Response to UW Milwaukee Assessment and Accreditation Material Sent August 27, 2004

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General Education Requirements

Material Reviewed

I have reviewed the packet of material on General Education sent to me on 8/27/04 from Rita Cheng, as well as relevant documents from my earlier work with the university and my visit to campus in March, 2004. Specifically, in relation to General Education, I have reviewed:

- The “APCC Summary of Concerns and Issues Related to the GER,” including cover memo of Feb. 10, 2004 from Kim Pietsch to Suzanne Falco, Rita Cheng, and Kathleen Barber. Part of this document is a “Proposed Structure for Evaluation.”
- Excerpt from the Minutes of December 9, 2003 APCC meeting, on GER Review, reporting the motion approved to require that “all future requests for GER approval will have to provide a justification for how the course meets the requirements in document 1382 for a GER course.”
- Page 10 from Section Four of the “Academic Planning and Program Review” of July 2003, dealing with the Institutional Review Process
- AAPCC’s “General Education Requirements Policies and Procedures” of December 1, 1998 (includes Faculty Senate Document #1382)
- Draft of the Program Review for GER (undated)
- Reports of subcommittees on assessment in response to General Education Outcomes Assessment Task Force request, in the following areas:
  - Composition
  - Mathematics
  - Foreign Language
  - The Arts
  - Humanities
  - Social Sciences
  - Natural Sciences
  - Cultural Diversity
  - Cultures and Communities
- Matrix on GER and Transfer Students in the Associate of Applied Science Programs, with cover memos of July 1, 2004 from Larry Rubin and from John Waters.
Achievements
Since my visit in March 2004, significant progress has been made in assessment within GER courses:

1. A list of seven bulleted General Education learning outcomes has been generated, which can serve as a basis for more discipline-specific statements of learning outcomes.
2. APCC has passed a requirement that “all future requests for GER approval will have to provide a justification for how the course meets the requirements in document 1382 for a GER Course.”
3. All sub-areas (Composition, Mathematics, Cultural Diversity, Communication and Community, as well as each of the disciplinary areas (Arts, Social Sciences, Humanities, etc.) have produced a report on assessment in GER. These reports not only document some of the assessment going on, but the reports especially from Social Sciences, Natural Sciences, and Humanities thoughtfully and richly grapple with the problems mentioned below
4. Conversation has been opened about how to include assessment of GER courses meaningfully in Program Review

Problems

1. Faculty Senate Document 1382 does not provide statements of learning goals/outcomes that easily can serve as bases for assessment for GER courses.
2. Current requirements for approval of GER courses do not specifically require assessment.
3. There is no periodic review process for GER courses once they are initially approved.
4. There is little integration of university-wide measures with course-specific and department/discipline-specific measures of student learning in GER courses.
5. There is insufficient evidence of integration of GER assessment with campus processes such as strategic planning and budgeting, or with important initiatives such as retention. GER assessment is still too peripheral to aspects of campus life that carry significant budgetary or other rewards and in which people are willing to invest time and energy.

My Recommendations

1. Accept the seven bulleted overall Gen Ed learning goals that are currently coming into use, and move on. Do not try to get Senate approval for changes in document #1382. Rather, let sub areas (natural sciences, humanities, etc.) and individual disciplines/courses construct their own learning goals as long as they are related to one or more of the 7 bulleted goals. The main problem to be addressed is NOT statements of learning goals at intermediate levels such as humanities as a whole, so don’t spend too much time on this. You can go directly from the 7 bulleted goals to individual course and disciplinary goals. The Humanities report is
especially in danger here of raising a storm around the meaning of the Humanities which may generate more heat than light and detract from the energy needed to get departments farther along on their own assessment plans (though my own humanist’s heart is fascinated with the cogent and thoughtful analysis of the nature of the humanities that Schuster and Ciccone present).

2. Institute some form of periodic review for GER courses that are already accepted, requiring evidence that effective assessment is being conducted.

   a. The Social Sciences, Natural Sciences, and Humanities reports all call for some way in which review of GER courses can be folded meaningfully into Program Review AND into some type of periodic review by APCC. The two must be integrated in some pattern that, within the coming five years, will cover all current GER courses, yet not be too burdensome on departments or involve them in duplicatory reviews.

   b. These reviews must not appear too draconian, centralized, or time consuming, or they will backfire. Better to start modestly with something that faculty and departments can accept as fair and feasible, and something they are already mostly doing. I’d begin by simply asking GER courses to state four things for their review:

      i. Learning goals stated in the syllabus
      ii. Assignments/exams that provide direct evidence of how well students are achieving the learning goals
      iii. If desired, also student evaluations that gather indirect evidence of students’ perception of their achievement of the goals as well as their evaluation of instruction
      iv. Explanation of how the teacher uses the class-wide results of those assignments/exams and student evaluations for course improvement, and an example or two of changes that have been based on such assessment information.

   c. Once the structure of periodical GER review is accepted, then people will figure out how to improve it, add more data, etc., but that’s for later.

   d. This means that most of the new survey and other data-gathering techniques discussed in the Humanities and other reports are a later stage. Don’t try to introduce them now.

   e. It’s very important to provide coaching, draft review, workshops, and other support to faculty and departments/programs as they prepare for the GER aspect of Program Review or for review by APCC. The intermediate, discipline-based structures that are starting to emerge might be good places for this to occur. The Humanities report, for example, envisions a Humanities Review Board that would in effect coach and pre-select GER courses before they come up for review by APCC. This is a lot of work for both the coachers and the faculty/departments, but it is crucial. For that reason, it is unwise to institute time-consuming new data-gathering strategies. Concentrate on helping faculty and departments report what they already do and refine it.
3. Begin to feed institution-wide student and alumni survey data to GER faculty and programs, as another source of data for their deliberation.
4. As new university-wide plans, initiatives, strategic plans, and budgeting processes emerge, base them on GER assessment data and integrate them with ongoing GER assessment processes.

**Prelude to the Individual GER Program Responses**

In the following pages, I respond to each GER sub-area report. I admire and respect the hard work that went into these reports.

