

University of Wisconsin-La Crosse

Assessment Plan

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The University of Wisconsin-La Crosse and Its Mission

The University of Wisconsin-La Crosse is a regional, public comprehensive university governed by the Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System. UW-La Crosse

offers 40 undergraduate and 13 graduate programs in the colleges of: 1) Liberal Studies, 2) Science and Allied Health, 3) Business Administration, and 4) Health, Physical Education and Recreation. The University enrolls 8,000 to 9,000 undergraduate and graduate students from Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, Illinois and 32 other states, Canada and 28 other foreign countries. There are approximately 450 faculty and instructional academic staff.

UW-La Crosse shares the UW System and core missions with other institutions in the System, and also the following select mission:

The primary purpose of the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse is to provide education leading to baccalaureate and approved graduate degrees supplemented by appropriate research and public service activities as further detailed in the following set of goals:

- a. The University shall emphasize excellence in educational programs and teaching.
- b. The University shall provide a broad base of liberal education as a foundation for the intellectual, cultural, and professional development of students.
- c. The University shall offer undergraduate programs and degrees in the arts, letters, and sciences; health and human services; education; health, physical education, and recreation; and business administration.
- d. The University shall offer graduate programs and degrees related to areas of strength within the institution.
- e. The University expects scholarly activity, including research, scholarship and creative endeavor, that supports its programs at the baccalaureate degree level, its selected graduate programs, and its special mission.
- f. The University shall support studies related to the environment, culture, heritage, institutions, and economy of La Crosse and the surrounding Upper Mississippi Valley region.
- g. The University shall serve as an academic and cultural center, providing service and professional expertise, and meeting the broader educational needs of the region. (Appendix A contains the UW System and Core mission statements.)

Overview and Development of the UWL Assessment Plan

The UW-La Crosse Assessment Plan focuses on assessment of student learning in all undergraduate and graduate programs including general education. In addition, the plan includes university-wide assessment of 1) student growth and development, 2) student satisfaction with programs, services and the learning environment, 3) alumni opinions, and 4) students' performance on standardized tests and post-graduate experiences. This report divides assessment broadly into three major areas: 1) general education, 2) undergraduate and graduate academic programs, and 3) university-wide assessment. Each of these involves different groups of faculty using a diverse array of methods and practices to assess student learning and development.

The UW-La Crosse Assessment Plan developed in the context of existing institutional assessment and assessment guidelines from the University of Wisconsin System and the North Central Association. The following chronology highlights significant assessment activities prior to and during the development of the institutional plan to assess student learning.

UWL Assessment prior to 1990. UWL has engaged in significant assessment activities since the mid-1980's. From 1986-1990 UWL administered the College Outcomes Measures Program tests (ACT-COMP) annually, and in 1990 conducted an extensive alumni survey. Moreover, the Office of Career Services collects information about employment and post graduate education of UWL graduates each year. In addition, some academic departments have traditionally assessed their students to evaluate program quality. However, UWL has not had a comprehensive plan to assess student learning across the institution.

UWL Assessment since 1990. In 1990 the University of Wisconsin System initiated the Academic Quality Program (AQP) which required each institution to: 1) define clear goals for each academic program including general education, 2) devise and implement methods to assess program goals, and 3) use the evaluation information to improve the curriculum and instruction. AQP also required each campus to assess students' quantitative and verbal skills annually. The Dean of the former College of Arts, Letters and Sciences coordinated the institution's response to AQP. In 1991-92 each academic department developed program goals and assessment methods, and by March 1993 all academic departments had submitted reports to the Provost, describing their progress in AQP assessment activities. The University also participated in sophomore skills competency testing using the Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency test (ACT-CAAP) in 1992.

In 1993, the Chancellor appointed an Assessment Coordinator to facilitate development of a comprehensive plan to assess student learning in all academic programs, and meet the assessment requirements of AQP and NCA. During 1993 the Provost/Vice Chancellor and Assessment Coordinator met with department chairpersons to discuss the AQP and NCA assessment initiatives. The Provost/Vice Chancellor requested that each academic department develop comprehensive plans to assess student learning outcomes in their respective programs, based upon NCA's "Characteristics of Assessment Plans."

