

Ursinus College Departmental Assessment and Review, 2012-2013

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Recommendations for Assessment at Ursinus

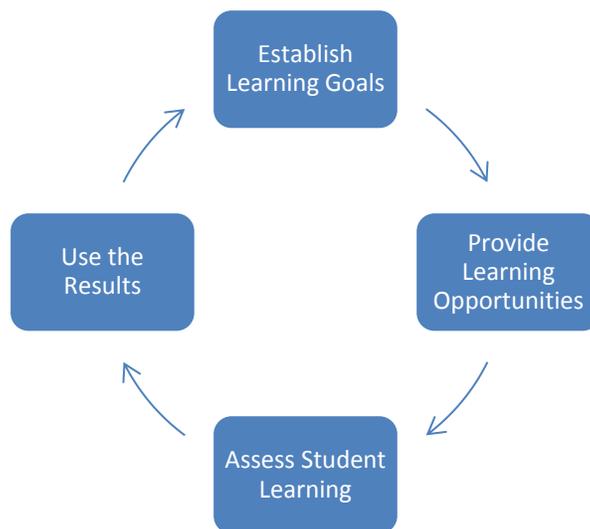
Information taken and adapted from Suskie, Linda. *Assessing Student Learning*. 2nd Ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009.

In correlation with the Strategic Plan, the Office of Academic Affairs asks departments to identify aspects of their programs that are “distinctive, rigorous, and relevant to this generation of students” (Priority 1, Recommendation 4). In other words, we ask departments to engage in self-assessment, identifying goals for student learning and considering how they might be met. Many departments are already doing much of what the Strategic Plan mandates; however, a written self-assessment (whether a periodic review, catalogue comparisons, or an outcomes statement) offers the occasion to formalize this process. The pages that follow offer a brief rationale for assessment, suggest ways to establish learning goals, and outline the elements your program assessment might contain. For clarification, what follows on this and the next page are recommendations, rather than requirements. Reconsidering assessment in the way that the next two pages suggest is intended to simplify the process and clarify its usefulness for student learning in your department.

Re-viewing Assessment

| <i>Contemporary Approaches: Assessment is...</i> | <i>Traditional Approaches: Assessment is...</i> |
|---|--|
| Carefully aligned with goals: the most important things we want students to learn | Planned and implemented without consideration of learning goals, if any even exist |
| Focused on thinking and performance skills | Often focused on memorized knowledge |
| Used to improve teaching and learning as well as to evaluate and assign grades to individual students | Used only to evaluate and grade individual students, with decisions about changes to curricula and pedagogies often based on hunch and anecdote rather than solid evidence |
| Used to tell our story: what makes our college or program distinctive and how successful we are in meeting students' and societal needs | Not used to tell our story; stories are told through anecdotes about star students rather than broader evidence from representative students |

Teaching, Learning, and Assessment as a continuous four-step cycle



Establish Learning Goals

The purpose of these questions is to help you fill out the Annual Department Review section on page 10. Departments may already have implicit or explicit answers to these questions; if not, they could be the subject of departmental discussion or a brainstorming session.

What do you and your colleagues aim to achieve with your students? What will students be able to do or what will they know after completing your major? Learning goals will often fall into one of three categories:

1. Knowledge and Conceptual Understanding: what basic facts, concepts, or phenomena do students need to know?
2. Thinking and other skills: what application, analytical, evaluative, problem-solving, synthesizing, creative, critical thinking, and/or information literacy skills do students need to gain?
3. Attitudes, Values, Dispositions, and Habits of Mind: what do you want students to appreciate or carefully consider? Are there values (e.g., personal responsibility, perseverance) you want to impart to students? Are there habits (e.g., metacognition, time management) you want to instill in students?

Provide Learning Opportunities

Where are the places in your curriculum where students can achieve the learning goals and what is the evidence of this learning? At the program level, students can demonstrate their achievement in a variety of ways, including

- Embedded course assignments that can be assessed for achievement of both course and program goals.
- Capstone experiences
- Independent Learning Experiences
- Portfolios
- Exams

Assess Student Learning

Measure student work *in the aggregate* against the learning goals you have established.