I note that they are of two types:
1. One type reports the kinds of assessments that are in place or are planned
2. Another types—Humanities, Social Sciences and Natural Sciences—are analyses of problems and recommendations for improvements in the SYSTEM by which courses in that area are considered or reviewed for GER status.

Both kinds are very helpful. Below, I’ve given only brief responses to Type 2 reports, because I have discussed the issues above.
GER Programs

Composition

1. The goal statements seem clear and useful.
2. The grid is very helpful, especially since it includes the column on USE of the information.
3. It is common for institutions that use a portfolio for pass/fail decisions in composition to focus solely on the individual student’s pass or fail. Your “Use of Information” column suggests you analyze portfolios for trends and patterns that can lead to program improvement.
4. I would not list “Orientation/Training Meetings,” “Fall Orientation Evaluations,” or “English 701” and the like as assessment measures of classroom learning. You have such a fine assessment program, you don’t want to look like you don’t know what a measure actually is or like you need to pack your report, which you don’t. It’s painful to eliminate this information, but in a report on the assessment measures you are using, it may be irrelevant. Alternately, if it is useful to include the information in the report, you might have a section titled something like “Supporting Assessment.” In here are the structural, logistical, and faculty-development actions you take to teach faculty about assessment and help them conduct it.
5. Your final section, “Innovations Based on Recent Assessment” is very important. Depending on the uses to which this report will be put, you might include a few sentences of further information in each example, showing how the action is linked to the data and indicating, if you can, how you will ascertain whether your action results in improvement.
6. You don’t analyze, in the report, what you think is strongest about your assessment and what improvements you hope or plan to make in the assessment system. I’d add a final section to do this.
Mathematics

1. As you implement Level Two Assessment, the learning goals you generate can appear at the beginning of the report.

2. Your Level One assessment measures seem to address various questions. It would be helpful to describe the assessment question each measure attempts to answer. For example, #2c: are you trying to find out whether first-time takers get higher grades than repeat takers? Or some other question? How will answers to this question help you improve learning?

3. In your section on “department activities/initiatives,” you include material that could go under a more useful (for the NCA report anyway) category—how assessment information is used. For example, the first bullet under #3—the course coordinators—could be described as one of the mechanisms for using assessment data. Where do the Course Coordinators get the data on which they determine what is to be covered, in what sequence, and in how much time? If they look at student learning evidence, then you have a nice use here of assessment data. Same for the UCC and some of the other items you describe.
1. You clearly outline the learning outcomes for the various modes by which students fulfill the FL requirement, and make recommendations within some of those modes.

2. Under “Indirect Assessment,” letter “a” and letter “c” are types of data—end-of-semester course evaluations and classroom observation. Points “b” and “d” are really ways of analyzing and using the data from exams and teachers’ daily classroom interactions with students. I’d move “b” and “d” into section III.

3. In Section III, on using the data, the division into direct and indirect data leads to repetition, because in fact some of the same groups of people meet to discuss both direct and indirect data. I’d use headings here such as “Individual Instructors,” “Groups of Instructors,” “Language Coordinators,” and “TA Training,” so the reader sees the layers of structural components in place for interpreting, and using the assessment data.

4. Item #4 is good information, but it tells what the departments do, rather than what students learn. I’d omit it. After such a strong report, you don’t want to end with a section that implies you have confused a description of what the teachers do with a description of what students are learning. That will be a red flag for NCA. What would be very useful is a final section that gives examples of how data have been used to make changes and, if possible, whether any data have indicated the success of those changes in improving learning. For example, you intimate that there have been syllabus changes as a result of assessment data—give a specific example.
The Arts

1. Your review of national practice in stating GEN ED outcomes generally and for the arts in particular is very helpful. Elsewhere in this report, I have made suggestions about how, politically, UW Milwaukee might address the problem of stating GER objectives along areas of competency. You are correct that this needs to be done.

2. Your “criteria” could be stated as “learning goals” as the first part of your report. In GEN ED arts courses, students will learn to:
   a. Create, collaborate….and so on

3. In that same initial section on goals, include the ways in which faculty in various Arts programs are deciding to include learning goals as part of their syllabus. Such information belongs under goals, not under assessment instruments.

4. Your current Section VI can then become a section on Assessment Instruments. Subheads could identify the various programs and their measures: e.g.
   a. Visual Arts: Student Survey
   b. Dance: Student Survey and Performance Reviews
   c. And so on

5. For each area (Visual Arts, Dance, etc.) it is important to describe how the faculty will USE the assessment data to make improvements.
1. Your review of the “criteria” for Humanities, other institutions’ practices as reflected in their websites, and your reduction of Humanities education to two primary goals are all very useful.

2. The Nine Principles are enormously helpful in many contexts, and an excellent guide for all GER assessment, but they seem anomalous in this document, if its purpose is to report assessment in the Humanities. You don’t refer to them later or link your reported assessment measures to them. I’d distribute them on campus and use them to shape practice, but not include them in this document, or only as an appendix.

3. Your use of Mark Harris’ view is very helpful here for all GER goal-setting, and I’d use it university-wide to allow the APCC and the various sub-disciplines to establish working descriptions of learning goals in the various areas.

4. You propose an intermediary body that would, in effect, act as a pre-screening and coaching body to help departments prepare to get their GER courses accepted by APCC. You propose in A.2. that there might be such a body just for the Humanities (and presumably for other sub-areas as well) or a Committee of the APCC that would review all proposals. Whichever strategy would make most sense given campus political realities, I think you are correct that such a review and coaching function is very important.

5. You propose two ways of implementing assessment in Humanities—a Preferred Plan and a Fallback plan. Both are very ambitious and likely to raise hackles, I think, but if implemented, even in part, could be very helpful in raising the quality of assessment and presumably of learning in humanities GER courses.

