A. Background and Overview

Ongoing assessment of graduate programs takes place largely at the program-level and is designed to meet the distinctive needs of the program, the degree, and the discipline. The Graduate School supports program-level assessment through activities such as program approvals and reviews by the Graduate Faculty Executive Committee (GFEC), providing assessment resources and opportunities, benchmarking of data, continuous improvement of data access and tools, and the deliberative review of policies in concert with other units.

The Graduate School also plays a role in offering assessment activities and opportunities directly to students and postdocs. The Graduate School strives to evaluate its own programs, workshops, and services it provides to students and programs. Also, the Graduate School serves as the assigned administrative school/college for two graduate programs with respect to program review, assessment, and accreditation compliance: Biophysics and Cellular and Molecular Biology.

Thus, this Assessment Annual Activities Report encompasses activities done at the program level, student and postdoc level, internally, as well as with the two graduate programs for which the Graduate School serves as the assigned administrative college. In all these realms, the Graduate School continues to emphasize the importance of the student experience and student learning.

B. Description of Graduate School Assessment Activities

1. Graduate Faculty Executive Committee (GFEC) Activities

Program Reviews: The committee completed 12 ten-year program reviews as well as reviewed the requested follow-up reports of eight previously completed ten-year program reviews. These numbers signal an extremely productive year for program review activities.

Program Proposals: The committee reviewed and approved 17 actions for new programs or program changes (excluding discontinuations/suspensions). An additional seven actions were reviewed and approved related to discontinuations or suspensions. These numbers signal an extremely productive year for program proposal activities.

Review and Development of Academic Policy: The committee reviewed and approved policies in five major categories to move campus into compliance with institutional accreditation criteria and to address other related impacts: minimum graduate residence credit requirement, minimum graduate degree credit requirement, minimum graduate course work (50%) requirement, prior course work criteria, and maximum credits per
term. Although prompted by the Higher Learning Commission’s (HLC) institutional accreditation criteria, these policy changes were utilized as another avenue to ensure the integrity of our graduate degrees and the quality of the graduate student experience. The committee also reviewed and approved the creation of an exception pathway based on specialized accreditation to allow undergraduate credits to count toward a graduate degree. The review and approval of all these policies represent a robust and comprehensive review of existing policies and practices which, in turn, led to thoughtful and responsive changes to graduate academic policy.

2. **Assessment Resources/Opportunities for Students and Programs**

   **Individual Development Plans:** The Graduate School took steps to partner with other campus offices and to build a repository of resources around individual development plans (IDPs) for students, postdocs, advisors/mentors, and programs. IDPs are valuable tools to help graduate students and postdoctoral researchers assess their skills, interests, and strengths; make a plan to meet academic and professional goals; and communicate those intentions with advisors/mentors. IDPs are continually revisited and refined and also serve as a way to record progress and accomplishments.

   **Professional Development Activities and Resources:** The Graduate School and partners across campus offer a variety of events for graduate students and post-docs around the following topics: career, ethics, financial education, presenting and publishing, research, teaching, work-life balance, writing, etc. These events are key assessment and learning opportunities to succeed academically and professionally. In addition, the Graduate School’s professional development webpages offer a variety of resources including planning guides, skills development tools, and career support resources to support professional goals.

   **Graduate Program Handbook Template:** In response to the absence of a program handbook during several program reviews, the Graduate School coordinated a comprehensive graduate program handbook template. The template includes several areas directly linked to student learning and a positive student experience: articulation of program learning goals, program advising, program requirements, program expectations, grievance procedures, student involvement, professional development and career planning, etc. The existence of a thoughtful and thorough program handbook has been deemed a key criterion to the success of graduate programs and its students. In fact, the exercise of reviewing the program handbook template against a program’s existing (or absent) handbook is an excellent assessment activity to determine areas of strength and weakness.

   **Outreach Efforts to Graduate Programs:** The Graduate School piloted a summer seminar series intended to increase graduate students’ access to career planning expertise at the program level, by building basic career development knowledge and referral skills in graduate program coordinators. Additionally, we funded two graduate program coordinators to attend an intensive 120-hour online/hybrid career development training. Assessment of the series and the training is currently underway.

   The Graduate School is also increasing its outreach work, in an effort to better publicize professional development opportunities. This outreach includes explicit messaging that
the Graduate School embraces diverse career outcomes, both within the tenure-track and in various other sectors outside of the academy.

