

Academic Matters

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FROM THE PROVOST:

THE YEAR IN REVIEW

As the 2003-2004 academic year comes to a close, I want to thank all of you for your very hard work and continued dedication to students and to the UW Colleges.

This has been a year in which we have taken on the expansion of our first year seminar program, which served approximately 31% of our new freshmen in 2003-2004. Campuses have engaged in a wide-range of other Engaging Students in the First Year (ESFY) activities including redesigned orientation programs, common readings, fall campus convocations, student "passports", study abroad, and special events for new students.

We achieved a record spring semester enrollment which has led to increased tuition revenue for the institution---in these times of financial woes across the UW, this is very good news.

On the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE), on most measures we scored above the benchmarks for all participating colleges including in the areas of student faculty interactions and academic challenge.

The PRISM project, our name for the PeopleSoft system, has successfully launched all phases of admission, registration and financial aid. This work involved many of those in academic and student affairs on campuses and in the central office.

One of our biggest challenges this year has been the revitalization and restructuring of our comprehensive program on the assessment of student learning and institutional effectiveness. The Colleges has moved forward with renewed energy and commitment. The faculty and instructional academic staff have been hard at work revising the institution-wide proficiencies, choosing courses for assessment, redoing assessment instruments and reporting forms, and creating department specific goals. The professional academic staff has been devising mission statements,

goals, performance indicators, and assessment instruments for their functional units. The central office academic affairs staff has been creating a template for institutional effectiveness based on the mission, goals and strategic plan of the institution.

These are just some of the things that have occurred throughout the institution this academic year through your efforts and those of my colleagues in the central office. You have my sincere thanks for what you have accomplished this year for our institution and its students.

Revised Mission
By Margaret Cleek

As part of the self-study for our reaccreditation, the UW Colleges underwent a review of our mission. The mission had not changed fundamentally since the institution was formed and was widely understood and supported by faculty and staff. However, the Self-Study Coordinating Committee (SCC) took the self-study as an opportunity to undertake an institutional examination of the statement. Each campus collegium was asked to assess the statement of mission and goals, both to identify any necessary changes and to review wording for clarity and concision.

No campus went beyond recommending ways to improve the communication of our primary purpose and agreed that the mission and goals should not be changed fundamentally. None reported debate or misunderstanding of the institution's basic purposes.

There was widespread agreement, however, that some of the language of the mission and goals was outdated and at times imprecise. Campus responses on rewording were collated, summarized, analyzed, and given to the Chancellor for his consideration.

A revised mission and goals statement was reviewed by various campus constituencies culminating in approval by the Colleges' Senate. We conducted our public hearing of the mission at the end of April and heard from faculty, staff, students, and community members. The response was very positive and speakers noted that the revised mission was clearer, more precisely worded, and more up to date. The Regents approved the revised mission on May 7, 2004.

REVISED MISSION STATEMENT

Select Mission and Goals of the University of Wisconsin Colleges

The University of Wisconsin Colleges is a multi-campus institution that prepares students for success at the baccalaureate level of education, provides the first two years of a liberal arts general education that is accessible and affordable, and advances the Wisconsin Idea by bringing the resources of the University to the people of the state and the communities that provide and support its campuses.

GOALS

1. To excel at delivering a liberal arts general education associate degree that prepares students for transfer to baccalaureate-granting institutions and professional programs

2. To emphasize teaching excellence including the development, use, and assessment of effective teaching methods
3. To prepare students for lifelong learning, leadership, service and responsible citizenship
4. To foster scholarly activity that supports the mission of the University of Wisconsin Colleges
5. To serve the people of Wisconsin by promoting continuing education and outreach in Wisconsin communities
6. To participate in collaborative relationships with other University of Wisconsin System institutions, the Wisconsin Technical College System, private colleges, and K-12 public schools in order to maximize educational opportunities and resources for the people of Wisconsin
7. To serve the needs of ethnically diverse students, students with disabilities and nontraditional students
8. To make available as a service to business, industry and the general public, the unique professional expertise of the faculty and staff
9. To provide opportunities for civic and cultural enrichment in the communities that support its campuses.

