

STRATEGIC PLANNING

Self-Study Report on Standard 2 for The Northwestern Commission on
Colleges and Universities: Assessment

Fairhaven College of Interdisciplinary Studies

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Fairhaven College of Interdisciplinary Studies

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I. Introduction

Assessment activities at Fairhaven College cannot be understood apart from understanding the unique mission, curriculum, and pedagogy of the college within Western Washington University and within the arena of Higher Education in the United States.

Fairhaven College of Interdisciplinary Studies is one of the six undergraduate colleges of Western Washington University. Its purpose is to offer students the opportunity to take an uncommon degree of responsibility for the structure and content of their own education and through its flexible curriculum to provide a site for innovation at Western Washington University. Fairhaven is a small learning community where students design their own degree programs by drawing on the resources of a larger University. The College offers training in writing and research, critical thought and creative expression, independent judgment and scholarship, and narrative self evaluation.

As a learning community, Fairhaven is defined by five attributes: (1) interdisciplinary study, (2) student designed studies and evaluation of learning, (3) examination of issues arising from a diverse society, (4) development of leadership and a sense of social responsibility, and (5) curricular, instructional and evaluative innovation.

Fairhaven has a national reputation for student involvement in learning. The College leads the University in its commitment to interdisciplinary study and in serving a diverse student body in terms of age, ethnic background, academic interest, and life experience.

At Fairhaven, students are challenged to bring what they learn to bear on human concerns and crucial social problems, to experiment, to discover and to act. This style of education supports the development of certain values, virtues and skills: self-discipline, resourcefulness, initiative, self-development, adaptability, reasonable risk-taking, leadership, sensitivity to injustice, and respect for persons.

Engagement in Fairhaven learning experiences prepare students to listen carefully and engage respectfully in discussion, to value different world views, and to appreciate multiple voices expressing the diversity of human experience and dialogue openly and honestly with those in our society and those around the world. To this end Fairhaven values multi-lingualism, study and travel abroad, and attention to international and global issues.

Fairhaven College is committed to gender-conscious and multi-cultural approaches to topics, resources and classroom practices. Courses and other learning experiences provide opportunities to examine the roots and impacts of race, class, and gender relations. They also provide the opportunity to understand long-term ecologically sensitive, sustainable lifestyles. Justice and sustainability are two foci of concern at Fairhaven.

Students in the College are encouraged to find their connection with the world, to understand relationships of thought and action, theory and experience, to cultivate opportunities to apply what they learn and to develop a strong sense of themselves as individuals in a community, including an acknowledgement of the benefits and responsibilities that come from membership in community. Students are encouraged while at Fairhaven to take on leadership roles and learn to negotiate with other leaders in a responsible and effective manner.

Fairhaven College's role in the University is not only to provide a learning environment for students interested in self-designed study and interdisciplinary learning, but also to help the University ask questions about and experiment with solutions to challenges of teaching and learning. Members of the Fairhaven community seek to learn from colleagues in other colleges both within and outside of Western

– through the Fairhaven Distinguished Teaching Colleague program, through other exchange and guest teaching opportunities at Fairhaven and through programs such as the Center for Law, Diversity and Justice and the World Issues Forum. Through programs such as these, Fairhaven provides the opportunity for faculty from other colleges to develop courses with an interdisciplinary approach, to experiment with new styles of pedagogy and to collaborate on issues of common interest. This makes Fairhaven a valuable faculty development resource for the whole University.

Fairhaven plays several roles in support of the larger mission of Western Washington University. The College has provided leadership in diversifying the curriculum and student body, in addressing international and global issues, and in demonstrating models for alternative pedagogical approaches to support development of critical thinking, creative expression, and independent learning skills. Fairhaven's programs have contributed to Western's strong national reputation by providing the opportunity for students to find a small college offering a personally tailored education within a large publicly purposed university with all its resources. In addition, the College provides an alternative for University students seeking more ownership of their education.

II. Learning Objectives and Outcomes Assessment

The College offers several undergraduate degrees in conjunction with Western Washington University with unique, alternative ways of satisfying standard degree requirements. Students may either design an interdisciplinary degree in consultation with a faculty committee or combine their Fairhaven Core studies with a traditional major from any of Western's departments and colleges. About 64 % of Fairhaven students choose the interdisciplinary concentration route.

The structure of learning at Fairhaven College consists of close working relationships between teachers and students; we are known for our practice of student-centered learning. Classes are small and the emphasis is on open discussion and the exchange of ideas. Our classes are interactive; we believe everyone is an essential participant in the creation of knowledge and value – the discovery and decision process.

In any given quarter, students may select classes offered at Fairhaven, in other departments and colleges across the University, and/or design independent study projects in consultation with their faculty advisor. Students are encouraged to formulate and carry out independent research projects. Faculty members sponsor and monitor these projects and help students develop the resources necessary to complete them. [About one-third of a Fairhaven professor's credit-load in a given year are engaged in independent study projects.] Field work, practica, internships, and study abroad can also form an important part of a Fairhaven education. Students are encouraged to work outside their comfort zone and to find ways to connect their learning with challenges and opportunities in the real world, ways to understand relationships of thought and action, theory and expertise, ways to cultivate opportunities for applying what they learn through campus and community volunteer activities, and through internships.

