

UW-Madison School of Human Ecology Assessment Plan

(Prepared by Associate Dean, Joy Dohr, April 2003
and updated by Associate Dean, Wendy Way, September 2004)

Description and Overview.

In 2003-2004, The School of Human Ecology (SoHE) celebrated its 100-year history. The School's underlying mission is to advance understanding of complex relationships of humans and their environments in order to enhance the quality of people's lives. We do this through research, creative innovation, teaching, learning and outreach. Committed to an interdisciplinary approach to academic study and scholarship, the School's five departments offer baccalaureate degrees (B.S.) in eight majors: consumer science, retailing, interior design, textile and apparel design, family and consumer journalism, human development and family studies, human ecology, and family, consumer and community education. At the graduate level, the School provides master's and doctoral degrees in three program concentrations—consumer behavior and family economics, design studies, and human development and family studies. The School also collaborates with the School of Education and the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences in offering two joint graduate programs. In addition, the School has a long history of outreach and action research involving various public, private, for-profit, not-for-profit and professional communities.

The School's 2003 enrollment was 1076 students (982 undergraduates and 94 graduates). Students across majors enhance their classroom learning by participating in study abroad programs, service learning, and internships both in the State of Wisconsin as well as nationally and internationally.

In the fall of 2004, SoHE received a gift of \$8 million to be used toward construction of a new building. The building is expected to enhance instruction, as well as research and outreach capacity, in many ways.

Administrative Structure for Assessment.

In 1997, the School of Human Ecology formed an ad-hoc committee under the direction of Professor Wendy Way with support from the Office of Quality Improvement and the LEAD (Learning through Evaluation, Assessment and Dissemination) Center. This work was funded through a grant from the University Assessment Council. The task of the committee was to examine assessment practices in the School, establish a benchmark for future development, and recommend a plan for operation. The work of that committee and the principles established by the campus continue to guide the assessment activities and its development in the School. The School holds assessment to be helpful to departments, not punitive, to assist in improving the educational experience, to be an ongoing part of our academic culture, to have both formative and summative meaning, and to be performance-based at the departmental/major level.

Administratively, the School's Academic Planning Council (with input from the Graduate Program Council, Undergraduate Program Council and departmental committees) has responsibility for academic program assessment plans and directives. The APC sets the schedule for program reviews and hears the reports from those reviews prior to making recommendations. The APC also reviews and acts upon specific topics that impact programs, such as the School's recent plan for enrollment management controls, the Plan 2008, service learning, work and learning climate and other issues that impact educational experience.

Departments have the responsibility for preparing and conducting self studies, measuring student performance, deriving implications from assessment information for curricula, meeting accreditation requirements where applicable, evaluating courses and course access, and assessing other learning experiences such as internships and study abroad programs. Individual faculty and staff are also often involved in specific projects on teaching/learning and work with the Associate Dean related to planning and implementing other unique assessment measures and projects.

The Student Academic Affairs (SAA) office plays a central role in supporting assessment activities. SAA provides necessary statistics and information from queries. They distribute, collect and code alumni surveys, and counsel and assist departments with evaluations on a variety of issues. They guide Plan 2008 and evaluate student advising and services. They also keep statistics on graduation, retention, University and School scholarships and awards.

The Associate Dean of Academic Affairs is the administrator who coordinates assessment activities, oversees specific projects, consults with and advises faculty, staff and school committees and works with campus counterparts. The Associate Dean guides development and monitors activity at various levels. For example, the activity might be as specific as discussion with a professor on how she augments her own grading by requiring students to self-assess papers or projects, or as general as a request for a school committee to review and develop a revised assessment plan.

The School's system of assessment includes *external* and *internal* reviews and exercises. Three departments have programs with specialized accreditation. Each engages in external reviews or site visits every 5-10 years. In the case of Interior Design, the Foundation for Interior Design Education and Research (FIDER) publishes standards for student performance and competencies required in the field. Standards for the Family and Consumer Science teachers certification program are published by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI). The programs must demonstrate compliance with those standards to be accredited. One option in Consumer Science, Personal Finance, is also accredited. In addition, the School's auxiliary unit—the Pre-School—required accreditation and review.

In completing internal program review for other majors (those overseen by the university system's 10-year cycle or at the request of the Dean and the APC), the School also invites external review. The external reviewer examines the program's self study, completes a

site visit and provides a report. An executive committee appointed by the dean then analyzes the report and self-study. This committee develops a summary and provides recommendations to the School's APC which takes final action. Internally, a schedule has been developed for all program reviews.

A variety of other assessment strategies are used on a school-wide and department basis. In general these include both direct measures of teaching/learning and indirect measures, and involve undergraduate and graduate courses/programs. Assessment participants include undergraduate and graduate students, alumni, faculty and staff, advisors, professional practitioners, employers, and academic colleagues.

Overview of Current Practice.

As previously stated, a wide variety of methods are used for academic assessment purposes. Past efforts have created a climate and capacity for wanting, receiving and acting upon assessment information for enhanced academic learning.

