



26 September, 2008

TO: Pat Farrell, Provost
Mo Noonan Bischof, Co-Chair, University Assessment Council

FROM: Gary Sandefur, Dean
Elaine M. Klein, Assistant Dean and Director, L&S Academic Planning, Program Review and Assessment

RE: Annual Report on Academic Assessment Activities, 2007-2008

The L&S Office of Academic Planning, Program Review and Assessment continues to work with L&S departments and programs to update, implement, and improve plans for assessing student learning in all academic degree programs offered across the college. The attached report catalogues our continued progress in these areas. It includes a progress report on implementation of changes made as a result of the assessment of the L&S baccalaureate degree requirements, a list of academic program revisions approved by the L&S Curriculum Committee, a discussion of assessment activities undertaken by L&S Student Academic Affairs, an update on L&S participation in campus-level efforts to identify and improve essential student learning in “The Wisconsin Experience”, and an overview of department-level assessment reports. L&S also makes substantial contributions to the assessment of student learning with respect to undergraduate general education, as is evident from the report already submitted by Associate Dean Nancy Westphal-Johnson on behalf of the University General Education Committee.

We hope that you will agree with us that L&S can take pride in our efforts in this area.

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Charles N. Halaby, Associate Dean for the Social Sciences
Magdalena Hauner, Associate Dean for the Humanities
Ann Groves-Lloyd, Associate Dean for Student Academic Affairs
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Annual Report on Academic Assessment Activities, 2007-2008

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1. The L&S Assessment Plan

The 2003 L&S Assessment Plan (<http://www.ls.wisc.edu/assess/AssessmentPlan.htm>) remains in force. This plan is intended to serve as a flexible mechanism for documenting and reporting, at a college level, L&S efforts to understand and improve student learning. It is reviewed by the L&S Academic Planning Council and by the Dean’s Senior Staff. That plan will be reexamined in the coming year, so as to reflect intersections between L&S learning goals and The Wisconsin Experience, and to devise strategies that evaluate the impact of recently implemented revisions to the L&S baccalaureate degree requirements.

2. College-wide Assessment Efforts

A. *Ongoing Administrative Support for Assessment in L&S (L&S Office of Academic Planning, Program Review, and Assessment of Student Learning)*

The office of Academic Planning, Program Review, and Assessment of Student Learning maintains a website dedicated to Academic Assessment in L&S, www.ls.wisc.edu/Assess. Visitors to the site can find information about the L&S assessment strategy and review college and department-level assessment reports.

We continue to encourage departments to approach the activity of assessing student learning as a tool used to gauge program performance and to use the results for “evidence-based decision-making” to improve learning. Assistant Dean Elaine Klein provides, where possible and necessary, consultation on how departments can develop achievable assessment plans and strategies. Assessment efforts are undertaken within department and college resource constraints; we are therefore inclined to encourage our colleagues to focus on questions that are important, to work toward obtaining useful information, and to pace projects so assessment activities neither languish nor induce “burnout”. To the extent possible, we ask departments to employ traditional projects and developmental milestones to obtain artifacts of student learning

that can be used as evidence of how programs function. We are, in short, working to develop an assessment model that is meaningful and sustainable – no small task.

*B. Implementation of Revisions to the L&S Baccalaureate Degree Requirements
(L&S Curriculum Committee and L&S Student Academic Affairs)*

2007-2008 saw the culmination of the first comprehensive review of the L&S baccalaureate degree requirements in more than thirty years, when “BABS07” went into effect. The review was an extensive undertaking to assess and improve baccalaureate education in L&S. Program revisions were based on results obtained from assessment projects that included peer benchmarking, a large-scale survey of recent alumni, and focus groups. The faculty-led committee developed a list of recommendations intended to streamline existing requirements and better convey the goals of a liberal arts education, as might be seen to be communicated by specific credit requirements. After the recommended changes were approved by the L&S Senate in April 2005, the Curriculum Committee and L&S Student Academic Affairs engaged in an extensive analysis of our technical systems and processes that would be affected by the revisions, which led to enacting a detailed series of procedural and policy changes needed to effect a smooth implementation, scheduled to be effective for students admitted in the Fall 2007 cohort. In particular, we wished to develop processes that would make the streamlined requirements available to continuing students; to that end, colleagues in the Registrar’s Office developed a “what if” process for students using the degree audit reporting system. We are pleased to report that careful attention to anticipating problems resulted in a remarkably smooth implementation process – indeed, no significant problems have been reported. Indeed, 607 continuing students have found it to their advantage to “opt in” and complete the revised requirements instead of the requirements under which they matriculated.