Narrative assessments, including student self-assessments (and written responses to these from faculty), replace letter grades. These narrative assessments form an "academic autobiography" (soon to be in electronic portfolio form) that charts a student's growth and learning experience. The whole structure of the learning environment at Fairhaven is designed to encourage students to take reasonable risks in exploring new ideas.

The intended Learning Outcomes for Fairhaven students are:

- Critical thinking and problem-solving
- Quantitative and logical reasoning
- Interdisciplinary research and explanation
- General knowledge across the disciplines (physical and cultural sciences; humanities and arts)
- Multicultural knowledge and sensitivity

- Global and local perspective-taking
- Gender, race and class analysis
- Independent learning and judgment
- Collaborative learning and judgment
- Insightful and honest self-assessment
- Persuasive writing
- Effective oral presentation
- Creative expression
- A sense of social and ecological responsibility
- Leadership skills

The Core curriculum provides the structure for many of these learning objectives. The learning of basic skills and knowledge across the curriculum are the priority goals of the first two years of Fairhaven's educational program; integrating higher order skills and attitudes is the goal of the later years of the program. The student learning outcomes which are currently assessed are: critical thinking, persuasive writing, oral presentation, and self-assessment skills.

III. General Education

Comprehending the overall requirements for the award of a bachelor's degree by Fairhaven College provides a context for understanding its general education program:

- The Fairhaven Core Curriculum
- A self-designed Fairhaven Interdisciplinary Concentration, or the Law, Diversity and Justice concentration, the Upside Down program, or a major in one of Western's disciplinary departments housed in one of its other colleges.
- Minimum of 180 credits, including 60 credits at the upper division level and 45 credits in residence.
- Completion of at least 25 credits at Fairhaven and 50 credits outside of Fairhaven.
- Completion of Western's writing proficiency requirements (satisfactorily completing FAIR 201a and FAIR 305a fulfill this requirement).
- Satisfaction of scholarship and credit standards as prescribed in the Student Guide to Fairhaven College.

The General Education CORE Program at Fairhaven College consists of three curricular stages of classes.

This program, unique to the College, includes a series of courses designed to widen students' exposure to areas of study, to connections among disciplines, and to interdisciplinary theory and practice. Its purpose is to help students become perceptive, probing learners who can ask questions and pursue answers with care and confidence. Skills in reading, writing, presenting, and analyzing are emphasized. Each course deals with methods of understanding and valuing, topics and themes, modes of creativity and practical application to be found in and across the disciplines of academic study.

Seven ingredients of this CORE experience contribute to its unique and effective character:

- Courses are conducted in a collaborative seminar format.
- Class size seldom exceeds 20 students.
- Where scheduling permits, students learn as members of a cohort in a learning community of linked classes.
- A strong mentoring and advising relationship is established between teachers and students.
- Interdisciplinary studies are problem-centered.
- Instruction in the CORE is shared by all Fairhaven College faculty members – artists,

scientists, historians, philosophers, poets, and so on – who adapt the diverse themes of their disciplines to the purposes of core studies.

Student self-evaluation precedes Faculty evaluation of students; both evaluations are in narrative (rather than letter grade) form.

Fairhaven students complete the CORE program in lieu of Western's General University Requirements (GURs). [A student who leaves Fairhaven College for another WWU college or program must complete the GURs. Fairhaven offers the opportunity for self-motivated students who have demonstrated exceptional learning skills to design an individualized version to parts of the CORE via existing course-challenge procedures.]

There are CORE courses in each of the three curricular stages in a Fairhaven education. Students need not complete one curricular stage before advancing to the next.

Stage One: Exploratory Studies

- 101a An Introduction to Interdisciplinary Study at Fairhaven College (Must be taken in the first quarter at Fairhaven College)
- 201a An Introduction to Critical and Reflective Inquiry (Must be taken in the first quarter at Fairhaven College)
- 202a The Humanities and Expressive Arts, I
- 203a Social Relationships and Responsibility: Theories and Critique (Must be taken within the two quarters at Fairhaven College)
- 206a Science and Our Place on the Planet, I
- One 300-level course in each of the following areas, with the specific course in each area selected from a listing of approved courses found in the quarterly Fairhaven Course Description Booklet:
 - Humanities and the Expressive Arts
 - Society and the Individual
 - Science and Our Place on the Planet
- 305a Writing Portfolio and Transition Conference

In the revision of the Core curriculum, the faculty agreed on common learning outcomes for the 200 level courses in the Core, including some common readings and assignments to develop these outcomes. The 300 level of the Core is intended to allow students to continue to develop the lenses of these disciplines as they explore more focused problem-based curriculum in those areas.

Stage Two: Concentrated Studies: (complete one of the following options)

OPTION A: a "Fairhaven Interdisciplinary Concentration" – the individually designed major includes:

- The 303a Concentration Seminar in which the student develops all the components of a self-designed Interdisciplinary Concentration, including a rationale and a proposed course of study. This proposal is approved by a three member committee comprised of faculty and/or experts in the field.
- The Senior Project designed by the student as a demonstration of learning in the Concentration

Since two thirds of Fairhaven students complete an interdisciplinary concentration and because this opportunity is a large part of what makes the College unique, further detail on this program is necessary to understanding Fairhaven culture of learning. This option allows maximal flexibility in formulating a program of study to meet personal and career goals, bringing together a student's interests from more than one discipline into a cohesive learning project.