I like the Preferred Plan because

- It is based on the assumption that assessment in Humanities, because the disciplines are so different, will be primarily, if not entirely, classroom-based. The goal of the Humanities Review Committee, and the APCC, then becomes to ensure and encourage the effective implementation of classroom assessment, by which instructors of GER Humanities courses state learning goals in line with the university’s GER learning goals and, most important, that they institute meaningful assessment of those goals and use the assessment information to improve teaching.
- In line with this assumption, the Preferred Plan calls for a body (The Humanities Review Committee) and a series of requirements and deadlines for approval of GER Humanities courses, but does not attempt over-arching assessment measures such as centrally-administered surveys of students in Humanities courses, standard end-of-semester evaluations, and the like, which, would likely engender strong hostility.

My advice is to begin with as much of the Preferred Plan as you can manage, as rapidly as you can manage, emphasizing that instructors must demonstrate three things: that they have articulated learning goals, they have instituted assessment of learning (usually by
student assignments and exams, and perhaps by student surveys or end-of-semester evaluations), and they are using the results of that assessment to improve their teaching.

I understand why you are very fixed on the syllabus as the document by which faculty will demonstrate the three steps of assessment, because submitting a syllabus is what they’re used to doing and are likely to accept. But it may be necessary to have faculty submit a proposal that specifically addresses the three steps of assessment, only two of which will be reflected in the syllabus. The proposal would be required to substantiate these three claims:
1. My learning goals are stated in the syllabus
2. I have instituted (and the syllabus reflects) assignments and tests/exams that assess these learning goals
3. I use the assessment data to make improvements, and here are one or more examples of changes I’ve made in my course based on information about student learning.

For purpose of the accreditation self-study it may be important for the Humanities subcommittee to do what the other GER sub-areas have done, which is to report the assessment that is currently being done, much as the Arts does, reporting program-by-program (Visual Arts, Dance, etc.).
Social Sciences

This is a cogent and helpful analysis of what needs to be done and some sensible ways of doing it.

Your analysis and that of the Humanities and Natural Sciences groups are very helpful in planning overall how GER assessment should be implemented—a topic I have discussed in the earlier section of my response having to do with university-wide implementation of assessment in GER.
Natural Sciences

Nice course-specific examples in the Appendix.

Your report, as well as those of Humanities and Social Sciences, are very useful in planning how to establish structures of review for GER courses. I have discussed this issue in an earlier part of this response.
Cultural Diversity

Department of Africology is the only departmental report included. See my response to them under departmental reports.
**Cultures and Communities**

1. The June 7, 1004 retreat was to “work on the learning objectives, course design, assignment, service learning component, and assessment instruments of the ‘Multicultural America’ Gen Ed course courses of the Cultures and Communities program.” The discussions and examples, as reflected in the “Minutes and Notes” were rich and useful.

2. The list of Learning Goals for CC Certificate Students is a good start. Its title is deceptive, because it not only gives goals but also assessment instruments. The only thing missing for it to be a complete report on the three steps of assessment is for it to describe how the assessment information is used to make improvements in course/program design, pedagogy, or other aspects.
GER and Transfer Students

The only material included is a matrix showing course equivalents among the various campuses in the UW system.
Majors and Graduate Programs

Prologue

My Assumptions about the NCA Self-Study and Visit

- The NCA self-study will contain:
  - A prose summary and evaluation of school/college plans
  - A table showing all plans and their progress
  - Selected examples of specific plans to illustrate points being made in the report
  - All the plans as an appendix and/or available in the Resource Room for the visiting team

- The NCA visiting team will
  - Interview selected department, school and college deans, chairs, and key leaders about their assessment programs
  - Address assessment in discussions with campus leaders such as president, provost, Faculty Senate, APPC, other administrators, deans, and chairs

Priorities

- Most important for the NCA visit:
  - Show that departments know what assessment of learning is and is not.
  - Be absolutely candid about where they are. Not puff up what they’ve done, claim as assessment things that are not really assessment of learning, or claim more than they actually have
  - Not whine or make excuses, but adopt an analytical and problem-solving stance about the difficulties the unit faces in conducting assessment and how it plans to move forward

Use of My Response

- To revise each unit’s written plan before the team arrives
- To move forward on assessment in the future, including after the accreditation review

Criteria I Used to Respond

- Are learning goals stated?
- Is there a good mix of indirect and direct measures of learning?
- Are assessment data systematically analyzed and used for decision-making?
- Are there examples of changes that have been made, based on assessment data?
School of Business Administration

Based on web page and accreditation survey given to me in August 2004

I do not have the matrix or the NCA Dean’s Document #4 that is mentioned in the web survey.

Strengths

• Examples of changes made on the basis of assessment
• A number of surveys and focus interviews

Suggestions

• All your assessment is “indirect” student opinion—useful but limited. Implement “direct” evidence of learning, based on faculty or business experts’ evaluation of students’ classroom or capstone work. You may very well do this already, but just need to develop it or write it up.
  o Example: in one business department, members of a business advisory team visited campus once a year to review senior student projects, give feedback to the students, and award prizes. To implement PROGRAM assessment, the department began to ask this team, at the end of the day, to meet with the department faculty to evaluate the performance of the group of students as a whole and give feedback to the department about how they might better prepare the students.
  o In another department, student senior capstone projects were evaluated by the instructor only. To implement PROGRAM assessment, the department instituted an annual department meeting where the teacher(s) of key courses reported student strengths and weaknesses in the aggregate, and the department discussed how, as a unit, it could help students do better.

• Eliminate claims about your success that are not backed up by evidence. Example: “The learning experiences of students are improved by effective student outcomes assessments.” Better to analyze what has and has not been done: e.g., “The School of Business has implemented a number of indirect assessments that are thoroughly reviewed by faculty and units and have led to changes in curriculum, staffing, and procedures. The next step is to make better use at the program level of the direct assessment taking place in classrooms.”
College of Engineering and Applied Science
Based on Strategic Planning Overview and Web Survey given to me in August 2004. I
did not have the Computer Science program review reports nor the ABET reports.