*C. Changes to Academic Programs
(L&S Curriculum Committee and various L&S departments and programs)*

As noted in previous reports, the L&S Curriculum Committee *Guidelines for Curricular Change* (<http://www.ls.wisc.edu/handbook/ChapterOne/chapter1-3ccpol.htm>) require discussion of assessment of student learning in requests to approve changes in academic programs. Brief notes on changes approved for various programs are listed below.

- Program overlap was addressed by revisions made to two Department of English graduate programs. The programs affected are the *Creative Writing* track in the MA program and in the PhD Minor, both of which overlap to some extent with the M.F.A. in Creative Writing. The changes (1) eliminate the creative writing track within the MA in English by closing admissions to the track (students who have already started the program will be allowed to complete it); and (2) retain, but clarify requirements for, the PhD minor.
- The Graduate School sought correction of catalog language related to the MA in *Library and Information Studies*, thereby repairing an obscure error of unknown vintage.
- The undergraduate major in *Linguistics* was improved by deleting a requirement that students take a general introduction for non-specialists, substituting a more focused course intended to prepare students for deeper study in the field. These changes are intended to offer instruction

appropriate to the students in each course, directing majors away from the more general course and better preparing them for courses that follow.

- Revisions to the undergraduate major in *Microbiology* delete the requirement to take a course that is no longer offered, and which had become a barrier to completion of the program.
- The number of credits required for the Acting Specialist option of the undergraduate major in *Theatre and Drama* was reduced by eliminating a requirement that students take specific, non-L&S courses in Voice and Movement. The department had been asked to resolve a concern that the program requirements exceeded the maximum credits L&S majors are allowed to require. Students in this program may still take these courses, and the new BABS07 degree requirements now allow the courses to count as elective credit. Both of these changes should lower the overall number of credits these students accumulate.
- The committee is continuing to consult with the Department of Languages and Cultures of Asia regarding a proposal to substantially revise that program. The revisions will make available a track that explores the “cultural” offerings of the department more fully. These revisions to this program are likely to be approved early in the 2008-2009 academic year.
- Revisions affording students the ability to complete Honors in the Major were approved for the *Communicative Disorders* major.

Efforts to improve student learning as a result of assessment efforts are often found at the course, rather than program, level. The most recent Curriculum Committee report notes that it approved 213 requests to add, change or delete courses in the L&S course array. These requests frequently attribute the changes to a need to modernize curricula, respond to feedback from students, improve course-sequencing, and align courses with learning outcomes.

*D. Focused Inquiry: the Role of Directed Study for L&S Undergraduates
(L&S Curriculum Committee)*

Dean Sandefur asked the L&S Curriculum Committee to respond to a series of questions about the role of directed/independent study in the undergraduate curriculum. The questions raised such issues as limiting directed study credits (e.g., amount taken each semester, or amount counting toward completion of the major or the degree), standardizing directed study courses, and implementing stricter deadlines for adding or dropping these courses. The committee undertook to obtain more information about these courses, including analysis of data describing the average proportion of students who complete one or more directed study course, and surveying faculty to better understand the range and variety of projects undertaken in these “faculty-mentored learning experiences”.¹ The committee’s response (Attachment A) outlines a series of recommendations related to directed study, assigning specific actions to be pursued at the department, curriculum committee, and administrative levels. Most significantly, the committee issued a statement about the value of the learning experiences found in these courses:

Each project is a unique negotiation between student and faculty that contributes to liberal education, not only by enriching students’ understanding of a particular topic, but also by teaching students to pursue knowledge outside the context of a structured course,

¹ We note with some pride that, of the 400 members of the faculty who were asked to provide information and opinions about their Directed Study practices, more than 56% responded – an exceptional response rate for an online survey.

for sake of personal interest. Hence, Directed Study teaches skills necessary to true “lifelong learning”, enhancing and enriching undergraduate education.

The committee strongly supports and encourages the use Directed Study for those students who have the interest and skill to engage in it, and for faculty who have the desire, dedication, and time to teach undergraduate students in this way.

The recommendations convey the committee’s conclusion that discussions of the nature of and expectations for these learning experiences are best conducted at the “most local level”, within the department communities through which the courses are offered. Department faculties are encouraged to develop guidelines for the extent and type of directed study projects, including general expectations about the frequency and type of instructional contact for these courses. In addition, they have been asked to consider how these courses may count toward completion of major requirements. To facilitate these discussions, the L&S Curriculum Committee will develop a website that provides resource materials for departments. Finally, in the coming year, the committee will explore a request related to the use of directed study, as it looks into how the College might provide better support for departments seeking to respond to students’ requests for internship credits.

E. Other College-Level Activities Related to the Assessment of Student Learning

The L&S Academic Planning Council approved revisions to the college-wide Guidelines for Academic Program Review to elicit more detailed discussions of student learning in academic programs. This emphasis is echoed in materials provided to departments and review committees when reviews are initiated and committees convened. We anticipate that efforts to reinforce the focus on student learning will not only improve learning, but will also enhance the college’s ability to present more clearly information about what our graduates know and can do when they complete their academic work.