The self-designed concentration process allows students to work with a faculty member committee to articulate a sound rationale for their area of study and to develop a learning plan that includes course work and independent studies, a senior project, and where applicable,

internships and apprenticeships. Students are assisted in completing their Learning Plan by taking the Concentration Seminar and by working with their Faculty Advisors and the members of their Concentration Committee. At the conclusion of the program, a Senior Project and a concentration Summary and Evaluation help each candidate for graduation to assess her or his own work and to look toward a future after college.

Concentrations have been developed in a wide range of areas not available through traditional majors in traditional departments in traditional colleges. Examples of previously approved and completed concentrations and further information pertaining to concentrations – their possibilities and prospects – may be found in the Student Guide to Fairhaven College.

OPTION B: A major in a department of a college other than Fairhaven at Western Washington University. Students selecting Option B combine their Fairhaven Core studies with one of the traditional majors at Western. [See the University Catalog for details regarding requirements for these majors. Note that Fairhaven students may not complete the General Studies degree program of the University.

OPTION C: the Law, Diversity and Justice Concentration

- The 303a Concentration Seminar in which the student develops all the components of a selfdesigned Interdisciplinary Concentration, including a rationale and a proposed course of study. This proposal is approved by a three member committee comprised of faculty and/or experts in the field. Students in the Law, Diversity and Justice Concentration begin with a prescribed sequence of classes
- Critical and Reflective Inquiry (201a); Social Relationships and Responsibilities (203a) ; The American Legal System (211b); Rights, Liberties and Justice in America (393a); Advanced Topics in Law (412e); and Advanced Legal Writing and Analysis (422k)
Through the Concentration process, they add electives from the Fairhaven curriculum or from offerings in other colleges at Western (under advisement) that support their unique studies in Law, Diversity and Justice.

OPTION D: the Upside Down Program (for transfer students who are graduates of a community college in Washington State who hold the ATA or AAS degree).

This program is open to a limited number of students and to a restricted slate ATA or AAS degrees. Upside-down students enter Fairhaven College with a technical degree which becomes a 'major' with the expectation. During their time at Fairhaven they complete the liberal arts Core and augment their degrees with additional upper division coursework. For all Upsidedown students, the Writing Portfolio and Transition Conference (305a) occurs no later than their **second** quarter at Fairhaven. The Transition Conference focuses on providing coherent advising and the development of a plan of study to complete Core work and work to deepen the degree.

The student prepares a proposed plan of study that addresses the following questions:
Core requirements – How are you planning to meet your Core requirements? As an Upsidedown student, you are required to take the standard Core sequences to fulfill the liberal arts Core:

Lower division Core: 101a, 201a, 202a, 203a, and 206a

Upper Division Core: one 300 level course each of the following areas from the list of approved courses in the quarterly Fairhaven Course Description Booklet: Humanities and the Expressive Arts, Society and the Individual, and Science and Our Place on the Planet.

Are there other experiences or courses you might choose to broaden this liberal arts base?

Deepening the major area - What courses/ISPs are you planning to take to deepen your work in the technical area to make it a baccalaureate 'major?' The bulk of these courses and experience should be upper division level work.

Through this program, students complete all of Stage One courses (with as many as possible at the 300 level or above) and also complete the Advanced Seminar requirements.

Stage Three: Advanced Studies

☐ 401a Senior Project (only Option A students)

☐ 403a Advanced Seminar (students in all Options) – In this course, students write a

Summary and Evaluation essay reviewing and reflecting upon the learning and milestones in the Concentrated Studies or major. This essay is also read and approved by the Concentration Committee members (for those in Option A & C) or the student's advisor (for those in Option B & D).

We have discovered that success at learning comes from both independent and collaborative research, both individual and collective responsibility. These practices depend on, and reinforce, each other. Critical and creative thinking requires moments of both independent and collaborative judgment and imagination. Sharing one's individual ideas and testing them collaboratively against those others is crucial to constructing real knowledge and value.

Fairhaven is committed to active learning techniques; learning is not a spectator sport. Passive listening and rote recitation do not add up to sophisticated learning. Students must talk about what they are learning, write reflectively about it. They must relate it to their experience and daily life; therefore field trips, internships and service learning figure regularly as opportunities within the Fairhaven learning community.

Fairhaven believes that prompt and frequent feedback is an important tool for learning. Frequent assessments from fellow learners, especially from expert and experienced facilitators, allow students to reflect on their own estimate of how well they understand and how well they value. In addition, Fairhaven believes that communicating high expectations for students stimulates participation and interpretation, while too little challenge discourages their interest.

Finally, the Fairhaven educational experiment believes that there are a variety of effective learning styles appropriate to learning different kinds of things. Different students bring different talents and learning styles to our learning community. Fairhaven strives to provide students with different kinds of things to learn and different environments in which to learn so that they can show their talents and learn in ways that work for them before they are expected to learn in new ways that do not come so easily.

The Experience and Success of Fairhaven College Graduates

Fairhaven graduates have obtained positions in virtually all occupational fields, from business to education, the fine arts and government, social work and counseling, medicine, law, engineering and journalism. They have started new businesses, created new jobs in established organizations, distinguished themselves in their professions, and been successful in research and publication. And they remain loyal to the College that helped them prepare not only for a career but prepared them to design a life full of meaning and value.

IV. Advising

Students benefit from high quality advising; extensive and intensive advising is a hallmark of the Fairhaven College learning experience for all its students, involving faculty and professional staff

advising along with student peer mentoring. We provide an organized sequence of required advising engagements with every student with multiple advisors and kinds of advising at multiple points along the path from admission to graduation. Advising is continuous and embedded in the curriculum. Here is a testimonial from Joe homes, a new student in the 101a advising course; this is from his self-evaluation.

