

UW-Madison Plan for the
Assessment of Student Learning

JANUARY 2015



This document describes a strategic and systematic process of improving the quality of degree and co-curricular programs at UW-Madison through the assessment of student learning. UW-Madison's plan for assessing student learning is dynamic and grounded in the university's mission and strategic plan.

A. Introduction

This institution-wide assessment plan provides a framework for student learning assessment at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. To ensure the quality of our students' experience, we engage in ongoing, systematic and integrated efforts to better understand and improve learning. This is what we mean by student learning assessment. Others may refer to this concept as evidenced-based learning. In any case, student learning assessment is the ongoing process of: 1) defining clear, measurable learning goals, 2) ensuring that students engage in sufficient learning experiences to achieve these goals, 3) gathering evidence to determine how well student learning matches our expectations, and 4) using the results to validate or improve learning.

B. Overview and Guiding Principles of Student Learning Assessment

UW-Madison adopts the philosophy that assessment of learning should be an integrated, ongoing component of academic life and the student experience. Student learning takes place both within and outside of the classroom, and UW-Madison promotes assessment of student learning across students' educational experiences. To this effect, UW-Madison considers the following guiding principles of assessment:

- Many of the regular activities of academic life are evaluative; when approached from a systematic perspective, they are forms of assessment.
- Student learning assessment supplements and supports (rather than replaces) curricular, departmental, and other types of ongoing review for program evaluation and improvement.
- Student learning assessment informs decision-making across several levels: institutional, school/college, division, department/program and course-level, and is especially informative at the course and program level where the learning experience is most immediate.
- Student learning assessment is ongoing, periodic and iterative; it is used both as a procedure for promoting and maintaining program excellence as well as for answering new questions about students' educational experiences as those questions arise.
- Academic student learning assessment activities are faculty driven, and are primarily organized at the program (major, degree, certificate, course) level.
- Collaboration between academic departments and co-curricular programs is strongly encouraged to identify and align opportunities for assessing student learning across the students' educational experience.

C. Framework for Student Learning Assessment

At UW-Madison, the [Wisconsin Experience](#) serves as an overarching framework across all academic and co-curricular programs for what is expected during a student's tenure. Through the Wisconsin Experience and guided by a set of learning goals referred to as the [Essential Learning Outcomes \(ELOs\)](#),¹ UW-Madison seeks to develop in students the ability to engage in the world, to be creative

UW-Madison Essential Learning Outcomes

- Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Physical and Natural World
- Intellectual and Practical Skills
- Personal and Social Responsibility
- Integrative Learning

¹ ELOs were developed from several national surveys done by the Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U) with employers, faculty, staff and alumni, asking the question, "What qualities and skills do you want in college graduates?"

problem solvers, to integrate empirical analysis and passion, to seek out and create new knowledge and technologies, and to adapt to new situations. The nature of these opportunities and how they are offered --- through the integration of student centered in-class and out- of-class learning experiences which are characterized by active and engaged learning --- exemplifies the Wisconsin Experience and what is expected of UW-Madison graduates. (See UW-Madison Essential Learning Outcomes, Appendix A.)

D. Guidance and Oversight

Faculty, academic departments, and schools/colleges are responsible for developing and implementing the curricula. As such, schools/colleges have appointed committees (such as academic planning and curricular committees) who regularly meet to review the curriculum and consider the results of assessment activities when developing suggestions for program improvement. Establishing departmental and co-curricular assessment plans helps to streamline this process and ensures an evidence-based approach to program quality.

The Office of the Provost, the University Council on Academic Affairs and Assessment (UCAAA)², and the deans' offices of the schools and colleges are jointly responsible for student learning assessment. Together these units collaborate to provide oversight and support for assessment activities.

The Office of the Provost maintains a [Student Learning Assessment website](#) intended for those at UW–Madison who lead or engage in assessment activities. The site serves as a resource for individuals to access information on activities around and best practices within the assessment of student learning. The Office of the Provost also provides professional development workshops and consultation to schools and colleges and other units to ensure student learning assessment is supported and an integral component of academic and co-curricular planning.



E. Conducting Student Learning Assessment

Conducting ongoing and systematic evaluation of student learning is an integral component of high-quality academic and co-curricular programs. At UW-Madison, student learning assessment considers what students are expected to learn, where in the curriculum these learning experiences are provided, how it is known that students are learning, and how and when evidence of learning is utilized to validate or make improvements to programs.

