

**College of Arts and Sciences**  
**Report on Outcome Assessment**  
(February, 2004)

The purpose of this report is to briefly summarize the outcome assessment activities of the College of Arts and Sciences. These activities are at the College-level in the assessment of the SAGES pilot program, and at the department-level in each of the College's 21 academic departments.

**College of Arts and Sciences' Assessment of SAGES (Seminar Approach to General Education and Scholarship):**

The primary outcome assessment activity of the College of Arts and Sciences is the ongoing assessment of the SAGES program. Currently in its pilot phase, SAGES is the subject of a comprehensive, rigorous, and continuous assessment program. The assessment involves a range of methods, including standardized course evaluations, SAGES-developed course evaluations, direct observations of the learning environment, interviews with faculty and students, and use of National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) data.

Multiple groups of students are currently included in the assessment. Students entering as first year students in August, 2002 were asked if they wanted to be included in a random selection pool for SAGES. The assessment includes: (a) first year students who wanted to participate and were selected to participate; (b) first year students who wanted to participate but were not selected to participate; and (c) students who declined to be included in the pool of students to be selected for SAGES. Students entering in August, 2003 have also been included in the assessment.

The high level of rigor and comprehensiveness in the SAGES assessment is of central importance to a pilot program like SAGES, both for the assessment of student outcomes and for evaluation and refinement of the SAGES program itself. Because new assessment information is continually collected and analyzed, the most effective reporting mechanism is through a website ([www.cwru.edu/sages/newgereval](http://www.cwru.edu/sages/newgereval)). The bulk of the information currently posted pertains to the first year of the pilot program beginning in August, 2002 and ending in May, 2003. In that first year, approximately 131 First Year students were involved in SAGES. Ten sections of First Seminar and 6 different University Seminars were offered.

An executive summary of the first year of the SAGES appended to the end of this report, and the website should be visited for the most current results.

**Department-Level Assessment in the College of Arts and Sciences:**

The Executive Committee of the College of Arts and Sciences, in consultation with then Dean John Bassett, determined that outcome assessment in the College required accommodation of the variability among our twenty-one departments. As would be expected, outcome assessment plans differ from department to department. All

departments submitted a plan for outcome assessment that was reviewed and approved by the Executive Committee and the Dean. Annual reports include an item asking for departmental activities related to outcome assessment. Interdisciplinary programs do not, in general, have formal outcome assessment plans.

While there is some overlap, there is not a single strategy for outcome assessment across academic departments. Outcome assessment methods across the departments include the following mechanisms:

- course evaluations
- exit interviews with graduating seniors
- essays by graduating seniors evaluating their experiences
- admission to top graduate and professional schools
- admission to special summer programs abroad
- discipline-specific written questionnaires
- e-mail or phone interviews
- portfolios of writing projects
- evaluations of capstone experiences
- ongoing evaluations of student progress
- alumni interviews

Some departmental plans originally included GRE scores. However, the Executive Committee raised questions as to confidentiality and GRE scores were removed from assessment plans.

### **Effectiveness of Outcome Assessment Efforts:**

The most promising outcome assessment is the ongoing assessment of the SAGES pilot program. The assessment procedures have resulted in adjustments to the program and it is anticipated that the assessment will be ongoing after full implementation as the program continually assesses itself and evolves. It is difficult to assess the effectiveness of department-based outcome assessment. Although annual reports from departments include an item about progress and activity in outcome assessment, there has been no evaluation of assessment results across College departments.

### **Plans to Implement New Assessment Activities and/or Phase Out Existing Methods**

The SAGES program will continue to be refined and evaluated. SAGES has already modified aspects of its program in response to assessment and evaluation. The SAGES budget contains funds for outcome assessment and personnel identified for these tasks. Importantly, there is an intellectual and programmatic interest in assessing how well SAGES is accomplishing its pedagogical goals.

There are a number of limitations to the department-based assessment activities. These limitations are outlined below (see Continuing Issues).