According to my high school instructor's grade books, I was a great student. I possessed an incredible ability to take tests without studying, and I figured out quickly how to produce the minimum effort for the maximum grade. I got through my English classes without reading, and my math classes without doing the exercises. I made sure to turn my assignments in and raise my hand at least once in every class period, quickly moving down my mental checklist of everything I needed to do. I knew how to "work the system," manipulate the scoring rubrics so that the teachers, despite my lack of effort, had no choice but to award me the highest grades.

This strategy did not last long at Fairhaven. The rigid pedagogical system of my high school, with all its loopholes, was suddenly gone. . . . The skeletal structure of the ivory tower, so easy to climb in my high school, simply did not exist at Fairhaven, leaving me to build myself from the ground up. Despite the absence of that structure (or, more accurately, because of it), I fell in love with Fairhaven this quarter. Everything I learned about the college deepened my respect for the undergraduate education I had chosen for myself. During the Degree Planning Workshop, I remember thinking that if I had invented a college, Fairhaven would be it. Everything about Fairhaven vibrates with the energy produced by allowing students to take charge of their own education. I found that anything a student can imagine to do to further his education is possible at Fairhaven . . This class transformed my philosophy about learning. No longer do I believe that learning is just something that I have to convince others I've done. Learning is only worthwhile to the learner insofar as it increases his knowledge of the world, and therefore his knowledge of himself in that world. Whether other people believe I have learned anything is irrelevant to me; learning only has its immeasurable value when it has actually taken place in my being. I have fallen in love with Fairhaven during this course, and look forward to truly learning as much as I can in the next few years.

At Fairhaven we have discovered that student success occurs with frequent student-faculty interaction, in and out of class, as a way of shaping and sustaining motivation and involvement. A faculty advisor's concern often helps a student get through rough times and keeps them working. Knowing a few faculty members well enhances students' intellectual commitment, provides role models for their development, and encourages them to think about their own values and plans.

A professional **Advising Coordinator** oversees the complex system of advising at Fairhaven. This person advises new students regarding credit evaluation, degree planning, graduation processes, narrative assessment, and programs and services outside the College. The Advising Coordinator regularly reviews the academic progress of each Fairhaven student and works with faculty advisors, support personnel, and students to promote retention and satisfactory academic progress. The professional Advisor teaches a one-credit required course for new students to help them understand the Fairhaven College mission, philosophy, and practice – its culture. In this course students also learn the purpose and method of narrative self-assessment and the value of qualitative evaluation by their teachers, the independent study process, Core program requirements, how to prepare a Writing Portfolio, what their Transition advising Conference will be like, and how to engage with their faculty advisor; all this information helps students effectively participate in the Fairhaven learning community. The text for this course (prepared by the Advising Coordinator in consultation with the faculty) is The Student Guide to Fairhaven College.

The Advising Coordinator assigns each incoming students to a **Faculty Academic Advisor** (and helps students change advisors when necessary). All full-time faculty members at Fairhaven College are academic advisors. The faculty advisor can access student academic records and review progress, student self-evaluations and teacher evaluations for each of the courses the student has completed as well as materials submitted for admission and transcripts from prior coursework.

The Coordinator also provides faculty with accurate, up to date information about University-wide services and programs. Through faculty advising, experience informs curricular planning and student recruitment. [With a student population of 400 and a faculty of 18 (tenure and/or tenure-track), each faculty has approximately 20-25 advisees.]

The role of the Faculty Academic Advisor is to mentor, advise, question, recommend resources, and, ultimately, oversee and approve the student's satisfaction of degree requirements for graduation. The Faculty Academic Advisor reviews each advisee's Writing Plan, a document each student writes in their first quarter at Fairhaven. The faculty advisor reviews the Writing Portfolio of each of his or her advisees; and serves on each advisee's Transition Conference (a degree planning and advising meeting required of all students prior to commencing the "Concentrated Studies" part of their studies.)

The Faculty Academic Advisor is a useful resource for facilitating connections for students with other departments and classes on campus; the advisor can also be an influential and important advocate for students seeking internships, study abroad recommendations, exceptions to policies, and graduate school information and references.

Faculty have additional advising responsibilities in several other elements of the Fairhaven curricular structure: 1) Two faculty members review and comment on each student's Writing Portfolio; one of those reviewers will be the student's faculty advisor; the other reviewer will be from the faculty at large; 2) Students are expected to invite two faculty to participate in their Transition Conference; again, one of those faculty members will be the student's faculty advisor; the other participant will be invited by the student; 3) A faculty member serving on a student's Interdisciplinary **Concentration Committee** accepts responsibility for advising and approving the student's rationale and plan for their major. Concentration Committee members provide intensive advising while the student is creating the plan, and during the Concentration Seminar; he or she provides on-going advising until graduation. It is not uncommon for Concentration Committee members to be consulted by students as they revise their plans as their goals and options change. Concentration Committee members read, review and approve each of their student's Summary and Evaluation document prior to graduation. Tenure and tenure-track faculty serve typically on 10-15 Concentration Committees.

