

FAIRNESS, ACCURACY, CONSISTENCY OF ASSESSMENTS

Fairness. We have carefully considered the fairness and potential for bias in the assessment system and have addressed these issues in a number of ways. First, having rubrics for the assessments ensures that all assessors use the same criteria for all candidates for each of the assessments. Second, no decisions about candidates' progress through the program are made on only one source of evidence. In several instances (e.g., admissions for all candidates), each candidate is assessed by more than one assessor. This ensures that, at these critical points in the program, decisions are made with input from people with multiple perspectives. In addition, the decisions at key transition points are made from the aggregation of data from several different assessments. A third important way in which we promote fairness in the assessment system is by sharing assessment criteria and relevant documents with students so they are aware of how they will be assessed.

For all programs, all relevant documents—including the key principles of the conceptual framework, institutional standards, assessment tasks, rubrics, and rating sheets—are included on course syllabi as well as the PSU online Exhibits site (Mahara) to which everyone has open and easy access.

Accuracy. We have sought to foster accuracy in the assessments through a number of efforts. First, all the assessments are designed so that they are aligned with the institutional mission, which in turn reflect our conceptual framework and supporting knowledge base. This ensures that ratings are focused on the criteria that are important to PSU as an institution. Second, faculty were involved in the development of the assessments, and instructors of different sections of courses using assessments discuss them and make needed adjustments. Third, each assessment was piloted by those who would ultimately be using the assessments and was then revised before it was fully implemented. In this process, aspects of the tasks assessed and the accompanying rubrics were refined so that they capture the knowledge, skills, and dispositions we are attempting to assess.

Consistency. We have also taken a number of steps to enhance the consistency of the assessment procedures and outcomes. One such step was to develop rubrics for assessments. Rubrics strengthen consistency in two ways. First, they ensure that all assessors use the same criteria to assess the performance of all students on the same task. This holds true not only across assessors and candidates assessed, but also across different semesters and years. Second, rubrics not only list criteria for assessment, they also provide guidance for assessors in determining their ratings. Having explanations for the different rating levels for each criterion for all assessment tasks increases the consistency of assessors' ratings.

We have also sought to enhance consistency, particularly in the advanced programs, by providing training for assessors on the use of the rubrics through retreats and meetings. The Deans of both Colleges and the COGS Assessment Coordinator as well as the OTC Director of Assessment has assisted in these efforts. The retreats have been devoted to reviewing the rubrics and rating sheets, discussing the sources of information used to make the ratings decisions, making suggestions for ways to collect the needed information, and addressing any questions or concerns.