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ABSTRACT

This is the introduction and summary of a series of six papers discussing major issues about student assessment for the University of Wisconsin Extended Degree Program, a program designed to give academic credit for college level learning derived from experiences outside the scope of formal classes. A distinction is made between prior learning, based on experiences that have not been planned with the faculty, and in-program learning, based on experiences that have been formally planned with and sponsored by the faculty. The definition of content must precede such experiences and must control the evaluation. Assessment procedures must be designed and performed by the faculty, but may take a wide variety of forms. They should not make requirements beyond those normally met in the traditional setting. Assessment techniques include objective or essay examinations, product assessment, job descriptions, certificates, papers, real or simulated job performance, and interviews. Assessment is not complete until it is a part of the official record; it is important to plan record keeping procedures early in the program. (Author/CTM)

University of Wisconsin Extended Degree Programs

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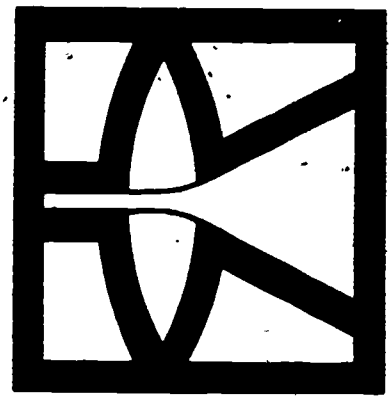
1st in a Series

Overview and Focus for the Series

This is the first in a series of six papers discussing major issues about assessment for Wisconsin's Extended Degree Programs. This first paper simply provides an overview of what is contained in the five subsequent papers. It's a kind of annotated table of contents.

WHY THIS SERIES OF PAPERS

Before describing the contents of the papers, a word or two about the focus for the series may be in order. Why produce these papers anyway? Hasn't there already been tons of stuff written about assessment for these types of programs? Well, as the man said: "In theory, yes. But also, in theory, no."



There has been a great outpouring of material about assessment in nontraditional educational programs in the last few years. Much, if not all,

of this material is included in the Annotated Bibliographies in the Assessment Center Handbook.

But right now, we are concerned about one particular kind of program - the Wisconsin Extended Degree. We have special emphases and a particular context to work in. What we have attempted to do in this series of papers - and, indeed, throughout the Assessment Center Handbook - is to abstract from the vast array of available materials those issues which seem to be especially relevant to the Wisconsin situation. We have tried to take into account our special concerns and emphases. By so doing, we hope to save the reader much time and grief.

On the other hand, each campus will also have its own idiosyncracies - a certain historical context, unique "political" problems, one type of degree program, etc. These factors, obviously, must be taken into account in planning and implementing the program. Therefore, we have tended to avoid saying "Do it this way," or "This is clearly the best method for handling that problem." Rather, we have tried to present alternatives, different ways of handling various problems, with frank discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of each alternative. Given the total set of circumstances prevailing on a campus, one alternative may be best there, while another alternative may be best on another campus.

WHAT IS COVERED

This paper - the first in the series - provides a focus for and an overview of the other papers.

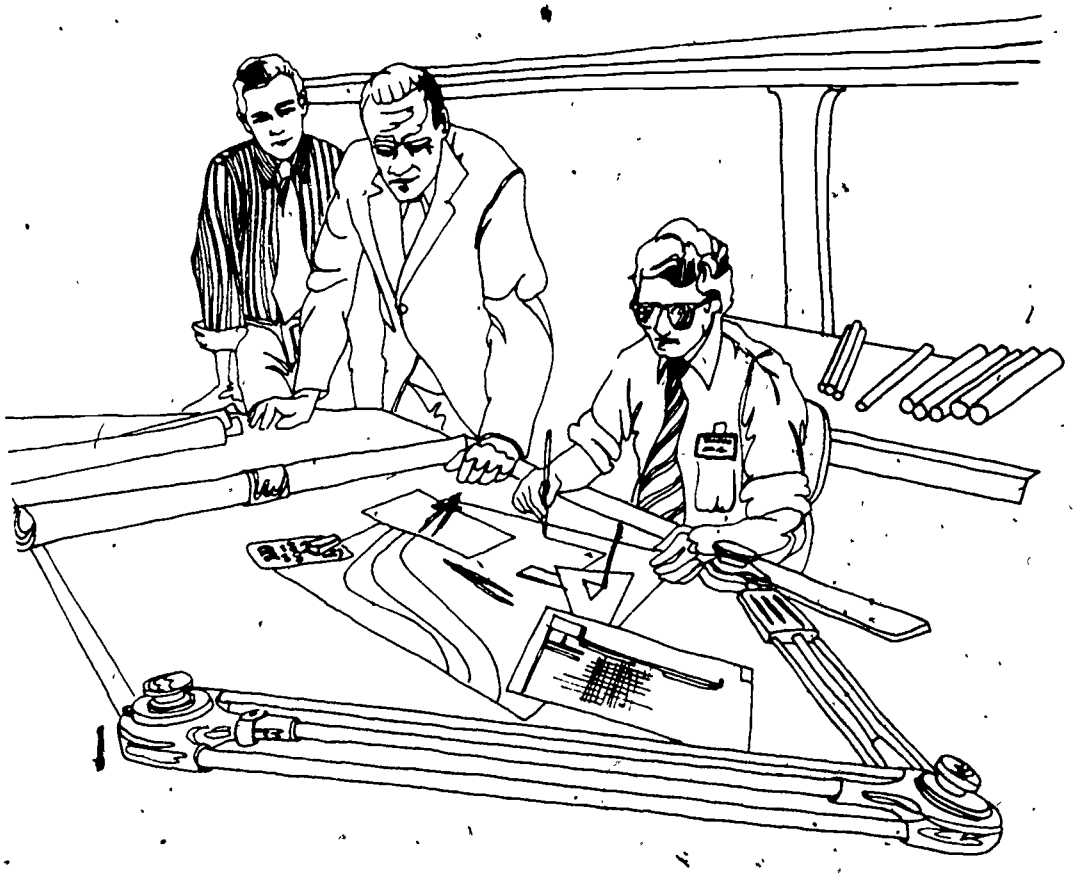
The 2nd paper, What's It All About, makes some important distinctions about the term "assessment." In this paper, we try to make sure that we all know what we are talking about - and what we are <u>not</u> talking about.

The 3rd paper, Fundamental Principles, lays out a rationale for assessment in the extended degree programs. The approach is practical, not theoretical. What

we have done is identify the questions about assessment most frequently raised by faculty members or other individuals who are accustomed to the traditional, classroom model for education, and provide answers for these questions.

The 4th, 5th, and 6th papers deal with different parts of what we call the "assessment system." The 4th paper describes alternative mechanisms for actually carrying out the assessment. The 5th paper describes different assessment techniques. The 6th paper describes various ways of recording the results of the assessment.

