School of Human Ecology
University of Wisconsin-Madison
2012-2013 Report on Academic Assessment Activities

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

The school/college assessment plan was most recently updated in May of 2012. No further changes were made in 2012-2013.

The School of Human Ecology completed two major school-wide assessment activities during this reporting period. One was a survey of all undergraduate alumni who graduated in calendar years 2009, 2010, and 2011 that collected, among other information, data on the degree to which students felt they had achieved learning outcomes specified for each undergraduate Human Ecology major and data on rates of employment and relation of employment to completed SoHE majors. The other activity was a survey of graduate alumni from the past ten years about the degree to which they felt they had achieved the graduate program learning outcomes, and their employment status. The graduate survey was carried out as part of the Human Ecology graduate program review which is scheduled to be completed in spring of 2014.

The undergraduate alumni survey revealed that, overall, students were satisfied with most of the aspects of their undergraduate learning experience and in particular, course formats, nature of instruction, availability of co-curricular student organizations, and the usefulness of internships. However, they were less satisfied with career services provided. Students also reported feeling as though their SoHE major had helped them develop a ‘fair amount’ of competency in several cross-disciplinary learning outcome areas, including problem solving, creative thinking, working collaboratively with others, appreciating and responding to alternative perspectives, applying information to new situations, representing ideas visually, organizing and using resources effectively, and assuming leadership roles. Graduates reported developing a lower level of competency in working with and applying a variety of technologies.

Overall, 90% of undergraduate alumni reported being employed across all majors and 84% said their jobs were related to their SoHE major. Human Development and Family Studies (HDFS) had the largest number of alumni pursuing graduate education (47%). These data, which reflected a range of 80% employed for HDFS alumni to 100% for Personal Finance and Textile and Apparel Design alumni, have been posted on the SoHE website at: http://www.sohe.wisc.edu/documents/Undergraduate%20Miscellaneous/SoHE_Alumni_Employment_and_Graduate_Education_Summary.pdf.

Several specific changes have been implemented to address student feedback regarding a) levels of competency in working with and applying technologies and b) having access to career services. A new course in the area of Career and Leadership Development has been developed and since fall of 2012, is either required or offered as an option for students in every undergraduate Human Ecology major. A career-focused Retail Leadership Symposium also
continues to be offered each semester for students in the Retailing major. Based on alumni survey feedback, plans were also developed to launch a unique Human Ecology ‘instance’ of BuckyNet for SoHE students in order to provide career development learning experiences that are more effectively customized in relation to SoHE majors. Students have been using the School of Business BuckyNet interface which has worked better for some majors than others.

The graduate alumni survey was distributed to students who had completed MS and PhD Human Ecology degrees with transcripted options in Human Development and Family Studies (HDFS), Consumer Behavior and Family Economics (CB&FE), and Design Studies (DS) and MFA degrees in Design Studies from 2002 to 2012. The graduate program option in Civil Society and Community Leadership, which was approved to enroll students beginning in fall of 2011 had not yet graduated any students at the time of the survey. The common learning outcomes for the graduate program were established in 2008.

Overall, graduate alumni agreed they had achieved 4 of 9 learning outcomes at a level above 4 on a 5-point (strongly disagree to strongly agree scale) and the other learning outcomes at a level above 3.75 on the 5.0 scale. Some variations were observed among degree types (MS, PhD, and MFA) and among program options (DS, CB&FE, HDFS), however. Some of the alumni respondents had graduated before the common learning outcomes for the graduate program were established so the overall feedback regarding them was not surprising. The findings do, however, suggest a need to further differentiate the learning outcomes to correspond with specific degree expectations and learning experiences provided. These and other insights will be taken up for further consideration during completion of the graduate program review taking place in 2013-2014.

Assessment Activities in Academic Programs and Departments

Human Development and Family Studies completed a review of its undergraduate major in 2012-2013. The review included preparation of a self-study and an external team visit. Part of the preparation for the review was an analysis of the extent to which both the learning outcomes and professional skills areas for the major were achieved by students using data from both direct (e.g., course assessments and internship evaluations) and indirect assessment measures (alumni survey). Although results indicated that students were achieving the vast majority of identified learning outcomes at or above target levels, several areas for further enhancement were noted. These included providing additional opportunities for students to understand and conduct social science research, engage in professional speaking, apply technology in professional practice, and prepare for careers and further education. In response to these identified needs, the department has thus far expanded opportunities for students to participate in undergraduate research experiences and has added the new Career and Leadership undergraduate course as a requirement for the major.

