2005 Update of the University of Wisconsin—Platteville Assessment Plan
Approved by the Faculty Senate
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Section 1—Introduction and Overview

A. Introduction

The 2005 Update builds upon the 2003 Assessment Plan\(^1\), which was primarily authored by Professors George Smith and David Boyles, and subsequently approved by the Assessment Oversight Committee and the Faculty Senate. That plan, in turn, was an update of the original 1995 UWP Assessment Plan. This document recounts the history of assessment at UWP. It also describes the recent steps UWP has taken in assessing its academic and student affairs programs, and how it will engage in on-going assessment in the future.

UW-Platteville is a comprehensive public institution enrolling approximately 6000 students in three colleges: Business, Industry, Life Science, and Agriculture; Liberal Arts and Education; and Engineering, Mathematics, and Science. The university offers Bachelor's degrees in forty-three programs and Master's degrees in seven programs. The university shares in the mission of the University of Wisconsin System and in the Core Mission of the University Cluster, as well as bearing responsibility for its own Select Mission. The three mission statements are included in Appendix 1.

In one form or another, assessment activities at UWP have existed for more than two decades. For the most part, these efforts have been directed by the faculty rather than imposed by the university administration. This long-standing commitment to this principle of faculty-based assessment continues to drive institutional efforts. A brief history of UWP's assessment activities is presented in Section 2 of this plan.

This assessment tradition includes a variety of activities at different institutional levels. For example, the Assessment Oversight Committee (AOC), the Academic Planning Council (APC) and the University Undergraduate Curriculum Commission (UUCC) routinely review all academic departments—beyond any on-going review processes within the programs themselves. The AOC is also involved in assessing general education, student affairs, and other ancillary areas, such as the Honor’s Program and Pioneer Farm. Assessment efforts in the basic skills area of the General Education Program date from at least 1982. Although campus-wide efforts remained somewhat fragmented and sporadic for a decade, assessment procedures have been more systematic since the early 1990s. The AOC and the UUCC have undertaken several efforts to broaden the scope of assessing the liberal studies area within General Education since the mid-1990s. Furthermore, eight academic programs are assessed by their respective national accrediting agencies, identified by the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program:</th>
<th>Accrediting Agency:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chemistry</td>
<td>American Chemical Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil Engineering</td>
<td>Accreditation Board for Engineering &amp; Technology (ABET)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^1\)The 2003 Assessment Plan can be found at [http://www.uwplatt.edu/committees/aoc/forms/files/plans.pdf](http://www.uwplatt.edu/committees/aoc/forms/files/plans.pdf).
The university as a whole is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC), and is a member of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (NCA).

This plan reaffirms the university's commitment to academic assessment. It identifies existing assessment practices and provides direction for the ongoing assessment of student learning. It is a testimony to the hard work that numerous faculty members have done over many years, and a pledge that assessment will continue as part of the culture of UW-Platteville.

B. Overview

UWP uses a model that identifies three phases in the assessment process.

1. **Mission/Goals/Student Learning Outcomes.** Identify and articulate operational goals and objectives implicit in the university mission statement.

2. **Tools.** Develop and implement techniques and instruments by which achievement of these goals and objectives can be measured.

3. **“Close the Loop”**. Use the observed results of the implemented assessment techniques to improve program quality, quantity and/or effectiveness.

All three phases are important, but of course good assessment demands that programs do not stop at phase 1 or phase 2. This assessment plan demonstrates that almost every academic major, general education area, student affairs area, and ancillary area has completed phases 1 and 2. Many programs and areas have already implemented phase 3, and all of them will “close the loop” on the assessment process over the next few years (see Appendix 6, “Assessment Oversight Committee Assessment Cycle”).

What follows is organized into sections 2-4 that describe what we’ve accomplished historically as an institution, our current assessment activities, and what we will attempt to accomplish in the future within the framework of the primary mission areas of the university. Six appendices are attached.

Section 2 provides the history and philosophical context of assessment at UWP. The section describes UWP's past assessment experiences, particularly as they support current and future assessment activities. It also explains how assessment relates to the
university mission and strategic plan, and identifies principles that guide assessment discussions at UWP.

Section 3 focuses on the implementation of the assessment plan. Principal facets of the section include identifying the individuals and entities responsible for implementing various components of the plan, specifying oversight and monitoring procedures, and indicating how the assessment plan itself is assessed.

Section 4 is a summary that addresses the five evaluative questions posed by the Higher Learning Commission.

