

What are students learning at The University of Iowa?



Annual Outcomes Assessment Update - 2018

Iowa Outcomes Assessment

The goal of outcomes assessment is to look systematically at what students are learning, across courses and over time, through their experiences in the major.

Assessment plans at UI incorporate a variety of strategies for examining student learning. No single approach serves all departments equally well.

This document provides a summary of UI's progress in establishing outcomes assessment as a practice in undergraduate programs throughout the campus.

Many departments at UI have been actively implementing student outcomes assessment for a number of years, and in recent years the university has made significant progress in strengthening outcomes assessment across all undergraduate degree programs. This report provides a summary of department involvement with outcomes assessment.

Our system for outcomes assessment similarly rests on faculty expertise and department leadership. Each department establishes learning outcomes for its undergraduate programs, determines how to best organize its curriculum to support student learning, devises appropriate strategies both for assessing student learning, and decides how to use assessment findings to further develop its programs. Central administration provides support, coordination, and resources to assist departments in carrying out assessment efforts.

Departmental Implementation for Outcomes Assessment at UI

UI departments have maintained an annual cycle of outcomes assessment of undergraduate programs since 2009/10. Annual progress reports of each year's assessment activities are available online at uiowa.edu/assessment/learning-outcomes-reports

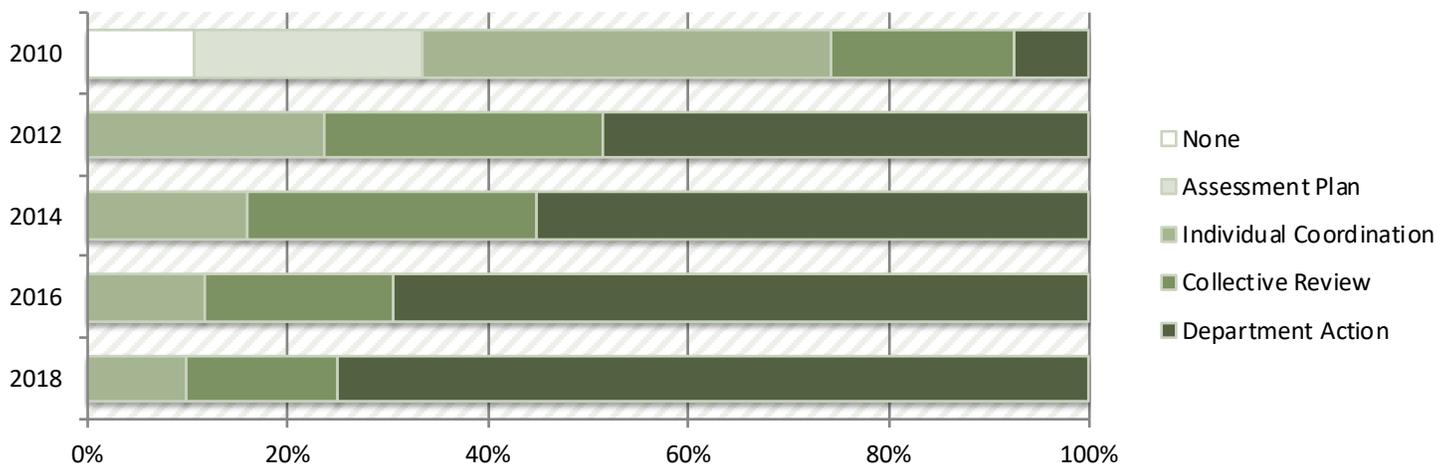
While methods used for outcomes assessment vary widely, all departments are expected to:

- Develop an assessment plan
- Assign an individual to coordinate assessment of one or more outcomes annually
- Conduct a collective review of assessment findings by faculty on a regular basis
- Identify next steps for program improvement or further development

Figure 1 presents department levels of engagement in outcomes assessment. Since 2010, the percentage of departments regularly reviewing and acting on assessment data has steadily increased. At that time, roughly one-third of departments reported no outcomes assessment efforts, or nothing more than an assessment plan on paper. By 2018, all departments were actively carrying out assessment of their programs, and in most cases, reviewing and acting on the data they had collected.

As shown in Figure 1, 72% of UI departments report ways that they use findings from the program-level assessments to improve or further develop their programs. Ongoing efforts in these departments include regularly scheduled review of assessment findings, discussion of program implications, and ongoing follow-up with actions taken based on their review. Next

Figure 1: Department Levels of Involvement in Outcomes Assessment



steps for these departments are to sustain their current level of assessment and continue acting on lessons learned from the assessment data they collect.

