student interaction, along with a number of what George Kuh has identified as “high-impact practices,” as a matter of course. However, classes and instruction, regardless of the practices they draw upon, are means to an end rather than our goal or purpose. To paraphrase John Tagg, universities cannot define their purpose as “providing instruction,” any more than a hospital can define its purpose as “filling beds” or a manufacturer can define its purpose as “building assembly lines.” As a means to an end, instruction is valuable only to the degree that it produces significant learning of the intended skills and knowledge. That means that the central question for defining our core institutional purpose is this: what is it that we intend our students to learn as a result of their university experience?

This chapter describes how Humboldt State University has answered that question, as well as the subsequent work involved in building an understanding of the student learning that is our objective. The chapter also describes how this work of understanding student learning is complicated by the fact that, although students themselves are integrated wholes, the responsibility for learning experiences in which they engage is divided among various program levels: General Education program, major program, minor program, co-curricular activities, and other kinds of experiences such as on-campus employment. The chapter also presents some initial results of our efforts to understand what students are learning, including an account of how we are changing our curricula in response to what we learned about student writing performance.

Describing the Learning We Produce: The HSU Outcomes

Beginning in September 2006, a broadly representative Action Team was convened to to guide the effort to identify the Humboldt State University Learning Outcomes. This effort was the central focus of the

first of two Themes articulated in our Institutional Proposal. The Action Team, comprising faculty, professional staff, students, and administrators, was tasked with addressing three questions:

- 1) What are core academic expectations for HSU students?
- 2) Are these core academic expectations being met by HSU students?
- 3) Are HSU students achieving proficiency in written communication skills?

Inspired by the AAC&U's landmark initiative *Greater Expectations*, most particularly its recommendation that institutions should rethink what they expect from a college education in the twenty-first century, the Action Team nicknamed the effort to identify HSU's institutional Learning Outcomes "Greater HSU Expectations."

Relying heavily on documents which had themselves been produced through broadly consultative processes, and which distilled the essential values and character of the HSU community, the team produced an initial set of discussion-draft outcomes around which the campus community could organize its deliberations. These deliberations occurred within a broad range of campus groups throughout the 2006-2007 academic year, and the resulting set of Humboldt State University Outcomes has been widely communicated. The HSU Outcomes, summarizing an education that is distinct to Humboldt State University, appear in the University Catalog, on the University website, and in many course syllabi:

CFR

HSU Student Outcomes:

What all HSU graduates should know and be able to do as a result of their HSU experience.

HSU graduates have demonstrated:

Effective oral and written communication

Critical and creative thinking skills in acquiring a broad knowledge base and applying it to complex issues

Competence in a major area of study

Appreciation for and understanding of an expanded world perspective by engaging respectfully with a diverse range of individuals, communities, and viewpoints

CFR 1.5

HSU graduates are prepared to:

Succeed in their chosen careers

Take responsibility for identifying personal goals and practicing lifelong learning

Pursue social justice, promote environmental responsibility, and improve economic conditions in their workplaces and communities

Academic departments, co-curricular programs, and campus offices worked to map their courses and activities onto the HSU Outcomes (see [Appendix X](#), HSU Outcomes Maps). Bearing in mind that undergraduate major student learning outcomes were articulated while an entirely separate process was developing the HSU Outcomes, content analysis of program outcomes revealed tremendous variability in conceptualizing the HSU Outcomes. This effort, while useful in helping a variety of campus constituencies to think about how their programs contributed to students' achievement of the HSU Outcomes, resulted in information that was difficult to interpret; the information collected indicated that each program seemed to envision the Outcomes, and the degree of focus involved in addressing them, somewhat differently. Some programs, for example, indicated that writing or critical thinking was the primary focus of instruction in all of its classes, a claim that was not supported by curricular evidence.

Of the 48 sets of programmatic SLOs, critical and creative thinking (HSU Outcome 2) was identified as a program outcome in 40, respect for diversity (HSU Outcome 4) was identified as a program outcome in 26, oral communication (HSU Outcome 1) was identified as a program outcome in 25, preparation for career success (HSU Outcome 5) was identified as a program outcome in 18, social and/or environmental and/or economic responsibility (HSU Outcome 7) was identified as a program outcome in 12, and lifelong learning (HSU Outcome 6) in 4. All programs are now required to identify written communication competence (HSU Outcome 1) as a program outcome.

