1. Identifying student learning outcomes

As unit plans, instructional programs, and support services are reviewed with respect to the College’s strategic planning goals, student learning outcomes are identified and addressed, the achievement of student learning outcomes is measured, and the results are assessed. Data on the results of activities designed to achieve measurable student learning outcomes are compiled, analyzed, and assessed using standard research methods.

For example,

Sociology 1301 (Introduction to Sociology) is a Core Curriculum course offered by the Department of Social Sciences through VCT as well as in the traditional classroom setting. The institutional effectiveness unit plan for Sociology 1301 for academic year 2005-2006 identifies Social Sciences as a program within the Division of Arts and Sciences. The unit plan document addresses that portion of the College Mission statement that deals with one of the purposes of the College, “To provide opportunities to increase intellectual capacities; to develop aesthetic awareness; to expand the dimensions of personal, social, ethical, and cultural development; and to develop civic responsibility and qualities essential to good citizenship.” It also links to the College’s Strategic Plan Goal A: “Del Mar College is a learning-centered institution that will provide high-quality educational opportunities in response to student and community needs,” and Objective 3: to “provide instructional and student support resources and services that enhance educational success opportunities for all students.”

In the unit plan, Sociology 1301 is linked to the appropriate student learning objectives identified in the department’s unit goals. In addition, as a part of the Core Curriculum, Sociology 1301 is linked to the component area of Social and Behavioral Sciences, and addresses the following five (1, 2, 3, 9, and 12) Exemplary Educational Objectives (EEOs) for that component area:

1. To employ the appropriate methods, technologies, and data that social and behavioral scientists use to investigate the human condition
2. To examine social institutions and processes across a range of historical periods, social structures, and cultures
3. To use and critique alternative explanatory systems or theories
9. To recognize and apply reasonable criteria for the acceptability of historical evidence and social research
12. To identify and understand differences and commonalities within diverse cultures

The unit plan also links to one of the Core Curriculum’s Intellectual Competencies (critical thinking) and two Perspectives: “Establish broad and multiple perspectives on the individual in relationship to the larger society and world in which he or she lives, and to understand the responsibilities of living in a culturally and ethnically diversified world,” and “Stimulate a capacity to discuss and reflect upon individual, political, economic, and social aspects of life in order to understand ways in which to be a responsible member of society.”

Assessment of student learning outcomes is specified in the unit plan—in this case, that at least 75 percent of students will score 70 percent or above on a core concepts exam given at the end of the semester. Specific planned activities describe how the assessment will be conducted, and a description of how the results of the assessment will be utilized is documented. In this case, the results of the student’s exams are examined and compared periodically (every two to three years) to measure and improve the effectiveness of the exam.

Like instructional programs, administrative support service programs also address the effectiveness of student services and assess how those services can be improved. The institutional effectiveness unit plan for Counseling Services for academic year 2005-2006 also links to a portion of the College’s Mission statement, “To provide student support services, including a continuing program of counseling and
Proposed assessment activities are documented: “Increase student and faculty exposure to the Virtual College of Texas through additional on-campus advertising via the student newspaper, flyers, seminars and invitational speaking engagements,” and assessment procedures are listed: “The VCT Coordinator will analyze the VCT enrollment data as provided on the VCT website.” The unit plan also documents how the assessment results will be utilized: “Findings will be used to corroborate the need to continue the College’s participation in the Virtual College of Texas.”

Every unit plan for an academic year is followed up with an assessment of that plan in the following year, with a description of how the planned activities were carried out, which assessment methods were used, the results of the assessment, and how the results of the assessment were utilized to improve student learning outcomes.

Other College-wide assessment activities regularly tie the goals and objectives identified in the unit planning and assessment process to improvement in College programs. For example, the Survey of Student Services Spring 2004 identified 11 of the 11 service areas that were measured over a five-year period as having improved in closing the gap between students’ level of importance and students’ level of agreement with the provided services. Each section of the SSS for Spring 2004 was evaluated individually. The goals set by the units were identified as they were reported in the Administrative and Educational Support Services Goals-April 2003-2004 or in the Institutional Effectiveness Unit Plans for 2003-2004. Results of the survey were calculated to rate students’ satisfaction with the services surveyed and then compared to the goals set by the units.

2. Assessing how outcomes are achieved

An example of assessing how outcomes are achieved is a grades comparison study that was conducted of students who attempted English 1301 and 1302 in the 13 semesters from Fall 2002 through Fall 2005. Of the 35 students who attempted English 1301 via VCT during that period, three went on to attempt English 1302 in a traditional classroom setting. Of those three, two earned a grade of A in English 1302, and one withdrew from the class. Additional analysis of the data will include overall comparisons between the grades in VCT and traditional on-campus classes, addressing mean course grade-point ratios, withdrawal rates, and course completion rates.

3. Evidence of improvement based on analysis of student learning outcomes achievement

As a result of program review, recent examples of program change have been made. For example, the 2003-2004 Unit Plan Assessment for English 1301 describes how instructors in English 1301 selected a sample of 82 student papers and evaluated each paper in a norming session. Then two instructors graded each paper, assigning a holistic grade and completing a “Grading Criteria for English 1301 Assessment” form to indicate each paper’s strengths and weaknesses. Using the results of the holistic scores and criteria sheets, the English 1301 Course Committee was able to identify teaching strategies that helped to reach its assessment goals and decide on specific changes in curriculum and pedagogy to implement in future semesters.

Assessment of Distance Learning Goals 2000
VCT Student Course Evaluation Survey Report Fall 2005
VCT Grades Comparison Report 2002-2005