

**UW-Madison College of Letters and Science**  
**Assessment Plan**  
**(April 2003 working draft; to be finalized by Spring 2004)**

## **1. Overview**

The College of Letters and Science (L&S) is UW-Madison's largest academic unit, consisting of 39 departments, 5 professional schools, and about 60 interdisciplinary research and teaching programs. Across this broad range of units, there are 250 L&S degrees possible (186 if distinctions are not drawn between BA and BS programs). In Fall 2000-2001, 52% of all UW-Madison enrollments were in L&S<sup>1</sup>, and L&S Faculty and staff taught 87% of all UW-Madison Freshman/Sophomore credit hours and 72% of all undergraduate credit hours in Fall, Spring and Summer 2000-2001. Of all UW-Madison degrees conferred in 2000-2001, L&S conferred 53% of the baccalaureate degrees, 40% of the master's degrees, and 50% of the doctoral degrees. Those graduates joined the 167,000 living L&S alumni—over half of all living UW-Madison alumni. In addition, L&S operates the largest and most complex academic affairs unit in the university, providing services ranging from general academic advising, to policy analysis and implementation of the L&S baccalaureate degree requirements, to enrichment programs serving the range of students from “at-risk” to honors. The breadth of the university is reflected in the breadth of the College, and the challenge of assessing academic endeavors across both of these entities is daunting.

Despite these challenges, L&S is committed to academic assessment, since it provides an important means by which information is obtained for making decisions essential to our students, departments, College, and University. In L&S, academic assessment is approached in a context provided by the following general principles:

- Many of the ordinary processes of academic life are evaluative; when approached from an analytical perspective, they are important, ongoing forms of assessment.
- Academic assessment supplements (rather than replaces) curricular, departmental, and other types of ongoing review for improvement.
- L&S academic programs have a wide array of educational objectives; therefore, L&S does not have a “one-plan-fits-all” assessment approach.
- Departments are central to academic assessment: faculty and staff develop and implement plans that align learning goals with their departmental missions, using tools appropriate to their available human, financial, and technical resources; and results are used to achieve or expand upon improvement.
- Faculty ownership and participation in assessment activities is essential.

## **2. Administrative structure, audiences and resources available for assessment**

The Assessment Plan articulated in 1995 identified an assessment matrix composed of three critically important areas: general education, undergraduate education, and graduate education. As implementation of that plan has progressed, that matrix has shifted somewhat: although the College still serves as the trustee for the General Education Requirements, the development of an

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<sup>1</sup> Percentages calculated using figures published in the *2001-2002 Data Digest*: enrollments, pp. 71-72; credit hours taught, pp. 74-75; degrees conferred, pp. 84-85. Alumni data provided by WAA.

assessment plan and priorities for those requirements has been delegated fully to the campus-wide General Education Committee, which has submitted a separate document to be included in the updated UW-Madison Assessment plan. Furthermore, while assessment of undergraduate and graduate education remain high priority assessment activities in the College, this revised plan recognizes that other assessment and related activities play a significant role in evaluating and improving the quality of our programs.

**a. Administrative Structure.** To the extent possible, it is L&S practice to delegate responsibility for assessment to those entities that are most able to effect change based on assessment outcomes. For example, academic departments propose, define and maintain individual academic programs and courses at the undergraduate and (in partnership with the Graduate School) graduate levels. They are therefore responsible for assessing student experience in those programs and courses, and for initiating and implementing changes made as a result of assessment findings. On the other hand, the L&S Curriculum Committee, which advises the Dean regarding college-wide curricular issues, conducts periodic investigations into questions that have a college-wide impact, such as the current review of the L&S baccalaureate degree requirements.

**b. Audiences.** Assessment results are reported to various audiences:

**Department and units** share assessment information with program faculty and staff to inform decision-making. Thus, academic units share results with the departmental curriculum and executive committees, and service units report results to directors and others who make decisions about services provided.

Since certain curricular changes may affect resources in other departments (e.g., adding prerequisites for the major, restructuring of core or service course offerings, etc.), departments are asked to submit requests for such changes to the college-wide L&S Curriculum Committee for review prior to implementation. These requests are generally accompanied by a discussion of the assessment processes used to formulate the request.

All assessment activity and general outcomes are reported in survey and summary form annually to the Dean. More thorough, department-wide self-studies are prepared for periodic program and accreditation reviews; in these reports, assessment provides key information about academic and service programs and student experience. Self-study audiences include ad hoc review committees, the Dean and L&S APC, and accrediting agencies.

Although University Academic Planning Council guidelines do not specifically call for assessment plans to be incorporated into new program development, the L&S Academic Planning process encourages programs to include discussion of assessment strategies in the planning process for all new programs, including certificate programs.

Finally, departments will often incorporate assessment results in communications with students and alumni, providing feedback about student success and/or satisfaction.

**At the College-level,** assessment activities of major committees and service units are included in annual reports to the dean. Committee and departmental reports serve as the foundation for the Dean's annual report to the Provost on assessment and program review.

(The Dean's reports to the Provost are available online at [www.provost.wisc.edu/assessment/](http://www.provost.wisc.edu/assessment/).) These reports include both academic and non-academic assessment activities conducted by departments and service units across the college.

Internal assessments (e.g., monitoring of course-closeouts, enrollment levels, most popular courses, and low-enrollment majors, as well as maintenance and distribution of the Departmental Planning Profile) are undertaken to ensure that decisions based on data rather than anecdotal evidence. These activities are not formally reported unless they are of sufficient magnitude.