L&S Student Academic Affairs. In 2006-07, the L&S Student Academic Affairs Assessment Team developed a set of learning outcomes that could be applied division-wide to SAA. This activity was intended to unify the work of the division by establishing a shared set of themes, each of which can be refined and applied to the distinctive mission and role of each SAA unit. Each unit was required to submit an annual report for 2006-07 that identified their individual assessment efforts and cited future plans for assessment.

Building upon these efforts, the Assessment Team, in collaboration with Associate Dean Ann Groves Lloyd and the Offices of the Dean of Students, then integrated these outcome with the “Essential Learning Outcomes” articulated in the Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP) Initiative. As an active participant in the campus-wide “convergence” that promotes Essential Learning and the Wisconsin Experience, L&S SAA has made significant contributions to creating a framework to support liberal education. SAA has developed a framework for articulating how advisors and enrichment programs support liberal education which may serve as a model for developing a campus-wide template for articulating learning outcomes and pursuing the assessment of student learning in the many realms where students learn. The most recent draft of this document appears here as Attachment B.

Liberal Education and America's Promise – An Exciting Convergence. As noted above, L&S representatives actively participate in and promote university-wide discussion of “Liberal Education and America’s Promise: Excellence for Everyone as a Nation Goes to College”, the ten-year initiative sponsored by the American Association of Colleges and Universities that champions the value of a liberal education to students and to the nation. Many UW System institutions are active in this project; Associate Dean Nancy Westphal-Johnson and Professor Jolanda Vanderwal Taylor (German) serve as the UW-Madison LEAP representatives to UWSA and to AAC&U. The LEAP initiative focuses on developing a better public understanding of “what really matters” in college, promoting for all students the type of flexible and broad education that helps students succeed, solve problems, participate in civic discourse, and have a positive impact on the world around them. The AAC&U project describes the knowledge and skills that students must attain in terms of “Essential Learning Outcomes”; at UW-Madison, this essential learning has evolved to encompass what has been termed “the Wisconsin Experience.” As these discussions evolve, members have shifted the emphasis from “LEAP” to “Essential Learning”, having noted that the former is a ten-year initiative, while the latter is a long-term value.

The “Convergence Group” is an informally convened group that shares information about and works to develop activities related to essential learning at UW-Madison; by sharing information about the range of projects under way in their various units, members can share resources and leverage small projects by focusing and aligning them with each other. As members note, the framework provided by the Wisconsin Experience and essential learning provide a shared structure and focus for the range of initiatives each unit would usually undertake. By aligning their efforts, the collective direction emerges.

In addition to the campus-level liaisons to the UW System Advisory Group on Liberal Education, the Convergence Group includes individuals from the following areas:

- Vice Provost for Teaching and Learning
- Offices of the Dean of Students
- University General Education Committee (also L&S Academic Administration and Undergraduate Education)
- University Assessment Council
- L&S Student Academic Affairs
- Academic Planning and Analysis
- The Center for First-Year Experience
- Cross-College Advising Service
- L&S Office of Academic Planning, Assessment, and Program Review

All of the units that have converged focus on enhancing student learning by identifying and assessing outcomes that are aligned with the broadly stated outcomes, but which are expressed in ways that are consonant with the mission and activities of the individual unit. The group actively encourages other groups on campus to adopt this strategy – thus, many groups on campus will claim shared ownership and understanding of the broad outcomes, while the path toward achieving those outcomes varies widely. The convergence strategy has been remarkably successful in sharing information about essential learning at UW-Madison. In the past year, this

group has engaged in several activities intended to understand and improve student learning, by:

- Developing a template that can be used to “map” unit-level activities onto the essential learning outcomes, and has made this template available online, so it can be used across campus (<http://www.ls.wisc.edu/gened/LEAP/Essential%20Learning%20Outcomes%20rubric%20template.doc>).
- Sponsoring a focused discussion with members of the faculty and staff who teach (or influence) those courses most frequently taken by first year and new transfer students, to determine if learning goals that transcend course content might be discerned from their teaching practice. The results of that event suggest that there may be a “UW-Madison friendly” way of developing and measuring cross-cutting learning goals.
- Developing a flexible three-year plan for future activities, one which is to “operationalize” the learning goals articulated in the Wisconsin Experience, and to propose strategies for assessing student achievement of them. (This work will be undertaken in consultation with and advisory to the University Assessment Council.)

We anticipate that L&S will continue to participate in these discussions, and look forward to the outcome.

