

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
Quality Initiative Proposal

**Renewing our Commitment
to
Undergraduate Education**

Submitted to the
Higher Learning Commission
of the
North Central Association of Colleges and Schools
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Overview of the Quality Initiative

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM) is engaged in two undergraduate education initiatives: a) a reform of the general education component and b) implementation of a systematic process for assessment of student learning. Together, these two initiatives, connected at multiple levels with overlapping goals and action steps, constitute a major effort on the part of the institution to improve the quality of undergraduate learning leading to a coherent learning experience for all undergraduate students.

At the heart of our efforts will be a restructuring of the undergraduate curriculum using the Essential Learning Outcomes (ELO's) of the Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) campaign of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) as guiding principles. The Essential Learning Outcomes are listed in Appendix I. Learning outcomes for the curriculum, each undergraduate program and student experience will be mapped to the ELO's providing a framework in which learning assessment at course, program, and institutional levels can be aggregated. The reformed general education component based on the ELO's will make integration of general education with the majors easier and more transparent.

This quality initiative will have a very broad and deep impact on all undergraduate programs at UWM. We expect significant and measurable increases in student learning outcomes that translate into higher rates of retention and graduation, higher rates student satisfaction with the UWM college experience, and improved faculty and staff satisfaction. We also expect that these efforts will contribute to closing the achievement gap further for disadvantaged students that began with the excellent work done under the *Access to Success* umbrella at UWM.

Clarity of Outcomes (1-2 pages)

1. *What are the intended outcomes or milestones of the initiative?*
 - a. Every undergraduate program at UWM will have
 - i. A set of program learning outcomes that are mapped to the Essential Learning Outcomes;
 - ii. An assessment plan that maps to the curriculum and other student experiences; and
 - iii. Analysis of assessment data and documentation of improvements made based on the analysis.
 - b. Institutional level analysis of achievement of student learning outcomes

c. A coherent, outcomes-based general education component with redesigned general education courses.

2. *What are the methods and measures for evaluating progress and for determining what has been accomplished?*

For outcomes 1.a. and 1.b, progress will be tracked through the WEAVE Online system to which UWM has subscribed. WEAVE Online is a web-based system for documenting and reporting assessment information including program mission, learning objectives, curriculum mapping, measurements of outcomes achievement and findings, analysis of findings, and actions taken to address identified issues. While every undergraduate program at UWM has been making program improvements that are based on formal and informal assessment of student learning, the current efforts are to document the information in a systematic way using a framework that allows aggregation of assessment information at program and institutional levels.

The General Education Task Force will continue its work to develop a proposal for the redesigned general education component. Progress reports will be made regularly to the Academic Programs and Curriculum Committee (APCC), the campus-level governance committee on undergraduate programs, the Faculty Senate, and to the Academic Deans Council. Outcome 1.c. will be achieved when the revised general education document is approved by APCC and the Faculty Senate and redesigned courses are in place. APCC will monitor progress in implementation of the revised general education as well as ongoing monitoring of the program.

A semi-annual progress report on the quality initiative will be prepared by the Provost's office and shared with the campus community.

3. *What potential challenges are anticipated in achieving the intended outcomes or milestones and how are they being addressed?*

We anticipate the same challenges faced by all institutions in implementing projects of this magnitude and scope. Resistance to change from the current way of doing things will be encountered. Our approach, thus far, has been to engage the broadest possible sections of the campus community in discussions on general education reform and assessment of student learning. While this strategy of wide and deliberate consultations requires investment of time and energy, our experience to date has been that the approach helps build consensus among faculty and staff for the goals and the action plans. Additionally, at an institution with a strong faculty governance tradition, extensive consultation is necessary to foster the acceptance that will help the proposals through the governance process.

Resource constraints pose other potential challenges to accomplishing the milestones. The institution has committed sufficient human and technology resources to maximize the probability meeting the timeline provided elsewhere. Since the initiative is led by a team, the potential challenges due to turn over in key positions are minimized.

Scope and Significance of the Initiative (3-4 pages)

4. *How is the proposed initiative relevant and timely, given the context of your institution?*

The Academic Programs and Curriculum Committee (APCC), the campus-level governance committee on undergraduate programs, has adopted the Essential Learning Outcomes of the Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) initiative of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU) as the guiding principles for all undergraduate programs at UWM. Appendix I contains the Essential Learning Outcomes. In addition, the UW System Board of Regents has adopted a set of Shared Learning Goals for all UW System institutions, which is also included in Appendix I. There is a significant convergence between the two with the Essential Learning Outcomes being more descriptive.