Academic Departments submitted plans to assess student learning outcomes in their programs to the Provost/Vice Chancellor in spring 1994. The University Assessment Coordinator reviewed all of the departmental assessment plans and provided written feedback to the faculty in each program. Faculty began implementing the plans during fall semester 1994.

In July 1994 the University Assessment Coordinator drafted the UWL Assessment Plan based upon the plans already established to assess general education, quantitative and verbal skills, and all undergraduate and graduate programs. The plan has been reviewed and revised with recommendations from the NCA Self-Study Steering Committee, the

General Education Committee, members of the Writing Skills and Quantitative Skills Committees, the UWL administration, and the University Faculty Senate.

Purposes and Principles of Assessment

Assessment is systematic inquiry into what, how and why students learn or do not learn at the university, inquiry that ultimately leads to improvement in educational experiences and programs. The three major purposes of assessment are to: 1) document student learning so that collectively we understand what students learn in our programs, 2) explore relationships between the curriculum, teaching and learning so that we better understand how and why students learn or do not learn, and 3) use the results to improve teaching, student learning, and the curriculum. The UWL plan is based upon several critical principles about the nature of assessment, and about how to create an institutional climate in which assessment leads to educational improvement. A first principle concerns the nature of learning itself--what we hope to measure and document. The collegiate experience--in and outside of the classroom--fosters the development of a wide range of knowledge, skills, dispositions, and values. We recognize that learning is a complex process that

. . . entails not only what students know but what they can do with what they know; it involves not only knowledge and skills, but values, attitudes and habits of mind that affects both academic success and performance beyond the classroom. Assessment should reflect these understandings by employing a diverse array of methods, including those that call for actual performance, using them over time so as to reveal change, growth, and increasing degrees of integration. Such an approach aims for a more complete and accurate picture of learning, and therefore firmer bases for improving our students' educational experiences.

(American Association for Higher Education, "Principles of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning," p.2)

Knowing what students learn is important but it is also critical to understand something about the experiences and conditions that affect student performance--to understand how and why students learn or do not learn in our classes and programs. Experts argue that assessment should help to identify the complex relationships between the curriculum, teaching and student learning.

Knowledge about what, how and why students learn provides the basis for addressing the ultimate aim of assessment--to improve the effectiveness and quality of the curriculum, teaching and students' learning, thinking and development. Assessment is not simply an attempt to understand student learning but a vehicle for educational improvement. Effective assessment programs produce good information about student learning and use that information to enhance the quality of students' educational experiences.

Assessment has little beneficial effect unless faculty are involved in the design, implementation, analysis, interpretation, use of results, and revision of the assessment process. Assessment is unlikely to be productive inquiry unless faculty members are the inquirers--asking the questions that are central to their concerns. To the greatest extent possible, responsibility for assessment should be in the hands of faculty who develop the curriculum, teach and work with students.

Finally, the institutional climate strongly affects whether assessment will produce desirable changes in program quality and student learning. We assume that faculty want to improve their performance and the quality of students' educational experiences. Faculty commitment to improvement can be strengthened when the university community--faculty, administration, students--value and support risk-taking efforts to better understand students' learning, and to experiment, when necessary, with alternative teaching strategies. Faculty commitment to improvement is undermined when assessment results are used in a strictly judgmental fashion to compare and evaluate faculty effort.

Assessment of General Education Description of the UWL General Education Program.

The UWL Select Mission indicates that a primary aim of the university is to "provide a broad base of liberal education as a foundation for the intellectual, cultural and professional development of the students". Recently, the UWL Strategic Plan reaffirmed the importance of a strong general education curriculum for students, asserting that the university should

Continue to provide a high quality inquiry-based liberal education . . . and help students see it as the foundation of all academic programs, and as a hallmark of a university education.

("Forward Together", 1993, p.22)

The General Education Program is the common educational experience for all undergraduates uniquely concerned with the broad education of the whole person. The primary purpose of General Education at UW-La Crosse is to

cultivate knowledge, skills and dispositions essential for independent learning and thinking. As a result of General Education, students will be more knowledgeable in a wide variety of subject matter areas, and also better able and more willing to ask significant questions, seek appropriate solutions to complex problems, make sound judgments and develop rational beliefs.