An additional 16% of departments report that faculty work together to review assessment findings on a regular basis. Steps taken include reviewing coursework, alumni experiences, and employer perceptions of program graduates. Ongoing efforts in these departments focus on testing their outcomes assessment strategies to identify the quality of the data they are collecting and discussing implications of findings. Next steps for these departments include integrating outcomes assessment with other quality improvement efforts, and finding ways to efficiently manage assessment processes in the department.

The remaining 12% of departments have taken the step of appointing an individual to coordinate their program-level learning outcomes assessment efforts. Current efforts in these departments include further developing and pilot-testing assessment strategies. Next steps for these departments include finalizing and more fully implementing assessment plans, and bringing assessment findings to the full department for review and follow-up action.

The proportion of departments represented at each level of involvement in assessment remains relatively steady, but departments represented at each level have changed as some departments have increased their level of involvement, others have stepped back to redesign and relaunch assessment efforts in order to accommodate new curriculum or other changes in their programs, and entirely new programs have been launched.

Department Uses of Assessment Findings

As one part of the Spring 2018 Annual Update, departments were asked to respond to the question, *“Thinking back on recent years of department efforts to assess student learning and experience in your program, what are 1-2 examples of ways that your department has benefited from using assessment findings?”*

In response, some departments reported insights gained through systematic assessment of their programs (Table 1), and many identified specific benefits experienced by their departments in a number of related areas:

1. Faculty Collaboration
2. Course and Curriculum Improvement
3. Increased Learning Opportunities for Students
4. Quality Assurance

Examples of benefits identified by departments in each of these areas are presented on the following pages.

Table 1: Examples of Assessment Insights Cited by Departments

“Our assessment strategies have allowed us to respond quickly to student needs and to changes in the discipline.”

“It was revealing to see how different instructors approached foundation, intermediate, and capstone courses.”

“It is clearly a good exercise to reflect on strengths and weaknesses of our program and to establish goals for future years.”

Faculty Collaboration

Social Work

By measuring competencies and practice behaviors in both field and in the classroom, the School can compare classroom instructors' ratings with field instructors' rating. For example, if field ratings are lower than classroom ratings, faculty discuss how those competencies are being taught and assessed, and what needs to change to prepare students for social work practice.

We also compare courses to identify issues or opportunities. If a course does not meet the benchmark, faculty who teach the course meet to discuss why students are not meeting the benchmark and how to address the concern. If almost all students meet the benchmark (e.g., 95%), this finding leads to a discussion for why almost all students are meeting the benchmark. This conversation may result in change, such as creating a more challenging assignment.

Theatre Arts

The faculty concluded that knowledge of theatre history, and how to apply that knowledge to production and scholarship, needed attention. As a result, units were added to several courses that now educate students in the history of particular disciplines (acting, directing, design). This has expanded students' exposure to theatre history and how it has shaped today's approach to theatrical art.

Gender, Women's, and Sexuality Studies

We have used our outcomes assessment discussion to change our curriculum based on feedback from faculty and students. The discussion also sparks great debates about pedagogy and content. These are spirited and our colleagues learn and grow a great deal in the process. We actively discuss and help each other to be better teachers.

Spanish & Portuguese

The primary way we have benefitted was the major overhaul and rethinking of our writing expectations across the curriculum ... In fact, it is hard to overstate how central writing instruction is to who we are and what we do as a department: we offer a liberal arts education through the study of culture, history, film, language and literature. ...

It was crucial for us to take a detailed look at what individual instructors were doing in their courses at different levels and to work from the ground up to create a document that represented the breadth of subject matter, methods and approaches we use to work toward this overarching goal: *Educate liberal arts writers*. The conversations we had about these issues were some of the most exhilarating some of us could remember, and we ended with a significant sense of satisfaction.

Course and Curriculum Improvement

Chinese

The Oral Reading Test and Silent Reading Comprehension Test allowed us to detect a high correlation between oral reading and silent reading comprehension in the lower level language classes and a moderate correlation in the advanced level language classes. These correlations suggest that our instruction should give more time to students practicing oral reading (both accuracy and speed) for improving their reading comprehension especially at lower level classes.

Oral Proficiency Interview allows us to find out difficulties and problems that our students are encountering during their learning, thus appropriate interventions can be made to improve students' speaking skills to reach curriculum goals.

Communication Studies

Results from our survey of undergraduates ... provided knowledge about how students perceive the major and what bottlenecks or problems they encounter. From this information, we know that we need to better establish the structure of the major and the distinction between different classes in the department.

Review of existing syllabi also provided valuable information for creating the new Learning Objectives.

Health and Human Physiology

We have begun administering an annual survey to graduating seniors ... We have learned that students are looking for more experiential learning opportunities. To address this, we have developed a new practicum course on Health Coaching which will provide students hands on training and experience ... We have also held meetings with the Director of Sports Management to learn from their success in providing experiential learning opportunities to their majors.

