

Undergraduate Outcomes Assessment Committee Minutes #8  
Wednesday, January 30, 2013  
Taylor Room, Campus Center

Present: Peter Hansen (Chair), Art Heinricher (Dean of Undergraduate Studies), Chrysanthe Demetry (Morgan Teaching & Learning Center), Tanja Dominko (CAP)

Chair Peter Hansen called the meeting to order at 10:02am.

1. Election of Secretary for C-term

C. Demetry agreed to take the minutes of this meeting. T. Dominko will take minutes at future meetings.

2. Acceptance of the Minutes for Meeting #7

Minutes of the meeting on 1/23/2013 were approved as distributed.

3. Updating and Improving the Assessment Plan

P. Hansen reported that he requested MQP peer review documents from department and program heads with a target date of February 5. C. Demetry requested IQP review documents from the IGSD. The committee decided to defer discussion of IQP and MQP peer reviews until that information is received.

The committee discussed the assessment of some undergraduate learning outcomes for which the criteria are only distribution requirements and degree audits. For example, the criterion for “graduates of WPI will have a base of knowledge in mathematics” is “all graduates have met applicable distribution requirements in mathematics.” The situation is similar for learning outcomes related to knowledge of science and humanistic studies. We have little information on how well our students achieve these outcomes and thus little ability to identify areas for improvement in these curricular elements.

The basic skills tests for Calculus 1 and 2 are direct measures of some mathematical knowledge, and students must pass the tests in order to pass the courses. Thus, de facto, if students pass the course they are certified to have “basic skills,” but that does not help us identify areas for improvement in their mathematics education. Perhaps the percentage of students who pass the test on the first attempt would be a more nuanced criterion.

The committee also discussed challenges related to the outcome that “graduates of WPI will have a base of knowledge in humanistic studies,” for which we have no criterion other than degree audits. Student learning outcomes in different disciplines (e.g., languages, arts, history) are entirely different. Generic outcomes could perhaps be identified, using the undergraduate learning outcomes as a guide. (To which of the institutional outcomes is the HUA requirement a key contribution?) The Inquiry Seminar or Practicum might be most readily assessed as the proxy for the 2-unit experience, but we should really inquire about the whole experience, not just the final activity. A “Student Report on the Humanities & Arts Requirement,” parallel to the Student Report on IQP/MQP Learning and Advising, could include both generic and area-specific questions. The committee agreed that the HUA department is the appropriate group to address these questions. P. Hansen and A. Heinricher agreed to meet with department head K. Boudreau.

The committee briefly discussed weaknesses in the assessment of Outcomes 8-10: graduates of WPI “will be aware of how their decisions affect and are affected by other individuals separated by time,

space, and culture,” “will be aware of personal, societal, and professional ethical standards,” and “will have the skills, diligence, and commitment excellence needed to engage in lifelong learning.”

Dean Heinricher shared some information that may have implications for UOAC’s work: 1) some of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) questions will be changing, which may have repercussions for our assessment plan; 2) at the request of students, the Career Development Center has purchased electronic portfolio software. Portfolios can be powerful tools for both professional development and assessment. A WPI committee investigated their use in the 1990s; Dean Heinricher will look for that report.

The meeting adjourned at 10:50am.

Respectfully submitted,  
Chrys Demetry, secretary pro tem