We hope you will find the papers useful, and maybe even enjoyable, as you work on one of Wisconsin's Extended Degree Programs.



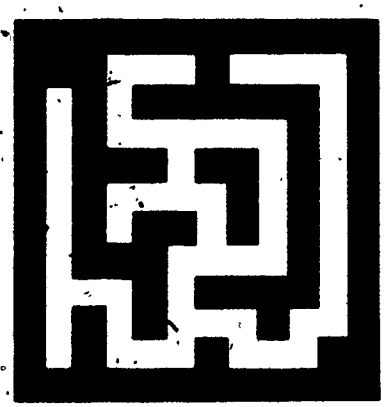
Thomas P. Hogan
July, 1977

2nd in a Series

What's It All About?

To the neophyte working on Extended Degrees - or other nontraditional educational programs - the term "assessment" conjures up a mysteryland of numbers, psychometric jargon, and big question marks. Is it just coincidence, you may wonder, that in the Dictionary of Funny Things to Watch Out For, "assessment" comes between alchemy and astrology?

There is one thing that everybody agrees on regarding assessment: It's important, very important. And that for two reasons. First, you've got to do it, one way or another. A quality program cannot be operated without assessment: testing, evaluation, examining. And, since assessment will present some unique problems in a nontraditional setting, you'd better confront these problems systematically at the outset or you may botch the whole job of program implementation.



Second - and this is perhaps the more pressing

reason -- assessment is the quality control operation in the nontraditional program. If there is one thing that the nontraditional program cannot abide, it is the charge that the program is "soft," an "easy touch," or "quick credit." Such charges, if true to any extent, not only jeopardize the existence of the program, but also cast a pall over the credentials of any students who have gone through the program in the past.

Rigorous, meticulous, well-thought-out assessment is the defense against such charges. Having the defense out front to start with is generally the best way to prevent the charges from arising in the first place.

One is tempted to counter that we tolerate all kinds of "soft" programs within our traditional educational structures, so why worry about the charge being leveled at a nontraditional program. That argument - while it may be true - doesn't help much. The nontraditional program, by its nature, is new and especially visible. It must make its case. It is the affirmative side in the debate and, in the classical debating format, if the affirmative doesn't make a good case, it loses - even if the negative stays home in bed. Further, we surely don't want to rest our case for nontraditional programs on the "laurels" of acknowledged weaknesses within the traditional structures.

"HE WANTS EXTRA CREDIT BECAUSE HE SAYS SEEING THE FOLLIES BERGERE IS AN EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE."

Well, then, what is assessment in the nontraditional program all about? The term actually has several different applications. In this paper, we shall sort out these different applications, make some distinctions in how the term is used, and tell which applications of the term we shall be concerned with in subsequent papers.

There are three crucial distinctions which should be made: between assessing

students and assessing programs, between assessing experience and learning, and between assessing prior learning and in-program or sponsored learning. Let's look at each distinction in turn.

STUDENTS VS. PROGRAMS

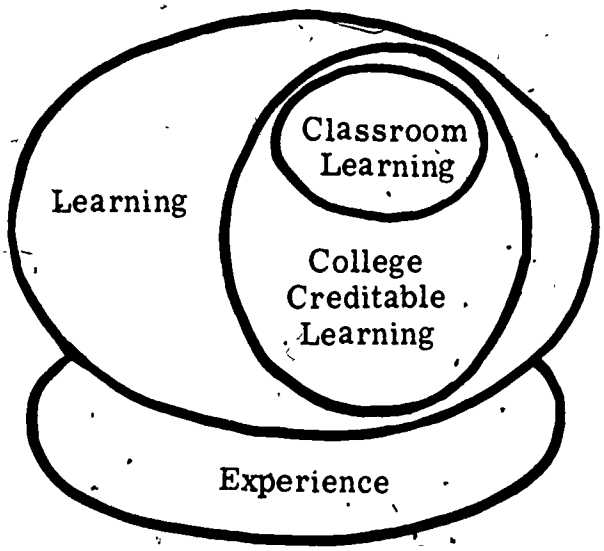
The term assessment is sometimes used with regard to students, sometimes with regard to entire educational programs. Assessment of students usually means determining the extent of their learning. The orientation is towards the individual student and his or her own educational progress. In the traditional setting, this usually means quizzes, exams, grades on term papers, etc.

On the other hand, we can talk about assessment of an entire educational program. This ordinarily involves looking at aggregates of students (by department, college, campus); and it ordinarily means looking at factors besides student learning, although student learning will often be at least one element in the picture. Program assessment may include investigation of costs, potential markets for graduates, student satisfaction, relationships to other programs, faculty loads, and so on. Program assessment is much broader in scope than is student assessment. In contrast, student assessment is more focused, more intensive at the individual student level.

In this series of papers, we will limit ourselves to considerations of <u>student assessment</u>. This is not to disparage or disregard program assessment. That is a vitally important part of the total assessment picture. But in this series we will not discuss program assessment.

EXPERIENCE VS. LEARNING

We have a problem. Within the past several years we have seen come into widespread usage the term "credit for experience." It even occurs in some college catalogs. So people, especially faculty, wonder: What is this credit for experience?



The simple fact is that colleges generally do not give credit for experience. They give credit for learning, more specifically for college level learning. We would be better off if the term "credit for experience" had never been coined. We might hope that it will gradually fade from usage, but it probably won't. The point to remember is that the term is a malapropism. We give credit for college level learning. It's just that the learning may have resulted from experiences other than classroom instruction.

The latter remarks perhaps slightly overstate the case against experience in two respects. First, while learning is the ultimate concern, in fact, we may start with an examination of experience. People are generally much more aware of what they have experienced than of what they have learned as a result of experience. Thus, when working with a student, we may begin with a description of experience: as a first step in getting at the learning.


"I'M GETTING A LOT OUT OF THIS---LIVING THE WAY THE NATIVES DO."

Second, even in our traditional programs, there may be instances where we are essentially giving credit for experience, per se. The best examples are foreign travel or "other culture" courses. Of course, formally we may protest that even in these courses it is the learning that is important. But ordinarily our evaluations of such other culture courses are such that an objective observer can only presume that the student is essentially getting credit just for the experience. The assumption may be made that something significant was probably learned as a result of the

experience, but the assumption is rarely tested. To the extent that such cases do exist in traditional programs on a campus, parallels may be set up in the Extended Degree Program. But one should be careful not to let the whole program be based on this notion.