The following methods and activities comprise the School's current practice:

Alumni Surveys

Every year the School sends an alumni survey to students who graduated the previous year. The instrument was designed by the ad hoc committee, reviewed by departments through faculty representatives, and is printed and mailed. Last year the School piloted a web-based version with a group of Consumer Science alumni (1-10 years after graduation as part of their program review). In addition, mailed versions went to other majors. The School collaborated with the Wisconsin Alumni Association (WAA) and UW Foundation in surveying alumni and plans to strengthen this working relationship in the future. Alumni surveys request information about skills and knowledge gained while in school, as well as ratings on application of learning to professional and personal lives. Each department/major has a page that requests information about achievement of core competencies as well as competencies specific to the respondents' major.

Advisory Boards

Some programs have advisory boards that meet with faculty and students once a year. This is in addition to the Dean's Board of Visitors that meets twice a year. As an indirect measure, faculty, staff and administrators seek comment on student performance criteria, curricular issues, and field-specific changes and developments.

Course/Teaching Evaluations

Course and teaching assessments are conducted every session (semester and summer) for every course in the School. On-line versions in three classes have been piloted, but results indicated that paper formats were more effective in eliciting responses, both in terms of numbers of returns and extensiveness of responses. While some campus units have been more successful with electronic versions of evaluations, we are still exploring its application.

Exit Interviews

Several programs in the School have used exit interviews of graduating seniors and graduate students. The practice is most often associated with capstone-type classes/seminars.

Focus Group Sessions

Periodically and across programs, a focus group format will be used to gain information from students and from employers/practicing professionals. Responses to specific discussion topics are then summarized and provided to committees and departments involved.

Graduate Program Assessment

Activities for the graduate program have included evaluating processes, as well as graduate student performance. The Associate Dean holds focus group sessions with graduate students once a year, plus departments use a variety of practices for rating student progress. For example, the HDFS program conducts a type of “merit” exercise for graduate students each year. A faculty committee reviews work submitted by the student and then provides comment and ratings. Students in the Design Studies area hold open exhibitions where faculty, students, alumni and others may comment on performance. All programs have planned public student presentations and either have or are creating a set of benchmarks to guide student progress. These represent both formative and summative evaluation of students and departments. Outcomes from such practices have contributed to the School’s assessment infrastructure, which includes a manual for faculty/office use.

Portfolios

Three programs in the School use direct measures of student performance through portfolios and exhibitions. These include the two design majors and the Family and Consumer Education teacher certification major. In the latter, the portfolio is developed and assessed in an electronic format.

Program Reviews

The School of Human Ecology APC approved a schedule of program reviews for undergraduate and graduate majors in 2001. All programs but two have been reviewed since 2002-03. Program reviews are scheduled for the remaining programs in 2005-06. Resources for completing these reviews have come from grants, school allocations, and departmental funds.

Evaluation of Special Projects to Enhance Instruction

Departments and programs in the School periodically have special projects that impact the teaching/learning experience. The School is currently completing such a project funded under a Teaching and Learning with Technology grant. The work grew from focus group and alumni survey responses that supported the tremendous need for computer-aided design technology in the Textile and

Apparel Design (TAD) major. Faculty and staff received a major gift of software, and additional funds for training, development and evaluation of the software.

Future Directions.

On the whole, the School's departments have had a sound assessment record for many years. Since 1997-98, SoHE has been working to refine the original plan developed from a School, department and program perspective. The coordination seems to be working and moving forward. Several gaps in the plan have been identified and addressed, and several additions have been added.

In 2002-03 the need to identify core competencies and performance critical for the Consumer Science and Retailing majors was discovered. With UAC grant support, an assistant was hired to work with department faculty to develop competencies, include them on the graduate follow-up survey, and test their use. This work has been completed, and surveys have been returned and coded. Results informed the recently completed Consumer Science program review and information for school wide strategic planning.

Plans are in place to further systemize the distribution, collection and coding of the graduate follow-up survey by collaborating more closely with the Wisconsin Alumni Association. Surveys will be sent to both graduate and undergraduate alumni, and the Associate Dean will complete analysis.

Last year, the Undergraduate Program Council and the Graduate Program Council developed suggestions for creating a more systematic feedback loop for using assessment information (other than program reviews, since the feedback for those are working well). One suggestion, a "Next Steps" seminar, was adapted from the Medical School, and was implemented in April of 2004. Approximately 30 faculty and staff attended to review assessment information available, learn how assessment information was being used to enhance instruction in the School, and generate ideas for future assessment. The plan is to make this event an annual activity.

Last year, plans were to complete a "Learning with Technology" assessment to ascertain faculty and staff technology needs as well as students' technology-related learning practices and needs. Resources did not permit collection of data as planned. However, an Emeritus faculty member has now been employed part time to undertake such a study. During the coming year, she will assess current uses of instructional technology in SoHE, desired uses among both students and faculty/staff, and possible future uses for enhancing academic achievement and program impact.