Design Studies encompasses two majors; interior design and textiles and apparel design. The interior design program completed a program review in 2011 that resulted in accreditation by the Council for Interior Design Accreditation (CIDA) for six years. The accreditation standards
outline a very specific array of learning outcomes that must be documented via direct assessment measures (primarily embedded assessments, portfolios, and internship reports). Although the program achieved expectations for accreditation, a number of areas for improvement were identified. The program will be expected to submit an interim report in the spring of 2014 outlining how these areas have been addressed. During 2012-2013, the program continued to implement recommendations based on the accreditation review. Specific changes made for the interior design program were:

1. The department continued to pilot a course on Sustainable Interiors to address the goal of providing coverage related to sustainable design.
2. Plans were made to modify DS 624, Portfolio Preparation, to deal exclusively with professional practice. A computer case study simulation is being developed to enhance the business aspects of the course.
3. Two courses (DS 320 and 323 on Sketching and Rendering and CAD) were merged into a new sequence of integrated courses on Visual Communication and the new format has facilitated the introduction of REVIT and other emerging digital technologies.
4. Design studio classes have been modified to increase coverage of materials and finishes.
5. Students are engaging in much more hands-on making, especially in DS 220 Design Fundamentals II where they make full scale mock-ups of chairs and lighting fixtures.
6. The program expanded coverage of lighting in all of its design studios.

The textile and apparel design program used both direct and indirect measures to assess student achievement of the learning outcomes for that program. At the end of the junior year, all students submit a portfolio and for many of the students, this is also used to determine admittance to the Fashion Institute of Technology for the senior year. Other opportunities for direct assessment of student work occur when students participate in the School’s runway fashion show and student competitive events such as the YMA and Geoffrey Beene scholarship competitions. The fashion show is juried and the scholarship competitions involve oral and visual presentation of a portfolio of work in New York City. During the past year, 100% of students who applied to FIT were admitted and all 5 students who competed for a YMA scholarship ($5000 each) were awarded scholarships. The alumni survey served as an additional form of indirect assessment this year. Based on this feedback, two areas were identified for improvement: expanding opportunities to learn about sustainable textiles and also using technology in textile and apparel design. Several curriculum modifications were made to address these needs. Professor Hark developed a Sustainable Practice in Textile Design course and received a DoIT academic technology grant to develop a situated learning experience for the course focused on the use of local bio-waste as a viable material for textile and apparel design. Professor Kallenborn worked with a local fair trade clothing store which hosted a design competition for students in the Apparel I and Collection Development classes. The competition required students to use fabrics constructed in Uganda to design a dress that could be produced by a Ugandan co-op and then sold at the Madison fair trade clothing store. The store owners participated in the assessment of the garments. They had planned to award only one prize, but liked so many of the garments students designed, that they gave three prizes.
Interdisciplinary Studies

The Department of Interdisciplinary Studies launched its graduate program option in Civil Society and Community Research in spring of 2012. So, a good deal of effort was devoted to developing and launching the strategy for assessing learning among students in this program option. The process established calls for students to submit a review packet annually in the spring, including updated curriculum vitae (education and experience, publications, presentations, teaching, outreach/service), list of completed/in-process courses and planned coursework, and brief statement of current research interests and goals for the next year. The adviser then completes the assessment using both learning outcomes and satisfactory progress guidelines as benchmarks and communicates the results of the review, including recommendations for the next year, in writing to the student. Human Development and Family Studies has used a similar process for students in that graduate program option for a number of years.

The Interdisciplinary Studies department reported carrying out a number of assessment activities focused on the undergraduate major in Community and Nonprofit Leadership. Among these were reviewing the results of the 2012 alumni survey and reviewing feedback about student performance from individuals who served as site supervisors for students in the major (Agency Performance Evaluation of Intern). Based on the feedback, and particularly students’ expressed interest in having greater opportunities for focused career preparation (one of the learning outcomes), the department chose to require all students to complete the new Career and Leadership course offered for SoHE undergraduates. Plans have also been developed to more carefully select internship sites to ensure students have the opportunity to experience multiple aspects of nonprofit management; such as finance, human resources, program planning, and evaluation.

Consumer Science

The Consumer Science department has been engaged in program development needed to implement results of the 2010-2011 program review. This review resulted in suspending admissions to one of the three department majors, Consumer Affairs, because overall departmental enrollments exceeded capacity. The department has now been authorized to add instructional staff and has been engaged in redesigning both the personal finance and retailing majors. This redesign will include a more integrated set of learning outcomes and experiences that retains the departmental focus on consumer behavior and consumer affairs, maximizes the synergies between the majors through a common course offerings and other high impact learning experiences, and makes the most of new instructional staff resources, including connections with business and industry for purposes of career development.
Future Assessment Plans

Program review self-studies are scheduled to be completed for the Community and Nonprofit Leadership and Textile and Apparel Design programs during the 2013-2014 academic year. These processes will provide an opportunity to examine the learning outcomes and assessment plans for these majors as well as the multiple other factors that contribute to academic quality on an on-going basis.

The Human Ecology graduate program review self-study, which includes consideration of data collection via the alumni survey discussed above, is scheduled to be completed in 2013. The follow-up external review, focusing on MS, PhD, and MFA degrees and the named options associated with them, will take place during 2013-2014.