Approved by the UW Colleges Senate
January 15, 2003

Approved by the UW Regents
May 7, 2004

2004 Engaging Students in the First Year Spring Conference
By Greg Lampe

On Saturday, April 24, nearly 70 faculty, staff, and administrators traveled to the University of Wisconsin-Baraboo/Sauk County campus to participate in the 2004 Engaging Students in the First Year (ESFY) Spring Conference. The Conference Planning Committee (Chris Taylor (chair), Salah Bassiouni, Jane Oitzinger, and Katherine Holman) planned an exciting day of opportunities to focus on the First-Year Seminar and occasions to listen to, learn from, and share with colleagues from across the institution.

The conference featured workshops ranging from institution-wide assessment of the First-Year Seminar to the overall course design to classroom activities to pedagogical approaches to the course. In all, nine different workshops were offered throughout the day. The sessions were facilitated by faculty, staff, and administrators. During the sessions, participants learned about different approaches to structuring, designing, and teaching First-Year Seminars on the campuses. The Program Review Committee (Michael Jacobs (chair), Deborah Cureton, Mary Hoeft, and Martha Nelson) did a superb job reviewing the proposals for each of the sessions. Participants were encouraged to take part in any of the workshops that were of interest to them.

In the afternoon, 60-minute Cracker Barrel Discussion Sessions were offered and conference participants had the opportunity to select one of the three sessions to attend. There was a session focusing on the First-Year Seminar curriculum, one centered on the assessment of the First-Year

Seminar, and another centered on the future of the ESFY initiative. Each group engaged in extended conversation about the topics and participants had opportunities to share their thoughts and feelings, raise questions and issues, and engage in meaningful dialogue.

Judging from the feedback that has been received from those who participated in the conference, it seems that participants found the day engaging, meaningful, and energizing. The UW-Baraboo/Sauk County provided excellent hospitality and facilities, and an outstanding teaching and learning environment. Overall, it was an outstanding day of learning and dialogue!

Interdisciplinary Service Learning Program at Fond du Lac
By Sondra Smith Gates
(Submitted by Shirley Hensch)

At its October meeting, the Senate Academic Policy Committee unanimously approved a new model of Interdisciplinary Studies based on the Fond du Lac campus's successful Interdisciplinary Service Learning Program. The program was first offered in Fall 2002 with help from a UW Colleges Grant to Increase Student Engagement. It aimed to increase the engagement, success, and retention of diverse student populations by combining a new service-learning writing course with an innovative model for interdisciplinary studies. In the new IS-designated course taught by Sondra Smith Gates (English 201, Intermediate Composition: Writing in the Real World), students volunteered at community organizations and completed a series of individually-tailored writing assignments based on their experiences.

Simultaneously, each English 201 student enrolled in one of a number of linked courses from other disciplines relevant to their service sites: Concepts of Biology (Elizabeth Hayes), Music Literature and Appreciation (Patricia Eby), or Introduction to Sociology (Michael Nofz). Instructors of the linked classes modified the requirements of those courses for the interdisciplinary students, creating assignments that asked them to apply the subject matter of the course to the students' volunteer work. For example, Sociology 101 students gave a series of presentations to their class applying sociological principles to the organization where they worked, in place of analyzing a sociological book. (Note: these courses were not given IS designation since not all their students participated in the interdisciplinary program.) Each instructor of a linked class also visited English 201 to lead discussions about the role of their discipline in the Fond du Lac community.

At the end of the semester, students created projects and wrote papers that employed the methods and skills of both disciplines. Biology students volunteering at Waters Elementary School, for example, wrote detailed lesson plans for teaching biological concepts to children. They drew upon both their subject matter from biology and their writing and organizational skills from English to create the plans, which they then gave to the Waters teachers for use in future years.

A recently completed assessment of the program indicates that it was successful in achieving its six stated goals: 1) To increase retention of diverse student populations; 2) To help students understand the relevance of academics for the larger community; 3) To strengthen students' academic skills, including higher-level thinking; 4) To aid students in making career decisions; 5) To foster partnerships among students, between students and teachers, and between students and members of the community; and 6) To provide a model for future interdisciplinary service-learning courses.

Moreover, the program increased students' sense of civic responsibility and personal achievement. Several of the final reflections written by students at the end of the semester indicate that combining academic study with volunteering was life-changing for them. "I learned more out of this class than any other class that I have ever taken," wrote one student; "I really saw life in a new light." For others, the class "became much more than just a college course." A number wrote that "All colleges should offer a course like this one." For more information about Fond du Lac's Interdisciplinary Service Learning Program or to read the full assessment report, please contact English professor Sondra Smith Gates, sgates@uwc.edu.

