

**ASSESSING STUDENT LEARNING IN A GRADUATE ACCOUNTING
PROGRAM : A CASE STUDY AT AN ACCREDITED
LIBERAL ARTS INSTITUTION**

Gregory B. Merrill*

*Saint Mary's College of California
Moraga, CA 94575, USA
gbm1@stmarys-ca.edu*

and

Sankaran Venkateswar

*Saint Mary's College of California
Moraga, CA 94575, USA
sv6@stmarys-ca.edu*

Abstract

The following paper documents the assessment processes and procedures, used to assess the learning goals and objectives of a graduate accounting program, at a leading liberal arts institution in the United States, that is accredited by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB International). The paper concludes by presenting the results of the assessment and actions taken by the faculty, to address the assessment results. The paper may be used as a template, to assess similar graduate business programs.

Keywords: *Assessment, Masters in Accounting Program and Assessment Rubrics.*

JEL Code : *M41 and D83*

Paper Received : *09-01-2020* ***Revised :*** *03-02-2020* ***Accepted :*** *21-05-2020*

*** Corresponding Author**

1. Introduction

The hybrid and full-time M.S. in Accounting Program was launched at Saint Mary's College of California in 2013 and 2015 respectively, to comply with the 150-hour requirement for licensure as Certified Public Accountant in California, by the California State Board of Accountancy. Both versions of the program are taught by the same faculty and

cover the same set of courses. They only differ in how they are delivered to the students. The hybrid version includes an online synchronous component. The program satisfies the 20 hours of accounting subjects and 10 hours of ethics subjects requirement for CPA licensure in California. The M.S. in Accounting Program requires a graduate to successfully complete the following ten courses:

1. ACCTG 202: Corporate Financial Reporting
2. ACCTG 203: Advanced Managerial Accounting
3. ACCTG 204: Governmental and Non-profit Accounting
4. ACCTG 205: International Accounting
5. ACCTG 206: Advanced Auditing and Forensic Accounting
6. ACCTG 207: Federal Income Taxation of Individuals, Estates, Gifts, and Trusts
7. ACCTG 208: Advanced Legal Environment of Business
8. ACCTG 209: Federal Income Taxation of Business Entities and Ethical Issues
9. ACCTG 210: Financial Statement Analysis and Accounting Valuation
10. ACCTG 211: Accounting Professional Ethics and Responsibilities

2. Objectives of the Study

The School of Economics and Business Administration, at the Saint Mary's College of California, is accredited by the Association of Collegiate Schools of Business International (AACSB). The AACSB International accredits leading business schools after a rigorous accreditation process and re-affirms the accreditation every five years. One of the important criteria in the accreditation process is Assurance of Learning. The following paper summarizes the Assurance of Learning in the Graduate Accounting Program, for the period 2013-18. It begins with mapping and alignment of the learning goals and objectives, to the mission statement of the School of Economics and Business Administration and Saint Mary's College. It is followed by the assessment

schedule, for various learning goals, during the 2013-18 assessment period, the scoring rubrics used for assessing student learning, assessment results for the various learning goals and closing with the loop recommendation and actions, stemming from the assessment results.

3. Mission and Learning Goals

The Chart in **Figure-1** maps the Assurance of Learning for the Graduates Accounting Program and the Chart in **Figure-2** shows the alignment of the learning goals and objectives with the mission statement of Saint Mary's College and the School of Economics and Business Administration. **Table-1** shows the Assessment Schedule, for the various learning goals and associated objectives, for the period 2013-18.

4. Learning Goals, Assessment Rubrics, and Results

The assessment results and closing with the loop recommendations and actions for the four learning goals, are summarized below.