3. Data Reporting and Access Activities

**National Data Reports/Directories**

- Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) *International Graduate Admissions Survey (Phase I, II, and III)*
- *Survey of Earned Doctorates (SED)*
- Council of Graduate Schools (CGS)/Graduate Records Examination (GRE) *Survey of Graduate Enrollment and Degrees*
- National Science Foundation (NSF)-National Institutes of Health (NIH) *Survey of Graduate Students and Postdoctorates in Science and Engineering*
- The Graduate School administers the Association of the American Universities Data Exchange’s (AAUDE) Graduate Education Doctoral Exit Survey. This data is provided to the Provost’s Office so it can be shared with AAUDE to provide further opportunities for analysis with peer institutions.
- ACT’s Graduate/Professional School Survey
- Peterson’s Annual Survey of Graduate and Professional Institutions

**Campus Data Surveys/Reports**

- Exit Surveys: The Graduate School continues to administer the internally developed master’s student exit survey. It also manages the completion of two doctoral exit surveys: *Survey of Earned Doctorates (SED)* and the American Universities Data Exchange’s (AAUDE) Graduate Education Doctoral Exit Survey. The new electronic warrant system and internal business practices help with the effective administration and completion rates of these surveys.
- Program Profiles: The Graduate School continues to annually create Graduate Program Profiles. These Profiles are available on the web and provide helpful program-specific data to prospective students, graduate programs, GFEC members, and the University community. An exciting addition this past year was doctoral completion rate data as well as doctoral time to degree data generated for the AAUDE by the Provost’s Office. Profiles are created at the overall program level, plan level, and the subplan level (named option) and include data on admissions, enrollment, funding, diversity, degree production, time to degree, and completion rates. Aggregate profiles are also created for each academic division and the Graduate School as a whole.
- Postdoc Survey: The *Graduate School Strategic Plan 2012-2017* charged a work group to explore the professional development needs of approximately 800 postdocs employed at UW-Madison. In March 2014, the work group distributed a survey to all postdocs at UW-Madison holding titles of research associate, postdoctoral trainee, or postdoctoral fellow. In addition to professional development, the survey identified some broader issues pertaining to climate, PI/mentor relationships, benefits, HR resources, governance, length of time in postdoc appointments, and career counseling. The work group used the survey, in addition to other information, to develop recommendations aimed at improving professional development opportunities for postdocs at UW-Madison.
Solutions to Improve Data Access and Assessment Efforts

- **Electronic Warrant System:** The Graduate School successfully completed an electronic warrant system for programs to use in lieu of the old paper warrant system. Not only will this system allow for greater efficiency and accuracy of the data elements documented on a warrant, but a future enhancement will also allow committee membership data to be retrievable in the Data Warehouse.

- **New Online Application:** The Graduate School continues its efforts to implement a new Graduate School online application that is integrated with ISIS. Throughout the entire application development process, attention has been placed not only enhancing the user experience but also on optimizing data integrity and access of collected data inputs. The thoughtful design and natural integration with ISIS will greatly benefit future data collection and analysis.

- **Query Library:** The Graduate School continues its efforts to improve and add to the collection of graduate-related queries in the Query Library. A Query Library workgroup has been formed which includes both Graduate School and graduate program representatives.

- **Campus Data Groups:** The Graduate School continues to participate in the campus Data Integrity Group (DIG) to explore campus dataview issues or initiatives. It also participates in campus conversations around the utilization of Tableau (a data visualization tool).

C. Learning Goals

1. **Graduate Programs with Graduate School as the Administrative School/College**
   The Graduate School is the assigned administrative school/college for two graduate programs: Biophysics; and Cellular and Molecular Biology. In this role, the Graduate School requested assessment plans, learning goals, and assessment activities reports from these two graduate programs (please see appendix). These materials will be reviewed internally by staff and by the Graduate School Academic Planning Council (GS APC) in Fall 2014. It is anticipated that the GS APC will provide feedback and request follow-up actions of the two programs.

