

## Department Strategies for Monitoring Program Quality and Supporting Faculty and Students, 2021/22

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.

Departments worked to monitor program quality and support student and faculty success throughout 2021/22. 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 assure program quality under conditions shaped by the pandemic (Appendix Two). Undergraduate programs represented in the report are listed in Appendix Three. This summary provides an overview of assessment efforts, lessons learned, and ways that departments are using their assessment findings.

### Common Themes Reported by Departments

In many ways campus returned to near-pre-pandemic conditions during 2021/22, but several departments reported that faculty members and students continued to be affected both academically and personally by effects of the pandemic. In a number of cases, departments reported significant efforts by faculty to connect with students and identify needs for additional support.

*“Students and faculty responded well to community building efforts, but it is clear both groups are still overwhelmed from the many burdens of the past few years.”*

During this same time, many departments also reported regular ongoing efforts to assess and improve courses, curriculum, and program expectations based on their assessments of student learning and experiences in the program. Efforts included evaluating and updating learning outcomes, reviewing and mapping the curriculum, restructuring program expectations and course sequences, pilot-testing innovative courses or teaching practices, expanding efforts to hear from students, and increasing support for student success.

*“We learned the importance of meeting students where they are. Students have various academic and career goals, and many are struggling with mental health issues, financial strain, and the cumulative stressors associated with the pandemic, just to name a few. Professors reported that their students seemed to thrive when they made time to get to get to know their students as a person and figure out how to connect.”*

This report contains examples from departments that illustrate these efforts to assure program quality and support their students. Examples are taken from each department’s Annual Assessment Update. Departments are not identified with each example, but department Updates can be looked up on the Assessment Exchange: <https://assessment.uiowa.edu/reports-and-surveys#Outcomes>

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*“The increase in mid-semester course evaluations and the focus on data analysis of our senior exit surveys have allowed for great feedback, discourse, and trust between students and their instructors. We see this as imperative to creating an environment where instruction is still rigorous but also responsive to the needs, proficiencies, and experiences of our students.”*

## Ongoing Pandemic Impacts

### *Examples of Accommodations Cited by Departments*

Students' mental health continued to suffer through the stresses of the pandemic. We strove to give our students a greater sense of connection and community by inviting students to listening sessions with faculty, inviting students to attend faculty meetings, and tapping students to serve as members of our DEI Committee.

It is clear through our monitoring that there are more students struggling with academics and, relatedly, mental health. There are more students on probation and receiving notices of concern based on course performance ... We are creating a position to help us design and deliver better student support.

Analysis of usage of our hybrid Help Center showed consistent usage for both in-person and online help center hours. However, although students appreciate the flexibility of a virtual option, they are not always as satisfied with the help they receive, so more training of TAs should be done. We also found that student usage of the Help Center was lower than expected, and have consulted with the Supplemental Instruction team to try to boost participation.

Instructors have continued to extend deadlines, to work with students to turn in late work, to be more flexible in terms of assignments, and to extend grace in the midst of one of the hardest school years to date. A big part of this has been to encourage transparency and communication between students and instructors, being explicit about expectations on the syllabus and then the use of mid- semester anonymous digital reviews of courses.

The main reason ... is still COVID: while our instructors are prepared to teach online, this adjustment was difficult for our students. Students were getting sick, missing classes, losing interest, and dropping classes.

We held Town Hall events outdoors in the fall, and End-of-Semester Events in the Fall and spring. The DEO met regularly with Undergraduate Student Organization offers to facilitate direct communication.

Faculty in [specialty areas] organized meetings with students in their specific discipline. It seemed to be the best approach to personally interact with students, check how the semesters were going, and provide guidance to overcome challenges. In addition to this, many faculty in the division spent more time holding individual meetings with students.

### *Maintaining Practices Originally Adopted Under Pandemic Conditions*

We incorporated many best teaching practices learned from the previous year of online learning. These included using more lower-stakes writing assignments and quizzes; accommodating students ... with poorer access to wireless internet by recording classes and posting all lecture notes and handouts on ICON; periodically 'checking in' with students (either orally or with a short writing exercise) to ask them how they were dealing with the stress of the pandemic.

