

## REVIEWING THE UNIVERSITY CORE CURRICULUM

*Approved by Assessment Committee  
October 15, 1997*

### **Preface**

Assessment has been defined as

*an ongoing process of improving student learning through program development and review. Program development in this context would include the research and development of new course work, revision of current course work, addition of new faculty, [and] professional development of faculty.... Program review would consist of efforts to assess the degree to which courses meet ... goals and the degree to which students are developing the abilities that each of these courses aims to promote.*

The following plan is presented in this spirit.

### **Purposes**

The overall intent of this plan is to assess the success of the University Core Curriculum (UCC) as a whole by assessing the degree to which students are able to achieve success in each of its individual categories.

Another purpose of the plan is to involve as many faculty members as possible in assessing the success of the UCC by charging a series of ad hoc faculty committees--hereafter called Category Assessment Committees--with developing the most appropriate means of assessment in each case. (These means will most likely vary from category to category). This is an on-going process that will contribute to an enriched dialog about, and assessment of, the effectiveness of the UCC and its individual categories.

The data received from these assessments will not speak for themselves and must be interpreted by the Category Assessment Committees. It may be that a Committee will recommend that an individual category be revised, or that course work or class limits be revised, or that faculty and teaching resources be enhanced.

### **Plan**

In order to determine its continued effectiveness, and to initiate improvements in the program, the University Core Curriculum will be reviewed and evaluated on a five-year cycle as outlined below. Each year, one of the following UCC categories--A/B/C1-2/C3-5/D--will begin the process in Year 1.

In order to conform to the University-wide Program Review Schedule already in place, this plan will be implemented during 1997-98 with Category B, resulting in the following schedule for Year 1:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Category to Begin in Year 1</u>
1997-98	B: The Self
1998-99	C1-2: The World (History/Individual Development and Social Relations)
1999-00	C3-5: The World (Science/Western Culture/Global Communities)
2000-01	D: The Synthesis
2001-02	A: The Mind

This arrangement will allow the UCC assessment plan to be synchronized with the University's Program Review Schedule, which concludes its cycle in 2000-01 and begins anew in 2001-02.

**Year 1:** A Category Assessment Committee representing full-time faculty teaching in the designated category will be formed. The size of the Committee will vary by category but there will be a minimum of three members each. Members will be nominated by departments which contribute to the category being reviewed. Final selections (including determination of the exact size of the Committee) will be made by the University Core Council. Each Committee will elect a chair who manages its work.

The Committee will be charged with reviewing the status and effectiveness of its category. Specific questions to be addressed will include:

1. A survey of the category's current status: its goal and objectives, and the courses and methods currently used to fulfill them.
2. A plan to assess the effectiveness of the current program in meeting the category's objectives. Such a plan may include:
  - a. Studies of input (e.g. reviews of syllabi, assignments, and examinations; assessment reports from instructors teaching in the category; etc.)
  - b. Studies of output (e.g., subscores [e.g., in math] on the November Academic Profile; other tests [selected or designed by the faculty] to be given on Assessment Day; portfolios; survey of faculty opinion on student capabilities as evidenced in subsequent courses; etc.)

c. Studies of teaching resources and support needed for program and faculty development.

3. Initial recommendations for improving the effectiveness of the category. These might include clarifying or updating goals and objectives, limiting, expanding, or revising the courses used to meet those objectives, and suggesting new equipment, teaching strategies, or faculty development programs.

The Committee's plan and recommendations must be reviewed and approved by the University Core Council.

**Year 2:** The assessment plan selected in Year 1 is applied.

**Year 3:** The same Committee analyzes assessment results and makes final recommendations for changes in the curriculum, in teaching methods, or in whatever area the assessment indicates to be in need of attention. Again, the Committee's report is reviewed and approved by the UCC Council.

**Years 4 and 5:** The recommended changes are implemented.

When the Category B project moves into Year 2, Category C1-2 begins its Year 1 work, and so on, so program review, evaluation, and reform become continuous processes.