(University of Wisconsin-La Crosse Catalog, p. 83)

A distinctive feature of the UW-La Crosse program is the emphasis on inquiry-based teaching and learning. All general education courses are intended to be inquiry-based--to involve students in active learning and critical thinking about important issues and

questions. The program aims not simply to impart information to students but to help them develop and refine the intellectual skills and habits of mind that lead to better understanding and complex thinking about enduring issues, problems and questions.

The general education curriculum consists of two major components: skills and liberal studies. Appendix B contains a description of each general education curriculum category and a list of the courses in the program. Skills courses improve students' abilities to learn, think and communicate more effectively. Liberal studies courses extend students' intellectual skills and engage them in the study of major areas of knowledge and experience.

Liberal studies courses afford opportunities for students to evaluate critically their heritage and see beyond the boundaries of their culture, to think scientifically in both the natural and social spheres, to explore texts thoroughly and imaginatively, to respond sensitively to the expressive arts, and to plan a life that makes the best possible use of work and leisure time. The thematic categories and inquiry-based teaching and learning in liberal studies courses help students to see connections among fields of knowledge, and to understand different perspectives and ways of thinking about important questions.

(University of Wisconsin-La Crosse Catalog, p. 84)

The inquiry-based emphasis of the program is intended to enhance students' abilities to think critically--the common outcome which all courses in the program address. However, each course in the curriculum addresses additional general education goals. In 1993 a group of UWL faculty attended the Lilly Endowment Workshop on the Liberal Arts where they formulated outcomes for the general education program based upon the stated objectives of each course in the general education curriculum (Bilby, Pandit, Tinapp, & Unbehaun, 1993, "Toward Assessing the General Education Program at The University of Wisconsin-La Crosse," pp. 11-17). During fall semester 1993, the General Education Committee asked faculty members who teach general education courses to review and revise the outcomes relevant to their courses. The result was a consensually-agreed upon set of learning outcomes for the General Education Program.

The General Education Committee is responsible for assessing the General Education Program. (The committee consists of 9 voting members, eight faculty and one student member, and 6 administrative consultants-- the Provost/Vice Chancellor, College Deans, and Director of Records and Registration.) According to the UWL Faculty Handbook, the committee is charged with "conducting a systematic review of the General Education Program by examining existing courses on a regular, rotating basis, and recommending curricular changes" (p. 237). Moreover, as emphasized in the strategic plan the university should "continue development and implementation of the general education and majors assessment programs" ("Forward Together", p. 22).

Since 1991, the General Education Committee conducted: 1) a faculty survey, 2) a student survey, 3) assessment of the writing emphasis courses, 4) assessment of freshmen writing skills, and 5) assessment of students' quantitative skills in statistics. Reports of these activities are on file in the Provost/Vice Chancellor's office. Recognizing the need

to coordinate its assessment activities, the General Education Committee adopted a comprehensive plan to assess the general education program in May, 1994. (The General Education Assessment Plan is on file in the Provost/Vice Chancellor's office.) The plan includes the assessment of:

1. students' academic skills in general education
2. student learning outcomes in the liberal studies areas
3. student beliefs, experiences and activities in general education
4. faculty beliefs, experiences and activities in general education
5. general education course materials.

Assessment of academic skills. The skills area of general education includes required coursework in writing, oral communication and mathematics.

Assessment of writing skills. The Writing Skills Assessment Committee, composed of English Department faculty, will assess the writing skills of freshmen and upper-division students in writing emphasis courses. Committee members will draw samples of student writing from sections of English Composition, and in alternating years from sections of writing emphasis courses. They will use locally-developed evaluation rubrics to assess the quality of writing for both freshmen and upper-division students. The Writing Skills Assessment Committee will include a member of the General Education Writing Emphasis Committee in years when the writing emphasis courses are assessed. The Writing Skills Assessment Committee piloted this assessment in spring 1994 and their report is on file in the Provost/Vice Chancellor's office.

In addition, UWL will administer a nationally standardized test in conjunction with the UW System assessment of sophomore competency in verbal skills. The last UW System verbal skills assessment used the ACT CAAP in 1992. The next assessment will take place in 1995 or 1996.

Assessment of oral communication skills. Faculty from the Department of Speech Communication and Theatre Arts will develop a procedure for assessing the oral communication skills of students. The faculty will assess students every three years starting in the 1995-96 academic year.