As such, every academic program is expected to have active assessment plans in place, conduct at least one assessment activity each year and report annually to the Office of the Provost, including plans for improvement.

² The UCAAA, made up largely of school/college associate deans, meets periodically each academic year to discuss issues related to academic planning, programs, and policies including accreditation, assessment, curricular development, reporting strategies, and other emerging educational trends.

Specifically, assessment plans should specify at least 3-5 learning goals, identify assessment strategies to determine how students are meeting these learning expectations. Assessment reports include a review and summary of the findings. [A Basic Assessment Plan](#) for academic programs is intended as a guide for program faculty and staff who are developing their assessment plans.

Program faculty and staff are required to utilize at least some direct measures of student learning (embedded questioning, capstone assignments evaluated with rubrics, standardized testing, portfolio reviews, etc.). They may also make use of indirect methods (surveying graduating students, alumni and employers, etc.) of assessment to document whether or not students meet the stated learning goals. Indirect methods are often seen as easier to use but they must be complemented by direct methods.

F. Institutional Assessment

The assessment of student learning goals at the program level also informs institution-level assessment activities. The Office of the Provost, the Vice Provost for Teaching and Learning, and the Office of Academic Planning and Institutional Research coordinate institution-level activities, including administration of the National Survey of Student Engagement and the Post-Graduation Plan Survey, and other institution-level assessment efforts in accordance with UW System and Board of Regent policies and accreditation standards set forth by the Higher Learning Commission. Institutional efforts also include ongoing and systematic documentation of the Wisconsin Experience and the Essential Learning Outcomes.

G. Assessment of General Education Program

[UW-Madison's General Education assessment](#) reflects further institution-level assessment of student learning. The general education program was created to ensure that every baccalaureate student at UW-Madison acquires the foundation of an undergraduate education which includes elements for living a productive life, being citizens of the world, appreciating aesthetic values, and engaging in lifelong learning in a changing world.



UW-Madison's General Education includes four foundational domains for undergraduate education:

- Breadth
- Communication
- Ethnic Studies
- Quantitative Reasoning

These foundational domains provide for breadth across the humanities and arts, social studies, and natural sciences; competence in communication, critical thinking and analytical skills appropriate for a university-educated person; and investigation of the issues inherent to living in a culturally diverse society. Importantly, UW-Madison's General Education program aligns with the Wisconsin Experience and Essential Learning Outcomes framework, especially as it relates to providing students with foundational intellectual and practical skills.

The University General Education Committee (UGEC) oversees the campus-wide undergraduate general education program, management of its requirements and assessment of the general education student learning outcomes, and reports to shared governance through the University Academic Planning Council.



H. Graduate Level Student Learning Goals

The Graduate School and the Graduate Faculty Executive Committee (GFEC) exercise the authority of the graduate faculty with respect to establishing, reviewing and modifying graduate degree programs, named options, doctoral minors, graduate/professional certificates, and capstone certificates. As part of its duties, GFEC, in collaboration with the Graduate School leadership, engages in strategic planning discussions. Such discussions include articulation of broad graduate student learning goals that may be modified and extended by academic programs. In Fall 2014

the Graduate School and the Graduate Executive Committee adopted a set of graduate level learning goals appropriate to distinguish a graduate education from the undergraduate experience. Assessment of student learning at the graduate level is, ultimately, articulated and carried out in the individual academic programs (UW-Madison Graduate Learning Goals, Appendix B.)

I. Requirements for Student Learning Assessment

Program-level Assessment

UW-Madison offers a wide range of academic programs at various levels (including bachelor's, master's, certificate, professional, and doctoral levels) and within many different areas of specialty. Each degree program is expected to articulate and adopt student learning goals, identify where in the curriculum the learning takes place and develop assessment plans that align with these learning goals. Further, each academic program is expected to engage in at least *one* assessment activity each year, report findings, and develop improvement plans as needed. Priority should be given to activities based on direct measures of student learning.

(See the UW-Madison 2015-17 Timeline for Program-level Assessment, App. C).

