



ACADEMIC ASSESSMENT PLAN 2003

A Plan for Assessment of Student Academic Achievement

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Prepared and Adopted by
The University Assessment Council
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UW-Madison University-wide Expectations for Student Learning A Preface to the UW-Madison 2003 Academic Assessment Plan

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This 2008 preface to the UW-Madison 2003 Academic Assessment Plan adopts institution-wide expectations for student learning, based on the language used for the Essential Learning Outcomes identified through the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), Liberal Education for America's Promise (LEAP) project <http://www.ls.wisc.edu/gened/LEAP/AACU-ELO.pdf>. These expectations serve as an overarching framework and provide UW-Madison with explicit institution-wide student learning outcomes.

The UW-Madison 2003 Academic Assessment Plan calls for every academic program, which includes general education to have an assessment plan and engage in assessment activities annually to evaluate student learning as measured against program goals. The plan focuses on individual academic units and distributes the ownership for assessment widely among the academic units. In so doing, the plan intentionally laid aside the specification of University-wide expectations for student learning.

Explicit university-wide expectations for student learning need to be articulated to provide a framework for describing and evaluating the quality of our learning environment. To that end, an "audit" was conducted (<http://apa.wisc.edu/degrees.html>) to catalogue expressed student learning goals from several existing UW-Madison documents. The audit provided a synthesis of learning outcomes already embraced by the university community. Further, the audit revealed that the expectation for learning described for UW-Madison students in various documents are consistent with the Essential Learning Outcomes.

UW-Madison University-wide Expectations for Student Learning

Students should prepare for the twenty-first century by gaining:

1. Knowledge of human cultures and the physical and natural worlds
 - through study in the sciences and mathematics, social sciences, humanities, histories, languages, and the arts
 - *focused* by engagement with big questions, both contemporary and enduring.
2. Intellectual and practical skills, including
 - inquiry and analysis, critical and creative thinking, written and oral communication, quantitative literacy, information literacy, technology literacy, teamwork and problem solving

- *practiced extensively*, across the curriculum, in the context of progressively more challenging problems, projects, and standard for performance.
3. Personal and social responsibility, including
 - civic knowledge and engagement (local and global), intercultural knowledge and competence, ethical reasoning and action, foundations and skills for lifelong learning
 - *anchored* through active involvement with diverse communities and real-world challenges.
 4. Integrative learning, including
 - synthesis and advanced accomplishment across general and specialized skills
 - *demonstrated* through the application of knowledge, skills, and responsibilities to new settings and complex problems.

Evidence that Students have met the Institution-wide Expectations for Student Learning

Establishing a framework for articulating university-level expectations for student learning is the first step. The next step is to construct a case of evidence to evaluate if students are achieving these learning expectations. To gather this evidence at the university-level, we began by asking:

1. Where do we look curricularly and programmatically?
2. Where in existing assessment activities, reports and plans do we find evidence?
3. Are there external validations or evidence that shows our students meet the expectations?
4. Where do gaps exist, curricularly and programmatically?, and
5. What strategies for improvement are needed to support ongoing review of progress to meeting these expectations for student learning at the university level?

As we move forward with these efforts to document evidence of meeting the expectations for student learning at the institutional level, periodic reports of progress will be shared across campus.

Taken together, a framework for describing and articulating explicit university-wide expectations for student learning and documenting evidence of our progress in meeting these broad learning expectations, will advance our efforts to evaluate the quality of the learning experiences and devise strategies for improvement.

UW-MADISON ACADEMIC ASSESSMENT PLAN 2003

A Plan for Assessment of Student Academic Achievement

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In September 2002, Provost Peter Spear asked the University Assessment Council (UAC) to revisit the university's existing assessment plan, the "Plan for Assessment of Student Achievement," which was adopted in 1995. The Council conducted a review and updated the plan to reflect current institutional practice and to describe future directions. This updated plan, a product of several months of deliberations, was adopted by the UAC on June 23, 2003.

The 2003 assessment plan describes the context for academic assessment at UW-Madison; describes the roles and responsibilities of faculty and unit staff for academic assessment; outlines the strata and levels within which assessment takes place on the UW-Madison campus; outlines some commonly accepted guiding principles; proposes operational guidelines; and illustrates typical uses of assessment results. Finally, the assessment plan describes and outlines future directions for the work of the UAC.

Roles and Responsibilities. Assessment of academic programs and student learning is a shared responsibility of faculty and staff who direct the programs, the school/college deans, the University Assessment Council, and the Office of the Provost. These organizational units work together to support assessment, to constrain duplication, to stimulate cooperation, to ensure that assessment activities are conducted at the most appropriate local level, and to facilitate the use of assessment to improve student learning. Program faculty exercise their authority by establishing learning goals, designing courses appropriate to achieving those goals, and assessing student achievement of those goals using methods appropriate to the discipline. Schools and colleges, through their deans, college-level curriculum committees and academic planning councils, provide leadership for their departments and programs, conduct school/college level assessments necessary for informed decision-making, and report to the provost regarding assessment activities. The University Assessment Council (UAC), which is comprised of faculty and staff representatives from across campus, is convened by and advisory to the provost. It is the coordinating resource for assessment-related efforts on campus, guides the implementation, review, and updating of the assessment plan, and connects those involved in academic assessment. The Office of the Provost and the UAC are partners in coordinating, guiding and supporting implementation of a broad range of assessment activities across these organizational levels.

Principles. Despite the complex structure of the university and the variety of disciplinary visions, a common set of assessment principles define the philosophy of academic assessment and serve as a touchstone for the diverse array of assessment activities on this campus:

- Many of the regular activities of academic life are evaluative; when approached from an analytical perspective, they are forms of assessment.