- Recommendations: establish your assessment criteria, using a rubric of your own design or an appropriate benchmark derived from Ursinus, peer institutions, or a national/international organization (AAC&U, for example).
- Focus on the big picture—general trends and patterns you see in student work, rather than specific or individual problems or achievements

Consider the difference between assessment and grading:

- Grades alone do not usually provide meaningful information on exactly what students have and have not learned
- Grading and assessment criteria may (appropriately) differ
- Grading standards may be vague or inconsistent
- Grades do not reflect all learning experiences
- Grades focus on individual students, while assessment focuses on entire cohorts or students and how effectively everyone, not an individual faculty member, is helping them learn

Grades often provide *indirect* evidence of student learning unless they are based on direct evidence of student learning such as tests, projects, papers, and assignments that are clearly linked to major learning goals through tools like rubrics.

Use the Results

- Consider the number, appropriateness, and/or clarity of your learning goals
- Consider how well your curriculum addresses your learning goals
- Consider how well your teaching is conveying and then imparting your learning goals
- Consider your assessment strategies and tools

And, yes, sometimes students are at fault for poor performance.

Senior Exit Interview

Departments are expected to engage in conversations with seniors about their experience in the major, either one on one or in small groups. The questions below are suggestions for spurring conversation, but can certainly be supplemented by other questions pertinent to departmental interests. Responses to these questions will be summarized in the annual departmental review.

1. Thinking about conversations you have had with your friends at other colleges, what has been distinctive about your experience at Ursinus?
2. If you have friends at other colleges in the same major, what has been distinctive about your experience in the major at Ursinus compared to their experiences?
3. What did you expect out of the department when you initially choose this major? In what ways were your expectations met or not met?
4. How prepared did you feel you were for your ILE? How has your ILE prepared you for what you are doing after college?
5. How have you used what you learned in core curriculum classes in the major?

Departmental Comparison

Departments are expected to complete this information and submit as the same time as the annual departmental review. Identify 5-8 small liberal arts college departments your department would consider as part of its peer group. Offer highlights of their curriculum and departmental offerings. After this list, do the same for your department.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.

Our department characteristics:

Based on these comparisons, what strengths would you affirm of your department?

-
-
-
-
-

What changes might you wish to make?

-
-
-
-
-

What changes are already in progress?

-
-
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-
-

Sample Comparison List: English

Earlham:

No of courses for major: 11 (4 credits)
Breakdown of major: 2 intros, 4 period courses, 2 contemp, 2 special topics, sen sem-- all at 300 or 400 level
Gateway: 302--IntrtoStof Lit
Capstone: Yes, 400-level sem
CW: Minor--poetry and 2 sems required
Special Features: Comprehensive Exam req to graduate; portfolio required for admission to CW minor
Full-time Faculty: 9

Wooster:

No of courses for major: 11 (1 credit each)
Breakdown of major: 120, 200, 1 pre-1800, 1 post-1800, junior ind study, 2 sen ind studies, 4 electives
Gateway: 120--Intro Lit/Culture, 200-Intro Theory Lit Methods
Capstone: Thesis (both semesters)
CW: w in the major
Special Features: All kinds of writing courses/rhet-comp courses; thesis required
Full-time faculty: 10

Rhodes:

No of courses for major:11
Breakdown of major: 285, 385, 8 additional courses in English (7 must be 300 or higher, 3 must be pre-1800), senior sem most courses are topics-based period courses, a few surveys are taught but not required)
Gateway: 285- Texts and Contexts; 385- Critical Theory (jun year)
Capstone: Senior Sem
CW: separate track w in the major
Special Features: 2 courses from other fields: film, journalism, etc allowed to count as electives
Full-time faculty: 17

Lawrence:

No of courses for major: 8+Senior Exp (trimesters; 6-credit courses)
Breakdown of major: 150, 2 200-levels, 2 pre-1800, 1 19th c, 1 20/21st, 1 elective
Gateway: 150--intro lit
Capstone: Senior Experience: Sem, Eng Internship, Certification, Creative, etc.
CW: Minor--6 courses
Special Features: Geographic distribution: 1 American, 1 British, 1 Af Am/po-co
Full-time faculty: 7

St. Olaf's:

No of courses for major: 10
Breakdown of major: 1 level I (Lit Studies), 3 level II (cross-cultural, genre, lit hist, x-disciplinary), 6 electives, 1 level III--topics/period-based
Gateway: 185 (Lit Studies)
Capstone: One 300-level sem
CW: Not a separate track
Special Features: Departmental "distinction" v thesis /honors--students invited to expand sem papers for this credential; First-Year Writing required as English pre-req; students and fac recommend summer reading on web site
Full-time faculty:17

Juniata:

No of courses for major: 10 + 1 + up to 5, depending on Program of Emphasis (note: 3 credit model)
Breakdown of courses for major: Forms, HOTEL, Grammar, Am Lit 1/2, Brit Lit 1-3, Theory + 1 writing course and 5 electives
Gateway: Forms of Lit
Capstone: 410-Theory, or 399-seminar
Special Features: POEs: English, Professional Writing, Elementary Ed, Secondary Ed
Full-time faculty: 8

Allegheny:

No of courses for major: 10 minimum
Breakdown of courses for major: 3 200-level intros + 2 of 4 surveys (at 200 level) , 1 300, 1 400, junior sem, senior project
Gateway: 200- Methods
Capstone: junior sem and senior project (independent)
CW: Emphasis
Special Features: Journalism emph also included; everyone does a mentored senior project; really nice web site with student updates, areas of distinction highlighted
Full-time faculty: 18 (includes journalism and communication)

Randolph-Macon:

No of courses for major: 12 + senior tutorial
Breakdown of courses for major: Brit Lit 1/2, pre-1485 req, 1-hour tutorial, Shx, cap, 7 electives
Gateway: 200-level tutorial, 1 credit hour, 1 essay
Capstone: 495 sen sem/ 2-term thesis optional
CW: not a separate track
Special Features: period-/topic-based; hard to say how frequently these courses rotate
Full-time faculty: 12

Beloit:

No of courses for major: 13/14 units
Breakdown of courses for major: 10 courses + 1 capstone and 3 supporting courses outside English; intro, Brit Lit 1/2, Am Lit 1/2, and topics-based period courses
Gateway: 190—Intro to Literary Study
Capstone: 4 options: seminar, honors, public symposium, capstone in other discipline
CW: Separate track within English major
Special Features: Like their ability to maintain some sense of literary history but more specificity in topics/period
Full-time faculty: 10

Ursinus:

No of courses for major: 10
Breakdown of courses for major: Methods, Brit Lit 1 and 2, Am Lit (all at 200-level), 3 300-level courses
1 pre-/1 post-1800), senior sem
Gateway: Methods
Capstone: seminar or honors
CW: track
Special features: writing for *Grizzly* or *Lantern* required for CW minors, using Philadelphia and environs
Full-time faculty: 10

Sample Summary

Affirmations

- Methods course prepares students well for upper-level courses, based on our departmental assessment
- writing for student publications is required for our CW students
- Using the local environment deepens student learning beyond the classroom

Areas for reconsideration

- question our reliance on a survey model in relation to an ever-expanding canon of literature
- consider more coursework on the upper level
- consider ways to strengthen senior capstone experience
- consider greater promotion/support for student internships

Changes in progress

- revising curriculum to emphasize skills rather than coverage on the lower level
- increasing the number of upper-level versus lower-level courses required for major
- adding public presentation requirement to senior capstone
- emphasizing the role of internships as part of the English major

Annual Departmental Review

Department Learning Goals

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

Departmental Changes addressing Student Learning Goals

Below, describe curricular or program changes made in the past year to improve student attainment of learning goals. Insert more rows as needed.

| Goal # | Change | Rationale |
|--------|--------|-----------|
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| | | |

Summary of Other Departmental Assessments, Initiatives, or Changes

Note changes made in response to recommendations from previous external reviews or self-studies.

Summary of Responses to Senior Exit Interviews

Outline of Assessment Plans for 2013-14

Departmental Goals for 2013-14

Summary of Student and Faculty Achievement

List of Student Achievements

Include student publications, presentations, internships, and notable post-baccalaureate plans

Narrative of Faculty Achievement

150-word narrative highlighting faculty achievement

List of Faculty Activities

Notable publications, presentations, and other professional activities