Without the ABET material, I cannot evaluate strengths and weaknesses. Your best
guide is ABET itself, as you move forward toward your next ABET review. The ABET
material can rather easily be adapted for NCA needs (but be careful about terminology. I
believe that ABET’s definition of direct assessment differs from that of NCA).
**Occupational Therapy**
Based on program’s assessment plan

**Strengths**
- Indirect assessment: a number of surveys of students, fieldwork supervisors, employers, and alumni; attrition rate; employment rate
- Direct assessment: national certification exams
- Curriculum Committee and Program Evaluation Committee review data and plan changes

**Suggestions**
- State learning goals so you have standards against which to evaluate the assessment data
School of Information Studies

Based on web survey, Q. 2

Strengths

- A good, varied mix of indirect and direct measures

Suggestions

- You need statements of learning goals so you know explicitly what you’re aiming for and can evaluate the assessment data
- The final paragraph could be more explicit about just how the sources “serve as input” and how faculty governance bodies use these information sources
- Examples of changes you’ve made, based on the data, would be helpful.
School of Continuing Education

Based on Web Survey Q. 2

Strengths

• Use of Kirkpatrick model
• Recent revision by Academic Planning and Budget Committee of standards and guidelines for faculty and staff involvement in assessing the fiscal and educational implications of all proposed projects

Suggestions

• You’re doing well. Continue to evaluate how to balance fiscal realities with educational goals
Peck School of the Arts

Based on NCA Self-Study Question 4, Spring 2004

Strengths

• Assessment is ongoing, classroom-based, performance-based, and integrated with learning
• There are a great number of assessment measures in use

Suggestions

• Throughout the reports, evaluation of individual student progress is conflated with program-level evaluation. It’s a red flag for NCA if the unit seems to take assessment of individual student performance (aimed at helping that student improve or providing a grade or letters of recommendation) with PROGRAM assessment, which considers student performances in the aggregate, for purpose of changes to the PROGRAM.
  o Example: in MFA, portfolio review so far focuses on feedback to the student. When the faculty convene each Wednesday, do they discuss students’ performance as a group and make decisions about programmatic changes? If not, then say that. Acknowledge that assessment is so far focused on feedback to individual students or on individual student progress through the program, and explain your plans for moving to program-level assessment.
  o What we’re looking for is like Music’s discussion of Praxis I and II Exam Results, where they state that music education faculty will begin comparing UWM student scores with national and state peers to help determine adjustment in core music course and curriculum. That plan moves to program-level assessment.
  o Eliminate from your report the assessment for which the only audience is the individual student, or, if you describe it, clearly demonstrate that you know this is assessment only of individual students, not yet program-level assessment.
  o The Visual Arts description of assessment tools contains some of the right stuff, but needs re-orienting and more detail. For example, give more explanation of “the portfolio review process provides an annual overview of the program’s instructional goals.” How and when is the annual review conducted? Can you give examples of department-level actions taken on the basis of the review of assessment data?
• This is not the place to present the actual data showing student success (e.g. “Dance students’ work has been published in dance periodicals in San Francisco and New York City” or “A sample of recent MFA student accomplishments include…”). Rather, describe the assessment method: “number of student publications in dance periodicals” or “number and quality of student national and international awards.” Then tell how the faculty evaluates these data—do you
compare your numbers of awards to peer institutions? Do you try to get a higher percentage of awards as time goes on? How is this discussed in the department, and what actions are taken?

- For example, a graduate department with which I worked noted that its rate of student publications was not what it wanted, so it instituted a 1-credit course for all graduate students entitled “Writing for Publication.” After that, the number of graduate student publications increased 3-fold.

- For all departments: the language and headings you use will be confusing to the NCA team. You might re-organize under these headings:
  - **Outcomes:** include only statements of what students will be able to do. For example “successfully audition and perform in productions” or “Demonstrate teaching competency in their area of expertise.” Your report is incomplete in defining what students should be able to do. A statement such as BA Theater Studies (the BA is designed to develop students’ knowledge of X, immerse students in…students are encouraged to…) still focuses on what the program does, not what students will be expected to be able to do at the end of the program. Take these statements and turn them into goals for learning: e.g. “students will conceptualize theater as a cultural and humanitarian art form….”
  - **Measures:** show how well students are achieving those outcomes. Measures include course evaluations, audience surveys, and the like. Explaining what these measures are and how they are used should be the bulk of the report. Give more detail. For example, the TEP plan’s listed bullets are a good start, but explain more about these methods.
  - **How the assessment data are used** on a departmental and school level for decision-making about program, curriculum, procedures, etc.
  - **Examples of program changes** you have made on the basis of assessment information

- Using the quality of applying students as a measure of learning will be a red flag for NCA, even though I know that student learning, as it translates to the department’s national reputation for quality, will draw good students. But it’s a long stretch. I’d omit it. If you use it, make REALLY clear the way in which you are using it as a measure of learning and indicate you know its limitations as such a measure. You have a sketchy explanation, but it would need to be much more complete.
Social Work
Basis: web survey

Strengths
• Objectives are not only specified at the course level, but they are monitored and used for course evaluation by the Curriculum Committee

Suggestions
• How does the department examine student work to see its strengths and weaknesses in light of both course objectives and program-wide objectives?
• How does the department gather indirect information from students about their perceptions of their own learning, their suggestions about better curriculum, better pedagogy, and the like?
**Criminal Justice**

Basis: Web survey

**Strengths**
- Four clearly-identified outcomes measures
- Course-level objectives are specified in syllabi (but this information is buried in the “Teaching Evaluations” section)

**Suggestions**
- Add a first section on outcomes, specifying that these are stated in each course syllabus. Are there program-level outcomes also? If so, these should be stated. If not, give the rationale for not developing program-level outcomes or the plan for doing so in the future.
- Add information on how the assessment data are used for improvement and some examples of changes that have been made on the basis of the data. For example, under “Survey Research,” you say that “Results of these surveys are processed by the School and are shared with faculty and staff.” Good start. How do faculty and staff USE these results? What changes have been made because of them?
- Distinguish clearly between assessment data that are used for grading and monitoring individual students’ progress, vs. data that are used for program-level changes. To conflate the two will be a red flag for NCA, which in an assessment report is primarily interested in program-level assessment and change.
School of Nursing

Basis: Faculty Document # (99-12) 108

Strengths
Very complete report, including specific objectives for learning, measures, and how the data will be used.