The programs that had career preparation SLOs were primarily (but not exclusively) those undergraduate majors with an obvious career preparation focus (e.g. Recreation Administration, Liberal Studies-Elementary Education, Forestry). The programs that articulated SLOs regarding improving social and/or environmental and/or economic conditions were primarily (but not exclusively) social science majors. Some programs (e.g. Women's Studies) had indicated in their mapping of curriculum onto the HSU Outcomes that these concerns were strongly addressed in most if not all courses, though this was not immediately evident in the major SLOs.

Such variation in different concepts of the Outcomes ultimately undermined implementation of the original cyclical plan to assess one of the HSU Outcomes each year using assignments to be drawn from courses identified on the Curricular Maps as having primary focus on the outcome to be assessed that year.

Assessing the HSU Outcomes

The effort to assess the HSU Outcomes had begun, as reported in the Capacity and Preparatory Review (p. 30), with assessing student writing proficiency using student work produced outside of the disciplinary structure. Writing proficiency, which was the focus of the third Theme One research question as well as part of the first HSU Outcome, was assessed during the fall semester of 2007 through an inductive analysis of Graduation Writing Proficiency Examination papers (see "Taking a Curricular Approach to Improving Student Writing," below).

As that first round of HSU Outcomes Assessment got underway in Fall 2007, the HSU Outcomes Assessment Working Group also began to consider the next Outcome on the Assessment Plan, "critical and creative thinking skills in acquiring a broad knowledge base and applying it to complex issues." Intending to implement curriculum-embedded assessment as described in the Assessment Plan, the

Working Group collected and reviewed assignments that various programs had identified as addressing the second HSU Outcome. However, the variation proved to be so wide-ranging, and the contexts so specific, that the committee was unable to develop a common set of indicators to use across the disciplines. Instead, they sought an approach that could be applied more effectively outside specific course contexts.

Looking back at the analysis of student writing competence, which had utilized student papers produced for a university-wide graduation requirement beyond any specific course or program, the Working Group proposed that a dual-purpose prompt be designed for a forthcoming GWPE administration. A first attempt was made to work with faculty members active in General Education Area A/Critical Thinking to develop prompts that could be used to assess the critica/creative thinking HSU Outcome described above, but that approach was unsuccessful. Next, having become aware of a CSU-Los Angeles pilot test assessing “Student Understanding and Appreciation of Diversity” using their Writing Proficiency Exam, the Working Group decided to follow that example and develop some suggested prompts to assess a similar HSU Outcome.

In consultation with campus diversity experts, the Working Group developed several prompts that would require students not only to demonstrate proficiency in writing, but also to demonstrate “appreciation for and understanding of an expanded world perspective by engaging respectfully with a diverse range of individuals, communities, and viewpoints” (the fourth HSU Outcome). Unfortunately, however, when the exams were administered, other prompts were substituted for those submitted by the Working Group, and the resulting student work had limited value for the direct evaluation of these skills.

These difficulties have stemmed from a number of familiar challenges that manifest themselves in various ways across the campus: lack of clear communication and allocation of responsibilities, views of assessment and its purposes that are still at the developing stages, and general – and genuine – confusion about the relationships among various levels of Outcomes and, therefore, various levels of assessment. The relationships among HSU Outcomes/Assessment, General Education Outcomes/Assessment, Program-level Outcomes/Assessment, and Co-Curricular Outcomes/Assessment have been difficult to conceptualize. As HSU has struggled to embrace assessment as a means of improving student learning, the Educational Effectiveness Review Steering Committee grappled with ways of framing and organizing the different levels of student learning outcomes as a means of institutionalizing the HSU Outcomes.

