

# University Studies Program Assessment Plan



*approved by Faculty Senate, 04.19.04*

## **I. Context: Institutional Curriculum, Programmatic Goals, and Accreditation Review**

The University Studies (formerly "general education") Program at Winona State University was developed in part in response to concerns raised by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Universities in its comprehensive evaluation of WSU in 1991. Among the more prominent concerns raised by the HLC in 1991 were, first, the lack of oversight of the program, and, second, the lack of opportunity for upper-division, sequenced-course, or skills-intensive course work in the program. As it was developed in the late 1990s and implemented in fall 2001, the USP addressed each of the concerns of the HLC, providing a Director, an oversight committee (the University Studies Subcommittee), a review process for course proposals, and a curriculum that allowed for courses with prerequisites, upper-division courses, and basic skills emphases.

Crucial to the success of any academic program is its ongoing assessment, and this assessment plan outlines the institutional context, and, in subsequent sections, the principles underlying that mission; resources available to support the mission; and a plan for its implementation and reporting procedures. Aside from the details of this plan as they are articulated in these sections, however, participants in the University Studies Program Assessment Plan (USPAP) must further be informed by a keen awareness of the institutional context, programmatic goals, and external review of the USP as it has been ...

- developed in response to the 1991 NCA Accreditation Review,
- approved by all WSU constituencies for implementation in fall 2001,
- articulated in the 2001 NCA Self-Study Report, and
- reviewed by the HLC of the NCA in its 2001 Comprehensive Visit.

Relevant to this context are the following appendices:

### ***Appendices A-C:***

- A. Excerpts from WSU's 2001 NCA Self-Study Report
- B. NCA/HLC Request for 2006 Progress Report
  - "on the completion, implementation, and assessment of the University Studies Program"
    1. A plan for assessment of USP objectives
    2. Evidence that the plan has been implemented
    3. A list of Flag courses in the USP program
- C. WSU Office of AIR on Current and Proposed Assessment Data

## II. Guiding Principles

The topic of assessment, as the Conference on College Composition and Communication notes (see Appendix F), evokes strong passions, as assessment programs have the potential for both tremendous gain and perilous abuse. Any academic assessment plan must protect the academic freedom of faculty, attend to concerns of data privacy, and articulate clear goals and methods. Winona State University's "Position Statement on Academic Assessment Programs" is quite clear in maintaining that the purpose of academic assessment programs is to "support and improve student learning" and that assessment data "will not be used for faculty or staff evaluation and, in particular, will not be used in making retention, tenure, and promotion recommendations or decisions by supervisors or administrators"—a point which the North Central Association, along with other professional disciplinary organizations, confirms. As it is developed and implemented, therefore, the USPAP should be designed and carried out with due respect to the principles and goals of academic assessment programs as they have been articulated by ...

- Winona State University, in its "Position Statement on Academic Assessment Programs"; and
- The North Central Association, in its *Handbook of Accreditation* and other publications.

Relevant to these guiding principles are the following appendices:

### ***Appendices D-E:***

- D. WSU's Position Statement on Academic Assessment Programs
- E. Excerpts from NCA Statements on Assessment Programs

While important to the design of any academic assessment program is the knowledge of institutional goals and directives, so too is an understanding of the importance of scholarship and comment on assessment as it has been articulated in the various disciplines and professional organizations that share in its goals. A number of relevant professional, disciplinary, and departmental organizations have articulated position statements and publications on assessment. The USPAP should be undertaken in full awareness of these statements, where applicable and relevant. Though faculty committees undertaking assessment work may have principled reasons for conducting assessment in ways other than, if not contrary to, those described, the work conducted for the USPAP must proceed with knowledge of such disciplinary position statements.

Relevant to the work of individual faculty committees undertaking assessment may be one of the following appendices:

### ***Appendices F-H: Position Statements from Professional Organizations***

- F. Conference on College Composition and Communication Statement on Writing Assessment
- G. National Communication Association Statements on Assessment
- H. Committee on Undergraduate Programs in Mathematics Guidelines for Assessment of Student Learning

## III. Goals

The primary goal of the USPAP shall be to articulate a means of collecting, interpreting, and making decisions based on data relevant to the University Studies Program in ways that will ultimately ...

- ***improve student learning in the program.***

Secondary goals of the USPAP may include, but need not be limited to ...

- providing necessary material for the required 2006 NCA Progress Report,
- articulating means by which the oversight or implementation of the USP may be improved,
- demonstrating connections between the USP and various major programs, and/or
- identifying needs for Faculty Development Programming relevant to the USP.

To these ends, the USS may wish to devise surveys for faculty and students regarding USP requirements, collect enrollment data pertaining to USP courses, and/or offer suggestions to A2C2 and departments regarding USP concerns.

#### **IV. Resources**

The following infrastructural elements of the university are noted as being potentially helpful to the implementation of the USPAP:

- Office of Assessment and Institutional Research
  - *provides expertise, Assessment Database, organizes Assessment Day activities*
- Exams Week
  - *potential source of assessment data*
- Assessment Day
  - *opportunity for data collection, analysis, reporting*
- Faculty Development Days
  - *opportunity for development activities related to USP assessment*
- Blackboard
  - *possibility of use as mechanism for data collection*
- Placement Examinations
  - *potential source of assessment data*
- CAAP Exam
  - *potential source of assessment data*
- University Studies Director and Subcommittee
  - *oversees curriculum, monitors program, provides disciplinary expertise*
- Other support services, if relevant, such as ...
  - Library
  - Academic skills center
  - Technical support center
  - Student support services
  - Career services/alumni
- Departmental assessment plans, practices, and data (if available, applicable, and relevant)

#### **V. Implementation**

Rather than attempt to conduct assessment of all areas of the USP simultaneously, the USPAP will instead focus assessment efforts (collection, analysis, and reporting of data) on a cyclical plan. Each cycle will include two full years' worth of concentrated attention. In some instances, data collected during one full phase of the cycle (e.g. in the first year of Basic Skills: College Reading and Writing) may be used as baseline data for comparison with other data sets (e.g. in the Writing Flag).

