

ASSESSMENT IN THE MAJORS 2007-2009

Catherine Beyer

December 2007

INTRODUCTION

Since 1992, UW departments offering undergraduate degrees have submitted assessment reports at the request of the Dean and Vice Provost for Undergraduate Academic Affairs. Most recently, department chairs are asked to include information about their departments' learning goals for undergraduate majors, about the methods the department uses to assess student learning, and about curricular change or assessment that has been or will be implemented in the coming years. This introduction provides a brief overview of biennial assessment reports for 2007-09.

After departments submit reports, they are compiled into three charts. [Assessment in the Majors 2007-2009](#) includes information from the reports of nearly all UW departments that offer undergraduate majors. In addition, [Departmental Learning Goals 2007-2009](#) categorizes the disciplinary goals of each department into the four broad areas of learning mandated by the Washington State Legislature (writing, critical thinking, quantitative reasoning, and information technology/literacy), as well as noting departmental goals in other broad categories. [Assessment Methods 2007-2009](#) lists the approaches all departments use to assess both teaching and student learning.

ASSESSMENT IN THE MAJORS

As the *Assessment in the Majors* chart shows, assessment reports included information from 90% of all UW undergraduate majors. Of the responding departments, 96% identified learning goals for their majors that were either well specified (68%) or emerging (28%). Others noted that they were in the process of developing such goals. Over the past few years, the number of departments with well defined learning goals has sharply increased. In 2004, 78% of all undergraduate departments identified either well-developed or emerging learning goals for majors; in 2007, 87% of all 63 departments identified learning goals for majors.

DEPARTMENTAL LEARNING GOALS

On the Departmental Learning Goals chart, a "+" designates departments whose learning goals are particularly well-developed, and a review of those departments' goals reveals the highly disciplinary nature of learning at the UW. Most departments included learning goals that were explicitly related to content (91%), writing (82%), critical thinking (75%), and methodology/research (74%). In addition to the broad categories tracked by OEA, departments indicated learning goals in other general areas, such as ethics, team skills, experiential learning, and lifelong learning.

ASSESSMENT METHODS

In terms of assessment, as the *Assessment Methods* chart shows, in addition to classroom assessment techniques and course evaluations, the following methods of assessing student learning were frequently noted by those who submitted reports:

- 43 (75%) used exit surveys of graduating seniors
- 35 (61%) used capstone or capstone-like experiences
- 13 (23%) used self-assessment/reflection

Departments also frequently used focus groups, interviews, or other forms of conversations with students to identify what students had learned and what they believed was working in the major, as well as those areas that needed improvement or attention. Other methods used to evaluate student learning in the majors included employer surveys, student self-assessment, and focused study of student performance. In addition, the OEA provides information to all departments summarizing surveys of graduates one, five, and ten years after graduation, as well as reports to departments and Deans on course evaluation results. Curricular review is an essential and time-consuming part of departmental assessment work at the UW. The departmental summaries in the *Assessment in the Majors* chart include descriptions of recent changes in the curriculum of the major. All but one of the departments reported significant curricular changes, and many of the departments connected these changes to information gathered in their assessment of learning processes.