Luckily, a statement in the report of the Capacity and Preparatory Review Visiting Team suggested a way to approach these relationships. The team noted that HSU faces the challenge of “assessing how the HSU Outcomes are met as a result of the integration of General Education and the Major, as well as curricular and co-curricular activities.” A careful reading of this observation led us to the insight that, while the HSU Outcomes had been mapped onto curricular and cocurricular activities, with very mixed and subjective results, we had not mapped them onto the GE, Program, or Co-Curricular *outcomes*. Certainly it would be possible for a program to address an HSU Outcome without it being highlighted as a program-level outcome, but it would not likely be an area of as much emphasis as those that are. Because the outcomes at each level not only captured what was most important to that program or area, but also would be part of a regular and cyclical assessment process, it seemed useful to map the HSU Outcomes onto all other levels of outcomes (see [Appendix XX](#)). This allows us to see alignments and gaps in program emphases.

Results of this mapping indicate uneven attention to the HSU Outcomes, with particularly noticeable gaps in preparation for career success, for goalsetting and lifelong learning, and for pursuing social justice, environmental responsibility, and economic improvement. While there are many opportunities on campus to engage with each of the Outcomes, there are no guidelines or requirements in place to ensure that all students do so. The Educational Effectiveness Steering Committee developed a proposal (see [Appendix XX](#)) to rethink the relationships among HSU's programs and the HSU Outcomes, with the goal of assuring that the Outcomes are reached by all HSU graduates. In Fall 2009, the Academic Policies Committee of the Academic Senate was charged with addressing the recommendations in the proposal.

A recent survey of HSU alumni as well as alumni from a number of other campuses asked respondents to rate how well their degree prepared them in a number of areas which reflect the HSU Outcomes. On a scale from 1 to 4, where 4 was defined as 'Excellent preparation,' the mean response for "Commitment to continuous learning" by HSU alumni was 3.39 (higher than the mean for comparable institutions). Similarly, the mean for "Contributing to my community" was 3.28, for "Current work status" was 3.18, and for "Further graduate education" was 3.17. Indirect evidence suggests, then, that alumni have a strong sense of having mastered the skills that we have subsequently identified as key outcomes of an HSU education. Development of more direct ways to measure student and/or alumni learning in these institutionally-valued areas will help us understand where, and for which students, this is occurring at HSU.

Assessing General Education Outcomes

Ongoing assessment and evaluation of the educational programs at HSU has been an area of development for the last several years. General Education (GE) has been one of the more difficult areas in which to develop, implement and institutionalize assessment, due in part to the fact that General Education courses are located in multiple colleges and departments. Assessment is further complicated by the level of choice students have in selecting their way through the GE curriculum. Perhaps the most difficult challenge to overcome, as noted in the Capacity and Preparatory Review Visiting Team Report, has been the fragmentation of GE oversight: until the new Integrated Curriculum Committee was established in Fall 2009, oversight of GE Area B resided in the College of Natural Resources and Sciences, oversight of GE Areas C and D were assigned to the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences, and oversight of Areas A and E, Institutions, and Diversity and Common Ground requirements was the responsibility of the University Curriculum Committee. Each of these supervisory bodies took a somewhat different approach to the process of conducting assessment, collecting results, and providing feedback.

In spite of these obstacles, HSU has made progress in identifying student learning outcomes in each area and beginning the process of assessing these outcomes. With the added impetus of the CPR Visiting Team's request that at least one outcome be assessed for each GE Area before the Educational Effectiveness Review was completed, the campus completed the process of identifying Student Learning Outcomes for all Areas by the end of Fall 2008. By the end of Spring 2009, at least one Outcome for each General Education Area had been assessed, and assessment is continuing in the 2009-2010 academic year.

In addition to taking direct responsibility for the assessment of Areas A and E, the Institutions requirement, the Diversity and Common Ground (DCG) requirement, and the Communication and Ways of Thinking (CWT) cluster, the University Curriculum Committee (UCC) was tasked with coordinating the assessment of General Education overall. Their initial report makes clear that this first year of assessment reflected "a learning experience" [see [Appendix xx](#)]. The nature of the report and the

process is reflective of the diverse approaches to general education on the HSU campus. The report also makes clear the need to continue to systematize and be more proactive and planful in the process of general education curriculum and assessment.