### **Category Assessment Committees**

Criteria for selecting membership: The procedures for selecting Category Assessment Committee (CAC) members are described above under **Plan: Year 1**. Criteria used by nominating departments will be chosen by those departments. Criteria used for final selection of members by the University Core Council will include the nominees' awareness of relevant issues and the need for balance among disciplines and perspectives.

If an individual Category Assessment Committee wishes outside membership (i.e., membership by faculty members from departments that do not contribute to the category being reviewed), it may propose outside membership to the University Core Council. However, outside membership will not be required.

Criteria for selecting size of committees: The University Core Council will determine the size of the Category Assessment Committees based upon the amount of assessment work involved in each category. For example, assessing the Mathematics, Ethics, or Health/Fitness categories would probably require the minimum of three members, whereas the Individual Development/Social Behavior and Global Communities categories may require more than three

because of the number and variety of courses offered in each.

Preparation of Category Assessment Committees: The Director of UCC Assessment (see **Administration and Funding** below), who will serve as an ex-officio member of the University Core Council, will coordinate this preparation based upon that person's research into general education assessment.

Term of service: Category Assessment Committee membership will last three years. The Committee chair will be available for advisement during implementation in Years 4 and 5.

Implementation verification: Subsequent Category Assessment Committees will verify the implementation of recommendations during the first year of the next five year cycle.

### **Methods for Measurement**

It is central to this plan that questions about methods, instruments for measurement, and criteria for determining satisfactory outcomes be answered by each Category Assessment Committee, subject to final approval by the University Core Council. The methods and criteria appropriate for reviewing, say, Mathematics (Category A2) will of necessity be quite different from those appropriate for reviewing, say, The Arts (Category B2). Given the broad nature of the UCC, generic, program-wide methods and criteria are inappropriate.

### **Reporting Assessment Data**

Assessment data will be collected and interpreted by the Category Assessment Committees, who will then make recommendations to the University Core Council. The standards for reporting collected data, interpretations, and recommendations have yet to be established, but these reports will be communicated to the Council, which will evaluate them and communicate its findings to the University Assessment Committee. Based upon these results, the Council may also make specific budgetary requests to support funding of recommendations.

In addition, the Director of UCC Assessment will regularly report the progress of Category Assessment Committees to the Council and the Assessment Committee.

### **University Context**

The working relationships among the various committees and offices responsible for assessment must be clearly articulated by the Faculty Senate. In informal discussions of the issue at Senate meetings during the Spring 1997 semester, the University Core Council was instructed to report its assessment-related activities to the Assessment Committee, which will include the information in

its annual report to the Senate. Roles to be played by the Curriculum Committee and Director of Institutional Research and Assessment have yet to be clarified by the Senate.

The UCC plan for review will operate on its own five-year cycle, working in tandem with the cycle approved for the University's Program Review Schedule. In the fifth and final year of that schedule (during the first cycle, this will be 2000-2001), the results of the UCC's previous five years of review will be summarized and included in the University's assessment reports. For this reason, the University Core Curriculum should be added to the list of programs scheduled for review in 2000-2001.

### **Self-Assessment of Review Process**

Checks and balances for a fair and reasonable review process will be provided by the University Core Council and the Assessment Committee. Specific assessment plans, results, and recommendations made by each Category Assessment Committee must be reviewed and approved by the Council. In turn, Council recommendations must be reviewed and approved by the Assessment Committee.

After the first complete five-year cycle, the University Core Council and the Assessment Committee will review the effectiveness of the UCC Assessment Plan. This review will occur during the years in which the University Core Curriculum is listed on the University's Program Review Schedule. (For the first cycle, this year will be 2000-2001). The Director of UCC Assessment will institute and manage any revisions to the plan.

### **Administration and Funding**

The Vice President for Academic Affairs has appointed a Director of UCC Assessment to research how other colleges and universities have designed and implemented the assessment of their general education programs, to recommend detailed ways of implementing the UCC assessment plan (including recommendations on the ways the Category Assessment Committees should be constituted and the available means of assessing individual categories), and to coordinate the continued implementation and evaluation of the plan.

Additional funding for a student worker, for travel to professional meetings, and for supplies (standardized tests, portfolio videos, questionnaires, mailings to students, and the like) will also be required.