Suggestions
Provide examples of how the process so nicely charted here has actually worked--how changes have actually been made in the program, based on assessment data.
College of Letters and Science

*Africology*

Basis:
Letters and Science Program Assessment Plan of 3/11/04 containing only the “Survey of Africology Knowledge”
Document sent to me as part of the GER material, August 2004, under heading “Cultural Diversity.” Contains single page diagram titled “Department of Africology Intended Outcomes and Assessment Methods,” the Survey, and “Statistics”

**Strengths**
- Department has moved forward in administering and analyzing the Survey of Africology Knowledge
- Goals are stated for the gateway courses and for each optional track—political economy and culture/society

**Suggestions**
1. “Methods,” “Tools” and “Measures” involves some overlap and might be confusing unless carefully defined. To simplify, they could be replaced by a single category titled something like “Measures of student learning.” Your assessment measures for program-level assessment appear to be
   a. The paper in 106-565
   b. Presentations in 106-565
   c. Portfolio sample
   d. The Survey of Africology Knowledge
   
   Explain how each of these is administered, analyzed, and then used for departmental decision-making about curriculum, pedagogy, etc.
2. Then give some examples of changes that have been made based on assessment data.
Art History

Based on “Art History Major Assessment Plan” of March 2004

Strengths

• Goal statements, divided into three subcategories: knowledge, application, and basic skills
• You make a good distinction between methods of assessing student progress and methods of assessing the major program
• Full description of how assessment data are discussed within the department.

Suggestions

• Can you give an example of two of changes that have been made on the basis of assessment data, and how those changes are working to improve learning?
**Biological Sciences**
Based on report from L&S I received in March, ‘04

**Strengths**
- Good statement of goals for majors and non-majors
- Questionnaire to graduating seniors is specifically tied to educational goals
- Submission of lab report is tied to the questionnaire, so seniors are queried only once, yet department has data from measures both indirect (questionnaire) and direct (actual student work in the discipline).
- Evidently the questionnaire is administered in a senior seminar class, so return rate should be fairly high
- Questionnaire to senior seminar faculty captures faculty classroom knowledge of students’ strengths and weaknesses

**Suggestions**
- The senior questionnaire has some items that are not phrased as usefully as they might be. I suggest asking a survey expert to review the questionnaire and make suggestions.
Chemistry

Based on report included with L&S report of March ‘04

Strengths

• Clear statements of learning goals for majors and non-majors
• A chart that lays out the relationship between learning goals, intended outcomes, and assessment
• Goals established for both majors and nonmajors (e.g. non-majors’ performance on ACS will compare favorably with national averages)
• Description of changes based on assessment data.

Suggestions

• The only measure of Outcome 3 (develop skills of analysis, synthesis, and quantitative reasoning essential to establish and rigorously test hypotheses) is that students participate in faculty supervised research and present data, usually in poster form, at a meeting. This is a measure of what they DID, not whether those activities resulted in the desired learning. Are there ways in which you do, or could, evaluate the quality of student work in a way that leads not only to grades and feedback to individuals but to feedback for the department? For example, Biology asks Senior Seminar faculty for their analysis of students’ acquisition of learning goals. Could chemistry make a similar written query of faculty who are supervising students in research projects, then analyze those written reports to identify program-wide strengths and weaknesses in student learning as a basis for improvement in the structure of the curriculum, pedagogy, or the students’ research experiences?
**Communication**

Based on “Undergraduate Assessment Plan Approved by the Department Spring, 2003,” part of L&S report on assessment of March, 2004

**Strengths**

- Clear statements of learning goals
- Criteria in rubric form developed by UG Committee

**Suggestions**

- Develop assessment in capstone (COM 698) and internship as you plan
- Add information about how the data are used for improvement at the program level
Comparative Literature
Based on plan included in L&S report of March 2004

Strengths
- Clear statement of learning goals
- Faculty teaching senior majors complete analysis of achievement of learning goals

Suggestions
- Rather than have faculty submit student-by-student analyses, you might ask faculty to aggregate data within their own class, to reveal overall strengths and weaknesses. Such information might be more useful for department-wide discussion of the learning of students as a group.
- Do you have, or do you wish to have, an indirect measure such as student evaluations of how well they thought they reached the learning goals, and/or the quality of instruction, advising, etc.?
Conservation and Environmental Sciences (CES)

Based on Draft of Feb. 24, 2004, included with L&S report to me of March, 2004

Strengths

- Clear intended outcomes, criteria, and tools

Suggestions

- Reliance on course grades as a measure of specific learning outcomes is often a “red flag” for NCA review teams, because grades are dependent on many factors, are not diagnostic of specific strengths and weaknesses of students, and criteria for the grades are often not known outside the individual classroom. I suggest:
  - Provide detailed description and rubrics of how the learning outcome is measured within all sections of the course and show that a student cannot get the course grade without demonstrating the required competence
  - Substitute the “grades” language with a description of the major assignment(s) on which the assessment is based. For example, instead of saying that students’ achievement of Goal #2 is based on grades of B or better in CES 491, say something like: “In CES 491, students are required to complete such-and-such an assignment(s) that require these skills. The assignments are evaluated by the instructor with a rubric, and students’ strengths and weaknesses, in the aggregate, are reported to the department in the annual assessment meeting.”
- Your Assessment Criteria sometimes state what students will do, not what they will learn. Example: 2a—students will participate in a service-learning experience. This may be a red flag to the NCA team. Is there an evaluation of the service-learning experience by students or by service-learning mentors/coordinators that could offer an evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses students exhibited in their service-learning experience?

