

# ***Curriculum Assessment Guide***

This guide was created by James Cousins when he was at WMU as an Associate Dean in the College of Arts & Sciences. Included here are the most commonly referenced assessments used in the creation of curricular improvements processed through the electronic curriculum system. This is intended for use by initiators when answering the question “Response to Assessment Outcomes.” For example, a proposal to revise an existing course title could have come from conversations in department meetings, observed changes within the discipline, and/or comments made by students in advising appointments,

In addition to simplifying and streamlining the process of assessment attribution, this Assessment Guide provides a common language of assessment useful for non-specialists charged with reviewing curriculum proposals. It may also be considered a “good practices” guide and may help units develop new or revise existing program and course assessment methods.

## **Types of Assessments**

### **1. Industry Influencers**

- 1.1 *Job Market Analysis*: The department carefully monitors sources such as the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) and online job postings to identify additions or alterations to professional requirements. The demand for specific technical skills (e.g. proficiencies in certain software) and other desired qualifications help shape learning outcomes and program improvement.
- 1.2 *Industry Partnerships*: The department leverages relationships with local and regional industries to identify emerging trends within the job market and evolving skills and technological abilities required of recent graduates.
- 1.3 *Industry Advisory Board*: Professionals in fields related to the discipline take part in regular conversations with faculty regarding new or revised curriculum. In this way, program improvement becomes a collaborative venture where industry experts become stakeholders in the department’s success and new or revised programs rest on firm, evidence-based suppositions.

### **2. Educational Collaboration**

- 2.1 *Engagement with Pre-college Learners*: Contact with K-12 educators and students is initiated through activities related to the department’s education programs. This contact gives faculty insight into secondary curriculum and changes to learning environments in general (emerging classroom technology, pedagogy, and related state policies).

2.2 Articulation Agreements. The department has built and maintained durable relationships with area community colleges. Sustained faculty and administrative interactions with counterparts from these institutions influences curriculum development and guides improvement.

2.3 Academic Trends. The review of other related programs, conducted through web-based searches or conversations with colleagues from other institutions, allows faculty to baseline offerings while providing new and innovative approaches to student learning outcomes and curricular design.

### 3. External Review

3.1 Academic Program Review: Academic Program Review and Planning (APR&P) that was conducted gave the department an opportunity to enhance its programs, grow enrollment, reduce time-to-degree, and otherwise enhance current offerings.

3.2 External Reviewers Invited to WMU: External review teams, brought to campus at the instigation of department or university administration, conduct comprehensive investigations of department programs and policies. Reviewers compile data into objective summaries and offer recommendations based on these observations.

3.3 External Review of Other Departments: WMU faculty are frequently invited to perform external reviews at other institutions. During their visits, WMU faculty conduct individual interviews, hold group meetings, and perform relevant background research to create reports and recommendations. In conducting these reviews, WMU faculty gain perspective on their home departments; this perspective often helps shape the student learning environment at WMU.

### 4. Undergraduate Student Engagement

4.1 Informal Feedback: Undergraduate student feedback occurs as a natural part of the classroom environment. Undergraduates communicate directly with faculty in and outside of class (e.g. emails, phone conversations, office hours). Through these interactions, faculty are able to evaluate curriculum and improve learning.

4.2 Course-embedded Assignments: Formative and summative assessments, collected as part of the regular classroom evaluation process, are a natural means of gathering and assessing student progress. Cumulative observations of these instruments (over a semester or year-over-year) helps inform course and program improvement.

- 4.3 Undergraduate Student Surveys: Regular or periodic surveys of undergraduate students, delivered electronically or in paper form, give insight into factors influencing student success.
- 4.4 Campus and Department Events: Department faculty and staff participate in many of the University's on-campus student events (e.g. Fall Welcome, summer orientation, Medallion Scholarship Competition, International Festival, fall open house events), as well as departmental events (seminars, optional field trips, and informal gatherings). Through conversations with current and prospective students, faculty gain insight into evolving student interests and concerns.
- 4.5 New Student Intake: Each new major and minor is put through a comprehensive intake protocol which, in addition to introducing students to the various curricular features and opportunities within the department, helps faculty gather anecdotal evidence on evolving student needs, identify emerging barriers to graduation, and improve student learning.
- 4.6 Undergraduate Advising within the Department: In this department, student advising is both a shared faculty responsibility and a point of focused concern. Individual student appointments not only benefit the student's overall learning experience, information received through these interactions helps uncover obstacles, identify curricular gaps and areas of need, and inform the department's approach to course and program improvement.
- 4.7 Undergraduate Student Focus Groups: Faculty led meetings and informal group conversations with undergraduate students allows the department to gauge the level of student satisfaction, measure the results of program improvements, and otherwise improve approaches to student learning.
- 4.8 Capstone Seminar: The department's capstone seminar is a culminating experience where students explore advanced themes and problems and, in so doing, exercise the abilities and habits of mind acquired throughout the program. In this way, the capstone functions as an ideal touch point for program assessment; student achievement in this course may be taken as partial evidence of programmatic efficacy.
- 4.9 Exit Interviews. Coordinated as an in-class activity or undertaken by individual faculty during advising, exit interviews are an effective means of gathering important feedback from undergraduate students. Comments regarding course requirements, progress to degree, and overall levels of student satisfaction are valuable guides to improvement.

