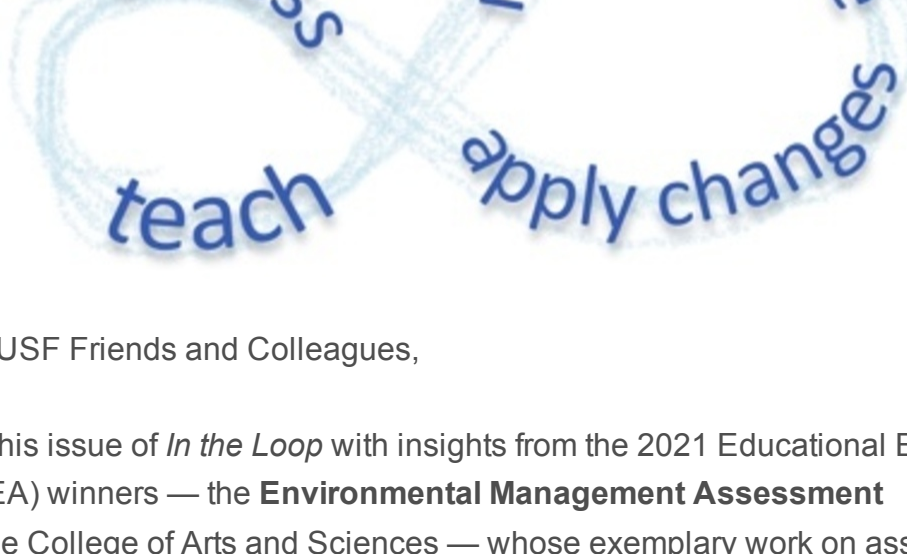


## In the Loop

Biannual Newsletter from the University Assessment Committee



Welcome USF Friends and Colleagues,

We open this issue of *In the Loop* with insights from the 2021 Educational Effectiveness Award (EEA) winners — the **Environmental Management Assessment Team** in the College of Arts and Sciences — whose exemplary work on assessment practices and on "closing the loop" led to winning the EEA. Congratulations!

We extend a huge thank you to all of our contributors! Described below are many examples of amazing assessment practices at USF. We hope you will find useful ideas, inspirations, and takeaways from them that can be adapted for assessment within your own department(s) and unit(s).

Many thanks,

The University Assessment Committee

### Assessment Insights from the 2021 Educational Effectiveness Award-Winning Team

by Allison Luengen, Tom MacDonald, April Randle, and Sindy Vela

The Masters of Science in Environmental Management (MSEM) program is one of the oldest environmental management programs in the country, created in 1978, partly to address the need for professionals to implement newly passed environmental legislation. The two-year program is aimed at students who work full-time, with courses offered on weekends and evenings. The degree requirements consist of three core classes, ten electives, and a capstone project. Students can also choose a concentration in one of four areas: ecology, water management, environmental health and hazards, or energy and climate change, or they can earn a certificate in geospatial analysis. Here, we write about the lessons learned from assessing our core courses, for which we received last year's Educational Effectiveness Award.

Our team assessed final exams from each of the three core courses. Across all three courses, 76 - 83 percent of students mastered the learning outcome either mostly or completely (Fig. 1). These results prompted a discussion about how to best support the 15 percent of students who were not mastering the learning outcome for one of the core classes (Fig. 1).