2. **GFEC Subcommittee on Graduate Student Learning Goals**
   In response to the Higher Learning Commission’s accreditation requirement as well as broader efforts to emphasize student learning and to be transparent regarding degree deliverables, the GFEC created a subcommittee to develop campus-level learning goals for graduate students. The subcommittee was charged in November 2013 and continues it work. It has developed drafts for overarching learning goals for master’s programs, doctoral programs, graduate certificates, and capstone certificates. Other goals of the committee is to consider how these overarching learning goals will articulate with program learning goals, share them with campus stakeholders, and map out an implementation plan that includes assessment workshops in cooperation with the Provost’s Office and the inclusion of program learning goals in the Graduate Catalog.
D. Description of Assessment Strategies, Methods, and Analyses Used to Assess Learning Goals

1. GFEC-Related Activities

   **Program Approvals**
   The Graduate School recognizes that the examination of local assessment plans/efforts can continue to be better incorporated within the evaluation of program approvals at GFEC. Nevertheless, the GFEC is improving its efforts of making sure that new program proposals have program learning goals as well as an assessment plan. It’s clear that programs still struggle to identify assessment strategies that provide evidence (or highlight the absence) of student learning around program learning goals. Or alternatively, they have assessment strategies already present in their program, but fail to make the link that it is an assessment strategy to evaluate student learning with respect to their learning goals.

   **Program Reviews**
   With respect to program reviews, several factors continued to be highlighted in the overall evaluation of programs such as job placement and preparation; sufficient program resources and student financial support; right-sizing of programs; effective communication to students and across program subdisciplines (including but limited to a comprehensive program handbook); distinctiveness from other campus programs; student diversity; an evaluation of possible differential rates of persistence/success; a constructive and equitable program/department climate; appropriate admissions policies/structures; effective program governance and administration; strong student advising/mentoring (including but not limited to annual student meetings); and clarity of program mission or identity.

   The GFEC program review representatives are increasingly focused on the student experience and value the input received directly from students at program review site visits. There is a growing shift to recognize program reputation and scholarship but to also make sure factors that impact the student experience are closely examined. It is noted that more attention can and should be placed on student learning goals and related assessment strategies during the program review process. There is hope that with the adoption overall graduate student learning goals and the implementation of program learning goals as a requirement for the next Graduate Catalog cycle will facilitate this area of program review.

   **GFEC Subcommittee on the Higher Learning Commission (HLC)**
   As noted, the GFEC reviewed and approved policies in five major categories to move campus into compliance with institutional accreditation criteria and to address other related impacts. These five major policy categories were presented only after the thoughtful and deliberative work of the GFEC Subcommittee on the HLC. The subcommittee met eight times and was charged in March 2013 and continued its work through October 2013.
Subcommittee representatives met at least once with academic planning faculty and staff in each school/college with graduate programs as well as several other stakeholders on campus including those in Academic Planning and Institutional Research (APIR), University Council for Academic Affairs and Assessment, and Educational Innovation Points group. Several customized data reports were created to analyze campus trends and issues of concern as well as to allow for a comparative analysis with peer institutions.

The divisional mix of the subcommittee, the numerous outreach meetings to schools/colleges, several consultations with campus stakeholders and with individual program faculty and staff, as well as specific data reports tailored to HLC criteria all led to a comprehensive and robust approach to the ultimate development of the five major policy categories: minimum graduate residence credit requirement, minimum graduate degree credit requirement, minimum graduate course work (50%) requirement, prior course work criteria, and maximum credits per term.

2. Graduate School Implementation of HLC-Related Policies

Upon the approval of the five major policy categories by GFEC, the Graduate School created a comprehensive KnowledgeBase article providing details on the approved policies, the implementation process and template, frequently asked questions, who to contact, useful queries in Query Library, degree data by school/college, and other related resources.

The Graduate School sent notification and reminder emails to both school/college academic planners as well as graduate program leadership about the process and timeline. Not all schools/colleges submitted the templates for the programs on-time, but eventually all templates were received. These templates were also used for submission of content for the Graduate Catalog.

Schools/colleges were asked to vet these templates, but some schools/colleges did not assume this role. To ensure proper vetting, the Graduate School reviewed all templates for compliance and compatibility with the Graduate Catalog. This review exercise was a major undertaking. However, beginning September 2014, the Graduate Catalog will have a comprehensive satisfactory progress chart for every graduate program on campus that lists more detailed degree requirements than ever before. These charts will serve as a valuable advising resource for students, programs, and campus partners.

3. Evaluation Surveys for Graduate School Professional Development Workshops

The Graduate School uses various tools and processes to assess its professional development workshops and other events designed for graduate students and postdoctoral scholars. An evaluation survey is distributed to all workshop participants electronically following the workshop via Qualtrics survey. Surveys include questions
related to level of participant’s understanding of topic before/after the workshop, listing of particular knowledge gained through the workshop, likelihood of using the information provided, overall satisfaction, and suggestions for improvement. Additional information is requested, such as academic degree status (Master’s, PhD dissertator, Postdoc, etc.), degree goal, and ideas for other professional development workshop topics, so the Graduate School can continue to gain insight into who actually attends the workshops vs. who registers, and the interests of attendees.