Assessment of quantitative skills. A Quantitative Skills Committee, composed of mathematics faculty, will conduct the assessment of quantitative skills. Members of the committee have developed and piloted tests for each mathematics course in the general education curriculum--Statistics, College Algebra and Trigonometry, and Applied Calculus.

The quantitative skills tests are used in two ways. First, the committee in cooperation with math instructors, uses them as pre- and post-tests in some sections of the general education mathematics courses. Each test will be given on a three year cycle, and the Mathematics Department will evaluate course goals, instructional patterns and so on in light of the results. Second, the tests will be given in courses with mathematics

prerequisites with the instructor's consent. The tests can be used to determine students' mathematical knowledge and skills as they enter the courses, and the instructors can use the results to plan reviews or supplemental instruction. The tests are scored and analyzed by members of the Quantitative Skills Assessment Committee who provide feedback to the course instructors, the Mathematics Department and also report their findings to the General Education Committee.

In addition to locally-developed assessment, UWL will administer a nationally standardized test of quantitative skills in conjunction with the UW System assessment of sophomore competency in quantitative skills. The results of the test will be distributed to the Mathematics Department, the General Education Committee and included in the annual UWL Assessment Report. The last UW System quantitative skills assessment used the ACT CAAP in 1992. The next assessment will take place in 1995 or 1996.

Assessment in other general education skill areas The skills area of the general education curriculum includes options for additional coursework in foreign languages, logic, and computer science. Faculty who teach in these areas will develop instruments to assess students' skills.

Table 1 contains a summary of the methods, administration and the timeline for development and implementation of academic skills assessment.

Skills Area	Method	Administered by	Conducted
Quantitative	Pre and Post tests used in course sections of statistics; applied calculus; algebra and trigonometry	Math Instructors and the Quantitative Skills Committee	One quantitative skills area annually
Quantitative	Tests to determine entry level skills in courses that require math skills	Course instructors and the Quantitative Skills Committee	Ongoing at the discretion of course instructors
Quantitative	Nationally Standardized Test	Assessment Coordinator	1995 or 1996-- Schedule determined by UW System
Verbal-writing Freshmen Writing Writing Emphasis courses	Samples of student writing from course sections	Writing Skills Assessment Committee	Annually, alternating freshmen writing and writing emphasis each year
Verbal-writing	Nationally Standardized Test	Assessment Coordinator	1995 or 1996-- Schedule

			determined by UW System
Verbal-speaking Oral Communication	To be developed	Speech Communication faculty	Once every three years starting with 1995-96
Other Skill Areas Foreign Language Logic Computer Science	To be developed	General Education Assessment Groups consisting of instructors in each skill area	Once every three years for each area starting with 1995-96
Table 1: Assessment of Academic Skills			

Assessment of student learning outcomes in liberal studies areas. Assessing the set of complex abilities, skills and dispositions fostered through the general education experience is a formidable challenge. However, it is essential to assess learning in all of its complexity and resist merely assessing what is easiest to count or observe. The proposed methods will measure students' ability to think critically using subject matter of the liberal studies categories. Moreover, they will measure additional learning outcomes in the curriculum. The plan to assess student learning outcomes in liberal studies categories includes the following features:

1. General Education Assessment Groups will be responsible for assessing outcomes in the liberal studies categories. The members will be instructors who teach in the program.
2. Each group will design and conduct the assessment for one category, and provide feedback to students, instructors and the General Education Committee.
3. The assessment instruments may include examinations (free-standing or course embedded) or coursework, such as assignments or projects, analyzed for program assessment. The instrument(s) for each category must 1) assess learning outcomes including critical thinking in the respective category and 2) not assume prior knowledge of specific factual information.
4. New freshmen and upper division students will be assessed. The assessments will take place during the fall orientation period for freshmen and during the first or second semester of the junior year for upper division students.
5. Learning outcomes will be assessed in each general education category every three years, with two or three categories assessed annually. Table 2 contains the timeline for assessment in each liberal studies area.

