Assessment in the Majors 2009-2011

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INTRODUCTION

University of Washington departments offering undergraduate degrees have submitted assessment reports at the request of the Dean and Vice Provost for Undergraduate Academic Affairs since 1992. 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 2009-11.

After departments submit reports, they are compiled into three charts. *Assessment in the Majors 2009-2011* includes information from the reports of all UW departments that offer undergraduate majors. In addition, *Departmental Learning Goals 2009-2011* categorizes the disciplinary goals of each department into four broad areas of learning mandated by the Washington State Legislature (writing, critical thinking, quantitative reasoning, and research methods[*]), as well as noting departmental goals in other broad categories. *Assessment Methods 2009-2011* 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, all departments submitted assessment reports for 2009-2011, compared with 90% of the departments in the 2007-09 biennium. In addition, all departments offering undergraduate majors identified specific learning goals for majors, even if they noted that faculty were still in the process of developing those goals. About 88% of the undergraduate departments included fully-developed learning goals in their 2009-2011 reports, and 12% noted that they were still engaged in the process of identifying goals.

These data indicate a marked change in departmental identification of learning goals over the past few years. In 2007, about 87% of all undergraduate departments reported some form of learning goals for majors, compared with 100% in 2009. Between 2004, when 78% of all departments reported learning goals for majors, and 2009, the UW has seen a 22% increase in the number of departments with learning goals for majors.

Furthermore, in 2007, 68% of the departments reporting learning goals for majors had well-developed goals, compared with 88% in 2009. This rapid increase in well-developed learning goals is illustrated by the fact that in 2007-09, we indicated which departments had learning goals that were particularly well-developed by adding a "+" beside their entry; however, in 2009-11, so many departments would have received this designation, we decided to eliminate it.

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[*] Previously referred to as "information technology and literacy"

DEPARTMENTAL LEARNING GOALS

The chart of *Departmental Learning Goals 2009-2011* summarizes the learning goals included by each department in its assessment report. As the chart shows, all departments—even those that indicated they were still in the process of developing goals—included learning goals that were explicitly related to content (100%) and to critical thinking and problem-solving (100% compared with 82% in 2007).   In addition:

- 89% identified learning goals related to written and oral communication

- 77% included goals related to disciplinary research methods
- 41% noted quantitative reasoning goals
- 41% identified learning goals related to diversity and multicultural or global awareness
- 38% included learning goals related to the development of team and leadership skills
- 28% noted goals related to ethical practice in the discipline
- 22% identified learning goals related to self-assessment, critique, or reflection
- 17% included goals related to career development and success
- 16% included life-long learning goals
- 8% identified creativity as a learning goal for majors

Although there was striking agreement across departments about some of these goals (content, critical thinking and problem solving, writing, and research methods), it should be noted that in terms of what specific departments wanted students to be able to do when they graduated, those goals varied in meaning across the disciplines. The table below illustrates these differences by reproducing some of the critical thinking/problem solving goals that six departments included in their learning goals for majors:

Dance	Law, Societies, and Justice	Physics	Landscape Architecture	Mechanical Engineering	Business
Develop and practice analytic, evaluative, and contextual skills requisite to critical thinking, kinesthetic understanding, and personal growth.	- Assess theoretical arguments in light of empirical information. - Assess contemporary practices of justice delivery against contemporary conceptions of justice.	- Translate physical concepts into symbolic mathematical language. - Use self-consistent reasoning and detect flaws in logic.	- Test state-of-the-art knowledge through design inquiry. - Demonstrate creativity, flexibility, and the capacity to navigate through ambiguous and complex situations.	Use fundamental science and analysis to solve engineering problems.	Identify a business problem; propose, analyze, and develop viable solutions; and defend the position, employing analytical and critical thinking skills.

ASSESSMENT METHODS

In terms of assessment, as the *Assessment Methods 2009-2011* chart shows, all departments reported using classroom assessment techniques and course evaluations to assess learning at the course-level. Classroom assessment techniques varied quite a bit, but often included analysis of student performance on exams, papers, projects and presentations , as well as use of clickers and other in-class methods to determine students' levels of understanding so that on-the spot adjustments could be made. Course

evaluation reports include a challenge index that lets faculty know how challenging students felt their courses were compared with other courses the students had taken.

In addition to classroom-based assessment and course evaluations, the following methods of assessing student learning were frequently noted by departments:

- 81% use exit surveys or interviews of graduating seniors

- 67% use capstone courses or capstone-like experiences (including senior seminars, theses, projects, shows, or performances)
- 45% conduct focused studies of student work as in portfolio review or specifically targeted outcomes
- 36% conduct focus groups, interviews, or formal and informal meetings with students about the quality of their experience in the major
- 31% assess student satisfaction or performance at one or more key points midway through the major
- 30% use external reviewers to assess student work
- 25% incorporate student self-assessment and reflection into their programs
- 16% require majors to demonstrate learning via internships, co-ops, or practica
- 11% use external standards, such as proficiency or professional exams, to assess learning

As was the case with learning goals, assessment methods often vary with the disciplines. For example, the arts integrate student self-assessment and critique into their courses both as a learning goal for majors and as a method for assessing learning. The arts also often make use of external reviewers of student work. Many engineering majors also make use of external review, but they are also likely to include assessment via internships or co-ops in their assessment work.

Departments regularly use results from these methods in their curricular review processes as noted on the *Assessment in the Majors* chart.

In addition to the work of departments, the Office of Educational Assessment provides information to all departments on results of surveys of UW graduates one, five, and ten years after graduation, as well as to department chairs and Deans on course evaluation results.