Faculty survey responses suggest that instructors largely preferred in-person teaching, but that they have continued to offer some on-line access to course materials and office hours. Some have continued to offer low-stakes weekly assignments to create a sense of semi-constant engagement by students, one stating that "hybridity leads to equity, which is something we should continue working on and towards." Faculty also noted that multiple platforms for participation (via ICON and in-person) also helped some students communicate more effectively.

The pandemic taught us the value of greater flexibility (in due dates and attendance), shorter and more frequent assignments with more explicit and transparent discussion of learning goals, and the importance of using ICON/Canvas course websites effectively. These practices have become integrated into our teaching practice.

The program has continued to apply the lessons learned during the pandemic to both live and remotely taught classes. This includes, continuing to have Zoom Help sessions in live courses, using more online homework, and making recordings lectures and discussions available to all students

Feedback from formative surveys told us that our new students, on average, were not performing as well in the clinic as previous pre-Covid cohorts had – especially in their preparation to begin performing tasks and using skills that historically had been considered something relatively easy-to-learn quickly. To immediately address this concern, we added two very “hands-on” labs to our clinical internship course ... Because these sessions proved to be effective and beneficial, we decided to have these labs become a routine part of our fall curriculum.

During emergency remote teaching our instructors acquired new knowledge and skills that have been applied to course design and delivery upon returning to in-person instruction in 2021/22. Outcomes assessment for graduating majors and ACE forms in 2020/21 indicated that students benefited from and appreciated the new modular course design and the collaborative activities and tools integrated in ICON ... These tools have proved to be especially useful for the following purposes: 1. to enhance student collaboration in projects and class activities; 2. to expand opportunities for effective feedback from both instructors and peers; and 3. to measure student progress toward learning goals.

This year’s report will address assessment in upper-level courses ... This is one professor’s report to the curriculum committee:

In Fall of 2020, in response to the pandemic, I made numerous changes in how I teach both the lecture and the lab. Furthermore, I decided to keep many of these changes because they appeared to be effective.

1. I eliminated big midterms and finals, replacing them with weekly ICON quizzes and worksheets/assignments. This had several positive effects, including more immediate and consistent engagement by the students in the material, (rather than having them languish until the first midterm, then gasp when they realize they couldn’t just cram). This approach allowed us to provide more regular feedback on their assignments so students could quickly learn from their mistakes and improve more quickly.
2. I established a weekly forum on ICON, where each student prepared a 5-minute presentation on [a course-related topic] of their interest ... Peers were required to post a minimum of one question or comment/per week to one of the presenters that week, and the presenter replied to those comments. In addition to the opportunity for them to explore their interests, students commented that this was great value-added because as the semester proceeded, curiosity and interpretations were increasingly based on principles learned in lecture.
3. Lab changes in Fall 2020 were ... extreme pivoting to provide meaningful lab experiences while having only half the students in the lab at any given time. The long-term benefit was that we pre-recorded many demos and guidelines that now serve as accessible resources (particularly helpful for SDS students)

The Curriculum Committee will continue to explore various means of learning assessments, such as those implemented in this course, and encourage instructors in other courses to consider employing similar schemes.

## Monitoring Student Learning and Feedback to Inform Faculty Practices and Department Decisions

### *Monitoring Student Learning*

Our writing assessment data (scored on a 20-point scale with 15/20 representing a minimum level for professional communication) indicate that students declaring the major are beginning the program with lower writing abilities than their pre-pandemic peers. In the last three semesters, incoming students averaged 12.99/20 vs. 14.08/20 in the three semesters before the pandemic. Like many other communication programs and centers nationwide, we have witnessed a drop in student usage of program resources since returning to in-person learning ... To address lower writing assessment scores, the program will work with instructors to further incentivize student use of program resources, which include in-person and virtual office hours with professional consultants, live and recorded tutorials for assignments, and guidance documents posted to the course ICON site. Incentives will likely involve a grade-based approach such as raising the point value for the communication assignments or implementing improvement-based rewards.