4. **Annual Reports for Program Assessment and Fund Allocation**

   **Graduate Research Scholars (GRS) Programs**
   The Graduate School reviewed quantitative and qualitative data on the Graduate Research Scholar (GRS) programs to which it allocates Advanced Opportunity Fellowship funds for the purpose of recruiting underrepresented students to graduate programs. GRS programs submitted annual reports to the Graduate School describing the process by which fellowship awards are made and outlining the design and outcomes of its community-building and professional development activities. The annual reports are used to monitor the quality of the programs and to determine the next year’s allocation of funds.

   **Divisional Fellowship/Funding Process for Programs**
   Graduate programs applying for recruitment funding are asked to submit reports containing quantitative and qualitative data on the quality of their graduate program, their recruitment activities, and their use of the previous year’s funding allocation. Allocations have typically been used to provide fellowships to incoming students, to fund campus visits for prospective students, to provide one-time research awards to incoming students, to develop recruitment materials, and to send faculty, staff, or students to recruitment conferences. Faculty committees review the reports and use the information to determine annual allocations.

5. **Graduate Preparatory Programs**
   The Summer Research Opportunities Program (SROP) and the TRiO Ronald E. McNair Post-baccalaureate Achievement Program, both graduate school preparatory programs, aim to encourage applications from well-prepared, diverse, low-income and first-generation college students who want to pursue graduate studies at UW-Madison. The UW-Madison SROP represents a partnership between the Graduate School and the various Schools and Colleges and the McNair program is housed within the Graduate School.

   **Summer Research Opportunities Program (SROP)**
   Using the Student Assessment of Learning gains (SALG) survey tool to measure program impact, Integrated Biological Sciences-Summer Research Program found that the SROP experience helps students gain significantly in their knowledge of the nature of research, the jobs of researchers, career paths of faculty, what graduate school is like, and career options in the sciences. Further, in most SROP programs, students interact
with a variety of mentors. The Psychology Research Experience Program surveyed mentors upon completion of the program and found that the graduate student mentors gain a number of skills through the experience of mentoring.

**The TRiO Ronald E. McNair Post-baccalaureate Achievement Program**

Regular feedback from students designed to evaluate the effectiveness of program services as well as exit surveys administered at the time of graduation, indicate that through their participation in the McNair Program, Scholars had increased their awareness of personal values, attitudes, interests and abilities regarding graduate school, careers that require a graduate degree, and how to fund their graduate education. Scholars indicated that exposure to research and other scholarly activities had improved their research, writing and presentation skills and they felt more self-assured about working directly with faculty. Results from program evaluation are used to improve services provided to students. In 2012 the McNair Program was renewed for five years (2013 to 2017).

### E. Summary and Use of Key Findings for Continuous Improvement

1. **GFEC-Related Activities**

   Recent efforts of GFEC to provide detailed feedback regarding proposals and reviews are greatly facilitating continuous improvement of campus programs. In nearly every case, the GFEC is requesting that programs provide a written follow-up report to GFEC, present a follow-up report in person to GFEC, or meet with an associate dean in the Graduate School and provide relevant documentation of progress. This completion of the feedback loop has helped build a culture and expectation of continuous improvement among GFEC members and graduate programs. In addition, it has generated several positive changes for programs including improved program handbooks, advising practices, program governance structures, etc.

   The recent policy changes triggered by HLC accreditation requirements also provided an opportunity to assess the landscape of our graduate programs on several measures. While policies were changed or created in response to HLC accreditation requirements, others were also created or modified based upon data discoveries or policy gaps. For example, we learned GPA was not significantly impacted when students enrolled in 15 credits per term and that peer institutions had a similar or higher credit allowance per term. In turn, the maximum number of credits allowed per term was increased from 12 credits to 15 credits. Again, our findings informed our policy decision-making.

   Finally, the Graduate School is the assigned administrative school/college for two graduate programs: Biophysics; and Cellular and Molecular Biology. In the summer of 2014, they were asked to submit assessment materials for their programs to the Graduate School. These assessment materials will be reviewed internally by staff and by the Graduate School Academic Planning Council (GS APC) in Fall 2014. It is
anticipated that the GS APC will provide feedback and request follow-up actions of the two programs.

