

**The**  
**Brooklyn College**  
**Outcomes Assessment Plan**

**Fall, 2001**

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## **OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT PLAN FOR BROOKLYN COLLEGE**

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

The Report of the Evaluation Team of the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools that visited Brooklyn College in 1999 included the recommendation that "a campus-wide comprehensive outcomes assessment plan be developed and implemented" (25). In response to this recommendation, the Outcomes Assessment Plan Committee (OAPC) of Brooklyn College was formed in December, 2000 by the Acting Provost. Its membership represented a cross-section of the College community, including administrators from both Academic and Student Affairs, members of the faculty from the major divisions of the college, and members of the professional staff (see Appendix A). The committee was chaired by the Dean of Undergraduate Studies.

The OAPC's charge was to develop an Outcomes Assessment Plan for the College by October, 2001. In the preliminary phase of its work the OAPC reviewed numerous internal documents, including the 1998 Title III grant proposal for the creation of an outcomes assessment plan; the 1999 Brooklyn College Self Study Report; and the 2000 Brooklyn College Strategic Plan. It examined and drew upon existing outcomes assessment plans at other institutions, particularly the College of Staten Island. It also relied heavily upon three publications of the Commission on Higher Education: Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education; Designs for Excellence; and Framework for Outcomes Assessment. The Outcomes Assessment Plan is closely linked to the implementation of the Strategic Action Plan and employs the Strategic Action Plan's three major goals as its organizing principles.

As a result of these initial deliberations, the OAPC identified five principal categories for assessment, three of which corresponded to the major goals set forth in the Brooklyn College Strategic Plan. Subcommittees were created to study and prepare a report on each of these categories, some of which were further divided into subcategories. A sixth subcommittee was established to draft the introduction, rationale and governing principles. The separate subcommittee reports were revised and merged by the OAPC to produce the Brooklyn College Outcomes Assessment Plan.

With the arrival of a new Provost and the availability of additional resources including the latest draft revision of Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education, it seemed appropriate to revisit and rethink certain aspects of the plan as submitted by the OAPC. For this purpose, the College requested and was granted an extension of the original deadline for submission of its plan to November 1, 2001.

## II. THE DEFINITION OF OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT

According to Framework for Outcomes Assessment (1996), "the fundamental purpose of assessment is to examine and enhance an institution's effectiveness, not only in terms of teaching and learning, which rest at the heart of the mission at colleges and universities, but also [in terms of] the effectiveness of the institution as a whole" (1). The revised draft of Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education (2001) amplifies this definition:

Outcomes assessment involves gathering and evaluating quantitative and/or qualitative information that demonstrates congruence between the institution's mission, goals, and objectives and the actual outcomes of its educational activities. . . . The systematic assessment of student learning is essential to monitoring quality and providing the information that leads to improvement. Implemented effectively, the assessment of student learning will involve the shared commitment of students, administrators and academic professionals. The assessment of student learning has the student as its primary focus of inquiry. . . .

The mission of the institution provides focus and direction to its outcomes assessment plan, and the plan should show how the institution translates its mission into learning goals and objectives. In order to carry out meaningful assessment activities, institutions must articulate statements of expected student learning at the institutional, program, and individual course levels, although the level of specificity will be greater at the course level. (42)

The chapter on outcomes assessment in the College's 1999 Self-Study also provides a statement that is pertinent to this project:

The purpose of the Outcomes Assessment Plan is to identify practices and programs at Brooklyn College that are doing well and those that need improvement, covering administrative operations, student services, teaching and learning. The process of outcomes assessment should engage all members of the college community in a continuing study of goals and effectiveness. The process should be circular or interactive, as the study of goals looks to the study of effectiveness and the latter looks back. Since the whole process itself is the key feature of the Outcomes Assessment Plan, it should not be thought to come to rest with a meaningless accumulation of more reports; good ideas must invigorate planning, not just within a program but among programs. Successes must feed into teaching throughout the curriculum. (130-31)

Clearly, outcomes assessment at Brooklyn College must be directly related to the mission and character of the College, as reflected in its mission statement (see Appendix B). Outcomes assessment is not an end in itself, but a means to an end, namely, the improvement of teaching, learning, service, and research. Outcomes assessment is not a onetime event, but an ongoing and self-renewing process of self-examination and self-improvement. At Brooklyn College outcomes assessment will mean seeking the answers to the following questions: 1) What do we want our students to learn? 2) What skills do we want our students to develop? 3) What should our students be able to do in order to demonstrate what they have gained from their Brooklyn College education? 4) What are we doing as individuals and as an institution to promote student learning and development?

### III. PRINCIPLES GOVERNING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT

The following principles should guide outcomes assessment at Brooklyn College:

**1. The primary purpose of outcomes assessment should be to improve College programs and services through a continuous process of self-examination.**

Outcomes assessment has two generally recognized purposes: accountability and improvement. Assessment that is conducted for accountability purposes involves demonstrating that the public funds used to support higher education are being spent wisely. Assessment that is conducted for improvement purposes involves using the knowledge gained through self-examination to promote those college-based activities that are found to meet or exceed expectations, and/or to fix what may fall short of expectations. This latter approach to assessment is governed by a spirit of inquiry that is often lacking in the former.

Assessment for accountability typically involves externally mandated comparisons of a college's performance either with the performance of other institutions or with an arbitrary performance standard established by the same external agency that is mandating the comparison. These comparisons are normally made using a limited set of outcome indicators chosen, for the sake of expediency, from among those data that are widely available at the state or national levels.

Assessment for improvement approaches performance from a different perspective. With this approach, a college compares its actual performance to its expected performance, as revealed in a set of locally developed outcome goals and objectives. Since these outcome goals are locally developed, they can be more sensitive to the mission and character of the institution. Locally determined goals can also be more detailed, thereby more closely approximating the true complexity of higher education's impact on students and the wider society.

Assessment for improvement, then, emphasizes the measurement of the degree to which the goals developed for itself by the College are being achieved. It seeks to use this knowledge to improve teaching, learning, research and service through an ongoing, self-renewing process of self-examination.

**2. The outcomes assessment plan should derive from and reflect the overall mission and character of the College as a senior institution of the City University of New York.**

Assessment for improvement demands that actual performance be measured against outcome goals and objectives that are locally defined. These goals and objectives should be derived from and clearly reflect the mission and character of the institution.

The College's mission statement and broad institutional goals, by themselves, cannot be used for assessment purposes. They are too abstract and all-encompassing to be used as a yardstick against which we might measure observable college outcomes. Although they do provide an overall direction for the institution, a more specific framework that can be translated into specific measurable outcome goals and objectives can be derived from the College's Strategic Plan.

