

UNIVERSITY OF PUGET SOUND & WHITMAN COLLEGE  
PLANNING GRANT PROPOSAL  
TO THE TEAGLE FOUNDATION

*Engaging Evidence*  
October 22, 2010

INTRODUCTION

The University of Puget Sound and Whitman College are pleased to submit a proposal to the Teagle Foundation requesting consideration of a planning grant under the *Engaging Evidence* initiative. We are enthusiastic about moving forward with collaborative efforts relating to improved assessment, effective data analysis and use, and eventual improved student learning in senior capstone experiences. Our geographic proximity (Puget Sound is located in western Washington some 250 miles away from Whitman in eastern Washington) combined with our complementary missions and similar student demographics draw us to work together for two important reasons:

- Almost a year ago, Willamette University, and Lewis and Clark College, University of Puget Sound, Whitman College, and Reed College received funds from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to form the Northwest 5 Consortium (NW5C), a group of colleges and universities in Oregon and Washington dedicated to recruiting and retaining outstanding teacher-scholars and providing excellent liberal arts and sciences learning experiences to our students. NW5C members share a collaborative ethos and commitment to facilitate best practices in the liberal arts and sciences in our region.

A partnership within the NW5C between Puget Sound and Whitman will serve to strengthen the collaborative efforts of member colleges as it efficiently focuses on the senior capstone experience, a topic important to us all. The results of Puget Sound's and Whitman's efforts relating to the senior capstone experience and its assessment will inform our own evidence-based decision making and will provide data and experiences which we will share with the other three schools in our consortium.

- Puget Sound and Whitman value the senior capstone experience although it takes a different form on each campus. The importance of a culminating learning experience for our students is fully supported by our respective institutional cultures, policies, and practices. We are dedicated to improving the assessment of these programs in order to more clearly articulate the benefits and value-added outcomes of this curricular experience to our campus communities and beyond. The objective of our work is to use assessment of the senior experience to inform student learning outcomes and curricular development to ultimately improve student learning.

HOW THE COLLABORATIVE WILL FUNCTION

Puget Sound and Whitman will both focus on the same issue—assessment of the senior capstone experience—but each will take an approach best suited to its environment and culture. Puget Sound will administer the planning grant; however, collaboration between the two colleges is key to the success of the grant.

The central collaborative features of the planning process will consist of the following actions:

- Project leaders from both colleges will maintain at least monthly contact throughout the planning period to share updates and progress reports that will eventually inform a full proposal.
- Project leaders will collaborate to plan the May 2010 workshop to be held at Puget Sound, with programming dedicated to improving assessment in the senior capstone experience.
- Whitman faculty will attend the workshop at Puget Sound. Faculty attendees from Puget Sound and Whitman will be required to complete a task particular to their campus in order to receive a monetary stipend. Willamette and Lewis and Clark will be invited to support faculty members from their colleges to attend the workshop.
- In conjunction with the May workshop project leaders and faculty members will meet in person to review each campus's efforts and develop plans to apply to the Teagle Foundation for an implementation grant in Fall 2011.
- Project leaders on each campus will communicate the outcomes of the planning grant to reach as many constituencies as possible on their campuses. Written reports, the results of data gathering, evaluation tools, data analysis, and summaries of project components will be shared with collaborative and consortium members.
- Project leaders and faculty members will collaborate to draft a Teagle Foundation *Engaging Evidence* proposal during the Fall of 2011 requesting funds to implement the interventions that will be based on evidence collected and synthesized during the planning grant period.

We are fortunate that other consortia are addressing senior capstone experiences, namely the consortium of Allegheny College, Augustana College, Washington College and The College of Wooster and the consortium of Hampshire College, Bard College, Bennington College, Colorado College, New College of Florida, Smith College, and Wellesley College. We are especially heartened by their statements about how disparate campus cultures and distinct major-specific capstone experiences can yield both challenges and benefits in a project such as the one we propose. Specifically, the refinement of senior capstone experiences rests upon successful understanding, use, and communication about the assessment of the experiences. This is true regardless of the format that the capstone experiences take, and regardless of the specific learning outcomes that the capstone experience captures. Undoubtedly, common learning goals will emerge as efforts toward improving the understanding, use, and communication about assessment of senior capstones are implemented during the planning grant period at Puget Sound and Whitman. Our hope is to be able to identify and communicate common outcomes in response to assessment data, and to capture the range of possible learning benefits to students while we work toward more consistent assessment efforts.

