

Assessment in the Majors 2015-17 University of Washington Bothell

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INTRODUCTION

This year, the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs at the University of Washington Bothell (UWB) asked all UWB programs that offer undergraduate degrees to submit Biennial Assessment Reports, similar to those submitted at UW Seattle. In these reports, departments provide information about learning goals for their undergraduate majors, details about the methods their departments use to assess student learning, and information about curricular changes that have been implemented over the previous two years or that are planned for implementation. This introduction provides a brief summary of UWB's program assessment reports for 2015-17.

Once reports are submitted to the Vice Chancellor, the Office of Educational Assessment (OEA) at UW Seattle compiles them into three charts. The [UWB Assessment in the Majors 2015-17](#) chart summarizes the information from the program reports. As the chart shows, 12 (80%) of the 15 programs on the UW's Bothell campus that offer undergraduate majors completed reports, although one of the 15 (Educational Studies) noted that as it would be graduating the program's first students in 2015-16, so assessment planning and work were still in process.

In addition to compiling the summary chart, OEA uses the learning goals submitted by programs to generate a second chart entitled [UWB Program Learning Goals 2015-17](#), which shows general patterns in program goals. Two aspects of this table are important to note. First, we have "translated" the specific learning goals of programs into the generic goal labels on column headers in the table. Second, this chart of learning goals is inductively generated. It is not a measure of how well programs are meeting university-wide goals for student learning; rather, it shows general patterns as they emerge and change across the UWB's rich and diverse undergraduate programs.

The third chart, [UWB Assessment Methods 2015-17](#), tracks the most frequently-given methods that programs use to assess teaching and learning. Again, it should be noted that methods have been translated from reports that use specific language for their assessment work into the more generic column headings. Also, the methods noted in this and the summary table are only those assessment practices used to assess all or most majors in the program; special assessment methods that are either

optional or designed only for a special group of students (such as honors students or students who study abroad) are not included.

ASSESSMENT IN THE MAJORS

Program-level articulation of learning goals for undergraduate majors is important because it provides faculty members with a framework for curricular and course planning, a set of criteria against which programs can assess the majors they offer, and a way for students to understand and assess their own learning in their majors. As the *UWB Assessment in the Majors 2015-17* chart shows, 80% of the programs offering undergraduate degrees identified learning goals for majors, a good percentage for the first time of this kind of reporting.

In addition, the learning goals for all of those programs (except for Educational Studies, which is just getting underway) are fully-developed. They clearly convey to undergraduates in language that is consistent with the program (as opposed to a set of “generic” goals) what the program hopes students will have learned once they have completed their majors.

PROGRAM LEARNING GOALS

The *UWB Program Learning Goals for Majors 2015-17* chart shows the broad learning goals that OEA generated from the unique program goals that each of the 11 programs reported, as well as the programs whose goals could be classified in those categories. Again, it is important to note that the broad goals are not institutional goals established by university administrators, but categories that emerged through analysis of the learning goals for majors that each program submitted in its own language. Therefore, although we may say that 100% of the UWB’s undergraduate programs share the goal of critical thinking/ problem-solving, the meaning of that goal and the specialized learning tasks that it represents may vary from one program to another. In addition, even within programs, the meaning of general learning goals, such as critical thinking/problem solving, can vary across areas of emphasis.

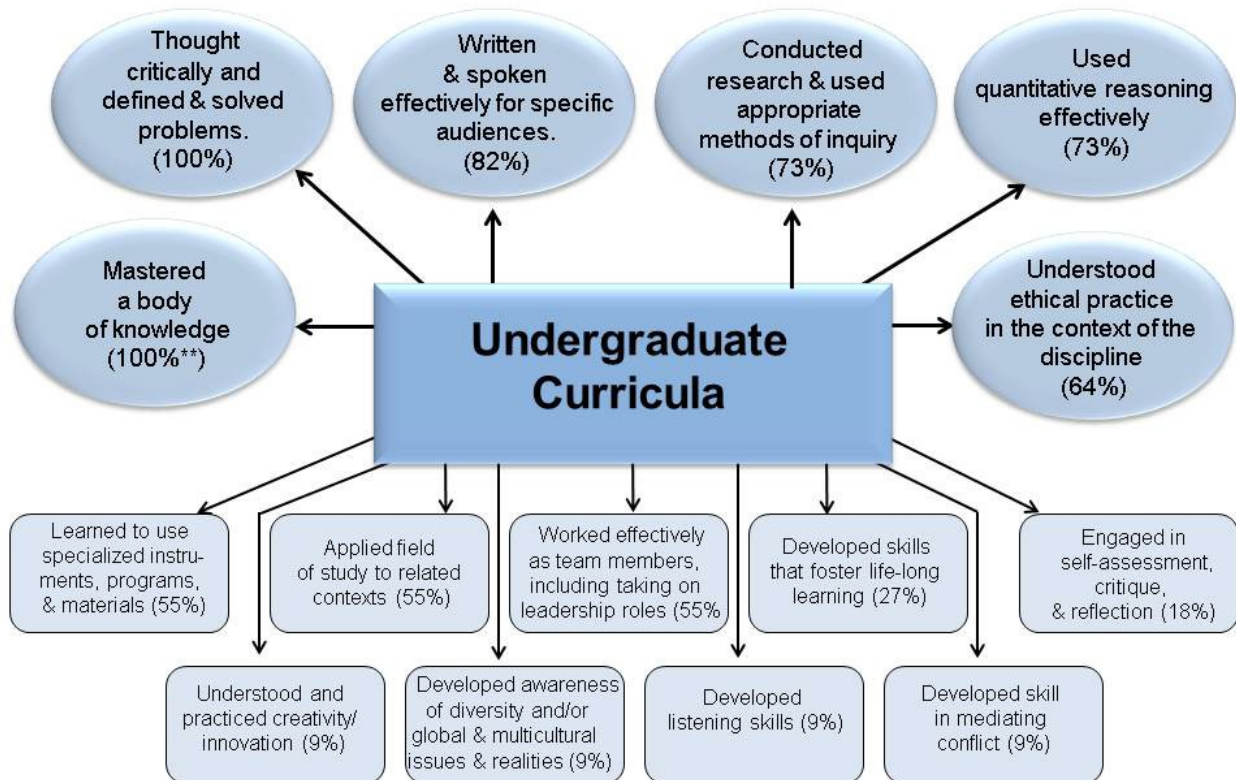
Furthermore, it is important to note that sometimes faculty members understand one goal to be included in others. For example, for some programs the goals of thinking critically and conducting research suggest the development of skills implicit in life-long learning, making listing “life-long learning” as a goal for majors unnecessary. Obviously, these implicit goals cannot be tracked.