Each program within the department develops their own assessment guidelines based on the accreditation criteria in their field of study. Outcomes data is collected and reviewed annually, while course feedback is reviewed each semester.

We continued monitoring of passing rates for national certification examination. UI graduates had a 96.3% passing rate for first-time test takers in 2021, compared to the national average passing rate of 86.3%.

For courses, students are assessed through weekly assignments (performance-based tasks, biweekly essays, in-class quizzes, monthly and midterm exams, and presentations). Outcomes assessment is based on the guidelines developed by the [national professional organization]. The goals for each level are clearly defined and published on the program website.

Along with standards for achievement in core courses, the Department has two main vehicles for assessing the value of the education provided to our majors: (1) the Capstone Course and (2) the “Future Plans Survey” completed by majors in the month before expected graduation. The response rate for the survey in AY '21-'22 was 100 percent.

### *Learning from Student Feedback*

Our primary method ... continues to be through a semi-annual discussion with the ~70 students taking the [Department] Seminar, a course that all majors must take twice. We also give them opportunities for anonymous feedback via surveys. The Seminar course was made more inclusive of other majors in 2019, bringing in students from other related majors. This has been beneficial for because it has allowed us to hear from students about areas of perceived overlap between majors and also to hear suggestions for building more connections between these programs.

We added three informal concentration areas to support the cohesiveness and clarity of the program. We held seven town-hall meetings to learn about student needs and interests ... Students appreciated efforts to make the curriculum more coherent and more aligned with students' interests.

Processes for continued program improvement continue. Faculty update curriculum to be current with the rapid changes in [the field]. Faculty participate in Team meetings as well as monthly forums, Council on Curriculum, and Council on Student Affairs. During these meetings, faculty brainstorm and discuss course content, teaching strategies, student learning needs, and student advocacy. Students have multiple opportunities to provide course and program feedback i.e. ACE evaluations, Annual Program Survey, Annual Exit Survey (prior to graduation), Clinical site evaluations, Student and Alumni focus groups, etc. Feedback from faculty and students guides our curriculum/program evaluation and improvements.

We have used feedback from course evaluations to assess and revise the format of our introductory course for the major. To provide more opportunities for students to engage in the analysis of data, we will be changing the course from two 75-minute lectures to two 50-minute lectures and a 50- minute discussion section.

A trend in student surveys is complaints about courses referred to as “Theory” and “Analysis” courses. While many students praise the same courses, there is a definite refrain among numerous survey respondents that these classes are not interesting and will not be useful to their career aspirations. Given the fact that successful alumni who return to our program *always* single out these courses as precisely what gave them a competitive advantage in the industry, this is a mindset faculty should definitely address. ... It will be important for all faculty (but especially instructors of introductory-level courses) to more consistently emphasize the importance of these courses to a student’s intellectual and creative development. More alumni events will likely help as well (as students will undoubtedly continue hearing this advice from successful alumni).

One lesson that we're learning is that students have strong preferences and they are not the same preferences for how they learn best.

## Implementing Program and Curriculum Changes

### *Following Through on Previously Planned Changes*

The department revised our major substantially this year [based on previous assessment] and ... students’ desire to specialize. We streamlined the entry level conceptual courses so students will now take [specialized] classes earlier in the major. We also piloted a place-based community- engagement project that involved 4 local nonprofit or civic organizations.

In response to a previously identified need for more direct assessment of learning objectives, the department has completed a formal mapping of undergraduate learning objectives to specific assessment activities across the undergraduate major curriculum.

During this academic year, we started implementing the action items suggested by the Undergraduate Program Curriculum Committee's report completed previously ... the department has removed an outdated required course, revised the four-year plan for majors to enable for students take core classes earlier to prepare them for potential internships, started creating new 1 s.h. elective classes to cover new developments in the industry or relevant professional and technology topics.