Specific outcomes measured by the assessment are as follows:

Institutions: Between sixty-six and eighty-seven percent of students were able to demonstrate knowledge “*about significant event in American history spanning a minimum of 100 years.*” There were significant methodological problems in the assessment of institutions, that raise questions about the validity of the data. Additional clarity is needed in instrument design and sampling methodology. [See Appendix XX]

Area A/ Oral Communication: Two thirds of the students were able to “*design an appropriately organized and credibly supported speech, using techniques to inform and/or persuade an audience.*” There were significant methodological challenges in the measurement of area A objectives that raise questions about the validity of the data. Greater unanimity is needed in use of criteria in assign imbedded assessment and greater consistency in application of criteria is needed. [See Appendix XX]

Area B/Mathematical Concepts & Quantitative Reasoning: One third of the the students sampled were able to, “*demonstrate their understanding of basic concepts in math and quantitative reasoning.*” .” There were significant methodological challenges in the measurement of area B objectives that raise questions about the validity of the data. Greater clarity in sampling and explication of relevant objectives across courses to increase accurate and meaningful measurement. [See Appendix XX]

Area C: Between five and sixty-two percent of the sample students were able to “*demonstrate an integrated response of affective subjectivity and collective standards of judgment in relation to an artistic or humanistic work.*” Substantial methodolgocial issues impede the value of this data. This area of assessment has been departmentally based and lacked consistency across departments and courses. Efforts are underway to create some level of uniformity in the rubrics and methodological processes used. [See Appendix XX]

Area D: Between seventeen and seventy-two percent of the students were able to “*demonstrate knowledge of and ability to apply discipline specific vocabulary.*” Significant methodological issues impede the utility of this data. Because the SLO is by definition disciplinary, uniformity across departments was difficult to achieve. Efforts are underway to bring greater consistency to the methodological concerns so that assessment data can be aggregated. [See Appendix XX]

Area E: Seventy percent of the students were able to “*demonstrate understanding of and appreciation for the nature of being human as an integration of physiological, psychological, and socio-cultural influences.*” There were some methodological challenges that resulted primarily from using a more heuristic method on top of a quantitative process. [See Appendix XX]

Diversity and Common Ground (DCG): Eighty-six percent of the students could “*demonstrate understanding of diverse cultural experiences.*” Significant methodological issues emerged in the development of the assessment rubric and its application. Additional work in this area is required to enable the data to be more useful. [See Appendix XX]

Communication and Ways of Thinking: Sixty-nine percent of the students could “distinguish among the ways of thinking which are characteristic of at least two of the following broad disciplinary areas: humanities, natural sciences, and social sciences.” There were some methodological challenges raised, but overall these appeared to be an accurate assessment of the HSU’s ability to meet this learning outcome.

[See Appendix XX]

The challenges in the assessment of general education are of a piece with the larger challenges of curriculum oversight within the University. As a result of feedback from the CPR Visiting Team, the campus has completely revised its processes for curricular oversight, including assessment processes. The development of the Integrated Curriculum Committee (discussed in Chapter 3, below) includes the subcommittee on Program Planning and Assessment (PPA). This body will provide a major vehicle for addressing the recommendations made in the UCC report on General Education. The PPA will help to systematize and link the assessment process with program planning and resource allocation. The subcommittee will be able to provide a formalized process with faculty who are familiar with and invested in planning and assessment. It will coordinate the process of assessment and the analysis and use of assessment data.

The initial assessment data gathered will be reviewed by the PPA and recommendations will be developed during the 2009-2010 academic year. The PPA will also refine and engage in ongoing assessment of GE. A critical part of this assessment will be to look at the SLO’s for GE and refine them to ensure they are measurable and reflect the university SLO’s and current course and faculty expectations. The initial GE assessment report makes clear that there are some questions related to alignment; the PPA will discuss how to address closing the loop by engaging faculty in discussion of the results.