Therefore, OEA’s summary of learning goals across the undergraduate curriculum represents only a bird’s eye view of learning aims across the UWB’s undergraduate programs, and, over time, these summaries allow a view of changes in those aims.

With these caveats in mind, we have created Figure 1B, which shows the percentage of programs whose learning goals could be categorized under 15 broad learning categories that emerged from the learning goals that each of the 11 UWB programs submitted. As the figure shows:

- 100% of the programs include goals related to mastering a body of knowledge.
- 100% have critical thinking and problem-solving goals.
- 82% have goals for written and oral communication.
- 73% have research-related goals for majors.
- 73% have quantitative reasoning goals.
- 64% include goals about ethical practice in the discipline.
- 55% have team and leadership goals.
- 55% have goals concerning the use of specialized instruments, computer programs, or materials.
- 55% have goals concerning the application of the field to related contexts.
- 27% have goals about life-long learning.
- 18% have self-assessment/critique/reflection goals.
- 9% have goals related to diversity, multiculturalism, or global awareness.
- 9% have creativity and innovation goals.
- 9% have listening goals.
- 9% have goals related to mediating conflict.

Students earning undergraduate degrees from the University of Washington Bothell campus have*:



* This summary was developed from analysis of 2015-17 program learning goals for majors at UWb submitted by programs in their 2015-17 Biennial Assessment Reports
 ** Indicates the percentage of departments stating each goal, not percentage of students.

Figure 1B. UW Learning Goals from the 2015-17 Assessment in the Majors Chart

ASSESSMENT METHODS

As the [UWB Assessment Methods 2015-17](#) chart shows, all departments reported methods for assessing student learning. The following direct and indirect methods were reported by departments:

- 100% reported using various kinds of classroom-based assessment, including analysis of student performance on exams, papers, projects, and presentations, as well as clickers and other in-class active learning methods used so that on-the-spot adjustments could be made.*
- 100% reported using student course evaluations.
- 100% use peer review of teaching.
- 73% reported using exit surveys
- 55% conducted focused studies of student work as in portfolio review or specifically targeting single outcomes, such as writing.
- 45% use capstone courses or capstone-like experiences, including senior seminars, theses, projects, shows, and performances.
- 18% assess student satisfaction or performance at one or more key points midway through the major.
- 9% reported using some kind of experiential learning.
- 18% reported using external reviewers to assess student work.
- 18% reported using focus groups, interviews, or formal and informal meetings with students to discuss the quality of their experience in the major.
- 9% incorporate student self-assessment, reflection, or critique into their programs
- 9% conduct alumni and/or employer surveys.
- 9% use external standards, such as those set by proficiency or professional exams, to assess learning.
- None of the programs gather information on student learning via undergraduate representation on departmental committees.

OTHER MEANS OF ASSESSING LEARNING IN THE MAJOR

In addition to the assessment work reported by programs in 2015-17, all programs use other methods for assessing student learning and the appropriateness of their curricula. For example, all academic programs have curriculum or undergraduate committees that engage in continuous evaluation of their undergraduate programs. These committees regularly consider faculty reports, student feedback, national trends, fiscal constraints, and areas of expertise among current faculty as they evaluate and revise their undergraduate programs.

* Confirmation of the prevalence of classroom-based assessment at UW can be found in a research study on changes UW faculty make in their teaching (Beyer, C. H., Taylor, E., & Gillmore, G. M., 2013, *Inside the Undergraduate Teaching Experience*, SUNY Press).

Also, all programs complete institutional 10-year Academic Program Reviews, which require self-studies that include questions about the quality of undergraduate learning along with external and internal reviewers' analyses of program effectiveness.

Furthermore, many programs engage in disciplinary-specific accreditation processes that require evidence of student learning and program effectiveness, such as ABET for engineering departments

Finally, the Office of Educational Assessment provides programs with the results of surveys of UW graduates one, five, and ten years after graduation, along with information on course evaluations.