

Adopted
Academic Planning Council
April 10, 1995

A PLAN FOR ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING IN THE COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURAL AND LIFE SCIENCES

The University of Wisconsin-Madison is mandated by the Board of Regents and by the University's major accrediting agency, the North Central Association, to develop an assessment plan for measuring and evaluating student learning outcomes in general education, in undergraduate majors, and in graduate education. The University has determined that assessment is best accomplished within the schools and colleges, so each school and college must develop an assessment plan. The plan outlined in this document was formulated by the CALS Instructional Improvement Council and was approved by CALS Academic Planning Council.

The objective of assessment is to measure the results of our academic programs, and to use the knowledge gained from these measurements to improve the quality of education we provide our students. Assessment is not an evaluation of individual students or faculty but an analysis of the learning results of an entire curriculum. Assessment is a regular part of the activity of the faculty as individual faculty consider the intellectual growth of their student advisees and as departments consider the effectiveness of their curriculum. Assessment is a necessary part of any truly dynamic and progressive educational program.

Thus assessment is in keeping with the College's long tradition of evaluating our programs to improve the quality of service to students. Each department and program in the College undertakes a periodic review of its programs, including self-studies, curriculum review, assessment of advising, review of graduate program results in preliminary examinations or dissertations, analysis of the results of final examinations in individual courses, evaluation of the curriculum integration in capstone coursework, and surveys of graduates. These ongoing reviews form the basis of the assessment strategy for that unit. In many cases, new measures will be implemented.

OVERALL APPROACH

CALS will employ a logical, three-stage assessment strategy focused at the departmental level:

1. Each department should clearly articulate the knowledge and skills it determines its students should acquire.
2. Each department should then develop mechanisms which measure the extent to which this knowledge and skill has been acquired by its students.
3. Using these assessments, each department should then monitor its program and make appropriate changes to improve student learning and the attainment of its educational goals.

Skills may be those acquired in a biological sciences laboratory, communication skills

acquired through practice in writing and editing, interpersonal skills that are enhanced in small group projects, and other types of skills appropriate for various majors. In a University setting, skills are an important means of applying, enhancing or extending knowledge in practical settings and are complementary to the process of acquisition of knowledge rather than an independent element of the curriculum.

The College of Letters and Sciences is developing an assessment plan for general education applicable to all schools and colleges at the University of Wisconsin-Madison based on the very successful previous work by the departments of Mathematics and English. The general education assessment procedures will address learning in communication and quantitative reasoning. The College of Agricultural and Life Sciences assessment plan incorporates, by reference, the General Education Assessment Plan developed by the College of Letters and Science. The College will review the results of the general education assessment and may, at a later date, develop its own general education assessment.

The Graduate School will be conducting assessment activities on behalf of all graduate programs at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, providing data to departments on time-to-degree, financing of graduate students and other data useful to analysis of graduate programs. The CALS Assessment Plan will incorporate, by reference, the assessment activities of the Graduate School, and the College will work with the Graduate School in assessment activities for graduate programs.

ASSESSMENT IN THE UNDERGRADUATE MAJOR

The nature of the undergraduate major in the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences varies according to departmental educational objectives and the nature of the discipline and its intellectual/skill content. Therefore, the exact nature of the assessment process will probably vary according to each unit doing the assessment. However, the following activities will be a part of all assessment plans:

1. The faculty in each department and program offering an undergraduate major will clearly articulate the goals of the educational program and the knowledge and skills students should acquire as a result of successful completion of the major.
2. Each department and program will develop mechanisms which measure the extent to which students have acquired the knowledge and skills deemed essential by the department. These mechanisms may include analysis of performance in capstone courses; surveys of alumni, graduate departments or employers; content analysis of examination performance in key courses; student portfolios; and general tests.
3. The faculty should use these measures, as appropriate, in making changes in the undergraduate program that will address deficiencies or generally improve undergraduate student attainment of skills and knowledge.

ASSESSMENT IN GRADUATE EDUCATION

Each CALS graduate program has particular objectives unique to the field of study which will dictate its assessment program. However, the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences adopts the following general procedures for assessment of graduate programs:

1. The faculty in each department and program offering graduate degrees will clearly articulate the goals of the educational program.
2. Each department and program will then develop mechanisms which measure the extent to which the goals of the program have been achieved. These measures include those provided by the Graduate School and others specific to the field of study.
3. The department or graduate program faculty will use these measures, as appropriate, in making changes in the graduate program that will address deficiencies or generally improve graduate student attainment of skills and knowledge.

IMPLEMENTATION OF ASSESSMENT PROGRAMS

By July 1, 1996, each department should develop its implementation plan including the goals of the program. By July 1, 1997, each department will choose at least one of the goals, specify the knowledge and skills students should acquire as a result of successful completion of that program goal, and develop and implement measure(s) to assess student achievement of that goal. By July 1, 1998, the department will: (a) choose at least one additional goal, specify the knowledge and skills appropriate to that goal and implement assessment measures; (b) continue with any annual assessment activity appropriate for the first goal. In each subsequent year the department will choose additional goals until the assessment is completed for all goals. The department should also review the experience with the assessment plan during the next scheduled review.