These documents provide the framework in which the quality initiative is defined. As seen in the descriptions of the program assessment and the general education components of the initiative below, there is considerable overlap and linkage between these two aspects. We believe it would be very difficult to work on one aspect without simultaneously impacting the other.

General Education

Current status:

At UWM, general education had not been viewed as a *program* but as a collection of large number of individual courses with general education designation. While it is possible for an individual student to put together a coherent set of general education courses to be meaningful for that student, this does not happen in general. There has not been any institutional level review of the general education requirements since they were formulated in 1984. Student learning outcomes for general education component of the curricula have not been established.

Efforts to assess student outcomes with respect to the goals of the general education have been stymied by the lack of clearly stated general education outcomes and are limited to assessment done at the course level where course level outcomes are defined. Without assessment results, it is not possible to answer questions about the general education requirements such as: Are they effective in preparing students for the 21st century? Are the requirements appropriate for the specializations in the array of disciplinary fields of study pursued by UWM students? Questions such as these arise both from an internal reflection as well as from the need to be accountable to various constituencies served by the University.

The goals of the general education requirements at UWM, formulated in 1984, are stated as "General education should provide opportunities to develop a strong foundation of verbal and quantitative skills; to understand the roles of methods and processes and their constraining effects on thought; to gain cultural and historical perspectives on the world; to develop consciousness of self in relation to tradition; to appreciate creativity, including the creation, testing, and application of ideas; to see how ideas relate to social structures; and to understand how values infuse both action and inquiry."

To meet these goals, the current general education requirements at UWM are organized into a blend of competency and distribution requirements. The competency requirements assure basic student competencies in English composition, mathematics,

and foreign language. The distribution requirements provide a broad body of knowledge in the arts, humanities, natural and social sciences, and cultural diversity (added in 1989) as a foundation for specialization. The competency requirements may be met by either achieving a specified score in a placement examination or by successfully completing coursework. The distribution requirements are met by successfully completing courses designated as general education courses in each area. Some of the distribution requirements may also be met by completing an alternative curriculum referred to as Cultures and Communities (developed in 2001), a set of courses that emphasizes diversity and cross-cultural literacy, multicultural arts, global studies, and the cultural contexts of science, health care, and technology.

Progress made:

The Provost established a General Education Task Force in the fall of 2007. Membership on the Task Force is made up of faculty, instructional academic staff, academic advisors, other student support professionals, and academic administrators. Teams of Task Force members have attended various national institutes and conferences on general education. The Task Force functions as the engine that pushes the agenda to redesign general education based on outcomes rather than on distribution of credits. Numerous open sessions have been held on campus to receive input from campus community and regular updates are given face-to-face to governance bodies, academic Deans, and Department Chairs, and electronically to the campus community. The LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes have been adopted as the basis for formulating general education outcomes. Much progress has been made on campus with several working groups of the Task Force (including members of the broad campus community) formulating recommendations on specific aspects of general education including oral and written communication, quantitative literacy, information literacy, cultural diversity, and breadth of knowledge. In particular, this is reflected in an enhanced first year experience that focuses on the general education learning outcomes in combination with the student support services under the *Access to Success* umbrella.

Projected timeline:

We expect to have the redesigned general education program and guidelines for general education courses to be adopted by campus governance bodies and administration in the course of 2010-11 academic year with implementation to begin in the Fall 2011 semester.

Student Learning Assessment

Current Status:

The responsibility for assessment of student learning at UWM is decentralized and rests at the program level. The maturity of the overall process of learning assessment varies among programs. Many programs, especially in the professional schools, have implemented a systematic process to define and assess outcomes and to use the assessment results for curricular and other programmatic decisions. Numerous examples can be found in the College of Engineering and Applied Science, Lubar School of Business, College of Nursing, School of Education, and College of Health Sciences.

There are also examples of programs in which defining and assessing student learning outcomes are in the early stages of development. The decentralized nature of the responsibility for assessment also has led to a lack of a common framework to aggregate student learning measures across the institution. As mentioned earlier, the institution is in the process of developing learning outcomes for the general education component of the curriculum.

Taking advantage of the work done by the General Education Task Force and the APCC adoption of LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes as guiding principles for all undergraduate majors, efforts are now under way to reformulate and reorganize program level learning outcomes and mapping them to the Essential Learning Outcomes. The latter, then, provides a common framework across all programs with which assessment results can be aggregated and reported at the institutional level.