In May 2021, as a result of our assessment, we proposed a regular colloquium series, for both faculty and students, in which faculty would offer brief presentations of their research areas. We further proposed 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. We learned that, because of the increased faculty workload due to both the pandemic and intensifying demands on faculty in the face of declining staffing and resources, we were unable to implement these changes in AY 2021-22. We will try again.

### *Examining Curriculum and Program Structures*

The DUS undertook a consultative process with departmental faculty to revise undergraduate learning outcomes to reflect the changing nature of our BA/BS programs.

In the coming year, the Department will reconsider and revise its stated Outcomes, alongside a thorough revision of the curriculum for both majors in the department.

The implementation of a curriculum committee this past two years was very effective in supervising major changes to the department curriculum. This committee will continue to be effective for understanding what students need and how we can continue to grow, as opposed to having the DEO and DUS make decisions alone.

As part of the self-study process in preparation for the upcoming departmental review, the faculty has developed a master document that links learning outcomes by major to individual classes that students have to take to graduate ... We are in the process of linking specific class activities to learning outcomes.

Our current focus is on transitioning to the program to a new Division within the College. The program's Academic Advisory Board voted unanimously for the move to the Division and we believe this will strengthen our program both intellectually and pedagogically. Our most immediate concern will be integrating our outcomes assessment with that of our new division.

We have created the first iteration of a new track with interdisciplinary connections, and we wish to maintain and improve upon it. To maintain it, at the end of each academic year, we must evaluate courses offered by our partners to assess whether they should count for credit. We will continue to advertise the new track, and the department itself. And we seek to improve upon the new track by actively receiving feedback from undergraduate majors and minors through direct one-on-one discussions.

The Student Advisory Board reported that there was not enough time during fall/spring semesters to make full use of access to specialized equipment (which is tied to their coursework). During the summer, when they do have time, there are no courses offered for majors and it's unclear whether faculty could supervise summer courses if we added more ... The request was for a summer course for majors so that they would have access to equipment in order to practice their craft when they have more time to do so, during the summer.

### *Pilot-Testing Course or Curriculum Changes*

In our efforts to provide more hands-on, real-world experiential education and training for our students, we began the process of integrating [field-based lab experiences] into a wide range of courses for our students this past year so that students would have the opportunity to interact with real tools and technology they use in ... direct employment within the discipline and also in further research pursuits within academia ... The next step is a complete re-evaluation of the whole curriculum in 2022-2023 that will begin with the process of asking the same questions that informed our decisions about [integrating field-based lab experiences], but applied to all courses within the program. We will continue our annual surveying and town-hall meetings with our students to determine their feelings and insights about the program and continue to integrate their comments and feedback into our plans moving forward.

We have traditionally followed the CLAS's recommended grade distribution, which as a curve has the effect of pitting students against each other. To encourage a community of learning, both courses have, in the past year, changed to a point system. There are points to be earned in a variety of ways: in addition to midterms and the final, there are lab scores plus quizzes. The syllabi now include threshold values for each letter grade. Students are better able to keep track of their progress toward a final grade, which should help reduce the anxiety about grades and help focus their attention toward learning. Next steps will be to assemble several semesters' worth of points awarded and grade distributions to see whether we are actually awarding more higher grades under this grading system.

Previous Annual Assessment Updates have highlighted expansion of pre-clinical opportunities/experiences as a goal for future work in the department. Student feedback has been overwhelmingly positive thus far

We modified our curriculum to reduce content redundancy and improve course flexibility for students in the major. Three upper-division courses were combined into two upper-division courses that are completed in sequential order during the Fall and Spring semesters. An additional elective course requirement was added. Students completed this new sequence for the first time in Fall 2021 and Spring 2022. We are working with instructors and advisors to gauge the success of this new course structure

## Collaborating to Support Faculty Work and Address Student Needs

### *Examples of Collaboration Among Faculty Members Within Departments*

Some of our courses were in person, some were hybrid, and some were entirely online. We had a great deal of conversations about pedagogy over the course of the year -- more than usual. These allowed us to compare notes on best practices across modalities. It also provided mentorship for less experienced faculty members. We also have learned technical pedagogical skills that will stay with us after the pandemic (hopefully) subsides ... We have all expanded our pedagogical repertoire and skill-set.