4.1 Learning Goal -1

Graduates will be critical thinkers and will have an in-depth understanding of accounting principles, theories, and concepts

This learning goal and associated objectives were assessed, in all functional areas of accounting, taught in the graduate accounting program and included in ACCTG 202, 203, 204, 206, 207, and 209. **Table-2** shows the scoring rubric, used to assess student learning, towards this goal. **Table-3** summarizes the assessment results for this learning goal. The pass rates for the FAR, REG, and AUD sections of the CPA exam were used as the benchmark level, for all associated objectives under this learning goal. It should be noted that the assessment results, for the full-time cohort, are mostly higher than the hybrid cohort. One possible explanation for the difference could be the fact that all students in the full-time cohort are recent accounting graduates while many students, in the hybrid cohort, are non-traditional students, who have either changed their career to accounting or may have graduated with an accounting degree many years ago. The assessment results, for Objectives 2-5, exceeded expectations for this learning and hence no further action was necessary at this time. The assessment for the Objective 1, for hybrid cohort, was below expectations and the faculty will discuss an action plan during its next scheduled meeting.

4.2 Learning Goal -2

Graduates will understand professional responsibilities and ethics

This learning goal and its associated objective were assessed in ACCTG 211. **Table-4** shows the scoring rubric, used to assess student learning, towards this goal. **Table-5** summarizes the assessment results for this learning goal. The assessment results for this learning goal, dropped significantly below expectations. The course, used to assess this learning goal was taught by adjunct faculty, who were not licensed CPAs and therefore, they were not well versed in the specialized code of ethical conduct for CPAs. The assessment instrument contains questions specific to the code of ethical conduct for CPAs. As a result, the instructors have now been given clear instructions and guidelines on the material, that should be covered in the course and asked to ensure that they are aligned with the material tested in the CPA exam. The results will be assessed at a later date to determine the effectiveness of this action.

4.3 Learning Goal -3

Graduates will be effective communicators

This learning goal and its two associated objectives were assessed in ACCTG 210. **Table 6** shows the scoring rubric, used to assess student learning, towards this goal. **Table-7** summarizes the assessment results for this learning goal. The results dropped below the desired benchmark level of 80%, in the 2015-17 assessment period. This issue was brought up during the most recent Accounting Advisory Board Meeting, in September 2017 and it was recommended that student mock interviews be taped, to provide feedback on oral communication skills. This recommendation will be implemented in the 2018-19 academic year and results will be analyzed at a later date.