Such a cyclical plan offers the benefit of concentrating the attendant efforts of assessment on smaller groups of faculty in any given year, thus reducing the burden on WSU faculty participating in the USPAP. For example, only a committee comprised of faculty associated with Basic Skills courses need be involved in the initial year of the program in the timeline proposed below.

## General Timeline

Spring 2004–Spring 2006:	Basic Skills
Spring 2005–Spring 2007:	Arts & Science Core
Spring 2006–Spring 2008:	Unity & Diversity
Spring 2007–Spring 2009:	Flags
Spring 2008–Spring 2010:	repeat cycle, beginning with Basic Skills

## Tentative Timeline for Faculty Assessment Committees, Round One (Basic Skills)

Spring semester, 2004:	Faculty Assessment Committees formed; initial meetings
Fall semester, 2004:	Development of learning objectives, indicators
Spring semester, 2005:	Initial data collection; data analysis; midterm report
Fall semester, 2005:	Data collection continues
Spring semester, 2006:	Data collection continues; data analysis; final report and recommendations due June 1

## VI. Data Collection and Analysis

Each USP Area (e.g. "Basic Skills: College Reading and Writing") will have its own Faculty Assessment Committee, comprised of faculty from courses offered in the area, responsible for ...

- review and discussion of student learning outcomes in the area,
- identification or development of mechanisms for data collection,
- collection of data (using both direct and indirect measures) relevant to the outcomes,
- analysis of the data, and
- reporting the results of their efforts to the USS and to program area faculty.

Each of these assessment committees (five members per USP area assessment committee) should be comprised of faculty representatives from the departments offering courses in the area. In some cases where a large number of departments offer courses in the area (e.g. "Unity and Diversity: Critical Analysis"), Faculty Association Committee on Committees may want to give additional consideration to representation of various colleges; however, in some other cases, especially the Basic Skills, such representation will not be a concern. Each area assessment committee will elect a chairperson ultimately responsible for the delivery of the two-year report (see below), although all committee members should review, and ultimately approve, that report.

USP Area/Cycle	Faculty Area Committees			
<b>Basic Skills</b>	College Reading/Writing	Oral Communication	Mathematics	Phys. Dev. & Wellness
<b>2004-06 (&amp; 2008-10)</b>	5 faculty	5 faculty	5 faculty	5 faculty
<b>Arts &amp; Sciences Core</b>	Humanities	Social Science	Natural Science	Fine & Performing Arts
<b>2005-07 (&amp; 2009-11)</b>	5 faculty	5 faculty	5 faculty	5 faculty
<b>Unity &amp; Diversity</b>	Critical Analysis	Science & Social Policy	Glob./Multicult. Perspect.	Citizenship/Democ. Inst.
<b>2006-08 (&amp; 2010-12)</b>	5 faculty	5 faculty	5 faculty	5 faculty
<b>Flag Requirements</b>	Writing	Oral Communication	Mathematics/Statistics	Critical Analysis
<b>2007-09 (&amp; 2011-13)</b>	5 faculty	5 faculty	5 faculty	5 faculty

Academic Affairs and Curriculum Committee recommends that each Faculty Area Committee Chairperson be compensated with three semester hours of reassigned time per semester per year, with appropriate

replacement to the Department. Each separate Faculty Area Committee should be further provided with a budget line of \$1000 per year for development and support of their efforts. Appropriate expenditures may include examinations, printing, student help, software, or postage. Second-year funding will be dependent upon delivery of a complete midterm (first-year) report. To access the funds, the committee will need to propose a brief budget narrative and justification, indicating how each budget item relates to the committee's plan.

Position statements regarding assessment in various academic disciplines articulate some potential sources of data and assessment instruments, which may vary considerably depending upon the learning objectives being assessed. In any case, the committees' collection of data may include ...

- authentic artifacts culled from classroom activities,
- artifacts created specifically for assessment purposes,
- standardized exams or activities (e.g. the ACT Assessment of English Writing), and/or
- instructor-specific exams or activities.

While committees may choose to analyze any kind of artifacts (from brochures to memoranda to performance) relevant to the area, they should nonetheless note that the traits (components) of the artifact being assessed must remain constant. Faculty development will need to be provided to ensure consistency and reliability in data assessment. The committee report delivered at the conclusion of each two-year cycle should address the following:

- a synopsis of improvements or actions implemented based on previous assessments (if any);
- the number and percentage of students involved;
- a description of the process of data collection and analysis;
- results of the current-year assessment; and
- suggestions for improvement or action based on the results.

## **VII. Reporting and Feedback Mechanism**

Once area assessment committees are in place, each committee will meet in full with the University Studies Director and Assessment Coordinator to review the committee charge, fundamentals of assessment, timelines, and reporting mechanism.

Each assessment committee's final report should be delivered, upon completion, to the University Studies Subcommittee and Director, with electronic copies to faculty teaching in the area of the USP. The University Studies Director will, upon final receipt of each area report, compile a biennial report on USP assessment efforts to be forwarded to A2C2, Faculty Senate, and Administration, and, as appropriate, to other constituencies or interested parties.