PRIOR LEARNING VS. IN-PROGRAM LEARNING

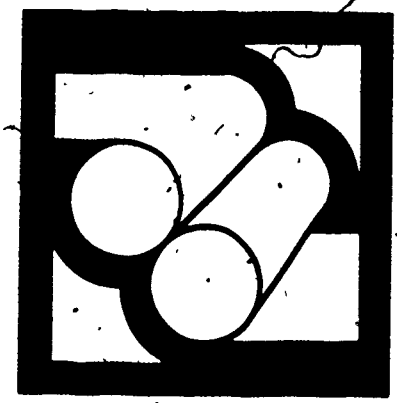
The third distinction which needs to be made is between assessment of prior learning and assessment of in-program or sponsored learning. Within the context of the Extended Degree Programs we need to be concerned about both types of assessment. While in both instances we are talking about assessing student learning, the two situations present somewhat different problems and should, therefore, probably be discussed as separate issues. However, after discussing the issues separately it is seen that the two cases have more similarities than differences.

In any educational program there are certain things which we want students to learn. In the usual setting, we define these "certain things" in terms of required courses, credit totals, majors, and so forth, which are presumed to represent the desired set of learnings. And usually, we start reckoning a person's progress toward the total set of desired learnings when the person starts in our program.

But many people - especially the kinds of people for whom some nontraditional programs are designed - have already learned at least some of the things we had planned on them getting from our program. So we establish a mechanism for giving credit for the learning that has already occurred. That's what assessment of prior learning is all about.

Of course, we also have to worry about assessing the learning that occurs in the program. This may be classroom learning or learning as a result of an internship or planned experience that is formally sponsored and supervised in some sense by the program. This type of in-program assessment presents fewer new problems

than assessment of prior learning since it is the kind of thing we do in much of our traditional work. We should not assume that because assessment of prior learning may require some new mechanisms that assessment of in-program learning will be just as complicated. On the other hand, we should not assume that all in-program learning (in a nontraditional program) should be handled by the same mix of quizzes and papers as are the traditional programs.



TO SUMMARIZE

1) There is assessment of students and assessment of programs. We are going to be concerned in these papers about assessment of students. But, remember, program assessment is also important.

2) Despite the term "credit for experience," we do not give credit just for experience. We give credit for learning and are interested in the experience only insofar as it relates to learning.

3) We need to worry about assessment of prior learning and in-program learning. While both deal with learning that is a desired outcome of our educational program, differences in the origin and timing of the learning require that we consider them at least somewhat separately.

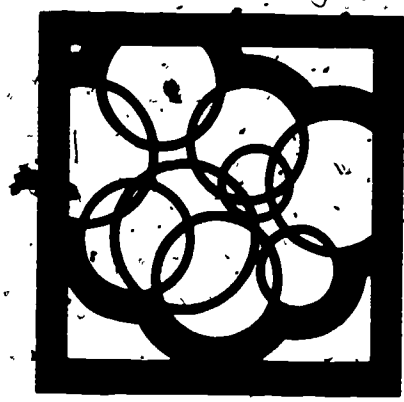
Thomas P. Hogan
July, 1977

3rd in a Series

Fundamental Principles

In the preceding paper in this series we identified what kind of assessment we would talk about. So, are we ready to get down to the nitty-gritty's, as they say? Well, not quite yet.

Before getting on with matters, we have found in working with faculty and staff groups over the years, there needs to be agreement on some fundamental principles, some general rationale that will help to guide us. We have identified six such principles. These principles do not arise from any theoretical framework and they may not constitute an exhaustive list. But we have found them to be important starting points. Let's identify them and comment just briefly on each.



1. THE DEFINITION OF "CONTENT" MUST PRECEDE SPECIFICATION OF ASSESSMENT PROCEDURES.

We must have a good idea of what we want to assess before we can intelligently discuss how we will assess

it. The principle seems absurdly simple. Yet, in practice, we often find faculty worrying about the assessment procedures before they have clearly defined the content of the program or, sometimes, before they have given any thought at all to the program.

As a general rule, if the content of the program is well thought out and particularly if it is stated in terms of competencies, appropriate assessment is very easily identified.

It becomes even easier to think about assessment if, in addition to having first defined content, you give some thought to "delivery systems," i.e. how the student will acquire the content, for example, via work experience, independent reading, course work, etc. To put it in simple terms, if you know where you want the student to go and how he is going to get there, it will usually not be difficult to "assess" whether or not he gets there.

Of course, in practice, this sequence will be more of a cyclical arrangement than a straight line. You'll think some about content, then about delivery systems, then perhaps revise your thinking about content somewhat in light of what you've learned about delivery systems. Then you'll investigate assessment and somewhat revise your thinking about both content and delivery systems in light of insights obtained about assessment. And you may repeat this cycle several times before the program seems to be ready.

2. CONTENT MAY BE DEFINED EITHER BY A COURSE-BASED MODEL OR A COMPETENCY-BASED MODEL.

This principle will be important for assessment in a nontraditional setting only if a competency-based model is used in that setting. But so many nontraditional programs use the competency-based model that we include this as a basic principle.

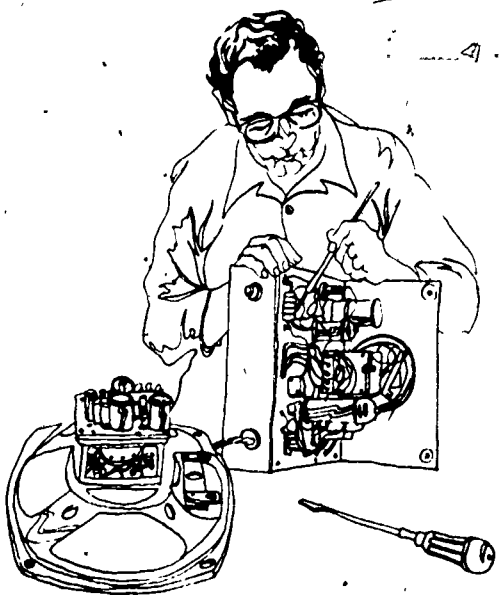
In the course-based model, we "package" learning in rather tidy little time

blocks. Included within the package, ordinarily, are certain requirements, readings, papers, quizzes, class meetings, etc. which result in the accumulation of credit points. This, obviously, is the typical model for education today.

In the competency model, we are concerned only with an end product - without regard to how that end was reached. But, it should be noted, the "end" is often exactly what we had hoped to achieve in a course-based model anyway. And while the competency is the overriding concern, we do usually specify several different ways in which the competency might be obtained.

The competency-based model is remarkably unfamiliar to most college faculty. However, the course-based and competency-based models have more similarities than differences. It is usually easy to translate back and forth between the two models.

The Wisconsin Extended Degrees are supposed to be competency-based. That does not mean that we scrap everything we know about course-based models. In some cases, a competency-based program will evolve rather directly from a course-based program. In addition, once a competency-based program is developed it can have a beneficial impact on some of our course-based programs. In general, it seems that we are better off emphasizing the similarities between the two types of programs rather than the differences.



3. IT IS POSSIBLE TO LEARN OUTSIDE THE NORMAL CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT.

This principle might be considered a corollary of the second principle (or vice versa). But, it is so crucial for extended degrees that it merits separate mention.