## ***Engaging Evidence Planning Grant: University of Puget Sound***

Learning at University of Puget Sound in Tacoma, Washington, centers around a four-year curriculum in the liberal arts tradition. Students choose from a set of courses in eight core areas, developing a foundation for a lifetime of learning. They expand their academic experience choosing from more than forty majors, minors, and interdisciplinary programs, selecting courses from an annual offering of more than a thousand classes. Puget Sound's trustees adopted our strategic plan, *Defining Moments*, in 2006. The strategic plan guides the further development of an innovative and inspiring academic environment, one in which we continually strive to elevate the overall experience of our students. Response from faculty and students in recent years has directed us to focus on strengthening the academic intensity of the Puget Sound curriculum to maximize student learning.

The Teagle Foundation *Engaging Evidence* initiative presents a timely opportunity to define and implement interventions to strengthen student learning by focusing on the culminating experience of the academic program for students at Puget Sound. Puget Sound's project supports our strategic objective to enhance the intellectual engagement of the campus by accomplishing greater depth and intensity within the existing educational framework and builds on work already begun on our campus. Our goal is to improve student learning by integrating assessment of our culminating curricula in the undergraduate program with existing data that combine to inform student learning within the majors and minors as well as the core curriculum. A planning grant from Teagle will allow us to refine interventions for each department and program that build on existing assessments, integrate institutional data, and directly address student learning outcomes.

### OBJECTIVES/OUTCOMES

Our objective for the *Engaging Evidence* planning grant is to integrate senior experience assessment in the majors and minors with existing institutional data to enhance student learning by refining department/program interventions that address student learning outcomes. Through the *Engaging Evidence* planning grant we seek to:

1. Develop and/or refine rubrics for assessment of senior capstone experiences at the department/program level; the rubrics will be based on department/program student learning outcomes and curricula, learning goals of the core curriculum and the college's eight educational goals (Appendix A), and will lead to specific interventions for each department/program.
2. Explore, learn, and share best practices for senior capstone experience assessment across the campus, including using tools such as the Mahara e-portfolio tool.
3. Enhance the accessibility of existing assessment data to enable integration with senior experience assessments.

The overall goal of *Engaging Evidence* is to enhance the academic experience of our students through the refinement of department/program student learning outcomes. At the end of the planning period we will be ready to implement organized, sustainable assessment practices at the department/program level that integrate existing data, inform curricular planning and decision-making, and are useful in the curriculum committee's ongoing review of the core and departmental curricula, while demonstrating areas of strength and concern in student learning.

We will work closely with our colleagues at Whitman College to develop strategies to integrate senior experience assessment for informing student learning outcomes. Through a collaborative faculty workshop and team meetings (both formal and informal) we will share best practices, consultation, and project outcomes. We will share results and best practices with two other member institutions of the Northwest 5 Consortium (NW5C), Willamette University and Lewis and Clark College extending the benefits of our work beyond Whitman and Puget Sound.

## PROJECT PLAN

Key components of Puget Sound's planning grant are: the Senior Experience Assessment and Consultation; Electronic Resource Training; and Access to the Institutional Research Repository. In summer 2010 we implemented three tools which will support our work:

- *Mahara*. This open-source e-portfolio tool is now available to faculty, staff, and students and is being piloted by some academic programs for reflective assessment of student work.
- *Sound Ideas*. The digital repository implemented through Collins Memorial Library uses the DSpace platform and houses student summer research reports, student publications, and some student theses.
- *SharePoint*. Migration of the Institutional Research Repository to *SharePoint* has set the stage for organizing institutional research reports to increase accessibility to faculty.

*Senior Experience Assessment and Consultation*: With the objective of developing and/or refining senior experience assessments and interventions, departments and programs have begun to evaluate their specific culminating experience assessment mechanisms. At a November 10, 2010, faculty development seminar, faculty will share best practices to further the discussion and focus their work. In May 2011, a workshop, offered in conjunction with a visit from an outside evaluator (Teagle Scholar), will provide a forum for chairs, directors and other faculty members to devise interventions that integrate culminating experience assessments and existing institutional data to inform their department/program student learning outcomes. Throughout the grant period, the faculty curriculum committee will continue their ongoing review of the core curriculum and department/program curricula, and evaluate department/program review guidelines to better integrate the culminating experience assessments.

