

School of Public and Environmental Affairs (SPEA)

2003-2004 PRAC Report on Undergraduate Assessment Activities

Introduction

SPEA is a multi-disciplinary program with undergraduate degrees in public affairs, criminal justice, and public health. The public affairs and criminal justice degrees include areas of specialization called concentrations, and the public health degree has traditional majors. SPEA on the IUPUI campus uses three curricular committees to oversee and make revisions in the public affairs, criminal justice and public health academic programs at the undergraduate levels. Each committee is chaired by a faculty member and all faculty members in SPEA at IUPUI can volunteer to serve on one or more of these committees.

Assessment Methods Used

Each degree program has a capstone course that all students receiving a Baccalaureate degree are required to complete. The capstone courses employ a variety of learning techniques such as examinations, term papers, group projects, debates, and oral presentations. The capstone courses incorporate learning outcomes for the PULs, degree-specific content, and learning outcomes for the major.

The capstone courses are the primary assessment tool for the majors, and assessment procedures are communicated to the student via the syllabi and through in-class discussions. Each instructor is responsible for structuring an assessment tool for evaluating his/her learning outcomes and for providing feedback to the appropriate curricular committee and Undergraduate Program Director. Additional methods for program evaluation and student learning include PRAC program review, focus groups, employer and student evaluation of internships, practicum report writing, student and employer surveys, alumni surveys, student job placement, and course evaluations.

Activities Undertake During the 2003-04 Academic Year

During the past year, the Director of Undergraduate Programs reviewed all course syllabi for a variety of features including learning objectives and PULs. Full-time faculty members were asked to address either or both of these elements, depending on whether or not there appeared to be gaps. By encouraging inclusion of specific language about learning objectives in each syllabus, we're trying to clarify objectives and assess how they fit into the curriculum (major and degree levels).

Associate faculty members were asked to include learning objectives in their syllabi, and this group was introduced them to the PULs. A syllabus checklist was created for associate faculty and the PULs are included as part of the checklist. All of these activities are intended to get associate faculty to think more about what they want students to learn, how to assess this learning, and how to evaluate whether or not their efforts have been successful. Our assumption is that if we're specific about learning objectives, that the tools of evaluation used by associate faculty members will ensure that prescribed learning objectives are met.

During the past year, the Director of Undergraduate Programs began developing performance indicators for SPEA's undergraduate programs. The first efforts to collect such data focused on DFWs which led the Director to look at students on probation and critical probation. The Director of Undergraduate Programs also began compiling information for SPEA with respect to retention and graduation rates. This project is in the early stages and the Director will be involving faculty in discussions of which indicators are most appropriate and useful to us, what these indicators mean, and how we can use them to improve our programs.

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