

**2004-05 Annual Report on Academic Program Assessment**  
**School of Human Ecology**  
**University of Wisconsin-Madison**  
(Submitted by Wendy L. Way, July 1, 2005)

*Background - Assessment in the School of Human Ecology.* 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 views assessment as an essential component of teaching, learning, and strategic planning that can be used to improve the educational enterprise and particularly, academic outcomes for students.

*Administration.* 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 initiatives designed to impact program quality, such as the School's recent plan for enrollment management controls, the Plan 2008, service learning, work and learning climate and other issues that affect 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 data about students and their progress in the School, and information related to other matters concerning student affairs and academic outcomes. SAA distributes, collects and codes alumni surveys, and counsels and assists departments with evaluations on a variety of issues. They guide Plan 2008 and evaluate student advising and services. They also keep summative statistics on graduation, retention, and 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 the Consumer Science major, Personal Finance, is registered with the Certified Financial Planner Board of Standards. In addition, the School's auxiliary unit—the Pre-School— participates required accreditation and review.

Internal program reviews for other majors (those handled solely through the university system's 10-year cycle or at the request of the Dean and the APC), also include an external review process. 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.* We believe the School's commitment to continuous improvement and active engagement in past assessment efforts have created a climate and capacity for wanting, receiving and acting upon assessment information to enhance 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 referenced earlier, reviewed by departments through faculty representatives, and is printed and mailed. Last year the School piloted a web-based version of the survey 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 face-to-face classes have been piloted, but results indicated that paper formats were more effective in eliciting responses in these types of classes, 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 in classes with traditional formats.

### 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 Human Development and Family Studies department 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 programs. 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, Interior Design and Textile and Apparel Design, and the Family and Consumer Education teacher certification major. In the latter, the portfolio is developed and assessed in an electronic format through a School of Education portal.

### Program Reviews

The School of Human Ecology APC approved a schedule of program reviews for undergraduate and graduate majors in 2001. All programs but three have been reviewed since 2002-03. Reviews for two programs, Consumer Science and Retailing are in process and one, Family and Consumer Education is scheduled to be held in 2005-06 in conjunction with a Department of Public Instruction on-site review of teacher certification programs. 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 major. Faculty and staff received a major gift of software and additional funds for training, development and evaluation of the software.

*Future Directions.* School of Human Ecology 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 made.

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. The final report of the findings was completed in February of 2005 and is informing the Consumer Science and Retailing

program reviews, which are on-going. The Department of Consumer Science also carried out an assessment of lifestyle characteristics of traditional and nontraditional students which may impact academic outcomes. This assessment was completed in May of 2005 and is also being used to inform the continuing reviews of the Consumer Science and Retailing program reviews.

Plans are in place to further systematize 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. While there is interest in continuing to distribute the alumni survey electronically, a concern is how to maintain an adequate database of e-mail addresses for ongoing use.

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 assessment part of a school-wide teaching and learning event annually.

In January of 2005, the mid-winter SoHE faculty/staff retreat focused on learning with technology, and specifically, how technology can be used to enhance teaching, learning, and assessment. Faculty and staff discussed current technology uses, explored possible future uses of technology for enhancing teaching and learning, and identified future school-wide and departmental technology needs. Plans are to draw on these ideas during the next phase of designing the new building for the School of Human Ecology, expected to be proposed for inclusion in the 2007-09 state budget bill.

One final assessment activity proposed for 2005-06 is a project to establish a school-wide process for assessing student achievement in SoHE undergraduate internship programs. SoHE alumni questionnaire feedback indicates that students rate internship programs as one of the most valuable of their learning experiences. However, such satisfaction data do not provide sufficient documentation of how internship programs contribute to achievement of specific academic expectations and outcomes. This project, if funded, will fill this information gap, and also provide an opportunity to devise assessment strategies appropriate for broader use in contextual learning situations (e.g., business and community), which may vary substantially from student to student and semester to semester.