### **Perceived Readiness of the College to be Evaluated (NCA accreditation):**

The SAGES evaluation is very strong, comprehensive and rigorous. It is an ongoing enterprise. This should be the College's primary effort in outcome assessment for accreditation. SAGES is in a position to evaluate how well the University is doing in promoting the goals of the SAGES program. Unlike the department assessment activities, SAGES touches a sufficient number of students for assessment and

### **Continuing Issues:**

Serious issues of resources and support for outcome assessment remain for department-based efforts. These include:

- Some departments graduate too few majors in any given year for assessment to move beyond anecdotes.
- It is difficult to separate out the major/minor from the broader educational experience.
- There is no clarity as to how outcome assessment results will be used or what value they will have.
- Departments should have a dedicated person to conduct and analyze these assessment data.
- Departments need funding and intellectual support for these activities, including support for the dedicated person.
- Departments need support from Alumni Relations to provide all departments with up-to-date lists of alumni for assessment purposes.
- Intellectual interest in outcome assessment that is valued by the College similar to other intellectual work and/or College and University service is needed.
- Departments need further education as to how to conduct and interpret outcome assessment.

The student component of outcome assessment also needs attention. The issues include:

- Students need to take ownership and interest in their learning goals and whether they are being accomplished.
- The value on student responses needs to be demonstrated by insuring that all students participate.

## **Addendum:**

### **SAGES**

Executive Summary of the Assessment Website

[www.cwru.edu/sages/newgereval/](http://www.cwru.edu/sages/newgereval/)

January, 2004

A comprehensive, rigorous, and continuous assessment program is of central importance to a pilot program like SAGES for two important reasons. First, the information gained can be used for program development. Weaknesses can be addressed and strengths can be maintained. Second, the faculty and administration of Case must be able to evaluate whether the SAGES program has satisfactorily addressed its primary goals and this can in part be accomplished through the dissemination of the assessment information. Because new assessment information is continually collected and analyzed, the most logical reporting platform (mechanism) is through a website. This website can be easily updated and readily accessed by the Case community.

Overall evaluation of the program's first year has been positive. Quantitative analyses of university course evaluations, SAGES designed course evaluations, and the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) all suggest that SAGES students when compared to non-SAGES students are reporting higher levels of satisfaction and engagement in the academic skills emphasized in SAGES (writing, critical discussion, oral presentation skills). They report higher levels of contact with faculty, and greater satisfaction with academic advising. For the NSSE data which has been collected on Case first year students for the last 3 years, SAGES students report significantly higher levels on these key variables when compared to the last three years of non-SAGES first year students and to first year students at other comparable universities. Retention at Case of students in SAGES was higher (97%) than that for non-SAGES students (92%).

Several weaknesses were also identified. During the fall of 2002, First Seminar faculty and students complained that the common syllabus was too regimented and had too many required activities. The University Circle Institution (UCI) events were enjoyable, but were not well integrated into the coursework. In the spring of 2003, the University Seminars had as many as 25 students enrolled. Faculty and students both complained that seminars with more than 15 students were too large to allow a true seminar format. Two other emphases of the SAGES program involving the integration of the topics of diversity and ethics into the curriculum were not found to be significantly higher when compared to non-SAGES students' evaluations.

Several changes were made to the SAGES program as a direct result of the assessment data:

- The common syllabus for the First Seminar was revised and instructors are now given more freedom in selecting readings, sequencing of topics, and in assignments.
- A 4<sup>th</sup> hour was identified for each First Seminar section to allow faculty and student participation in the UCI events as a group. Furthermore, the faculty worked directly with UCI representatives to create programs targeted specifically at course related topics.

- Beginning in the Spring of 2004, University Seminars are limited to 15 or fewer students. This was made possible by the addition of the Presidential Fellow Program
- Prior to the beginning of the fall 2003 semester, faculty were engaged in a training session with Professor Beth McGee, the Case Diversity Officer, on how to better incorporate diversity issues into the First Seminar.
- Online modules on ethics have been developed and made available to SAGES faculty for use in their courses. All First Year students beginning with the class entering in the fall of 2004 will be required to pass a test on understanding plagiarism as part of their Writing Portfolio requirement.

This executive summary is accurate and current as of the end of December, 2003. Because the assessment website is not static, interested parties are encouraged to refer directly to the website for the most up to date perspective on SAGES. The bulk of the information currently posted pertains to the first year of the pilot program beginning in August, 2002 and ending in May, 2003. In that first year, approximately 131 First Year students were involved in SAGES. Ten sections of First Seminar and 6 different University Seminars were offered.