**3. The focus of outcomes assessment should be on courses, programs and services, not on individual students, staff or faculty.**

The goal of outcomes assessment at the College should be program improvement. Assessment activities should not be used to judge the performance of individuals.

Assessment is most effective when those engaged in it believe that they can learn from what is successful and apply that knowledge for further improvement. Commitment to this process of continuous quality improvement can be undermined if assessment is linked to personnel decisions or to individual students' progress through the institution.

**4. Assessment should recognize and respect variation among members of the College community and among College programs of study.**

Outcome goals and objectives, assessment methods and the analysis and use of results must not be prejudicial to any segment of the College community. Assessment must be designed in a way that respects diversity.

Program heterogeneity must also be respected. Academic disciplines and programs approach the teaching and learning process from different perspectives, each expecting unique outcomes from their endeavors. The various student services programs also have unique goals and objectives. Clearly at an institution of the complexity and diversity of Brooklyn College, a one size fits all approach to assessment is not desirable.

**5. Outcomes assessment must occur at both the academic program and the course level. The faculty of academic departments are best suited to design the assessment of outcomes related to their courses and academic programs. Similarly, the faculty and staff of student services and other support offices are best suited to design the assessment of outcomes related to their programs and activities.**

Outcomes assessment is best designed by those who possess the knowledge of a discipline or service area and an awareness of the objectives of that academic or service program. Faculty and staff, working with students and/or community representatives as appropriate, as well as with each other, should establish the outcome goals and objectives for their programs, courses, and activities, determine the appropriate assessment methods, and decide how best to use the knowledge gained to improve the processes underlying teaching, learning and service. Consequently, each program's assessment plan will be, to some degree, unique. Training for those engaged in this process will be essential. Outcomes assessment should begin with orientation for the participants in best practices, drawing on outside expertise.

**6. Outcomes assessment should be as direct and simple as possible.**

Whenever possible, outcomes assessment should take advantage of appropriate existing data and other self-evaluation processes that are already in place. Assessments should, to the extent possible, evaluate outcomes directly rather than through secondary "proxies." Outcomes assessment measures should be precise and thorough but not unnecessarily complex.

**7. Outcomes assessment should be multidimensional and should involve the use of both quantitative and qualitative, formative and summative measures.**

Multiple perspectives and methods must be used to assess outcomes, since approaches that are appropriate in one area of college life may not be appropriate in another. Both quantitative and qualitative outcomes data should be gathered and used to determine whether locally developed goals and objectives are being achieved. Quantitative and qualitative baseline data on entering students should be collected to allow us to judge how our students progress during their years at the College and in their future endeavors.

**8. Outcomes assessment should yield a comprehensive understanding of the College's impact on students and the wider society.**

In the end, the various strands of outcomes assessment should be pulled together to yield an integrated, holistic understanding of what is happening at this institution. This can only be

achieved when outcomes assessment is carried out for the purpose of improvement and when it is related to the mission, goals and strategic plan of the College. An in-depth understanding of college-wide outcomes is essential for improved institutional performance.

**9. Outcomes assessment should be a continuous process of self-examination and improvement.**

To be of greatest value, outcomes assessment should be continuous. It should not be started and stopped based on any calendar of external demands for information; rather, it should be an ongoing process in which goals, objectives and assessment measures are identified, reexamined and modified in a continuous feedback loop.

The desire to improve teaching, learning, research and service is a constant. Faculty, students, and staff are always concerned about ways to improve their performance. Outcomes assessment should be a constant too, because it provides a useful tool for determining if one's efforts have been successful.

**10. Outcomes assessment should involve all segments of the College community and become an integral part of campus life.**

The widespread involvement of faculty, staff and students at every stage of the outcomes assessment process is critical to its success. The entire College community should feel a sense of ownership of the program, because this will enhance their commitment to achieving outcome goals and improving performance.

#### **IV. AREAS FOR OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT**

Based on Brooklyn College's mission statement, which encapsulates the College's essential purposes, values and characteristics, the OAPC has identified five broad categories for outcomes assessment. The first three of these categories correspond to the three major goals set forth in the Brooklyn College Strategic Plan. Certain of these categories have been further divided into subcategories. The fourth and fifth general categories were added to ensure that all areas of the college are involved in the assessment process and that all areas of the plan are integrated into a comprehensive understanding of the institution's effectiveness.

##### **1. Academic Quality**

Brooklyn College is committed to first-rate academic programs, taught by a distinguished faculty to an academically able student body. It attaches great value to teaching, research, and scholarship, recognizes and rewards faculty accomplishments, and creates an atmosphere conducive to learning. It is in these terms that we define academic quality. To assure academic quality, the College must be vigilant in holding the different facets of its academic enterprise to the highest standards and take bold initiatives to expand and secure the vitality of that enterprise. (Strategic Plan)

Assessment of academic quality will take place under the following specific rubrics:

- **General Education**
- **Learning in the Major and in Graduate Programs**
- **Faculty Development and Research**

##### **2. A Student-Oriented Campus**

Brooklyn College is about students, in the classroom and out of it. Having recruited them to the College, we must provide them with a collegiate setting that enables them to meet their educational goals, gives them a college experience that encourages them to complete their studies at the College, and bonds them to the institution and to one another. Their needs and interests must be at the center of our concerns and activity. (Strategic Plan)

The interactions among students, faculty and staff at Brooklyn College are an integral part of the educational and developmental process for our students. Such interactions occur not only in the classroom, but in all official and unofficial facets of campus life. A positive, student-centered environment is essential to the promotion of teaching and learning as well as to the creation of a sense of collegiality and community.

Assessment of the student-oriented campus will take place under the following specific rubrics:

- **Academic Support Services**
- **Student Life**
- **Other Official and Unofficial interactions with Students**

##### **3. Model Citizenship in the Borough of Brooklyn**

As a public institution, Brooklyn College has public obligations. It educates and trains students, most of whom reside in Brooklyn. It plays a role in the immediate neighborhood and is known and active in the community at large. It looks to the borough as a subject of study, as a laboratory, as a setting for practical involvement through internships, training programs, and fieldwork. It depends on the community for financial and political support. The College has been and can be enormously enriched

by interaction with the community, and it can play an important leadership role in its affairs. (Strategic Plan)

Brooklyn College strives to be a model citizen-an engaged campus that provides an environment that is conducive to teaching and learning and that is accessible and welcoming to community residents. In short, the College must be both an institution of outstanding academic quality and a good neighbor.

