Ensuring Student Attainment of the Principles of Undergraduate Learning
~ Information for Department Chairs and Faculty ~

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

IUPUI's Principles of Undergraduate Learning (PULs) have an almost 20-year history, dating from discussions about general education that began in 1990. The PULs were formally adopted by Faculty Council in 1998 and revised and reaffirmed in 2007. Taken together, the PULs summarize the general education outcomes and abilities we want all undergraduate students to have opportunities to achieve, regardless of major. (For a listing of the PULs, with definitions, consult http://www.iupui.edu/~fcouncil/documents/PULs.pdf).

In the 1990s, an outcomes-based approach to general education was ahead of its time; most institutions defined general education as a set of course or distribution requirements. Today, the public expects higher education institutions to articulate and demonstrate what students gain from higher education—i.e., learning outcomes. Accrediting bodies also now expect programs and institutions to present evidence that students are achieving key college-level abilities and skills. When the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association conducts its ten-year reaccreditation review of IUPUI in 2012, we must show the Commission team that our students are developing the knowledge, abilities, and attributes embodied in the PULs. Failure to achieve reaccreditation has serious consequences: IUPUI could lose access to all federal funding, including student aid and research support.

After almost a year of campus-wide discussion, the representative committee that is guiding the plans for the 2012 reaccreditation review (the 2012 Committee) has developed a process, detailed in the attachment that follows this one, for gathering and presenting evidence of student learning of the PULs. The faculty of each undergraduate program should determine whether it makes most sense for these activities to take place at the school level, the department level, or at the track or concentration level.

Data on student outcomes will **not** be used to evaluate individual faculty members. The purpose of gathering these data is to gauge program and institutional effectiveness and to suggest ways that faculty can work together to identify areas where academic programs have particular strengths or need development and improvement.

PRIOR WORK

In spring 2009, faculty in every undergraduate department identified for each course one, two, or three PULs emphasized through class activities and assignments. Each PUL was assigned a major, moderate, or minor emphasis (see the review of this process in the next attachment).

Drawing on this information, staff in the Offices of the Registrar and Information Management and Institutional Research (IMIR) have created a database that links courses with PULs emphasized. With this information, faculty members and advisors can use the matrix at http://www.planning.iupui.edu/pul/matrix to enter courses in an academic program or an individual student's plan of study and see immediately which PULs are addressed. That is, by

simply entering course names and numbers using abbreviations such as ENG-W131 in this matrix, faculty and advisors can do the following:

a. Study the PUL coverage offered by courses in a single department.
b. Review the PUL coverage in any combination of courses to determine whether typical course-taking patterns provide students with sufficient opportunities to learn the skills associated with each of the PULs. That is, faculty can use the matrix to identify parts of the curriculum where emphasis on particular PULs might be strengthened, especially if outcome data indicate that student attainment in any of the PUL areas is not satisfactory.
c. Help students develop four-year plans that provide opportunities both within and outside the major department or program to practice and master the complex, higher-order intellectual skills represented by the PULs.

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE

The 2012 Committee is beginning to collect evidence of the PULs' integration in the curriculum and students' achievement of them. Since the faculty has defined the PULs as the key common outcomes of an undergraduate education at IUPUI, this evidence will comprise an important component of our reaccreditation self-study. If the data collection and analyses are to yield meaningful results that speak to the implementation and sustainability of the PULs as the foundation for the IUPUI undergraduate experience, several tasks must be performed by departments and by individual faculty members. The most important tasks include **developing a department- or program-wide plan to evaluate student attainment of the PULs** and, **over a span of five years**, rating students' performance on the PULs emphasized **in at least one section of each course**. Detailed instructions for recording and submitting plans and ratings to IMIR appear in the attachment that follows this one. An application for IRB exempt status for this initiative has been prepared.

OPTIONAL – MINUTE PAPER FOR STUDENTS

For their own personal use, faculty members may wish to ask students about their experiences with the PULs in a course. Some suggested questions for students may be viewed at http://nca.iupui.edu. If using these items, faculty members should **select only the questions** designed for the **one, two, or three PULs emphasized in their course. They also may develop their own items to use instead of, or in addition to, those listed at this site**. This exercise is called a "minute paper" because students will be able to answer the questions in just a minute or so of class time. Student responses may give faculty members some insights that can be used to develop alternative approaches to teaching and evaluating student learning in the course.

NEXT STEPS

Ratings of students' attainment of the PULs will be stored on secure servers in the Office of Information Management and Institutional Research. While a copy of the ratings with student identifiers will be archived in case changes need to be made, the ratings maintained on IMIR servers will not contain student, faculty, or section identifiers.

IMIR staff will provide a summary report of faculty ratings of students' achievement of each PUL in 400-level courses. These campus-wide means and percentages will supply evidence for

accreditors and other external stakeholders of students' attainment of the PULs as they near graduation. Similar summary reports for PUL achievement in 100-, 200-, and 300-level courses will provide evidence for use at the school level as faculty seek the most effective pedagogy and curriculum for advancing student achievement of the PULs. Only campus- and school-level reports will be developed. No results that can be linked to a particular class, section, faculty member, or student will be compiled.

These steps will produce evidence of student achievement of the PULs that can be used as part of IUPUI's North Central reaccreditation self-study. They will be most meaningful if faculty members come together to study the resulting outcomes data to determine areas where pedagogy or curriculum need adjustment. These data might be examined in combination with other available information on student learning—results of licensure or other achievement examinations, results of campus and external surveys administered to students or graduates, and other available data. Discussion and analysis of outcomes data can serve as rich learning opportunities for faculty members. Faculty may wish to include students in these discussions as well.

We hope that this process will lead schools, departments, and programs to identify and implement changes meant to strengthen student learning of PUL-related knowledge and skills. These changes might include course redesign, curriculum revision, or modifications to advising, as well as adjustments in requirements or electives outside the major. Through an ongoing evaluation and improvement cycle, program faculty can determine whether the procedures explained here actually help to strengthen student learning. The annual report that each school submits to the Program Review and Assessment Committee (PRAC) can be used to document improvements undertaken and the impact of those improvements. These reports will provide another source of evidence that IUPUI has institutionalized systematic processes of evaluation and improvement. Most important, the entire procedure—if it works as intended—will lead to real, identifiable gains in student achievement.

Attachment that follows: Instructions for Evaluating Student Attainment of the PULs