To many people, this principle may seem to be a truism. However, one hears it flatly denied on occasion by faculty members. More frequent than a

flat denial is an implicit denial, i.e. making translation of the principle into practical results so difficult as to make it inoperative.

In general, unless faculty feel comfortable with this principle, assessment in a nontraditional setting will be impossible - in fact, the whole nontraditional program becomes impossible.

4. ASSESSMENT IN THE NONTRADITIONAL SETTING SHOULD NOT BE MADE TO MEET REQUIREMENTS WHICH ARE NOT MET IN THE TRADITIONAL SETTING.

This is an extremely important principle. We sometimes expect assessment in the nontraditional setting to be perfect, forgetting that assessment in our traditional programs has many imperfections and is, in fact, often woefully inadequate.

How frequently we hear questions such as these:

> How can you test for sensitivity and values?
>
> How can you be sure that a person has really mastered the material?
>
> Shouldn't a college education provide for some integration or synthesis over and above a set of competencies or courses?

To be sure, assessment in the nontraditional setting probably will not get at these things. The important point is that we don't assess these things in our traditional programs anyway (much as we might like to). So why require that we do so in the nontraditional setting?

5. CREDIT (OR OTHER CERTIFICATION) IS GIVEN FOR AN ACCEPTABLE DEGREE OF LEARNING OF COLLEGE LEVEL MATERIAL.

AND

6. WHAT IS COLLEGE LEVEL MATERIAL AND HOW MUCH LEARNING IS ENOUGH DEPEND ON FACULTY JUDGMENT. THERE IS NO MAGIC INVOLVED.

These two principles probably answer more than half of all the questions raised by faculty regarding assessment in a nontraditional setting, particularly for assessment of prior learning. And, it should be noted that these principles govern assessment for all of college level education, both traditional and nontraditional.

What legitimizes putting course No. 600-101 on a student's transcript, with a "Pass" next to the entry? Two things: (1) the faculty has agreed that 600-101 is college level material and (2) the faculty (usually on the word of one faculty member) has determined that the student has learned an adequate amount of the material. It is no different in a nontraditional setting.

If we can get agreement on these six principles, at least among those people in an institution who will determine the acceptability of the program, then we are ready to begin discussing actual assessment procedures and mechanics. It is these procedures and mechanics which are taken up in the next three papers in this series.

Thomas P. Hogan
July, 1977

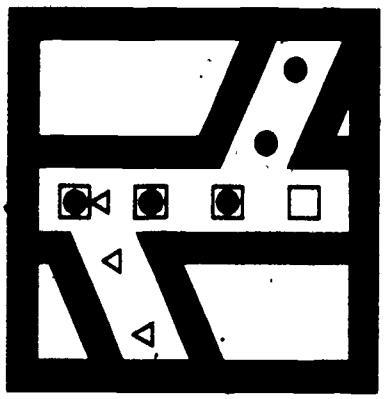
4th in a Series

Components of the System:

Mechanisms for Implementing the Program

In the two previous papers in this series, we considered some general issues that help to establish the framework for assessment in Wisconsin's Extended Degree Programs. Now it is time to consider how assessment will actually occur. Rather than thinking of assessment as a set of "tests," we need to think of a total system for assessment.

There are three critical components of the total assessment system that require attention. First we need to establish a mechanism for implementing the assessment. Second, we need to consider some assessment techniques. Third, we need to review methods for recording the results of the assessment. The first of these concerns is treated in this paper. The other two concerns are treated in the two subsequent papers in this series.



HOW THE TRADITIONAL SYSTEM WORKS

At the outset, we might note how these problems are handled in our traditional, classroom-based programs. They are familiar matters. The "mechanism" for implementing assessment is to allow the individual instructor to do it within the class setting. The "assessment techniques" are typically written examinations, prepared by the instructor, supplemented by term papers or lab exercises; and, of course, an occasional example of purely subjective judgment. The "recording of results" is handled by the Registrar recording a grade (A, B, ... Pass, etc.) next to a course number and title on a transcript. The grade originates with the instructor. The course title is elaborated on in a catalog and in various obscure documents in files of departments or the Dean's office. The whole system usually works pretty efficiently because we have lots of rules governing it and we've had lots of experience with it.

SPECIAL FEATURES OF EXTENDED DEGREE PROGRAMS

Three characteristics of the Extended Degree Programs require us to re-think how the assessment system will work. First, the programs should provide for the evaluation of prior learning. So, we are not just evaluating learning as it is taking place, as we do in the classroom setting. We need to evaluate learning that may have occurred 1, 5, 20 years ago.

Second, the programs should be competency based. We are no longer talking about giving a grade for a course. We need to assess individual competencies. Third, the Extended Degree Programs should provide for alternative learning modes. While the competencies remain the same regardless of learning mode, the mode actually used by a given student may suggest variations in the approach to assessment.

MECHANISMS FOR IMPLEMENTING ASSESSMENT

As identified in the second paper in this series, we can distinguish between assessment of prior learning and in-program or sponsored learning. Although the assessment techniques used and the way in which results are recorded - the second and third components of the assessment system - can be very much the same for prior and in-program learning, the mechanisms for implementing assessment are usually rather different. So we treat them separately here.

The mechanism needed for implementing assessment of in-program learning is just about what one would expect. An individual faculty member will be responsible for supervising a student's learning, as specified, for example, in a contract. And that individual faculty member will be responsible for evaluating the student's learning, with the method of evaluation being stipulated in the contract. The situation is almost identical to that prevailing for evaluation in the context of classroom learning. Nothing extraordinary is required.

In the case of assessment of prior learning, some special mechanism must be established. Actually, different universities have evolved several different models for handling the assessment of prior learning. What we would like to do in the remainder of the paper is to outline various possibilities for assessing prior learning and comment on their merits or shortcomings.

We can discuss the various models for implementing assessment of prior learning in terms of (a) what the student does and (b) how the faculty is involved. In the following paragraphs we discuss alternative ways in which the student might be involved and in which faculty might be involved in the process. Then some specific examples are used to illustrate some of the alternatives.

STUDENT INVOLVEMENT

Let's look first at what the student does. There are three possibilities.

First, the student can participate in a seminar, the purpose of which is to review the principles of giving credit for prior learning, help the student identify areas in which he or she may be able to get credit, and at least begin to assemble the evidence or documentation which faculty will review for determining if credit should be granted. The seminar approach is a very efficient one, since it allows for handling a group of people all at once. In addition participants, for whom the whole "credit for experience" enterprise is rather novel, probably get some measure of moral support from one another.

The disadvantage of the seminar approach for programs such as the Extended Degree is that it requires students to come together somewhere for some period of time - a circumstance which the Extended Degree Program was originally designed to avoid. However, it may be that some sort of state-wide network of seminars can be established in Wisconsin so that we can take advantage of the efficiencies of the seminar approach while not relinquishing the advantages of geographical flexibility.