Assessment of model citizenship in the Borough of Brooklyn will take place under the following specific rubrics:

- **Teacher Training**
- **High School Outreach**
- **Credit and Non-Credit Workforce Training**
- **Community Programs**
- **Contributions to Cultural Life**

#### **4. General Student Outcomes**

The overarching goal of the educational experience at Brooklyn College is to provide students with the knowledge and skills to live in a globally interdependent world and the support services to help them succeed. The College also seeks to develop a sense of personal and social responsibility by encouraging involvement in community and public service. It fosters a campus environment hospitable to multicultural interests and activities. Moreover, as an urban institution, it is able to draw upon the myriad resources of the city to enhance its educational mission. (Mission Statement)

As a supplement to the direct assessment of student learning, most institutions developing and implementing assessment programs have also made provisions to assess learning by indirect means ("proxy measures") through studies of such areas as retention, graduation, post-graduation student satisfaction surveys, results of graduate and professional school admissions tests, grade point averages and alumni surveys. These indicators provide important information about student learning although they are not strictly classified as learning per se. We believe that a comprehensive assessment program should examine these variables in order to complete the picture of our institution's success in fulfilling its mission.

#### **5. Institutional Effectiveness**

Institutions should develop guidelines and procedures for assessing their overall effectiveness as well as student learning outcomes. The deciding factor in assessing institutional effectiveness is evidence of the extent to which it achieves its goals and objectives. The process of seeking such evidence and its subsequent use helps to cultivate educational excellence. One of the primary indications of the effectiveness of faculty, administration, and governing boards is the skill with which they raise questions about institutional effectiveness, seek answers, and significantly improve procedures in light of their findings. (Characteristics of Excellence 16)

Outcomes assessment is not limited to academic and student affairs. In order for the College to fulfill its mission, all of its official and unofficial policies, practices, and procedures must be examined, and all units must be involved in the assessment process. These units include the following areas:

- Budget and Finance
- Technology
- Facilities and Operations
- Campus Safety and Security

- Human Resource Services
- Institutional Planning and Research
- Admissions
- Financial Aid
- Registrar
- Bursar
- Scholarships
- Counseling
- Fundraising
- Library Services

The outcomes assessment plan must integrate all assessment activities to ensure that all areas of the College support its mission.

## **V. METHODS OF OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT**

It is important that outcomes assessment at Brooklyn College be both professional and feasible. Adequate time and resources must be devoted to the task of designing in the five areas identified above, means of assessing outcomes that will involve all segments of the College community in an effort that is consistent with the College mission. At the same time, assessment must be sustainable within the given resource constraints faced by the institution.

Outcomes assessment must not detract from the very efforts (i.e., teaching, learning, service and research) that it is intended to enhance. Assessment should not place demands on students, faculty or staff that are excessive or overly burdensome.

To satisfy the demands of both professionalism and feasibility, the following general guidelines will be followed when implementing outcomes assessment at Brooklyn College:

1. Adequate time will be given for the initial development of assessment in any given area. Start-up activities will be staggered so that not all programs and service areas initiate development of their assessment plans at the same time. To begin with, two departments in each of the College's academic divisions will initiate their assessment process. This will spread start-up costs over a period of several years, thereby enhancing program viability. This approach fosters the development of a cadre of internal consultants who can advise their peers, thereby enhancing program quality.
2. Once all components of the Assessment Plan have been initiated, the timetable should be built-in and continuous. This will ensure that resource demands in any particular year do not threaten the sustainability of the overall program. Outcomes assessment will contribute to, but not replace, regular program review.
3. Whenever possible, existing data will be used in the assessment process. New data will be collected only when questions arise that cannot be answered by data that have already been collected and housed in various College offices.
4. College-wide data that can be disaggregated by program will be provided to programs involved in outcomes assessment so as to avoid duplication of effort.
5. Both qualitative and quantitative data will be used to provide evidence of student learning.

### **Three Steps for Outcomes Assessment**

In general outcomes assessment in each of the areas identified in Section IV will proceed in accordance with the following three steps:

1. Articulation of Goals and Outcomes
2. Identification of Assessment Measures
3. Implementation and Ongoing Modification

These steps, taken together and repeated in a continuing cycle, constitute the outcomes assessment process.

### **Academic Quality: General Education**

Assessing student learning in General Education is a key component of Outcomes Assessment at Brooklyn College. The undergraduate General Education program at the College is a source of pride and national renown for our faculty and our entire College community. It is important that

we ensure that in either its present form or a different form the program delivers the best possible education to our students. Outcomes assessment is an important tool to enable us to regulate and enhance student learning in this area.

General Education at Brooklyn College consists of a number of components. Chief among these is our nationally prominent Core Curriculum, a series of 13 courses that every Brooklyn College student (except some transfer students and majors in certain disciplines who can opt out of the Core course most closely related to their discipline) must complete. Other components of General Education at Brooklyn College are the writing requirement (English 1 and 2), the foreign language requirement, and the speech requirement. The writing requirement is being expanded via the Writing Across the Curriculum initiative.

#### 1. Articulation of Goals and Outcomes

The first step in the assessment process for General Education must be the development of goals and desired outcomes for the program that are broadly accepted throughout the College community. The goal set from SUNY is shown in Appendix C. We have also reviewed the general education outcomes statements of California State University (Monterey Bay). A series of goals were instituted when the Core was first promulgated and are listed in Appendix D. These must be reviewed, possibly expanded to accommodate change over the past 20 years, and, as necessary, restated in terms of desired and measurable outcomes.

Goals and outcomes should be developed both for the program as a whole and for individual courses within the program. The goals and outcomes for courses should be explicitly related to the program goals and outcomes, and it should be clear how the course goals and outcomes advance the program goals and outcomes.

The program goals and outcomes should be set by a college-wide General Education Assessment faculty body (the GEA Committee) consisting of representatives of the Core Curriculum Committee, the Writing Across the Curriculum Committee, and the College Undergraduate Curriculum Committee. The GEA Committee should consult with the Core course coordinators and representatives from other courses such as foreign language and speech courses within the General Education program.

Course goals and outcomes should be set by the faculty of the department( s) most closely related to each Core course, and those goals and outcomes should be reviewed by the GEA Committee. Students should also participate in these discussions. The original goals for the Core Curriculum, developed in 1980, can serve as the starting point for goals development for outcomes assessment in the current decade. Once goals and desired outcomes have been established, they should be communicated to students through mechanisms such as course syllabi and other forms of documentation.

Central to the goal- and outcomes-setting process both for the program as a whole and for individual courses are answers to a few closely intertwined questions: 1) What are we trying to teach our students? 2) What do our students need to know? 3) What skills do they need to develop? 4) How do the goals and desired outcomes of a particular course articulate with the goals of the entire General Education program? 5) How will we measure achievement of these goals and outcomes?