Faculty Academic Advisors are known for asking hard questions of students about their academic proposals. They are expert at suggesting options to and resources for proposed study projects and the Faculty Academic Advisor helps advisees determine their readiness for advancing to new stages of the Curriculum (such as the Writing Competency, Transition Conference, and Interdisciplinary Concentration).

Faculty Advisors at Fairhaven College expect students to be involved, active, and informed participants in their own educational planning – expect them to take responsibility for it. Advisors expect students to ask for advice, to be honest in describing their circumstances, and to acknowledge the complexities of

planning concentrations and satisfying degree requirements. In the non conventional structure of Fairhaven College, advisors worry about students who do not have any questions about how to proceed. Another element of advising at Fairhaven College happens during New Student Orientation before classes begin in Fall Quarter. It involves extensive use of **Student Peer Mentors** (who are upper-level students that have been trained to facilitate activities and discussions designed to create insight into the big-picture view of life and learning at Fairhaven College).

Peer Mentors are trained to help acclimate and welcome new students to Fairhaven College by helping plan, organize and conduct the New Student Orientation advising event. Peer mentors continue their connections with new students by serving as mentors in the first quarter required-course, FAIR 101a, Introduction to Interdisciplinary Studies.

Peer Mentors also help new students connect with student governance and student activism at

Fairhaven College. And they model the playful curiosity and serious research that characterizes Fairhaven students.

V. Assessment

Since its founding in 1967 as an experimental college, Fairhaven has been committed to assessing the effect of its practices, specifically the relation of its intended and actual learning outcomes. From the beginning, our assessment plans and practices have been evolving. Most of our assessment is embedded in the curriculum and its courses. Student narrative self-assessment and teacher narrative assessment of students, the Writing Portfolio, the Senior Project, the Transition Conference, the graduation Summary and Evaluation paper all provide evidence of learning.

Fairhaven has adopted a student-centered model of education that focuses on outputs rather than inputs -- on knowledge and skills actually learned by students rather than on the credentials and expertise provided by professors. Implicit in our view of student-centered learning is the idea that instructors are not providers of knowledge, but rather facilitators of learning. We believe it is not enough to construct a syllabus and present information, however skillfully, to a captive audience; we have learned that students must actively construct knowledge and value. Teachers must be learning partners with students; they must give frequent feedback in order to develop deeper understanding and better valuing of things (rather than merely demand correct answers on infrequent tests). Student-centered learning demands more of both students and faculty; it demands of both of them individual and collaborative responsibility.

Fairhaven's learning model is a developmental one and we are seeking sequences of learning activities for promoting integrated intellectual, attitudinal, and social development. Because complex learning is our goal, and because humans tend to become embedded in their beliefs and practices, it is essential that students become engaged and challenged and supported as they develop in all these interacting dimensions. The College believes that it is obligated to evaluate its model of facilitating students' understanding and valuing. Together with best practices in teaching and effective facilitation of student involvement, assessment of learning outcomes is important to the whole cycle of setting goals, choosing methods to meet these goals, checking to see how well they have been achieved, and making appropriate adjustments to courses, programs, and methods (including assessment methods themselves). These elements, applied and practiced over time, have created a "culture of working from evidence" at Fairhaven College. To us, assessment is part of learning.

Fairhaven's intended student learning outcomes are explicitly stated in the course descriptions for the Stage I Core Courses (201a, 202a, 203a, and 206a). They are implicit in the mission statement of the College (see attached).

At Fairhaven, assessment is a systematic collecting and analyzing of information to improve student learning. It leads us to ask: what should students be learning and in what ways should they be growing? What are students actually learning and in what ways are they actually growing? What should we be doing to facilitate student learning and growth? In short: Are we doing what we think we're doing? How do we know we are successful? And how successful are we (if we are)?

Fairhaven recognizes the benefits of on-going assessment: it allows us to target the knowledge and skill levels students should have acquired upon finishing a course of study; it allows us to make better judgments about proposed innovations in instruction and to share successes more easily -- all of which enhances our satisfaction with our role and participation in the Fairhaven learning community. The Fairhaven experiment in educating oneself assumes that the best learning results from the integration of good teaching, student engagement, on-going assessment, and revisions in program and pedagogy based on that assessment.

Assessment occurs in a number of informal and formal ways. The rich pool of **narrative self-assessments** provide faculty with detailed and specific information about the learning outcomes for each student in their classes. In addition, the development of the ability to assess one's own work successfully is also an important learning outcome at Fairhaven College. We share Pat Hutchings' view that college education should go beyond learning information specific to a discipline or major. The object here is graduates who know their own strengths and weaknesses, can set and pursue goals, who monitor their own progress and learn from experience. There's considerable evidence now that students who are self-conscious about their processes as learners are better learners, that they learn more easily and deeply, and that their learning lasts. The fashionable label for the skills in question here is 'meta-cognitive,' but whatever you call them they represent a kind of learning that speaks to a belief that learning is personally liberating, self-empowering, and for all students. (June 30, 1990) "Assessment and the way we work" Closing Plenary Address, Fifth AAHE Conference on Assessment, p.7.)

Narrative self-evaluations not only give students a voice to describe their own experiences, but to evaluate those experiences. In the self-evaluation process, assessment of the value of one's work is not simply relegated to others, but is also required of one's self. In using narrative self-assessments as part of the evaluation process, we are not giving students control over determining our standards or criteria for performance, rather we are encouraging students to reflect on their own, finding the connections between knowledge and life. As one of our students said:

"When I take a graded class, I can just live with the C+, but when I have to write a self-evaluation, I have to take responsibility for what it was I did or did not do that earned me that grade. It makes me confront myself more directly. The process makes me be more honest, both with the instructor and with myself."