**Strengths**

- Clear progression from mission to learning goals to assessment activities
- The Capstone faculty survey is the simplest and least time-consuming way to conduct direct evaluation of student learning. If it works well to identify student strengths and weaknesses for departmental action, you will have an efficient assessment method.
- Conclusion contains a sensible and useful set of questions generated by the department itself, with an eye to improving its quality

**Suggestions**

- Instead of “Record-Keeping,” I would use the sub-heads “M.A. Oral Exam” (which is a separate measure of learning and needs a heading by itself) and “Professional Decisions/Career Progress”
- You don’t say exactly how the data will be analyzed and used for departmental decision-making.
Film Studies

Based on report from L&S presented to me in March 2004

Strengths

- A broad statement of learning goals, e.g. “working understanding of….”
- Plan to use the Capstone seminar papers as tool for program-level assessment

Suggestions

- Specify the learning goals in more detail, in bulleted items under a heading “Intended Outcomes.” Remove the description of the four levels of curriculum—those are means to bring about student learning, not learning goals and not measures of learning.
- After “Outcomes,” you will need a heading and a bulleted list to show the measures you will use to assess students’ achievement of the outcomes. The capstone paper is one of these. You mention other exams and essays in courses—do you bring results of any of these to the department for program-level decision-making? If so, they become program assessment measures. Do you have a student evaluation, student focus groups, alumni surveys, or records of students’ future schools or career progress? If so, those are all measures of learning.
- Then you need to say how the department will review, analyze, and act on the assessment data
**Foreign Languages and Linguistics**

Based on “Continuous Quality Assessment and Improvement Flowchart,” part of L&S assessment report given to me in March 2004

**Strengths**

- Flowchart is a clear and helpful way to identify positioning and nature of assessment measures
- Flowchart at bottom right shows use of data for departmental and program-level decision-making

**Suggestions**

- Needs statement of student learning goals. What should students be able to do when they complete the major?
- The flow chart primarily shows student progress; it does not describe any program-level assessment until the very end, bottom right, when advisors collect and tabulate data that are then forwarded to department committees. NCA readers, especially if they’re skimming it, may think that you are presenting student progress as a flow chart of assessment. That will be a red flag. I’d suggest doing a flow chart that shows how DATA from assessment progresses through the department and programs, into action. If the end-point data from advisors is all you have, then the chart begins there.
- Clarify exactly what the advisor tabulates. You say “grade results (course project, exam, etc.).” Does the advisor have only the grades? The word grades, and the use of grades as an assessment measure of student learning in the program as a whole will be a red flag to the visiting team because grades are an overall measure that may include many things; they are not specific enough to be diagnostic (for example, if a student gets a “B” in the capstone course, one doesn’t know what were the strengths and weaknesses that the department could work on). If you can analyze the actual papers and exams with a good rubric, you can discover that the students as a whole were weak in X and strong in Y. Thus you would have diagnostic information that can lead to steps for improvement.
- Do you have student surveys, focus groups, alumni surveys, or other information that might also be available to the departmental committee(s)?
Master of Arts in Foreign Language and Literature (MAFLL)

Based on “Assessment of Masters Candidates in …MAFLL,” included as part of the L&S report on assessment given to me March 2004.

Strengths

- The “outcomes” listed under “Assessment” state student learning
- A number of measures give data about how well students have achieved those learning outcomes

Suggestions

- Under “Intended Outcomes,” you have some items that state what the students will receive or be exposed to, rather than what they will learn. You need, in this report, only one heading—“Outcomes”—under which can be included the four items you list later under your heading “Assessment.” Leave out the “Intended Outcomes”
- Your “Measurable Criteria…” heading focuses on what students and the department do, not on how learning is measured. Leave out the “Measurable Criteria” material that you have. Essentially, this report could open with a short explanation of the purpose and structure of the students’ course of study, and then move directly to the four outcomes, each with its measures, as you have listed them under the outcomes. That is the real meat of your report.
- Make sure you demonstrate to the NCA that you understand the difference between assessment that focuses on individual student grades and guidance for the student in progressing through the program, vs. program-level assessment, which examines the strengths and weaknesses of students as a group and takes action to improve the program’s curriculum, pedagogy, advising, structure, etc. For example, under Outcome 2 (1), you state that “assessment is based on various measures and requirements, depending on the nature of the course:…..” Be more specific about the assessment measures for which results are aggregated and brought to the department or program for program-level changes.
- In general, say more about how the assessment measures are analyzed and how they are brought to the department and program-level for action.
**French Program Major**

Based on information included as part of L&S assessment report given to me in March 2004

**Strengths**

- The grid is a useful tool. The distinction between goals and outcomes is clear, as is the distinction between “Training” (what the department does to try to bring about the desired learning) and “Assessment” (the measures of learning)

**Suggestions**

- You have used the formula “Besides the continual testing…in virtually every course in the program…” This is a good start, but make even more clear that you understand the difference between tests, exams, etc. whose results are used for student grades or graduation requirements, and those assessment measures that are aggregated for department or program-level decision-making. An unclear distinction here can be a red flag for the NCA and cause confusion for the department.
- You need to say more about how the measures are actually used for department and program-level decision-making and give some examples of changes you have made based on the data.
- Do you use student evaluations, student focus group, alumni surveys, or other indirect measures? If so, include them and explain how they are used.
Geography
Based on L&S assessment report of March 2004

Strengths
- Student involvement in assessment.
- Statements of what the department will do in response to the student evaluation.
- In short, you gave your students a lot of power and you got some really useful data that indicated a number of items for departmental action. You took these seriously and are moving to make changes.