Assessment of Liberal Studies	95-96	96-97	97-98	98-99	99-00	00-01
Minority and Multiracial Women's Studies			X			X
International Studies: Becoming World Citizens		X			X	
Science: Understanding the Natural World	X			X		
Self and Society	X			X		

Humanistic Studies: The Search for Meaning			X			X
Art: The Aesthetic Experience	X			X		
Health and Physical Well-Being: Learning to Create Healthy Lives		X			X	
Table 2: Timeline for Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes in:						

Assessment of students' beliefs, experiences and activities. Assessment of academic achievement reveals what students learn, but additional information is necessary to understand the conditions that influence student learning. Academic achievement depends upon many factors such as students' academic background, their interests, effort, values, skills, as well as teaching strategies, curricular structures and so on. The General Education Committee is interested in learning more about the kinds of experiences that students find most rewarding, their beliefs about the value of general education, their involvement and commitment to learning, and the recurring problems they experience in the program. To examine relationships between student learning, the curriculum, and teaching, the General Education Committee will use focus groups and surveys of students.

Assessment of faculty beliefs, experiences and activities in the general education program. The quality of students' learning depends most directly on the faculty who teach in the program. The General Education Committee will use focus groups and surveys of faculty to assess important issues such as: Do instructors support the purposes, goals and aims of the program? What can be done to encourage a greater sense of collective responsibility for students' learning in general education? What are the recurring problems that instructors face in trying to attain general education objectives? What suggestions do instructors have for improving the quality of the general education experience at the university? What kinds of pedagogical approaches and strategies work best in helping students attain the expected outcomes of the program?

Assessment of general education course materials. A study of general education programs by the Association of American Colleges and Universities found that strong general education programs "strive continuously for educational coherence" (Strong Foundations: Twelve Principles for Effective General Education Programs, p. 12). General education at UWL is intended to be a coherent educational program. But, attaining coherence is particularly challenging in a program where courses are located in many different academic departments. The crucial link among courses, however, is that each contributes to established program goals and each incorporates inquiry-based teaching and learning.

The General Education Committee reviews all new course proposals and revisions of existing courses to determine whether they meet general education guidelines. According to the guidelines, courses must contribute to the program in substantive ways by addressing general education goals through inquiry-based teaching and learning.

Initial reviews ensure that new courses contain prerequisite general education elements. But, courses change over time; instructors modify them and new faculty assume responsibilities for them. Consequently, the General Education Committee will review course materials such as syllabi, assignments, and handouts on a regular basis to determine whether the approved courses continue to address the program goals through inquiry-based teaching and learning as indicated in the original course proposals.

When conducted in the spirit of program improvement, course reviews can strengthen curricular coherence and improve communication among instructors about the goals, opportunities, strengths and problems associated with the program. Table 3 indicates the timeline for use of indirect measures to assess the general education program.

Indirect Measures Used to Assess General Education	Method	Administered by	Conducted
Assessment of Student Beliefs, Experiences and Activities	Focused group interviews/surveys	General Education Committee and Assessment Coordinator	Semi-annually starting spring 1995
Assessment of Faculty Beliefs, Experiences and Activities	Focused group interviews/surveys	General Education Committee and Assessment Coordinator	Semi-annually starting spring 1996
Assessment of Course Materials	Review by General Education Committee	General Education Committee	Annually starting spring 1995

Table 3: Indirect Measures Used to Assess General Education Program Outcomes

In summary, the General Education Assessment Plan involves systematic, ongoing assessment of: 1) skills acquired in general education courses, 2) student learning outcomes in each general education category, 3) the beliefs, experiences and activities of students and instructors, and 4) course materials to determine the integrity and coherence of the curriculum.

Administration of General Education Assessment. The General Education Committee administers the assessment program in cooperation with committee-appointed assessment groups:

1. The General Education Committee as a whole conducts the annual reviews of course materials on a rotational basis.
2. The Writing Skills Assessment Committee conducts assessment of students' writing skills. The committee reports its findings to the General Education Committee, and provides feedback to instructors and students. The committee consists of English Department members.

3. The Quantitative Skills Assessment Committee conducts assessment of quantitative skills. The committee reports its findings to the General Education Committee, and provides feedback to instructors and students. The committee consists of Mathematics Department faculty members.
4. General Education Assessment Groups consist of faculty members who teach general education courses. They will design assessment instruments and conduct assessment in the liberal studies areas of the curriculum.
5. The UWL Assessment Coordinator will assist in the development of assessment instruments, and in the assessment of student and faculty beliefs, experiences and activities.

Using Assessment Results To Improve the Quality of the Curriculum, Teaching and Learning in General Education.