The spring workshop will be attended by department/program chairs/directors (or their designees) and will be open to collaborative members as well. For Puget Sound attendees, the workshop outcome will be a clearly defined intervention that integrates senior experience assessment and institutional data to address student learning outcomes.

*Electronic Resource Training*. Portfolios provide a mechanism for reflective assessment of work within the majors and minors. We have recently adopted Mahara, an e-portfolio tool that can serve as a repository for student work from the first year onward. This searchable repository will not only provide a mechanism for assessment of student outcomes, but will create a lasting archive of student work at the college. In conjunction with Mahara, the library staff will work with departments and programs to develop electronic repositories of student culminating work, such as student theses, in the electronic repository *Sound Ideas*. The planning grant will provide an opportunity to offer training in the use of two electronic resources to department/program faculty members during Spring 2011. The outcome of this training will provide departments/programs wishing to use the resources to support their assessment interventions with the tools they need for implementation.

*Institutional Research Repository Accessibility*. During Spring 2011 faculty, staff, and students will collaborate to enhance the accessibility of the existing Institutional Research Repository. The repository reports are now housed on the SharePoint platform. Organization of the reports as well as the development of an accessible roadmap for the SharePoint site will provide better access to the wealth of data contained within the repository. The outcome of this project will be accessible reports that can be used by chairs/directors/faculty as they develop and implement their senior experience interventions.

Intervention implementation will commence in the 2011-2012 academic year.

## RELEVANT PREPARATION

A recommendation from the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities in our recent institutional self-study document noted that we need to become more effective users of our data. The evidentiary resources available to us are many:

- Enrollments by class and department in capstone courses or culminating projects
- Results of nationally normed surveys (NSSE, CIRP, HEDS Senior Survey, Maquire Alumni Survey)
- Annual senior focus groups and campus “student voice” surveys
- Data compiled by the President’s Retention Task Force, 2009-2010
- Research Practices Survey
- Annual departmental reports on assessment
- Department/program 5-year curricular reviews
- Ongoing core curriculum assessment, including comparative data regarding student learning centered on the eight educational goals under our current core curriculum and the previous core curriculum (transition made in 2004).

In 2009-2010 we identified culminating experiences across the curriculum and opened discussion of this array among department chairs, program directors, and deans. Most of our departments have an existing senior experience and some means to assess it. The department chairs and program directors discussed options and shared best practices for assessment of the senior experience in the departments and programs.

Some departments/programs have already begun to define interventions and their work noted below illustrates some of the many ways in which departments/programs may opt to proceed.

- In the Psychology Department, all majors are required to take a capstone course, PSYCH 492, Perspectives on Behavior. In this course each student writes a substantial paper in the form of a research proposal. The department faculty uses a rubric that identifies four key learning goals in the major (writing quality, scientific thinking, quality of proposal, intellectual ownership) in its assessment of a sampling of the PSYCH 492 proposals.
- All Foreign Languages and Literature Department seniors are required to compile a portfolio of their work that spans their history within the department. The portfolios are assessed by the departmental faculty. The department is currently running a pilot study to determine the feasibility of moving to all-electronic preparation, submission, and assessment of the portfolios through Mahara.
- The Comparative Sociology Department requires that all majors complete a senior thesis. An evaluation rubric is used by faculty members teaching the senior thesis courses to assess each thesis on tasks and outcomes defined by the department as specific student learning outcomes. Aggregated assessment results are then used to identify areas of strength and weakness.
- Both the Chemistry and Economics departments use standardized exams as assessment tools (among other assessment practices). The Chemistry Department faculty administers American Chemical Society (ACS) exams in five courses (exams by topic) while the Economics Department faculty administers the Standardized Field Exam in Economics to all senior Economics majors.

The examples cited above will be further developed and refined during the planning process. Faculty will grapple with defining clearly the best data and best use of that data in achieving our ultimate outcome. Based on the preparatory work already underway, we will use the planning period to establish interventions for integrated and reflective assessment of the senior experience that will inform student learning outcomes university-wide across all departments/programs. While our project represents a

cohesive effort to strengthen academic programming and the culminating experiences of our students overall, much of the work will be decentralized, formulated and implemented by individual departments and programs to ensure that the proposed interventions meet their specific learning outcomes. The very nature of the multiple academic disciplines and interdisciplinary programs across our curriculum dictates that interventions will vary by department/program.