Section 2 - Historical and Philosophical Perspectives

A. History: 1980s-2003

Systematic and campus-wide assessment dates primarily from the early 1980s, with UWP's participation in the UW-System's task force on assessment. At this time, the University of Wisconsin System initiated a formal discussion of assessment, a dialogue in which UWP was an active participant. This discussion focused on the fundamental principles of assessment, with specific concern in the area of basic skills. As a member of the System-wide Task Force on Assessment, UWP assessed the writing and mathematics skills of a representative sample of its students and also participated in a pilot assessment project in its College of Engineering.

Programs and colleges also conducted program-specific assessment during this period. For example, the Department of Economics began a series of pedagogical experiments in 1987 designed to improve students' critical thinking skills in the introductory economics course. The department assessed specific aspects of critical thinking, as identified by the Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal. Findings were then applied to teaching methodologies, which were refined over several years.

Formal assessment of basic skills began in the early 1990s, although varying methodologies limited direct comparison of student data. Several external instruments were evaluated for appropriateness, but the UW System elected to require individual campuses to administer the ACT-CAAP tools for writing and mathematics skills. While the UW System mandate required such administration once every five years, UWP opted to administer these tests (as well as the critical thinking skills tool) every two years.

A significant assessment accomplishment in 1994-95 was an input assessment of all courses approved within the institution's General Education Program. The University Undergraduate Curriculum Commission assessed more than 300 courses, resulting in the removal of more than 20 courses and revisions in many others.

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2 See George Smith and John Simonson, “Evolving a Campus Assessment Culture” (http://www.uwplatt.edu/committees/aoc/journals/2002/evol_camp.html).
In the early 1990s, a planning committee studied the problem of a university-wide strategy for assessment activities. The result was the formation of the Assessment Oversight Committee (AOC). The initial mission of the AOC was to coordinate university-level assessment efforts and provide counsel and support for individual programs and colleges. It monitored the various activities and procedures comprising the assessment program to ensure their consistency with the Assessment Plan. It also took actions and made recommendations deemed appropriate to improve and enhance existing procedures and to revise the Assessment Plan as needed. During the late 1990s and early 2000s, the AOC also oversaw the administration of the basic skills tests.

Basic Skills Tests—1990s-2001

In the early 1990s, the UW System mandated use of the ACT's Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency (CAAP) program. Specifically, the CAAP tools for assessing writing and mathematical skills were imposed by UW System, with a pilot administration planned in 1991. The target group to be tested was "rising juniors", i.e., students who had earned 45-59 credits.

In accordance with this UW-System directive, UWP assessed writing and mathematical skills among "rising juniors" in 1991-92. However, UWP elected to administer basic skills assessment on a more frequent basis. Biennial administration of ACT-CAAP was articulated in the original Assessment Plan (1995). In addition, UWP elected to administer the ACT-CAAP critical thinking skills test in selected upper-division classes (i.e., not to rising juniors) on a pilot basis at the same time.

Initial efforts to employ ACT-CAAP took place in 1992 and 1994, but systematic administration at the local level did not occur until 1996 (with subsequent replications in 1998 and 2001). By employing a consistent methodology in selecting the sample, proctoring the exams, etc., UWP developed some benchmarking of CAAP results. Campus results were not only compared to nationally standardized data, but were analyzed with a local regression model that employed nearly 40 variables.\(^3\) Results of these analyses were provided to appropriate governance groups, academic programs and campus administration.

General Education Assessment: 1990s-2003

In 1987-1988 the University Undergraduate Curriculum Commission (UUCC) conducted extensive discussion of the goals and objectives of UWP's general education requirements, culminating in substantial revisions in the liberal studies requirements in 1989-90. The UUCC reviewed alternative techniques for assessing the revised liberal studies program and decided on an appropriate testing instrument, "General Intellectual Skills". However, little progress was made on that particular assessment project while the

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UUCC attempted to complete its three-year revamping of the UWP General Education Program.

In 1994-95, the UUCC conducted a yearlong review of all courses approved for General Education credit. Three-person teams evaluated course syllabi, exams, written assignments, and other educational inputs for more than 300 courses in the basic skills, social sciences, humanities, etc. This assessment of course inputs was acknowledged as less useful than effective outcomes assessment, but it did result in more than 20 courses being dropped from the General Education Program and in the refinement of many additional courses.

