

# **Undergraduate Biology Major**

## *Plan for Assessment of Student Learning & Update on Activities 2003-2006*

*April, 2006*

### **Introduction:**

The Biology Major is a unique inter-college program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison that was developed to meet student demand for a broad-based biology major. Students are granted degrees from either the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences or the College of Letters and Science and the Institute for Cross-college Biology Education provides administrative support. There are currently no courses controlled by the Biology Major; instead the biology curriculum is made up of classes from numerous departments in the collaborating colleges. This presents a unique challenge for curriculum development, advising, and assessment.

### **Educational Mission Statement:**

The University of Wisconsin-Madison Undergraduate Biology Major prepares students to think critically and synthesize information. We strive to graduate students who are aware citizens and who will contribute positively to the world around them.

### **Goals and Objectives:**

- Provide a broad background of knowledge and experience in the biological sciences.
- Prepare students for admission to graduate and professional schools.
- Provide students with a rigorous yet broad educational foundation typical of a liberal arts program.
- Allow for successful transfer to another undergraduate major in the biological sciences.
- Support students with high-quality mentorship and guidance.
- Empower students to develop an optimal career path using flexible course requirements and a wide range of available educational opportunities.

## Methods of Assessment:

1. *Mid-term web-based survey.* Faculty advisors will email their advisees mid-semester encouraging them to complete a web-based survey that primarily addresses the quality of faculty and peer advising. Survey results will automatically go to a database for analysis by staff in the Academic Student Affairs Office of the Institute for Cross-college Biology Education and Biology Major Executive Committee. Anonymous results will be sent to the faculty advisors. *This survey has been administered in the spring and fall semesters of 2004 and in the fall semester of 2005. Feedback has been used to improve our website, develop advisor resources, and improve our Peer Advisor program for CALS first-year students.*
2. *Exit Survey.* One of the Co-Chairs will oversee an email exit survey to graduating seniors at the end of November and the end of April each year. This survey will focus on how well the student feels the major has provided them a flexible and broad education, how beneficial they found advising to be, whether they were able to achieve admission to graduate/professional school if desired, and how well the major prepared them to think critically and synthesize information. *This survey has been administered every spring semester since 2001, and in fall semesters of 2001, 2003, and 2005. Feedback from surveys has catalyzed changes in our curriculum, particularly the required foundational courses.*
3. *Early Career Survey.* At such time when there are a substantial number of graduates who are 5-8 years past graduation, the office staff will work from the UW Alumni Database to find contact information and send this survey, similar to the exit survey, to program alumni. There will be heavy emphasis on the degree to which the mission statement was achieved and how this major prepared graduates for further career and educational objectives. *This survey has not yet been administered. We anticipate that it will be administered for the first time during the 2006-2007 academic year.*
4. *GPA.* The GPA for students in the major and graduating students will be monitored at the end of fall and spring semesters and compared to overall undergraduate GPA, as well as previous years of the Biology Major. *This information has been gathered since 2000. Our graduates continue to perform at a high level (typical mean GPA is 3.4).*