Featured School:
Assurance of Learning Center (AoL)
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Asian Institute of Management Assurance of Learning Center

The Asian Institute of Management (AIM) has endorsed the importance of producing socially responsible entrepreneurial leaders and managers, clearly conveying this objective in not only its mission statement, but also through initiatives such as the creation of an Assurance of Learning Center (AoL). AIM’s strong passion for implementing assessment processes throughout its programs has contributed to its solid reputation among management education institutions for its dedication in striving “to achieve and maintain an environment of excellence in all our business education programs.”

During AIM’s initial accreditation process with AACSB (achieved in 2004), the development of a comprehensive AoL program was determined to be essential in meeting the assessment-related AACSB standards. The system that was created presents multiple occasions for measurement, and is highly compatible with the institution’s focus on the case method as the primary mode of learning in all its programs. According to Dr. Ricardo Lim, Associate Dean for the Graduate School of Business, it also proved superior to the existing system of student, class, and teacher questionnaires, and other similar assessment methods.

AoL Goals and Objectives

The program-level goals and objectives on which the AoL Center focuses on are interdependent and related to AIM’s Mission as well as each courses’ goals and objectives. Four criteria guide the Center’s pursuit of excellence:

- Clarity and alignment of the program's target market and value proposition with AIM's mission.
- Alignment of learning goals and objectives with the program goals. The program goals highlight the Institution's vision and mission.
- Promote continuous improvement through the development and implementation of an outcomes assessment process specifying where, how, and when the program's learning goals and objectives will be assessed.
- Develop and enhance students in the business programs to develop attributes such as skill building, accountability, and networking.

As a complement to its assessment efforts, AIM is currently developing an “E-Learning Portal.” The aim of the portal is to bring transparency about learning goals to the faculty, students, and community. The portal will enable students to see what outcomes are expected and what will be measured, while obliging faculty to commit to specific learning outcomes. Dr. Lim describes this portal as a work in progress that over time will include more definitions and become more comprehensive. Nonetheless, as Dr. Lim states, many issues have been addressed or prevented by implementing a “keep it simple” philosophy, and
resisting the often natural tendency to tend towards lofty ideals that are not easily measured or to define too many learning goals and objectives for one program.

In carrying out AoL processes, several levels of individuals at AIM are involved: the institute level, the school level, the program level, the faculty level, and others (which include alumni, IT staff members, and those involved in recruitment, admissions, and placement.) As is stressed throughout the school’s AoL Brochure as well as by Dr. Lim, the most important factor in making AoL happen is striving to drive faculty members to commit to the specific learning outcomes of the program. This has necessitated a willingness to grant faculty time for training and assessment activities. It has also meant involving the IT department in establishing and maintaining an assessment database to facilitate broad communication and a shared understanding of objectives and processes.

**Assessment Processes**

An AoL Board and several AoL Committees, structured hierarchically, play a large role in the success of the assessment process. The smaller committees each represent larger faculty groups/departments, and together report to an overarching AoL Board. The Board is headed by a respected and influential senior professor, whom Lim likes to refer to as the “Drill Master.” The role of the board is to “light a fire” among the committee members and to constantly push AoL forward. According to Dr. Lim, at each program level, the faculty representatives on each committee in turn act as “evangelists” or “gentle persuaders” to the broader set of faculty members.

In addition to the Board and Committees, AIM’s alumni volunteers and hired outside specialists also assist with the assessment of learning goals and objectives. The group of alumni that volunteer in this endeavor is made up of a cadre of 50-60 individuals who have a passion for assessment and improvement of business education programs at AIM. They are often recruited through email blasts calling for alumni volunteers, or reach out on their own will. These groups are made up of business professionals who are familiar with what skills are needed from students and graduates to be successful in management positions. Dr. Lim explained that the program usually contracts eight volunteers at a time to focus on assessment of a particular learning objective. Over time, that group might rotate across different types of student evaluations: from reading student papers and reports and rating performance on a rubric, to observing student behavior patterns, public speaking skills, etc. in class. These volunteers provide briefings on the quality of the output they review. Hired functional specialists, e.g. financial specialists, are sometimes used to assess more technical output.

As mentioned earlier, the case analysis method plays a vital role in the learning structure of students at AIM, requiring students to analyze real-life solutions in class discussions, while learning important concepts and skills. Students evaluate large numbers of cases during the program to sharpen their
managerial skills. One such case experience, the Written Analysis of Case (WAC) serves as an important opportunity for direct assessment, and is an experience that Dr. Lim points out as one of the program’s most notable accomplishments. Through WAC, students address each case individually rather than using the traditional group or team approach to solving a case. Dr. Lim points out that this is beneficial for students who may be shy to voice their opinions working in a group; as well as constructive in evaluating how each student performs individually when he/she does not have the advantage of relying exclusively on the group’s ideas and efforts.

WAC is carried out by assigning students a business case to work on overnight, every other week. Students are given this case at 5 pm Friday, and must hand in their proposal by 8 am that Saturday. Students must write a 1,000 word response that assesses the problem and presents a proposed course of action from a general management’s point of view. The purpose is to sharpen the students’ communication skills, as well as train them to work under intense time pressure. Dr. Lim mentions that a future aim with WAC would be to compare performance ratings from a sample of proposals in 2013, for example, with a sample of those written in 2010 to see if any improvements in quality have been achieved.

A Work in Progress

As for the future of AIM’s Assurance of Learning program, Dr. Lim stresses it to be a constant work in progress. The AOL Board strives to consistently reinforce that the number and types of outputs that should be used in the school’s assessment processes are not expected to reach a state of finality. New requirements are predicted to constantly arise from the business world, and the program is focusing on constantly improving the communication of its goals and objectives in evaluating the learning of students, to promote high quality management education.

Dr. Lim notes that regular focus group discussions with the business community help the school to identify appropriate learning goals and effective course design, and that AIM plans more related efforts, particularly those that engage the employers who hire the school’s graduates. For example, recent discussions with human resources employers revealed a desire for graduates who are specialists or project managers, but can adapt easily from one project/ task to another; finding ways to measure this would be favorable.

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End Notes