In a review of campus assessment activities during its 1996 accreditation visit, the North Central Association (now the Higher Learning Commission) applauded the UUCC’s input evaluation effort, but confirmed the greater value of assessing educational outcomes in the future.4

Since the last NCA/HLC visit, various liberal studies areas made efforts to develop homegrown assessment tools. For example, faculty members attempted to develop local assessment instruments and/or processes in the social sciences (1999), humanities (2001), fine arts (2001), natural sciences (2001), and historical perspectives (2001).5 These activities followed the three-phase model identified earlier: clarifying goals, selecting appropriate assessment techniques, and providing useful feedback to relevant departments to enhance educational quality. In part, these efforts were supported through the Assessment Activity Fund grant program. This program began informal funding of assessment activities in 1995, and was formally established in 1998.

In 2001, the Faculty Senate directed an existing committee, the Academic Standards Committee, to take over the UUCC’s historical role of reviewing courses already approved for general education credit. The ASC developed a process of portfolio assessment for all general education courses. Each course was held up to the existing standards to determine how successfully the university is meeting its general education mission. However, the ASC ran into difficulties in interpreting the general education standards and, more importantly, enforcement of those standards. The ASC continued to review general education courses until 2003-2004, i.e., around the time that UWP began placing a much heavier emphasis on student learning outcomes, rather than instructor inputs.

In 2001, the Faculty and Academic Staff Senates and the UUCC also recommended that the Provost appoint a Director of General Education and Assessment to oversee the assessment process. David Boyles, Associate Professor of Mathematics,

5 See the Assessment Oversight Committee website, under Journals http://www.uwplatt.edu/committees/aoc/journals/index.html.
was appointed Director of General Education and Assessment, and he remained in that post until 2003.

*Program Assessment: 1990s-2003*

During this time, while systematic assessment of basic skills and liberal studies were assigned to the AOC and the UUCC, respectively, program assessment efforts remain dispersed among academic and administrative units.

Individual discipline-based assessment activities were conducted by specific academic programs as needs arose. Many of these program-based assessment efforts were, and still are, conducted in conjunction with accreditation activities involving external agencies and organizations (e.g., ABET, NAIT, NCATE, NASM). Certification of programs in engineering, industrial studies, education, music, and other areas confirms the quality control exercised in these areas.

In addition to the AOC and UUCC, the Academic Planning Council (APC) reviews every academic program on a (then) five-year cycle. The APC review consists of two parts: (1) input assessment that focuses primarily on data such as FTE (Full-Time Equivalency) faculty resources, SCH (Student Credit Hours) generated, and budgets; and (2) outcomes assessment that asks programs to identify appropriate quantitative and qualitative measures of quality control and goal achievement. Prior to 2003, most of the focus was on inputs, and until 2004 academic programs were not required to have assessment plans.

*Student Life Assessment: 1990s-2003*

In 2001, UWP’s Division of Student Affairs surveyed local students (freshmen and seniors) regarding selected academic and non-academic issues. These areas included (1) level of academic challenge, (2) active and collaborative learning, (3) student interactions with faculty members, (4) enriching educational experiences, and (5) supportive campus environment. Imposed by the UW System (UWS), this National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) attempts to assess attitudes and perceptions of student life and to compare the results against national norms as well as with other UW System campuses.

The 2001 Survey results suggested that UWP's level of academic challenge was slightly above that of UWS institutions, but slightly below all NSSE institutions. Platteville's levels of active and collaborative learning were significantly above the UWS average, but again slightly below the national norm. Student interactions with faculty members at UWP were slightly higher than those at other UWS campuses, but significantly below the national mean. "Enriching educational experiences" at UWP were lower than those at other UWS institutions, and significantly below the NSSE average.

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6 In 2003, the Academic Planning Council moved to a six-year review cycle.
UWP's campus environment was perceived to be somewhat better than those at other UWS campuses, but slightly below the national mean.

Other standardized tools used to assess student life at UWP are the CORE Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Survey and the benchmarked ACUHO-I/EBI survey of residence hall experiences. Internally developed user surveys assess student perceptions of academic advising, university counseling services, intramural athletics, university health services, placement services, and multi-cultural services.

**Assessment Activity Fund: 1998-2003**

A variety of other efforts evolved over the late 1990s to create a campus environment conducive to assessment activities. Such efforts attempted (1) to support and reward faculty and staff involvement in campus assessment activities, (2) to enhance the visibility of these efforts on a campus-wide basis, and (3) to support faculty participation in professional conferences dealing with assessment.

Among the most important of such efforts is the Assessment Activity Fund (AAF) grant program. It was formally established in 1998 in an effort to support a wide range of assessment initiatives, including proposals that address discipline-specific needs as well as proposals that address campus-wide assessment issues. In part, the AAF grants respond to the expressed need to broaden institutional interest in and support for assessment activities.

