

Department Strategies for Monitoring Program Quality and Supporting Faculty and Students, 2020/21

Learning outcomes assessment at the university rests on faculty expertise and department leadership. Each department establishes learning outcomes for its programs, determines how to best organize its curriculum to support student learning, devises appropriate strategies for assessing student learning, and decides how to use assessment findings to further develop its programs.

Under the pandemic conditions of 2020-21, departments continued to monitor program quality and worked to support student and faculty success. At the end of the academic year, departments were asked to provide an update on lessons learned from their program-level assessments, using either the standard Assessment Update form (Appendix One) or an online Assessment Short Form focusing more on specific efforts to support students and faculty under conditions caused by the pandemic (Appendix Two). By the end of July 2021, just over 90% of undergraduate programs provided an update using one form or the other (see Appendix Three). This summary provides an overview of actions taken, lessons learned, and concerns identified by departments.

Common Themes Reported by Departments

Across departments, extensive efforts were made to adapt courses for pandemic conditions. To support faculty as they made these changes, many departments reported relying on faculty collaboration, communication, and increased professional development opportunities. Many also reported relying on student input through student advisory groups, frequent course feedback, and regular communication from faculty members and department leadership. A number of departments noted innovations made under pandemic conditions that they hope to maintain in the future because of the additional support they provide for student learning.

“Students and faculty demonstrated remarkable resilience and adaptability throughout this academic year. Adequate time and resources were available to address COVID-19 related teaching and learning issues, with the majority of time during faculty meetings spent discussing non-COVID-19 curricular matters.”

Many departments noted numerous non-academic challenges influencing their students that they worked to accommodate. However, many also noted that the increased workload of adapting instruction and accommodating for pandemic conditions came at a considerable cost to faculty members.

Finally, while considerable effort went into adapting courses and curriculum and support both students and faculty in response to pandemic conditions, a significant number of departments also reported on ways they are assessing and improving their programs on an ongoing basis, including curriculum review, expanded program offerings, and increased support for student success.

This report contains examples from departments that illustrate these common themes, followed by examples of questions and concerns raised by departments as they anticipate 2021/22. Examples cited in the following pages are taken directly from each department’s Annual Assessment Update. Departments are not identified with each example, but each department’s Update can be accessed online through the Assessment Exchange: <https://assessment.uiowa.edu/reports-and-surveys#Outcomes>

“The students are incredibly resilient, and faculty reported being moved by their compassion for one another, work ethic, and kindness.”

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Adapting Courses for Pandemic Conditions

Examples of Program-Wide Adaptations Cited by Departments

Faculty substantially redesigned their courses to better suit online modalities, basing these changes on best practices and using a mixture of synchronous, mixed, and asynchronous course modalities, each of which required a different pedagogical approach. As part of rethinking their courses for an online/pandemic environment, faculty members redesigned assignments, the structure of assignments in courses, grading rubrics, and were far more flexible with accepting late assignments.

We have

- adopted or expanded use of technologies including Flipgrid, Padlet, ICON-based testing, Google documents, and Zoom;
- taken advantage of teaching and technology workshops offered by CLCL and OTLT.
- offered peer-tutoring program for Elementary and Intermediate language students in an online format;
- held our weekly conversation hour in an online format, with CLAS Student Ambassadors providing unique topics, games, and other activities to help foster connections among students and the learning of the language.

The department revised processes in all classes (live and online) during the pandemic. All lectures were prerecorded and, in some cases, broken into shorter learning segments to try to give students more flexibility. Live class times, when maintained, were more focused.

To increase student access and keep students connected, more “live” online help meetings, review sessions and office hours were offered by Zoom. Syllabi were revised and timing of activities were altered to accommodate the shutdown and the changing needs during pandemic. Most classes provided more detailed instructions ... including detailed class agendas, outlines for each class, separate orientation sessions at the beginning of the semester to explain processes and expectations, and more detailed instructions for assignments and projects.

- Frequent quizzes help students stay caught up and provides a "self-check" mechanism for student success.
- Consistency in weekly framework is very helpful to students. Send weekly announcements, consistent HW due dates, establishing consistent weekly expectations.
- Personal emails can help student get back on track if they are falling behind.