Along with the mapping of the program outcomes to Essential Learning Outcomes, we will also be working on a common method of reporting assessment measures for many of the outcomes such as analytical reasoning, critical thinking, communication skills, information literacy, quantitative literacy, and problem solving skills.

The campus has subscribed to WEAVE Online, a web based system for documenting assessment information including the mission, learning objectives, curriculum mapping, measurements and findings, analysis of findings, and actions taken to address identified issues. The system allows for some standardization in the format for reporting assessment information and to generate institutional monitoring and reporting of assessment information. The Provost's office has provided support staff to assist departments in uploading information into the system. The overall expected outcome is better and formalized documentation of assessment information to assist faculty in making the necessary decisions for program improvement. While every undergraduate program at UWM has been making program improvements that are based on formal and informal assessment of student learning, the current efforts are to document the information in WEAVE Online.

Progress made:

In the 2009-10 academic year, discussions have been held with all department chairs, deans and associate deans on the proposed framework for organizing and assessing program outcomes. Teams of faculty and staff from the General Education Task Force visited with nearly every academic department to begin the work of mapping program outcomes to the Essential Learning Outcomes and the curriculum. About 80% of the departments have made progress towards Outcome 1 of the quality initiative already.

5. *How does the proposed initiative reflect key elements of the institution's mission, vision, and strategic priorities?*

The goal of the quality initiative is to increase the focus on student learning in the undergraduate programs in a systematic and transparent way and is core to the mission and vision of the institution. Additionally, UWM has two primary strategic foci: research growth, and *Access to Success*. Launched in 2005, *Access to Success* combines various academic and student service programs to increase academic success of all students, to decrease the achievement gap in performance, retention, and graduation

between students of color and majority students, as well as between students placing at college level versus developmental level math and English. By focusing on the quality of the academic experiences for all undergraduate students, the quality initiative directly contributes to the *Access to Success* initiative.

6. *How does the proposed initiative represent a “stretch project” for the institution?*

The initial focus for *Access to Success* was the critical first year of the students’ academic life in college. Great strides have been made in improving first year academic performance and retention rates and reducing achievement gaps. High impact practices such as first year seminars, redesigned courses, learning communities, and undergraduate research have contributed to students’ success in the first year. Student advising, mentoring, and a redesigned freshman orientation program contributes to the engagement of first year students and encourages more intentional focus on academic goals. The work done by the dedicated staff of the First Year Center has been critical to achieving the goals of *Access to Success*.

At the same time, under the umbrella of the General Education Task Force, faculty and staff have been engaged in discussion on improving the quality of student learning and achieving coherence in the undergraduate programs to prepare students for the 21st century. Merging the work of *Access to Success* working groups and the work of the General Education Task Force has enabled the development of a new path for improving the quality of undergraduate experience for all students from admission to graduation. Restructuring the entire undergraduate experience for all students based on learning outcomes that are relevant for the 21st century is a major quality undertaking for the institution.

7. *How does the initiative align with, compete with, or support other operational and strategic priorities?*

As described above, the quality initiative aligns extremely well with the *Access to Success* strategic priority. The initiative also directly supports the research growth priority of the institution. Discussions with the Graduate Faculty Committee, the governance committee with oversight on graduate programs and research, and with the Academic Deans Council brought forth the appreciation of the relevance and the value of Essential Learning Outcomes to graduate education and research. Since the initiative focuses on improving student learning based on these outcomes, it has the potential to prepare a high quality pool of students who can engage effectively in research. Including and expanding undergraduate research as one of the key high impact experiences for students also supports the research growth priority.

8. *What is the intended impact of the initiative on the institution generally and on its academic core?*

The impact of the initiative will be felt across the institution in all programs. We expect the graduates of UWM to be well prepared to face the challenges of the real world in the 21st century. We expect the quality of learning and teaching in the academic programs to improve continuously in meaningful ways. We expect the transparency of the

relationship between outcomes and curriculum/courses to enable students to be more intentional learners. By creating a common articulation of program goals as ELOs, the initiative will make it possible to see and exploit interdisciplinary links that were not apparent when programs were considered only from the point of view of subject matters.

