Appendix F
A Plan for Simplifying Assessment Across the University:
A Joint Project of the Offices of Institutional Research and Academic Assessment

As a next step in the decade-long commitment to the assessment of student learning, the University is in the process of developing a plan that would simplify and standardize assessment at the program, college and University levels. The following briefly outlines the design for a new system that is currently being rolled out, with interested departments/programs taking the lead in testing and refining the new system during 2010/11.

Every degree-conferring academic program at Cal State Northridge has an assessment plan which identifies student learning outcomes, assessed cyclically using a variety of instruments and rubrics. The joint project has identified two challenges facing current assessment activity and proposes a system and a plan which would respond to these, initially with the first challenge.

The need for technological support to simplify program assessment

**Challenge #1.** Currently, much of the assessment work done at the department/program level is done using hard-copy assignments that are disposed of after each assessment exercise. In an effort to use technology to support this process across the University and to make it longitudinal, we are developing a centrally-maintained electronic system that would store departments’ assessment materials. Such a system is likely to require some changes in existing procedures and the project has begun to identify partners at the program level to help test and refine the new system as it is developed over the next eighteen months.

As currently conceptualized, the electronic system will serve as a repository for assignments prepared by students in the initial and final courses of their majors – that is, the degree programs’ gateway and capstone courses. These “signature assignments” will be integral to the coursework and submitted for a grade. However, the assignments themselves or the scores students receive on them will be deposited in an electronic repository for use in subsequent assessment work.
The benefit of technological support to simplify college-level assessment

Challenge #2. Annual Program Assessment Reports have shown that many academic departments/programs specify similar goals and student learning outcomes. But because similar SLOs are assessed using a variety of instruments, we have been unable to develop a clear picture of our students’ strengths and opportunities for growth. The lack of uniformity across program assessment became the impetus for the development of University Learning Outcomes.

The 2007-2008 College Assessment Reports show that some colleges (Health and Human Development, Humanities and Social and Behavioral Sciences) are moving in the direction of assessment of college student learning competencies. Establishing an electronic mechanism to support college assessment would assist these efforts.

The Immediate Plan: Simplifying Program Assessment

The system will function differently for assignments that are text- or image-based (e.g., essays) and those that are quantitative in nature (e.g., quizzes or problems to which there are right and wrong answers). Students will submit the first with the aid of drop boxes while instructors will submit summary scores in the case of the second. Once the textual assignments are stored in a specially-created central database, the following should be feasible:

- assignments can be combined in different ways (e.g., at the course or department level);
- random samples can be selected for assessment purposes;
- rubrics developed by departments/programs can be used to assign summary scores to sampled assignments;
- the rubric scores can be summarized and analyzed in different ways.

The electronic system also will include similar functionality for combining and analyzing quantitative summary scores.

During the two-year pilot period, interested departments, drawn from most Colleges, will take the lead in testing and refining the new system as it is developed. Each participant will be committed to
doing the following:

**Spring 2010:** Develop implementation plans for 2010-11. This will involve the following:
   a. identify gateway and capstone course(s)
   b. identify appropriate signature assignments for each, perhaps focusing on a single SLO
   c. develop an initial assessment mechanism (e.g., rubric)

During this initial planning period, participants will meet periodically to discuss their emerging plans.

**Fall 2010:** Students submit signature assignments as they are prepared, probably with the aid of Moodle-based drop boxes that will be part of the new system. Instructors will submit quantitative summary scores at the end of the semester.

**Spring 2011:** Pilot participants select samples of student work from the repository and assess them using the mechanisms developed in Spring 2010.

As departments begin to test the electronic repository during 2010-11, refinements and changes will be made as needed.

**The Longer Range Plan: Simplifying Assessment Across Colleges**

Once the new electronic system is firmly in place at the department/program level, we may pilot its use at the college level. Such a pilot might focus on a small set of College Competencies, perhaps including written communication and critical thinking. These might be assessed using the gateway and capstone courses (or their equivalent) already in place, along with embedded signature assignments. Common assessment tools, such as rubrics, likely would have to be developed for this new venture.