Among the initial AAF-supported proposals was an effort to create a local assessment journal to compile articles and reports on campus assessment efforts. The first publication of this journal occurred in 2000. Content included summaries of ACT-CAAP analyses and program-specific assessment projects, and copies of papers presented at professional conferences. The AAF program also supported analysis of ACT-CAAP data in basic skills assessment. Funded through additional AAF grants were efforts to develop local assessment tools in mathematics, the social sciences, humanities, fine arts, natural sciences, historical perspectives, international education, and ethnic and gender studies.

**B. History: 2003-present**

Obviously, faculty members have done a great deal of work on assessment at UWP over the years, and those of us who have recently become involved in the assessment process are greatly indebted to them. The history of assessment since 2003 builds on the work done prior to that time.

One of the biggest changes has been the restructuring of the Assessment Oversight Committee (AOC). In the fall of 2004, the structure of the Assessment Oversight Committee was changed in order to give the committee, and the role of

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8 The online journals are posted at [http://www.uwplatt.edu/committees/aoc/journals/index.html](http://www.uwplatt.edu/committees/aoc/journals/index.html).
assessment, greater prominence. In the past, representatives were appointed from Faculty Senate, Academic Planning Council, University Budget Commission, Student Services, the Undergraduate Curriculum Commission, Student Senate, and by the Provost. Now, in addition to one representative each from Faculty Senate, APC, UUCC, Student Services, and Student Senate, there are two representatives elected from each college. It is believed that by electing the faculty membership, the committee will have greater visibility on campus.

The mission of the AOC was also modified. Administration of the ACT-CAAP tests has been shelved because UW-System no longer requires it. Starting in 2005-2006, the AOC will take on a greater role in monitoring the assessment of the undergraduate academic majors, and the assessment of general education. Now the broad duties of the AOC are to work closely with the Provost, Academic Planning Council, Graduate Council, the University Undergraduate Curriculum Commission, and Student Affairs Leadership Team in assisting, coordinating, evaluating, and overseeing the various efforts to assess student learning done by departments, programs, general education, and student services. Specifically, the AOC:

1. disseminates assessment information and serves as a resource to academic and administrative units regarding assessment issues;
2. monitors on a continuing basis the assessment of general education; reviews assessment updates from each of the departments and programs, scheduled to fall half-way between the APC reviews of said departments and programs;
3. makes recommendations for funding assessment activities;
4. submits an annual report to the Faculty Senate, Academic Staff Senate, Student Affairs, and Chancellor’s Cabinet.

Another change since 2003 was the appointment of Shane Drefcinski, Associate Professor of Philosophy, as Director of General Education and Assessment. Drefcinski began his term in January, 2004.

Program Assessment: 2003-present

During 2003-2004, the Academic Planning Council (APC) suspended its regular review schedule in order to assist each undergraduate academic major in the development of a program assessment plan. Many academic programs did not have an assessment plan at that time, and some were at a loss about how to begin. Under the leadership of the APC, faculty members developed assessment plans that include: (1) a statement that connects the major to the mission of the university, (2) a set of goals, (3) a set of specific student learning outcomes, (4) a list of tools that are or will be used to measure student achievement of the student learning outcomes, and (5) a chart that indicates which specific tools are being used to measure which specific student learning outcomes. Most of the academic majors submitted their assessment plans on time. Many of them received

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10 See the minutes of the Academic Planning Council at [http://www.uwplatt.edu/committees/apc/agend_min.html](http://www.uwplatt.edu/committees/apc/agend_min.html).
feedback from the APC in 2003-2004. All of them received feedback from the AOC in 2004-2005. The goals and student learning outcomes for the academic majors are published in the 2005-2007 Undergraduate Catalog and the goals and student learning outcomes of the graduate programs are published in the 2005-2007 Graduate Catalog. In order to ensure that all academic programs employ their assessment plans and then use the results, the AOC developed a review cycle that is based upon the APC review cycle. At the mid-point of the six-year APC review cycle, academic programs that offer a major must submit a report to the AOC that answers the following questions:

1. What evidence do you have that students achieve your stated learning outcomes?
2. What have you learned as a result?
3. What, if any, changes will you make in order to improve student learning?

In sum, the assessment efforts of all of the academic programs that offer a major are reviewed every three years.

General Education Assessment: 2003-present

Nationwide, universities struggle to determine how to assess general education. UWP is no exception. As indicated above in section 2.A, over the years a number of efforts to assess the general education program were done under the auspices of the AOC. In 2004-2005, several faculty and staff tied these efforts all together and build upon them.