During zoom sessions, all instructors made time at the beginning and end of each class session to get feedback from the students to see if there were any issues they were dealing with that we faculty could help them with. To help evaluate and ensure that no students were suffering from some unintended learning gap related to having to attend classes remotely, all instructors increased the number of low-stakes/non- graded assessment opportunities. ...

Instructors also were diligent about comparing student process during these two semesters with student process records from the years immediately preceding to make sure student performance (e.g., exam, quiz and homework scores) were similar. And if not, remediation was put in place to review and re-assess the materials that might have been identified as being more difficult for this group to pick-up for some reason.

Examples of Adaptations to Lab Instruction

We developed a full series of labs for introductory courses that could be done virtually, so as to be able to pivot to remote learning as needed and to offer an equivalent experience for hybrid courses.

Most of the focus was on how to change in-person active-learning laboratory sessions into online components. This involved a wide range of actions, most including how to utilize existing technology created by other faculty and/or third-party companies to accomplish our teaching objectives.

All practicums and laboratory/simulation returned to face-to face learning experiences following agency COVID-19 safety protocols (i.e. wearing face shields, face mask, frequent handwashing, social distancing when possible, etc.) ... Practicum sites mandated new 4:1 student to faculty ratios ... In specialty areas students worked 1:1 with a preceptor, and faculty added meaningful specialty virtual learning activities. Detailed spread sheets were created to track student placement.

We made major adaptations to space usage and teaching to offer in person lab courses. It was important for teaching outcomes to have the hands-on experimental learning, but it required twice the effort to serve the same number of students.

Faculty Collaboration, Communication, and Professional Development

Examples of Collaboration and Communication Cited by Departments

We had multiple discussions at faculty meetings to share our experiences and challenges and troubleshoot issues that arose. We created a repository of best practices that all faculty contributed to and could access to get ideas and improve classroom management. Many of us solicited feedback from students throughout the year to ensure adjustments could be made.

Periodic Zoom meetings about pedagogy, challenges faced during the pandemic, and strategies for effective online/hybrid teaching.

We continued to use a college-wide ICON page to house resources regarding teach strategies. We also developed an ICON page to help onboard new instructors, which includes resources that are helpful to all instructors. We held teaching circles on specific topics (e.g., creating an inclusive classroom) that allowed for informal discussions regarding teaching. We continued to use monthly department faculty meetings to discuss teaching challenges, focusing especially on our college strategic priorities around communication and problem solving.

Examples of Other Professional Development

In Summer 2020 instructors in our program attended weekly workshops which helped them gain new insights and learn new tools for pandemic course design and delivery. Based on the newly gained knowledge and skills, our instructors thoroughly redesigned all the courses offered in AY 2020/21.

The College provided significant support of faculty teaching through training sessions and teaching circles throughout the year. 79% of responding department faculty stated that they attended one or more of these events. .

To provide timely support and feedback to the instructors and teaching assistants as a means of teaching quality control, the program coordinator observed the courses taught by instructors and teaching assistants. Afterwards, the program coordinator identified effective online and hybrid teaching techniques/activities during the class observation and encouraged instructors learn from each other by observing each other's teaching to strive for teaching excellence. Also, the program coordinator discussed with each instructor and teaching assistant about the areas that could be further improved.

Student Input to Inform Faculty and Department Practices

Changes aimed at supporting student learning were also implemented in response to students' evaluations, mid-term surveys, and virtual drop-in sessions. Instructors conferred regularly through the year to compare notes on what was going well and what challenges were coming up in classes.

Instructors were encouraged to do formative assessments throughout the semester to identify and address student needs.

All course instructors were asked to incorporate mid-semester course evaluations in order to better respond to the reactions and needs of students in the online environment.

The DEO met monthly with the leaders of the Undergraduate Student Organization, a student-led body that helped the department understand the needs of students for their learning and well-being.

We supported the creation of a new student-led organization ... to foster a greater sense of community among our undergraduates. The Club is already functioning, and it has been great in terms of community building, morale, and as an additional channel of communication between the DUS and the student body. It actually proved instrumental for the success of our first-ever Undergraduate Townhall Meeting.

