

College of Letters and Science

Assessment Report

May 1, 1998

Department or Program Name: Astronomy

Abstract

The Astronomy Department carried out the assessment of the undergraduate program according to the Plan For Assessment of the Undergraduate Astronomy-Physics Major that was developed in 1996. With each of the graduating seniors, we carried out exit interviews and asked each to fill out a questionnaire, that allowed for positive and negative comments about our program and for suggestions for improving the major. The Faculty of the Department were presented with the results and we are considering changes in our course offerings, such as having AST 330 offered each year instead of alternative years, and we also plan to improve the avenues of communication with our majors.

Assessment Tools Used:

Direct Indicators

Undergraduate
Major

Graduate
Program

National Exams

Local Exams

Capstone Course(s)

Embedded Testing

Student Portfolios

Review theses & dissertations

Performance Evaluations

Pre and Post Testing

Indirect Indicators

Undergraduate
Major

Graduate
Program

Student Surveys XXX

Exit Interviews XXX

Alumni Surveys

Employer Surveys

External Reviews

Narrative

We provided each of our graduating Astronomy Physics Majors with a Statement of the Goals and Objectives of our program and a 12 part questionnaire, soliciting their opinions about the successes and failings of our program, and any suggestions that they might have about the program and about the assessment methods that we are using. Two of our senior faculty members also conducted individual exit interviews with the majors.

We were pleased to see that a majority of the majors are going on to excellent graduate schools. Two plan to go on to graduate schools in astronomy (at Johns Hopkins and Arizona), the person going to Arizona has been awarded a fellowship. Another of our Majors will be graduate school in Physics. Another has been accepted at the History of Science program at Princeton. The Majors who are not going on to graduate school will be pursuing positions with computer sciences and engineering companies.

The students were generally pleased with the program and especially the research opportunities that were provided. It was suggested that we put in place a bulletin board for the majors and post their pictures. It was also suggested that we offer more courses annually instead of biennially. At the faculty meeting at which we provided the feedback from the assessment there was wide agreement that we offer AST 330 on Extragalactic Astronomy and Cosmology every year. Increased frequency of social activities with the faculty, staff, and graduate students was also recommended. As for suggestions regarding the assessment process, the students generally liked the interviewing process. This being the first year that we conducted interviews, we found it somewhat difficult to reach some of the students to organize the interview appointments. To avoid this problem in the future, we plan to communicate with each major by e-mail, periodically during the academic year. We will revise the questionnaire for the interviews that will take place next year.