4.4 Learning Goal -4

Graduates will demonstrate the knowledge of international context of accounting

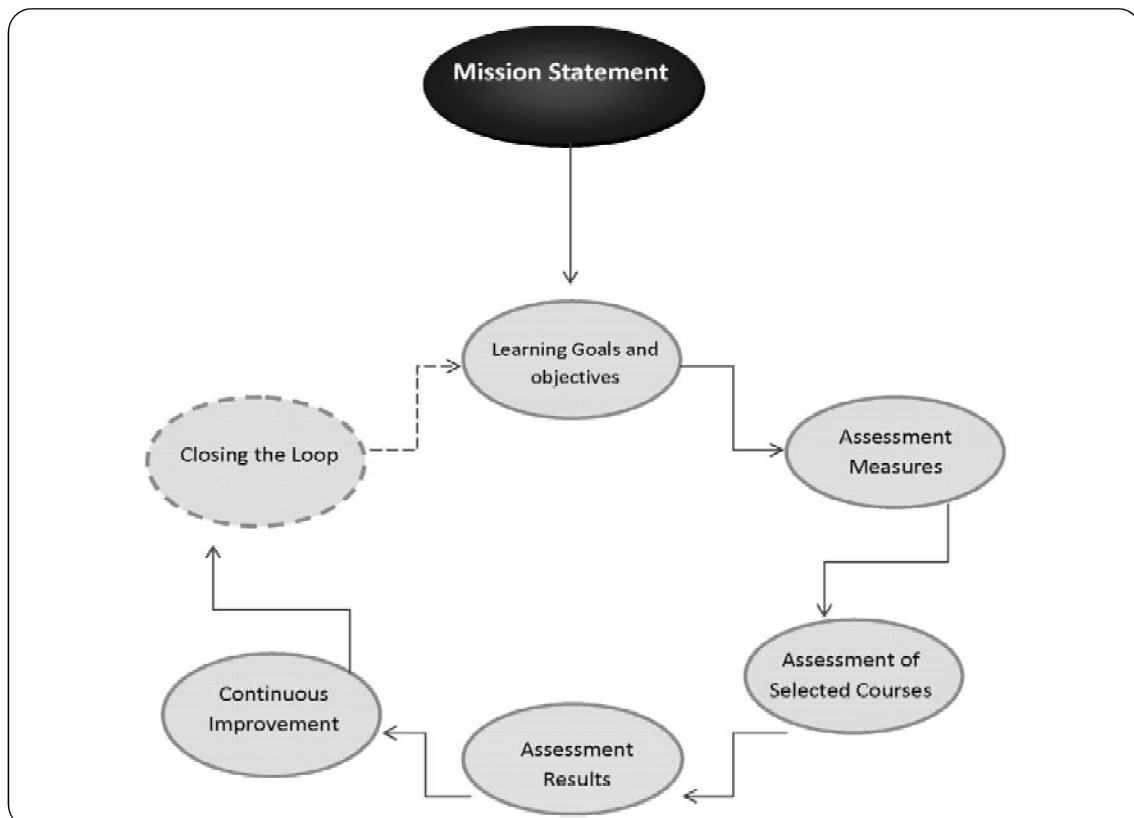
This learning goal and its associated objective were assessed in ACCTG 205. Table 8 shows the scoring rubric, used to assess student learning, towards this goal. Table 9 summarizes the assessment results for this learning goal. The assessment results were strong in 2013-15 but declined in 2015-17 for the hybrid cohort. One reason could be that the text book, used for the course, did not have the latest international accounting standards. The assessment instrument contained quizzes from the IFRS website and included the most recent international accounting standards. There were only two international accounting textbooks in the market and the one, that was being used in the course, was last published in 2015 and did not contain the latest updates to international accounting standards. As a result, the students,

in the 2017-18 academic year, are now required to be familiar with the latest international accounting standards, by visiting the IFRS website, for the latest updates. The results will be assessed at a later date, to determine the effectiveness of this action.

5. Conclusion

In sum, the assessment results, for most goals, had exceeded expectations. The results, for the full-time version of the program, outperformed the hybrid version of the program. The results, for Goal 2, dropped significantly below expectations and implementing appropriate change, in the content of the ethics course, is in progress and will assess the ensuing results at a later date, to study the effect of the change in the content.

Figure-1: Mapping Assurance of Learning



Source : Drawn by authors

Figure 2: Saint Mary's College of California Mission Statement

To probe deeply the mystery of existence by cultivating the ways of knowing and the arts of thinking.

To affirm and foster the Christian understanding of the human person which animates the educational mission of the Catholic Church.

