

# Academic Assessment Plan for The University of Montana:

## Introduction

Academic assessment at The University of Montana is an ongoing process with the highest priority. As part of that process, we regularly reaffirm our dedication to assessment and expand our understanding of assessment as a dynamic process. In this document, we review basic principles of assessment established at The University of Montana and build on these to create a university-wide plan.

Institutional assessment projects at The University of Montana—Missoula use a wide variety of measures such as standardized testing, portfolios, surveys of undergraduate and graduate students and alumni, and a writing assessment developed at the university. The findings are analyzed and summarized for use throughout the university. Communication requires continual attention and improvement so that results can be used for informed action.

Assessment also occurs at the program and department levels. Procedures for department reports have been streamlined, and faculty develop department-specific assessment procedures and tools as they integrate assessment into their educational efforts.

Students have primarily served as the “instruments” by which we obtain information about their learning. They participate in assessment activities, but they must become more aware of their own accomplishments and concerns as they complete assessment measures and realize the importance of making personal assessments regarding achievement of educational aims. This remains a goal at The University of Montana—Missoula.

The university also obtains external feedback in its assessment activities. The feedback ranges from that provided by advisory boards comprised of community members to institutional and discipline-specific accreditation agencies. These bodies contribute to programs and their development, as well as provide guidance for assessment activities.

The University of Montana addresses academic assessment and planning at a foundational level in its Mission Statement:

## Mission Statement

The mission of The University of Montana—Missoula is the pursuit of academic excellence as indicated by the quality of curriculum and instruction, student performance, and faculty professional accomplishments. The University accomplishes this mission, in part, by providing unique educational experiences through the integration of the liberal arts, graduate study, and professional training with international and interdisciplinary emphases. Through its graduates, the University also seeks to educate competent and humane professionals and informed, ethical, and engaged citizens of local and global communities. Through its programs and the activities of faculty, staff, and students, The University of Montana—Missoula provides basic and applied research, technology transfer, cultural outreach, and service benefiting the local community, region, state, nation, and the world. (Approved by the Board of Regents, March 2001).

## Principles of Assessment

As the university has developed, implemented, and reviewed its assessment goals and procedures, a number of principles have emerged. These principles are outlined below.

1. An academic assessment plan should be comprehensive in scope, but specific assessment projects should be targeted, allowing for a flexible and dynamic system that can be modified to include new goals and concerns.

2. Assessment should combine centralized and decentralized activities. In general, statements of goals and objectives are to be developed by faculty within units, and activities should maximize the role of faculty in the assessment process. A comprehensive assessment of students' overall performance can be carried out at a more central level.

3. Assessment should be incorporate multiple measures, including direct and indirect measures of learning. Each unit should develop their own approach to assessment.

4. Assessment should be aimed at evaluating academic programs and educational opportunities to identify areas of excellence and areas for improvement. Neither the performance of individual faculty or individual students is to be evaluated.

5. Assessment activities should encompass in their design findings from research, and those responsible for assessment should be knowledgeable about relevant research. Workshops and other presentations and information should be made available for all those planning and implementing assessment activities.

6. Assessment is an evolving process that builds on past practices combined with experimentation and change to yield improved practices. Assessment should be built on the ongoing efforts of faculty and staff to enhance students' learning and experiences at the university.

## Objectives of the Assessment Plan

To assess students' academic and personal growth at The University of Montana, assessment objectives have been identified. These include:

1. To ascertain the knowledge and skills, values, and expectations of entering students.
2. To evaluate growth in students' knowledge and skills from their participation in General Education coursework.
3. To evaluate growth in students' knowledge and skills from their participation in the coursework and programs offered in their major fields of study.
4. To delineate what factors are related to students' progress and graduation.
5. To discover how students view their educational experience and to determine how satisfied they are with the adequacy of their preparation for the future.
6. To measure students' success in employment and/or further education.

## Assessment Process: Program Level Assessment

Every academic department at The University of Montana—Missoula submits an Assessment Report to the Office of the Provost each year. The report summarizes assessment activities within the department and provides information about changes that may have been made to curriculum and/or organizational structures in the department in response to assessment data.

In brief, every department outlines up to five student learning outcomes in response to the question, "What do you want the student who completes your major to know and be able to do?" The departments also provide a list of measures used to assess students' learning and a list of program-level changes that have been made.