We believe that the "accountability" movement must include the voices of students in the evaluation process. Sharing the responsibility for evaluation with students gives them a degree of responsibility in their own education and encourages them to learn something about the nature of evaluation itself. The **Teacher/Class Evaluation Forms** provide individual faculty with additional information about teaching strategies, readings, and activities that promoted student learning and also solicits suggestions for improvement.

The **Summary and Evaluation** (S&E) essays provide another narrative glimpse into students' learning achievements. These essays, read by the students' Concentration Committee members, not only chronicle individual student learning, but when aggregated also often provide useful information about elements of the curriculum that are either particularly successful or need revision. From time to time the Dean reads all the S&Es from each academic year and provides a report to the faculty about themes and patterns.

In fact, the recent Core revision was prompted in part by feedback from students in the S&E papers. During the first quarter at Fairhaven College, each student develops a **Writing Plan** in which they reflect on their own writing strengths and weaknesses and develop a plan to strengthen their writing. Through the **Writing Portfolio** process, students' ability to write documented and persuasive papers is formally evaluated. Students submit a portfolio of three papers, which are read and evaluated by two faculty members based on a rubric. Based on the results of this evaluation, the student and advisor meet to review and revise the **Writing Plan**.

During the **Transition Conference**, each student meets with two faculty members and an upperdivision student to lay out a tentative plan of study. This conference also often provides useful information about student progress.

The recent revision of our CORE curriculum illustrates elements of our Program assessment plan. As we developed the new Core, faculty explicitly stated what students who complete the Fairhaven learning experience need to understand, value, and do when they graduate. Then we assessed how successful

the current Core program was in producing this intended learning in our students based on faculty reflections of student performance in upper-division classes and student feedback on the Core. The comparison led us to some significant revisions of our core course and sequence of our classes. In the process we referred to our mission statement to remind us of our core values and objectives; we examined the syllabi of core courses and exacted the general categories of skills, knowledge and abilities that manifest those values; and then defined specific learning outcomes that were indicators that one possesses the skill, knowledge, and ability in these categories. With this alignment and definition in place, we mapped learning outcomes to courses to see if we were comprehensive and consistent in facilitating the learning we intended. We refined this by further mapping of assignments within the syllabi to its learning outcomes. This exercise is one we intend to apply to all our learning programs.

The core curriculum was then redesigned to emphasize mastery of fundamental skills of reasoning and writing and speaking as sufficient preparation for the sequential development of advanced thought and expression, commitment and action. We also paid particular attention to mapping learning outcomes for students in their understanding of social, economic and political relationships. Similar exercises were used to refine the sequencing of learning events like the Transition Conference, the Concentration Proposal, the Senior Project, the graduation Summary and Evaluation paper; this exercise also helped us to properly designate the course levels and pre-requisites for upper level courses. As a result of the Core revision process, we also recognized that although students gain skills in quantitative and logical reasoning through the science portion of our Core, this element needs further strengthening. We are in the process of hiring a new faculty member part of whose job description requires the teaching of quantitative skills.

We have recently launched a new **Core Assessment** project in which we are soliciting feedback about students' experiences in their Core programs as a means of evaluating the changes we have made in the new Core. Students in the Advanced Seminar are asked to provide feedback on specific elements of their Core studies and students completing the Writing Portfolio are asked to reflect on the ways the Core curriculum supported the development of their writing skills. (See attached Core Assessment Plan.) There are many more dimensions to a learning community than can practically be assessed. At Fairhaven we look to assess what we most need to know next, what it is feasible to assess, and that might lead to improvements. Assessment makes a difference when it illuminates questions people really care about. At Fairhaven, teachers always want to learn more about how people learn to understand and value – about how to construct an effective learning environment.

We believe that effective assessment must generally be systematic and significant; it should be cumulative, building a body of evidence over time; it should be multi-faceted, using multiple measures of multiple dimensions of learning; it should be practical, providing useful results; it should be tailored to the unique needs of the College.

At Fairhaven we believe student learning objectives should be brief, clear, and focused. Each outcome should be linked directly to one or more of our program goals. Each should be measurable by clearly stated criteria (we like to use clear action verbs to translate outcomes into observable behaviors). We develop our goals and criteria by open discussion and decision-making based on assessments of our experiments.

The general dimensions (objects) of our learning community that we have identified for assessment are: student learning, student attitudes and perceptions, and institutional processes. Student learning of: knowledge, skills, values. Student attitudes and perceptions about: community, curriculum, scheduling, satisfaction. College processes involving: advising, transcripts and recommendations, communications. At Fairhaven we seek to use direct demonstration behaviors (standards) to measure mastery of basic skills, and indirect reflective attitudes (comparisons) to measure developmental changes. Reflective essays and oral performances are the methods we typically use to assess skills. Surveys and interviews are frequently used to assess student attitudes and perceptions, and institutional processes.

All of these assessment activities will be enhanced by a shift to electronic portfolios; there will be a quantum leap of convenience in collecting, organizing, and searching the rich qualitative data produced by each of our students. With all this, our assessment efforts will become even more powerful. We are now in the process of identifying a product to use for this purpose.