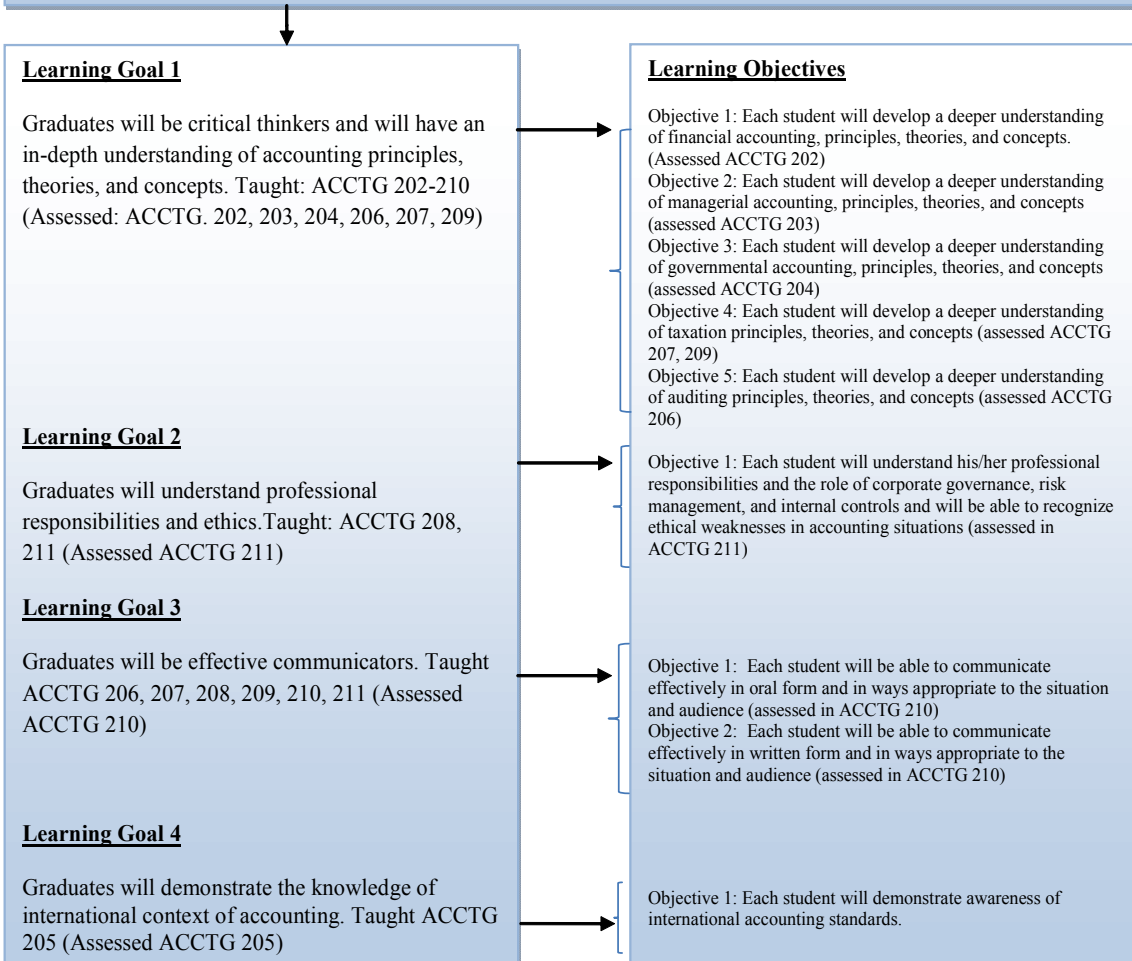
To create a student-centered educational community whose members support one another with mutual understanding and respect.
<http://www.stmarys-ca.edu/about-smc/our-mission>

School of Economics and Business Administration Mission Statement

Built upon the Lasallian, Catholic and Liberal Arts traditions of Saint Mary's College, the School of Economics and Business Administration strives to develop business and community leaders with global and responsible perspectives.

We prepare our graduates to be professionally skilled, culturally aware, socially responsible and ethically principled.

As teachers, scholars and mentors, we offer students a rigorous, innovative and diverse learning experience by leveraging on our practice-relevant, pedagogical and discipline-based research.
<http://www.stmarys-ca.edu/school-of-economics-and-business-administration/about-us/mission-vision>



Source : Framed by Authors

Table-1: Assessment Schedule: 2013 – 2018

Goals and Courses Assessed	2013-15	2015-17
<u>Learning Goal-1</u>		
ACCTG 202		X
ACCTG 203		X
ACCTG 204		X
ACCTG 206		X
ACCTG 207		X
ACCTG 209		X
<u>Learning Goal-2</u>		
ACCTG 211	X	X
<u>Learning Goal-3</u>		
ACCTG 210	X	X
<u>Learning Goal-4</u>		
ACCTG 205	X	X

Source : Computed by Authors

Table-2: Learning Goal-1

Does not meet	Meets	Exceeds
1	2	3
Unable to apply appropriate accounting principles and standards in a given situation	Able to identify the appropriate accounting principle or standards. But, unable to fully implement the accounting principle or standards to a given situation	Clearly identifies and applies the appropriate accounting principles and standards to a given business situation.