- Academic assessment supplements (rather than replaces) curricular, departmental, and other types of ongoing review for improvement.
- Academic assessment informs decision-making across several levels: institutional, school/college, department/program/unit, and course-level.
- Academic assessment is ongoing and periodic; it is used both as a procedure for maintaining program excellence as well as for answering new questions about students' educational experience as those questions arise.

Practices. Assessment of student performance in the major is the responsibility of the departments and units that offer academic programs. UW-Madison's academic programs have a wide array of educational objectives; a "one-plan-fits-all" assessment approach is inappropriate. However, program-specific assessment plans generally incorporate some common elements: identification of learning goals for academic programs and service courses; a timetable for periodic assessment of students' attainment of these learning goals; description of methods, which make use of existing academic milestones, processes, and resources as loci of assessment because such events and processes are embedded in the curricular experience and are valued and understood by faculty, staff, and students; an explicit assignment of responsibility for assessment activities to an individual or a faculty committee that considers academic and curricular decisions. Exemplary assessment strategies and practices and guidelines for the use of assessment information are outlined in the assessment plan.

The UAC Plan. The UAC identified directions for improvement to strengthen assessment practice. Near-term goals: (1) Redesign the format for the annual report that the school and college deans submit to the provost. An ideal report format would provide a predictable structure, sufficient flexibility to accommodate the differences in assessment practice across campus, and a mechanism for collection and dissemination of assessment tools; (2) Enhance the "Resource Manual" on the assessment web site; include more complete information on the currently available campus-based and off-campus resources; and (3) Institutionalize a skills-based assessment workshop as an annual event. Longer term goals: (1) Build resources for assessment, where appropriate, by forging links to those engaged in assessment of other activities that are outside the scope the UAC's focus, for example, research, student services, or administration; (2) Review and enhance connections to alumni and employer information needed for assessment; and (3) Define students' role in assessment and communicate that role to students, for example, through a statement in the Undergraduate Catalog.

School/College Plans. The University assessment plan reasserts UW-Madison's commitment to using assessment activities to advance our vision, mission and priorities for academic excellence. The plan allows for divergent goals, objectives, and implementation strategies and distributes the ownership for assessment widely among the academic units. Associated with this document are the individual assessment plans of the schools, and colleges and the plan for general education assessment. These plans evolve on a varied time line that reflects the different needs and structures of the units themselves; these unit plans will be reviewed, updated and replaced as they change. These plans celebrate the progress made since our previous plan was adopted eight years ago and articulate an agenda to guide assessment in the future.

UW-MADISON ACADEMIC ASSESSMENT PLAN 2003, with 2008 Preface
A Plan for Assessment of Student Academic Achievement

Table of Contents

2008 Preface	i
Executive Summary	iii
Table of Contents	v
1. Introduction	1
2. The Context for Assessment at UW-Madison	1
3. Roles and Responsibility for Assessment at UW-Madison	2
4. Levels and Strands of UW-Madison Assessment	5
5. UW-Madison Assessment Principles	7
6. Operational Guidelines for Assessment in Departments, Units, and Programs	7
7. Uses of Assessment Results	11
8. Building on the Foundation for Assessment	11
9. A Plan for the University Assessment Council	12
2002-2003 University Assessment Council Members and Alternates	17
Figure 1. Overview of Academic Assessment at UW-Madison	3
Figure 2. Examples of Assessment Strategies Implemented at UW-Madison	9
Figure 3. Practices that Contribute to Successful Academic Assessment	10

UW-MADISON ACADEMIC ASSESSMENT PLAN 2003

A Plan for Assessment of Student Academic Achievement

1 Introduction

- 1.1 In September 2002, Provost Peter Spear asked the University Assessment Council (UAC) to revisit the university's existing assessment plan, the "Plan for Assessment of Student Achievement," which was adopted by UW-Madison in 1995. The council met several times to discuss the contents of the current plan, the North Central Association's guidelines for assessment plans, the 1999 North Central Association site evaluation team's comments about assessment at UW-Madison, elements of "ideal" assessment plans, and elements of the plans currently in place. In these conversations, the council came to understand that a working understanding of academic assessment has penetrated the various levels of the university beyond that articulated in the 1995 assessment plan. The UAC determined that the plan was due for an update to reflect current institutional practice and to look forward from the present time.
- 1.2 The plan describes the context for academic assessment at UW-Madison; reviews faculty and unit responsibilities for academic assessment, including those units that steer and coordinate assessment efforts; outlines the strata within which assessment takes place on the UW-Madison campus; explains a set of guiding assessment principles; and proposes operational guidelines for assessment. The plan also includes a description of the work of the UAC and guidelines for future work of the council. Associated with this document are separate assessment plans for the schools and colleges and for general education; those plans exist in conjunction with but separate from this university-wide plan.
- 1.3 Various sections of this plan are appropriate for different audiences. Individuals unfamiliar with the context for academic assessment at UW-Madison may be most interested in sections 2, 3, 4, and 5, which describe the context for assessment, roles and responsibilities of those who are involved, and provide a set of guiding principles. For those undertaking assessment in academic units, sections 5, 6, and 7, which describe the guiding principles, operational guidelines, and guidelines for using assessment results may be of greatest interest. Specific examples of assessment strategies and practice are given in Figures 2 and 3. Those interested in the role of the assessment council and the UAC's priorities for the future will be most interested in section 9.

2 The Context for Assessment at UW-Madison

- 2.1 UW-Madison is a large public research university guided by the core mission objective to "sustain and strengthen our preeminence in research and higher education."¹ Founded in 1848, the university is a public, land-grant institution that provides on a single campus a complete spectrum of liberal arts studies, professional programs, and student activities. This complex organization enrolls approximately 40,000 students (29,000 undergraduates and 11,000 graduate and professional students) in more than 200 academic programs

¹ Connecting Ideas: Strategies for the University of Wisconsin-Madison. 2001.