We engaged in major efforts to support students and instructors during the pandemic, in ways which included frequent check-ins from program leadership, flexibility regarding deadlines and appropriate expectations from instructors for students, and frequent communication through multiple channels (newsletter, social media, email) to reach students while we were all working/learning from home. We also maintained mandatory advising with our in-house advisor to offer personalized support and encouragement for students.

As was heard during the transition in Spring 2020, students appreciated direct faculty engagement, as well as open and regular communication from instructors and TAs re: expectations (on a weekly basis). Students appreciated flexibility on the part of faculty, especially with respect to late assignment policies.

Challenges From Outside the Classroom

Many faculty members and graduate students reported that they needed to be incredibly compassionate, flexible, and provide extensive emotional support to their students. Students were sick themselves, caregiving for sick relatives, experiencing serious mental health issues related to isolation, and having financial hardships. Given those challenges, instructors found that using positive reinforcement, kindness, “radical compassion” (as one faculty put it), and flexibility with deadlines was helpful and appreciated by students. ... Faculty also made intentional efforts to build community with students by recognizing the struggles each of them were going through and by sharing their own struggles. They also encouraged students to support each other through chat or other types of affirmations.

Pay extra attention to each student's progress and communicate with them whenever we feel they have problems or are under a lot of stress.

Students needed ongoing support both academically, and in other areas related to academic success (such as online learning, financial, and mental health resources).

The pandemic alongside continued police violence against Black people has centered the Program’s need for flexibility. Some courses ... have incorporated an awareness of the social and political as well as the physical and mental health toll of the pandemic by providing students with a menu of available assignments that can be completed to successfully master course material.

Extra-curricular community building activities were regularly scheduled. Although they did not directly impact coursework, we believe these were essential to maintaining a healthy learning environment for students and faculty.

Not Without Cost

Time and Energy Required

Faculty are emotionally and physically exhausted from the additional teaching and emotional support that students required during the pandemic ... and this will likely have a negative impact of faculty research productivity, now and in the near term. Faculty members noted that there is a need for time and mental space to recover from the past academic year and a half.

Our unit is having an especially hard time because of a swell of retirements--most of which were hastened by the pandemic. Our resources are going to be severely depleted as a result, which will make it more difficult to serve our students and will place additional service on our remaining faculty and staff.

While being more flexible with students was necessary during the pandemic, it came at a cost. Faculty have concerns about how to moderate students' expectations post-pandemic.

Applicants were unable to gain hands-on clinical and job shadowing experiences due to pandemic restrictions. This important aspect of the cohort selection process had to essentially be waived.

Lost Opportunities

Many of the changes made during the pandemic increase faculty teaching time. (This includes more live help sessions and one-on-one meetings via Zoom.) This decreases time available for other responsibilities.

Although we have been very successful in our virtual performances, the opportunities for our students to perform for live audiences is an important part of their education that will likely still be missing for most of them.

The lack of in-person activities has hurt our undergraduate majors' ability to form relationships with faculty and engage effectively in research.

Innovations to Maintain

Examples of Course and Curriculum Innovations

Another key lesson is that different assignment and assessment structures can help to optimize student learning outcomes. Some faculty noted that students retained knowledge better using lower-stakes writing assignments and quizzes rather than using traditional exams, which they will continue to do in the post-pandemic environment.

The new modular course structure proved to be very effective and will therefore remain a permanent feature of our courses.

Nearly every one of our faculty reported that many of the modifications they made to their teaching related to the ways they interact with their students have proven to be very effective and useful – especially those associated with the new use of technology – and plan to incorporate their use into the classes they teach going forward. For instance, students have reported they liked having the ability to go back and view videos of class sessions at any point. They found this option especially useful when studying for exams and writing papers ... A number of faculty found that pre-recording their lectures proved to be valuable in terms of freeing up class time for more interactive discussion-based sessions and plan to continue using this "flipped classroom" framework. (Nuclear Medicine Technology)

Faculty and students learned how to use zoom and other online resources in creative ways, as well as the limitations of these technologies. Some changes that took place in courses will be carried over and be part of in-person instruction in the future. (Theatre Arts)

Many of the possibilities for enhancing face-to-face learning (the mainstay of the university) through online components or courses are being explored. In particular, integrating online synchronous discussion in our courses has become a major and permanent instructional tool. (Philosophy)

Examples of Support for Students to Maintain

Analysis of usage of our virtual Help Center showed that approximately twice as many students used the help center when it was held on zoom compared to in-person in previous semesters. Recognizing that some students will strongly prefer the in-person experience, we plan a hybrid format for the coming academic year.