We held an ongoing Colloquium series within the Department which provides a space for lectures/ information/expertise-sharing and discussions (for example of one this year which particularly resonated: trauma informed pedagogy).

We learned the importance of enhanced communication among instructors and the program coordinator in treating and evaluating students fairly, especially in making adjustments and accommodations for assignments and evaluation.

Faculty meetings offered ample opportunity for administrators to share vital information about pandemic-related policies and for colleagues to share their experienced with best practices for dealing with the classroom dynamics and course management issues that the pandemic created ... Monthly meetings of Directors of Undergraduate Studies provided knowledge and many helpful suggestions for dealing with the specific challenges our students were facing.

### *Examples of Collaboration Across Departments and Offices*

An important lesson learned during the 2021/22 academic year is that building partnerships with allied units across campus can yield important sources of support for our students and undergraduate programs. Moving forward, our department will seek to maintain open and active lines of communication with the Academic Advising Center, the Pomerantz Center, Study Abroad, and other related units.

Professional development opportunities for faculty and teaching assistants included a retreat for faculty and a training session for TAs led by the undergraduate program director ... as well as sessions led by staff from the Center for Teaching and Learning, UI Counseling, Dean of Students, and the Office of Community Engagement.

We created a graduating survey to assess student satisfaction, gather their perspectives for program improvement, get information about their post-graduation prospects, and collect future contact information ... The Sociology Department was kind enough to share their survey with us. We adopted and expanded on their model, developing one specifically oriented to the needs of our majors. Our model has now been shared, at their request, with the French and Cinematic Arts programs.

In [graduating seniors'] rating of readiness for employment, students asked for more career planning support and information. To address students' feedback, the Program director and academic advisors will meet with experts at the Pomerantz Career Center to develop strategies to enhance our career support for graduating students.

We are increasing our outreach to student advocacy organizations, such as Student Disability Services, Academic Advising Center, and The Writing Center at the beginning of semesters to address individual student needs.

Gateway Course redesign and reassessment. This project was started in 2019, by using funds provided by the UI Provost. The project is ongoing with the efforts of the Department, Office of Teaching and Learning Technology, and Distance and Online Education. This course is a gateway course for many UI students.

## Planning Strategically

### *Examples Based on Analyzing Trends and Anticipating Future Needs*

The Committee for Undergraduate Studies worked with OTLT to secure data regarding DFW rates and grades as a function of gender, generation status (first or continuing), and URM-or-nonURM status. We focused on our largest course, our two large Research Methods and Data Analysis courses, and our five large introductory courses that span of variety of topics. The committee has reviewed the reports from OTLT .... We considered this a baseline review because some of the course instructors are now implementing interventions aimed at reducing disparities in DFW rates or grades. We noticed a variety of trends that require further attention. For example, 1<sup>st</sup> generation and URM students tend to have lower grades and higher DFW rates.

[Among] incoming first-year students who identify as [our major], a significant percentage, at least 75%, change to a different major during that first year. This occurs before students have taken any of our courses! This is because [the pre-req] structure ensures that students must wait at least one semester, if not an entire year, before taking our courses. The Curriculum Committee initiated a first-semester course that could maintain interest in the discipline, introducing students to some of the teaching faculty, and exploring the field in a relatively low-stakes way, and thus stem the losses to other majors. Indeed, this appears to have been successful: students who took the course in Fall 2020, 45% are currently still in our major, and of those who took it in Fall 2021, 49% are still in our major.

A required class is only offered once a year and students struggle to meet that requirement if they put off taking the class ... We are moving to a model where TA's will TA for this course in the fall with a faculty member and then teach a smaller section of it in the Spring.