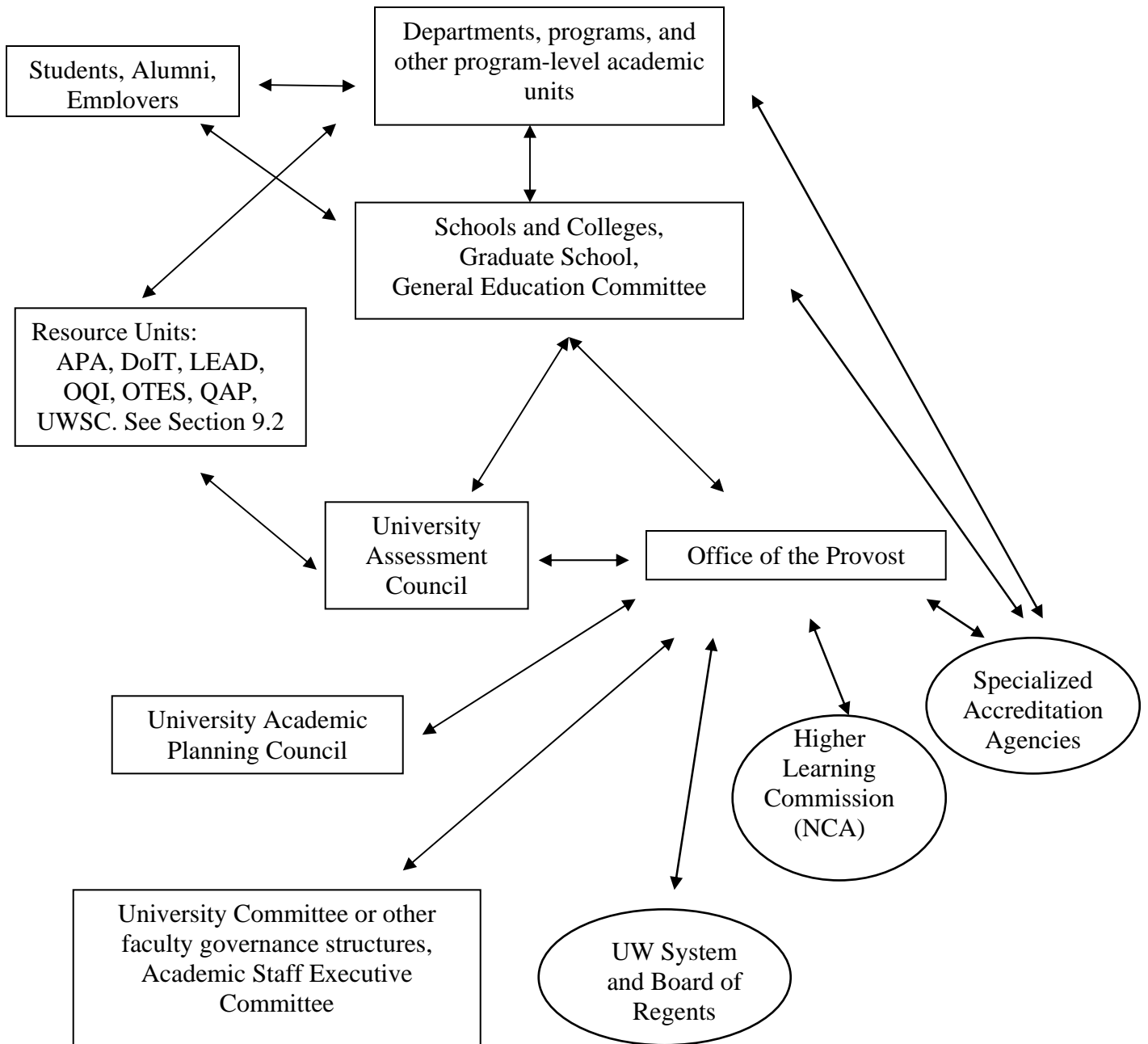
distributed across 13 schools and colleges, which are comprised of 125 departments. Nearly 20,000 employees, including about 2,200 faculty members, support the teaching, research, and public service missions of the University.

- 2.2 In achievement and prestige, UW-Madison has long been recognized as one of America's preeminent public universities. UW-Madison's academic reputation has been rated among the top 10 in many areas of study since 1910. UW-Madison is, as observed by a peer review group in the course of the last institutional reaccreditation cycle, a “miracle”—one that is built upon fundamental values regarding its relationship with the state and dedication to its educational mission. This excellence in education has been achieved through ongoing evaluative analysis that is embedded in all aspects of academic life. This evaluative analysis, when systematized and documented, represents the evidence of assessment that drives innovation in our educational programs. Thus, assessment activities and the resources that support assessment are integrated into the academic life of the institution or program under consideration.
- 2.3 The distributed nature of the university’s governance structure and the breadth of educational missions encompassed by the university’s academic units requires a campus-wide assessment plan that recognizes divergent views of how assessment can be used to enhance student learning. Assessment objectives are defined in academic units or departments, at the level of schools and colleges, at points of intersection between academic units or schools and colleges, and at the campus-level; in all cases, assessment is a local activity driven by the objectives, needs, and purposes established by the relevant constituency. Since assessment occurs at many levels or strata, a variety of university structures and personnel are responsible for and participate in assessment activities.

3 Roles and Responsibility for Assessment at UW-Madison

- 3.1 **Assessment of academic programs and student learning is a shared responsibility** of the faculty and staff, the school/college deans, the University Assessment Council, and the Office of the Provost; students are also inherently involved in assessment and their engagement and participation is essential. These broad-level organizational units work together to support assessment, to constrain duplication, to stimulate cooperation, to ensure that assessment activities are conducted at the most appropriate local level, and to facilitate the use of assessment to improve students’ learning experience. The interrelationships of these units and others are illustrated in Figure 1.
- 3.2 **Program faculty** are responsible for and have authority over the curriculum. The faculty exercise that authority by establishing learning goals in their disciplines and programs, by designing curricula and courses appropriate to achieving those goals, and by assessing student achievement of those goals using methods appropriate to the discipline and its culture.