Proposed program and course goals and outcomes for the General Education program should be the subject of wide dissemination and comment across the entire College community, and comments received during this process should be used as additional input.

## 2. Identification of Assessment Measures

As goals and desired outcomes are established, the assessment methods and procedures will arise out of them. The methods used will be qualitative and/or quantitative. Outcomes measures should demonstrate students' mastery of factual knowledge, analytical reasoning, appropriate skills and the ability to synthesize and use information. Departments and faculty may find that many such measures are already in place and only need to be formally identified and acknowledged.

Course-level assessment measures designed to demonstrate student progress toward articulated course goals may include:

- A uniform exam
- A common question or questions embedded in exams for all sections of a specific course
- Portfolios of students' work
- Laboratory activities and assignments
- Analytical papers
- Research and library activities and assignments
- One-minute in-class papers and evaluation sheets
- Journals
- Pre-and post-tests
- Midterm and final examinations
- Student presentations and performances
- Student contributions to class discussions and/ or collaborative group activities

Program-level measures of student learning may include:

- Surveys, interviews and/or focus groups of alumni and current students
- Reviews of selected students' writing portfolios in writing intensive courses
- Student performance on the CUNY Proficiency Examination
- Student performance on examinations such as GRE, LAST, LSAT, or MCAT

## 3. Implementation and Ongoing Modification

As the assessment measures are applied and results are collected and analyzed, conclusions will be drawn as to how well students are learning and how the learning process at both the course, and program level may be improved. This formative assessment process will provide feedback for continuous modification and improvement.

As the assessment process continues, modifications may be made to the General Education program itself. Such changes may be curricular and/or methodological. The interpretation of the assessment measures, the drawing of conclusions as to how to improve their results, the associated curricular and methodological changes, and the reexamination of goals and assessment measures will constitute an ongoing cycle.

### **Academic Quality: Learning in the Major and in Graduate Programs**

A central component of outcomes assessment at Brooklyn College will be assessing student learning in the undergraduate major and in graduate programs. Outcomes assessment in both areas will advance in a manner parallel to the assessment of General Education. The principles common to all good outcomes assessment apply. Any strategy must balance the imperative of effective outcomes measurement with the pragmatic considerations of available time and resources.

The primary purpose of outcomes assessment in the major and in graduate programs will be to improve student learning through a process of self-examination. Outcomes assessment should derive

from and reflect the mission of the major or the graduate program. While outcomes assessment in both should *not* focus on individual faculty or students and should respect diversity among faculty, departments and programs, it must nonetheless be linked to demonstrable goals and outcomes which the faculty envision for their courses. To a significant extent, program-level goals and outcomes should reflect and be built upon course-level goals and outcomes. The most appropriate designers of outcomes assessment for a major and a graduate program are thus the faculty of the major department or program.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The term *major* as used here is equally applicable to the term *program*. So too, the terms *department* and *departmental* are intended as synonyms for *program* and *programmatic* respectively.

## 1 . Articulation of Goals and Outcomes

The articulation of clear goals and desired outcomes must be the starting point. Goals and outcomes will, of course, vary widely from discipline to discipline, but within each discipline the goals and outcomes should be widely accepted by the faculty. The faculty must therefore take whatever steps are needed to ascertain what students should be learning and what skills they should be developing in their courses and programs. This can be done in a number of ways, of which the following are but a few examples: the collection and analysis of syllabi which speak by their practice to the implicit goals and outcomes of the curriculum; analysis of past departmental mission statements and/or of previously stated departmental goals (often embedded in departments' self-study and annual reports); organized discussion in focus groups (either small or large or in some combination of the above). The goals and outcomes of any major or graduate program ought, of course, to be consonant with the mission and General Education goals of Brooklyn College.

Many faculty will find that central to the goal- and outcomes-setting process for both courses and programs are answers to a few closely intertwined questions: 1) What are we trying to teach our students? 2) what do our students need to know? 3) what skills do they need to develop? 4) What should our students be able to do when they have completed their major or graduate program? 5) How will we measure achievement of these goals and outcomes? 6) And (for graduate programs), how do specific courses and the program as a whole prepare students for the careers they intend to enter?

As any programmatic outcomes statement ought to reflect the goals of the faculty and their courses, it is therefore essential that all faculty be encouraged to articulate the goals and outcomes for students in their courses. While all the goals and outcomes of every course may not be reflected in the stated goals and outcomes of the major or graduate program, they ought to be in line with programmatic goals and to contribute to them.

To assure that goals and outcomes are developed and articulated in a timely manner, the department chairperson should appoint a committee charged to develop a statement of goals and desired outcomes and set an appropriate timetable. The charge should emphasize that, whatever the specific means chosen, the process should be carried out in a way that assures the input of the entire faculty. It is not necessary that everyone agree on every detail, but the goals and outcomes that are basic to the major should be clear and widely accepted.

## 2. Identification of Assessment Measures

On both a programmatic and course level, the identification of appropriate assessment measures should arise out of goal setting. Course goals and outcomes should be linked to program goals, and the assessment measures that are chosen or developed ought to measure student learning progress in a demonstrable way.

We are all expected to grade students. There should be clear connections between the grading process and course goals and outcomes. When we grade, for example, an essay or an examination, we should be evaluating student progress toward specific course goals and outcomes. The grading process may include a number of different measures. Some of these may be qualitative, others quantitative; which of these predominates depends on the nature of the major or graduate program.

Course-level assessment measures designed to demonstrate student progress toward articulated course goals and outcomes may include:

- Midterms and final examinations
- Portfolios of students' work
- Laboratory activities and assignments

- Analytical papers
- Research and library activities and assignments
- One-minute in-class essays and evaluation sheets
- Journals
- Pre- and post-tests
- Student presentations and performances
- Student contributions to class discussions and/or collaborative group activities

Program-level assessment measures of student learning may include:

- Standardized tests
- Review of student portfolios
- Senior thesis or seminar, or a masters essay or comprehensive examination, or a creative, synthetic capstone project
- Student performance, exhibition or other public presentation of creative work
- Student teaching or field work or community-based internship project with a journal or other form of reflection and self-assessment
- Student performance on examinations such as the GRE, LAST, LSAT or MCAT
- Surveys, interviews and/or focus groups of current or past students in the program

There are sundry other possibilities. The faculty of each major or graduate program are best suited to decide what measures will be appropriate. Whatever methods are chosen, each course should have a means of measuring student success as a group in advancing toward articulated goals and outcomes.