Second, the student can work with a central advisor. The advisor attempts to accomplish on a one-to-one basis exactly what the seminar does on a group basis: review the principles of getting credit for prior learning, identify areas in which credit might be awarded, and help the student to assemble documentation for prior learning.

The central advisor would ordinarily be someone on the academic staff, perhaps from the academic advising, testing, admissions, or registrar's office, with a percentage of time specifically assigned to working on assessment of prior learning. Part of the advisor's responsibilities, obviously, would be to keep

informed about developments in the area of assessing prior learning.

The central advisor mechanism is the one we use at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay. At the present time, the advisor, located in the Academic Advising Office, is assigned 60% time to working with students on assessment of prior learning. The advisor deals with about 100 students per year on these matters.

The advantage of the central advisor system is its flexibility. This flexibility is manifested in a number of ways. First, students can start through the process at any time and continue the process at an individualized pace, whereas the seminar approach limits the student to starting whenever the seminar starts and to continuing at the group's pace. Second, the areas of experience in which different students may qualify for credit are quite varied. Working on a one-to-one basis, the central advisor can quickly zero in on the areas relevant to a particular student. Thirdly, the student can work with a central advisor on a "long distance" basis, a point which is particularly crucial for the Extended Degree Programs. And finally, the amount of time devoted to working with students on assessment of prior learning by the central advisor can be expanded or contracted as needed - assuming the advisor is working in an office with a number of other individuals for whom the overall flow of work can be adjusted. This point may be especially important in the start-up period for Extended Degrees, when the numbers of students to be dealt with is uncertain.

The major disadvantage of the central advisor system is its inefficiency. Much of what must be explained about credit for prior learning is the same for all students, and the advisor has to repeat this for each new student. (One might think that all this common material could be written down so new students could

read it in advance of working with the central advisor. Alas, the information usually is available in written form, but still must be reviewed personally with each student.)

The third way in which students can be involved in getting credit for prior learning is to pursue the matter on their own. There is no seminar or central advisor or any other mechanism to assist the student - or, at least, the student has not identified the mechanism. The student simply bumbles along, going from office to office, picking up bits and pieces of information - overall a very excruciating experience. This is really not a formal mechanism at all. Rather, it is the lack of a mechanism. It is identified here as a possibility simply because one does find it in operation on occasion. Perhaps the only case where this non-mechanism might be justifiable is where there are so few students qualified to get credit for prior learning that establishment of one of the other mechanisms would be senseless.

FACULTY INVOLVEMENT

What results from student involvement, as described above, is an indication of learning for which credit might be granted and documentation for the learning. Whether or not credit will be granted is a matter for the faculty to determine. So we must talk about how the faculty will be involved in the process. We have three possibilities for faculty involvement.

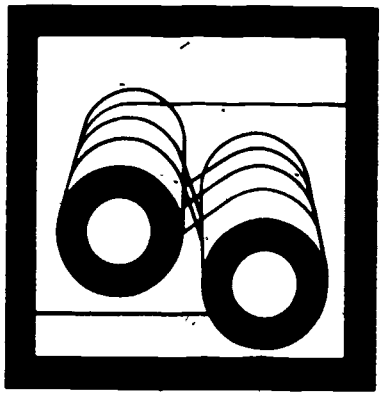
First, each department or other instructional unit may have an individual responsible for evaluating learning which falls within the general purview of that department.

Second, individual faculty members can be selected to evaluate evidence of learning in terms of the courses they teach or in terms of some other indication of their areas of expertise. A variation on this mode of operation is having

individuals with some special expertise who are not faculty members (e.g. local businessmen, engineers, artists) help to evaluate the evidence.

Third, a faculty committee, consisting of representatives from different areas of learning, can review evidence for all students from all areas of learning.

The advantages and disadvantages of these three methods tend to be complementary. On the one hand, the fewer people involved in the total process, the easier it is to organize, and the more experience these people get with the system. On the other hand, the smaller the number of people involved, the more frequently they will be called upon to make judgments outside their areas of greatest expertise.



SOME EXAMPLES

Let us pick two examples representing combinations of student and faculty involvement to illustrate very briefly how the mechanism for assessing prior learning can take place. First, consider the case where students are involved via seminar and faculty via standing committee. Students, say 15 of them, participate in a six-week seminar. In the seminar, conducted by one faculty member, the students become familiar with the principles and procedures for getting credit for prior learning. By using certain manuals, such as the CAEL Guide for Student Portfolio Development (see CAEL Bibliography, page 3), the students sift through their previous work experience, independent readings, community activities, etc., to identify areas in which they might get credit. Then they begin to assemble documentation for the learning or identify exams they might take, papers they might write, products they can prepare, etc. which will demonstrate their learning. After all of the appropriate material is in order, it is presented to the standing Faculty Committee on Assessment of Prior Learning. The committee consists of six faculty members, one each from the

following areas: business, social sciences, natural sciences, humanities, fine arts, and education. The committee reviews the evidence for each student in turn, deciding how much credit is to be granted in various areas. The committee might meet weekly for about two hours, so that the entire task would take about two months. Sometimes a student may be asked for additional documentation or for clarification of information already submitted.

For a second example, let us take the case where the student is involved via a central advisor and faculty involved according to area of expertise. The student begins by contacting the central advisor. In an initial meeting, the advisor reviews the principles and procedures for getting credit for prior learning and begins to explore areas in this student's background that may have resulted in creditable learning. The advisor will suggest that the student begin to analyze previous experiences in more detail, compare what was learned with descriptions of courses in the university's catalog, and begin to determine what evidence might be available to document this learning. The student will not complete all of these things before next meeting with the advisor, but will at least get started on them. The student and the advisor may meet again in about two weeks to review progress. Several additional meetings, each one representing successive refinements of the student's documentation may occur. The advisor may be talking all along with faculty members in various areas about the kind of evidence that may be needed for a particular case. After the portfolio is ready, or even as pieces of it are finished, the advisor selects faculty members with appropriate areas of expertise to review the evidence. In case the advisor is unsure about which faculty member would be best for evaluating a certain kind of learning, she seeks advice from the department chairman in an appropriate department. Once the faculty member is

selected, he or she reviews the evidence and makes a credit recommendation. For a given student, there will be as many faculty involved as there are areas of learning to be evaluated.

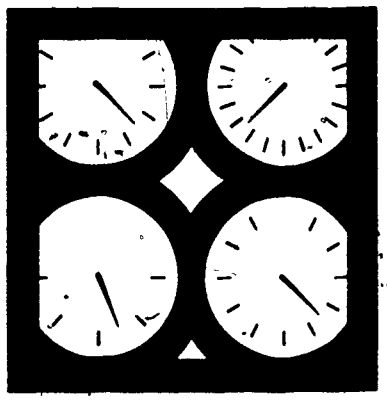
5th in a Series

Components of the System:

Assessment Techniques

In the last paper in this series, we indicated that there are three components in the total assessment system: mechanisms for implementing the assessment, assessment techniques, and methods for recording the results of assessment. The last paper (#4) treated the mechanisms for implementing assessment. The next paper (#6) will discuss methods of recording the results.