Figure 1. Overview of Academic Assessment at UW-Madison



This representation of the relationships among units with a role in assessment is explained in the text.

- 3.3 **Schools and colleges**, through their deans, college-level curriculum committees and academic planning councils, support faculty and staff responsibility for assessment and curricula by providing leadership for the departments and programs housed within their units. In addition, they conduct a variety of school/college level assessments to gather data necessary for informed decision-making; coordinate school/college-level assessment activities; monitor implementation of the assessment plan; and report to the provost regarding assessment activities.
- 3.4 **The University Assessment Council (UAC)** is convened by and reports to the provost. It is the coordinating resource for assessment-related efforts on campus. The UAC is composed of appointed faculty and staff representatives from the schools and colleges and from administrative and functional units that support assessment practices. The mission of the UAC is to:
- 3.4.1 Connect people who are actively involved in assessment in academic units with resources that are available for assessment and to help units maximize the use of shared tools and resources;
 - 3.4.2 Serve as a cross-campus forum for the exchange of ideas, information, and advice on methods and practices of assessment;
 - 3.4.3 Keep the university community apprised of expectations for assessment, including expectations related to our regional accreditation;
 - 3.4.4 Advise the provost on matters related to assessment and evaluation;
 - 3.4.5 Assure the implementation of the University’s assessment plan, and to periodically evaluate and revise the University assessment plan; and
 - 3.4.6 Work with those who engage in assessment activities to help them understand (or enhance) their activities as “assessment” *per se*².
- 3.5 The provost is the chief academic officer of the university. **The Office of the Provost:**
- 3.5.1 Assures coordination of assessment activities and implementation of the assessment plan through the University Assessment Council and the representatives of the schools and colleges;
 - 3.5.2 Assures that (a) other governance bodies (such as the University Academic Planning Council and the University Committee) are apprised of assessment issues that have campus-wide instructional impact; and (b) the associate vice chancellor for teaching and

² The University Assessment Council is less concerned that the university community adopts the language of assessment than that it recognizes the ongoing *practice* of assessment

learning, and committees and groups responsible for teaching improvement are apprised of academic program assessment issues;

- 3.5.3 Determines the level and source of campus funding that is specifically designated for assessment projects and activities, and for the distribution and administration of that funding;
- 3.5.4 Requests that schools and colleges report annually on academic assessment activities, as required to exercise responsibility for campus-level reporting about aggregated assessment activities to external audiences, for example, assembling “patterns of evidence” required for institutional-level accreditation processes;
- 3.5.1 Initiates *ad hoc* assessment activities as recommended or required by campus leadership.

4 **Levels and Strands of UW-Madison Assessment**

- 4.1 **Departments, units, and programs** are responsible for assessing student performance in undergraduate and graduate majors, certificate and other formal academic programs. This work can include a variety of approaches, for example, assessment of student performance in courses required as prerequisites, evaluating coordination between course sequences or series, working with other departments to measure the efficacy of key service courses, evaluating advising and other types of communication about the program, or evaluating students’ overall experience of the curriculum.
 - 4.1.1 Course-level assessment and the evaluation of instruction are important components of program assessment conducted in departments. Course-level assessments are vital to the improvement of student learning and may be especially useful to individual instructors as they develop their teaching repertoire. If appropriately constructed, course evaluations may also contribute to program assessment; however, assessment of academic programs should not be limited to course-level inquiry. (Policies associated with the requirements for course evaluations and public availability of course evaluation summaries are the purview of the faculty senate and the University Committee.)
 - 4.1.2 Academic assessment primarily is focused on assessment of the program *as a whole*. Thus, the emphasis is not on the performance of individual students or instructors, but rather on students’ overall experience of the curriculum. Such assessments are essential to the department, unit, or program’s decision-making processes as it considers the strengths and weaknesses of the academic program.
 - 4.1.3 Schools and colleges report abundant assessment of the students’ experience of the curriculum, consisting of both formal assessment activities and evidence of results of assessment in practice. Formal assessment activities include the use of student and alumni surveys, analysis of student efforts in capstone courses and examinations, or analysis of student papers or performances. Assessments also arise from the faculty’s understanding of their and their students’ academic experience of and scholarly perspective on the curriculum, for example, changing the learning goals of the major to

reflect changes in the field, analyzing and updating the course array to reflect changes in the faculty, or realigning the curriculum within the major. Departments, units and programs understand that these common academic practices, when undertaken as a careful investigation into students' academic experiences are "assessment."

4.2 Decisions made by departments or programs as a result of assessment are sometimes ratified at the **school / college level**. In addition, various types of assessment help the deans understand the needs of departments and programs within the school or college, helping them better serve the needs of departments, programs, and students in the school/college. Common assessment practices at this level include:

4.2.1 Regular review of academic programs;

4.2.2 Policy analysis and planning for evaluation of progress towards unit-level educational goals and objectives, including professional accreditation and/or certification by outside agencies and review boards, if applicable;

4.2.3 College-wide curricular assessment and planning;

4.2.4 Curriculum committee review of course proposals and changes to academic programs;

4.2.5 Oversight, development, review, and approval of new academic programs (degrees, majors, certificates).

4.3 **Campus-level** assessment activities are essential for evaluating progress towards strategic priorities and educational goals. Campus-level assessment activities are most appropriately implemented for learning activities or experiences that have university-wide or cross-college impacts. These campus-level activities include—but are not limited to—the following types of activities:

4.3.1 Academic planning and policy analysis and reviews conducted by central administrative offices of the campus, schools and colleges;