#### ENGAGING CAMPUS CONSTITUENTS

Department/program chairs and directors are working together to share best practices and will continue to do so throughout the project. Venues such as chairs meetings, workshops, and our faculty development seminar will provide dissemination opportunities. The academic leadership team will facilitate this work, as will the faculty curriculum committee and other facets of the existing faculty governance. Key personnel in Institutional Research will work with the steering committee and faculty stakeholders to organize the data repository into a more accessible resource. President Thomas and university leadership have indicated their support for and fully endorsed this project.

#### CAMPUS DECISION-MAKING

Outcomes of this project will become part of our existing and ongoing curriculum review structure. Through regular curriculum reviews and assessment reports, departments/programs will revise and refine curricula to meet student learning objectives. These reviews are evaluated by the faculty curriculum committee which, in turn, reports to the faculty senate.

The planning grant provides an opportunity to develop and/or refine department/program interventions that will set the foundation for both a “backwards design” review of the core curriculum in order to refine an integrated set of learning objectives for the core that can be meaningfully assessed on an ongoing basis, and implementation of a similar approach in the five-year curriculum review process for majors and minors. The current proposal marks the beginning of an ongoing project to use assessment of the senior experience, coupled with existing institutional data, to improve student learning within departments and programs as well as within the academic program of the college. Such work promises to develop for the academic program a more discernable vertical coherence – perhaps even greater elegance in its design and implementation – as we engage students effectively in learning that prepares them for a lifetime of intellectual curiosity, active inquiry, and reasoned independence.

## Appendix A – University of Puget Sound

Goals of the core curriculum:

1. To improve each student's grasp of the intellectual tools necessary for the understanding and communication of ideas;
2. To enable each student to understand herself or himself as a thinking person capable of making ethical and aesthetic choices;
3. To help each student comprehend the diversity of intellectual approaches to understanding human society and the physical world; and
4. To increase each student's awareness of his or her place in those broader contexts.

Students choose from a set of courses in eight core areas, developing over four years an understanding of the liberal arts as the foundation for a lifetime of learning.

### Mission and Educational Goals

The mission of the university is to develop in its students capacities for critical analysis, aesthetic appreciation, sound judgment, and apt expression that will sustain a lifetime of intellectual curiosity, active inquiry, and reasoned independence. A Puget Sound education, both academic and co-curricular, encourages a rich knowledge of self and others, an appreciation of commonality and difference, the full, open, and civil discussion of ideas, thoughtful moral discourse, and the integration of learning, preparing the university's graduates to meet the highest tests of democratic citizenship. Such an education seeks to liberate each person's fullest intellectual and human potential to assist in the unfolding of creative and useful lives.

To these ends, the faculty has selected the following goals to emphasize in the undergraduate curriculum:

1. the ability to think logically, analytically, and independently;
2. the ability to communicate clearly and effectively, both orally and in writing;
3. the ability to learn on one's own;
4. breadth of learning in the form of familiarity with a variety of academic fields and potential interests;
5. depth of knowledge in a single field in order to know a sense of the power that comes with learning;
6. an understanding of the interrelationships among the various fields of knowledge and the significance of one discipline for another;
7. an acknowledged set of personal values; and
8. informed appreciation of self and others as part of a broader humanity in the world environment

## University of Puget Sound Timeline

2009-2010 Academic Year	
	Departments/programs conducted senior experience audit and shared methodologies of senior experience assessment.
	Departments/programs and Institutional Research reviewed existing assessment data.
Fall 2009	Student work symposia held.
Summer 2010	Mahara implementation and training held; migrate Institutional Research Repository to SharePoint; <i>Sound Ideas</i> repository implementation.
	Established advisory group for <i>Engaging Evidence</i> project.
2010-2011 Academic Year	
Fall 2010	Student work symposia.
	Begin to pilot Mahara e-portfolio projects (Foreign Languages and Literature Department).
	Departments/programs continue to share methodologies of senior experience assessment.
	Consortium project leaders correspond regarding updates, revisions and progress reports.
	Contact Teagle Scholar Program.
	<i>Engaging Evidence</i> advisory group meets.
Winter-Spring 2011	Teagle Foundation releases funds; planning grant period begins.
	Plan May workshop, selecting participants, communicating with facilitator, preparing materials.
	Teagle scholar visits Puget Sound.
	Departments/programs review assessment report parameters.
	Technology training.
	Upgrade Institutional Research Repository (IRR) access.
	Host workshop on using assessment data effectively for chairs/directors (or their delegates) – open to collaborative and NW5C partners.
	Consortium project leaders correspond regarding updates, revisions and progress reports.
	<i>Engaging Evidence</i> advisory group meets.
Summer 2011	Prepare interventions report.
	Communicate initial findings to internal Puget Sound and Whitman constituents as well as NW5C members.
	Departments/programs begin to implement interventions.
	Continue Mahara implementation.
	Implement revised department/program curriculum review guidelines.
	Begin planning full <i>Engaging Evidence</i> proposal.
	<i>Engaging Evidence</i> advisory group meets.
2011-12 Academic Year	
Fall 2011	Puget Sound and Whitman collaborate to prepare full <i>Engaging Evidence</i> proposal for October deadline.

