

**College of Letters and Science
Department of Botany
Assessment Report
1999-2000**

Department Name: Botany

Chair of Assessment Committee: Prof. Wayne Becker (262-5833/wbecker@facstaff.wisc.edu)

Undergraduate Assessment: Our undergraduate assessment efforts this year have focused on following up the recommendations made to the department at the conclusion of the 1998-99 academic year (faculty meeting of May 19, 1999). The decision was made at that time not to establish an implementation committee but to ask existing committees to pick up on the various recommendations, as appropriate, and to create *ad hoc* committees as needed. These activities have largely been outside the purview of the Assessment Committee but several very positive changes come immediately to mind:

1. **Academic Advising.** A concern expressed by our undergrads in our assessment exercise focused on availability and responsiveness of advisors within the department. Largely through the efforts of Prof. Edgar Spalding, academic advising in the department has improved greatly. Prof. Spalding serves as the "gate-keeper" for undergrad majors and has been instrumental in ensuring that other faculty members take more interest in their advisees and respond to phone calls and e-mail messages in a much more prompt, helpful manner.
2. **Awareness of Undergraduate Research Opportunities.** A commonly voiced complaint from our undergrads in the assessment exercise was the difficulty they had learning about research opportunities for undergrads within the department. This was remedied swiftly by the formation of a Senior Thesis Committee, which assembles information from the faculty concerning availability of research openings and then sponsors an annual meeting, at which faculty members each take a few minutes to describe their research programs and to indicate where an undergrad might fit in. The meeting is well attended by undergrads, especially juniors, and seems to be meeting a real need.
3. **Undergrad Lounge.** A modest but very important recommendation of the Assessment Committee was the creation of an undergrad lounge where our majors would be able to "hang out" and interact informally with each other. The tightness of space in Birge Hall has thus far precluded creation of an undergrad lounge, but Prof. Paul Berry has reported that provision for such a facility is included in the plans for the new Biology Library.

Graduate Assessment. The assessment of our graduate program originally scheduled for the spring of 2000 was delayed by the absence of Prof. Wayne Becker, who spent part of the semester on sabbatical leave at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Graduate assessment will be the top priority for the Assessment Committee in the fall of 2000. A draft version of the survey form to be used for this purpose is attached. All graduate students associated with the research groups of Botany faculty members will be surveyed regardless of whether their degree will be in Botany or in any of several related programs, such as the Cell and Molecular Biology Program and the Institute for Environmental Studies.