ATTACHMENTS

Appendix A: Core Assessment Plan

Appendix B: 403 Reflection Assignment for CORE Feedback

Appendix C: Mission Statement

Appendix D: Writing Portfolio Instructions and Evaluation Form

Appendix A: Core Assessment Plan

Fairhaven College of Interdisciplinary Studies

Discussed and approved – May 24, 2006

In order to assess the impact of the new Core curriculum, we have agreed to engage in some assessment activities that can be embedded in our regular process courses.

1. **403** – We agreed to use a common assignment for all 403 classes that will gather information from students about the impact of their Core courses on their later studies. (See attached assignment prompt.) This assignment will use a prompting question to elicit their perspectives on their preparation for critical and reflective writing and critical social theory. This assignment will also gather information about which core classes they took (201a & 203a or 101/201/301). This assignment will be collected separately from the S&E document and given to Jackie McClure.

2. **Writing Portfolio Introduction** – We will add the following prompting question to the Writing Portfolio Introduction which will ask students to reflect on how well the 201a course prepared them in critical and reflective writing skills.

“Written Introduction: In essay form, please address the following questions: What are the strengths and weaknesses in your writing? **Did Fairhaven 201a (Critical and Reflective Inquiry) help you develop your writing skills? If so, in what ways? What progress have you made in your writing since you developed your Writing Plan.....”**

3. **Upper division course in areas that rely on the 201/203 content as pre-requisite knowledge** – For the next two years faculty teaching the upper division courses that use the critical social theory from 201/203 as pre-requisites will collect information at the beginning of class about which Core sequence students have taken. Faculty will write a reflection at the end of the term on the relative ability of students from each Core program to handle the complex issues and critical social theory. (In other words, does the new Core actually do what we hoped.)

4. **WELS Project** – Using the data collected by the WELS project on our 2003 frosh as sophomore, we will repeat the same question set with the 2005 frosh at the end of their sophomore year. These data should provide some comparisons for the two Cores, particularly in the area of writing.

5. **201/203 Evaluations** – One source of some information about the new Core are the student evaluations from those courses. Collecting ‘student voice’ from them might be useful.

6. **Retention and Completion Rates** – Comparing retention and completions rates between 201 and the old 101/201/301 sequence might also prove useful.

7. **Exit Interviews** – Developing a policy of exit interviews for students who leave Fairhaven College might also garner some information.

Appendix B: 403 Reflection Assignment for CORE Feedback

Beginning fall of 2005, Fairhaven launched a new Core Curriculum; we are seeking feedback on both the old and new Core curriculum to help us evaluate these changes. Your thoughtful responses to this assignment will help in that evaluation. During your time at Fairhaven College you have been required to take some content and process Core courses. Please put a check mark by all the Core courses below that you have taken. Please be sure you select the correct box, depending on the date you entered Fairhaven College.

Now please reflect on the Core curriculum. Why do you think these courses are required? What impacts have these courses had on your education? Pay particular attention to the ways these classes may have prepared you for the work in the rest of the curriculum and in your concentration or major. Attach this sheet to your reflections.

Some guiding questions might be:

1. Did these classes support the development of your writing and critical thinking skills? If so, please be specific about how it happened, in what course(s), and describe any key moments, readings, or assignments.
2. Did these classes prepare you to deal with some of the complex issues raised in your upper division electives at Fairhaven? If so, please be specific about how it happened, in what course(s), and describe any key moments, readings, or assignments.
3. Did other courses (outside of the Core) support your learning in these areas? If so, please provide a few specific examples; identify the course and any key moments, readings, assignments?

Old Core (for all students who entered prior to fall 2005)

- FAIR 101 - Foundations
- FAIR 201 – Transfer Seminar
- FAIR 301 – Transfer Seminar
- FAIR 202 – Humanities and the Expressive Arts I
- FAIR 204 – Society and the Individual I
- FAIR 206 – Science and Our Place on the Planet I
- FAIR 302 – Humanities and the Expressive Arts II **OR**
Upper division humanities (course name) _____
- FAIR 304 – Society and the Individual II **OR**
Upper division social science (course name) _____
- FAIR 306 – Science and Our Place on the Planet II **OR**
Upper division social science (course name) _____

New Core (for all students who entered fall 2005 or after)

- FAIR 101 - Intro to Interdisciplinary Study
- FAIR 201a – Critical and Reflective Inquiry
- FAIR 203a – Social Relationships and Responsibilities
- FAIR 202 – Humanities and the Expressive Arts I
- FAIR 206 – Science and Our Place on the Planet I
- FAIR 3XX – Upper division humanities (course name) _____
- FAIR 3XX – Upper division social science (course name) _____
- FAIR 3XX – Upper division science (course name) _____

Appendix C: Mission Statement

Fairhaven, begun in 1967 as an experimental college within Western Washington University, exists today as an undergraduate learning community defined by five attributes: (1) interdisciplinary study, (2) student designed studies and evaluation of learning, (3) examination of issues arising from a diverse society, (4) development of leadership and a sense of social responsibility, and (5) curricular, instructional and evaluative innovation.

INTERDISCIPLINARY CURRICULUM

Fairhaven's interdisciplinary curriculum is centered on the process of inquiry as well as on the development of knowledge. Courses and experiences introduce students to thinking strategies used in various disciplines and areas of study, and application of these thinking and problem solving skills to larger issues and questions. Classes prepare students to learn on their own, and move from the skills of critiquing and interpreting knowledge to constructing knowledge.