4.3.2 *Ad hoc* and regular course proposal review as conducted by central faculty governance committees (such as the divisional executive committees);

4.3.3 Periodic surveys of the student body, for example the undergraduate survey, the graduate student survey, or the national survey of student engagement (NSSE);

4.3.4 Assessment projects focused with broad scope on general education activities, such as the ongoing assessment of verbal assessment project, the quantitative assessment project, and the recent assessment and review of the ethnic studies requirement;

4.3.5 Retention and graduation rate analyses, and analyses of student progress based on specified criteria;

4.3.6 Provision and maintenance of student and faculty/staff record data sources that are essential for the enumerative and trend analysis that underpins assessment activities;

- 4.3.7 Inquiries into the efficacy of key courses and course sequences (for example, such as courses most commonly taken by new freshmen, or “gateway courses”, courses that serve as key prerequisites to large or many majors, or semester-to-semester articulation of such courses).

5 UW-Madison Assessment Principles:

- 5.1 Despite the complex structure of the university and the variety of disciplinary visions represented across the units that contribute to its mission, a common set of assessment principles can be identified.³ These principles define the philosophy of academic assessment at UW-Madison and serve as a touchstone for the diverse array of assessment activities on this campus.
- 5.1.1 Many of the regular activities of academic life are evaluative; when approached from an analytical perspective, they are forms of assessment.
- 5.1.2 Academic assessment supplements (rather than replaces) curricular, departmental, and other types of ongoing review for improvement.
- 5.1.3 Academic assessment is essential to inform decision-making at several levels: institutional, school/college, department/program/unit, and course-level. Assessment encompasses the range of student experience, from broad to specific. For example, assessment includes general education requirements, degree requirements, major programs, course sequences and key/leverage courses and provides departments, deans and administrators with the information needed to support judgments about the value and costs associated with making changes.
- 5.1.4 Academic assessment is ongoing and periodic, used both as a procedure for maintaining program excellence as well as for answering new questions about students’ educational experience as those questions arise. Thus, academic assessment is conducted both regularly and on an *ad hoc* basis (whether by the department or program, the general education or school/college curriculum committees, or academic planning councils).

6 Operational Guidelines for Assessment in Departments, Units, and Programs

- 6.1 UW-Madison’s academic programs have a wide array of educational objectives; furthermore, our strong tradition of shared governance emphasizes the local authority of departments, units and programs. Although a “one-plan-fits-all” assessment approach is inappropriate, all departments, units and academic programs can reasonably be expected to operate within a common framework outlined here. The sharing of successful approaches is expected and encouraged.
- 6.2 Assessment of student performance in the major is the responsibility of the departments,

³ The focus of these principles and this plan is on the assessment of academic programs and units. These principles and the values of assessment may apply equally to assessment of student academic affairs offices, student life units, and functional offices.

units and programs offering academic programs. These entities shall revise (if necessary) current assessment plans or develop and implement new assessment plans that endeavor to incorporate the following seven elements:

- 6.2.1 Identify learning goals for academic programs and service courses offered in the department; these goals should be aligned with the departmental mission, appropriate to the discipline, and attainable by students operating within the department/unit context. A framework that describes how courses align with and illustrate how program goals are met is a useful strategy.
 - 6.2.2 Involve faculty, who will necessarily provide leadership in this area, since they will identify the learning goals and must align the curriculum with those goals; faculty may involve others who have a stake in the assessment process and its outcomes (staff, students, alumni, etc).
 - 6.2.3 Ensure continuity of attention to academic assessment by assigning responsibility to a faculty committee that considers academic and curricular decisions (such as the departmental curriculum committee or executive committee).
 - 6.2.4 Assess students' attainment of learning goals periodically, using tools appropriate to the task and feasible for the available human and financial resources.
 - 6.2.5 Use existing academic milestones, processes, and resources whenever possible, because such processes are embedded in the curricular experience and are valued and understood by faculty and students. Strategies that assess existing curricular features will provide useful evidence to support recommendations for either implementing change or for stabilizing effective curricular features. Some examples that illustrate the variety of assessment strategies and methods at UW-Madison are given in Figure 2.
 - 6.2.6 Establish routines to gather, retain, and summarize quantitative and qualitative information and administrative and student data.
 - 6.2.7 Use appropriate assessment methods so conclusions have validity. For example, the limits of sampling and self-selection, which are frequently encountered in assessment methodology, should be explicitly recognized when drawing conclusions and using assessment data to support recommendations for change.
- 6.3 In instantiating these seven elements, departments, units and programs have found that various practices contribute to successful academic assessment. Examples of exemplary practices in use in UW-Madison academic units are listed in Figure 3.

Figure 2. Examples of Assessment Strategies Implemented at UW-Madison

<p>1. After administering prelims, a faculty committee uses a scale to rate each student's performance in each of the identified learning goals. Those ratings are summarized annually as an indication of the program's effectiveness in conveying information students need to meet program expectations.</p>
<p>2. A capstone course requires upper-level students to complete a final project. A faculty committee reviews these projects and rates the extent to which they reflect identified learning goals. Results are presented at a faculty meeting in a discussion of the program's effectiveness in conveying information students need to meet program goals.</p>
<p>3. All students completing a course required for admission to the major take a final exam containing one or more questions targeting one of the learning goals. Results are compiled to assess students' "before" scores; later, when students complete their final requirements for the major, they are asked to respond to the same question to evaluate their attainment of information related to that goal.</p>
<p>4. A department asks the quantitative assessment project to develop an examination to assess the math preparation of students taking a course as a prerequisite for entry into the major; results are used to improve communication with students about necessary quantitative skills, and online tutorials developed to convey those skills.</p>
<p>5. Course directors meet with TA's and instructors on a regular basis to discuss various components of an introductory course sequence. Specific outcomes are identified for each stage of students' progress through the curriculum; the directors design a project used both to evaluate individual student achievement (individual grades assigned by instructors) as well as program evaluation (a sample of papers rated by all instructors using a common rubric).</p>
<p>6. A department publishes a list of problems that students should be able to perform on entering a course and another list of problems that students should be able to solve on completing the course. From time to time, and instructor in the course reports to the department on how the students are measuring up to these expectations.</p>
<p>7. The department's curriculum committee establishes a regular sequence of course offerings to ensure that majors can fulfill degree requirements in a timely way; this sequence is consulted when the timetable is built, when sabbaticals are considered, and when other decisions are made that influence the regular scheduling of offerings. The arrival or departure of faculty may provoke a review of the course array or of the requirements for the major.</p>