During 2004-2005, UWP developed assessment plans for the various components of general education. Various subcommittees composed of members from the UUCC, ASC, AOC, and faculty who teach general education courses in the respective area developed assessment plans for each of the five competencies and eight liberal studies areas. Their minutes were posted on the web in order to inform the rest of the UWP community of their progress. By the end of the year, each of these areas revised its mission statement and developed specific student learning outcomes. Those mission statements and student learning outcomes are published in the 2005-2007 Undergraduate Catalog. Many of these areas also committed to using particular assessment tools, such as homegrown exams, rubrics for assessing student work, and surveys. In order to ensure that these assessment plans are implemented, every area of general education will be assessed and must report its findings to the AOC on a six-year cycle.

11 The complete set of undergraduate academic major assessment plans are found in a link off of the AOC web site (http://www.uwplatt.edu/committees/aoc/assessments/index.html).
12 The online version of the 2005-2007 Undergraduate Catalog is posted at (http://www.uwplatt.edu/academics/catalogs/undergraduate/current/index.html).
13 The online version of the 2005-2007 Graduate Catalog is posted at (http://www.uwplatt.edu/academics/catalogs/graduate/current/index.html).
14 The AOC review cycle is found in Appendix X. It is also posted at (http://www.uwplatt.edu/committees/aoc/files/AOCReviewCycle.pdf).
15 These minutes are posted at (http://www.uwplatt.edu/gened/minutes/index.html).
Student Life Assessment: 2003-present

In 2004, UWP's Division of Student Affairs again administered the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) to freshmen and seniors regarding selected academic and non-academic issues. These areas include most of the same areas addressed in the 2001 NSSE.

The 2004 Survey results suggested that UWP's level of academic challenge was comparable to other institutions surveyed. In some areas, UWP ranks slightly higher than other UWS (University of Wisconsin System) institutions. For instance UWP's levels of active and collaborative learning were above both the UWS average and the national norm. In other areas, UWP ranks slightly lower than other UWS institutions. For instance, UWP ranks slightly lower than other UWS institutions in “additional collegiate experiences” and UWP's level of diversity is lower than both the UWS average and the national average. In general, the survey showed that UWP is very close to the UWS average and the national average in almost every area.

In 2005-2006, the Improvement of Learning Committee is studying the NSSE results and, based on their analysis, will make recommendations regarding programming and professional development.

During the spring 2005 semester, the assessment plans composed by various student affairs organizations were reviewed by the AOC. Revisions to those assessment plans were made and posted on the web. Beginning in 2005-2006, student affairs organizations will report to the AOC on a six-year cycle.

Ancillary Areas Assessment: 2003-present

During the fall 2005 semester, the assessment plans composed by various ancillary areas (e.g., Honor’s program, Pioneer Farm, Foundation, etc.) were reviewed by the AOC and posted on the web. These areas will report to the AOC on a six-year cycle.

Assessment Activity Fund: 2003-present

The AOC continues to make recommendations to the Provost for funding assessment activities. In 2004, proposals concerning the assessment of writing skills, the Master’s program in Criminal Justice, and the Biology and Civil Engineering programs were funded, and the faculty involved in these activities presented their results to the AOC in 2005-2006. In 2005, proposals concerning freshman retention, UWP engagement with internal and external constituencies, alternative deliveries, liberal studies outcomes within Engineering, academic advising, and Chemistry were funded.

16 The AOC minutes are posted at (http://www.uwplatt.edu/committees/aoc/agend_min.html).

17 Student Affairs assessment plans are posted at (http://www.uwplatt.edu/stuaffairs/assessment.html).
C. Philosophical Aspects of Assessment

1. The Relation of the Mission to Planned Assessment

University assessment is designed to be consistent with university missions. Missions of the University of Wisconsin-Platteville are threefold: The University of Wisconsin System Mission Statement, the Core Mission of the University Cluster, and the Select Mission of the University of Wisconsin-Platteville. The latter two are each comprised of nine statements that reflect the goals of the university. The purpose of assessment is to determine the extent to which goals of the three missions are being met.  

The relationship between each of the three principal areas of assessment - general education, baccalaureate and graduate degree programs, and student affairs/ancillary areas - and the Core Mission of the University Cluster is shown in Appendix 2, Table 1. The relationship between each of the four principal areas of assessment and the Select Mission of the University of Wisconsin-Platteville is shown in Appendix 2, Table 2.