The present paper discusses various assessment techniques. It is odd, in a way, that while this whole series of papers is about "assessment," this fifth paper is the only one that is purely about assessment. But that's the way it is: Most of the problems of assessment in extended degrees are not really about assessment, as such, but about organization, personnel, records, rationale, and so on.



The basic question to be answered in this paper is: What methods are available for documenting that learning has occurred? (We assume that a deter-

mination has already been made that the area of learning in question is in fact college-type material.) As indicated in the second paper in this series, the basic principle is that we will use whatever information helps us to draw the inference that the level of learning is adequate. While it is important to explicate that statement as a general principle, it is not very helpful at a practical level. What techniques, specifically, are available?

It may not be possible to give an exhaustive listing of available assessment techniques, but it is possible to identify a number of techniques which will cover about 99% of our needs. In the following paragraphs, we identify seven categories of assessment techniques which should be suggestive of the wide variety of ways in which we can determine whether or not a student's level of learning in an area is adequate. There is some overlap among the categories but they are generally different ways of approaching the assessment question. The seven categories are listed in the following chart.

LIST OF ASSESSMENT TECHNIQUES

EXAMINATIONS
Objective or Essay
Standardized or Locally Prepared

PRODUCT ASSESSMENT

JOB DESCRIPTIONS

CERTIFICATES

PREPARING A PAPER

JOB PERFORMANCE
Real or Simulated

INTERVIEW

EXAMINATIONS

One obvious method for determining a student's level of learning is by use of examinations. This is the method most familiar to us for the ordinary classroom situation.

"AT LEAST, THEY COULD SUSPECT US IN PERSON."

Examinations may be subdivided into a number of more specific categories, suggesting the wide variety of possibilities for this technique. First, there are series of standardized examinations, best represented by (but not limited to) the College Level Examination Program (CLEP) and the College Proficiency Examination Program (CPEP). There are a great variety of other standardized examinations, usually aimed at special audiences or subject matter that is more restricted than that for CLEP or CPEP. Examples of these other standardized exams are those published by or for the National League for Nursing, the American Chemical Society, the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants, the National Occupational Competency Testing Institute, and many others.

These standardized exams have several desirable features. First, the very fact that they already exist, so that little local effort is required, is a great convenience. Second, they have ordinarily been carefully developed; the "bugs" have been worked out. Third, there is usually some normative information available for them which is helpful in establishing reasonable standards for performance. Fourth, because they are usually developed by individuals representing different institutions, they tend to be free of idiosyncracies which might be found in locally prepared exams. Finally, it is relatively easy to communicate with students and other institutions about them because there are manuals and other types of des-

criptive information available for the tests.

The major disadvantage of standardized examinations is that they tend to be available only for areas covered by widely-taught, lower level courses. In addition, most of the examinations are very "academic." This factor needs to be taken into account especially for adults, who are the expected audience for extended degrees. Individuals who feel that they have acquired, through experience, a good working knowledge of the practical aspects of some field may be thrown by the bookishness of most standardized examinations.

A second type of examination is the locally prepared one. These exams may be prepared by an individual instructor or by a department.

The major advantage of locally prepared exams is that they are available for nearly all regularly taught courses. However, these exams have a number of disadvantages. First, they often incorporate idiosyncracies peculiar to a particular institution, instructor, or textbook. Second, when used over a period of several years, it may be difficult to keep these exams secure, especially if they continue to be used in regularly taught courses. Third, these exams will not ordinarily have the array of supplementary descriptive material, normative data, etc., available for standardized exams.

PRODUCT ASSESSMENT

Examining and judging the quality of a product is one of the most sensible ways of determining whether or not a person has a particular competency. This assessment technique is especially suitable for evaluating competencies in the areas of fine arts (music, dance, painting, etc.) and communications skills (speaking and writing), although it has many

other applications, too.

In some instances, the product to be judged has already been produced by the student - perhaps over a long period of time, for example, a piece of sculpture or a poem. In other instances, the student may be able to produce the work, more or less, on demand, for example, playing a musical instrument or giving a short speech. In both instances, we need one or more experts (usually faculty members) to judge the quality of the product. A convenient way of doing this is by comparing the quality of the work with that characteristic of students who have just completed a course in the relevant area.

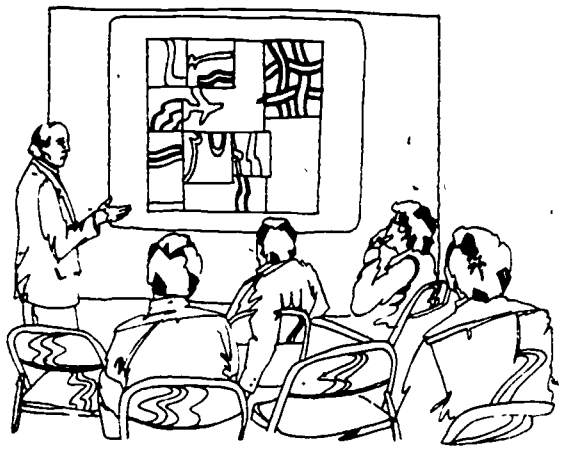
In addition to judging the quality of the work, in instances where the work has already been produced, we need to worry about the authenticity of authorship. Is it really the student's own work? If there is some question regarding authorship, it may be helpful to have the student discuss the work: why he used certain techniques, what is the meaning of a certain part of the work, etc. Or it may be helpful to have the student demonstrate some techniques (of sculpting, painting, etc.), not to produce a complete work but just to verify that the skills are there.

JOB DESCRIPTIONS

For many competencies relevant to the Extended Degree Programs, examinations of a person's job description will be helpful in determining what competencies a person possesses. The job description should not originate with the student but should be an official description supplied by the employer. It is best to have a statement from the employer that the person does actually perform the duties listed in the job description.

From the job descriptions, and supporting material from the employer, we can either determine directly that a person has a certain competency or we may <u>infer</u> that, if the person does certain things, he must have a certain kind of knowledge or skill.

For example, from a job description for an employee at the middle-management level in a bank we might be able to determine rather directly that the person knows certain things about banking operations, because the job description specifically calls for this knowledge; and we may be able to infer that the person knows certain things about stock and bond markets because the person has responsibilities relating to investment of the bank's funds.



