

## College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, Assessment Plan (2004)

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 in order to determine if program objectives are met, and to use the knowledge gained from these measurements to improve the quality of education we provide our students.

Programmatic assessment is not an evaluation of individual students or faculty but an analysis of the learning results of an entire curriculum. Individual assessment is already a regular part of the activity of the faculty as individual faculty consider the intellectual growth of their student advisees. Assessment is a necessary part of any truly dynamic and progressive educational program.

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 performs programmatic assessment activities such as periodic program reviews, self studies, curriculum reviews, 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, evaluation of student performance on professional credential exams, and surveys of current students and graduates. In many cases, new assessment strategies have been and will continue to be implemented.

### **OVERALL APPROACH**

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

1. Each department should clearly articulate desired learning outcomes for its students.
2. Each department should then develop mechanisms which measure the extent to which these outcomes have been met.
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.

The College of Letters and Science has developed an assessment plan for general education applicable to all schools and colleges at the University of Wisconsin Madison based on very successful previous work by the departments of Mathematics and English. The general education assessment procedures 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 incorporates, by reference, the assessment activities of the Graduate School, and the College continues 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 varies 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 desired outcomes attained by students 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 achieved desired outcomes 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 desired outcomes.

### **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 desired outcomes.

### **IMPLEMENTATION OF ASSESSMENT PROGRAMS**

Departments will use feedback from their assessment activities to continually improve

their curricula. In almost all cases, departments have changed assessment plans developed in the late 1990s. It is expected that changes will be made in the future as well.

Adopted by CALS Academic Planning Council, November 23, 2004.