Assessing Degree Program Outcomes, Implementing improvements

As recently as the spring of 2006, when a half-time Faculty Associate for Assessment was appointed to support assessment efforts, only a few of the undergraduate major programs had begun assessing student learning at the program level, and there was widespread faculty suspicion that implementing assessment might result in negative or punitive consequences if assessment findings revealed student performance that was less than stellar. In order to encourage more widespread engagement with assessment as collegial inquiry rather than a test to be passed or a hurdle to be cleared, reporting has been strictly to the Faculty Associate for Assessment. The only information provided to the Associate Deans was about programs that were seriously out of compliance in providing their student learning outcomes, assessment multi-year plans, and/or assessment results. This deliberate choice to provide confidentiality to the programs was intended to create an atmosphere of embracing formative, not summative, assessment.

For the academic year 2006-07, the Faculty Associate for Assessment received assessment reports for 30 of the 52 undergraduate majors. Most of the lessons learned in the first year of requiring programmatic assessment activities had to do with the assessment process itself. However, some programs made curricular or pedagogical changes as a result of their analysis of assessment results. For example, an existing course in Environmental Communication was moved to the core curriculum for the Natural Resources Planning and Interpretation program, to improve student performance in oral communication. As another example, the Sociology program made changes to more intentionally link theory and research methods in courses addressing both of those areas, and it developed a more structured process supporting student preparation of senior project proposals prior to taking the culminating project course. For that first year, assessment reports were due to the Faculty Associate for Assessment at the end of the spring semester. However, it became clear that this was an unrealistic

deadline when most reports actually trickled in during the following fall semester, and the ones that had been submitted in May typically did not have evidence that the program faculty had actually reviewed and interpreted the assessment results.

Accordingly, the due date for reports on program assessment activity for 2007-2008 was set for September 2008. The Faculty Associate for Assessment received assessment reports for 32 majors. Four of the programs that had provided first year reports did not provide second year reports, while six programs that had not been assessed in the first year were assessed in the second. In general, the 2007-2008 assessment reports reflected substantial improvement in the quality of the assessment activities themselves and in faculty perception that assessment activities are, in fact, useful – particularly the conversations among faculty around the process of interpreting the results -- and more programs indicated plans to implement improvements as a result of their analyses of their assessment findings. For example, the Political Science faculty recognized the need to provide more explicit instruction in distinguishing and critically evaluating the rapidly changing landscape of political information. And in response to gaps revealed by assessment results, the Women's Studies faculty planned a faculty development workshop for Fall 2008 to help faculty develop techniques for teaching intersectional analysis throughout courses in their curriculum. In short, moving the due date to the beginning of the next academic year resulted in substantially more complete reports, including "Closing the Loop" discussions and subsequent action.

Due dates are still problematic, especially as there was considerable General Education assessment activity in the academic year 2008-09, as well as the expectation for continued programmatic assessment activities. As this goes to press, the Faculty Associate for Assessment has received [number to be provided] reports for 2008-2009.

As described later in this chapter, all undergraduate programs have developed an explicit student learning outcome regarding written communication. For those programs that have not yet assessed the quality of student writing, and only a handful have, the program outcome to be assessed this academic year, 2009-10, is the writing outcome. Workshops last spring and one planned for this fall are providing assistance to program faculty in crafting written skill expectations for their disciplines, assignments, and rubrics for assessing the quality of writing produced by students. This support has also contributed to a greater willingness among faculty to embrace assessment activities.

In the first two and a half years of the new assessment activities, attention was concentrated on the undergraduate major programs. During 2008-09, graduate programs were brought into the process, though they are not yet submitting reports to the Faculty Associate for Assessment. Currently the credential programs are formalizing their student learning outcomes, and evaluating the massive amounts data they routinely receive from the state on student performance, to craft a manageable routine of processing and making sense of that data.

As noted above, in these first years of regular assessment, expectations were deliberately disconnected from consequences in order to build experience in and trust of the processes among the faculty. With the advent of the new Integrated Curriculum Committee, the Program Planning and Assessment subcommittee is crafting a new program review process that is structured around using assessment results. We expect that when the new process is adopted by the Academic Senate, annual reporting by programs of their assessment findings will be submitted directly to the programs' Deans and will be incorporated into resource allocation and other decisions.