The primary lessons learned this past year include the following: 1) offering virtual office hours as a choice provides important opportunities for some students to seek outside assistance; 2) being able to connect virtually with successful alumni and

business leaders increased the quality and quantity of interactions with students and faculty; 3) offering virtual co-curricular options increased participation by certain populations-- especially when it came to pitch competitions, ideation events, and guest speakers

The department purchased licenses to software to support remote supervision of practicum and clinical placements. We will maintain some licenses to support remote supervision for clinical and practicum placements as appropriate.

Ongoing Efforts to Assess and Improve Courses and Curriculum

Examples of efforts to assess and improve curriculum undertaken during 2020/21

The department has also redesigned the major, set to be introduced in Fall '22.

About 5 years ago the Department reexamined the requirements and enrollments of the various degrees it offered. ... The first cohort of students working toward a degree under the new requirements would have been registering for upper level courses in Spring, 2020. With three semesters recorded, it is now possible to assess whether indeed students have been taking more program courses in aggregate. ... Examination of enrollments at the end of the term for upper level courses [indicate] that students are indeed reaping the benefits of the changes made in the degree requirements. Although this is an early assessment of the effects of the changes in requirements, which will need to be monitored in upcoming years, it is reassuring to find that the considerable effort made to improve the quality of the undergraduate degree programs has had the desired results.

In AY 20-21 our program undertook a complete overhaul of the requirements of the major. This process was the result of several years of work by the staff, faculty on the Academic Advisory Board, and was done in light of student input collected via annual exit surveys and focus groups.

A student survey revealed that student satisfaction was generally high. However ... students observed a redundancy in course material. We were in the process of restructuring of the curriculum to address this concern.

During this academic year, the department completed a self-study analyzing all programs offered within the department. The undergraduate program review focused on improvements for undergraduate curriculum, student advising, and resources for both students and faculty to be successful ... The undergraduate program review suggested changes in core curriculum for undergraduate students. These changes include eliminating a required course in the light of recent technological changes ... and increasing the number of elective credit course for to better align students' skillsets with the industry outlook.

In talking with our former students and in conversing with our colleagues at other universities, we have identified a potential weakness in our undergraduate program. In the past, we have not specifically had a Clinical Methods course. Although we have taught most of the associated content in other courses, we have decided it would be helpful for our students to specifically have this class. This year we launched the new course.

Student success with multi-media presentations (rather than the traditional "poster" sessions) prompted us to encourage a wide range of presentation formats in the future capstone presentation events ... We also recognized that both undergraduate and graduate students might benefit from more opportunities for consultation with department faculty, and developed two ways to accomplish this. We proposed a regular colloquium series, for both faculty and students, in which faculty would offer brief presentations of their research areas; and secondly, a fall assignment in which students would visit with a faculty member during office hours, and report back to their classmates what they learned about the faculty member's area of research.

Last year the seminar course became more inclusive of students from other majors ... Many of the students in other, related majors have offered valuable insight about our major that we have not previously heard (e.g., why students might choose one major over another and how our curriculum is viewed by other students).

[Our advisor] collaborated with previous DUS in the Fall of 2020 in order to edit and overhaul the undergraduate handbook. This new edition improved departmental transparency in terms of advising, requirements, resources, and contacts.

Examples of efforts to assess and improve curriculum currently planned for next year

One goal for the 2021-22 academic year is to undergo a self-study based curriculum review. Goals would be to improve vertical alignment between core and elective courses, optimize course offerings to meet enrollment demands, and consider how to improve opportunities for applied learning.

We plan to discuss whether certain courses, or the current prerequisites for certain courses, may be having a negative impact on student outcomes. There is an idea that the curriculum may currently require coursework that is only tangentially relevant to the major's learning outcomes while also being particularly challenging and consequently having a negative effect on student confidence in both themselves and the major.

