What are students learning at The University of Iowa?

Annual Outcomes Assessment Update - 2012

As one component of the Iowa Board of Regents current Strategic Plan, Iowa’s public universities have been 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 a summary of department involvement with outcomes assessment, as well as examples of how departments are using assessment and further developing their assessment practices.

Each department establishes learning outcomes for its undergraduate programs, and each determines 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 at UI identifies what constitutes satisfactory achievement of its learning outcomes, and each determines 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.

Benchmark Activities for Outcomes Assessment at UI

In 2010, UI identified targets for implementing outcomes assessment on campus. Targets for 2011 and 2012 were met through sustained efforts to establish an annual cycle of updating department assessment plans, maintaining assessment efforts in departments, and identifying next year’s priorities for assessment of student learning in the department.

We will continue efforts to 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 benchmarks and future priorities for outcomes assessment at UI.
Departmental Implementation of Assessment

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

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

Until recently, some UI departments were still at the stage of initially developing or fine-tuning outcomes assessment plans. A review of plans throughout the campus this year showed that these departments have now identified strategies for assessing their programs and have begun taking next steps to implement the strategies they have identified.

Campus-wide, nearly one-fourth of UI undergraduate programs have assigned an assessment coordinator, and taken steps to begin regularly assessing achievement of one or more program learning outcomes. Steps taken 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. Ongoing 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 include finalizing and more fully implementing assessment plans, and bringing assessment findings to the full department for review and follow-up action.

The remaining three-fourths of UI undergraduate programs have already taken these initial steps and currently have ongoing 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.

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

Examples of Ways UI Departments are Using Assessment

All faculty regularly evaluate student work as a way to give students feedback on their learning in a course. For Outcomes Assessment, faculty take the additional step of reviewing how effectively the department is supporting overall student learning across courses.

UI departments provide annual updates on ways they are assessing outcomes and using assessment findings in the department. In each department, outcomes assessment is designed to reflect the nature of the discipline, the structure of the programs.

Figure 1: Outcomes Assessment in Departments, 2011/12

http://www.uiowa.edu/~outcomes
program, and the questions that faculty members have about their students’ learning and success. These annual updates can be accessed online at http://www.uiowa.edu/~outcomes/learning.htm. The summary that follows provides a few brief examples of some ways that UI departments are using assessment to improve their programs.

In French and Italian, a review of translation projects for the senior capstone course is prompting the department to review ways that students are learning complex grammatical constructions in prerequisite courses, and making connections across other senior-level courses in the major. The department is also increasing the integration of student learning portfolios across courses in the major so that student learning can be more easily reviewed across courses and over time.

Geography faculty review Senior Seminar projects as an indicator of how students are integrating their learning across courses in areas of geographical knowledge, critical thinking, quantitative ability, and graphical ability. Faculty reviews of senior projects, alongside senior exit survey responses, have helped the department make decisions about modifying prerequisite requirements and changing the curriculum structure in order to increase student access to advanced courses.

Faculty in Theatre Arts review student learning in terms of eight expected outcomes for the major. Based on their review of trends in student learning across these areas, faculty decided to modify ways that theatre history is presented in courses throughout the curriculum, and to modify the ways that the History of Theatre and Drama course is taught so that students are actively applying historical knowledge to solve specific problems. The department will continue to monitor student learning of theatre history as these changes are integrated across the curriculum.

In the department of Nuclear Medicine Technology, faculty recently developed a new course and modified the curriculum in response to changes in the field. To review the effectiveness of these changes, the department collected feedback on the new course from both faculty and students, and reviewed student performance on exams for the course. The department also reviewed licensure exam results for students who had taken the course, and conducted phone interviews with graduates to ask about their perceptions of the quality and usefulness of the course.

The Linguistics Department continues to use its undergraduate student advisory board as a way to gather feedback from students on program quality and suggestions for program development. Input from the board has led the department to offer a new course that students reported a high level of interest in. The advisory board will also contribute to department assessment efforts by contacting alumni in order request information from former students that will be helpful for them as current students in the major.

Anthropology has also used information from program alumni, combined with survey responses from graduating seniors, to help the department identify new course offerings, expand undergraduate research opportunities, create workshops for students on career planning and applying for graduate school, and develop different ways to communicate (on the department web site, in the General Catalog, and on the Admissions web page) what students can expect in the major.

Examples of Assessment Innovations Underway

In addition to these examples of ways that assessment is regularly being used to develop and improve programs, a number of departments are exploring innovative assessment strategies to help them examine their programs.
Some department innovations focus on gathering information about student learning across courses. The department of History is implementing program-wide use of student learning portfolios, using UI’s ifolio system, to collect examples of students’ history papers during their time in the major. As Nursing implements a new undergraduate curriculum, teaching teams are being formed so that faculty who teach the same students can easily communicate about content across courses, identify and support struggling students early, and foster thoughtful critique and revision of courses as they unfold. The teaching teams are working on a faculty reflection instrument that will capture reflections on how the course went and what they would do differently if/when they teach the course again.

Some departments are also developing ways to assess student mastery of fundamental concepts in the major. Biology is developing ways to measure baseline fundamental knowledge acquired by students in their introductory course series. The department is designing a standard assessment instrument to measure the depth of student understanding in relationship to specific learning goals for Principles of Biology I and II. Psychology is similarly developing and piloting a set of instruments to assess student learning of key concepts taught in the curriculum.

Other departmental innovations focus on examining how well students apply the knowledge they acquire in class. The Child Life track of the Leisure Studies program is developing a systematic methodology for collecting evaluations of student internship experiences from agency mentors. Social Work is also working on developing manageable systems for collecting faculty observations of student attainment of social work practice behaviors in their foundation courses. French, German, and Spanish have worked together to train faculty and graduate students to administer the Simulated Oral Proficiency Interview (SOPI), a standardized test of second language oral proficiency, in order to facilitate consistent assessment of language majors’ spoken language proficiency.

Some departments have been experimenting with active student participation in assessment. The Honors Program has deployed an assessment team made up of Honors students to gather and examine data on broader student participation in Honors opportunities on campus. Similarly, Anthropology is creating student-led data-collection teams to begin conducting focus groups with peers to explore why they have chosen to major (or not to major) in the field, providing data that the department can use to complement and extend the more structured survey data collected from current and self-identified potential new majors.

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, nearly 40% of 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.

http://www.uiowa.edu/~outcomes