Annual Outcomes Assessment Update - 2011

As one component of the Iowa Board of Regents 2010-2016 Strategic Plan, Iowa’s public universities were directed to develop, in collaboration with faculty, student outcomes assessment plans for each academic program and establish targets for collecting and using assessment results.

Many departments at UI have been actively implementing student outcomes assessment for a number of years, and in recent years the university has made significant progress in strengthening outcomes assessment across all undergraduate degree programs.

This report provides the University’s timeline for establishing outcomes assessment throughout the institution. It also provides a summary of department involvement with outcomes assessment, an overview of assessment methods in use, and examples of departments using selected methods.

Each department is asked to establish learning outcomes for its undergraduate programs, and to determine how to best organize its curriculum to support student learning. Our system for outcomes assessment similarly rests on faculty expertise and department leadership: Each department is asked to identify what is required for students to show satisfactory achievement of program learning outcomes, and to determine appropriate strategies both for assessing student learning and for using assessment findings to further develop its programs. Central administration provides support, coordination, and resources to assist departments in carrying out assessment efforts.

Proposed Benchmark Activities for Outcomes Assessment at UI

During 2010/11, UI completed the process of reviewing and updating department assessment plans. We also initiated an annual cycle of identifying annual department priorities for assessment and annual reports on lessons learned from assessment in each department.

We will continue efforts to establish and maintain this annual cycle, and are developing a system for preparing an annual university profile of assessment activities based on information collected through this process. Table 1 presents a summary of these benchmark activities for outcomes assessment at UI.

Iowa Outcomes Assessment

The goal of outcomes assessment is to look systematically at what students are learning, across courses and over time, through their experiences in the major.

Assessment plans at UI incorporate a variety of strategies for examining student learning. No single approach serves all departments equally well.

This document provides a summary of the University’s plans for supporting Outcomes Assessment institution-wide, along with examples of the many outcomes assessment efforts already underway in UI departments.
Departmental Implementation of Assessment

While methods used for outcomes assessment vary widely, all departments are expected to:

1. Develop an assessment plan identifying learning outcomes and assessment strategies in use
2. Assign an individual to coordinate assessment of one or more learning outcomes annually
3. Conduct a collective review of assessment findings by faculty on a regular basis, as a basis for identifying as a department next steps for program improvement or further development

Review of outcomes assessment plans in 2010/2011 revealed that 6% of UI undergraduate programs are in the early stages of developing or updating plans for outcomes assessment. Current efforts for these departments include reviewing courses and other student learning opportunities, as well as external review of alumni experiences, employer perceptions, and programs of peer departments at other universities. Next steps for these departments include selection or development of assessment strategies, and development of a timeline for testing and fully implementing their newly developed assessment plans.

Approximately 33% of UI undergraduate programs have developed outcomes assessment plans and assigned an assessment coordinator, and they regularly assess achievement of program learning outcomes. Current efforts in these departments focus on testing their outcomes assessment strategies, integrating outcomes assessment with other quality improvement information, and finding ways to efficiently manage assessment processes. Next steps for these departments are to finalize and begin fully implementing their assessment plans, and to begin bringing assessment findings to the full department for review and follow-up action.

Over 60% of UI undergraduate programs have outcomes assessment strategies in place. Current efforts in these departments include regularly scheduled review of assessment findings, discussion of program implications, and when appropriate, identification of ways to further develop or improve their programs. Next steps for these departments are to sustain their current level of assessment and continue acting on lessons learned from the assessment data they collect.

An overview of departmental involvement in Outcomes Assessment is presented in Figure 1.

Examples of Methods Used for Direct Assessment of Outcomes

Review of outcomes assessment plans in 2010/2011 revealed a wide variety of assessment methods in use. In each department, outcomes assessment is designed to reflect the nature of the discipline, the structure of the program, and the questions that faculty members have about their students’ learning and success.

Departmental Outcomes Assessment Plans and Annual Updates can be

Table 1: Proposed Benchmark Activities for Implementation of Outcomes Assessment at UI

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Proposed Benchmark Activities</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>June 2011</td>
<td>○ Collect department assessment plans and confirm that plans reflect current practices&lt;br&gt;○ Identify department priorities and specific plans for assessment during 2011/12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2012</td>
<td>○ Collect department reports on lessons learned from assessment during 2011/12&lt;br&gt;○ Identify department priorities and specific plans for assessment during 2012/13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2013</td>
<td>○ Continue annual cycle of department updates on assessment priorities and activities&lt;br&gt;○ Prepare a profile of university-wide assessment activities and outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2014</td>
<td>○ Continue annual cycle of department updates on assessment priorities and activities&lt;br&gt;○ Update and expand the profile of university-wide assessment activities and outcomes</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1: Outcomes Assessment in Departments, 2010/11

- Reviewing and Updating Assessment Plans
- Implementing and Testing Assessment Strategies
- Ongoing Implementation and Use of Assessment

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Examples of Methods Used for Direct Assessment of Outcomes

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Departmental Outcomes Assessment Plans and Annual Updates can be
In each department, outcomes assessment is designed to reflect the nature of the discipline, the structure of the program, and the questions faculty members have about student learning.