Suggestions
- Under Outcomes/Goals, eliminate or change #5. This is not a learning goal but a goal connected to what the department will do to try to bring about learning. Don’t say students “will be exposed to,” but rather students will be able to…” What will they get out of the internships and speakers? What will they be able to do?
- Your student evaluation gave you a large number of action items. I’d concentrate on following up, rather than instituting new measures now.
- Eventually, however, you will want to institute a direct measure--faculty actually evaluating the quality of student work in the capstone. What do faculty, looking at student work with a good rubric, find to be student strengths and weaknesses in light of the learning goals? Graded work can be the basis for this evaluation, but you’ll want a committee of faculty to look at a sample of student work with a rubric designed to yield not individual grades but strengths and weaknesses of the students as a group, so that the department has a basis for action.
- Clarify dates—some items are slated for “Fall 2003” and some for “Fall 2004.”
History

Based on “Assessment of Learning Outcomes in the History Major,” part of L&S assessment report given to me in March 2004

Strengths

• Clear statement of learning goals
• Clear indication of how assessment data are collected, discussed, and acted upon at the department level

Suggestions

• I’d re-organize a bit to make this excellent program more clear to NCA readers under the three categories they look for:
  o Departmental Learning Objectives [as they are]
  o Measures of Student Achievement of the Objectives
    ▪ Capstone course instructors’ assessments…[as it is]
    ▪ Current majors’ assessments…[as is it]
  o Use of the assessment data for departmental action
    ▪ Each semester, the Director [to end of first sentence under C.]
    ▪ Each year, the Undergraduate Affairs Committee… [as is, to end of sentence]
• Complete a similar plan for the M.A., incorporating the “Faculty Assessment of Learning Outcomes for History MA Students.” Do you also have student evaluations or focus groups of your M.A. students? Do you track their future paths in graduate school or careers?
Masters in Human Resources and Labor Relations

Based on “As Revised in Spring 2003 (following our meeting with Dean Meadows),” part of L&S assessment report given to me in March 2004

Strengths

- “Input in Revising Goals and Intended Outcomes” is a useful category that other programs might also incorporate
- Examples of recent program changes
- “Tools” list is comprehensive and reasonable.

Suggestions

- More on how these tools are aggregated, analyzed, and used for departmental action, and some examples of departmental changes based on assessment data (parallel to examples of changes based on goals input from alumni, WIRRA, employers, etc., in section III.B.)
- You might revise the Graduate Survey to reflect students’ perception of their achievement of the learning goals. For example, “how well did your education in the department help you achieve each of the following learning goals [list them]: The scale would be something like “extremely well…..not at all well”
Italian

Based on “Italian Undergraduate Major,” part of the L&S assessment report given to me in March 2004

Strengths

• Clear goals
• Clear and sensible assessment tools

Suggestions

• You need a final section to describe how the tools will be analyzed and used by the department for changes
• Under “Assessment Tools” #3, you state “successful completion” of the capstone project. Course completion used as an assessment measure may be a red flag to the NCA visiting team. Explain what course completion can and cannot tell you about student learning, and how it can give the department information for action to improve learning. To get more information about student strengths and weaknesses, you could ask capstone teachers, and eventually perhaps others, to examine capstone projects, or a sample of them, with a rubric, to identify students’ strengths and weaknesses, providing more specific and helpful information for departmental action.
Journalism and Mass Communication

Based on “Proposed Plan for Assessment of Student Learning,” December 2003, included in L&S assessment plans given to me in March 2004

Strengths

- Clear learning goals based on mission
- Use of AEJMC as a guide for good practice

Suggestions

- Your use of “indirect” and “direct” is a bit different from the NCA’s. Further, some of your measures combine direct and indirect—for example, students’ self-reports are indirect measures, but a workplace supervisor’s evaluation of the student’s on-the-job performance is direct assessment. Contests and awards are tricky because they may be based on judges’ review of actual student work, in which case they’re direct assessment, or they may be based on items like letters of recommendation, in which case they’re indirect. I’d eliminate the distinction and just list assessment measures. Reviewers will see that you have a mixture of direct and indirect.

- I would acknowledge under “Grade Distribution” that grades by themselves are not highly diagnostic measures of learning, because they may include many factors, not all of which are known. State what you expect to find out about student learning from the grade analysis. Same for retention and graduation rates. It helps that AEJMC recommends these analyses, but be clear how they do and do not provide evidence of learning, and what kind of evidence it is.

- Entry-level assessment. As you describe it, this is an assessment whose major purpose is to decide whether a student can be admitted. Explain more fully how the department will use these results as assessment of learning. Will they be a pre-test or baseline data for later assessment of what these high-quality entering students learn from the department? Will they be an assessment of learning in Intro to Mass Media?

- “Evidence of Assessment to Improve Curriculum.” I would retittle this “USE of Assessment Evidence to Improve Curriculum.” What you have there is weak: the first item is directed toward response to individual students, not programmatic change, and the second is a repeat of your earlier description of the student evaluations. Instead, describe how your assessment data will be brought before the department as the basis for action and change, and, if possible, give some examples of changes that have been made by the department on the basis of assessment data.
**Master of Liberal Studies (MLS)**

Based on “Assessment Master of Liberal Studies (MLS),” part of L&S report on assessment given to me in March 2004

**Strengths**
- Reasonable list of assessment tools

**Suggestions**
- Learning Goals are stated as things the department will do, not as what students will be able to do. Restate them. For example: Students will “communicate effectively, both orally and in writing, in a variety of professional situations” and “demonstrate diverse, cross-cultural perspectives on historical and contemporary issues.”
- You need a section to describe how the data from the Assessment Tools will be analyzed and used as the basis for program-level action. For example, who will see and act on the post-graduation questionnaire? How will the annual consultations between the Director and each student be aggregated, analyzed, and presented to the department or a relevant committee for action?
Mathematical Sciences

Based on “Ongoing Assessment Activities: Department of Mathematical Sciences,” September 2003, part of L&S assessment report given to me in March 2004

Strengths
• An active plan is described, including goals statements and assessment measures

Suggestions
• What you have is a list of suggestions and proposed actions. Now you need to work toward a plan that can be represented under three heading:
  o Learning goals
  o Measures of students’ achievement of the goals
  o Use of the assessment data for departmental action
Philosophy

Based on “Assessment of Philosophy Majors,” part of L&S assessment reports given to me in March 2004

Strengths

- Clear learning goals
- A sensible array of measures under “Overall Evaluation of Philosophy Major”