As faculty assess current measures and develop new ones for assessing student learning in a major or graduate program, they must also articulate and review procedures for evaluating the results of those measures. According to what criteria will the examinations be graded? On what basis will student portfolios be evaluated?

### 3. Implementation and Ongoing Modification

Measuring student learning will lead to an evaluation of the process itself and of the measures that were applied and to making needed corrections. The committee on outcomes assessment of student learning in a major or graduate program will thus establish a baseline for assessment. Depending on what procedures are feasible for measuring student learning in a given department or program, this task may be simple or complex. Faculty members will be encouraged to develop their own goals and assessment measures. but these must reflect the goals and desired outcomes of the program.

Once initiated, outcomes assessment should become a recurring process of self reflection and improvement in the major or graduate program. The department or program may wish to initiate changes in program structure, course work or program goals, depending on the findings indicated by the outcomes assessment process.

### **Academic Quality: Faculty Development and Research**

In the rapidly changing world of the twenty-first century, new developments in teaching, scholarship and research are a constant of academic life. The outcomes assessment process, with its goal-centered and performance-centered orientation, will increase the process of change in the academy. To ensure the best outcomes for our students, faculty currency and preparedness must be enhanced and targeted at the goals we set for our institution. The outcomes assessment process must acknowledge and incorporate our understanding of changing faculty roles and must find ways to assess innovations such as computer-enhanced education and non-traditional forms of scholarship and publication. The benefits of faculty activity in all areas should be iteratively improved and focused.

We are fortunate at Brooklyn College already to have an extensive program of faculty development. The Center for Teaching, the Wolfe Institute, the Office of Research and Program Development, Academic Information Technology Services, the committees for the annual Faculty Day, the Freshman Year Seminar, and the Writing Across the Curriculum seminar, all do or promote significant faculty development on campus. The College will use the activities of and participation in these programs to create a database of faculty activities and a set of outcomes measures for the faculty as a whole.

Additional methods of assessing faculty development and research may include the following:

1. A questionnaire to faculty regarding the College environment and how it affects their work. The questionnaire will explore support for teaching and research, the intellectual and aesthetic environment, governance issues, morale issues and diversity issues.
2. A series of surveys, interviews and focus groups on the subjects of teaching, research, scholarship and creative work and the balance among them, the possible and actual outcomes of these activities, the best indicators of these outcomes, and the best way to improve and measure these outcomes.

These activities should lead to the specification of the outcome goals and methods for measuring these goals. Outcomes include not merely scholarly papers, creative works, books, software, reviews, committee work, administrative activities and community service activities, but also the effects these activities have on the discipline, on peers within and outside the College, on students, on community residents and on the general public, as well as on teaching and curriculum development.

The nature of faculty activity outcomes calls for a more flexible assessment process, with special emphasis on qualitative measures. The dialogue and self-evaluation that is engendered by outcomes assessment in this area is also a valuable and useful activity in institutional self-improvement.

### **A Student-Oriented Campus**

In assessing our effectiveness as a student-oriented campus, we are in reality assessing the quality of campus life in the larger sense. This includes the interactions, transactions, programs, support opportunities, environment, resources, collegiality and campus community that comprise the learning environment at Brooklyn College and support the college's educational mission and goals.

Campus life is an enormous force in the development and learning of our students. The way we support and develop student academic and co-curricular success by instituting a campus culture of learning and development is the basis for outcomes assessment of the quality of campus life.

Goals and desired outcomes for a student-centered campus should be set by a college-wide Student-Oriented Campus Assessment Committee consisting of representatives of the Division of Student Life and of academic support services such as the Academic Advisement Center, the Learning Center, the Library, the Computer Center, the Center for Personal Counseling and Career Services, and the Offices of the Registrar, the Bursar, and Financial Aid. While the college-wide Student-Centered Campus Assessment Committee should be responsible for planning and carrying out the assessment of the quality of campus life, students, faculty and staff will be involved in all aspects of the process, and individual departments and divisions will be encouraged to consider their own student-centered values in preparing their individual assessment plans.

The plan must be feasible for implementation, and must be supported equally with the assessment of academic programs.

The following are the steps for establishing campus-wide outcomes assessment for a student-centered campus.

### 1) Articulation of Goals and Outcomes

Goals and desired outcomes for a student-oriented campus will be articulated in relation to the institutional mission.

General elements for inclusion are:

- A summary of programs, support services, and other interactions with students
- A statement of the goals of individual programs as defined by those responsible for them
- A statement of their relationship to the goals of the institution
- General objectives for student achievement or competencies
- General objectives for student cognitive and affective skill development

### 2) Identification of Assessment Measures

Both qualitative and quantitative measures will be used. Examples include: quality of campus life inventories, developmental inventories, focus groups, alumni surveys, surveys for stop out students, retention data, graduate surveys, and employer follow up. Other outcomes assessment measures include:

- The ratio of student acceptances to enrollments
- Student retention rates
- The degree of student involvement in co-curricular programs
- The degree of utilization of academic support services and special programs
- The number and success of events and activities that address diversity and promote cultural exchange
- The extent of staff training to promote campus life and foster a student-friendly environment
- The extent of collaboration and cross-training within and across offices and departments to assist students and prevent their "running around" to resolve an issue
- The degree of student inclusion in campus governance and advisory processes

### 3) Implementation and Ongoing Modification

Assessment measures will be applied and modified as appropriate, data will be collected, and the results will be evaluated. The first step will be the development and administration of a student satisfaction survey. Conclusions will be drawn regarding the quality of student-centeredness on campus and the steps required to bring about improvement.

Results of the assessment will be communicated to faculty, students and staff as points of departure for program modification and improvement. It is critical that the process include formalized feedback loops to related university processes and programs (e.g., academic advisement, leadership development) so that findings do not just remain in a vacuum but have potential to influence the larger campus community.

## **Model Citizenship in the Borough of Brooklyn**

Brooklyn College makes many contributions to the surrounding community, by employing the borough's citizens, supporting the community's financial health, educating its workforce including its teachers, and providing an array of cultural and community-based activities. In order to determine whether these and other contributions are having the beneficial effect that both the College and members of the community desire, it is necessary to develop a means of assessing programs and their impact on the community.

Brooklyn College has always been widely respected for the programs it provides to train and educate teachers at all levels. In addition to the programs in education provided on campus, there are many creative outreach programs. Information on these programs' effectiveness may include the number of children and teachers who participated, the subsequent performance of the children and the modified practices of the teachers in their classrooms.