All faculty regularly evaluate student work as a way to give students feedback on their learning in a course. For Outcomes Assessment, departments take the additional step of reviewing student work as a way of gaining feedback for the department on how effectively it is supporting overall student learning across courses. Table 2 provides an overview of the different strategies in use by departments for directly assessing achievement of student learning outcomes.

Many departments take advantage of opportunities to assess student learning directly by examining student work at specified points in the program. Biomedical Engineering has identified “iconic assignments” that students complete at fixed points in the curriculum which the department then uses as a source of evidence for examining program effectiveness. Similarly, Social Work reviews students’ “signature assignments” that allow the department to examine achievement of particular program learning goals through the students’ work. Dance combines the recitals and auditions that are integrated throughout the program with regular faculty meetings to reflect not only on individual students’ performance, but also on how effectively the department is preparing students to achieve.

Many other departments assess student learning by examining projects that reflect a synthesis of student learning across courses, such as a senior research project or student learning portfolio. Students in Art and Art History use UI’s ifolio system to collect and reflect samples of their work throughout the program, which faculty can then use to help them review student learning in the program as a whole. Education undergraduates document a wide range of course assignments and field experiences in their portfolios as they prepare to become teachers, which the department can then use to document student learning program-wide. Students in Gender, Women’s, and Sexuality Studies complete a final senior project which they present in a poster session; faculty evaluate each individual student, and then meet as a group to reflect on the overall quality of learning represented across student projects.

Some also make use of exams that represent cumulative student learning throughout the program. Actuarial Science regularly reviews their students’ levels of achievement on national actuarial exams and uses that information to help them assess program effectiveness. Leisure Studies and Nursing are two more examples of undergraduate programs that extensively review their students’ performance on licensure and certification exams, and use that information as a basis for examining and improving curriculum and courses in the department.

Examples of Methods Used for Indirect Assessment of Outcomes

In addition to these direct indicators of student learning, many departments also survey students, recent graduates, and/or employers to learn how others perceive the effectiveness of their program at helping students learn. Table 3 provides an overview of the different methods used by departments to identify perceptions of the quality of student learning by students, alumni, and others who interact with program graduates in a variety of ways.

The departments of International Studies and Linguistics have established student advisory boards as a way to collect systematic feedback from undergraduates on
their experiences in the program, and to help departments reflect on both the effectiveness of particular courses and the overall organization of the curriculum.

In other departments such as Communication Studies and Interdepartmental Studies, an undergraduate advisor meets with each student on a regular basis throughout their undergraduate program, and reports from the advisor are reviewed by the department as a way to help identify overall student progress and possible ways that the program might be improved or further developed.

Numerous departments ask graduating students to complete a senior exit survey (on paper or online) as one component of their outcomes assessment plan. Anthropology and Theatre Arts are two examples of programs that have recently used information that they collected through student senior exit surveys to help them consider possible modifications to courses and curriculum.

The departments of Communication Sciences and Disorders and Physics and Astronomy take the additional step of conducting face-to-face exit interviews with graduating seniors. At these interviews they discuss students’ future plans, satisfaction with preparation they have received from the program, and recommendations students might want to offer about improving the program for future students.

A number of departments also examine their program effectiveness by requesting feedback from former students. These alumni surveys have allowed departments such as Sociology and Microbiology to identify where students go after completing the program, how they use the skills they acquired in the program, and with the benefit of their longer experience away from the program, how they think the program could best serve their current students.

Some departments also make use of external advisory boards representing members of the profession, alumni, and in many cases, potential employers of UI graduates. Chemical and Biochemical Engineering regularly seeks input from an external advisory board as it assesses the quality of its curriculum and courses. Clinical Laboratory Sciences is another department that uses an external advisory board as a continual source of input and feedback on ways to improve and further develop the program.

### Table 3: Methods for Indirect Assessment of Program Learning Outcomes, Number of Departments Using Each

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Number of Departments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advisor report</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alumni survey</td>
<td>22</td>
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<tr>
<td>Employer survey</td>
<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td>External advisory board</td>
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<tr>
<td>Placement of graduates</td>
<td>19</td>
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<tr>
<td>Placement of interns</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student advisory board</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student focus groups</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student interviews</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student survey</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Coordination With Other Institutional Assessment Efforts

In addition to departmental Outcomes Assessment, each department’s educational programs are reviewed as part of the department’s regularly scheduled Academic Program Review, and student learning is one of five core components reviewed as part of the University’s institutional accreditation process. In addition, 26 undergraduate degree programs undergo periodic disciplinary accreditation review. These reviews typically include an extensive departmental self-study and a visit by a team of external reviewers.

These Academic Program and Accreditation-related reviews occur every 5-10 years, depending on the case, and require assessment of a number of program characteristics in addition to learning outcomes. The annual cycle of learning outcomes assessment contributes to these longer-term processes by helping departments maintain learning outcomes assessment on a year-to-year basis and by making it possible to act on current information that becomes available between Academic Program Reviews and Accreditation-related assessments.