The College of Arts and Sciences
Learning Initiative

Between its inception in January 2004 and January 2009, the College of Arts and Sciences’ Learning Initiative provided funding to improve learning in 75% of its academic majors. The Learning Initiative gave teams of faculty funding for projects that included identifying learning goals for majors and for foundational courses, creating active-learning strategies, and assessing outcomes in courses and majors. In addition, the College partnered with the Office of Educational Assessment to provide departments with information about assessment strategies and help in designing assessment methods and instruments.

As the chart that follows this summary shows, Arts and Sciences funded three kinds of projects through the Learning Initiative:

- **Writing.** Workshops for departmental teams of faculty on writing, a learning goal in most Arts and Sciences majors and a writing center for writing and research assistance.

- **Course-based learning.** Assistance with design and assessment of foundations courses for majors, web-enhanced foreign language instruction, and curricular development with a focus on integrating technology, active learning strategies, learning goals, and assessment into courses that serve many undergraduates.

- **Learning in the major.** Help for departments as they identified learning goals for majors, articulated learning goals for courses, created curricular maps for majors, identified methods for assessing learning goals, piloted them, and analyzed results.

The most ambitious of the Learning Initiative projects focus on assessing learning in the major. Proposed by faculty teams in Arts and Sciences departments, these projects called on faculty to identify learning goals for their majors; to track how the curriculum delivered the learning goals to students by developing curricular maps; to determine methods for assessing learning; and to pilot assessment plans. As the chart that follows shows, during the course of the Learning Initiative, about a third of Arts and Sciences departments received funding for assessment of learning in the major. Such funding was often granted for two or more years, because of the challenges inherent in completing each stage of the process. Many of those 13, as well as 17 other departments, received funding to increase active-learning strategies, assess or develop foundational courses in the major, or focus on writing. All projects required faculty to articulate their goals for student learning.

The Learning Initiative contributed significantly to a creating a climate of reflective practice and evidence-based decision making at the UW. This contribution is illustrated by the increase in the number of College departments that had learning goals for majors between 2002 and 2009. In 2002, six College of Arts and Sciences departments had well-formed, clearly-specified
learning goals for majors and another five departments articulated emerging goals. The 11 departments together represented about 28% of the departments in the College at that time. By 2009, 100% of the College’s departments had some form of learning goals for majors. About 85% had clearly-specified goals for majors, and about 15% had general goals and noted that they were still refining them. Nearly every department has instituted assessment measures for learning, many of which are now tied directly to those goals.

The Learning Initiative was suspended in 2009 because of statewide budget cuts.
THE COLLEGE OF ARTS & SCIENCES LEARNING INITIATIVE ~ PROJECTS 2004-08

The Learning Initiative provided funding for departmental projects aimed at assessing and improving undergraduate learning.

**Writing**
- Coordinating disciplinary writing centers
- Providing an undergraduate writing/research center in the undergraduate library
- Engaging faculty teams from four departments at a time in workshops that focus on integrating writing into their courses (61 faculty members from 17 departments)

**Course-based Learning**
- Blending online with face-to-face instruction in introductory foreign language classes
- Supporting curricular innovations
- Creating learning goals and active-learning strategies for large foundational courses serving as gateways into majors
- Facilitating assessment processes

**Learning in the Major**
- Assisting departments in developing learning goals for majors
- Creating curricular maps that track goals through courses
- Identifying methods and sites for assessing learning goals
- Facilitating assessment processes

**Curricular Development**
- Helping departments in developing learning goals for majors
- Creating curricular maps that track goals through courses
- Identifying methods and sites for assessing learning goals
- Facilitating assessment processes

**Web-Enhanced Foreign Language Initiative**
- Spanish* T. Geist K. Boem
- Japanese* K. Ohta
- German* M. Bansleben
- Art (Photog) P. Berger E. Garvens R. Cummins
- Atmos. Science R. Wood J. Thornton
- CHID J. Toews K. Rosenberg

**Foundation Courses**
- Accounting B. Wells E. Widdison
- Biology T. Daniel S. Freeman
- Economics* H. Salehi-Esfahani
- Physics D. Boulware P. Heron
- Psychology* M. Passer
- Communication P. Howard

*Funded for two years