High school outreach is an important part of Brooklyn College's community-centered activities. In cooperation with local public schools, the College assists teachers in preparing high school students for college-level work. These programs take place in the high schools as well as on the college campus. The programs not only assist in increasing enrollment by local students at Brooklyn College, they also serve as an invitation to community members to think of themselves as affiliated with the College. The success of these programs may be measured by the participants' high school retention and graduation rates, their performance on the Regents and CUNY assessment exams, and their rate of college enrollment.

Individuals learn not only in the classroom but on the job as well. Brooklyn College is committed to educating the local workforce through both credit and non-credit programs. The relevance of such programs to borough residents will be determined by enrollment data, customer satisfaction surveys, post-program job and career information, and review of support service access. Surveys focusing on adult student employment or promotion will measure the economic impact of the programs.

Brooklyn College prides itself on its community programs within the borough and throughout CUNY. Assessment of these activities will include an account of the growth, variety, scope, and impact of community-building activities, legislative and funding initiatives, student activities (both within the College and without) and the CUNY-wide programs in which we participate. Data on participation and attendance will be collected, along with surveys that assess the impact of the programs within the communities they serve.

Finally, Brooklyn College significantly contributes to the cultural life of the borough through the many special artistic, musical, literary and other cultural events held both on campus at The Brooklyn Center for the Performing Arts and other sites and off campus. These programs are often free and provide access to the College's facilities as well as showcasing the talents of students and faculty. Data concerning community access to College cultural events will be gathered by taking attendance, encouraging attendees to complete surveys, and tracking whether or not people return to the College for further activities or even whether they enroll in an educational program.

### **General Student Outcomes**

General student outcomes consist of indirect indicators of student learning or "proxy measures." These include measures such as retention rates, graduation rates, transfer rates, grade point averages, credit completion ratios, pass rates on licensure examinations (when applicable), and centrally administered survey results. Some of these measures are reported annually in the Brooklyn College Fact Book and in other analyses prepared by the Office of Planning and Research. While these measures do not directly measure student learning, they are an important component of the overall information package and are important assessment tools.

The Office of Institutional Planning and Research has been reorganized during the past year and is now equipped to provide standard and ad hoc reports to academic departments in support of outcomes assessment and to work closely with faculty and staff in these efforts. Admissions, enrollment, performance, and graduation data are used to produce comprehensive descriptive reports that can be aggregated at course, department, division, and college-wide levels using a wide range of variables. Reports such as those described above are routinely generated.

Data collection efforts will be expanded to further support college initiatives, including outcomes assessment. In December 2000, a Data and Information Task Force was established to address these issues and progress has been made in this area. The overall objective is to establish a system that integrates the use of data to insure consistency and availability. As enhancements are incorporated, additional information will be available which will provide additional feedback for assessment.

As part of academic outcomes assessment, we recommend that student performance analyses include comparisons with both internal and external criteria. Analyzing different cohorts, using available data, will provide a variety of information that can be used for assessment.

One framework that can be used is based on Alexander Astin's I-E-O model. This involves evaluating outputs in terms of inputs and the environment. The inputs are the skills and knowledge each student brings to the College and the environment is what the College adds through curricular and co-curricular activities. Using this value-added approach is a good way to assess the impact of programs and changes that result from these experiences. Analyses and results can then be used for projections, planning, and to guide administrative, program, and instructional modifications.

### **Institutional Effectiveness**

#### **1. Articulation of Goals and Outcomes**

In order for the College to be successful in serving its students, all units must critically assess their operations to insure the achievement of desired outcomes. Each non-instructional area will articulate its own specific goals and desired outcomes through a process of collective self-examination and self-reflection. Goals will differ across departments but will all be consistent with the mission of the college. Examples of goals and desired outcomes may include:

- Purchasing
  - Reduce processing time on purchase requisitions by one day
  - Develop website to improve information dissemination to departments
- Financial Aid
  - Offer 10 additional financial aid workshops
  - Increase number of financial aid applicants by 2%
  - Increase student satisfaction with services by 10%.
- Facilities and operations
  - Rehabilitate 5% of the classrooms during the academic year
  - Improve student opinion of campus grounds by 10%
- Human Resource Services/Affirmative Action
  - Increase applicant pool for faculty searches by 10%
  - Increase underrepresented minority faculty members by 12%
  - Reduce attrition rate of technical staff by 9%

#### **2. Identification of Assessment Measures**

After goals are established, it is necessary to determine the methods used for measurement. Examples of such measures may include:

- Surveys
  - Student satisfaction surveys
  - Faculty/staff surveys
- Focus Groups

- Departmental Data
  - Numbers of students applying to the College
  - Numbers of students requesting and receiving financial aid
  - Percentage of students using credit cards to pay tuition
  - Dollar amount of alumni donations
- General Student Outcomes
  - Retention rate for students who applied for and received financial aid
  - Attempted credits, course completion rates and grade point averages for scholarship recipients

### 3. Implementation and Ongoing Modification

Departments will review desired outcomes and assess their performance in light of the available information. Streamlined procedures or new services may result from this process. The assessment effort will inform efforts to improve the functioning of each department and will lead to increased institutional effectiveness.

## VI. THE USES OF OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT FINDINGS

The primary purpose of outcomes assessment at Brooklyn College is to improve College programs and services. Brooklyn College will use its assessment findings in three important ways. First, they will be used to show the extent to which, at a particular point in time, performance matches locally developed mission-related goals and objectives. Second, they will be viewed longitudinally to reveal the long-term relationship between performance and goals (e.g., to demonstrate that the quality of the education we provide is continually improving). Finally, the heuristic value of assessment findings will be that, by revealing strengths and weaknesses, they will guide further study of the ways in which improvement can occur.

The faculty and staff who comprise the various College departments and offices will be both the primary producers, and the primary consumers, of assessment findings. These individuals, with the assistance of peers or off-campus experts, will:

- Define program goals, objectives, and outcomes
- Design (or select), prepare, and administer assessment instruments
- Collect, enter, analyze, and store the raw assessment data
- Prepare summary reports that elucidate the findings
- Collectively consider and act on the implications of these findings.

As longitudinal assessment data becomes available, it will generate discussions, in summary reports, of the impact on outcomes of those changes to program processes that were made in response to earlier assessment findings.

Outcomes assessment findings will also be used to generate a college-wide picture of the effects of assessment on College processes. The College will engage in a continuous process of self-examination and self-improvement.

Finally, it is expected that the College will experience an increasing number of external demands for assessment findings in the coming years. All external demands for assessment data will be channeled through an appropriate college-wide body (see Section VII, below). As a general rule, aggregate, rather than program level; assessment findings will be used when responding to legitimate external requests for information. However, under certain circumstances (e.g., external accreditation), program-level assessment findings may be released to an external agency.

