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**EDUCATIONAL
ASSESSMENT**
Improving Learning Through Assessment

Overview Report: Assessment in the Majors 2015-17
University of Washington Bothell & University of Washington Seattle

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INTRODUCTION

This biennium, the University of Washington Bothell (UWB) joined the University of Washington Seattle (UWS) in the Assessment in the Majors reporting process. In the next biennium, we hope to be joined by the University of Washington Tacoma (UWT), as well.

As the reports—*Assessment in the Majors, University of Washington Bothell* and *Assessment in the Majors, University of Washington Seattle*—and their links to tables that show the learning goals, assessment methods, and curricular changes for academic departments and programs suggest, the two institutions differ from each other. They differ in size, mission, age, and academic structure, but both are committed to providing undergraduate students with an excellent learning experience.

ASSESSMENT IN THE MAJORS

As the tables linked to the reports show, both UWB and UWS assess learning at the programmatic and departmental levels.   In its first year of biennial reporting, 80% of UWB's academic programs reported their learning goals and assessment approaches, even though some of the programs at UWB are so new, they have yet to graduate their first students. Now, after more than 15 years of reporting, 100% of UWS's departments reported learning goals and assessment methods for majors.   Nearly all of the goals are robust and measurable. They communicate the diverse values and practices of the programs and disciplines that created them and the schools and colleges in which those academic fields reside.

LEARNING GOALS

Table 1 shows the broad learning goals generated from the unique disciplinary goals representing each of the UWB's 12 programs and UWS's 69 departments, as well as the percentage of departments and programs whose goals could be classified in those general categories. It is important to note that the broad goals are not institutional goals established by university administrators at either institution. Rather, they are the categories that emerged through analysis of the learning goals for majors that each department and program submitted in its own terms.

We should also note that sometimes faculty members understand one goal to be included in others. For example, for some departments the goals of thinking critically and conducting research in the discipline

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.

As Table 1 shows, there is wide agreement across the two institutions about the learning goals that programs and departments most frequently hold for students. Mastering a body of knowledge, critical thinking and problem-solving, written and oral communication, and research goals top the lists of both institutions. In addition, quantitative reasoning; the use of specialized instruments, computer programs, or materials; team and leadership goals; and the application of the field to related contexts are learning goals that appear frequently among the programs and departments at both institutions.

Differences in the two sets of goals are also interesting. For example, ethical practice in the disciplines is a learning goal embraced by a greater percentage of programs at UWB than at UWS, while diversity, multiculturalism, or global awareness is represented by a greater percentage of programs at UWS than at UWB. Listening and mediating conflict are goals that appear at UWB but not at UWS, while civic engagement and sustainability are goals that appear at UWS but not at UWB. These differences may reflect the differing missions of the two institutions, as well as the sizes of both.

Table 1. UWB and UWS learning goals

Learning Goals	% of programs/ departments with that goal	
	UWB	UWS
Master a body of knowledge	100	100
Think critically and solve problems	100	100
Write and speak effectively for specific audiences	82	93
Conduct research and use appropriate methods of inquiry	73	93
Use quantitative reasoning effectively	73	54
Understand ethical practice in the context of the field/discipline	64	39
Work effectively as team members including taking on leadership roles	55	43
Learn to use specialized instruments, computer programs, or materials.	55	43
Apply field of study to related contexts.	55	33
Develop skills that foster life-long learning.	27	17
Engage in self-assessment, critique, or reflection.	18	30
Develop awareness of diversity and/or global and multicultural issues & realities	9	68
Understand and practice creativity and innovation	9	12
Listen effectively	9	--
Understand how to mediate conflict	9	--
Participate in experiential learning	--	12
Practice/learn civic engagement or citizenship	--	10
Develop awareness of sustainability and environmental/ecological practices	--	10

ASSESSMENT METHODS

Table 2 shows the main assessment methods programs and departments at UWB and UWS use to understand how well students are meeting their learning goals. It is important to remember that these methods are not the only ones that departments and programs use. All departments and programs, for example, have faculty committees who review and revise their curricula, and all participate in the UW's Program Review process. However, both of those processes are informed by the assessment methods that faculty reported as ways to understand and evaluate student learning.

As did the learning goals chart, Table 2 shows strong agreement across the two institutions about the most frequently-used methods of assessment. As the Table shows, all departments and programs at UWB and UWS use classroom-based assessment, course evaluations, and peer review of teaching. A sizeable percentage of departments and programs at both institutions also use exit surveys and capstone courses or experiences.

The differences in the two institutions' uses of assessment methods are also important and, perhaps, point to both differences in size of programs and institutional missions. For example, UWB uses focused study of student work more frequently as an assessment method than does UWS, while UWS tends to use mid-program assessment methods more frequently than does UWB.

Table 2. UWB and UWS assessment methods

Method	% of programs/ departments using that method	
	UWB	UWS
Classroom-based assessment	100	100
Student course evaluations	100	100
Peer review of teaching	100	100
Exit surveys	73	87
Focused studies of student work	55	10
Capstone courses or experiences	45	68
Mid-program assessment	18	46
External reviewers	18	36
Student focus groups, interviews, meetings	18	33
Student self-assessment, reflection, critique	9	30
Experiential learning/supervisors' review	9	39
Alumni and/or employer surveys	9	28
External standards, such as those set by proficiency or professional exams	9	12
Undergraduate representation on program committees	0	16

CONCLUSION

This analysis presents a coarse-grained view of the learning values and assessment practices at UWB and UWS. When reading a program's stated goals, those in the field may be aware of a great deal of complexity, which may be opaque to those outside it. Furthermore, many goals go unstated because they are not measurable. For example, it is likely that every program and department hopes that students develop a passion for that area of study, but they rarely state that.

Given the limitations of this kind of analysis, it appears that UWB and UWS share values around what is important for UW students to be learning, as well as in the ways that learning should be assessed. The differing missions of the two institutions, their sizes and the sizes of their programs, the availability of support staff and other kinds of assistance, and student demographics are likely to affect both goals and assessment strategies to some extent. Nevertheless, these reports clearly demonstrate commitment to undergraduate learning and to assessment methods that can help us understand the learning experience of our students.