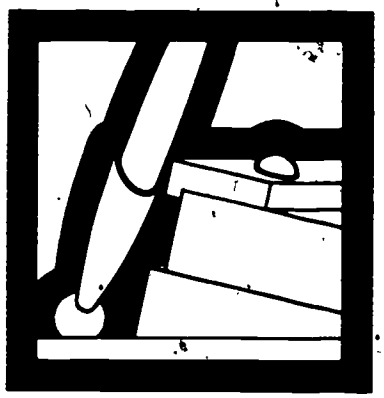
CERTIFICATES AND RELATED DOCUMENTATION

If a person takes a regular college course, "credit" is obtained which can be transferred from one institution to another via a transcript. The credit on the transcript is taken as evidence that learning has occurred. Many people participate in formal learning experiences which are not regular college courses. These experiences include seminars, workshops, and similar endeavors. People may participate in these as part of their work or for personal interest.

Frequently, certificates will be issued to persons who have completed one of these types of learning experiences. Or, the person may have other evidence of effective participation: completed worksheets, appearance in different parts of the program, etc. Provided that the subject matter for the experience was college-level in nature, the certificates or other documentation can be taken as evidence for learning in very much the same way as a transcript of credit is.

PREPARING A PAPER

Preparing a paper in which a person displays his knowledge of a certain subject is, of course, a time-honored method of evaluation. The technique is wonderfully flexible, being applicable to almost any area of knowledge and allowing for



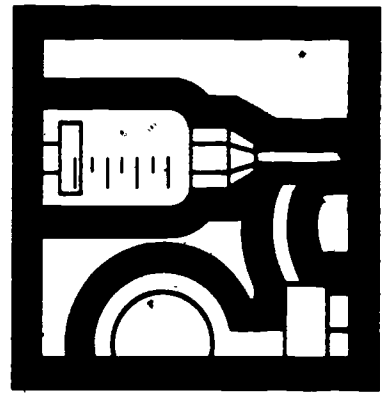
consideration of special treatments suitable to a person's background.

The very flexibility of the technique, however, leads to certain difficulties. First, since each paper will probably be on a unique topic, it may be difficult to specify an acceptable level of performance. Second, it is so easy to say "Write me a paper about such and such," that we tend to overlook other, possibly more suitable, methods of evaluating a person's knowledge. We should be particularly reluctant to use the "Write me..." line when evidence already exists regarding a person's knowledge. It seems inhumane to ask a person to write a 30 page paper about local economic problems when it is perfectly clear from the person's job description that he knows about these problems.

JOB PERFORMANCE

In some instances, when there may be some question about what a job description implies, it is possible to have a person actually perform some part of a job. The evaluator observes the job performance and makes a judgment about the quality of the work. This is obviously similar to the product assessment technique discussed above; in the present instance, the "product" to be judged is some activity required by the person's job.

The observation may be made of performance in a real or simulated job, depending mostly on which is more convenient. For example, a person's job may require chemical analysis of water, soil, and other substances. We might arrange to observe the person conducting such analysis in the field or we might simulate the field operation in a university laboratory.



INTERVIEWING

The final assessment technique we wish to identify is that of interviewing. This is a very flexible technique which allows us to probe virtually any area of knowledge or experience. It is particularly suitable for very unusual areas or unique combinations of areas. It can also be very helpful in supplementing some of the other assessment techniques.

Of course, as one might expect, the flexibility of the interviewing technique can be its downfall. If the interview is nothing more than a "chit chat," it will be difficult to tell what has been learned from it. It is preferable to have a prepared list of questions or areas to be probed in the interview. Using such a list as a basic guideline, the interviewer can then follow up on selected points or pursue certain comments without fear of becoming totally lost in the interview.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

For most types of college level learning, assessment can be accomplished with several of the techniques identified above. The selection of one particular technique over others can be made on the basis of convenience, cost, and even, to some extent, personal preferences of the local faculty.

Here is a useful procedure for investigating the applicability of various assessment techniques to competencies which have been identified for an extended degree program. List the competencies along the left hand side of a page and the assessment techniques as column headings across the top, as is done for a sample set of competencies on the next page. For each competency, investigate the applicability of each assessment technique. If an assessment technique does seem applicable, write a short description of how it would work; you will want a more detailed description later on if you decide to actually use the technique.

Then, for competencies which can be assessed in more than one way; rank the

ILLUSTRATION OF APPLICABILITY OF VARIOUS ASSESSMENT TECHNIQUES TO SAMPLE COMPETENCIES

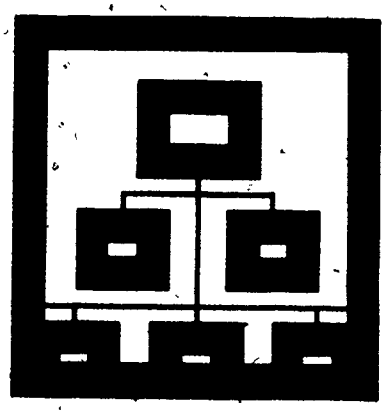
COMPETENCIES[a]	ASSESSMENT TECHNIQUES						
	Examinations	Product Assess.	Job Descrip.	Certificates	Prepare Paper	Job Perform.	Interview
Ability to use some computer language at an elementary level	4[b]	2	1	3			
Knowledge of social aspects of some "other" culture					1		2
Ability to portray information graphically		1	3			2	
Ability to apply concepts of sampling to interpretation of survey data	1	2			3		

[a]These competency statements are given in a very abbreviated fashion for purposes of this illustration.

[b]Assessment techniques are ranked here in order of preference for use with each particular competency.

techniques in order of preference. This ranking may result in the selection of a single technique to be used with all students under all circumstances. Or it may result in a "contingency" list, i.e. one that specifies use of one technique under certain circumstances, another technique under other circumstances.

There is one type of contingency listing of assessment techniques which merits special mention because its use is not immediately obvious but, when used, it can save a considerable amount of time. Several techniques might be applied serially, beginning with the most convenient and continuing to use different techniques only until it is clear whether the person does or does not possess the competency in question.



Suppose we are trying to determine if a person has competency in the area of computer programming. We might start with the person's job description. It may be perfectly obvious from the job description that the person does have the level and type of competency desired. In that case the investigation stops here. On the other hand, the faculty member reviewing the job description may not be ready to conclude that the person has the desired competency. Then, some sample programs prepared by the person may be reviewed (an example of the product assessment technique). Now it may be perfectly obvious that the person has the desired competency, in which case the investigation is concluded. If there is still some question about the person's competency, he may be asked to take a standardized exam on computer programming. Application of this serial procedure is designed to minimize time (and grief) for both the student and the faculty.