**Histograms of Scores in Core Classes**

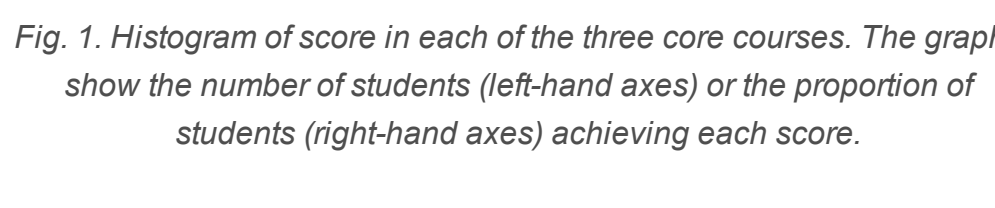


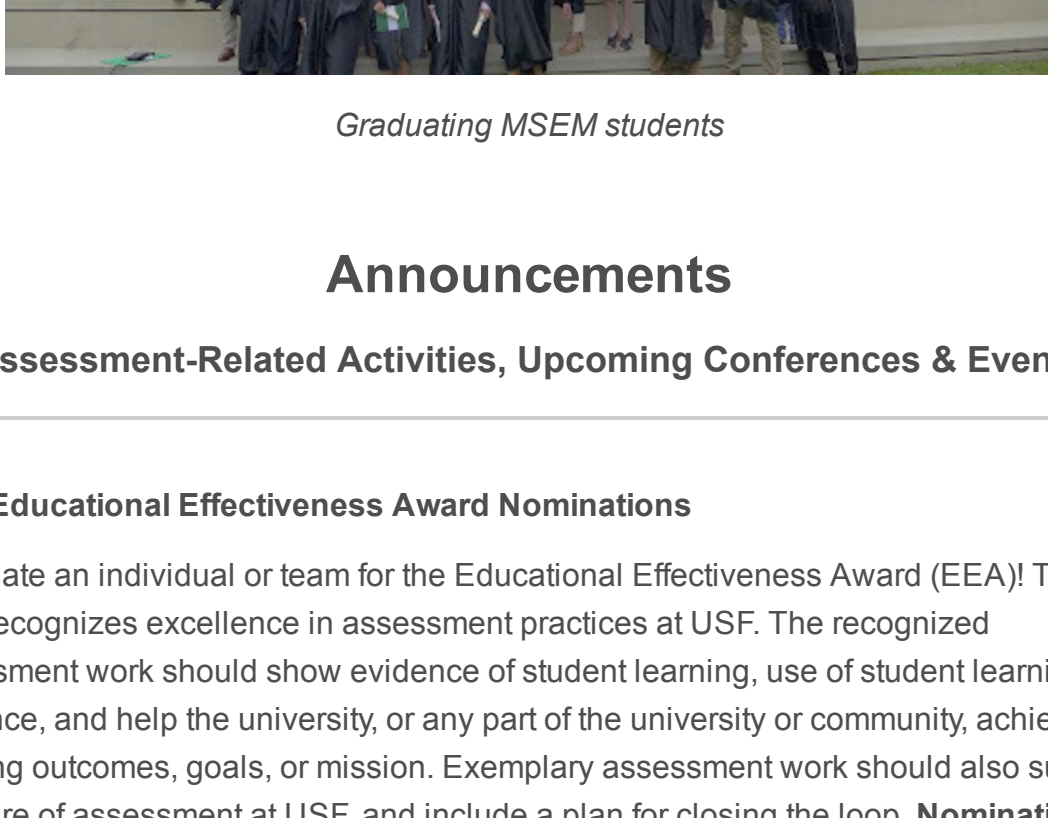
Fig. 1. Histogram of score in each of the three core courses. The graphs show the number of students (left-hand axes) or the proportion of students (right-hand axes) achieving each score.

Our assessment explored whether we could have identified these students during the admissions process. We looked for a relationship between the score given to the applicants during admissions and their performance in core courses. For all but the top applicants, there was no relationship between their grade in the core courses and their program admissions score. The results indicated that a stricter admissions process would not eliminate our struggling students.

We used a department retreat to explore options for supporting this group of students. Our assessment work had both established the extent of the issue and had already ruled out the strategy of raising the bar on admissions. Faculty turned their attention to how to strengthen the existing structure of our program. One option is to build more opportunities to master this learning outcome into existing courses. We continue to use our assessment efforts to explore options for improving learning outcomes in our program.

One of our successes in assessment has come from linking our assessment efforts to larger questions that we have about how our program is working. Our most obvious task in the recent assessment was to assess whether our capstone course was helping students to fulfill one of the program's learning outcomes: *choose and apply appropriate tools, techniques, and technologies to analyze environmental issues*. On a broader level, we had noticed a gradual change in the composition of the student body, to include more students who came straight from their undergraduate degree and more students who lacked a science background. Ongoing questions in our program have centered on whether we should be admitting students without professional backgrounds in the field and whether additional required courses would help support these students. Thus, an additional goal from our assessment was to examine whether our current curriculum serves our students that are recent graduates as well as it serves our more experienced students, and to determine if there was a difference in success among these two groups of students.

We have continued building upon this assessment in our most recent examination of student performance in our Research Methods course. Our upcoming assessment in fall 2022 will add even more information by examining student elective course choices and how successful students have been in those courses and in the capstone project. Thus, we try to not only assess a particular program learning outcome, but we also try to use these assessments to incrementally enhance our ability to recruit and accept students likely to succeed in the program.



Graduating MSEM students

## Announcements

### Assessment-Related Activities, Upcoming Conferences & Events

#### 2022 Educational Effectiveness Award Nominations

Nominate an individual or team for the Educational Effectiveness Award (EEA)! The EEA recognizes excellence in assessment practices at USF. The recognized assessment work should show evidence of student learning, use of student learning evidence, and help the university, or any part of the university or community, achieve its learning outcomes, goals, or mission. Exemplary assessment work should also support a culture of assessment at USF, and include a plan for closing the loop. **Nominations are due March 7, 2022 by 5 p.m.**

[EEA Nomination »](#)

#### Addressing Bias and Racism in Assessment Series

The 6+ You Jesuit Foundation Initiative awarded the Anti-Bias in Assessment subgroup of the University Assessment Committee a mini-grant of \$2,500 to host a series of workshops and talks for faculty, staff, and students titled "Addressing Bias and Racism in Assessment." Sessions will be led by experts and facilitators from the university, and include topics such as bias and racism in grading, reviewing student and program learning outcomes, and identifying bias in assessment. Please be on the lookout for more information soon.