Co-curricular Assessment

Co-curricular life plays an important role in the student experience at UW-Madison. Students engage in activities that highlight, integrate and enhance formal academic learning. As such, assessment planning also includes the identification of the range of co-curricular educational experiences

Academic Program Requirements for Student Learning Assessment

All academic programs (major/degree/co-curricular) will:

- Articulate student learning goals.
- Specify where in the curriculum learning takes place.
- Develop an assessment plan to evaluate whether or not students are meeting expectations of learning.
- Engage in **at least** one assessment activity per year; that is, at least one of a programs student learning goals will be evaluated each year. At least some activities must be based in direct measures of learning.
- Review the results of annual student learning assessment and utilize findings to inform curricular and co-curricular planning and consider ways that academic programs can more effectively help students learn.

Program faculty/staff are required to document assessment activity, and annually report to the Office of the Provost.

through which students demonstrate learning. Thus, co-curricular units and programs set priorities including learning goals, assess these goals and report on progress annually.

In addition, academic departments are encouraged to collaborate with co-curricular programs to identify instances in which students demonstrate learning related to the articulated program-level learning goals. Assessment activities designed around these out-of-classroom experiences are included in the program's annual assessment report. For example, student leadership activities, student governance work, or volunteer opportunities in which students meet intended learning expectations often support academic learning goals.

Course-level Assessment

Faculty are responsible for guiding and monitoring student learning throughout the academic program beginning at the course level. When designing new courses or planning current offerings, faculty establish course goals and course-level student learning outcomes which advance some aspect of the academic program outcomes. All courses offered at UW-Madison must have course syllabi with course objectives and student learning goals clearly articulated. Information about the UW-Madison [course approval process](#) can be found on the Academic Planning and Institutional Research website.

Courses are the unit in which most students directly experience academic programs and are the building blocks of much of the academic experience. In addition to an expectation for academic programs to have learning goals, for-credit courses are also expected to have learning goals. Faculty are required to articulate in their [syllabus](#) what they expect students to learn (to know or be able to do) from the course. The learning goals for courses should align with and accumulate to a full set of learning goals for the academic program.

J. Academic Planning and Review

UW-Madison has a long history of conducting regular review of academic programs as outlined in the UW-Madison Academic Program Review Guidelines. Academic programs must be reviewed at least once every ten years under University Academic Planning Council (UAPC) policy, and Board of Regents policy. All new academic programs must be reviewed five years after implementation. The purpose of program review is to examine strengths and challenges, to celebrate accomplishments, and to reflect on, and plan for, the future. Program review is a platform for exploring ways to maintain and enhance the academic quality of a range

of academic activities. This review should be a natural outcome of an on-going, program-level assessment process. A plan for assessing student learning and the student experience is required as part of the new program proposal and is expected to be implemented with the initiation of the program. Program review is to be student-focused and, through regular assessment activities, report on issues related to student learning and the student experience.

More information about the [program review process](#) can be found on the Academic Planning and Institutional Research Website.



K. UW-Madison Selected Resources for Assessment

UW-Madison Student Learning Assessment website – <https://assessment.provost.wisc.edu>

College of Letters & Science Example – <https://kb.wisc.edu/lc/page.php?id=25242>

General Education at UW-Madison – <https://gened.wisc.edu/>

Undergraduate Program Profile (trends in degrees, enrollments, time-to-degree, by major) – <http://apir.wisc.edu/students.htm>

Undergraduate Post-Graduation Plans Reports – see the web page for standard reports and how to request program-specific requests – <http://apir.wisc.edu/pgp.htm>

National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) – major-specific reports by request to Academic Planning and Institutional Research – <https://apir.wisc.edu/students/student-surveys/>

Adopted by the University Council for Academic Affairs and Assessment, January 30, 2015

UW-Madison Essential Learning Outcomes

At UW-Madison, we have adopted the AAC&U Essential Learning Outcomes (ELOs) as our overarching undergraduate learning goals. The ELOs describe a core set of skills, abilities and knowledge that align with our values to develop extraordinary national and global leaders. These learning goals were developed by AAC&U through extensive national surveys and interviews done with employers, faculty, staff, and alumni, asking the basic question, "What qualities and skills do you want in college graduates?" These outcomes include:

Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Physical and Natural World

- Through study in the sciences and mathematics, social sciences, humanities, histories, languages, and the arts

Focused by engagement with big questions, both contemporary and enduring

Intellectual and Practical Skills

- Inquiry and analysis
- Critical and creative thinking
- Written and oral communication
- Quantitative literacy
- Information, media, and technology literacy
- Teamwork and problem solving