2. **Graduate School Implementation of HLC-Related Policies**
   As the Graduate School received HLC templates and content for the Graduate Catalog, it used these transmissions as another opportunity to review compliance and understanding of the new policies. When there were issues, the Graduate School asked clarifying questions and requested additional details. Ultimately, these exchanges led to greater understanding of the new policies among campus stakeholders and improved transparency to general public regarding program requirements within the Graduate Catalog.

   Additionally, as finer details of the policies were documented in the context of each program’s unique curriculum, special circumstances were presented that warranted additional attention. One such circumstance was how to handle undergraduate credits from specialized accredited programs. This circumstance was reviewed by GFEC and an exception pathway was created for programs meeting specific criteria. This demonstrates how the Graduate School continues to be responsive to (or continuously improve) its policies in cases with a strong rationale as well as compliance within the spirit of new Graduate School policy and HLC accreditation requirements.

3. **Evaluation Surveys for Graduate School Professional Development Workshops**
   The evaluation surveys provide valuable information about the usefulness of professional development workshops. In the past, we have learned:
   
   - Students and postdocs appreciate and continue to request professional development opportunities related to careers, e.g., strategies and materials for the job search; interviewing; careers beyond the professoriate, including how skills learned during graduate school can transfer.
   - There is a need among those who have recently achieved dissertator status for information about managing this transition.

   Thus, we have accomplished or will accomplish:
   
   - Explicit identification of learning outcomes, inclusion of learning outcomes in the promotion of workshops and events, and direct assessment of those learning outcomes in evaluation surveys
   - Redesign of the Graduate School website, and particularly the professional development pages, will better organize and expand information related to: 1) creating a plan for achieving academic success and goals for the future, 2) developing the skills needed to achieve these, and 3) planning for a career (e.g., career exploration, applying for jobs, postdoctoral training)
   - Continued development of collaborations with campus career services offices
   - Continued coordination of an event for new dissertators
F. Planned Assessment Activities

The Graduate School is committed to continuing and building upon its existing assessment activities. Here are some highlights of the some planned assessment activities for 2014-15:

1. **Redefined Role of Assistant Dean for Academic Planning and Assessment**
   A search is currently underway to hire a new assistant dean for academic planning and assessment. Prior to the search, the position description was updated to encompass responsibilities around assessment and student learning. One possible initiative for the new assistant dean in this realm, it to revisit the Graduate School’s assessment plan and coordinate that plan and related assessment activities with other graduate education units.

2. **Graduate Student Placement Tracking Work Group Summary Report**
   Over the 2013-14 academic year, a graduate student placement tracking work group met and explored various alternatives for acquiring data on students post-graduation. A great deal of groundwork and valuable information was collected and it has been deemed beneficial to assemble and document all this information into a summary report. In turn, when the Graduate School is ready to take next steps with this initiative they know what avenues have already been explored as well as which tools and strategies are most recommended.

3. **Graduate Program Learning Goals for Next Graduate Catalog**
   The GFEC Subcommittee on Graduate Student Learning Goals will continue its work in 2014-15. As a result of their work of identifying global learning goals for graduate students, the next step will be to ask programs to articulate learning goals for their graduate programs. In turn, these learning goals will be documented in the next cycle of the Graduate Catalog. This major initiative will not only bring our institution into compliance with institutional accreditation requirements, it will also beneficial in several other ways: provide a mechanism for programs to reflect on the purpose of their programs; offer programs a starting point for assessment activities; provide transparency to prospective and enrolled students on the goals of the programs; offer students a means to explore how achieved program goals transfer to a variety of careers; and present GFEC and program reviewers a means to evaluate the success and quality of a program.

G. Acknowledgements

2013-14 GFEC Membership:
Martin Cadwallader, Chair, Vice Chancellor for Research and Dean of the Graduate School
Steve Ackerman, Graduate School, Associate Dean of Physical Sciences
Michael Bell, Community and Environmental Sociology
Duncan Carlsmith, Physics
Cynthia Czajkowski, Neuroscience
Aparna Dharwadker, Theatre and Drama/English
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Ted Golos, Comparative Biosciences
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Jose Pincheira, Civil and Environmental Engineering
Pamela Potter, Music/German
Stephen Quintana, Counseling Psychology
Kevin Shinners, Biological Systems Engineering
L. Fernando Tejedo-Herrero, Spanish and Portuguese
Susan Thibeault, Surgery

Graduate School Participation: The following individuals actively participated in one or more of the above activities:

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Judy Bauman, Director of Admissions
Eileen Callahan, Director of Graduate Student Professional Development
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