## VII. COORDINATION OF OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT ACTIVITIES

Outcomes assessment at Brooklyn College will involve diverse groups of people engaged in a variety of activities. This process must be coordinated so as to avoid duplication of effort and the over-extension of College personnel and resources. Coordination will also promote high standards of professionalism in all assessment activities, from the development of mission-related goals and appropriate methods, to the analysis and use of the findings. The OAPC proposes the formation of an initial coordinating structure that consists of:

- A College Assessment Committee
- Five Assessment Coordinating Subcommittees
- An Assessment Coordinator

The College Assessment Committee will be a broadly representative body that shapes overall College policy with respect to outcomes assessment. This committee will be the recipient of all periodic reports on assessment activities and findings, and it will serve as the liaison between the College and any external agencies seeking outcomes-related information. As the implementation of outcomes assessment proceeds, the College Assessment Committee may create additional subcommittees or modify or even eliminate the original subcommittees.

The College Assessment Committee will consist of the following members: the Provost, the Associate Provost, the Dean of Undergraduate Studies, the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research, the Dean for Student Life, the Assistant Vice President for Budget and Planning, five department chairs (one from each academic division), the four Assessment Subcommittee chairs, a member of the professional staff, a student representative, and the Assessment Coordinator. The College Assessment Committee will be chaired by the Provost.

The following Assessment Coordinating Subcommittees will be established:

- A Subcommittee on General Education
- A Subcommittee on the Student-Oriented Campus
- A Subcommittee on Model Citizenship in the Borough of Brooklyn
- A Subcommittee on General Student Outcomes
- A Subcommittee on Institutional Effectiveness

Working within guidelines established by the College Assessment Committee, these subcommittees will take responsibility for the implementation of assessment activities in their area.

The Director of Institutional Planning, Research and Assessment will be the Assessment Coordinator. He or she will facilitate and monitor implementation of the Assessment Plan following guidelines established by the College Assessment Committee. The Coordinator will be in regular contact with those departments and offices actively engaged in assessment activities and will respond to requests for information; provide technical assistance (or channel requests for assistance to those on or off campus who can provide the needed expertise); assist, when asked, in data collection, storage and analysis; and receive periodic assessment reports for transmission to the College Assessment Committee. In addition, the Assessment Coordinator will periodically report to the College Assessment Committee on progress in implementing the Assessment Plan. The College will also hire an expert on outcomes assessment of academic programs to work with the faculty.

Finally, assessment will be coordinated with other college-wide activities. The activities of the College Assessment Committee will be coordinated with those of the Faculty Council and its

standing committees. Specific lines of communication should be established between each of the subcommittees and all relevant departments, Faculty Council committees, and campus, community and alumni groups.

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ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education (n.d.). *Critical Issue Bibliography (CRIB) Sheet: Assessment*. <http://www.eriche.org/crib/assessment.html>. Washington DC: George Washington University.

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APPENDIX A

MEMBERS OF THE OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT PLAN COMMITTEE  
AND ITS SUBCOMMITTEES

Ellen Belton, Chair  
Dean of Undergraduate Studies

Nancy Brooks  
Associate Director, Program Services

Steve Jervis  
Professor, English

Melanie Bush  
Special Assistant to the  
Dean for Student Life

Sherwood Johnson  
Director, Financial Aid

Maurie Callahan  
Executive Assistant to the Provost

Manuel Martinez-Pons  
Associate Professor, Education

David Forbes  
Assistant Professor, Education

David Owen  
Professor, Psychology

Philip Gallagher  
Professor & Chair, History

Mariana Regalado  
Assistant Professor, Library

Alan Gilbert  
Assistant Vice President,  
Budget and Planning

Aaron Tenenbaum  
Professor & Chair, CIS

Nancy Hager  
Professor & Chair, Music

Eric Steinberg  
Associate Provost

Nicole Hosten  
Director, College/Community Relations

Norman Weissberg  
Professor, Psychology

Bonnie Impagliazzo  
Director, Government & External  
Affairs

Helen Wussow  
Assistant Dean, Adult Degree  
Programs & Continuing Education

Vicki Irgang  
Director, Center for Educational Change

### **The mission of the college**

Brooklyn College is a comprehensive, state-funded institution of higher learning in the borough of Brooklyn, a culturally and ethnically diverse community of two-and-one-half million people. As one of the nine senior colleges of the City University of New York, it shares the mission of the university, whose primary goals are access and excellence.

Within the context of this broader mission, the particular mission of Brooklyn College is to provide a superior education in the liberal arts and sciences. The college offers a wide variety of programs, both in the liberal arts and in professional and career-oriented areas, leading to the baccalaureate and master's degrees and to undergraduate and advanced certificates. In addition, the college participates in the doctoral programs of the City University of New York, including campus-based programs in the sciences.

Distinctive in this liberal arts education is the core curriculum, which is required of all baccalaureate students. The core has long been a national model for general education programs and for faculty and curriculum development. The ten Core Studies courses are designed to expose students to the principal branches of learning—the arts, humanities, social sciences, and sciences—and to provide a rigorous foundation for study in a major field.

Through its distinguished faculty, the college promotes excellence in teaching, advances the frontiers of knowledge through research and scholarship, and stimulates creative achievement and intellectual growth.

The overarching goal of the educational experience at Brooklyn College is to provide students with the knowledge and skills to live in a globally interdependent world and the support services to help them succeed. The college also seeks to develop a sense of personal and social responsibility by encouraging involvement in community and public service. It fosters a campus environment hospitable to multicultural interests and activities. Moreover, as an urban institution, it is able to draw upon the myriad resources of the city to enhance its educational mission.

## APPENDIX C

### SUNY Assessment Initiative

#### GENERAL EDUCATION LEARNING OUTCOMES

This section delineates the learning outcomes required by the SUNY General Education program.

#### Knowledge and Skills Areas

##### **1. MATHEMATICS**

Students will show competence in the following quantitative reasoning skills:

- Arithmetic;
- Algebra;
- Geometry;
- Data analysis; and
- Quantitative reasoning.

##### **2. NATURAL SCIENCES**

Students will demonstrate:

- Understanding of the methods scientists use to explore natural phenomena, including observation, hypothesis development, measurement and data collection, experimentation, evaluation of evidence, and employment of mathematical analysis; and
- Application of scientific data, concepts, and models in one of the natural sciences.

##### **3. SOCIAL SCIENCES**

Students will demonstrate:

- Understanding of the methods social scientists use to explore social phenomena, including observation, hypothesis development, measurement and data collection, experimentation, evaluation of evidence, and employment of mathematical and interpretive analysis; and
- Knowledge of major concepts, models and issues of at least one discipline in the social sciences.