The ultimate aim of assessment--to enhance students' learning, thinking and development--depends upon a set of related factors, including: 1) the quality of the results, 2) a procedure for ongoing, systematic review of the results, 3) feedback to faculty and students, and 4) support for enacting appropriate changes.

Quality of the results Good assessment information is credible and applicable to decisions that need to be made. The assessment instruments will be developed by the faculty, which increases the chances that the results will be of interest to instructors and that the instruments will be well suited to assessing what students learn in our program.

Ongoing review There must be occasions for systematic review, analysis and interpretations of the results, and discussions about their implications for improvement. The General Education Committee meets twice monthly, and intends to review assessment results on a regular basis. While it is important for the committee to review results and recommend changes, it is essential to engage instructors in the review process. The committee intends to do this in two ways. First, the reviews of course materials will be conducted in conjunction with the analysis of student outcomes assessment results. The General Education Committee will invite instructors to examine and discuss the results of surveys and outcomes assessment in conjunction with review of course materials. The reviews, which will involve instructors in collective analysis and discussion about the implications for changes and improvements, will bring together three important sources of information about what students:

1. Were taught (determined by examining course materials)
2. Experienced (determined through focus groups and/or survey data)
3. Actually learned (determined from the results of learning outcomes assessment)

Second, as part of a new faculty development plan, UWL will hold an annual All-University General Education Colloquium in the intersession between fall and spring semester. At each colloquium faculty will present assessment results and engage in collective review and discussion about the implications of the findings for the curriculum, teaching and learning.

Feedback to instructors and students Assessment information must end up in the hands of those most likely to benefit from it--instructors and students. Faculty assessment groups are responsible for providing feedback to instructors, students and to the General

Education Committee. The General Education Committee provides feedback to the administration and other relevant faculty groups as necessary.

Support for appropriate changes The committee must actively encourage and support desirable changes in the curriculum and teaching. Assessment should help to identify the kinds of assistance and support faculty need to enact changes. The General Education Committee intends to work with other units on campus to promote improvement. For instance, the committee will help to organize and present the annual General Education Colloquium. The committee might co-sponsor seminars, workshops, informal discussion groups or other types of activities that focus on improving teaching and learning, and the committee may also initiate or encourage faculty groups to seek external funds to further improve the program.

In summary, the General Education Committee has adopted a comprehensive plan to use direct measures of student learning to assess the outcomes of the program. The Committee will assess students' academic skills in writing, oral communication and mathematics, as well as critical thinking and other outcomes in the liberal studies component of the program. The Committee will use indirect measures such as focus groups and surveys to examine student and faculty beliefs and experiences related to general education. Moreover, the Committee members will conduct annual reviews of general education courses materials.

Assessment in Undergraduate and Graduate Programs

During the 1993-94 academic year, faculty in all academic departments developed plans to assess student learning outcomes in their programs according to the NCA Characteristics of Good Assessment Programs." (See Appendix C, Guidelines for Departmental Assessment Program Reports.") The University Assessment Coordinator reviewed each plan in light of the NCA guidelines and provided written feedback to the program faculty. During the 1994-95 academic year, academic programs began to implement their assessment plans. Each plan, developed and approved by its program faculty, contains the following elements:

1. A conceptual framework that describes the purposes of assessment and links it to the university's mission.
2. The expected student learning outcomes in the program.
3. The methods and practices used to assess student outcomes.
4. A description of how students are involved in assessment.
5. A description of how each academic program administers assessment.
6. A description of how assessment results will be used to improve the program's curriculum, teaching and student learning.

Summary of academic program assessment plans. The diversity of assessment approaches makes it difficult to summarize all of the departmental/program plans. The Assessment Plans are on file in the Provost/Vice Chancellor's office. Below we highlight the range of approaches to each of the six assessment plan elements.

