

# MEMORANDUM

APRIL 19, 2021

---

**TO:** GHEE TAN, DIRECTOR OF THE PHD PHARMACEUTICAL SCIENCE PROGRAM  
CAROLYN MA, DEAN OF THE COLLEGE OF PHARMACY  
KRIS RONEY, VICE CHANCELLOR FOR ACADEMIC AFFAIRS  
BONNIE IRWIN, CHANCELLOR

**FROM:** SERI JUANGPAINITH, ACCREDITATION LIAISON OFFICER  
*Seri Juangpainith*

**SUBJECT:** REVIEW OF THE 2020-2021 PHD PHARMACEUTICAL SCIENCE PROGRAM SELF STUDY

**CC:** ACADEMIC PROGRAM REVIEW ADVISORY COMMITTEE

---

This memorandum constitutes the evaluation of the document submitted April 19, 2021 as evidence of program rigor, integrity, and quality of instruction and operations in the PhD Pharmaceutical Sciences Program in the College of Pharmacy

This memo is to simply summarize WSCUC compliance issues, namely assessment and continual improvement. Because the PharmD Program is externally accredited by the Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education (ACPE), which requires detailed and rigorous assessment, this program is exempt from this review per WSCUC policies on program review: "Universities and colleges are encouraged to coordinate the specialized program accreditation process (e.g., ABET, NCATE, AACSB, etc.) with the institutional program review process to avoid duplication of labor. This is sometimes accomplished by substituting the specialized accreditation review for an institution's internal program review process" ([WSCUC Program Resource Guide](#), 2013 Handbook of Accreditation Update, p. 7).

Details of the College's current accreditation status is posted on its [Accreditation and Program Disclosure webpage](#).

## I. Assessment

The self-study opens with Program Outcomes and a "Curriculum Matrix" (pp. 5-6, 8). While this represents a sincere attempt to institutionalize assessment, the wording of the outcomes are problematic as is the reliance on letter grades for determining successful "completion" of student learning objectives. This may explain why assessment remains underdeveloped for the program. For example, GPO 8 states: "Graduate students may participate in teaching (pedagogy) and apply their skills in the classroom consistent with disciplinary norms" (p. 5). Simply having student participate in a classroom activity does not ensure they learn, further develop, or master skills. the exact nature of which are unclear in this statement. In other words, the skill sets for each learning outcomes (GPO 1 through 8) are vaguely worded and may be at the root of a lack of proper descriptors for the sequencing of learning—beginning, practicing, and mastery.

Nevertheless, the Curriculum Matrix points to where the College can successfully target skills because the learning outcomes are matched to key assignments and very specific activities in the program. These "artifacts" and "behaviors" pose the best opportunity to gauge student skills if faculty know exactly what they need to look for in

terms of measuring student skill and can be “piggy-backed” onto what can be considered a good start in core competency assessments.

Data for graduate-level assessment—written communication, quantitative reasoning, and information literacy—were cited by the self-study (pp. 18 to 21) based on faculty evaluations of student dissertations. Data using the Chemistry Department’s rubric for posters was also submitted (pp. 22 to 23). These data sets only represent half of the students who have graduated from the program and it is not clear if the data itself was used other than for compliance with program review or core competency assessment. What appears to be missing is any attempt to close-the-loop based on this data. In other words, what is not clear from the self-study is whether the faculty actually use the data to improve instruction, curriculum, sequencing, or even the assessment process itself (i.e. revisiting PLOs, assessment tools, etc.).

This, along with the data from the survey (indirect assessment), represent a missed opportunity for faculty to engage in robust continual improvement of student learning.

## **II. Recommendations**

Based on the observations above, the ALO offers the following recommendations:

### **A. Rethink the wording of SLOs & develop college-specific assessments**

One of the challenges in approaching assessment is ensuring that learning outcome are measurable and provide actionable data. For this reason, it may be best to rethink the PLOs with the intent of drafting scaled descriptors representing I (Skill Introduced), P (Practiced) and D (Demonstrated Mastery). Once this is done, the descriptors are easily compiled into rubrics that can be used to evaluate key signature assignments.

Another avenue may be to take graduate-level rubrics and expand on the descriptors. This would allow the program to undertake core competency assessment as well as more meaningful assessments that are based on expectations of student work in their college. One suggestion is to take GPO6 which targets “scholarly communication,” and expand on the generic core competency rubric which only looks at: (1) argument/thesis; (2) organization & structure; (3) synthesis of content; and (4) prose.

### **B. Eliminate grading as a measurement of assessment**

Grades can never substitute for assessment data as it is unclear what an “A” or a “B” represents in terms of exact student skills or PLOs. This comes back to the first recommendation—rewording SLOs that then leads to measurements will easily solve this problem.

If exams are used in the curriculum (courses), then mapping types of questions or problems to specific SLOs would generate far more accurate and acceptable assessment data. For example, if GPO1 is reworded to state: “Graduate students will be able to identify and correctly explain key concepts in their specialized fields,” then test questions that ask students to do exactly this can be used to measure proficiency.

### **C. Plan for a sustainable, annual “culture” of assessment**

Lastly, as stated above in the overall evaluation, assessment has to be meaningful if it is to be of any use to the college. To simply drum up assessment data for accreditation or program review renders what is very valuable information a waste of time. Instead of looking at assessment as a matter of compliance, faculty should instead think of how such data can be used to improve student performance. And if meaningful assessment can also be undertaken early in a student’s career, it may help identify weaknesses that can be targeted for intervention prior to students entering the dissertation writing stage.