## 5. Information Gathered from Graduate Students

- 5.1 Informal Feedback: Graduate student feedback occurs daily as a natural part of the classroom environment. Graduate students communicate directly with faculty in and outside of class (e.g. emails, phone conversations, office hours) and through these interactions, faculty are able to evaluate curriculum and improve learning.
- 5.2 Course-embedded Assignments: Formative and summative assessments, collected as part of the regular classroom evaluation process, are a natural means of gathering and assessing student progress. Cumulative observations of these instruments (over a semester or year-over-year) helps inform course and program improvement.
- 5.3 Graduate Student Focus Groups: Faculty led meetings and informal group conversations with graduate students allows the department to gauge the level of student satisfaction, measure the results of program improvements, and otherwise improve approaches to student learning.
- 5.4 Graduate Student Surveys: Regular or periodic surveys of graduate students, delivered electronically or in paper form, give insight into factors influencing student success.
- 5.5 Campus Events: Department faculty and staff participate in many of the on-campus student events and, through conversations with prospective students, department faculty gain insight into evolving student interests and concerns.
- 5.6 Graduate Student First-Year Completion Talk: Interviews, conducted near the end of the student's first year, allow the Department's Director of Graduate Studies to assess student progress and gauge student satisfaction.
- 5.7 Graduate Student Advising: Graduate students are assigned a mentor who guides the student toward degree completion. Information received through the faculty mentor's interactions with the student helps uncover obstacles, identify areas of need, and informs the department's approach to course and program improvement.
- 5.8 Graduate Student Exit Interviews. Undertaken by individual faculty mentors, exit interviews are an effective means of gathering feedback from graduate students. Students are asked to assess their time in the department, discuss teaching and coursework, and tell faculty what worked and what did not. Comments regarding course requirements, progress to degree, and overall levels of student satisfaction are valuable guides to improvement.

## 6. Alumni Engagement

6.1 Faculty Interaction: Faculty initiated contact with graduates occurs throughout the year. Through these interactions, faculty are able to stay informed of professional concerns and evaluate the departmental programs against job-market realities.

6.2 Alumni Advisory Board: Board members, drawn from recent and established alumni, provide faculty and staff with information relevant to the department's planned and potential activities. Their feedback is essential to the long-term success.

## 7. Department Operations

7.1 Department Meetings: Faculty meetings make room for robust conversations regarding student learning and the relationship of student learning outcomes to individual courses or programs. Discussion may focus on individual curricular concerns or proposals or may generally relate to the health of individual programs. These free-flowing exchanges allow the department to explore multiple channels of evidence and investigate new pathways of improvement. Instructional methods, faculty interest, anecdotal reports and developments from within and without the department, are some but do not sum the total of the topics used to enhance or otherwise improve programs.

7.2 Program Student Learning Outcomes (by program): Student learning outcomes are provided in the department's annual assessment report.

7.3 Department Strategic Plan: The department's updated mission and vision statements, as well as connected objectives and strategies.

7.4 Department Resource Assessment: Budgetary constraints, changes to faculty workload, and a host of other issues influencing the allocation of departmental instructional resources, are assessed frequently and in the normal course of program revision.

## 8. Standards and Practices

8.1 Professional Standards: The department's professional organization outlines disciplinary goals and expectations for post-secondary learning environments. These goals are articulated in the organization's mission and vision statements but through established learning outcomes. The professional organization also publishes results of undergraduate and graduate surveys to better inform departments of immediate and long-term career success. Frequent interaction with this information, either

through their website or at the annual meeting, allows the department to keep pace with evolving trends and adjust curricular expectations.

**8.2 Changes within the Discipline:** Disciplines are, themselves, in a constant state of change. The department keeps pace by adjusting expectations for student learning, modifying course content, adjusting course and program offerings, and updating nomenclature.

**8.3 Secondary Education Accreditation:** Included in this category are materials required for teacher educator recertification. This includes, but is not limited to, Michigan Test for Certification (MTTC) results; assignments, rubrics, and assessments of candidate performance in secondary methods courses; intern teaching evaluations, and Impact on Student Learning (ISL) data.

## **9. Institutional Planning and Reporting**

**9.1 College Strategic Plan:** The guiding principles of WMU colleges (mission and vision statements), core values, as well as objectives and strategies.

**9.2 University Strategic Plan:** WMU's mission, vision, and objectives are found in the Our Future: 2032 strategic plan: <https://wmich.edu/strategic>

**9.3 Institutional Research Reporting:** Institutional Research reports allow assessment-driven improvement. Careful and consistent attention to rates of retention, time-to-degree, student success (expressed as a percentage of course grades), and other common reports have informed the department's approach to student learning and program improvement.