Offering baccalaureate and graduate degrees is primary to both the University Cluster Mission and Select Mission of the University of Wisconsin-Platteville, and constitutes one of the university's goals. Degree programs are assessed in a variety of ways, including: student portfolios, graduating senior exit surveys and interviews, placement rates, accreditation visits, alumni surveys, employer surveys, input from advisory councils, feedback from capstone courses, and focus groups.

Offering a core of basic competencies and liberal studies that supports university degrees is stated in the Core Mission of the University Cluster and comprises another goal of the university. During 2004-2005, student learning outcomes for the competencies and liberal studies areas were revised, and each area of general education will be assessed on a six-year cycle.

Although basic competencies, liberal studies, and major programs are clearly identifiable among the major goals of the university, the university missions include many other goals and objectives as well. For example, the university is charged with providing an environment in which students may achieve maximum personal development as well as educational growth. Programs to enhance student life include University Counseling Services, Dining Services, the Multi-cultural Education Resource Center, the Children's Center, student health care, tutoring, basic skills workshops, cultural events, and placement services. Methods for assessing this goal include

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18 The UWP Mission is posted at (http://www.uwplatt.edu/academics/catalogs/undergraduate/current/about.html#mission).
interviews, opinion questionnaires, aptitude and mental ability tests, diagnostic tests, personal inventories, and suggestion boxes.

The university is also charged with providing outreach services to individuals, to businesses, to agriculture, and to government agencies. This goal is addressed through non-credit courses, research activities by faculty and students, and assorted consulting activities by university personnel. A wide variety of techniques are also available for assessing the university's effectiveness in achieving its community outreach mission goals. The matrix in Appendix 2 includes all mission goals of the university.

2. Assessment Philosophy and Maxims

Several characteristics appear critical to the development and implementation of any successful assessment program in higher education. The following Assessment Maxims form the foundation of assessment philosophy and activity at UW-Platteville.

- **Assessment must be faculty- and staff-based.** Assessment outcomes to be measured and measurement instruments to be used must be developed or selected by faculty and staff. Likewise, the results of assessment must be made available to faculty and staff in a form that permits their use in improving student learning.

- **The primary goal of assessment must be the improvement of teaching and learning.** Regardless of the impetus for undertaking assessment, both the process and the product of assessment must be used for improvement of learning for the student, the overall program, or both.

- **Institutional Uniqueness and Autonomy.** No existing assessment model is likely to be appropriately replicated elsewhere precisely. That is, an assessment program must recognize institutional uniqueness and autonomy, and be consonant with the particular mission, programs, and character of the campus. (A corollary is that program-specific measures are unlikely to be readily comparable across programs or across campuses.) Assessment should neither limit access to educational opportunities nor distort educational goals.

- **Use Multiple Measures.** Within given resource limitations, more information is almost always better than less in assessing learning in higher education. Appropriate assessment of a particular program may involve indirect measures, such as surveys, and direct measures, such as student portfolios and standardized tests.

- **Simplicity and Utility.** Assessment can easily appear to be one more time-consuming burden imposed upon already over-burdened faculty and staff. Furthermore, if that burden appears useless, faculty and staff will not bother with it beyond what is absolutely necessary. Assessment tools should be simple and useful for the improvement of student learning.

- **Assessment should be evolutionary rather than revolutionary.** Assessment is an on-going process. We assess in all our courses, for all our students, and in all our programs. What is new, however, is how we assess - more
systematically, more explicitly and with greater feedback to the teaching/learning process. In sum, we should build slowly and surely on the existing assessment system.

Implementation of a true assessment program may create profound changes in curriculum, in faculty and staff perspectives, and within the overall learning environment. We believe that an emphasis on assessment is more of an attitude than a collection of tests, and that serious assessment must institutionalize self-awareness.

Section 3—Implementation

Existing administrative and governance bodies, with coordination by the Provost and Director of General Education and Assessment, are responsible for carrying out the various facets of UW-Platteville's Assessment Plan. More specifically, campus assessment activities have been assigned at three levels.

- The AOC monitors on a continuing basis the assessment of general education.
- The individual academic program units shall administer their respective assessment programs, with audit and review by the APC and AOC.
- The Division of Student Affairs shall oversee administration of appropriate assessment activities in the area of student life, with review by the AOC.

A. Role of Assessment Oversight Committee

Since its inception, the AOC has played an important role in assessment. It has spearheaded efforts to assess general education, it has been a resource for assisting academic and administrative units in developing assessment tools, and it has operated the Assessment Activity Fund.