Restructure collecting outcomes data in core courses to assess student learning ... We would like to substantially increase the amount of data collected on how majors are learning the outcomes the department imposes. We also plan to survey students in our service courses and other departments that require our courses.

Though rubric-based assessments showed appropriate progress from lower to upper division courses, the undergraduate committee recommends discussing to help more students achieve higher levels of proficiency in the area of writing. Further, as writing morphs in social and visual media, it may be appropriate for the undergraduate committee to consider adding social media and writing for video rubrics to the School's assessment plan.

One of the program's goal post-pandemic is to start a portfolio program for graduating students to assess our program's objectives.

Adopt a systematic look at the undergraduate curriculum (which courses overlap, which haven't been taught in a while, etc.)

Begin curriculum revision process according to the College Strategic plan and new disciplinary organization guidelines.

Examples of efforts to assess and improve key coursework planned for next year

We will be moving forward in AY 2021 with reviewing the current form of the capstone course ...and we will be reviewing our current learning outcomes procedures and considering proposals to make them more efficient and informative.

We found that a strict two-course sequence required of all upper-level courses created a bottleneck that limited and delayed enrollment in our upper-level courses. To ensure that we did not slow students' progress toward degree, the Committee for Undergraduate Studies revised upper-level prerequisites to include only the first research methods course, which would allow students to co-enroll in the second semester of research methods and upper-level courses. The Department approved this revision, and we continue to monitor and manage our enrollments around Research Methods and its prerequisite status.

As part of our response to the CLAS departmental review, we created an Undergraduate Curriculum Committee. ... We have been discussing whether adding another required course might be helpful in building some community among our students, since so many do not take many classes together, and to ensure that all our students get a solid foundation.

Create more opportunities for students to learn about careers and graduate school *before* their last year in the program. The Capstone course educates students on these issues, but most take it the last semester before graduation and many students say they wish they had this information earlier.

Questions and Concerns

Health and Safety

There are concerns about students' and faculty's mental health after such a hard year, particularly given that vaccines will not be mandatory on campus.

Many instructors are concerned about health and safety next year. They are worried about outbreaks and what this will mean for everyone's health as well as student learning in the fall. They worry about disruptions and being forced to go online at the last minute due to outbreaks. Instructors are also concerned about students' comfort levels with being back in person and doing small group activities in the classroom. Other instructors were concerned about whether the university has enough resources to have back-up instructors if someone gets sick. Relative to classroom activities, faculty expressed continued anxiety about the safety of in-person gatherings moving forward.

Because of the importance of in-person and personal interactions to the department's mission ... what are the best ways to provide safe working and learning environments for students, faculty, and staff.

Faculty Workload

Departments have been encouraged to consider (1) development of pathways to evaluate program learning outcomes, and (2) development of applied learning experiences and/or capstone courses. However, clarification for how this important work will count toward overall workload has not been articulated. What resources are available to help programs with these efforts?

The program is committed to the University's missions around continued efforts at diversity, equity, and inclusion. However, we are challenged ... by the loss of two more faculty members, thus further stretching our faculty—many of whom are people of color, a group that has historically been overburdened with service obligations as they serve on a PWI campus.

Three upcoming faculty retirements and 1 recent departure from another tenured faculty member has resulted in increased workload for all remaining faculty.

The big question is: what will the new normal look like? Specifically, now that we know we can teach online, to what degree will we continue to incorporate fully online teaching into our post-pandemic portfolio. ... To what degree will online platforms like Zoom replace in person office hours and advising.

Academic Preparation of Students

Many students struggled to maintain their focus on academics during the pandemic and some aspects of language courses do not work well in online and socially-distanced learning. Many of our students will need time and additional support from instructors to catch up as we transition back to usual forms of instruction.

We are concerned about the incoming students in the fall who have had less-than-ideal preparation in high school especially in math. This equity issue has always existed, but we feel it will be more serious in the coming year, and are trying to find ways to prepare. We are meeting with Supplemental Instruction program leaders to understand if something can be done in conjunction with that program, or if we can offer further tutorial assistance to students struggling with math preparation using extra Discussion sessions or through the Help Center.

