

UNDERGRADUATE OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE (UOAC)
WORCESTER POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE
Minutes of 2017-18 meeting #13, February 8, 2018

Present: L. Mathews (chair), D. Samson (secretary), C. Demetry, R. Malick, A. Heinricher (Provost's Office), A. Donta-Venman (Institutional Research), G. Cataldo '20 (SGA), P. St. Louis (Engineering, permanent visitor), Prof. L. Schachterle, visitor

The meeting came to order at 12:01. Review of the minutes of meeting #12 was postponed until the next meeting.

L. Mathews introduced Professor Lance Schachterle, Professor of English in the Department of Humanities and Arts, who was invited to describe the Department of Humanities and Arts's contribution to WPI's Undergraduate Outcomes, and comment on how UOAC might be able to help the department complete its initiatives.

Professor Schachterle explained that at the time he joined WPI in 1970, WPI President Hazard was working to implement a liberal-arts component into the nascent WPI Plan. Hazard's ambition was to educate what were then called "technological humanists," experts in engineering disciplines with a wide grasp of, and empathy for, timeless human concerns and contemporary intellectual and ethical issues. English professor Charles Heventhal devised the "Sufficiency" as an independent, one-on-one research paper in a liberal-arts discipline to parallel the Competency Examination that capped undergraduates' engineering and science education. The Competency Exam was discontinued in the 1980s and the independent Sufficiency was replaced by group Inquiry Seminars and Practicums after 2007-2008. As to outcome assessments, Schachterle headed a group created in what is now the Interdisciplinary and Global Studies Division (IGSD) in the mid-1980s to discuss the learning outcome assessment of students completing the Interactive Qualifying Project (IQP). Dean Frank Lutz then mandated a university-wide policy of outcome assessment in line with ABET goals; this was in place by 1999-2000. WPI's non-conformity to ABET's own assessment guidelines was accepted by ABET due to WPI's status as a well-known experiment (based on The Plan) in engineering education. NEASC has for its part adopted recently a policy on outcomes assessment and will review WPI for only the second time under this policy in 2022.

In response to questions, Prof. Schachterle said that the Department of Humanities and Arts was working "judiciously" toward assessment means for the Inquiry Seminar and Practicum. D. Samson added to this a description of his work for the department guiding the creation of a worksheet that would guide Seminar and Practicum instructors on student writing. Schachterle remarked that the department's experience reviewing Sufficiency Projects had shown that students' Humanities and Arts work and the department faculty's assessment of were both to some degree personal and subjective, assessment being dependent in some measure on individual reviewers' judgment. There is as yet no checklist of expected "things that need to be done" in the final Humanities and Arts academic experience as there is for the IQP. A. Heinricher stated that NEASC and AACU now concern themselves also with issues of assessment.

L. Mathews concluded the meeting by stating that there would be no committee meeting on February 15 and that at the Faculty Meeting on February 13, UOAC would present for discussion the motion approved by CAP concerning Undergraduate Learning Outcome #8.

The meeting adjourned at 1:02.

Respectfully submitted, D. Samson, secretary