Consultation with UW Survey Center. In prior years, the college used Assessment Council funds to award small S&E grants to departments to fund use of Websurvey@UW. That project has ended, however, the UW Survey Center continues to provide a limited amount of expert consultation to departments to help develop effective survey tools in support of program-level assessment of student learning. Departments consult with UWSC and Dr. Klein about survey design challenges (e.g., question development, sampling strategies, data analysis). This consultation helps to ensure that surveys produce useful results and departments understand “the basics” of good quality survey research. It also helps us understand needs related to program-level assessment, and has helped us reflect upon questions commonly asked as units engage in this type of research.

Higher Learning Commission (HLC) Activities. Members of L&S continue to maintain a professional relationship with the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, UW-Madison’s regional accrediting agency. Both co-authors of this report serve as members of the consultant evaluator corps, and have shared their expertise on this topic with campus leaders who are preparing for the 2009 HLC site evaluation. In addition, Dr. Klein also works with the HLC as a peer-mentor in the Commission’s Academy for Assessment and as an instructor for periodic HLC-sponsored workshops on assessment. She has been invited to consult with other institutions that are developing assessment strategies or preparing for site visits. She and Associate Dean Nancy Westphal-Johnson have been active in UW-Madison, CIC, and UW System discussions on the topic of assessment of student learning, particularly as it is practiced in the General Education curriculum.

3. Assessment Activity in Academic Programs and Departments

Attached to this document is the *L&S Departmental Assessment Plan Summary, 2007-2008*, which outlines the status of assessment plans and reports regarding degree programs offered within the College of Letters and Science (Attachment C). This document reflects the three-year cycle for reporting on assessment activities. The L&S APC approved that cycle so departments and programs have sufficient time to develop meaningful assessment projects, obtain and consider results, and undertake action based on the evidence that change may be required. Where feasible, the cycle is linked to other regular activities, such as accreditation, program review, new program development, etc. We share here college-level overview:

- This is the first time we have sought reports since imposing the new reporting cycle. Departments and programs responded well to our request: 86% of the reports were supplied as requested; the remainder of departments have arranged for extensions of the deadline. Department chairs have indicated (informally) that they appreciate having time to conduct studies and reflect on them before submitting reports.
- Surveys continue to be popular tools for assessing students; however, the quality and focus of these tools have evolved over the past several years. Whereas early surveys attended to “satisfaction” with services, many of the surveys currently in use invite students to reflect upon their attainment of program learning goals.
- An impressive number of reports include “direct” assessment of student learning (e.g., examination of portfolios, review of papers, interviews conducted in a target language).
- Professional schools continue to lead the college assessment efforts, with robust assessment activities underway in the Schools of Library and Information Studies and Social Work.
- Departments that manage large majors have responded creatively to this task. History fields a carefully constructed survey to all students in the major, via a course evaluation in the capstone History course. Spanish and Portuguese samples student papers in key courses required of majors. Sociology uses the UW Data Warehouse to obtain information about student course-taking patterns. Each strategy draws upon the particular strengths of the faculty in each of these department; each renders information the faculty can use immediately for program improvement.
- Some programs are beginning to respond to the invitation to consider student learning in light of The Wisconsin Experience and goals of liberal education. The report from the International Studies major observes that this area is an important means by which students develop skills in integrative learning, as well as knowledge of human cultures and inter-cultural knowledge. These connections are drawn explicitly in the report submitted by the Center for Latin American, Caribbean, and Iberian Studies, which made use of the essential learning template to “map” its educational program to those goals.

4. Assessment Activities Planned for 2008-2009

- The L&S Academic Planning Council and L&S Curriculum Committee will continue to receive reports on and/or approve actions arising from assessment of student learning in L&S programs. As we encourage departments to engage in meaningful assessment of student learning, we will continue to find sensible uses for assessment results in areas for which these key committees provide college-level oversight (e.g., as a component of department/program review, as the foundation for requests for revisions to existing academic programs, as the rationale requests to develop new programs).
- The L&S Curriculum Committee, in consultation with L&S Student Academic Affairs, will continue to monitor the impact of the implementation of BABS07. The Committee will be asked to review the college-level assessment plan and to revise or develop, as necessary, elements related to college-level learning goals.
- L&S faculty and staff will continue to participate in campus-level assessment activities (Assessment Council, LEAP, UGEC); these connections will enhance college-level efforts to describe college-level learning goals that will align with and build upon learning goals developed for undergraduate General Education and “the Wisconsin Experience”.
- We will continue to develop low-cost mechanisms to support departmental efforts related to improving student learning (maintaining website, talking with departments, etc.).
- We anticipate that in the coming year, these activities will include participation in activities related to the university-wide reaccreditation project, and in discussions related to the April 2009 site visit.
- L&S will continue to support Dr. Klein’s interactions with the Higher Learning Commission Assessment Mentor Network and Assessment Academy, with an eye toward better understanding of the national conversation that increasingly seeks to encourage institutions of higher education to be “learner-focused”.