Figure 3. Practices that Contribute to Successful Academic Assessment

<p>1. Do not assess every learning goal every year. For example, a major with five discrete learning goals might evaluate each goal in turn. Or one distinct methodology may be applied at any one time. Break the task into achievable units to maintain a manageable assessment program.</p>
<p>2. Use both direct and indirect measures to evaluate student achievement of learning goals. For example, evaluate a group of papers by graduating seniors against standardized expectations (a direct measure of student performance) or survey students about their learning behaviors and perceptions of learning (an indirect measure of student experience).</p>
<p>3. Use both formative and summative elements. For example, student performance on a goal might be evaluated upon conclusion of a course required for admission to the major (as an early formative measure) and the same goal might be evaluated when those students complete their degree requirements (a final summative measure).</p>
<p>4. Employ the highest research standards possible within the limits posed by resources and expertise. The value of measurement increases if it is taken repeatedly over time and especially if the same measurement is taken repeatedly over a period of time that spans a change in the program. Such trend analyses are likely to be sensitive to change over time.</p>
<p>5. Collect retain and summarize data in ways that facilitate its use. Use data to support academic judgment.</p>
<p>6. Collect data when it becomes available even if the analysis of the data will take place later. Examples: course closeout information; course evaluation forms; collections of capstone papers; faculty evaluations of preliminary exams. Collect the same data at the same time each semester and/or year since time series data are essential to high-quality assessment.</p>
<p>7. When possible make use of standard reports and tabulations of student curricular and budgetary data that are produced regularly for campus use. Examples: enrollment and degree reports; grade distributions reports; enrollment statistics by minority group and gender; Departmental Planning Profiles; Data Digest; Graduate Program Profiles. Department or program records need not replicate all of this information if the historical data can be retrieved from campus data resources (the UW Data Warehouse).</p>
<p>8. Those who undertake assessment projects that involve interaction with individuals seek advice on whether human subjects review is necessary based on the most recent regulations and legislation (see http://info.gradsch.wisc.edu/research/compliance/humansubjects/index.html).</p>
<p>9. Students who participate in assessment activities need to understand their role in the assessment activity, its purpose, and how results will be used. Students may come to the task with greater commitment if they understand that the goal is to improve the program.</p>

7 Uses of Assessment Results

- 7.1 The primary value of academic assessment is in its *local impact*. Using knowledge gleaned from assessment, it is the department or program responsibility to interpret the results and effect change.
- 7.2 Consistent with the assessment mission of the university, assessment activity that is locally motivated and that has local implications need not be reported in detail beyond the local unit. However, when reports may be instructive to others by illustrating effective strategies or methods, the local unit is encouraged to disseminate that information to other units.
- 7.3 Departments, units, and programs should use assessment results to inform self-studies conducted as part of the regular review of academic programs and to evaluate current status as well as potential changes. Review committees should ask about the assessment strategies and assessment evidence and how assessment contributes to the state of the program.
- 7.4 Assessment results should be reported as supporting evidence in proposals to revise curricula, develop or alter degree programs, or obtain new resources.
- 7.5 Changes made based on the evidence of assessment should be reported periodically (as required by the dean) to the dean for use in her/his annual report to the provost. These reports contribute to the University's understanding of how well it is meeting its educational goals and progressing toward its strategic objectives. In addition, periodic accounting of assessment activity helps to establish "patterns of evidence" required for institutional accreditation.

8 Building on the Foundation for Assessment

Our goal has been to review the infrastructure, principles, and practices that give shape to academic assessment at UW-Madison. By doing so, this document identifies the core philosophy that permeates assessment activities throughout the university. In turn, clarifying these issues of central importance to assessment efforts provides a touchstone to guide the development and revision of assessment plans within academic units. The university assessment plan as a whole reasserts our commitment to using assessment activities to advance our vision, mission and priorities for academic excellence. At the same time, it allows for divergent goals, objectives, and implementation strategies and distributes the ownership for assessment widely among the academic units. In this spirit, the last section of this document describes the assessment plan developed by the UAC to guide its own work. Associated with this document are the individual assessment plans of the schools, and colleges and the plan for general education assessment. These plans evolve on a varied time line that reflects the different needs and structures of the units themselves and they will be reviewed, updated and replaced as these units address changing needs in their plans. These plans celebrate the progress made since our previous plan was adopted eight years ago, recognize gaps in assessment activities, and articulate an agenda to guide assessment efforts into the future.

9 A Plan for the University Assessment Council

9.1 Description of the University Assessment Council (UAC)

The UAC is convened by and is advisory to the provost. It is the coordinating resource for academic assessment-related efforts for UW-Madison's schools and colleges. The UAC is composed of appointed faculty and staff representatives from each of the schools and colleges and from administrative and functional units that support assessment practices. The mission of the UAC is to:

- 9.1.1 Connect people who are actively involved in assessment in academic units with resources that are available for assessment and to help units maximize the use of shared tools and resources;
- 9.1.2 Serve as a cross-campus forum for the exchange of ideas, information, and advice on methods and practices of assessment;
- 9.1.3 Keep the university community apprised of expectations for assessment, including expectations related to our regional accreditation;
- 9.1.4 Advise the provost on matters related to assessment and evaluation;
- 9.1.5 Guide the implementation of the assessment plan, and periodically evaluate and revise the assessment plan; and
- 9.1.6 Work with those who engage in assessment-related activities to help them understand and enhance how their activities contribute to academic assessment.

