

**UNIVERSITY ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE**  
**Feedback to Academic Departments on Assessment Activities Reported in 2009-10 Annual Reports**  
**UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMS**

**DEPARTMENT** Interdisciplinary Studies **DATE** February 16, 2011

**COMMITTEE MEMBER(S) CONDUCTING REVIEW** Joan Hawthorne, Krista Lynn Minnotte

**1. STUDENT LEARNING GOALS**

- |                                       |              |              |                         |
|---------------------------------------|--------------|--------------|-------------------------|
| • Were any goals referenced?          | YES <u>X</u> | NO <u>  </u> | QUALIFIED Y/N <u>  </u> |
| • If so, were goals well articulated? | YES <u>X</u> | NO <u>  </u> | QUALIFIED Y/N <u>  </u> |
| • Do goals address student learning?  | YES <u>X</u> | NO <u>  </u> | QUALIFIED Y/N <u>  </u> |

**Comments:**

*We note that goals were reconsidered although not revised in the wake of a previous review, and that these goals were chosen because they align with national standards for learning in this field. It certainly would be possible to word some goals in ways that would make assessment more straightforward (e.g., instead of saying students “demonstrate enlarged horizons,” IDS advisory committee members might describe what those enlarged horizons should look like when demonstrated – would they incorporate multiple perspectives? analyze using the tools of more than a single discipline? or what?). And yet the verbs used in goals are clear (e.g. “apply” “synthesize”) and the ideas are well-aligned with national norms.*

In addition to the Departmental goals, please also consider UND’s Institutional and Essential Studies goals for student learning (shown in alignment within parentheses) and identify which goals are similar to departmental goals.

- 1 Communication – written or oral (“able to write and speak in various settings with a sense of purpose/audience”)  
  x   2 Thinking and reasoning – critical thinking (or “be intellectually curious”; analyze, synthesize, evaluate)  
  x   3 Thinking and reasoning – creative thinking (or “be intellectually creative”; explore, discover, engage)  
       4 Thinking and reasoning – quantitative reasoning (“apply empirical data...analyze graphical information”)  
       5 Information literacy (“be able to access and evaluate...for effective, efficient, and ethical use”)  
       6 Diversity (“demonstrate understanding of diversity and use that understanding...”)  
       7 Lifelong learning (“commit themselves to lifelong learning”)  
       8 Service/citizenship (“share responsibility both for their communities and for the world”)

**Comments regarding departmental goals and alignment of departmental goals with institutional and Essential Studies goals:**

*Goal #1 (“think critically and unconventionally about problems”) aligns with critical and creative thinking.*

**2. ASSESSMENT METHODS**

- |  |              |              |                         |
|--|--------------|--------------|-------------------------|
| Were any specific assessment methods referenced?   | YES <u>X</u> | NO <u>  </u> | QUALIFIED Y/N <u>  </u> |
| • If so, were specifically chosen assessment methods appropriately aligned with individual goals?        | YES <u>X</u> | NO <u>  </u> | QUALIFIED Y/N <u>  </u> |
| • Were both direct and indirect assessment methods used as components of a “multiple measures” approach? | YES <u>X</u> | NO <u>  </u> | QUALIFIED Y/N <u>  </u> |

**Comments:**

*Methods described include several which are indirect and reflect the students’ own perceptions of their learning (focus groups, surveys, student evaluations, student self-assessments). Direct methods are not clearly described in the assessment plan, but more detail comes out in the annual report. Course products have been collected from the two IDS core courses, senior projects have been analyzed, and problem-solving exercises have been tried – all direct. According to the annual report, none of these has been as effectively implemented as hoped, which means additional work is still needed on methods.*

*The annual report also refers to student presentations during which students are asked to give examples of their work that demonstrate goal achievement. This is described as a direct assessment, but it would really only be a direct assessment if the scorer actually SEES the student demonstrate the learning within the presentation as opposed to simply hearing the learning described. So whether this is direct assessment depends on what the scorer sees (and scores) during the demonstration.*

### 3. ASSESSMENT RESULTS

|  |                 |                |                           |
|--|-----------------|----------------|---------------------------|
| Were any assessment results reported?  | YES <u>X</u>    | NO <u>    </u> | QUALIFIED Y/N <u>    </u> |
| • If so, were the results clear in terms of how they specifically affirm achievement of goals? | YES <u>    </u> | NO <u>    </u> | QUALIFIED Y/N <u>X</u>    |
| • If so, were the results clear in terms of how they indicate need for improvement?            | YES <u>    </u> | NO <u>    </u> | QUALIFIED Y/N <u>X</u>    |
| • Were the results tied to goals for student learning?   | YES <u>X</u>    | NO <u>    </u> | QUALIFIED Y/N <u>    </u> |