##### **4. AMERICAN HISTORY**

Students will demonstrate:

- Knowledge of a basic narrative of American history: political, economic, social, and cultural, including knowledge of unity and diversity in American society;
- Knowledge of common institutions in American society and how they have affected different groups; and
- Understanding of America's evolving relationship with the rest of the world.

## **5. WESTERN CIVILIZATION**

Student will:

- Demonstrate knowledge of the development of the distinctive features of the history, institutions, economy, society, culture, etc., of Western civilization; and
- Relate the development of Western civilization to that of other regions of the world.

## **6. OTHER WORLD CIVILIZATIONS**

Students will demonstrate:

- Knowledge of either a broad outline of world history, or
- The distinctive features of the history, institutions, economy, society, culture, etc., of one non-Western civilization.

## **7. HUMANITIES**

Students will demonstrate:

- Knowledge of the conventions and methods of at least one of the humanities in addition to those encompassed by other knowledge areas required by the General Education program.

## **8. THE ARTS**

Students will demonstrate:

- Understanding of at least one principal form of artistic expression and the creative process inherent therein.

## **9. FOREIGN LANGUAGE**

Students will demonstrate:

- Basic proficiency in the understanding and use of a foreign language; and
- Knowledge of the distinctive features of culture(s) associated with the language they are studying.

## **10. BASIC COMMUNICATION**

Students will:

- Produce coherent texts within common college-level written forms;
- Demonstrate the ability to revise and improve such texts;
- Research a topic, develop an argument, and organize supporting details;
- Develop proficiency in oral discourse; and
- Evaluate an oral presentation according to established criteria.

## Competencies

The following two competencies should be infused throughout the General Education program:

### **1. CRITICAL THINKING (REASONING)**

Students will:

- Identify, analyze, and evaluate arguments as they occur in their own or other's work; and
- Develop well-reasoned arguments.

### **2. INFORMATION MANAGEMENT**

Students will:

- Perform the basic operations of personal computer use;
- Understand and use basic research techniques; and
- Locate, evaluate and synthesize information from a variety of sources.

The establishment of a core curriculum at Brooklyn College reflects the faculty's belief that priorities must be set with regard to the core of broad intellectual experience to be required of the liberally educated graduate of the college. A Brooklyn College degree has long stood as a mark of superior achievement and potential to the city and the nation. Continuing to stand in the 1980s as such a mark of achievement, the complete program of study provides true baccalaureate education in the liberal arts and sciences. It ensures, first of all, a well-rounded education that results in the acquisition of knowledge and habits of thought of general and lasting significance, an education which values and promotes the qualities of independence and understanding, and one which provides, moreover, a foundation for making a rational choice of career and the strongest possible sequence of preparation in a major field of study. Such an education, we believe, can best be defined in terms of the abilities and substantive knowledge each student is expected to acquire during the four-year program.

At the time of graduation each student should be expected by the faculty to have attained the following goals:

- Goal 1: Development of the faculty of critical thought and the ability to acquire and organize large amounts of knowledge; along with this, the ability to write and speak clearly – to communicate with precision and force.
- Goal 2: An informed acquaintance with the visres of modern science and a critical appreciation of the ways in which knowledge of nature and man is gained.
- Goal 3: An informed acquaintance with major forms of literary and artistic achievement, past and present, and a critical appreciation of the contributions of literature and the arts to the life of the individual and society.
- Goal 4: An informed acquaintance with the working and development of modern societies and with the various perspectives from which social scientists study these.
- Goal 5: A sense of the past – of the foundations of western civilization and the shaping of the modern world.
- Goal 6: An appreciation of cultures other than one's own, including the diverse cultures represented in the collegiate community at Brooklyn.
- Goal 7: Establishment of personal standards of responsibility and experience in thinking about moral and ethical problems.
- Goal 8: Depth in some field of knowledge, a major field of concentration.

It would be inappropriate to think of the core curriculum as bearer of the entire general education of the student. The core introduces a minimum standard, a minimum level of acquaintance and competence that will be increased in individually selected ways in elective studies and also in the major field of concentration.

Although it is impossible to agree precisely on what the educated man or woman should know, “ the attempt to agree with respect to a limited objective is worthwhile, and the sheer pedagogical advantage of common intellectual experience is not to be lightly set aside.

In very general terms, we seek to expose students in the most effective way to the principal branches of learning and the diverse points of view of our faculty. We have tried to be equally aware of the arguments of those who would build understanding primarily on a study of origins and developments and those, on the other hand, who would argue that we should concentrate on contemporary concerns. We have not limited the core curriculum to either of these perspectives.

The core courses establish both a contemporary perspective and a solid liberal arts base. They emphasize modes of thought as well as substantive knowledge. There is much variety in scope, orientation, and approach – features that stimulate lively student interest. As can be seen in the course descriptions, two courses – in the sciences and world cultures areas - can be most accurately described as modular, and short courses in the arts are run concurrently ( these are not integrated courses, but rather wholes composed of administratively separate but complementary smaller courses ); two others take an interdisciplinary approach; and one is purely discipline-based. The remaining courses are discipline-based but with strong interdisciplinary ramifications. One course is both modular and multidisciplinary. The individual courses are unified in their address of the interlocking goals that have been outlined above.

The core curriculum is founded on the premise that the most effective way to ensure a minimum standard of general education – as defined in the goals stated – is to provide a common educational experience, a uniform and coherent required core curriculum. We will not settle here the argument as to whether it is still valuable in our day to attempt to define an essential core of intellectual experience that every educated person ought to have, or whether it is wiser deliberately to abandon the notion of common intellectual ground and concentrate instead on developing the capacity to probe deeply into particular, individual topics. We see the common experience advantage as in large part pedagogical. Faculty members and students are able to refer to and build on what has been learned before.

This small core establishes requirements in 10 areas which give the student a substantive acquaintance with the kinds of general knowledge that exist, how they were and are acquired, and how they are used in major forms of intellectual discourse. Through a sequence that is both complementary and cumulative, we establish a fund of cross-reference for cross-disciplinary dialogue. In this way, the common experience courses increase the quality of the elective area of the curriculum and add a broader perspective to the student’s chosen major.

It is important to note what this small core does not propose to do. It rejects the inevitably thin survey associated with courses devised to “ cover” the conventional larger divisions of humanities, social sciences, and natural science; and it does not propose an evenhanded introduction to all fields of knowledge, which is not feasible in any case. It also rejects the hit-or-miss choices of inevitably uneven distribution requirements.