1. Conceptual frameworks and rationale for assessment. Each plan indicates the reasons for conducting assessment and its connection to the department, college or university mission. While most provide a brief rationale, several have well developed philosophies and frameworks for their assessment programs. The large majority of plans emphasize assessment for purposes of program improvement rather than for simply documenting student achievement.
2. Expected student learning outcomes. Each plan specifies expected learning outcomes for its students. These range from a few global outcomes such as the ability to think critically to programs that have defined an extensive array of learning outcomes.
3. Methods and practices used to assess student outcomes. Each plan specifies multiple direct and indirect measures to assess student outcomes separate from course grading and evaluations. Direct measures include, examinations (locally developed, course-embedded, proprietary exams such as the ETS Major Field Tests and some licensure examinations); checklists and rating scales used to assess student performance in internships, fieldwork, and clinical settings; student portfolios; assessment of student projects and coursework for program assessment; theses; performance assessment such as auditions, exhibitions; and student performance in capstone courses. Indirect measures include alumni surveys, senior exit interviews, student focus groups, employer surveys, job placement data, and graduate/professional school placement data.
4. Student involvement. The plans explain how students are involved in assessment. In most cases the student's role in assessment is one of being assessed. In some programs students play a role in the design and development of assessment (i.e., students sit on departmental assessment committees or participate in focus groups about assessment). Programs that have adopted student portfolios also involve students more directly in self-assessment.
5. Administration and revision of assessment plans. Each plan proposes a procedure to administer assessment in the department/program. The most common procedure is a departmental assessment committee responsible for conducting assessment and presenting the results to colleagues. Most have established a procedure for collective analysis and interpretation of assessment results by department faculty.
6. Use of results to improve the curriculum, teaching and learning. Many of the plans anticipate how and where their assessment results will be most relevant (i.e., for which faculty members, parts of the curriculum, teaching practices, etc.), and propose ways to use the results. Most plans indicate that faculty will meet periodically to examine assessment results and to make proposals for changes. Several departments include assessment in the faculty merit evaluation process.

Implementation of academic program assessment plans. Faculty in each program began to implement assessment plans during the 1994-95 academic year. Departments are in different phases of this process, but each submitted a brief report on their assessment activities during the 1994-1995 academic year. These are available in the Provost/Vice Chancellor's office.

Accountability and support for academic program assessment. It is important to note that the development and implementation of assessment has occurred without new resources at the university. Moreover, faculty uniformly claim that the additional time needed to work on assessment has been a significant problem. It is fair to say that, with the exception of a few departments, UWL faculty are in the initial phases of learning how to do program-level assessment and how to integrate this responsibility into departmental business.

In order to monitor the continued implementation of assessment, each program will submit to its college dean, a brief annual report that describes how assessment was used to enhance program quality.

In addition, the Planning and Program Review Committee requires departments to report on the results of assessment as part of the program audit and review process. The committee reviews approximately four programs each year.

Tangible support for academic program assessment is limited. UWL has established a University Assessment Coordinator who can provide limited technical assistance to departments. The coordinator will also have a small budget which will be used to support innovative assessment approaches and strategies.

The UWL administration will support program assessment by helping to establish a climate in which faculty can identify program weaknesses and develop change strategies without the threat of losing resources. The goal of assessment is not simply to maintain programs but to improve them. Faculty who initiate significant changes to improve the curriculum, teaching and learning should be acknowledged and supported.

University-wide Assessment

Assessment in general education and in individual undergraduate and graduate academic programs will provide essential information about student learning at UWL. However, it is important to complement program-specific assessment with broader, university-wide assessment. UWL will conduct university-wide assessment in the areas of: 1) university impact on student development, 2) student satisfaction with programs, services and the learning environment, 3) alumni opinions, and 4) performance of students in post-graduate experiences.

University influence on student development. A college education is a transforming experience that affects not only students' knowledge and intellectual skills, but contributes to significant changes in their personal and social development. Research indicates that activities outside the classroom as well as maturational processes can influence students' learning and development as much as what happens in their classes (Ewell, 1993; Light, 1992; Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991; Kuh, 1993).

Attaining a more complete, integrated perspective of student learning and development involves assessing areas that are not strictly academic but which have important

implications for students' academic achievement. Currently, little is known about how or even which university experiences affect students' aspirations, values, beliefs, commitments, interests and so on. The UWL Assessment Coordinator will conduct focus group and surveys semi-annually to examine relationships among students' academic and co-curricular experiences, their learning and personal development.

Student satisfaction with programs, services and the learning environment. The UWL Assessment Coordinator will conduct surveys semi-annually to assess student satisfaction with programs, services and other areas of the university environment. These will be coordinated with the University of Wisconsin System accountability initiative which requires student satisfaction surveys on all campuses in the system.

