

College of Letters and Science
2002 Annual Survey and Report of Departmental Assessment Practices

Please return to Dean Certain by May 24, 2002
 c/o Associate Academic Planner Elaine Klein
 307-E South Hall, 1055 Bascom Mall, Madison WI 53706

Department Name: Biology Core Curriculum
Prepared by Ann Burgess 5/17/02

I. Assessment Plan

- Q1. The department has an assessment plan for the undergraduate program. (Y) N
 Q2. The department has an assessment plan for the graduate program. Y (N) NA
 Q3. The assessment plan/s is/are linked to articulated outcome goals for your majors. (Y) N

Please identify the types of tools in the assessment plan(s); if possible, indicate the academic years in which they have been or are intended to be employed:

Tools used to directly assess student learning:	Undergraduate Program	Graduate Program
National Exams		
Local Exams	1996-2002	
Capstone Courses	1996-2002	
Embedded Testing		
Student Portfolios		
Theses, Dissertations		
Performance Evaluations		
Pre & Post Testing		
Tools used to indirectly assess student learning:	Undergraduate Program	Graduate Program
Student Surveys	1996-2002	
Exit Interviews (group)	1996-2002	
Alumni Surveys		
Employer Surveys		
External Reviews		

Q5. Of the tools used to directly assess student learning, which provide the most useful information?
student performance on team worksheets and individual exams in Biocore 333, our capstone course

Q6. Of the tools used to directly assess student learning, which provide the least useful information?

Q7. Of the tools used to indirectly assess student learning, which provide the most useful information?
individual survey + group discussion during final class meeting - looking back over all 4 semesters

Q8. Of the tools used to indirectly assess student learning, which provide the least useful information?

Q9. Please elaborate on any of the responses given above (please attach additional pages as needed).
see attached page in response to III. 1.

II. Assessment Processes

Q10. Responsibility for assessment has been assumed by X an individual
_____ a committee

If responsibility is delegated to an individual, this person is:

the chair / tenured faculty / untenured faculty / academic staff / short term staff / other: _____
director

If responsibility is delegated to a committee, this group is:

Specially constituted to address assessment of student learning	Y	N
Part of the Curriculum Committee	Y	N
Part of the Executive Committee	Y	N
Part of the Undergraduate/Graduate Education Committee	Y	N
Other: _____		

Q11. The department has requested funds from the University Assessment Council (UAC) to help the department assess student learning. Y N

If "yes", did the UAC award the department funds? Y N

Were those funds useful? Y N

Q12. The department has sought professional assistance to conduct assessment. Y N

If "yes", from whom has the department sought professional assistance? (For example, the LEAD Center, the Office of Quality Improvement, the UW Survey Center, etc.)

informal advice from LEAD and OQI over the years. Help with focus groups in 2000 from OQI.

III. Additional Information

1. Please attach a brief description of any changes in curriculum, advising, or procedures that were the result of your assessment findings so we may include this information in our annual report to the Provost. If your department has received funds from the University Assessment Council, you may attach the assessment report submitted to the UAC in compliance with its funding support requirements.

2. In the interest of streamlining our requests for assessment information, please identify an assessment contact person: Prof. Jeff Hardin, incoming Faculty Director

3. Do you have any suggestions for workshops or learning opportunities in the area of student outcomes assessment?

I wish there were a way for upper level courses to assess how well the various intro courses, including Biocore, prepared students.

Thank you for taking time to complete this report.

Please return this report by May 25, 2002.

III. 1. Changes in curriculum and procedures that resulted from our findings:

In past years it sometimes seemed that many students were frustrated by Biocore and found it not to be what they were expecting. For example, even though we are a broad-based program intended for students interested in any field of biological science, many pre-medical students complained that we spent too much time on plants. Some students treated faculty and TAs as adversaries to fight with for more points rather than as partners in the learning process. Focus groups conducted by the Office of Quality Improvement in 2000 made us realize that many students enrolled in Biocore without understanding the program's values and goals. Based on this, we began providing much more information about our goals, curriculum, and grading policies during the admissions process (see attached letter). While this has not eliminated all complaints, it has certainly reduced them; students seem much more aware of what we are trying to accomplish.