Source : Framed by Authors

Table-3: Assessment Results: Learning Goal-1

COURSES	2013-15 Hybrid	2015-17 Hybrid	2015-17 Full-time
Objective 1 ACCTG 202	N.A.	45.00%	67.00%
Objective 2 ACCTG 203	N.A.	78.20% Meets/Exceeds	83.30% Meets/Exceeds
Objective 3 ACCTG 204	N.A.	78.20% Meets/Exceeds	83.30% Meets/Exceeds
Objective 4 ACCTG 207&209	N.A.	82.90% Meets/Exceeds	87.60% Meets/Exceeds
Objective 5 ACCTG 206	N.A.	100.00% Meets/Exceeds	94.10% Meets/Exceeds

N.A – Not Assessed

Source : Computed by Authors

Table-4: Learning Goal-2

Does not meet	Meets	Exceeds
1	2	3
Approach to the issue is in egocentric or socio-centric terms. Does not relate issues to other contexts (cultural, political, historical, etc.) or stakeholders. Analysis is grounded in absolutes, with little acknowledgment of own biases. Does not recognize context or surface assumptions and underlying ethical implications, or does so superficially.	Presents and explores relevant ethical concepts and their implications, although in a limited way. Analysis includes identification of significant facts relevant to an ethical question.	Analysis evidences student recognition of complexity (understanding that complex ethical questions do not have a definitive answer and require reasoned judgment) and is supported by application of appropriate ethical concepts and principles to the underlying facts and evidences a fair consideration of those facts. Identifies influence of context and questions assumptions, addressing ethical dimensions and effects on stakeholders.

Source : Framed by Authors

Table-5: Assessment Results: Learning Goal -2

COURSES	2013-15 Hybrid	2015-17 Hybrid	2015-17 Full-time
ACCTG 211	30.20% Meets/Exceeds	3.00% Meets/Exceeds	16.70% Meets/Exceeds

Source : Computed by Authors

Table-6: Learning Goal-3

Does not meet	Meets	Exceeds
1	2	3
In many places, language obscures meaning.	In general, language does not interfere with communication.	Language clearly and effectively communicates ideas. May at times be nuanced and eloquent.
Grammar, syntax, or other errors are distracting or repeated. Little evidence of proofreading. Work is unfocused and poorly organized; lacks logical connection ideas. Format is absent, inconsistent or distracting. Few sources are cited or used correctly.	Errors are not distracting or frequent, although there may be some problems with more difficult aspects of style and voice. Basic organization is apparent; transitions connect ideas, although they may be mechanical issues. Format is appropriate although at times inconsistent. Most sources are cited and used correctly.	Errors are minimal. Style is appropriate for audience. Organization is clear; transitions between ideas enhance presentation. Consistent use of appropriate format. Few problems with other components of presentation. All sources are cited and used correctly

Source : Framed by Authors

Table-7: Assessment Results: Learning Goal-3

COURSES	2013-15 Hybrid	2015-17 Hybrid	2015-17 Full-time
ACCTG 210 Objective 1	100.00% Meets/Exceeds	66.60% Meets/Exceeds	84.40% Meets/Exceeds
Objective 2	97.75% Meets/Exceeds	62.90% Meets/Exceeds	66.60% Meets/Exceeds

Source : Computed by Authors

Table-8: Learning Goal-4

Does not meet	Meets	Exceeds
1	2	3
Unable to identify an international accounting issue and its appropriate treatment using IFRS.	Able to identify a significant number of international accounting issues and their appropriate treatment using IFRS.	Able to identify the vast majority of international accounting issues and their appropriate treatment using IFRS.

Source : Framed by Authors

Table-9: Assessment Results: Learning Goal-4

COURSES	2013-15 Hybrid	2015-17 Hybrid	2015-17 Full-time
ACCTG 205	100% Meets/Exceeds	58.60% Meets/Exceeds	100.00% Meets/Exceeds

Source : Computed by Authors