Beginning in fall 2005, the AOC’s role became even more prominent. It now monitors on a continuing basis the assessment of general education. It also reviews assessment updates from each of the departments and programs, scheduled to fall halfway between the APC reviews of those departments and programs. Moreover, it reviews assessment updates from Student Affairs areas and other ancillary programs.¹⁹

Finally, the AOC takes actions and makes recommendations deemed appropriate to improve and enhance existing assessment procedures and to revise the Assessment Plan as needed. Above all, the AOC is responsible for ensuring maximum benefits are derived from the Assessment Program. This will entail disseminating assessment information and facilitating improvement of programs based upon that information.

B. Role of Academic Planning Council

¹⁹ The AOC review schedule is posted at (http://www.uwplatt.edu/committees/aoc/files/AOCReviewCycle.pdf).
The APC is charged with "audit and review" responsibilities for academic programs. Academic programs are assessed by the APC every six years on a rotating basis. These evaluations consist of a review of quantitative measures of faculty productivity and workload (e.g., Student Credit Hours generated), an analysis of factors that measure program quality (e.g., placement of program graduates), and an examination of the assessment processes used by the program to measure the program's effectiveness in meeting its goals. Also examined is the effect of the assessment processes in bringing about changes and improvements.

During the mid-1990s, the APC's audit and review protocol was substantially modified to incorporate basic assessment techniques. As a result, academic programs are asked to address the following questions.

- What is the mission of the program? How does the program mission support university/college missions and strategic plans?
- What are the goals and objectives of the program? Have any of the goals/objectives changed since the last review? If so, briefly explain.
- What relation does the program have with other academic programs in the UW System?
- Have there been any significant changes in the assessment plan since the last review? If so, briefly describe the changes.
- Provide evidence that the assessment plan is being implemented on a continuous basis and outcomes of the assessment are being used for program improvement.

C. Assessing Assessment

Ideally, evaluation of the university's assessment program is based on its contribution to attainment of clearly defined and generally agreed upon educational goals and objectives, especially the goal of enhanced student learning. While difficulties in evaluating such a program's effectiveness are potentially unlimited, two fundamental concerns focus on the nature, level, and efficiency of student learning.

- Desired educational outcomes may not be well defined, making effective measurement of such changes difficult to conduct and to evaluate.
- Key variables in the learning process may be difficult to identify and isolate for assessment purposes, thereby making it difficult to improve those elements within the control of the institution and its faculty.

Given these inherent concerns, the assessment program must be evaluated through the best techniques available. It is essential that the evaluative process be systematic, objective, and firmly anchored in the educational process (i.e., the evaluation must avoid heavy reliance on anecdotes, casual observation, or other ad hoc evidence of how the educational system is performing).

Unfortunately, since outcomes are often difficult to measure in education and other service areas, the evaluation frequently focuses on the educational process itself,
e.g., through "performance evaluation". Regardless of the merit of what is being achieved through the educational process, the efficiency of the process itself is assessed to determine whether outcomes are being achieved at minimal cost, in minimum time, or with fewest possible resources.

The assessment program's impact on the educational process is essentially what is assessed at UW-Platteville. All four areas of UW-Platteville's assessment program—basic competencies, liberal studies, major programs, and student life/ancillary areas—are routinely monitored and evaluated.

1. **Step One: Goals and Student Learning Outcomes**

The first step in assessment - identifying goals and objectives - has received considerable attention at UW-Platteville since the mid-1980s. The goals and objectives of the competencies component of general education program remain more focused than those of the other areas; as a result, achievement of these goals has traditionally been easier to assess.

In 2004-2005, goals and objectives of the liberal studies component of general education have been identified by committees of faculty members drawn from the UUCC, AOC, ASC, and instructors in the liberal studies areas. These committees were able to build upon the previous efforts supported through the Assessment Activity Fund grants.

In 2003-2004, major program goals and objectives received systematic attention. Academic programs are evaluated on a rotating schedule, with individual departments and majors reviewed once every six years. The APC performance audit and review process focuses on assessment and pays less attention on program data trends (e.g., student credit hours generated, full-time equivalency faculty positions, number of student majors) than in the past. In addition, every academic major program gets reviewed by the AOC at the mid-point of the six-year APC review cycle.

