Department of Business and Accounting
University of Wisconsin-Platteville

Report to the Assessment Oversight Committee
Related to the Department’s Accounting Program
December, 2008

The following report has been prepared in the context of a document prepared by the Department in 2005. That document was prepared for the Academic Planning Council and listed the set of skills and knowledge that the Department attempts to convey to its accounting majors. The document also specified the assessment-related indices that faculty would use in establishing that students had acquired these capabilities. The assessment-related indicators form the basis for this summary and are addressed using the questions posed by your committee.

Question 1: What evidence do you have that students achieve your stated learning outcomes?

Academic programs that offer majors in accounting generally accept the performance of graduates on the Certified Public Accountant Examination as an indicator of the effectiveness of an institution’s accounting program. The administrator of the examination makes available to academic institutions the percentage of their students who successfully complete sections of the exam. Over the past several years this percentage for UWP graduates:

— has been comparable to equivalent percentages for the other institutions in the University of Wisconsin System; and

— has typically exceeded the percentages for graduates of Wisconsin’s private institutions.

In assessing these results, it should be noted that UWP has fewer accounting faculty that most of the other accounting programs in the University System.

For several years our Department has required majors in business and accounting to complete the comprehensive major examination administered by the Educational Teaching Service. Business majors at several hundred universities take this exam at the conclusion of their undergraduate degrees. The examination focuses on all of the academic disciplines covered in a business major. Institutions are notified of the percentile rankings of their students for all sections of the exam. Since UWP students began taking the exam, their percentile rankings have been uniformly high. The most recent percentile ranking for our business majors on the Accounting section of the exam—the 80th percentile—is consistent with the ranking earned by our graduates over the past decade. The ranking can be interpreted as an indicator of the quality of accounting-related instruction received by UWP’s business majors.
The Department’s accounting faculty maintains an advisory committee composed of accounting practitioners who meet on two occasions during each academic year. In addition to these meetings, informal contact between the faculty and committee members—who are typically graduates of our accounting program—occur frequently. The advisory committee’s roles include:

—responding to faculty proposals for modifying the accounting-related curriculum;

—providing practitioner-oriented perspectives on changes in accounting practices; and

—alerting faculty to internship and employment opportunities for our current accounting majors.

Our faculty characterizes the interaction with the advisory board as being uniformly positive. The reactions of committee members—to planned modifications in our courses and to the abilities of our graduates—have shown a high degree of support for and approval of the faculty’s efforts.

Throughout the time period our current accounting faculty has been employed at UWP, the department’s accounting majors have experienced little difficulty finding employment after graduation. This has been established on a continuing basis by following up on graduates immediately after they complete their degrees. In addition, annual surveys conducted by the accounting student organization have established that UWP’s accounting alumni typically progress to higher level managerial and auditor positions during their first decade of professional experience.

Question 2: What have you learned as a result [of your assessment activities]?

In addition to feedback cited above, one other item addressed in the 2005 report to the Academic Planning Council should be addressed In that document the faculty indicated that accounting students needed exceptional written and verbal communication skills. Since that time faculty has expanded assignments focused on these educational areas. These efforts have included:

—the incorporation of additional individual and group presentations on accounting-related topics into the upper level accounting courses Accounting Theory and Accounting Information Systems;

—the establishment of more rigorous standards for written assignments in the Intermediate and Advanced Accounting courses; and

—the use of discussion forums—focused on responding to students’ accounting-related essays—in the graduate-level accounting course required for UWP’s Masters Degree in Project Management.
Feedback from employers and students has suggested to the faculty that the increased emphasis on communication skills has improved students’ capabilities in these areas.

Question 3: Document [additional] specific changes that have resulted from your assessment efforts.

1. Department faculty has increased the frequency with which they offer courses to students on a tutorial or arranged credit basis. This has resulted from students needing courses outside the terms during which they are typically offered. In these instances students are required to complete the course curriculum with a greatly reduced amount of direct faculty instruction. In addition, students are required to prepare extensive verbal presentations that demonstrate their mastery of course content. Courses that have been offered on this basis in recent years include Intermediate Accounting, Accounting Information Systems, Budgeting and Accounting Theory.

2. Classroom presentation of accounting content has been enhanced in recent years by the improved technological resources available to our faculty. The use of spreadsheets for solving problems and simulating accounting computerized accounting procedures, experimentation with computerized testing to provide students with immediate feedback for examinations, extensive student analysis of accounting information processing software have all resulted from the efforts of faculty to exploit the technology now present in our classrooms.

3. Since accounting practices are continually changing, the content of accounting courses requires on-going revision. As noted above, modifications in our curriculum also result from the feedback of employers and alumni. In recent years, the Intermediate Accounting course sequence has changed its coverage of the nonmonetary exchanges, accounting principles and pension accounting topics to reflect changes in accounting practice. In addition a revision of more than half of the content of the Advanced Accounting course is currently in process. The changes resulting from this revision will be implemented in the course offered in the Fall 2009 semester.

4. The accounting faculty is working the other business faculty to incorporate the capabilities of a comprehensive business software program into our curriculum. These efforts will be directed at enhancing student understanding of how such programs can be used to provide practitioners with accounting-related information needed for planning and problem solving.

5. Other recent developments in accounting practice—Lean Manufacturing and Lean Accounting, the Sarbanes-Oxley legislation and refinements of Activity-based Costing—have also been incorporated into accounting courses.

6. Faculty have actively participated in the campus-wide Enhanced Instruction initiative focused on courses which UWP students have found very difficult. Their
efforts have made upper-class accounting majors available to assist students taking the introductory courses in Financial and Managerial Accounting