Revisions to the anatomy course required of HHP majors to involve higher levels of hands-on learning in laboratories involving dissection and use of fewer models and more actual specimens (i.e., sheep or pig hearts, human brains) and higher levels of instruction with more difficult examinations in the lecture course.

Revisions to the physiology course required of HHP majors to involve higher levels of hands-on learning in laboratories with additional and more detailed physiological experiments to teach major concepts.

Nuclear Medicine Technology

Program assessment of student learning and clinical experience over the past few years provided us with the detailed information necessary to identify the need and articulate the justification for adding another faculty member on the clinical side of our small program ... Our students are now getting more faculty-supervised clinical experience than has ever been the case previously.

International Studies

The IS senior exit survey allowed our majors to let us know that Intro to Intl Studies was not functioning in our curriculum the way that it needed to. The IS Faculty Director then worked with the instructor of the course, and the Center for Teaching to create a new version of the course which was well received in fall 2017 when it was first offered.

Expanded Learning Opportunities for Students

Geography

We have made substantive changes to the curriculum and major requirements in our continuing assessment of major outcomes through capstone evaluation and exit surveys. Most notably, we have implemented a practical experience requirement. Initial feedback from students has been positive. In addition, we have modified our BS statistics/mathematics requirement to better reflect graduate school and professional requirements in the field.

We also continue to use and value academic major surveys (particularly in relation to college-wide assessments) and alumni follow-up surveys. This is informative in terms of advising on career planning and course selection. In addition, these surveys assist the department in recruitment and retention of students.

History

Ongoing assessment of the undergraduate program has led directly to major changes and reforms, including:

- The establishment of a professional advisor
- Renewed and continued efforts to promote internships and other high-impact learning opportunities

Dance

Based on graduating student feedback and in an effort to better support the BFA program and graduating seniors, the department has implemented:

- A Senior Day, in the fall semester where students meet over lunch to reflect on where they have been and share with each other and faculty where they are going and how best to utilize their final year to achieve post-university goals.
- Senior Seminar, a new course that prepares students for a professional dance career, including resume building, cover letters, researching dance companies, cities to live/work in, etc.
- A fully produced BFA Concert, which now provides technical and design support and has three performances.

Previous assessment has found that students are over-committed and not always clear on departmental policies in regards to auditions, rehearsals and performances. In response, the department has revised the audition and rehearsal policies, as well as the production guidelines, in order to be transparent and help clarify student, faculty and choreographer expectations, commitments and accountability, while providing broader participation opportunities for a larger pool of students.

Ethics and Public Policy

While we haven't been able to introduce capstone seminars in many of the fields, we have a new course ... designed to give students "real" world experience and to integrate their educational skills with the practical world.

Linguistics

One of the steps that we took a number of years ago, driven by outcomes assessment activities, was the implementation of both a more systematic and structured academic advising process and a more careful monitoring of student progress in the major and performance in courses. This has led to a reduction in the number of students within the major who are struggling to meet the basic major graduation requirements, and has also helped us to provide better career guidance for students.

The student advisory board feedback mechanism has allowed us to develop programming and curriculum that is responsive to student desires and needs. While we are still working on developing strategies that will enable us to increase student research opportunities, there is no doubt that the advisory board has led to programmatic changes that have proven beneficial to students.

Quality Assurance

Public Health

Although the undergraduate program is new, the undergraduate program director works with faculty to monitor competency coverage in the required courses. ... For example, Inquiry and Investigation in Public Health was first offered in spring 2017.

After a review of course content, competencies, and student feedback, instructors determined there was insufficient course coverage of basic public health principles and functions to contextualize course concepts

Nursing

Senior Surveys results for the pre-licensure BSN and RN BSN students are consistently above the University mean. Students commonly comment on the quality of our program, positive learning experiences in the classroom and clinical settings, multiple learning resources, and supportive faculty.

Students feel well prepared for the NCLEX licensure exam to pass boards (NCLEX 2017 pass rate 97.76%), and easily find employment within a few months of graduation.

Chemistry

- We have evaluated our learning objectives and revised them in response to assessment findings.
- We have begun working to better align the curriculum to scaffold achievement of the laboratory learning objectives.
- We are identifying better measures to assess the degree to which students are meeting the desired learning objectives.

Therapeutic Recreation

We have benefited from the outcomes assessment to stay on track with professional preparation of our students using the most current practical and research evidence. The results have been manifest in our students' professional successes and the number/percentage entering graduate programs.

Results of the outcomes assessments have also resulted in a better structure of the internship/capstone experiences for students as well as integrating more service learning and experiential learning into academic classes.