Changed [one] major with three emphasis areas to three independent majors. This change will give each major an identity and will clarify the training students are receiving on their transcripts. We will continue to work on establishing a plan for assessing learning outcomes across the three majors.

We also are working on creating a better way to assess student outcomes in nontraditional academic programs ... We are working on it and discussing with colleagues at peer institutions with like degrees how outcomes are meaningfully assessed.

Enrollment data from the last 10 years show that students have mainly been interested in [our] courses to enhance their degree, but not necessarily to earn a degree in [our field]. This finding is critically important since it has made us realize that the unit can contribute to the University by adding value to other majors, and by the nature of our courses is in a unique position to enhance diversity, equity, and inclusion across the campus. Students from other large academic programs ... are interested in learning about the cultures of communities that are deeply diverse. The Department is now highlighting courses that directly contribute to gaining competence in ... cultural diversity.

### Learning Outcomes Assessment Update - 2021/22



Please select Option A or Option B for completing this year's Annual Assessment Update:

- Option A (below) is for departments that prefer to follow the same format that was used in previous years. Departments that choose Option A can email the completed document to [outcomes@uiowa.edu](mailto:outcomes@uiowa.edu) by the end of June 2022.
- Option B is for departments that prefer to go online to complete the [Assessment Update Short Form](#), which focuses on steps taken to support students and instructors during the pandemic.

We will use this information to help document work done by departments and faculty to systematically monitor program quality and support student learning.

#### Option A: Information to Be Included in the Annual Update

1. Department:
2. Date:
3. Actions Taken, Lessons Learned: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Actions taken and/or lessons learned since last year's update</i></li></ul>
4. Current Focus of Outcomes Assessment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <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></li></ul>
5. Next Steps for the Department: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Follow-up actions or next steps that are planned</i></li></ul>
6. Contact:

## Appendix Two: Assessment Update Short Form

### Option B: Preview of the Online Assessment Update Short Form

This document provides a preview of the questions asked on the online Assessment Short Form. The goal of this form is to help the university document department efforts of to support teaching and learning during 2021/22.

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#### Contact Information

- Name \_\_\_\_\_
- Email \_\_\_\_\_
- Program \_\_\_\_\_

Steps the program has taken to **support teaching and learning** during 2021/22

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**Lessons learned** through program efforts to support faculty and students during 2021/22

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Information about student learning that has been used to **support planning decisions** as the program continues dealing with uncertainties and disruptions brought on by the pandemic

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

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Complete online at [https://uiowa.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_0llgz1SQntPAUI0](https://uiowa.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_0llgz1SQntPAUI0) by the end of June 2022.

## Appendix Three: Undergraduate Programs Represented

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

- Accounting
- Actuarial Science
- American Studies
- Anthropology
- Art
- Art History
- BAS/BLS
- Biochemistry and Molecular Biology
- Biology
- Chemistry
- Chinese
- Cinematic Arts
- Classics
- Communication Sciences and Disorders
- Communication Studies
- Computer Science
- Criminology, Law, and Justice
- Dance
- Earth and Environmental Science
- Education Studies and Human Relations
- English
- Environmental Policy and Planning
- Environmental Sciences
- Finance
- French
- Gender, Women's & Sexuality Studies
- Geographical and Sustainability Sciences
- German
- Global Health Studies
- Health and Human Physiology
- History
- Human Physiology
- Informatics
- International Relations
- International Studies
- Italian
- Japanese
- Journalism and Mass Communication
- Linguistics
- Mathematics
- Medical Laboratory Science
- Neuroscience
- Nuclear Medicine Technology
- Nursing
- Philosophy
- Physics and Astronomy
- Political Science
- Psychological and Brain Sciences
- Public Health
- Radiation Sciences
- Religious Studies
- Russian
- Social Justice
- Social Work
- Sociology
- Spanish and Portuguese
- Sport and Recreation Management
- Teaching and Learning
- Theatre Arts
- Therapeutic Recreation