Assessing Co-Curricular and Academic Support Program Outcomes

Last year Student Affairs embraced a division-wide Student Learning Outcomes model as a new tool for assessing the success of programs and services. Initially, a team of 5 staff members was sent to a CSU Student Learning Outcomes and Assessment training. The training presented a model for assessment of student learning that is linked to whole student development, institutional effectiveness, and student success. Participants in the training learned how to create economical and effective assessment plans, methods, metrics and processes, taking advantage of opportunities to define, develop, write, and revise outcomes.

Upon its return, this team facilitated in-service training for all Student Affairs units. The team presented what they had learned by way of an iterative and interactive workshop, held in the context of assessment as a collaborative practice. Representatives from each program learned how to use the Learning Outcomes template to produce and track at least one student learning outcome for 2008.

Each program added another outcome for 2009; for every subsequent year all programs will create and track additional outcomes. The outcomes are aligned with the HSU Student Learning Outcomes learning outcomes, as well as with the Making Excellence Inclusive initiative; they are part of the comprehensive university-wide attempt to engage in ongoing institutional learning.

Initially, staff from various programs responded with some anxiety regarding this new assessment focus. The shift from tracking numbers of students served by specific programs to measuring what learning occurs as a result of engaging students in particular ways was a significant and change that caused concern on the part of many staff members who were wary of having to use yet another way of assessing their programs.

The anxiety surrounding the adoption of Student Learning Outcomes was eased through many follow-up discussions among the various program staff and the team of five individuals who attended the training and facilitated the workshop. Team members made themselves available to help units create outcomes and brainstorm ways that outcomes could be measured. Also, the Vice President of Student Affairs sent a clear message to all staff stating the importance of shifting the way Student Affairs programs measure their success and he reassured programs that this new tool was not the only measurement to be utilized in planning or making budget decisions.

As a result of adopting the Student Learning Outcomes model of assessment, many Student Affairs co-curricular programs and academic support programs have initiated plans to change how success of services and programs is identified and how units improve the way in which they serve students. For example, the Career Center tracks the kind of student learning that occurs through resume development sessions by looking at changes in resume content once students have received guidance from the Career Center, instead of just gathering counts of students served by the center. Another example is the Learning Center's change to a scenario-based activity that asks student instructional leaders to demonstrate how well they have learned effective communication skills through the center's training program, instead of having them fill out traditional evaluation forms. All Student Affairs co-curricular and academic support programs have started tracking student learning in similar fashion. These Student Learning Outcomes will not replace existing assessment tools but will enhance the way programs approach gathering information about the effectiveness of services and student learning success.

Taking a Curricular Approach to Improving Student Writing

The quality of student writing emerged as a campus-wide concern during the extensive process of identifying the areas on which we most needed to work, in the course of developing the Institutional Proposal. A focus on this area was eventually incorporated into our first Theme, in which we sought to identify and assess the outcomes of an HSU education. It was clear that students' writing proficiency was not only an outcome that the campus community valued, but it was also one that had been identified consistently as needing additional attention.

It is important to note that institutional evaluation of student writing has been ongoing for thirty years. As part of the California State University system, HSU is required to administer an exit assessment of student writing proficiency. At HSU, that assessment takes the form of a timed writing called the Graduation Writing Proficiency Examination (GWPE), first administered in the fall of 1979. However, the high passing rate on the GWPE, in the context of widespread perceptions that student writing was not proficient, has led to questions regarding the validity of GWPE scores; moreover, papers written for the GWPE are scored holistically and thus give little indication of specific areas for improvement in student writing overall.

Accordingly, the first step in improving student writing was to examine actual student work, in order to identify areas in need of improvement. A random sample of student papers written for the February 2007 GWPE administration was evaluated, independent of the GWPE rubric and scores, at a September 2007 writing assessment workshop. Eight groups of faculty and staff evaluators, a total of sixteen readers, each reached consensus on their categorization of a dozen papers as "average/adequate," "weak," or "strong." The evaluators then did a trait analysis of the student work in the "weak" and "strong" categories, in order to identify the characteristics of student writing most in need of improvement. The traits identified as most common -- and most troubling -- were not simply surface problem of grammar or structure. Instead, they tended to be large, global problems: lack of focus or purpose, underdeveloped ideas, inadequate support, and insufficient depth or thoughtfulness. In subsequent discussion of these findings among the evaluators, over the course of several meetings, it became clear that most students could benefit from improving their competence in these areas.