Alumni opinions. The opinions of alumni are an important source of information about educational quality and about the long-term effects of a university education on the quality of individuals' lives. UWL will conduct alumni surveys in conjunction with the University of Wisconsin System alumni survey process. The UW System intends to survey alumni of each institution in the system as part of its accountability procedures.

Students' post-graduate performance. UWL will continue to collect information about students' post graduate experiences, including percentage of students who obtain employment, income of graduates, percentage of students admitted to graduate and professional school programs, and performance of students on standardized admissions tests (e.g., GRE, LSAT, MCAT) and on licensure examinations.

Administration of university-wide assessment. The UWL Assessment Coordinator, who reports to the Provost/Vice Chancellor, conducts assessments of student development, student satisfaction, and alumni. The coordinator works with other units on campus including the Office of Career Services and Academic Departments who collect information about students' post-graduate employment, income, graduate education, and performance on standardized tests such as the GRE, LSAT, MCAT and licensure examinations. Table 4 indicates who is responsible for each area of university-wide assessment, and specifies the timeline for implementation of these activities.

Assessment	Method	Administered by	Conducted
Student Development	Focused Group Interviews/Surveys	Assessment Coordinator	semi-annually starting Spring 1995
Student Satisfaction	Survey	Assessment Coordinator	In conjunction with UW System
Alumni	Survey	Assessment Coordinator	In conjunction with UW System
Employment of new graduates	Survey	Office of Career Services	Annually

Income of new graduates	Survey	Office of Career Services	Annually
Graduate/Professional School Placement	Survey	Office of Career Services/Academic Departments	Annually
Standardized Tests (GRE,LSAT,MCAT)	Survey	Assessment Coordinator/Academic Departments	Annually
Table 4: Administration of University-wide Assessment			

Using the results of university-wide assessment to document and improve the quality of students' education at UWL. The UW System policy, "Accountability for Achievement," requires institutions to report on a broad range of factors for purposes of public accountability. According to the UW System the objectives of accountability are 1) to enable our stakeholders to know what we are achieving with our resources and 2) to encourage continuous improvement in serving our many clients, using appropriate feedback mechanisms (Accountability for Achievement: Progress Report on Recommendations of the Accountability Task Force," December 10, 1993, p. 4).

UW-La Crosse assessment activities overlap with several UW System accountability indicators such as 1) surveys of student satisfaction and alumni opinions, 2) student performance on standardized tests (GRE, LSAT, GMAT, etc.) and pass rates on licensure examinations, and 3) job placement data and professional/graduate school acceptance information. UWL will coordinate its local assessment with UW System mandates. The Provost/Vice Chancellor reports on accountability to the UW System and the University of Wisconsin Board of Regents.

The UWL Assessment Coordinator will prepare an Annual Assessment Report that summarizes the results of university-wide assessment activities. The report will be distributed to the University's Faculty Senate, the Academic Staff Council, the UWL administration, the Student Association, and all academic and support service departments and programs. The administration and the faculty senate will review the results of university assessment annually and examine their policy implications.

The UWL Assessment Coordinator will be responsible for revising the assessment program and conducting additional assessment in response to recommendations from the faculty senate and the administration. For example, if the results of a student survey indicate that a large students number of students perceive a problem in some aspect of the learning environment, the assessment coordinator may collect additional information to help clarify the nature of the problem and then report that information to the relevant faculty and student groups.

Summary

UW-La Crosse will assess student learning in all undergraduate and graduate academic programs including general education. The primary aim of our assessment program is to enhance the quality of curricula, teaching and student learning throughout the institution.

UWL began to implement the assessment plan in the 1994-95 academic year. Faculty members in all academic programs have been involved in the formulation of learning outcomes, selection of multiple direct and indirect measures, and the design of procedures to determine what and how students learn in their respective programs. The General Education Committee adopted a comprehensive plan to assess the general education curriculum. In addition, university-wide assessment will collect a broad range of information about student growth and development, student satisfaction with academic programs and services, alumni opinions, and student post-graduate performance.

Each program has established a procedure for collective review of assessment results. The results of general education assessment and university-wide assessment will be disseminated throughout the institution. The college deans will monitor the implementation of assessment in undergraduate and graduate programs annually. The General Education Committee will submit an annual report on the results of assessment to the faculty senate, and the university's assessment coordinator will distribute the results of institution-wide assessment annually.

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