

## **UW-Madison Graduate School, Assessment Plan, 2008-09**

Spanning all 13 schools and colleges, the Graduate School enrolls almost 9000 Masters and Ph.D. students each year in more than 150 majors. The Graduate School has a representative on the University's Assessment Council, and participates in assessment in a variety of ways as indicated below. Part One lists ongoing assessment projects. Part Two looks forward to the next five years as we increasingly turn our attention to learning outcomes based assessment at the graduate level.

### **PART ONE:**

The UW-Madison 2003 Academic Assessment Plan calls for every academic program to have an assessment plan and to engage in assessment activities annually to evaluate student learning. The Graduate School supports assessment activities in academic programs in the following ways:

#### Program Profiles

In order to facilitate ongoing assessment and improvement of individual programs, the Graduate School produces the Program Profiles for campus use. Available on the web since 1994, and open to the public, the Profiles document trends in enrollment, admissions, degrees and financial support. Departments are encouraged to access information in the profiles for purposes ranging from strategic planning to program assessment and review. The Graduate School also provides specialized reports, when feasible, to programs and departments seeking information for more unique needs. (<http://info.gradsch.wisc.edu/education/academicprograms/profiles.html>)

#### Documenting and Maintaining Graduate Student Records

Because the Graduate School serves as the admitting office for graduate students across campus, it is in the unique position of documenting and maintaining admissions records. The Graduate School provides tools for campus use ranging from data views in the InfoAccess Campus Data Warehouse to Graduate Web Information Systems (GWIS). We are continually engaged in improving GWIS to make it as user-friendly as possible at the program level.

Enrolled student information is maintained in our Student Academic Record Administration system (SARA). Efforts are underway to allow input into SARA from the program level, and to better coordinate GWIS and SARA data and views.

We are also currently involved in developing a recruitment tracking system for students, from time of first recruitment contact through application, admission, matriculation, and graduation. This will make it even easier to assess efforts in both recruitment and retention.

The Graduate School seeks to ensure departmental personnel obtain the training they need to successfully use the information available to them on

campus. To that end, the Graduate School offers workshops on GWIS and campus data resources annually, as well as on best practices in recruitment and other crucial areas.

#### Admissions Data

We regularly analyze data collected from our application records (GWIS) to assess changes in international vs. domestic admissions (including the yield per program of application to acceptance to enrollment), diversity data about our applicant pool, the male/female ratio of graduate students in different programs and divisions, etc.

#### Survey of Earned Doctorates/UW-Madison's Doctoral Completion Survey

In the past, the Graduate School has sought more detailed information on graduate student satisfaction and life through surveys of both current students and alumni. We also monitor the results of the Survey of Earned Doctorates (SED), administered to each graduating Ph.D. candidate. The Graduate school has developed its own exit survey for completing doctoral students. It is administered to all graduating doctoral students each academic year. It focuses on key areas of interest for the campus and campus graduate programs - academics, advising, funding, professional development, and overall experiences and satisfaction.

#### National Surveys

The Graduate School is the unit responsible for providing data on graduate student admissions, completion, programs, etc. to a wide variety of organizations, including the NSF, the CGS, and the NRC. The data collected from programs for national surveys are on the web, and accessible through University net identification. For the NRC's survey, the Graduate School was the coordinating unit for full campus involvement. We have not yet had the opportunity to use the NRC data fully, but intend to incorporate the results into Program Review (see below), and other studies of time-to-degree, attrition, student productivity, etc.

#### Program Review

The process of periodic program review is intended to ensure that standards of excellence are maintained in UW-Madison's graduate programs. Periodic review provides a mechanism through which the Graduate School can provide advice for improvement and recognize examples of quality and effectiveness. The process also provides the context for continuous self-assessment and improvement within programs. New programs are reviewed after five years, and other programs are reviewed every ten years.

