School of Human Ecology  
University of Wisconsin-Madison  
2011-2012 Report on Academic Assessment Activities

The School/College Assessment Plan and School-wide Assessment Activities

As noted in the 2010-2011 Human Ecology assessment report, the SoHE Assessment Plan was updated in 2011. This update reflected the creation of a new school-wide Curriculum Committee within the School’s governance structure and a revised array of undergraduate degree majors. We have made some minor further revisions in 2012 to note that admissions have been suspended in two of the degree majors (see attached). The new committee structure replaced separate undergraduate and graduate program committees and was implemented during the past year. The Committee now provides input on program and evaluation efforts across degree levels and between and among programs.

During the 2011-2012 academic year, the Curriculum Committee spent a good deal of time examining how graduate coursework for the Human Ecology named options (Consumer Behavior and Family Economics, Design Studies, Human Development and Family Studies, and Civil Society and Community Leadership) related to the learning outcomes expected for all graduate students. Going forward, this analysis will enable the School to better address gaps and synergies in learning opportunities relative to stated outcomes, more effectively deploy instructional resources, and more readily gauge student learning for use in program improvement. Use of a new assessment form for evaluating student theses and dissertations has begun to be required and a new doctoral prelim evaluation form has been developed. Faculty will consider implementing use of the prelim evaluation form after the start of the fall semester.

During the past year, it became evident that, in the face of past budget reductions, the School could not sustain the current level of undergraduate course offerings and also continue to adequately support learning opportunities within the graduate program. Thus, departments were asked to engage in a school-wide curriculum planning effort. This involved examining courses in relation to learning outcomes and using results of the last undergraduate alumni survey to streamline undergraduate program offerings while ensuring that key learning outcomes were addressed. A goal was to structure offerings so that faculty members were able to also provide instructional effort sufficient to support achievement of learning outcomes within the graduate program. The School’s Curriculum Committee devoted substantial time to reviewing curriculum plans advanced for the ‘streamlined’ undergraduate degree majors to ensure that the revised course requirements were appropriate in relation to stated learning outcomes and were consistent with available resources.

Assessment Activities in Academic Programs and Departments

A major focus for two Human Ecology departments (Design Studies and Consumer Science) during the past year was implementing recommendations from program reviews completed in 2010-2011. Based on results of the review of the Interior Design major, faculty in Design
Studies made several changes in Interior Design that will become effective with the incoming class of 2012-2013. A new course in Professional Practice will be introduced to provide additional experiences for students related to business development, financial management and strategic planning, and the content of building systems and building codes courses will be modified to provide increased coverage of fire detection and suppression systems and accessibility requirements. Also, based on a review of internship employer evaluations, coursework in the major related to hand and digital drawing is being revamped to facilitate the introduction of REVIT and other new and emerging digital technologies. The Interior Design curriculum revision also will introduce a flexible semester during the junior year to allow students to travel abroad or participate in out-of-town internships.

In addition to planning for implementing recommendations from the Interior Design program review, the Department of Design Studies also examined assessment strategies that could be used to better guide students in the Textile and Apparel Design program in terms of a) selecting a focus on textiles versus apparel design and preparing for the portfolio review required for admission to the Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT) program which students complete in New York City during their senior year of study. A review of student work will now be completed at the end of the students' first year in the program, and used as the basis for offering students an opportunity to focus on either textile or apparel design. Further, the annual portfolio review will be held in the fall rather than in the spring, to provide more timely feedback for students who will, for the first time in 2013, be required to submit portfolios directly to FIT for review by that institution as a condition of admission (as opposed to being admitted to FIT solely on the recommendation of UW-Madison). To ensure that students are well prepared for the FIT portfolio review, faculty also conducted a comprehensive analysis of the UW-Madison TAD curriculum in relation to learning outcomes to be demonstrated in the FIT portfolio review, and determined that the Fashion Illustration course needed to be offered earlier in the course sequence. This change will be implemented beginning in 2012-2013.

Following the review of programs in Consumer Affairs, Retailing, and Personal Finance in 2010-2011, the Consumer Science Department submitted proposals under the Madison Initiative for Undergraduates to obtain additional resources to address review recommendations; one of the most important of which was to either secure additional resources to support course offerings or reduce the number of majors. Unfortunately, the MIU proposals were not funded, so based on the review recommendations and considering feedback about the majors from the last comprehensive alumni assessment as well as the relation of the programs to established research and development Centers, the School's Academic Planning Council voted to suspend admissions to the program in Consumer Affairs for a period of three years. This recommendation was approved by the University Academic Planning Council in December of 2011 for implementation beginning in the fall of 2012. In addition, the Department revised the curriculum of the remaining two majors in retailing and personal finance to include a common core of courses that would eliminate identified redundancies in course content and permit more efficient use of resources. One specific additional change in the Retailing major that was made in response to feedback on student course evaluations was establishment of a new requirement that all students in the major obtain competency in Excel prior to taking the CS 564 Retail Financial Analysis course. This change will make it possible to consolidate two courses into a single course, consistent with the overall School effort to streamline course offerings.
The Department of Human Development and Family Studies focused its efforts on examining learning outcomes across the two transcripted options for the B.S. degree of the same name. They identified 6 common learning outcomes and realigned course requirements in relation to those learning outcomes, resulting in a single consolidated degree major with no options that will be implemented beginning in the fall of 2012. Drawing on results of the last alumni survey, the new consolidated major will now also require 7 credits of professional development courses which will provide additional opportunities for students to focus on career development and/or preparation for future graduate education. This will include a 1-credit career and internship preparation course, a 3-credit research or community-based internship, and at least 3 additional credits of high-impact, practice-based opportunities from HDFS or any other department on campus (e.g., study abroad or a service learning course, or a graduate-level offering).

Based on feedback gleaned from former students’ final oral internship reports, the Department of Interdisciplinary Studies has focused on collecting more specific information about student learning during the internship portion of the Community & Nonprofit Leadership program. Internship site supervisors are now asked to evaluate their students twice per semester by completing an Agency Performance Evaluation of Intern form which asks supervisors to provide input on the degree to which specified student learning outcomes are being met. The internship coordinator can then use the results to design learning experiences that are different in terms of either content or level of challenge if targeted learning outcomes are not being met. It’s anticipated that such feedback will further be useful in selecting future internship sites. The Department has also begun using midterm course evaluations in one of its classes (Nonprofit Sector Overview and Foundations) to gather student feedback that would be helpful in adjusting course learning experiences, including assignments, to improve learning outcomes before it is too late at the end of the course.

**Future Assessment Plans**

During the summer of 2012, the School will be surveying undergraduate alumni from the calendar years of 2009, 2010, and 2011. This survey is conducted every three years to gather student feedback on achievement of general learning outcomes and learning outcomes unique to each degree major. Information collected will be available for use by departments beginning in the fall of 2012. The decision was made to continue to use a mailed questionnaire (and follow-ups) because an adequate email database for graduates is not now available. But we are concerned about the cost of this approach and are exploring strategies that could be used to lower costs in the future and perhaps simultaneously enhance response rates.

The Department of Human Development and Family Studies is scheduled to complete the review of its undergraduate degree major next year. The self-study is nearly complete and the external review is planned for fall semester.

The self-study for the review of the Human Ecology Graduate Program will be completed in 2012-2013. This will put us on target to follow with an external review and consideration by relevant campus governance committees in 2013-2014.