- c. **Resources.** Financial responsibility for conducting assessment is delegated to the entities responsible for making best use of the results. L&S Administration absorbs many of the costs of college-level inquiry (such as those assessment projects conducted by the L&S Curriculum Committee or the university-wide General Education Committee). Departments and other entities are also encouraged to seek University Assessment Council funding to help fund large undertakings.

The Dean of the College has delegated oversight of academic assessment to the Dean's Office academic planner, ensuring a close relationship between assessment, program review, and policy analysis in the College. The Academic Planner represents the Dean on the University Assessment Council, and reports directly to the Dean on matters related to assessment.

### 3. Overview of current policy and practice

- a. **Department-Level.** As noted above, departments are responsible for assessing undergraduate and graduate education. In 1996-97, each L&S department was asked to submit a statement of educational objectives for each degree program it sponsors. These statements provided a foundation for departmental assessment plans, which were to have included the following characteristics:

*For undergraduate majors:*

- i. Objectives named in the statement of educational objectives relate to the College mission to provide a liberal arts education, as well as to the field in question.
- ii. Departments evaluate their programs in each in undergraduate major, using instruments appropriate to the stated objectives and resources available.
- iii. Department and program committees review assessment results and recommend any changes needed to teaching methods or program goals.

*For graduate majors:*

- i. Objectives identified in the statement of educational objectives relate to the mission of the department, its place in the liberal arts tradition, its capacity to provide financial support for students, the time students take to earn their degrees, and how well the program meets the career goals of its students. Departments use this information to establish clearer educational goals for the program.
- ii. Departments develop instruments to measure the extent to which it is achieving its educational goals.

- iii. Department and program committees use these measures to monitor success and suggest changes in the graduate program.
- iv. Periodic program reviews conducted by the College in collaboration with the Graduate school examine and monitor this assessment process.

Departments complete an annual survey of assessment activities; survey results compiled by the L&S academic planner are used to develop the Dean's report to the Provost.

- b. College-Level.** Although not mentioned in the 1995 UW-Madison Assessment Plan, a number of academic and administrative practices have been identified as worthy of mention in this revised plan.

*L&S Curriculum Committee.* Since 1995, the L&S Curriculum Committee has been expanded and improved, with appointed faculty members serving rotating terms and *ex officio* members of L&S administration serving as advisors to the committee. Given the increasing interdisciplinarity of study, changing campus requirements, and the extent to which departments require students to achieve familiarity or skills in areas served by other departments, the Curriculum Committee mission has been reformulated to ensure that a college-wide perspective is taken in course and curricular review. The Curriculum Committee therefore engages in studies such as the current multi-year assessment of the credit rules used to implement the L&S degree requirements; the recent revision of the process used to add, change and delete courses; the development of guidelines to ensure proper review of substantial changes made to requirements for L&S majors; and *ad hoc* reviews of "T" and "C" courses.

*The L&S Academic Planning Council* oversees the program review process. It ensures that the criteria by which reviews are conducted are appropriate to the array of programs and entities in the College as well as consistent with the larger goals of the university. Assessment results contribute to program review, providing some of the data used to evaluate and understand L&S academic programs. The L&S APC also reviews broad-scale decisions made as a result of academic assessment conducted at the unit-level, such as when a major or program is developed, substantially changed, or eliminated.

The *L&S Dean's Office Academic Planner* coordinates the academic program review process and assessment reporting activities; provides staff support and expertise to the APC and Curriculum Committee; responds to *ad hoc* requests for data tendered by the Dean, the Associate Deans, campus administration, and departments; and serves as a resource to departments and committees on assessment and program review.

The *L&S Office of Budget Planning and Analysis* has developed and maintains the "Departmental Planning Profile" database as a component of the UW Data Warehouse Project. The Profile provides departments, review committees, the Academic Planning Council, Deans and others with ten-year trend data on topics ranging from FTE employees by category, headcount and FTE major declarations, degrees conferred and credits delivered.

*L&S Student Academic Affairs* has undertaken an extensive expansion of its efforts to evaluate student satisfaction with academic and career advising, academic enrichment programs, and other student services. Although considered "non-academic," such activities

and services are increasingly seen as providing a much-needed foundation for student success both in and out of the classroom.

#### **4. Future Directions**

As seen in the section above, this plan recounts activities not addressed in the original 1995 UW-Madison Assessment Plan. It does not represent a revision ratified by the L&S Academic Planning Council. Thus, update and revision of the L&S Assessment Plan should be a priority for the coming academic year. A revised plan might include issues related to non-academic assessment, means to strengthen departmental commitment to academic assessment, and that dedication of financial and informational resources supports assessment activities.

#### **5. Five year assessment agenda**

2003-04: Semester I - Convene committee to update L&S Assessment Plan for submission to the Academic Planning Council in Semester II; disseminate revised plan to L&S departments with request for updated departmental assessment plans (due Semester I, 2004-05)

2004-05: Semester I – Updated departmental assessment plans due. Examine assessment reporting cycle and devise scheme to request substantive assessment reports every 3 years.

2005-06: Request substantive reports from first third of L&S Departments and/or units.

2006-07: Request substantive reports from second third of L&S Departments and/or units.

2007-08: Request substantive reports from final third of L&S Departments and/or units.

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