On a local level, an elected member of the Graduate Faculty Executive Committee (GFEC) is placed on each review committee for all graduate programs that is appointed by the deans of individual schools and colleges. That individual reports back to the GFEC. The GFEC then makes suggestions, recommendations, and sometime sanctions, in conjunction with the appropriate school or college Academic Planning Council. The

Graduate School also houses two graduate programs (Biophysics and Cellular and Molecular Biology), and in their case serves as the deans office for their review. In order to prepare members of GFEC for reviews, and to help programs develop their own self-studies, the Graduate School maintains a webpage of guidelines and resources for program review:

(<http://info.gradsch.wisc.edu/education/academicprograms/programreview.html>).

Although the current program review process relies mostly on the propagation of best practices, we are moving toward a more formal assessment of learning outcomes, based on the stated goals of individual programs. We will use NRC data together with information collected from the SED and our new exit survey for PhDs (see below) to make recommendations for improvement at the program level.

#### New Program Development

The Graduate School is also involved in new program development, working closely with the Office of Academic Planning and Analysis. The following website guides faculty and staff developing a new program

<http://info.gradsch.wisc.edu/education/academicprograms/newprogplanwkst.html> . We are in the process of including an item on program assessment as part of the regular program development process.

#### PART TWO:

The Graduate School has been involved in data collection for many years, but has not been able to turn our attention to the analysis of that data for self-assessment as much as we would like. A staff member who left over four years ago had been responsible for analysis, and who authored a thorough analysis of attrition data that she presented at a national meeting, was replaced with a decentralized system of data experts throughout the various Graduate Education units. These units continued to collect data, but were not always able to interpret and report out when necessary. During this past year, the Graduate School has hired a Director of Policy and Program Analysis who works now directly with the Senior Associate Dean for Graduate Education on all aspects of analysis and assessment of our prospective, current, and former student body, as well as of our array of over 150 graduate programs. She, along with other colleagues, has begun a regular book club to review the latest scholarship on assessment, and to raise the awareness of the entire Graduate School staff. With her help, we hope to accomplish the following in the next five years:

#### Templates for Assessment Plans

To assist faculty in assessing learning outcomes at the graduate level, we will develop templates and collect examples of assessment activities that take advantage of the milestones of graduate education, such as the preliminary examination and thesis defense. These activities will take advantage of what was learned through the University's participation in the Carnegie Initiative on the Doctorate.

### Definition of University-wide Learning Outcomes

While there has been a focus on program-level learning goals and their assessment for many years on campus, it is only recently that the University's Assessment Plan was revised to include university-wide expectations for student learning. These are based on the Essential Learning Outcomes identified through the American Association of Colleges and Universities Liberal Education for America's Promise (LEAP) project. We also plan to engage faculty campus-wide in the development of overarching outcomes for graduate education. Although graduate education, especially at the doctoral level, is specialized, with the expectations for student outcomes grounded in the discipline, we are optimistic that university-wide outcomes will emerge, which will serve in time as a useful framework for the Graduate School and individual programs.

### Regular Reports and Discussion at GFEC

We plan to engage the members of GFEC in ongoing discussion about learning outcomes and their assessment at the graduate level, and to provide them with data on questions of time-to-degree, attrition, student satisfaction, post-graduation employment, etc. The results from these discussions will be used to create policy in the Graduate School. In addition, we will use the GFEC to consider the efficacy of requiring a posting of the learning outcomes for each program in the Graduate School Catalog, along with Satisfactory Progress criteria.

### Work with Assessment Council

The Graduate School representative on the Assessment Council, in partnership with members who represent the other schools and colleges, will consult with academic units as they develop and implement strategies to measure student learning at the program level. The Graduate School's representative will also work with other members in support of systematic reporting of assessment results by programs.

#### Year 1

Develop templates, rubrics and examples of activities that take advantage of the milestones of graduate education.

Create dissemination plan for the Graduate School's reports (e.g., SED trends), program profiles, templates, etc.

Begin regular reports and discussion with GFEC on assessing graduate student learning outcomes.

Begin to coordinate Graduate School's consultative activities with other Assessment Council members.

#### Year 2

Pilot employment exit survey of master degree students.

Engage campus in discussion of university-wide expectations for graduate student learning.

Year 3

Assess integration of review of assessment plans into new program development and graduate program review.

Conduct alumni survey to follow up on survey conducted in 1999.

Years 4-5

Continue to provide feedback to graduate programs about their assessment activities.