The ad hoc HSU Outcomes Assessment Working Group received the findings and was tasked with making recommendations for how to improve student writing. In considering the results of the analysis, the group realized that the necessary improvements would not be achieved by simply expanding the Writing Center resources and services or conducting workshops on writing instruction, though both of these actions could be helpful. Instead, if all HSU students are to achieve proficiency in academic writing, they require more instruction, and more opportunities work on and receive feedback about their writing. In short, more frequent and explicit writing instruction needed to be built into the curriculum.

The Working Group looked at a number of other universities to see how student writing instruction was approached and found a range of writing programs or projects in a wide variety of institutions, including some of the other CSU campuses. Based on this survey, the group submitted to the Education Policies Committee a continuum of possible curricular policy approaches.

After carefully considering the approaches described by the Working Group, the Education Policies Committee forwarded a resolution to the Academic Senate, observing that "[b]ecause writing skill develops over time with constant practice, an approach that develops skills over multiple courses will increase student learning of this essential skill. In addition, developing discipline-specific writing skills is

essential because effective writing is tied to the content of the writing.” The policy that resulted from extensive discussion of that recommendation has been implemented as follows:

- Each undergraduate program was directed to include discipline-specific writing skills as one of the student learning outcomes for the major.
- Each program submitted a writing plan that identifies and describes at least one specific type of document that students in the program will learn to produce, using the one-page template provided [see [Appendix xx](#)].
- Each program’s writing plan also identifies where in the program’s curriculum the students are introduced to, develop, and demonstrate mastery of that type of document [see [Appendix xx](#) for a set of samples illustrating several ways of apportioning document instruction within or across courses].
- Feedback on the writing plans was provided by the Program Planning and Assessment Committee in Fall 2009 [see [Appendix xx](#) for feedback form].
- Each program is to conduct a baseline assessment of its students’ writing skills, if they have not already done so, during the 2009-2010 academic year.

In order to support departments’ efforts to identify and describe the documents around which they could plan their writing instruction, and to map the instruction onto their curricula, two workshops were facilitated by Carol Holder, expert in the field of writing in the disciplines, during the spring of 2009. Programs were asked to identify two writing liaisons, who were paid to participate in the workshops and prepare the draft plans to be developed and refined in collaboration with their departments [see [Appendix xx](#) for examples from several programs]. The plans were submitted in May, 2009.

The Program Planning and Assessment Subcommittee of the new Integrated Curriculum Committee was given the responsibility of providing feedback on the plans by mid-October, 2009. In Fall 2009, with the support of the Faculty Development Committee, workshops will assist departments in preparing to assess student writing, analyze the results, and consider adjustments to assignments, courses, or teaching methods.

Learning to Make a Positive Difference

As noted in the Commission letter that followed the Capacity and Preparatory Review Visit, “HSU has a history of beginning [assessment] efforts but failing to sustain them.” To some degree, wariness about how any resulting data might be used – a symptom of pervasive trust issues across the campus, discussed in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, below – were to blame for the lack of progress in this area. There were also a number of practical reasons, including the absence of cohesive curricular oversight, a shortage of support for assessment efforts, and a disconnect among curricular planning, assessment, and resource decisions.

In the time since the Capacity and Preparatory Review, Humboldt State has made concrete progress in addressing these challenges in order to better address our educational objectives. We have begun to overcome distrust and to approach assessment with a spirit of inquiry. Helping in this effort is an institutional commitment to developing and filling a new full-time position : Director of Learning Assessment. The search to fill this position was unsuccessful last year; however, even in the context of our current budget constraints, an increased level of assessment support and expertise is so important to achieving HSU's educational objectives that the search is being conducted again this year.

As a campus community, we are gradually shifting away from considering assessment to be an external requirement to be either resisted or complied with. Instead, we are more consistently seeking to learn from our assessment efforts and, as a result of what we learn, to make positive changes in our students' experiences so that they achieve the learning that we have collectively identified as our purpose.