Thomas P. Hogan
July, 1977

6th in a Series

Components of the System:

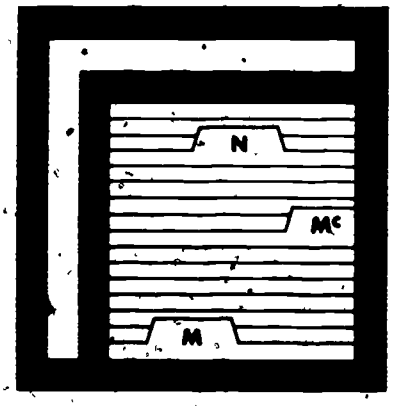
Methods for Recording Results

As indicated at the beginning of our discussion about the components of an assessment system, an assessment is not complete until the result is recorded in some fashion. In the traditional system, the record is a transcript in the Registrar's office. On this transcript, a course number and title and a grade are recorded.

What are the problems of recording the results of assessment in a competency-based Extended Degree Program? And, how shall we handle these problems? These are the questions which will be treated in this paper.

SPECIAL CONCERNS

As we investigate the methods for recording results, there are a number of special concerns which should be kept in mind. First, our concern is with competency-based programs, rather than course-based programs. Second, we will be dealing



with assessment of prior learning as well as in-program or sponsored learning. Third, the record keeping system requires paperwork and procedures for completing the paperwork. Lead time will be needed for preparing these, at least if significant changes are introduced into the present system for recording results.

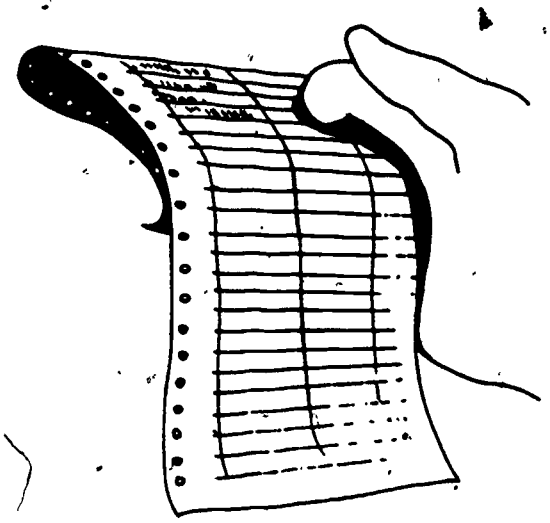
USING A COURSE-BASED MODEL FOR RECORDING IN A COMPETENCY-BASED PROGRAM

The record of results of assessment in an extended degree program may follow either a course-based or a competency-based model. The course-based model for recording, it should be noted, can be used even if the program itself is competency-based. We simply aggregate a number of related competencies and treat them as if they were a course. This is particularly easy to do for those Extended Degree Programs which originated from existing on-campus degrees with a highly structured set of courses. Most of the Wisconsin extended degrees now being developed are of this type.

If you are going to use a course-based recording model for a competency-based program, there are a number of "tricks" which can be used to facilitate procedures. First - and this is no trick at all - it will be convenient, if at all possible, to identify existing courses which correspond roughly to the competencies displayed by the student.

Second, it may be possible to identify courses which, while not actually in existence at a particular institution, are actual courses at other institutions or at least potential courses. For example, in a recent case at Green Bay, we were asked to evaluate a student's competency in the Finnish language. Now, Green Bay is not a large enough school to justify having courses in Finnish - in fact, few schools in the country do offer it. But it is obvious what the courses would be if they were offered: There would be Finnish I, Finnish II, Finnish Conversation and Finnish Literature, or something along those lines. With this framework

in mind (and, fortunately, a faculty member who was a native of Finland), it was not difficult to proceed with the evaluation and to record it in a manner consistent with treatment of existing courses.



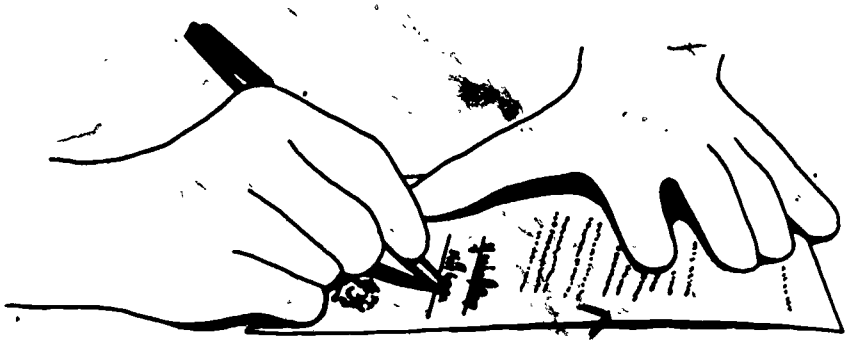
Some areas of competency may not fit either of the patterns described above - they are just very unique, although judged to be college-level in nature. A convenient method for handling these situations is through the use of procedures established for independent study, field experiences, or experimental courses. Many institutions have special numbers for such courses, such as 999, prefixed by a department number. Such special numbers can be used for recording results of an evaluation of a very unique competency, while still working within the course-based recording system.

MASTER LIST OF COMPETENCIES

If the recording system is to be competency-based, one of two approaches can be used. First, a master list of competencies can be developed for the program. The list may include 40-50 competencies or it may include hundreds of detailed competencies. The list can be coded in some fashion and a short title can be assigned to each competency. Then this list can be used in the same manner as a course listing is used in the traditional recording system. A student's transcript would show a list of competencies, identified by code number and title. A catalog, somewhere, would identify in more complete fashion exactly what the competencies are.

THE NARRATIVE TRANSCRIPT

An alternative method for recording results in the competency-based model is the so-called narrative transcript. As suggested by the name, the narrative transcript gives a detailed description of a student's competencies, experiences, methods used for evaluation, etc. in a manner that is unique to each student. The advantages and disadvantages of the narrative transcript should be obvious. It is rich in detail, can be customized to fit the nuances of each case, and does not require the reader to check other sources (e.g. catalogs) to determine what the meaning of an entry is. On the other hand, the narrative transcript can be a pain in the neck. It tends to be very long, thereby causing storage problems. In addition, it is devoid of those summary statistics, such as overall GPA, which many people look for. As a result of these latter factors, the narrative transcript may cause problems for students who are transferring to another institution, going on to graduate school, or submitting the transcript in conjunction with a job application.



The narrative transcript can be a very useful document, in theory, probably much more useful than our traditional transcripts. However, because it is so different from the traditional transcript, the decision to adopt it should not be made without considerable advance planning and exploration. In fact, in the Wisconsin situation right now, given that the extended degree programs will be relatively small for some period of time, even overshadowed by our traditional campus-based programs, we would not recommend adopting the narrative transcript at the outset.

A CONCLUDING NOTE

Easing the flow of paperwork and making sure that records make sense are important considerations in developing an extended degree or any other nontraditional program. Failure to attend to these issues can cause much grief both for faculty who are developing the program, for students, and for student service personnel.

We strongly recommend that a representative from the Registrar's office be included in discussions about the extended degree from the earliest stages of development. Ultimately, this will save much time and effort for everyone involved.

Thomas P. Hogan
July, 1977