#### **Comments:**

*Most results reported are indirect, e.g., student focus group conclusions (students believe they have enlarged their horizons, become better critical and creative thinkers, e.g.). Students are asked to provide examples of their learning which is cited as a kind of direct assessment although, as noted, direct assessment would only occur if the scorer could see observe the skill demonstrated (perhaps this occurs as the student analyzes the example?). The report notes, however, that students are often unable to provide examples. That inability itself may be one indication that the goal is less well met than hoped.*

*Findings from the class exercises and senior projects are also mentioned, but it is difficult to tell (from the annual report narrative) whether the conclusions mentioned are the teacher's impressionistic summary of what seems to have occurred or conclusions drawn from a systematic analysis of actual data. The report indicates what seems to be the situation with learning related to program goals – but it's not clear how those conclusions are reached.*

In addition to departmental goals, some assessment results may be applicable to institutional and Essential Studies goals.

Indicate any goals for which the department presents findings, and, for indicated items, describe findings below. .

- 1 Communication – written or oral (“able to write and speak in various settings with a sense of purpose/audience”)
- X 2 Thinking and reasoning – critical thinking (or “be intellectually curious”; analyze, synthesize, evaluate)
- X 3 Thinking and reasoning – creative thinking (or “be intellectually creative”; explore, discover, engage)
- 4 Thinking and reasoning – quantitative reasoning (“apply empirical data...analyze graphical information”)
- 5 Information literacy (“be able to access and evaluate...for effective, efficient, and ethical use”)
- 6 Diversity (“demonstrate understanding of diversity and use that understanding...”)
- 7 Lifelong learning (“commit themselves to lifelong learning”)
- 8 Service/citizenship (“share responsibility both for their communities and for the world”)

#### **Comments regarding results and the application of results to departmental, institutional and Essential Studies goals:**

*Indirect assessment reveals that students believe they are becoming better critical and creative thinkers but they often can't identify examples demonstrating those skills.*

### 4. CLOSING THE LOOP

|   |                 |                |                           |
|---|-----------------|----------------|---------------------------|
| Were any actions taken on the basis of assessment results reported?   | YES <u>X</u>    | NO <u>    </u> | QUALIFIED Y/N <u>    </u> |
| • If so, do curricular or other improvements/changes arising from assessment results directly address goals for student learning? | YES <u>    </u> | NO <u>    </u> | QUALIFIED Y/N <u>X</u>    |

#### **Comments:**

*Given limited longitudinal data (and somewhat limited data overall), it is unclear if problems identified are program-wide or related to students from one cohort group. However, even with partial information, the director is working with advisory committees to encourage seniors to be more diligent about submitting their best possible work with the aim of getting a clearer*

view in the future. The findings also suggest that additional IDS coursework should be required as a means of more strongly emphasizing program goals, but current budgets have precluded that.

## SUMMARY

### *Strengths*

- ☒ A specific plan for assessment is in place.
- ☒ Student learning goals are well-articulated.
- ☐ Assessment methods are clearly described.
- ☐ Assessment methods are appropriately selected.
- ☐ Assessment methods are well-implemented.
- ☒ Direct and indirect methods are implemented.
- ☒ Results are reported.
- ☐ Results are tied to closing the loop.  
(Decision-making is tied to evidence.)

### *Areas for Improvement*

- ☐ No specific plan for assessment is in place.
- ☐ Student learning goals are not well-articulated.
- ☐ Assessment methods are not clearly described.
- ☐ Assessment methods are not appropriately selected.
- ☐ Assessment methods are not well-implemented.
- ☐ A single type of assessment methods predominates.
- ☐ No results are reported.
- ☐ Results are not clearly tied to closing the loop.  
(Decision-making is not directly tied to evidence.)

## OVERALL SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

*It appears that it would be worth rethinking methods to ensure that direct assessment occurs regularly and findings are analyzed systematically rather than impressionistically – and that systematic analysis may be occurring but it's difficult to be sure.*

*It would also be very helpful to review and possibly update (at least add a “reviewed on” date) the posted assessment plan. The plan is now several years old and indicates some uncertainty about exact methods to be used. It should be possible at this point to do minor revisions indicating methods that are (and will be) used regularly and to be add some indication of how analysis will occur.*

## MATERIALS REVIEWED

- ☒ Annual report
- ☐ Appendices (cited in annual report)
- ☐ Other (please describe)
- ☒ Assessment plan (as posted)
- ☒ Previous assessment review

|              |              |                              |                         |       |
|--------------|--------------|------------------------------|-------------------------|-------|
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Section 1: ☐ Y ☐ Section 2: ☐ Y/? ☐ Section 3: ☐ ? ☐ Section 4: ☐ ? ☐

### Coding Key:

- Y = yes, this is done appropriately and well
- N = no, this is not done at all, or it is not done in relationship to student learning
- NA = no information reported
- ? = action or progress is apparent; however, evidence is lacking that this is completely and appropriately done