The ad hoc committee was tasked with answering two questions: (1) what would an evaluation process look like; and (2) is this possible to complete in a year.

Prior to answering these questions, our first task was to identify exactly what the Curriculum Committee should be assessing. Because the committee’s contractual obligation is “...from time to time conduct a College-wide study of the overall academic program in order to consider and propose major changes in the curriculum design”, we needed to know what was meant by the “overall academic program”. After some consultation, we determined this statement refers to the general education requirements, not the curriculum of academic departments.

Generally, our recommendation is an assessment plan with annual objectives. It is unlikely that all aspects of the core could be assessed within one academic year, and so each year an assessment committee would randomly select student work samples to assess from core courses. Prior to initiating this assessment process, one year (2013-2014) is needed to finalize core learning objectives, tools to assess the objectives, and receive training on how to use the e-portfolio system. This process allows for continuous accumulation of assessment-related information using valid methods. We outline in greater detail the recommended methods for implementing the assessment over the next several years.

**Assessment Methods**

**Assessment Committee.** To successfully implement this process, the Ad Hoc committee recommends a special committee be established by the All University Committee, which would include faculty representation, at least one member from the Curriculum Committee, the Dean of Institutional Assessment, and the Faculty Liaison for Assessment. By including the Associate Dean of Institutional Assessment, we can ensure there is continuity across academic years, and that assessment procedures for the common core are coordinated with other assessment practices on campus, in order to minimize the impact on instructors. Ideally, the committee will include faculty members from departments whose courses are to be evaluated.

**Learning Outcomes:** The first task of the assessment committee will be to note any difficulties with objectives as currently stated. The objectives to be assessed are articulated in the WSU Core Course Objectives & Requirements document.

**Student Work:** An optimal strategy to assess learning outcomes is to evaluate student coursework. All student work will have the student’s and instructor’s identifiers removed to ensure anonymity. The effectiveness of the curriculum in achieving Core objectives is assessed, not individual students or instructors.
**Grading Rubrics.** Rubrics are widely used across institutions of higher education to assess core learning outcomes. We recommend that the assessment committee consider using or modifying LEAP rubrics—these tools have established inter-rater reliability, face validity, and content validity. They were designed specifically to assist with the process of assessing core curriculum learning outcomes.

**E-Portfolio System:** Westfield State University will soon offer a university-wide e-portfolio system. The choice of this system is dependent on its capacity to provide students with a useful method of self-reflection and promotion (e.g., for jobs), and the system’s ability to support assessment practices.

**Year-End Assessment Report.** The year-end assessment report should describe the learning outcomes assessed that year, the methods that were used, results of inter-rater reliability, results from rubric grading, and commentary on learning objectives. The comments should focus on (1) the objectives themselves; (2) whether students have satisfactorily achieved the objectives; (3) recommendations on curricular and/or assessment revisions in response to the findings; and (4) how recommendations from the previous year were addressed. The assessment methods should allow the committee to identify whether outcomes can be linked to the structure of the core or implementation of core standards.

**Professional Development.** Monetary support should be provided on an annual basis to members of the assessment committee for training in using and implementing grading rubrics.

**TIMELINE FOR IMPLEMENTATION**

**YEAR I (2013-2014)**

- Form assessment committee
- Finalize learning outcomes to be assessed
- Choose and modify (if needed) LEAP rubrics
- Develop rubrics for learning outcomes not provided
- Pilot with a few core courses

**YEAR II (2014-2015)**

- Assess Appreciation of the Arts & Diversity
- Report to curriculum committee

**YEAR III (2015-2016)**

- Address methodological recommendations from YEAR II
- Assess Composition, and Literary & Philosophical Analysis
- Report to curriculum committee
YEAR IV (2016-2017)

Address methodological recommendations from YEAR III
Assess Math/Applied Analytical Reasoning and Science
Report to curriculum committee

YEAR V (2017-2018)

Address methodological recommendations from YEAR IV
Assess Social Understanding and US History & Government and
Report to curriculum committee

Final Points: Some core course objectives, as currently stated, are too vague, and so attention must be paid to this either when planning the assessment or interpreting the results. The Ad Hoc committee also believes it is important to assess not just student outcomes, but how core courses are implementing/addressing the objectives. This can be assessed by asking instructors to upload assignments, for example, and describe how the assignment tests for specific objectives.

Conclusions

To answer the initial questions: (1) it would not be feasible to assess the entire core in one academic year; and (2) an assessment plan would require one year to finalize the methods, then use a four-year rotation to assess core learning outcomes. We thank the full Curriculum Committee for the opportunity to share with you our work this year, and we look forward to your feedback and discussion.

Respectfully submitted,

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