2. **Step Two: Using Tools to Measure Student Learning**

The second step in assessment - measuring achievement of outcomes - has continued to evolve. In the competencies, ACT-CAAP tests of writing and mathematics skills have been administered to a random sample of rising juniors since the early 1990s (see Section 2). Subsequent development of homegrown assessment tools began in the late 1990s. Progress has been slow; however a local test of basic math skills has been developed (with AAF funding). This test has been piloted and shown to be a qualified success. In 2004, with the help of an AAF grant, the writing competency was assessed and the results were reported to the AOC in fall 2005. The implementation of assessment tools in the liberal studies areas will begin 2005-2006, and promises to be a challenge.
Major program areas continue to be assessed through a wide variety of methods, many tied to discipline-specific needs or characteristics. These practices provide a baseline against which future assessment results can be evaluated. The reviews of both the APC and AOC ensure that assessment of major programs is ongoing.

Student Affairs will continue to assess the quality of student life at UW-Platteville through multiple measures, including externally developed tools such as the NSSE survey and locally designed processes.

3. *Step Three: Closing the Loop*

The critical third step in the assessment process is creating and delivering appropriate feedback on assessment findings. Successful assessment would provide routine feedback to the administration, governance bodies, and individual colleges and departments. Such feedback can be useful in effecting change in curricula and other aspects of institutional operation. Regular dialogue would also contribute to the evolution of an effective campus assessment culture. Therefore, high priority is given to ongoing efforts in providing direct and explicit linkages between program assessment and decision-making by the administration and governance bodies (e.g., Faculty Senate, Academic Staff Senate, UUCC, APC, UABC).

This University Assessment Plan is a dynamic document designed to meet a variety of institutional needs, with input from individual faculty, governance groups, and campus administration. It is appropriate, therefore, that the Assessment Program continually be subject to periodic review by these governance groups and campus administration. It is the intention of the AOC that a major evaluation of the Assessment Plan be conducted approximately every five years, or more often (as needed). Moreover, it is the duty of the AOC to review the Assessment Plan on an ongoing basis, to solicit input from governance groups and academic programs, and to make appropriate recommendations for change as part of its annual report.

Section 4—Summary and Evaluative Criteria

A. Summary

The Assessment Plan represents a logical continuation of what has been occurring at UW-Platteville for many years. It documents the assessment efforts in the competencies, liberal studies, major programs, and student life. It enshrines the philosophical principles that underlie UWP’s assessment efforts. Finally, it ensures that assessment efforts are on-going.

In summary, assessment at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville has a history that provides fertile ground for the institutional growth of a culture of awareness and curiosity, with the goal of always improving that which the university offers the communities it serves.
B. Response to The Higher Learning Commission’s Evaluative Criteria

The Higher Learning Commission lists “five fundamental questions for conversations on student learning.” Our responses follow.

1. How are your stated student learning outcomes appropriate to your mission, programs, and degrees?

Evidence of a clear linkage between the various student learning outcomes and UW-Platteville's mission and goal statement is explicit throughout this document, in all of the academic program, student affairs, and ancillary area assessment plans, and in the responses that each academic program must provide to the APC and AOC during its review. For further evidence that the student learning outcomes in each of the academic majors, competencies, and liberal studies areas are tied to the mission of the university, see Appendices 1-4).

2. What evidence do you have that students achieve your stated learning outcomes?

Virtually every academic major program, general education competency, liberal studies area, student affairs and ancillary area has an assessment plan. Some of them have already implemented their assessment plan, and have reported their findings to the APC or AOC. They have discovered strengths and weaknesses, and are in the process of remedying the latter. Others have yet to implement their assessment plan, but must and will prior to their review by the APC or AOC.

3. In what ways do you analyze and use evidence of student learning?

Analysis of the assessment results is principally done by the faculty and staff involved in that area. The results of their analysis are reported to the APC and/or AOC. Those results are also shared with their colleagues and posted on the web.

4. How do you ensure shared responsibility for assessment of student learning?

Shared responsibility for the assessment of student learning is ensured by the way in which this responsibility is distributed across campus. Administration of the assessment program is institution-wide. In particular, large shares of the responsibility for assessment fall upon the AOC, the APC, and the UUCC, as well as upon individual academic and administrative departments. Faculty members are responsible for assessing their majors, and then must report their findings to the APC and AOC. Members of the APC, AOC, and UUCC are elected from the ranks of the faculty and staff, or are appointed by governance bodies. The Director of General Education and Assessment is a member of the faculty. Finally, staff members in Student Affairs are responsible for assessing student learning in their areas, and then report their findings to the AOC. (See above Section 3—Implementation.)

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5. How do you evaluate and improve the effectiveness of your efforts to assess and improve student learning?

Every assessment plan is open to revision. The goals and student learning outcomes for general education were revised during 2004-2005. The assessment review questions posed by the AOC invite programs, general education areas, and student affairs areas to make changes to their assessment efforts.