9.2 Administrative structure and context for UAC activities

- 9.2.1 *Regional accreditation.* The Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association (NCA) of Colleges and Schools (www.ncacihe.org) is the regional accrediting agency for UW-Madison. NCA requires that accredited institutions have a vibrant academic assessment plan and NCA looks to assessment evidence for patterns of evidence that demonstrate compliance with the criteria for accreditation. UW System and Board of Regents policy also requires that System institutions undertake and report on academic assessment; by Regents' policy, UW System accepts the standards of regional accreditation guidelines for assessment.
- 9.2.2 *Specialized accreditation.* Specialized accrediting agencies set standards for assessment and prescribe required patterns of evidence of student learning outcomes. About 45 degree-granting programs representing every school and college receive accreditation from program-specific accrediting agencies (<http://wiscinfo.doit.wisc.edu/obpa/spaccreditation.htm>). Most of the academic programs in the School of Business, College of Engineering, Law School, Medical School, School of Nursing, School of Pharmacy, and the School of Veterinary Medicine, and several programs in the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, the School of Education, the School of Human Ecology, and the College of Letters and Sciences are subject to specialized accreditation. In addition, the College of Agricultural and Life Science and

the School of Education have accreditation-like accountability to federal and/or state government agencies.

- 9.2.3 *Office of the Provost.* The provost is the chief academic officer of the university (<http://www.provost.wisc.edu/>). The provost's office is the central campus office that holds responsibility for assuring coordination of assessment activities and implementation of the assessment plan through a designated staff person and through the UAC. Consequently, the provost's office requests annual reports on academic assessment activities from the schools and colleges. The provost's office oversees allocation of the assessment funds. As appropriate and necessary, the provost's office assures that other governance bodies are apprised of assessment issues that have campus wide impacts. (See Part 1, section 3.5 for more detail.) The designated provost's office staff person chairs or co-chairs the UAC, administers the assessment funds; manages the school/college reporting requirement; and is a key liaison between the provost and the campus community on academic assessment issues.
- 9.2.4 *Program Review, Assessment, and Accreditation.* Institutional policy requires that academic programs be reviewed at least once every ten years. This assessment plan envisions that assessment and evaluation of student learning will provide foundational information for the program review process. Program review, academic assessment, and accreditation are linked processes that assure the quality of our academic programs. The responsibility for these activities resides primarily with the deans of the schools and colleges and campus-level oversight resides with the provost (http://wiscinfo.doit.wisc.edu/obpa/uapc.htm#Program_Review). Schools and colleges are required to make annual reports on assessment activities to the provost. This reporting requirement is coordinated with the annual requirement for reporting on program review and specialized accreditation, which is mandated by UW System Administration.
- 9.2.5 *Assessment Fund.* Assessment mandates were established in the mid-1990s with no new funding provided to support these activities. Consequently, the university sets aside dollars from existing funding to support assessment across the academic units. This assessment fund was first established with the goal of promoting the development of solid student outcomes assessment practices in individual academic programs. About half of the fund is assigned to general education assessment. The other half is made available to academic units for assessment of programs and student learning, through an annual call for proposals. The modest assessment fund awards to schools, colleges, and departments are intended to "jump-start" assessment programs. Even small awards have been useful to assist faculty and staff to transform undocumented evaluation strategies into active assessment plans.
- 9.2.6 *Resource Units.* Academic assessment at UW-Madison is generally decentralized with the authority for assessment resting with the faculty and staff, who also hold the responsibility for the curriculum. In addition to the oversight and coordination roles of the provost's office and the UAC, several campus units provide support for assessment activities:

- Academic Planning and Analysis (APA, a sub-unit of the Office of the Provost <http://wiscinfo.doit.wisc.edu/obpa/>),
- Division of Information Technology, Learning Technology and Distance Education (DoIT <http://wiscinfo.doit.wisc.edu/ltde/>),
- Office of Quality Improvement (OQI <http://www.wisc.edu/improve/>),
- Testing and Evaluation Services (OTES <http://wiscinfo.doit.wisc.edu/exams/>),
- LEAD Center (<http://www.cae.wisc.edu/~lead/>),
- UW Survey Center (UWSC) (<http://www.wisc.edu/uwsc/>),
- Quantitative Assessment Project (<http://www.math.wisc.edu/~assess/>).

9.3 Overview of current assessment practice

- 9.3.1 *UAC Membership and Meetings.* The UAC is comprised of representatives from the schools, colleges and resource units and is convened by a chair or co-chairs appointed by the provost. The council meets six to eight times each academic year.
- 9.3.2 *A Forum for Information Sharing.* The UAC meeting agendas are focused around issues related to the mission of the council. Recent council agenda items that exemplify the information sharing activities of the council include: presentations by UAC members about assessment activities and outcomes in the schools and colleges; presentations by visitors detailing tools and strategies that have been successfully used for academic assessment (examples include portfolios in the School of Education and the use of WebCT to survey seniors in Psychology); presentations on the quantitative assessment project and the verbal assessment project; presentations from vendors of assessment services (for example, Educational Testing Service’s “Academic Profile”); discussion of how institutional review boards and human subjects protection are related to academic assessment; and presentations from the various resource units.
- 9.3.3 *Workshops.* In collaboration with other units, the UAC occasionally supports “how-to” workshops on assessment topics. Examples include: “Conducting Web-based Surveys of Students”, (2000) Denise Solomon, Diane Lindstrom, and Dianne Bowcock; “Demystifying Assessment of Student Services”, (2002) presented/organized by Ann Groves-Lloyd, Jo Meier, Dean Pribbenow, Jocelyn Milner.
- 9.3.4 *Advisory Role.* The UAC is advisory to the provost, primarily through the chair/co-chair who is the provost’s representative on the council. The UAC chair/co-chairs seek advice on broad issues and on narrower specific issues. Issues include discussion of the future directions for assessment (embodied in this plan, for example); recommendations on resource needs to support assessment; recommendations on the timing of and criteria for distribution of assessment funds; and the structure of the annual assessment reports of the schools and college deans to the provost.