Practiced extensively across the curriculum in the context of progressively more challenging problems, projects, and standards for performance

Personal and Social Responsibility

- Civic knowledge and engagement -- local and global
- Intercultural knowledge and competence
- Ethical reasoning and action
- Foundations and skills for lifelong learning

Anchored through active involvement with diverse communities and real-world challenges

Integrative Learning

- Synthesis and advanced accomplishment across general and specialized studies

Demonstrated through the application of knowledge, skills, and responsibilities to new settings and complex problems

Adopted by UW-Madison University Assessment Council, April 2008

UW-Madison Graduate Learning Goals

	Master's Level	Doctoral Level
Introduction	All UW-Madison students enter the Graduate School's graduate programs with at least a bachelor's degree. Graduates obtaining a master's degree from the Graduate School, whether it be a research-based, project-based, or course-work-only master's degree, are expected to achieve the following learning goals by the end of their degree work.	Regardless of whether an individual is awarded a master's degree, the doctoral level learning goals are inclusive of the master's level learning goals. Research-based doctoral programs culminate in a dissertation. Professional doctoral programs culminate in a project or performance. Additionally, students receiving a doctoral degree from the Graduate School in both research-based and professional programs are expected to achieve the following learning goals by the end of their degree work.
Knowledge and Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Articulates, critiques, or elaborates the theories, research methods, and approaches to inquiry or schools of practice in the field of study. • Identifies sources and assembles evidence pertaining to questions or challenges in the field of study. • Demonstrates understanding of the primary field of study in a historical, social, or global context. • Selects and/or utilizes the most appropriate methodologies and practices. • Evaluates or synthesizes information pertaining to questions or challenges in the field of study. • Communicates clearly in ways appropriate to the field of study. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Articulates research problems, potentials, and limits with respect to theory, knowledge, or practice within the field of study. • Formulates ideas, concepts, designs, and/or techniques beyond the current boundaries of knowledge within the field of study. • Creates research, scholarship, or performance that makes a substantive contribution. • Demonstrates breadth within their learning experiences. • Advances contributions of the field of study to society. • Communicates complex ideas in a clear and understandable manner.
Professional Conduct	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognizes and applies principles of ethical and professional conduct. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fosters ethical and professional conduct.

Approved by the Graduate Faculty Executive Committee, December 14, 2014

Certificates

A certificate program is a designated set of for-credit courses focused upon a specific topic or theme. The certificates are distinguished by the enrollment status of students pursuing the certificates: Graduate Certificates are earned by students enrolled in a graduate program and Capstone Certificates are earned by post-baccalaureate University Special (non-degree) students.

Students receiving a Graduate Certificate are expected to achieve the learning goals at the master's or doctoral level and the following: Demonstrates an understanding of a body of knowledge focused on a specific topic outside or as an extension of the major field of study.

Students receiving a Capstone Certificate are expected to achieve the following: Articulates the key concepts, methodologies, or theoretical concepts in a specialized area of study.

UW-Madison Program-level Assessment Timeline, 2015-17

January-June 2015

- Provost's Office and Graduate School coordinate on learning goal and assessment plan development for undergraduate and graduate programs
- Provide workshops and consultation for program faculty and staff
- Provost's Office begins collection of program-level learning goals
- Provost's Office develops a Request for Proposal for a campus-wide software solution to support course and program assessment planning, management and reporting

July 2015

- Deadline for undergraduate and graduate programs to submit learning goals to the Provost's Office

September 2015

- Graduate programs final opportunity to edit learning goals for the Graduate Catalog

September – December 2015

- Begin collection of undergraduate and graduate program assessment plans
- Provide workshops and consultation for program faculty and staff

January – July 2016

- Undergraduate programs final opportunity to edit learning goals for the Undergraduate Catalog
- Continue to develop and collect undergraduate and graduate program assessment plans
- Provide workshops for program faculty and staff

July 2016

- Deadline for undergraduate graduate programs to submit assessment plans and annual assessment reports to Provost's Office

September-May 2017

- Continue to develop and collect program assessment plans
- Provide workshops for program faculty and staff

July 2017 - ongoing

- All programs engage in at least one assessment activity annually and submit an annual report to the Provost's Office

At UW-Madison student learning assessment is an integral component of academic planning and is used to continuously enhance the quality of our academic programs and the student experience.