Suggestions

- I would eliminate “Assessing Student Progress” because course completion is so broad a measure that it is hard to tell what student completion is based on or what completion information reveals that is actionable for the department. Further, course completion as a measure of learning will be a red flag for the NCA visiting team.
- After the Goals, I would next have a heading “Measures of Student Achievement of the Learning Goals,” and include here the first two items under your “Overall Evaluation of the Philosophy Major.” You will actually have five items under this heading: exit interviews, capstone research paper, capstone instructor’s evaluation, and special achievements. Give as much detail about each as you can.
- The next heading might be “Use of the Assessment Data,” and it would describe how the undergraduate advisor first reviews each portfolio, then the department meeting at which portfolios are discussed, and finally the Curriculum Committee report.
Physics

Based on material submitted as part of L&S assessment report given to me in March 2004

Strengths

- Some clear goal statements (but see suggestions below)
- Student questionnaire has been developed

Suggestions

- Some of your goals are to “expose” students to XYZ. This will be a red flag to NCA because it is a measure of what the department does, not a measure of the learning the supposedly resulted from the exposure. Change these goals, e.g. instead of “how much they have been exposed to vital (if routine) tasks that a professional scientist must perform,” state “students will be able to perform vital (if routine) tasks that a professional scientist must perform.”
- After Goals, construct a section that describes your “Measures of Student Achievement of the Goals.” In this section, describe only those measures that go beyond tracking and monitoring individual students or guiding them through the program. Focus on those measures that yield information about the students as a whole and that are brought to the department for program-level action.
  - Annual surveys of faculty who teach upper-level experimental lab courses
  - Objective, standardized test drawn from the GRE
  - Colloquium presentations in the capstone course
  - Student self-assessment of learning
  - To claim that grades are a programmatic measure of student learning may be a red flag for the NCA visiting team, so you must carefully describe how you make the evaluation of grades diagnostic—that is, how does the department know the criteria for a grade and know the strengths and weaknesses of student work in enough detail to inform program-level decisions?
- Next, construct a section on “Use of Assessment Data for Improvement.” Here you can list “informal faculty discussion,” since the number of majors, and their involvement with faculty, make this a major mode of assessment, but put it last, and emphasize your more systematic modes. For example, how do faculty evaluate colloquium presentations as a whole, with an eye toward needed changes in the structure or curriculum of the major? How will the advisors of 309 students aggregate and report what they learn to the department as a whole?
- In the questionnaire, you may be “leading” the student when you say “Often, but not always, these will be the same.” I’d omit this. Further, you ask “What did you like best?” I would instead say “What aspects of your experience and
education as a physics major best helped your learning?” Learning, not liking should be the object of attention.
Political Science
Based on “Exit Survey” included as part of L&S assessment report given to me March 2004

Strengths
- Survey has been developed and its use has been described (it will be analyzed by Director of Undergraduate Studies)

Suggestions
- Still needed: a set of learning goals (students will be able to…), then a description of all the measures you use (not just the questionnaire), then a section that describes how those measures are analyzed and used as basis for departmental action
- The questionnaire might be revised to more closely reflect learning goals. Ask students how well they believe the departmental program and instruction have helped them achieve each of the goals.
**Sociology**

Based on “Assessment of Undergraduate and Graduate Programs in Sociology” as part of the L&S assessment report given to me in March 2004

**Strengths**

- The description of curriculum and other departmental features is clearly subordinate to the learning goals. It is clear that the department understands what learning goals are, and the relationship between learning goals and departmental actions intended to achieve those goals.
- Clear goals and procedures for both undergraduate and graduate programs
- Clear movement from the overall goals to the goals of the capstone paper to the bases for evaluating the seminar paper.
- Simple, usable rubric for seminar papers
- Questionnaires have been developed. The exit questionnaire is tied to achievement of the learning goals, as well as to instructional quality. It includes advising issues as well as instructional quality. The survey is strong and should yield valuable information.

**Suggestions**

- Goals for Graduate Program are not stated as what students will be able to do. For example, instead of “will provide students with…” frame your statements as “students will be able to…”
- Instead of “Assessment Follow Up” I would use the language that will be more readily understandable to the NCA: “Use of the Assessment Information for Improvement.”
- Question 7 on the Course Evaluation form is the only question that addresses students’ perceptions of whether they achieved course learning goals, and the question seems ambiguous and perhaps misleading. I would construct a question something like “The course was effective in helping me reach the learning goals stated in the syllabus.” Then I’d also tie one or more of the open-ended questions to the learning goals, asking students to discuss how the instructor’s methods helped them reach the learning goals and what changes might help them learn more effectively.
Spanish and Portuguese

Based on “Progress Report on the Assessment of Spanish Majors,” part of L&S assessment report given to me in March 2004

Strengths

- Clear goals linked to assessment measures
- Discussion under “Implementation” is candid, thoughtful, and helpful.

Suggestions

- Success in coursework as an assessment may be a red flag for NCA visiting team members, because coursework grades often reflect a number of factors, not all of which are known outside the individual classroom. You should demonstrate clearly that students cannot do well in these courses without having the proficiency in comprehension you describe. You have the beginning of such a rationale in the “Implementation” section, but make it more detailed and remember that the visiting team may have no language faculty on it, so you are talking to non-experts in language instruction.
- Outcomes 3 and 4: It appears that, so far, this evaluation only results in an individual grade or letters of recommendation. How will the Capstone professors as a whole evaluate student work as a whole and bring those results to the department for program-level action?
**Urban Studies MS Program**

Based on “DRAFT February 2004 USP MS Assessment Procedures,” included as part of L&S assessment report given to me in March 2004

**Strengths**
- Includes information on how assessment results are used for departmental action

**Suggestions**
- Intended Outcomes need to be stated not as things the department does (develop students skills, provide students with XYZ), but rather as what the student will be able to do. Rework them into that format (e.g. “students will be able to [1] conduct independent research in the field; [2] communicate appropriately to both professional and lay audiences in written and oral form;” etc.)
- Heading “Assessment Criteria” does not contain the appropriate type of information the NCA will be looking for and the department needs. I’d organize the whole report by three simple headings: (1) goals for student learning; (2) assessment methods [including two items: study of student and survey of advisors, plus whatever other methods you have or develop]; and (3) Use of assessment results [what you have, plus examples of changes that have resulted from departmental discussion of assessment data].