9.3.5 *Assessment Planning.* The UAC guides the implementation, review and updating of the university's assessment plan. The plan provides a framework for the ongoing work of the council and of the units engaged in academic assessment. As a document, it provides an articulation of the assessment culture on campus and a view of aspirations for the future. The charge to the UAC for the 2002-03 academic year was to update the assessment plan, which had served UW-Madison since 1995. This 2003 assessment plan articulates the contemporary assessment culture, which has evolved in the intervening eight years, and names priorities for the near-term and longer-term future.

9.4 **Priorities and Goals**

In the course of reviewing the 1995 assessment plan, the UAC concluded that great progress has been made in implementing assessment practices. The UAC identified some areas for which additional achievement would strengthen assessment practice. This self-assessment provides goals for the UAC for the next several years.

The UAC has identified these three goals as priorities for the near future:

9.4.1 *Goal: Redesign the format for the annual report that the school and college deans submit to the provost.*

Rationale: The current report structure, which was useful when academic programs were developing their assessment plans in the late 1990's, is less useful now. For example, the matrix of assessment practices by major program is not useful for all units. An ideal report format would provide a predictable structure, sufficient flexibility to accommodate the differences in assessment practice across campus, and a mechanism for efficient collection and dissemination of assessment tools.

9.4.2 *Goal: Update and enhance the "Resource Manual" on the assessment web site.*

Rationale: The assessment web site and the "Resource Manual" could be updated to reflect the range of data and services available to support assessment and to provide a "clearinghouse" for samples of instruments and strategies that have been successfully implemented at UW-Madison.

9.4.3 *Goal: Plan a skills-based assessment workshop; institutionalize an assessment workshop as an annual event.*

Rationale: Those attending the December 2002 assessment workshop requested more such workshops and requested that additional skills-based workshops be provided. Attendees identified "how-to" workshops and seminars as a high priority for helping them implement assessment in their unit.

The UAC has identified these additional longer-term goals:

- 9.4.4 *Goal: Forge stronger linkages with those engaged in assessment of activities other than academic program assessment, for example, research, student services, or administration.*

Rationale: The focus of the UAC is on assessment of academic programs. Where appropriate, council members should be attentive to the potential to strengthen relationships to those engaged in assessment of other activities, for example research, student services, or administration. More open and intentional communication with those engaged in and responsible for assessment of such activities may uncover opportunities to share resources and solve mutual problems.

- 9.4.5 *Goal: Enhance resources for assessment by reviewing campus connections to alumni and sources of information that are available on alumni. Similarly review strategies for connecting to employers.*

Rationale: Alumni and employers are increasingly sources of information to support assessment activity. Outcomes based on the activities of students after they graduate, and the evaluation of their preparedness by employers is a key element of program assessment. Strengthening these connections and modeling effective strategies will be beneficial.

- 9.4.6 *Goal: Consider and define the student's role in assessment. Communicate that role to students, for example, through a statement in the Undergraduate Catalog.*

Rationale: Students who participate in assessment activities need to understand their role in assessment methodology its purpose and how results will be used. Students may come to the task with greater commitment if they know that the goal is to improve the program, not to evaluate them.

2002-2003 University Assessment Council Members and Alternates (Appointment Date)

Mark Albanese*, Medical School (September 2002)
Carolyn Lazar Butler, Law School (May 2003)
Kathleen Christoph*, Learning Technology and Distance Education (September 2002)
Jennifer Coburn*, School of Education (January 2003) ‡
Alan Cohen, Office of Testing and Evaluation Services (September 2002)
Joy Dohr*, School of Human Ecology (September 2002)
Gesele Durham*, Graduate School (September 2002)
Patrick Farrell, College of Engineering (September 2002)
Julie Foertsch*, LEAD Center (April 2002)
Susan Hyland*, School of Veterinary Medicine (September 2002)
Marilyn Jenkins*, School of Nursing (September 2002)
James Johannes*, School of Business (September 2002)
Elaine Klein*, College of Letters and Science (September 2002)
Kathy Luker*, Office of Quality Improvement (September 2002)
Jocelyn Milner*, Office of the Provost, Co-Chair (September 2002)
Christine Molter, ASM Representative (September 2002)
Ken Neimeyer, School of Pharmacy (September 2002) ‡
Sarah Pfatteicher*, College of Engineering (September 2002) ‡
Dean Pribbenow, Office of Quality Improvement (September 2002)
Robert Ray*, College of Agricultural and Life Sciences (September 2002)
Joel Robbin*, Letters and Science, Quantitative Assessment Project (September 2002)
Denise Solomon*, Letters and Science, Verbal Assessment Project, Co-Chair (September 2002)
Michael Subkoviak*, School of Education (September 2002)
James Sweet, UW Survey Center (September 2002)
Judith Thompson*, School of Pharmacy (September 2002)
Char Tortorice*, Office of Testing and Evaluation Services (September 2002) ‡

* These members ratified the final assessment plan in June 2003 and/or were present when the plan was adopted in principle at the May 20, 2003 University Assessment Council meeting, pending final edits.

‡ Alternates assigned by some schools and colleges.