During the last meeting of the final (capstone) semester, students fill out a survey as they look back over their four semesters. This includes a chance to rate how well they accomplished Biocore's seven goals for them. Students then discuss in small groups and then share with me and the large group what contributed most to their learning and what needs to be improved. I convey these ideas to the faculty. As a result of these and other discussions, we will be including a broader discussion of human physiology in the Organismal Biology course (323) rather than focusing quite so much on a few key areas. Another point that students brought up that will become a focus during the coming year is achieving better integration among the four semesters.

Last year when we prepared our nomination packet for the Chancellor's Award for Departmental Excellence in Teaching, we received many letters from students attesting to how well Biocore had prepared them for their future careers.



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February 28, 2002

Dear

Congratulations! You have been admitted to the Biocore Program for Fall 2002.

More about Biocore

Biocore is a four semester honors sequence that emphasizes important biological concepts but also the process of science - how we know what we know. We want to enhance your ability to draw conclusions from evidence and to think like a scientist. The assignments and labs give you experience with this and also introduce you to many of the tools and procedures that biologists use. Our program is writing-intensive because writing helps thinking and because excellent communication skills are essential for all types of biologists. (Biocore 301/302 and 303/304 each fulfill the university's Comm-B requirement.)

If you are a premed

We know from reading your applications that many of you are considering medical careers. Biocore welcomes premeds and has received high praise from the UW Medical School and from former Biocore students who say that Biocore provides an excellent preparation. *However*, we want you to know from the beginning that Biocore is designed for students with diverse interests in biological science. Biocore is not designed as a premed program. We think that an understanding of the environment is essential, and we consider plants to be just as important as animals. Thus, we want you to be aware that a large portion of your coursework will focus on plants and ecology.

A word about grades

All of our courses have set grading scales, not curves. This means that you are not in competition with anyone for a grade and that everyone can get an A if everyone does excellent work. Our experience in past years has been that a large number of students earn As. However, you will not do well in Biocore by simply attending lectures and reading the book. Assignments, class discussions, and recommended problems to work (some from previous exams) give you opportunities to deepen your understanding by applying what you are learning to new situations. This means struggling with challenging problems; this (not mere memorization) is how learning occurs. Likewise, exams are directly related to the concepts emphasized in the particular unit or course, but often ask you to deal with a new situation, not one that comes directly from the book or notes. Do not sign up for Biocore if your biggest concern is the short term goal of getting an A. This focus is likely to get in the way of learning and cause you view Biocore faculty and TAs not as partners in learning (which they truly want to be) but as enemies you fight to try to get more points. It is very frustrating to all of us when this happens. Biocore faculty are volunteers who have chosen to participate in Biocore on top of their normal departmental responsibilities. They do this because they care deeply about undergraduates and because they like interacting with bright students over challenging material.

Registration

If you have gotten this far and think Biocore is for you, we welcome you enthusiastically! You can look forward to interacting with faculty who want to help you succeed and who care about you enough to challenge you. You can also look forward to working with an awesome bunch of fellow students over the next four semesters. We loved reading about your interests and accomplishments. Note that we have **authorized** you for Biocore, but **you still need to register** during the Touchtone period in April (Biocore 301: Evolution, Ecology, and Genetics; Biocore 302: Evolution, Ecology, and Genetics Laboratory). **Remember to register for honors credit.** (You will be doing honors work whether or not you sign up for honors credit - let it show on your record!) If you have any problems with Touchtone registration, call Carol Borcharding at the phone number on the letterhead or email her at clborche@facstaff.wisc.edu.

If you have any questions, feel free to stop by my office (361 Noland), call (263-1594) or email me (aburgess@facstaff.wisc.edu).

We look forward to working with you!

Ann Burgess, Director