First Year Initiative Survey (FYI)
By Gregg Nettesheim

Overview

Last fall the Office of Academic Affairs invited instructors teaching the First-Year Seminar (FYS) to administer the First Year Initiative Survey to students enrolled in their classes. The survey was designed by Educational Benchmarking Incorporated (EBI) in consultation with the Policy Center on the First Year of College and measures student perceptions of the effectiveness of first year programs. We chose this particular survey because it is a good fit for the UWC common course goals for FYS, and because it is the only survey available designed specifically to measure the perceptions of students in their first year.

By the end of the fall term 758 students in 50 different sections of FYS had taken the survey. The results were then sent to EBI for scoring and analysis.

Survey Analysis

Background

The FYI survey includes 70 questions related to the student's experience in a first year program. Using factor analysis these 70 questions were grouped into 15 more generalized factors. In analyzing the survey results, one of these factors, the student's perception of "Overall Course Effectiveness," was chosen to be a dependent variable. Then the scores for the other 14 factors were analyzed to measure the degree to which each of those other factors contributed to the perception of overall effectiveness.

Results

Based on this analysis, the factors were divided into two groups. The first group includes those factors that contribute to or predict the student's perception of overall course effectiveness. These factors can be ordered based on the degree to which they contribute to this perception. The second group includes those factors that appear not to contribute to the perception of overall course effectiveness. The following chart summarizes these findings.

Dependent Variable	Predictor Rank	Mean Score*
Overall Course Effectiveness		4.58
Contributing Factors		
Usefulness of Course Readings	Top Predictor	4.43
Course Improved Managing Time and Priorities	2 nd	4.52
Satisfaction with College/University	3 rd	5.23
Course Improved Connections with Peers	4 th	4.44
Course Included Engaging Pedagogy	5 th	4.71
Course Increased Out-of-Class Engagement	6 th	3.47
Course Improved Study Strategies	7 th	4.25
Dependent Variable	Predictor Rank	Mean Score*
Non-Contributing Factors		
Course Improved Academic and Cognitive Skills	Not a Predictor	3.90
Course Improved Critical Thinking	“	4.34
Course Improved Connections with Faculty	“	4.52
Course Improved Knowledge of Campus Policies	“	4.13
Course Improved Knowledge of Academic Services	“	4.62
Course Improved Knowledge of Wellness	“	3.50
Sense of Belonging	“	5.06

*Students answered the survey questions using a 7 point scale, with 1 meaning “not at all” and 7 meaning “significantly.” There was also an option of “not applicable.” For example, for the statement “This course increased the degree to which I attended campus cultural events” students could answer 1 if the course had no effect, 7 if the course significantly increased the student’s attendance at campus cultural events, or any number between.

For all of these factors a mean score of 5.5 or greater is considered excellent or superior; 4.5 to 5.49 is considered good; 3.5 to 4.49 fair, and below 3.5 is poor.

Focusing on the Contributing Factors

If we focus just on the contributing factors, we see that this group can be further divided into 3 sets:

1. The top and 5th predictors, “Usefulness of Course Readings” and “Engaging Pedagogy” are factors which would likely contribute toward the effectiveness of any of our courses at the Colleges. This emphasizes that students taking the FYS will evaluate the course in much the same way they judge any other course.
2. The 3rd predictor, “Satisfaction with College/University,” while certainly related to a student’s experience in the FYS, is perhaps better seen as a cumulative perception formed by all of the student’s experiences at the Colleges during the course of the semester.
3. The 2nd, 4th, 6th and 7th factors, “Managing Time and Priorities,” “Connecting with Peers,” “Out-of-Class Engagement,” and “Study Strategies” are those issues that are both important to these students and are likely not included in the other courses they are taking. Among all of the very practical skills that students need to learn when entering the university, these are the areas our students would like to see emphasized in a First-Year Seminar.

Next Steps

- ∞ We will be asking instructors to administer the FYI survey in the fall of 2004. This will extend our information beyond the one term snapshot we now have and will help us to evaluate any changes made to the curriculum.
- ∞ We will also be gathering additional information about our top predictor, the usefulness of course readings, so as to better understand what students consider useful reading in a First-Year Seminar. This includes collecting samples of the readings from participating instructors and reviewing the section by section analysis of this factor.
- ∞ Finally, we plan to conduct focus groups with students who were enrolled in FYS classes in the fall of 2003 to further explore the factors that contribute to overall course effectiveness.

Enjoy the summer!

