Assessing the First Year of College Experience:
A Multifaceted, Integrated Approach

Greg Lampe – Associate Vice Chancellor
&
Gregg Nettesheim – Senior Information Manager

Office of Academic Affairs

February 2006 Conference on the First-Year Experience
Challenging Context

The challenge: 13 campuses + a central office = 1 university
- Strong campus and department cultures
- A predisposition against assessment

Response:
- Commonly developed curriculum and policies
- Common assessment methods
ESFY Assessment Planning Process

➢ **Intentional approach:**
  o Linking ESFY assessment to institutional mission and priorities
  o Reflecting critically on measures that could be useful in decision-making and curriculum planning

➢ **Integrated approach:**
  o Integrating standardized assessment instruments with existing institutional measures
  o Blending quantitative measures with qualitative measures

➢ **Focused approach:**
  o Limiting assessment strategies to key goals of initiative
  o Focusing on desirable outcomes of initiative
  o Focusing on data that could be useful to multiple constituencies

➢ **Engaging approach:**
  o Engaging faculty and staff in the development of assessment measures and tools
  o Developing clear and coherent reporting methods of key assessment findings
Challenging Context

The challenge: non-residential, commuter campuses
- Difficulty fostering awareness of the program
- Reduced sense of community
- Reduced participation in co-curricular activities

Response:
- Use of in-class surveys whenever possible
- Use of short, targeted web surveys
Challenging Context

The challenge: A two year university teaching a freshman/sophomore baccalaureate, general education curriculum
- Reduced opportunity for follow-up in 2\textsuperscript{nd} year
- No follow-up possible within the Colleges in the 3\textsuperscript{rd} and 4\textsuperscript{th} year

Response:
- Intensive monitoring in first year
- Emphasis on retention
- Follow-up with transfers within the UWS
Meaningful Assessment

To be meaningful, assessment must be informative:

- How does the First Year Experience support achievement of the institutional mission?
- How does the First Year Experience improve student success and retention?
- What does the First Year Experience tell us about the overall effectiveness of the UW Colleges?

To be meaningful, assessment must be useful:

- Measure the effectiveness of the *Engaging Students in the First Year* (ESFY) initiative
- Inform changes to the ESFY initiative
- Inform changes to curriculum and instruction delivered to first year students
University of Wisconsin Colleges Mission Statement:

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.

Engaging Students in the First Year Mission Statement:

The University of Wisconsin Colleges’ first year of college experience will focus on first year students as they make the transition from their high school or post high school experiences to the college experience. This intentional, comprehensive curricular and co-curricular initiative will promote an understanding and appreciation of liberal education, will assist students with developing strategies and attitudes that will maximize academic success, familiarize students with campus resources and how to use them, foster the development of positive relationships between and among students, faculty, and staff, and prepare students to become life-long learners, responsible citizens and leaders.
Coherence and Integration

Conduct assessment that is consistent with:

- The mission of the UW Colleges
  - The UW University of Access
  - Freshman/Sophomore transfer institution
- The mission and goals of the ESFY program
  - Assess the various curricular, campus community and student success aspects of ESFY.
- The UW Colleges student populations
  - Level of readiness for college
  - Curricular needs
  - Barriers to success
  - Academic aspirations
Assessing the First Year of College Experience: A Multifaceted, Integrated Approach

Coherence and Integration

Integrate assessment of the first year experience with:

- Other assessments being conducted
  - Assessment of general education
  - Assessment of student engagement
- Analysis of student retention
- Reporting of university outcomes
Methods and Instruments

Survey Instruments:

- First-Year Initiative from EBI Inc.
  - Designed specifically for first year students
  - Good fit for the UWC ESFY initiative

- Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE)
  - Learning centered indicators
  - Broadly administered

- Internal Surveys
  - Annual survey of student goals and intentions
  - Orientation survey to new freshmen
  - Foundations of Excellence self-study survey of students and faculty.
Methods and Instruments

Assessment of general education proficiency

Proficiencies:
  a. Analytical Skills
  b. Quantitative Skills
  c. Communication Skills
  d. Aesthetic Skills

b. Quantitative Skills Performance Indicators
  1. Solve quantitative and mathematical problems
  2. Interpret graphs, tables and diagrams
  3. Use statistics appropriately and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Geography&amp;Geology</th>
<th>Freshmen</th>
<th>Sophomores</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GEO 101</td>
<td>Prior Credits →</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exceeds Expectations</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meets Expectations</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fails to Meet Expectations</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

B2 – Interpret graphs, tables and diagrams
Assessing the First Year of College Experience: A Multifaceted, Integrated Approach

Methods and Instruments

Incorporate First Year Assessment into other Assessments

Retention to a 3rd Term by High School Rank and FYS Enrollment
6 Year Average

Retention to a 3rd Term by Curricular Group and FYS Enrollment
2 Year Average

February 2006 Conference on the First Year Experience - 11 -
Significant Findings and Lessons Learned

In the First-Year Seminar:
- Reading materials matter
- Students value survival skills over academic skills
- Enrollments in FYS are too conventional
  - Predominantly traditional age students
  - Predominantly full-time students

In the first year students are seeking more interaction:
- With other students
- With instructors
Significant Findings and Lessons Learned

Enrollment in First-Year Seminars improves retention, but the benefits may not be uniformly distributed.
Significant Findings and Lessons Learned

- First year students are students *in transition*
- Acquiring or relearning general education skills
- Need and want higher education survival skills
- Looking for academic direction
- Looking for direction beyond academia
Significant Findings and Lessons Learned

- Distribute ownership of the initiative
- Beware of over-assessment
- Integrate first-year assessment into existing assessment practices, and vice versa
- Maintain momentum
Appendix A – Environmental Scan

Campus Participation in ESFY Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2005</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First-year seminars</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intro. To college programs</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common reading</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills workshops/guest speakers</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall campus convocation</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity “passport” model</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study abroad</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New student special events</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career center</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhanced curricular offerings</td>
<td>Na</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(learning communities, service learning, project-based learning, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Assessing the First Year of College Experience: A Multifaceted, Integrated Approach

Questions, Comments and Suggestions

Greg Lampe – glampe@uwc.edu

Gregg Nettesheim – gnettesh@uwc.edu