Students are in very different socioeconomic and cultural situations. Expectations need to remain high, but we need to be flexible.

Uncertainty About the "New Normal"

There is general excitement for a return to in-person teaching. However, there is also trepidation over future COVID outbreaks.

We have a range of faculty opinions re: the upcoming fall experience - from thinking it'll be back to Fall 2019 to things will never be the same (in other words, we'll have a 'new normal' rather than 'back to normal')

One of the chief questions for the program, and the university writ large, concerns what our "new normal" looks like.

Unequal Access

The pandemic highlighted and exacerbated inequalities among students. This is most evident with access to technology and wireless internet, but cascaded across the learning experience for students, as the barriers experienced by students from first generation and historically disadvantaged communities were increased due to the technological and social divide associated with the pandemic. While faculty attempted to support students as they navigated these barriers, it is clear that these inequalities will continue to have an uneven impact on students moving forward.

Using synchronous zoom meetings for classroom delivery did prove to be a source of inequality in the classroom in that some students routinely had more trouble attending/listening/viewing than others. Issues related to the poor quality of a student's internet connection seemed to negatively affect at least one or two students each class. We also had a couple students whose personal computer resources were especially limited (e.g., old hardware/software, non-working or absence video camera) and/or of poor quality that negatively affected their experience as well.

Learning Outcomes Assessment Update - 2020/21



Please select one of the following two options for completing this year's Assessment Update:

- Option A is to go online to complete the [Assessment Update Short Form](#), which focuses on steps taken to support students and instructors during the pandemic.
- Option B (below) is for departments that prefer to follow the same format that was used in previous years.

We will use this information to help document work done by departments and faculty to continue supporting students during the pandemic.

Information to Be Included in the Annual Update

1. Department:
2. Date:
3. Actions Taken, Lessons Learned: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Actions taken and/or lessons learned since last year's update</i>
4. Current Focus of Outcomes Assessment: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Brief description of department's current area of focus (for example, particular areas of program being reviewed, assessment strategies being developed, or issues the department is examining)</i>
5. Next Steps for the Department: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Follow-up actions or next steps that are planned</i>
6. Contact:

Appendix Two: Assessment Update Short Form

Assessment Update Short Form 2021

The goal of this form is to help the university document the efforts of departments to support teaching and learning during 2020/21.

This survey can serve as the Annual Assessment Update for 2021. Departments that would rather use the format for Assessment Updates that was used in previous years can email the department's update directly to the [Assessment Office](#).

Contact Information

- Name _____
- Email _____
- Program _____

Steps the program has taken to **support teaching and learning** during 2020/21

Lessons learned through program efforts to support faculty and students during 2020/21

Information about student learning that will be needed to **support program planning decisions** as the university transitions to post-pandemic conditions

Questions or challenges that the department is anticipating as you plan for next year:

Appendix Three: Undergraduate Programs Represented

The following undergraduate degree programs provided updates that formed the basis for this report:

- Accounting
- Actuarial Science
- African American Studies
- American Studies
- Anthropology
- Art
- Art History
- Biochemistry
- Biology
- Chemistry
- Chinese
- Cinema
- Classics
- Communication Sciences and Disorders
- Communication Studies
- Computer Science
- Criminology, Law, and Justice
- Dance
- Data Science
- Economics
- English
- Enterprise Leadership
- Environmental Policy and Planning
- Environmental Sciences
- Ethics and Public Policy
- Finance
- French
- Gender, Women's & Sexuality Studies
- Geography
- Geoscience
- German
- Global Health Studies
- Health and Human Physiology
- History
- Human Physiology
- Informatics
- Interdepartmental Studies
- International Relations
- International Studies
- Italian
- Japanese
- Journalism & Mass Communication
- Linguistics
- Management and Entrepreneurship
- Mathematics
- Medical Laboratory Science
- Neuroscience
- Nuclear Medicine Technology
- Nursing
- Philosophy
- Physics and Astronomy
- Political Science
- Psychology
- Public Health
- Radiation Sciences
- Religious Studies
- Russian
- Social Justice
- Social Work
- Sociology
- Spanish
- Sport and Recreation Management
- Statistics
- Teaching and Learning
- Theatre Arts
- Therapeutic Recreation