The Assessment Advisory Committee evaluates these reports using five criteria:

1. Is there a Mission Statement? Is it well-articulated and assessable (measurable)?
2. Does the department report a set of objectives/goals/outcomes. Do these fit the mission of the department and are they measurable? Is there a clear focus (e.g., on service, research, student learning)?
3. Does the department report a set of measures (direct or indirect)? Will these measures yield evidence or data useful to the department with respect to program evaluation and improvement?
4. Is there a plan and/or structure in place to use the assessment data? How successful is this plan likely to be?
5. Has the department used the data to revise the program or create initiatives? Are there plans for continued assessment?

Assessment Reports are formatted and posted on the Provost's website (example given below).

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## Music Department

### Mission Statement

The mission of the Department of Music is to provide a comprehensive instructional program in music that will develop teachers, performers, composers, scholars, and informed audiences. In addition we strive to set and maintain high standards of musical excellence for a broad and diverse community of constituents. At the same time we acknowledge the value to ourselves and our students in interaction with other departments on campus in the belief such efforts will broaden our sphere of influence resulting in promotion of the role of arts in our culture. Finally we recognize a responsibility to be of service to the greater region by providing leadership and public service to students and teachers in schools and communities. The Department of Music and the other units of the School of Fine Arts were recently recognized by the Northwest Accreditation Association as being "a jewel in the crown of The University of Montana."

- To develop the aural and analytical skills required to enter into graduate studies or the professional music world.
- To display a high level of technical skill and a capacity for artistic expression on their chosen musical instrument in both solo and ensemble situations.
- To achieve a minimum level of keyboard proficiency necessary to work in music professions and to satisfy NASM accreditation requirements.
- To experience a varied and diverse selection of musical experiences both through performance and perception.
- To acquire the historical and cultural knowledge to engage in scholarly research and critical inquiry for the purpose of musical interpretation and in preparation for possible graduate studies.
- For B.M.E. students: to develop the skills and competencies to gain certification and become outstanding music teachers.

### Measurement of Goals

All students are required to take two years of Music Theory and Aural Perception. All B.M and B.A. students take an additional year of Forms and Analysis. In addition, students are required to pass sight - reading exams on their instruments at their semester juries, and pre-Upper-Divisional Recital Program (UDRP) Exams.

All music department students are assessed by audition on their major instruments when entering the

program. Each semester of study requires the student to participate in one large ensemble. Each semester these ensembles perform several times on campus, and often on tour. Each semester of one-on-one pedagogy requires a juried examination assessed by area instructors. At the end of the sophomore year all students must perform and pass an Upper-Division Recital Program Exam assessed by the full music faculty. Upper Division students give full or half length public recitals (depending on the degree program). Each recital is preceded by a pre-recital hearing assessed by the area faculty.

All students in the B.M. and B.M.E. programs must pass a ten-part piano functional exam by the end of their sophomore year to proceed to upper-division status. B. A. students must take a minimum of one year of class piano.

All music students must have participated in or attended at least 154 concerts to obtain a music degree.

All students must take three semesters of music history and at least two writing courses in music history. Students must also demonstrate historical and repertoire knowledge of their instrument in area juries, paper and conference presentations, and in preparation of program notes.

B.M.E. students are assessed for competency on all musical instruments, conducting and orchestration. In addition, these students must take courses in psychology, health sciences, and education to achieve their Montana teaching certification.

## Modifications

Aural Perception teachers believe we should offer a unified approach to solfeggio and ear training. Next semester we will informally combine selected sections of this class.

In order to define performance expectations for student performers and to create a better assessment tool for faculty adjudicators at the Upper-Division Recital Program Exam, the department recently created new assessment forms for each of the performance areas. Because of these forms, the quality of both student recital and faculty feedback has been enhanced. As of Fall 2006, this exam will be listed as a class, MUS 220

As of Fall 2006, students will enroll in MUS 219, Piano Proficiency Assessment for 0 credit and CR/NCR grade. Advisors and faculty will now be able to track those students who need extra assistance in this area. The passing of the ten-part assessment will also appear on the student's transcript.

Because our students would benefit from more direct exposure to professional artists, the department plans to offer more master classes and guest artist interactions for students. As of Fall 2006, MUS 386, Concert Attendance, will appear on the student transcript at the completion of this requirement.

The department plans to revise the upper-division music history curriculum to provide a more variety and depth in global, cultural, and genre topics in musicology. Upper-Division period courses will be changed to two new courses: MUS 436, Topics in Music History and MUS 437, Topics in Music and Culture.

In order to better prepare our music education students for using computers in the classroom, we will incorporate instruction in music technology into the B.M.E. curriculum.