## Magis Methods

Faculty members in the Department of Communication Studies, Eve-Anne Doohan, Brandi Lawless, and Evelyn Y. Ho, recently published an article about program assessment in the journal *Communication Teacher* entitled ***Are students learning what we want them to learn? A communication program assessment.***

"Assessment in the Communication Studies Department has been a true department-wide effort with every faculty member involved. Each year we have an assessment committee that takes the lead on developing a rubric to assess the program learning outcome that we will be evaluating that year and training faculty on how to use it. All faculty then participate in the rating of work products. In this way, the work of assessment is distributed among faculty members and everyone contributes to the process." commented Doohan.

[Read the article »](#)

## Notes from the Field

### High Impact Practices in the School of Management

by Keith O. Hunter, PhD, MSCS, MPhil  
Associate Professor, School of Management

Within higher education circles, there has been great and understandable interest in what George D. Kuh referred to as High-impact Practices (HIPs). As applied across academia, this term typically refers to practices that enhance student engagement and achieve deep, integrative learning while driving higher persistence and rates of graduation (Kuh 2008). Long before the emergence of this particular nomenclature, the structures, processes, and experiences that define or contribute to HIPs have been in place to varying extents and in various forms throughout higher education. Moving forward adaptively within a changing world, colleges and universities are aptly motivated to design and utilize systematic approaches to the identification, support, and creation of practices that enhance student success. A useful **list of example practices and categories** provided by the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AACU) includes numerous approaches to experiential learning and programmatic support that are understood to deliver high educational benefits to students participating in them. Worthy of note is that these same practices are also correlated with enhanced educational results within student demographics that institutions of higher education have historically underserved.

In 2018, the School of Management (SOM) initiated its own internal effort to document, recognize and cultivate HIPs as part of our process of continuous improvement as well as our preparation for the next round of AACSB accreditation. The Dean's Office established a HIP Task Force composed of and co-chaired by a move staff and faculty members to establish SOM's own definition of high-impact, a more well-informed by the literature's assertion that "these practices take many different forms, depending on learner characteristics and on institutional priorities and contexts" (AACU 2018). Having identified high-impact practices to be School of Management activities, opportunities, and support (inside or outside the classroom) that are directly associated with student success, the task force moved forward to engage with SOM faculty and staff as a whole through sessions within two successive all-hands meetings. The task force facilitated awareness and reflection regarding HIP to foster important discussion and consideration of evidence associated with HIP. This effort was greeted with interest and enthusiasm, which was instrumental in the success to capture more detailed information regarding HIPs already being delivered at the SOM, utilizing a simple data collection tool rolled out at the second all-hands meeting in the sequence. The success of this effort was a result of strong engagement from the staff and faculty. In addition, the exercise highlighted its strengths and opportunities for greatest growth.

#### Sample SOM High Impact Practices, 2016-2020

|   | Engagement | Innovation | Impact |
|---|------------|------------|--------|
| <u>Undergraduate Community Engaged Learning (CEL).</u> All undergraduates are required to enroll in at least one CEL- designated course before graduating.  | x          |            | x      |
| <u>Innovate for Good Conference.</u> Held annually since 2017 (except 2020 due to COVID 19). Conference brings together leaders who have already acted on their passion to change the world.  | x          | x          | x      |
| <u>Ignatian Activities by Faculty.</u> Produced a total of 159 Ignatian-focused intellectual contributions: 92 presentations and 67 publications (eight of which were peer reviewed).   | x          |            |        |
| <u>MSEI New Venture Expositions.</u> Held three such expositions annually in August since 2018 showcasing MSEI student capstone projects. The 2020 expo was virtual. Key Expo objectives are to showcase the venture-launch related work in the program and to raise pre-seed funding. On average, the Expo attracts over 100 attendees annually, including MSEI company partners, funders, and founders from Silicon Valley. | x          | x          |        |
| <u>The Management Exercises.</u> Integrated the Management Exercises in the newly-redesigned MBA programs; offered as an elective in the BSM program; and offered at the Universidad of Loyola (Seville, Spain) in December 2019.   | x          | x          | x      |

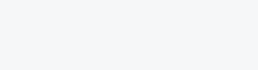
SOM expects to continue the practice of documentation and information sharing that started in 2018, and additional tools and resources for HIP development and collaboration are under consideration. Ultimately, it is intended for SOM to be a unit that is even more broadly engaged in a perpetual cycle of deployment, observation, and adaption with respect to HIP that goes hand-in-hand with the assurance of learning and the maximization of our potential to support student success.

## Submit to *In the Loop*

We want to feature your assessment experiences in the next edition of *In the Loop*! Please email your ideas to **Katie Hoffman**.

If you are looking for support with academic and co-curricular program reviews, the Office of Assessment and Accreditation Support (OAAAS) can help. Please email **Deborah Panter**, call **(415) 422-4588**, or visit the **OAAAS website** for more information.

Join the conversation **#USFCA**



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