9. *How does the initiative align with one or more of the Commission's Criteria for Accreditation?*

The initiative aligns most strongly with Criterion 3 (*The organization provides evidence of student learning and teaching effectiveness that demonstrates it is fulfilling its educational mission*) and its core components 3.a, 3.b, and 3.d, as its focus is on clearly stating the institutions goals for student learning for each program and implement an effective assessment plan that allows for providing evidence at the course, program, and the institutional levels (3.a). The associated faculty and staff development aspects of the initiative and the investments made cataloging and organizing assessment demonstrate that the institution valued and supports effective teaching and student learning (3.b, 3.d). Through integration of general education into the undergraduate programs, the initiative also supports Criterion 4.b. By using the Essential Learning Outcomes, which have been vetted with multiple national constituencies, as the basis for undergraduate program and the associated assessment plans, the initiative supports Criterion 4.c

Evidence of Commitment and Capacity (2-3 pages)

10. *How did the idea for this initiative originate? Who was involved in identifying it? To what extent do major internal or external stakeholders support this initiative as a priority for your institution?*

The seeds for the initiative were planted in 2005 when the *Access to Success* initiative to improve student performance and success in the first year was launched. Contemporaneous discussions among faculty on the status of the general education component of undergraduate program led teams of faculty and staff to attend multiple institutes and workshops on reform of general education and integration of general education into the majors. The General Education Task Force, established in 2007, has grown its roster to over 70 faculty, staff, and administrators. Using the Essential Learning Outcomes for establishing the framework for mapping program outcomes (including general education) and assessment of student learning was first developed by a team of faculty that attended the AACU Engaging Departments Institute in 2009. Upon returning to campus, the team worked with other faculty and staff to develop templates for mapping program and course level outcomes. Thus, overall, the initiative was identified through teamwork.

Discussions were held with the Academic Programs and Curriculum Committee, the University Committee (Executive Committee of the Faculty Senate), the Academic Staff Committee (Executive Committee of Academic Staff Senate), the Academic Deans Council, the General Education Task Force, and campus administration on the initiative and identifying it as a priority. Concurrence was achieved from all of the consulted

governance and administrative bodies. The fact that faculty, staff, and administration were already working on the action plan proposed in the initiative prior to being invited to be part of the Pathways Project speaks to the importance given to the initiative by the institution.

The work plan has been discussed with UW System Administration staff and presented at the President's Summit on Student Learning and Teaching in April 2010. Support for the proposed activities has been received.

11. *What groups and individuals have been designated to ensure adequate leadership to implement and sustain the initiative?*

The overall responsibility and leadership for the project rests with UWM's Provost. In each school/college, the Dean will have overall responsibility and leadership for the initiative. The institutional tradition is to involve teams of faculty and staff to focus on various aspects of a project of this magnitude and involve the broadest possible swath of the campus community in implementing the project.

Overall campus level coordination of the initiative will rest with a leadership team made up of the following individuals:

- Anthony Ciccone, Director, Center for Instructional and Professional Development
- Gesele Durham, Director of Assessment and Institutional Research
- Kathryn Dindia, Professor, Communication, Member of General Education Task Force
- William Keith, Professor, Communication, Member of General Education Task Force
- Jeffrey Merrick, Associate Dean, College of Letters and Science
- Laura Pedrick, Special Assistant to the Provost
- Ericca Rolland, Director, First Year Center
- Susan Stalewski, Clinical Associate Professor, College of Health Sciences
- Dev Venugopalan, Associate Vice Chancellor, Academic Affairs

The Assessment Council, consisting of members from each school and college as well as from the Academic Affairs division, will meet on a regular basis to assess progress and will identify strategies to help programs meet milestones. Academic support units such as the Center for Instructional and Professional Development will provide the necessary consultation and faculty/staff development programs on assessment tools, techniques, and methodology.

Regular consultations and updates will be held with key governance committees including the Academic Programs and Curriculum Committee, the University Committee, and the Academic Staff Committee, and with the Academic Deans Council Associate Dean Network, Academic Administrative Network, and Department Chairs.

12. *What human, financial, technological and other resources has the institution committed to this initiative and are they sufficient?*

Implementing and sustaining the initiative will be largely based on existing structures and resources within the institution. The necessary investments in the technology needed to support the work (WEAVE Online, course management system (D2L), survey and assessment tools) have already been made and will be sufficient for conducting the work on the initiative. Assessment of student learning at the course level is part of the normal responsibilities of faculty and instructional academic staff. The Provost's office will provide support staff for uploading and maintaining program level assessment information in the WEAVE Online system and for generating institutional level reports on assessment. The existing structures such as the General Education Task Force and the Assessment Council will continue to function as they do now. The Center for Instructional and Professional Development will align its faculty and staff professional development in full support of the quality initiative. Support for facilitating meetings and workshops for faculty and staff will be provided by the Provost.