THE DRAFT SECTION THAT FOLLOWS WAS ADDED IN AUGUST 2006 FOLLOWING THE SUMMER INSTITUTE ON THE ASSESSMENT OF GENERAL EDUCATION. PROCESSES FOR GENERAL EDUCATION ASSESSMENT ARE BEING DEVELOPED.

## Integrated Assessment for General Education

All students must complete General Education Requirements in order to obtain a baccalaureate degree at The University of Montana. These include three competency requirements and distributional requirements in six perspectives, as follows.

The faculty of The University of Montana—Missoula requires that all graduates of the University (1) possess the ability to write with clarity of thought and precision of language; (2) that all graduates possess the ability to accomplish basic algebraic manipulations and achieve mathematical literacy at a level typically presented in college mathematics courses; and that (3) upon completion of the Foreign Language Competence a student will have knowledge of a language other than English sufficient to read and write elementary texts and, when the language is modern, to understand basic speech and to carry on simple conversations; or upon completion of the Symbolic Systems Competency, a student will have sufficient knowledge of a symbolic system to be able to perform elementary operations in the system, including correct notation.

Students must also complete successfully 27 credits in six perspectives—(1) Expressive Arts, (2) Literary and Artistic Studies, (3) Historical and Cultural Studies, (4) Social Sciences, (5) Ethical and Human Values, and (6) Natural Sciences. At least one course completed from perspectives 1 through 5 must be non-western, and at least one course from perspective 6 must include a laboratory experience.

Assessment of General Education goals and objectives respects the same overarching principles outlined above: comprehensive, yet focused; centralized and decentralized processes; multiple measures, and evaluation of General Education goals rather than faculty or students. In addition, assessment of the perspectives will be done at the course level, yet reported in aggregate; embedded assessment is emphasized, faculty expertise is utilized and developed; and external, standardized assessment tools are used to validate the results of the internal measures.

Faculty who teach courses within a perspective are asked to include the student learning goals for that perspective on the syllabus for the course. For example, the intended outcomes upon completion of Perspective 4, indicate that a student will be able to:

1. describe the nature, structure and historical development of human organizations and/or relationships.
2. comprehend the role of theory in explaining social phenomena.
3. generate and/or interpret social science data.
4. assess and evaluate the significance of social phenomena.

Beginning in Fall 2006, faculty will coordinate an embedded assessment exercise, in which specific measures of the student learning goals for a perspective are obtained from multiple courses, assessed using a common rubric by a perspective-level committee, and forwarded, in aggregate, to the Office of the Provost. These data will be evaluated and disseminated to all units.

The University of Montana has selected the Collegiate Learning Assessment to determine how well students are doing with respect to gains in critical thinking, analytic reasoning, problem solving, and written communication. On a recurring schedule, first-year students complete the CLA in the fall semester and senior students in the spring semester. Comparisons are made across institutions ( $N = \sim 1100$ ) using deviation scores and across the institution using differences scores. These data also provide external validation for internally generated assessment tools such as the Upper Division Writing Proficiency Exam and perspective-level improvements in learning.

## Selected Tools for Assessment

LEARNING OUTCOMES	Where it happens	Tool or Instrument used to measure			
		Institutional	Department		
Students' Learning					
Discipline-specific knowledge	Programs/Depts	Grade distributions	Capstone Course		
		Retention rates	Discipline-specific exams		
		Graduation rates	Exit interviews		
		Placement exams	Grade distributions		
			Public performances		
			Awards		
			Placement (job, grad school, internships)		
			Portfolios		
			Common exams		
			Course-embedded assessment		
			Senior thesis		
			GRE topic exam		
			Bar exam or other accrediting exam		
		General knowledge knowledges		Grade distributions	Course-embedded assessment
				Retention rates	Portfolios
Graduation rates					
Placement exams					
Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA)					
Writing skills	Composition courses	UPDWA	Capstone coursework		
		First-year prompts study	Portfolios		
	All coursework				
	Capstone seminars				
Information literacy	Library	Standardized Assessment of Information Literacy Skills (SAILS)			
Symbolic Systems/Math	Math courses Language courses	College Board Validity Study in Math and Science (CBVS)	Common exams Math placement exams		

ENGAGEMENT			
Research Participation	Programs/Depts	NSSE	Enrollment in major
			Advisor visits Presentations at conferences
Extra-Curricular Activities	Across campus	NSSE First-year prompts study	Student clubs
MULTICULTURAL LEARNING		Enrollment in multicultural coursework reported annually to Board of Regents	

