

## **UW-Madison School of Human Ecology Assessment Plan**

**(from Associate Dean Joy Dohr, April 2003)**

### Description and overview.

In 2003-2004, the School of Human Ecology will celebrate 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 and consumer education. At the graduate level, the School provides master degrees and doctorates in three program concentrations-- consumer science, design studies, and human development and family studies. The School also collaborates with the School of Education and with the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences in offering two joint graduate programs. In addition, the School has a long history of outreach and action research working with various public, private, for profit, not-for-profit and professional communities.

The School's current enrollment is 1,113 students. 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.

### Administrative structure for assessment.

In 1998, the School of Human Ecology formed an ad committee under the direction of Professor Wendy Way and with support from the Office of Quality Improvement and the Leads 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, interpreting assessment information related to their curricula, meeting accreditation requirements where applicable, evaluating courses and course access, plus other learning experiences such as internships and study abroad programs. Individual faculty and staff might also be involved with specific projects on teaching/learning and be working with the Associate Dean related to assessment measures and plan for the project.

Further, the Student Academic Affairs office is a critical unit and plays a central role in supporting assessment activities. They provide necessary statistics and information from queries. They distribute, collect and code alumni surveys, plus counsel and work with departments doing 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, as well as works with campus counterparts. The Associate Dean guides development and monitors a variety of activity at different 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. Two departments have programs with specialized accreditation. Each engages in external reviews or site visits every 6 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. The program must demonstrate compliance with those standards to be accredited. One option in Consumer Science also is accredited. In addition, the School's auxiliary unit--the Pre School-- requires accreditation and review.

In completing internal program reviews 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. The report and self study are then analyzed by an executive committee appointed by the Dean. This committee develops a summary and provides recommendations to the School's APC who take final action. Internally, a schedule has been developed for all program reviews.

A variety of other internal methods for assessment are conducted school-wide, as well as department/major specific. In general these are both direct type measures of teaching/learning and indirect measures and are conducted for undergraduate and graduate levels. Audiences include undergraduate and graduate students, alumni, faculty and staff, advisors, professional practitioners, employers, and academic colleagues.

The administrative structure for assessment in the School is characterized as decentralized yet integrated. Further, faculty, staff and advisors are interested in having sound assessment for making decision about students' educational experience and maintaining quality of programs. Yet if I ask

individual faculty and staff what methods and plans are being used for assessment, they will most often cite their own classroom and program activity. They might or might not use terminology or references used by the UAC. The bigger picture from the campus or school/college level most likely would remain unclear to them. This fact suggests the strong value of having this campus plan available and the shepherding and interpretative skills of colleagues dedicated to building a picture of the whole.

#### Overview of Current Practice.

As previously stated, a wide variety of methods are used for academic assessment purposes. The timing of the methods vary, as does the administrative component responsible. In addition and related, the School has conducted numerous accelerated planning exercises (facilitated by OQI) over the past few years addressing governance structure, student academic affairs and enrollment management, classified staff responsibilities and tasks, diversity in the University, and strategic planning at department and school levels. While different in intent from the academic focus of this report, the work has contributed to creating a climate and capacity for wanting, receiving and acting upon assessment across programs.

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

##### *Alumni Surveys*

Every year the School sends an alumni surveys 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. For the first time this year, the School is piloting a web-based version with a broader group of Consumer Science alumni (1-10 years after graduation as part of their program review). In addition mailed versions will go to our other majors. The School has collaborated with WAA and UW Foundation in working with alumni and piloting the format. The project is supported with funding from a UAC grant. The survey seeks general information as well as responses to questions about academic experience including general, liberal arts education competencies, plus major specific competencies. The information requested goes beyond satisfaction type responses, requesting evaluation of skills and knowledge gained while in school, as well as a rating on application in their current positions and lives. Each department/major has a page that requests response to core competencies or performance criteria expected of graduates and related to major course work

##### *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 key agenda items related to student performance criteria, curricular issues and field specific changes/development.

##### *Course/Teaching Evaluations*

Course and teaching assessments are collected every session (semester and summer) for every course. The School piloted using on-line versions in three classes, but at this point paper formats provide a larger percentage of completed evaluations, plus more consistent comment. While some campus units have been more successful with electronic version 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/practice professionals. Responses to specific discussion topics are then summarized and provided to committees and departments involved.

#### *Graduate Program Specific Assessment*

Activities for the graduate program have included evaluating our processes, as well as standard graduate student performance examinations. In addition, the Associate Dean has begun holding a focus group sessions with graduate students once a year, plus departments use a variety of practices for rating their student progress. For example the HDFS program conducts a type of “merit” exercise for graduate students each year. A committee of faculty reviews work and information provided by the student, then provides comment and ratings for students. Students in the Design Studies area have exhibitions open to everyone where faculty, students, alumni and others may comment on performance. All programs have planned student presentations where all are invited and have or are creating a set of benchmarks for students. Again, these represent types of formative evaluation for students and departments. In addition, programs have a list of benchmarks that guide student progress.

Outcomes from such practices have resulted in building an infrastructure with evaluation/assessment as an objective; a manual for faculty/office use; and development that the Graduate Program Council is undertaking to formalize a plan.

#### *Portfolios*

Two programs in the School use direct measures of student performance through portfolios and exhibitions. While an annual activity the two design majors, one other department is exploring adding a portfolio format.

#### *Program Reviews*

APC approved a schedule of program reviews for undergraduate and graduate majors two years ago. FCC is completed; CAVE has completed reports to the APC in CALS, SoE, SoHE and will be discussed further in May; the report for HDFS will be presented to APC this semester; CS is currently working on their self study; and ETD is gearing up for their FIDER visit and TAD review in 2004. Resources for completing these reviews have come from grants, school allocations, and departmental funds.

#### *Special Projects Evaluation*

Departments and programs in the School will periodically have special projects that impact the teaching/learning experience. The School currently is completing

such a project from a TLTC grant. The work grew from focus group and alumni survey responses that supported the tremendous need for computer aided design technology in TAD. Faculty and staff received a major gift of software, alumni and industry support and additional funds for training, development and evaluation of the software.

Directions of improvement, further development, inquiry, or closing of gaps.

On the whole, the School's departments have had a sound assessment record for many years. Since 1998/99, we have been working to give clarity to the plan developed from a school, department and program perspective. The coordination seems to be working and moving forward. We have however identified gaps. One gap related to the alumni survey for one department. A second gap was a flow of work issue for the survey. The third gap concerns systematic/identified feedback loops to all constituents.

In the first issue, the Consumer Science and Retailing majors did not have core competencies or performance criteria identified as other majors did for the survey. With UAC grant support, we hired an assistant to work with department faculty, develop the instrument, test and the use. The work has been completed and surveys, both paper and electronic versions, are being returned for coding at this time. This work will inform both their program review and information for the School.

Secondly, after turnover in the Student Academic Affairs office, a recent hire has been identified and is now working with overseeing the distribution, collection and coding of the survey. Analysis will be completed by the Associate Dean.

Thirdly, the Undergraduate Program Council and the Graduate Program Council have developed suggestions for addressing a systematic feedback loop for assessment information (other than program reviews, since the feedback for those are working well). Suggestions have included a "*Next Steps*" *Day*. This idea is adapted from a similar one in the Medical School. A couple of versions are under consideration.

The final new activity for next year will be a completion of a "Learning with Technology" assessment with our students. The Learning Technology Coordinator has assessed faculty and staff needs over the past two years. He and the School are now interested in better understanding students' practices and needs. Several components (e.g. study issues, use for design, soft ware programs, class assignments and information searches) are included.