13. *What is the plan for integrating and sustaining the results of the initiative into the systems and ongoing work of the institution?*

The current approach to the work on general education reform and assessment of program outcomes might be best described as a "grass roots approach". The work done by more than 70 faculty and staff of the General Education Task Force and the Assessment Council is focused on student learning and is oriented towards building a culture of assessment on campus. The campus investments in *Access to Success* initiatives, technology to support assessment, and teaching and learning improvement activities are intended to be sustained and will help integrate the outcomes of the initiative with the ongoing work of the institution.

Appropriate Timeline (1 – 2 pages or an appended action plan)

14. *What are the strategies and timeline for implementing the initiative?*

Timeline and strategies:

a. Outcome 1.a.i. will be completed by December 2010.

Strategies:

- Identification of assessment coordinator for each program
- Consultations with program assessment coordinator and chair on program outcomes and mapping to Essential Learning Outcomes
- Uploading and revising information in WEAVE Online

b. Outcome 1.a.ii. will be completed by May 2011

Strategies:

- Professional development for assessment coordinators, chairs, faculty and staff on
 - mapping outcomes to curriculum and co-curricular experiences
 - developing assessment tools (such as rubrics)
- Uploading and revising information in WEAVE Online

- c. Work on outcome 1.a.iii. is ongoing. All programs will have completed at least one cycle of data collection, analysis, and reporting of findings and actions taken for improvement by end of 2011-12 academic year.

Strategies:

- Professional development and consultations with assessment coordinators, chairs, faculty and staff, as needed, on assessment of student learning outcomes
- Assistance, as needed, on data collection and analysis
- Uploading information in WEAVE Online

- d. At least one cycle of institutional level analysis on Outcome 1.b. will be completed by the end of the 2011-12 academic year.

Strategies:

- Academic Affairs staff analysis of outcomes achievement and action plans at the institutional level

- e. Approval of redesigned general education component and guidelines for general education courses by the Academic Program and Curriculum Committee by the end of 2010-11 academic year.

Strategies:

- Regular meetings of general education task force on redesign of general education requirements and guidelines
- Regular consultation with governance committees of faculty and staff, and with administrators
- Communication to campus community on the revisions and obtaining feedback

Institutional Contact for Quality Initiative Proposal

Please include the name(s) of the primary contact person for the Quality Initiative.

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Appendix I

The Essential Learning Outcomes



Beginning in school, and continuing at successively higher levels across their college studies, students should prepare for twenty-first-century challenges by gaining:

★ **Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Physical and Natural World**

- Through study in the sciences and mathematics, social sciences, humanities, histories, languages, and the arts

Focused by engagement with big questions, both contemporary and enduring

★ **Intellectual and Practical Skills, including**

- Inquiry and analysis
- Critical and creative thinking
- Written and oral communication
- Quantitative literacy
- Information literacy
- Teamwork and problem solving

Practiced extensively, across the curriculum, in the context of progressively more challenging problems, projects, and standards for performance

★ **Personal and Social Responsibility, including**

- Civic knowledge and engagement—local and global
- Intercultural knowledge and competence
- Ethical reasoning and action
- Foundations and skills for lifelong learning

Anchored through active involvement with diverse communities and real-world challenges

★ **Integrative Learning, including**

- Synthesis and advanced accomplishment across general and specialized studies

Demonstrated through the application of knowledge, skills, and responsibilities to new settings and complex problems

Note: This listing was developed through a multiyear dialogue with hundreds of colleges and universities about needed goals for student learning; analysis of a long series of recommendations and reports from the business community; and analysis of the accreditation requirements for engineering, business, nursing, and teacher education. The findings are documented in previous publications of the Association of American Colleges and Universities: *Greater Expectations: A New Vision for Learning as a Nation Goes to College* (2002), *Taking Responsibility for the Quality of the Baccalaureate Degree* (2004), and *Liberal Education Outcomes: A Preliminary Report on Achievement in College* (2005).



Taken from *College Learning for the New Global Century*, Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2007.

University of Wisconsin System

Shared Learning Goals for Baccalaureate Students

- **Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Natural World** including breadth of knowledge and the ability to think beyond one's discipline, major, or area of concentration. This knowledge can be gained through the study of the arts, humanities, languages, sciences, and social sciences.
- **Critical and Creative Thinking Skills** including inquiry, problem solving, and higher order qualitative and quantitative reasoning.
- **Effective Communication Skills** including listening, speaking, reading, writing, and information literacy.
- **Intercultural knowledge and competence** including the ability to interact and work with people from diverse backgrounds and cultures; to lead or contribute support to those who lead; and to empathize with and understand those who are different than they are.
- **Individual, Social and Environmental Responsibility** including civic knowledge and engagement (both local and global), ethical reasoning, and action.