Fairhaven prepares students to listen carefully and engage respectfully in discussion, and to value and respect different world views, and appreciate multiple voices reflecting the diversity of experience in our society. Fairhaven students should learn to communicate clearly in various modes and to value modes effective in other cultures. They should develop curiosity about and tolerance for diverse ideas and values, and the ability to engage in dialogue about controversial issues. They should learn to recognize that maintaining healthy diversity is essential for all living systems - ecological, cultural, ideological, genetic - to provide flexibility and adaptability.

STUDENT INVOLVEMENT IN LEARNING AND EVALUATION

Students are encouraged to design an interdisciplinary concentration integrating the contributions of several disciplines to a central problem, issue, or theme, or to choose a major in another college. Seminar formats encouraging collaborative assignments enhance active student participation. Motivating students to develop their own goals for learning is central to Fairhaven's programs. Narrative assessments, including a student self-evaluation and written responses from faculty, foster this process.

EXAMINATION OF ISSUES ARISING FROM A DIVERSE SOCIETY

Cultural pluralism is an important part of Fairhaven's curricular focus. A positive learning environment embraces difference. We recognize that survival requires diversity—that difference is essential, and is in the best interest of the planet. Courses and other learning experiences provide an examination of the impacts and contemporary and historical roots of race, class and gender relations. Social issues such as, homophobia, and internalized oppression are examined along with strategies for conflict resolution

LEADERSHIP AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Courses and experiences encourage students to practice and assume leadership roles, and to challenge leaders responsibly and intelligently.

Students will be encouraged to find their connection with the world, to understand relationships of thought and action, theory and experience, to cultivate opportunities to apply what they learn, and to develop a strong sense of themselves as individuals in a community, including the benefits and responsibilities that come from membership in it.

INNOVATION

The college seeks to help students learn in a collaborative and non-competitive way, examining the new and different while avoiding new dogmas and conformities. The college assumes a responsibility to provide leadership for Western Washington University in diversifying the curriculum, faculty, and student body, as well as demonstrating models for alternative curricular forms and course structures. Fairhaven's programs offer alternatives for students seeking more responsibility for their educations. Fairhaven's curriculum seeks to help students develop a strong sense of history and its importance in understanding the present, and the desire and ability to define connections between social

phenomena. Courses and experiences should help students become aware of connections and encourage them to act in relation to their interdependence with all around them.

The curriculum seeks to help students develop an intimate knowledge of physical world and effects of science and society on it, and an ability to use these tools to resolve human and environmental issues. The curriculum seeks to help students develop an appreciation for and experience with literature, the arts, and movement, and an exploration of these as a modes of expression and communication in the worlds of ideas and social action.

Appendix D: Writing Portfolio Instructions and Evaluation Form

Appendix E: Up-date, 2010: Improvements Made due to College Assessment activities over the past three years:

1. Reviewed Adjunct Faculty mentoring process and made recommendations for improvement to the handbook. More discussion to occur this year about mentoring for issues of diversity that occur in classroom settings.
2. Reviewed our Core Program and created a Process Core to supplement the Content Core of required classes. The Process Core embeds advising into the Curriculum at four places, one each year (freshman, sophomore, junior, senior); and creates four advisors for each student (a professional advisor; faculty advisor; peer mentor; and Concentration Committee members).
3. Reviewed faculty load issues and set clearer policies for priorities for leave, sabbatical, and international teaching requests.
4. Worked to align some curricular offerings with those of the Center for Law, Diversity and Justice.
5. Each year the Curriculum Committee surveys students to discover their needs and desires for interdisciplinary courses and incorporates these results into planning the following years' curriculum.
6. Developed new processes for entering Concentration theme data and used this data to guide the development of the 2010-2011 curriculum.
7. Modified team-taught Linked Courses to connect only two courses rather than three (because the three course block inhibited participation by many students).
8. Introduced and developed an Electronic Portfolio system.
9. Reviewed the Concentration Proposal process, including the exercises used to teach the course, and made suggestions for changes.
10. Implemented changes to the Writing Portfolio and Transition Conference process, including the recommendation for earlier contact with the possible Concentration chair. We examined and tweaked the development and writing of the proposal, putting together the course lists and helping our

students gain access to classes in other colleges and departments on campus. We reaffirmed our requirement and model of the Writing Portfolio. Now we need to follow up with new assessment to see if these changes are working.

11. Worked with the University Academic Coordinating Commission to develop clearer policies for the proposal and approval of Concentration titles.
12. Used comparative data from sister colleges in the CIEL consortium (Consortium for Innovative Environments in Learning) to develop our international studies and study abroad programs to amplify our World Issues Forum.
13. Created line-item budget for the College with rationales for each line in order to create transparency, efficiency and coherence to our strategic planning.
14. Expanded Video-production and Audio-production labs; modernized our Science and Art studios due to task force analysis.
15. Adjusted the cohort system of enrollment into the Law, Diversity, and Justice program, and created special themes for different quarters concerning law, diversity and justice.
16. Developed a briefing document on the issues of Cross Listing classes with other colleges on campus.
17. Developed an Average Time to Degree report for the College.
18. Dedicated Faculty Retreat to discussion about the intersection between teaching and our mission statement.
19. Reviewed and affirmed the processes for student-led classes.
20. Finalized development and implementation of the on-line directed Independent Study proposals and process.
21. Discussed and affirmed the importance of Narrative Evaluations in the Fairhaven Model of education.