Analysis of GRC New Course Approval Process

This study is designed to assess whether the GRC policy for course approval is being implemented as written in support of a culture of assessment grounded in explicit descriptions of student learning expectations at the course level. To assess compliance with the GRC's course approval policy, the expectations of which are outlined below, all CRFs reviewed and approved by the GRC during AY 2009-2010 were examined. This includes both new courses and modifications to existing courses. Additionally, the explicitness of the student learning outcomes was assessed according to Explicitness criterion of the Rubric for Creating and Aligning Student Learning Outcomes. Summary results are reported below. Raw data are available in the two remaining worksheets of this workbook.

All CRFs were assessed for their compliance with the following expectations of the GRC's policy for Graduate Course Approval and the CRF Process:

1) All CRFs approved by vote of the faculty of the submitting Graduate Group or committee.
2) CRFs signed by faculty proposing course
3) CRFs signed by Dean for the submitting graduate group.
4) New courses should include a "WASC compliant syllabus" that provides the following:
    - course goals/objectives
    - student learning outcomes
    - contact information
    - class policies
    - academic integrity policy
    - disability services information
    - course schedule/assignments/resources
    - assessment/grading policy
    - a description of what the course contributes to the students overall education (its relationship to PLOs)
    - a description of how the course enriches rather than duplicates the existing curriculum (the course's relationship to existing courses)
5) A WASC compliant syllabus should also be included with the CRF submitted for modifications to an existing course.
6) If the course if conjoined with an undergraduate course, the graduate portion "must have clearly differentiated and unique performance criteria, requirements and goals."

Results:

New Courses:
GRC considered and approved a total of 9 new course requests during AY 2009-2010. Of these, 100% were signed by the submitting faculty member and appropriate Dean. Five of the nine CRF packages included the letter confirming the faculty vote and the approval of the graduate group chair. This information was not included for the remaining four.

Eight of nine CFRs included a syllabus (89%). A syllabus waiver was requested for the nineth based on the fact that the course is a special topics course and syllabi will vary with the topic considered.
Of the eight approved CFRS that included syllabi:

- 50% included course goals/objectives
- 100% included student learning outcomes
- 50% included contact information
- 25% included class policies
- 75% included academic integrity policy

63% included disability services information
63% included course schedule/assignments/resources
88% included assessment/grading policy
50% included a description of what the course contributes to the students overall education (its relationship to PLOs)
13% included a description of how the course enriches rather than duplicates the existing curriculum (the course's relationship to existing courses)

Related to the explicitness of the course learning outcomes, 50% were assessed as emerging, 13% as emerging/developed, and 38% as developed.
The number of emerging learning outcomes maybe due in part to the template syllabus available to faculty that did not provide an appropriate set of model outcomes.
This templated is being updated. No new courses were conjoined with an undergraduate course.

Modified Existing Courses

GRC considered and approved a total of three CRFS addressing modifications to existing courses. Of these 100% were signed by the submitting faculty member and appropriate Dean.
Two of three included the letter confirming the faculty vote and approval of the graduate group chair. This letter was not included in the remainder.
100% of the CFRS included a syllabus. Of these three syllabi:

100% included course goals/objectives
100% included student learning outcomes
33% included contact information
67% included class policies
67% included academic integrity policy
33% included disability services information
67% included course schedule/assignments/resources
100% included assessment/grading policy
33% included a description of what the course contributes to the students overall education (its relationship to PLOs)
0% included a description of how the course enriches rather than duplicates the existing curriculum (the course's relationship to existing courses)

Related to the explicitness of the course learning outcomes 33% were assessed as emerging, 66% as developed.
The single conjoined course included a description of the graduate level performance criteria, requirements and goals.

Summary

In terms of laying a foundation in support of a culture of assessment and in keeping with policy, the vast majority of approved course requests included syllabi with a description of the course goals and, with one exception, all syllabi included student learning outcomes.
The explicitness of these outcomes, as assessed against the Explicitness criterion of the Rubric for Creating and Aligning Student Learning Outcomes, was approximately evenly divided between emerging and developed with developed indicating that most SLOs are measurable, stating with some specificity what the student will be able to do in terms of relevant skills and knowledge.
The number of emerging learning outcomes maybe due in part to the template syllabus available to faculty that did not provide an appropriate set of model outcomes.
This templated is being updated.

Two thirds of syllabi, however, failed to provide information to help students situate course goals and outcomes within the larger learning purposes of their graduate degree program, with less than a third providing information contextualizing the course with respect to PLOs.
This result also calls into question the degree to which faculty are aware of the need to align course learning outcomes with program curriculum.
Attention to other expected attributes of a "WASC compliant syllabus" varied greatly.
In general, many syllabi did not address one or more of these additional criteria all of which are intended to help make course expectations explicit and at least one of which is legally required (disability services information).