

Update Report: Student Outcomes Assessment Plan  
Land Resources and Environmental Sciences Department  
April 18, 2006

The Department of Land Resources and Environmental Sciences (LRES) implemented our initial student outcomes assessment plan during Spring of 2004. The Plan included preparing tools for dissemination to undergraduate and graduate students to obtain feedback concerning their perceptions regarding the quality and effectiveness of our curricula, courses, instructors, and advising. These tools have been used for the past two years. We plan to reevaluate these this spring/summer to assess their utility, and to determine whether some questions might be reworked or replaced. As noted in the Plan, we created and filled a new position of Instructional Programs Coordinator. This individual is responsible for helping with many administrative aspects of our programs, and coordinates the provision of outcomes and advising assessment tools to students.

We have recently convened a faculty workgroup to reevaluate our existing outcomes assessment protocol, and to investigate whether some modifications might create a more effective system. This committee should finalize their recommendations by mid-summer. The 2004 LRES Assessment Plan stated that departmental faculty would review and discuss our outcomes program on a biennial basis. This has not yet been completed (we are now at the 2-year mark), but will be a part of our consideration of the updated Assessment Plan recommendation provided by the faculty workgroup. We have, however, discussed the outcomes process and information thus obtained at a departmental Curriculum Committee meeting, and addressed our curricula and student outcomes at a two-day faculty retreat during summer of 2005.

Additional insight into student outcomes has been gained from our annual capstone course, where students synthesize the information, skills, and tools they have obtained in their previous and concurrent disciplinary courses. By evaluating the quality of student small group sub-projects, and the processes leading to the final written and oral presentations, we are able to gain useful information as to the 'quality' of their learning relative to our goals and expectations. One important shortcoming of this otherwise excellent 'practical feedback' opportunity is that most of our own (LRES) disciplinary courses are offered at the senior level, thus students will either be taking many of these courses concurrently with the capstone experience, or will not yet have taken them. Scheduling realities unfortunately do not allow for a different relationship between the capstone and other courses (unless we bring them back for a fifth year!). We have utilized the information gained from our outcomes assessment to modify the courses required in our curricula, and to address perceived information or learning 'deficits' in relevant courses.

To date we have only partially undertaken collection of sample examinations, lab reports, capstone course activities and products, and other materials to assist in documenting students' experiences in their courses. Our procedures for in-depth peer review of teaching, currently under substantive revision, will include acquisition of these materials, so will provide excellent synergy with respect to our outcomes assessment efforts.

Finally, with respect to graduate education, we have created a new faculty committee that is charged with reviewing and updating graduate program requirements and standards. The

recommendations of this committee will also inform our collective outcomes endeavors.

**Supplement:** Summarized responsibilities of the LRES Instructional Programs Coordinator position (as requested by a review team memo dated March 8, 2005):

Under supervision of the Department Head, the person in this position will coordinate and advance overall instructional efforts within the department of Land Resources and Environmental Sciences (LRES). The primary emphasis is to develop and achieve shared departmental goals to enhance the quality and effectiveness of undergraduate and graduate student educational programs, services, and experiences. The position will assist faculty with writing grant proposals in support of instructional efforts (e.g., Higher Education Challenge Grants program), will have oversight responsibility for such grants and for additional aspects of the department's instructional program, and will prepare or help prepare educational materials for undergraduate and undergraduate students. The person will be expected to develop new programs and activities related to student recruitment and retention, and will determine how to implement such programs and activities. The person will develop relationships with new and existing clients, including potential employers, to augment existing educational efforts. The position has primary responsibility to provide and document excellent recruitment, orientation, advising, support, progress facilitation, records preparation and maintenance, and advising/outcomes assessment activities for students at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Will supervise hourly and work study employees. Will work independently and in cooperation with the LRES Department Head, Certifying Officer, Curriculum Committee, individual faculty, and with appropriate MSU offices and personnel.