### ***Engaging Evidence Planning Grant: Whitman College***

Whitman College requests a planning grant from the Teagle Foundation to support Phase I (planning) of our project to improve student learning in the major-specific senior capstone experience, a collaborative effort with the University of Puget Sound. A primary goal of this planning grant is to bring our two campuses to the point where we can design and implement evidence-based interventions that will ultimately improve our students' educational experience. At this point, our efforts to educate our faculty about the importance of assessment are well underway, but in order to engage them more effectively in the intervention process, we need to help them better understand the types of assessments we need to do. This is particularly important in light of the newly implemented accreditation standards of the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU), which apply to all the institutions within our Northwest Five Consortium. A planning grant would provide us the resources that will help us clarify the questions we want to ask, facilitate the gathering and analysis of the appropriate assessment data, and define the learning outcomes we want to measure and improve in Phase II (implementation) of our project.

Our project directly relates to a current institutional priority—how best to demonstrate effective student learning. Whitman's desire to improve assessment of the senior capstone experience in its departments and programs is reflected in *Building on Excellence 2010*, a planning document developed last spring by Whitman College's faculty and academic leadership that is meant to guide the development of Whitman's academic program for the next several years. The document states the following principle and recommendation:

Each of the key elements of the current academic program should be subject to critical examination in order to determine whether and how it enhances the liberal arts education offered by Whitman College, and resources should be allocated in light of that examination... The College should develop appropriate mechanisms for assessing the Senior Assessment in the Major...

*Senior Assessment in the Major Program.* One of the distinctive features of Whitman College's offerings is the long-successful Senior Assessment in the Major (SAM) program. In 1913, Whitman became the first college or university in the nation to require undergraduate students to complete comprehensive oral examinations in their major fields. The SAM is usually a year-long process that includes evaluative components such as senior theses, performances or productions, written examinations, oral examinations, external examinations (e.g., the GRE or an ETS Major Field Test), or some combination thereof. The exact composition of the SAM depends on the major field. In addition to the examinations themselves, many majors offer, and some require, upper-level seminars that serve to prepare students for the successful completion of the written and/or oral components of the SAM. The credit level, format, and content of these seminars vary across programs, just as they do for the SAM itself. Regardless of major, the overall goal of the SAM is to test students' mastery of their major subject during their senior year.

*Assessing the SAM.* We currently invest a great deal of time and energy in the SAM because we believe it to be a fundamentally important component of Whitman's liberal arts experience. However, despite the fact that each SAM includes assessment of students' oral and written communication skills, we have an incomplete understanding of any other overall student learning goals we seek to measure with the SAM and the identifiable ways that this experience can be improved. Given the variation in major subject and variation in how much emphasis is placed on oral or written communication, each department and interdisciplinary program at Whitman has developed SAM assessment techniques and formats that best capture their own unique curricular goals. Our task is to improve overall student learning in the SAM by highlighting any ways that learning goals between majors overlap, while still respecting these individual

differences. We hope that departments and programs will begin to see that some learning goals are present across disciplines, thus enhancing the College's efforts at 1) more clearly identifying the SAM learning goals, and 2) enhancing student learning in the SAM more universally.

#### OBJECTIVES/OUTCOMES

The College has already devoted significant resources to improving assessment efforts – we have created a position (Assistant Dean of the Faculty) and a committee (Assessment Committee, made up of faculty and staff and chaired by the Assistant Dean) that deal directly and exclusively with assessment and accreditation. The ultimate objective for our collaborative project is to **refine our already-existing assessment efforts relating to our SAM, with the ultimate goal of using results from improved assessment efforts to improve learning in the SAM.** We intend to do this by conducting assessments of the SAM that focus on department-specific learning outcomes, some of which may transform into more universally-applied campus learning goals for the SAM. The results of these major assessments will allow us to pinpoint areas of student learning within each department that may need improvement. Eventually, these results will inform teaching and learning in these departments/programs in a more systematic way than has been done in the past.

We are currently in the preliminary stages of this project. In Phase I, the planning phase, we will:

- Facilitate communication between administration and faculty, among faculty, and between colleges, about existing assessment efforts related to the SAM in order to more effectively communicate learning goals to students, and to increase understanding of assessment efforts across majors, at the institutional level, and across colleges.
- Analyze existing data to more systematically identify major-specific student learning outcomes in the SAM. This will help us determine the departmental learning outcomes that we may want to more carefully measure and improve in the implementation phase.
- Develop a more efficient SAM evaluation tool by creating an on-line system that will generate comparable data across departments and programs. Determine how best to make the data accessible to the campus.
- Use the data gathered to help clarify the questions we will ask, the learning outcomes we will measure, and the possible interventions that we will implement (and the number of departments and programs that will participate) in Phase II (implementation).

Upon successful completion of this planning grant, we will have engaged the Whitman faculty in improving communication about assessment, more effectively used existing evidence to guide departments in identifying learning outcomes in the SAM, and gathered data that will help inform the development of interventions. We will work closely with our partner institution, the University of Puget Sound, to share best practices for our individual schools, as well as to identify overarching principles that relate to improving the senior capstone experience. Based on the data gathered, we hope to proceed with a proposal to fund Phase II of our project—implementation of a program to develop major-specific interventions that will improve student learning in the SAM.

#### RELEVANT PREPARATION

*Nationally normed surveys:* Assessing nationally normed senior exit survey data on student self-reports about written and oral communication skills is appropriate before and after any interventions. Whitman College participates in three surveys, rotated annually: HEDS Senior Survey, HERI College Senior Survey, and the NSSE. Currently the nationally normed data are collected and the received reports are examined by the Director of Institutional Research for areas of concern. Whitman College students fare relatively well compared to students from peer institutions. It is important to note that these data are limited in three ways: they are based on self-reported responses and are therefore indirect measures of student learning; the SAM experience is not isolated in questions that measure written and oral

communication; and it will be difficult to isolate the students who participate in an intervention in order to compare their outcomes relative to their peers. However, NSSE data do show that oral communication skills and some aspects of written communication skills can improve – both student learning outcomes that are featured in the SAM.

*Annual department and program assessment reports:* In light of our increased interest in developing evidence-based programs for assessing student learning, for the past three years each department and program has submitted annual assessment reports in order to document ways in which student learning, especially in the SAM, has been refined and/or improved. The 2009 reports reveal that most of the major programs at Whitman have clear and visible learning goals articulated, and that about half of these have specific learning outcomes identified that have involved attempts at, or suggestions for, improvement in the SAM (examples of these learning goals include ability to make clear and organized arguments in oral exams, effective use of discipline-specific technical writing, and demonstration of practical skills. Numerous individualized rubrics and assessment tools in existing departments and programs that directly and/or indirectly measure student learning in the SAM are articulated in these reports, with varying degree of implementation, consistency, and utility. Sometimes the desired improvements occur in other places in the curriculum, such that the eventual outcome in the SAM is improved. Many of these reports that identify areas of improvement, especially in the sciences, articulate the need for improvement in oral communication skills.

Despite this relatively clear articulation of a desire for improvement in a learning outcome by some departments, many have different learning outcome improvements listed, and about half are not yet able to articulate a) which learning outcome they want to improve or revise; and b) how they can directly and indirectly measure learning outcomes (or their improvements) in the SAM that are connected to their learning goals. Because of this variability in understanding of learning outcome articulation and improvement, it is important to ensure more consistency across programs in order to build an institutional-level articulation of learning goals for the SAM (even if the formats or specific learning outcomes beyond written and oral communication of each major-specific SAM may vary).

Analysis of the 2010 annual assessment reports (submitted in September 2010) is currently being conducted by the Assessment Committee. We are evaluating whether proposed learning outcomes and measures have been clarified or changed since 2009. We are also figuring out ways to better communicate back to departments and programs about the quality and content of the reports. The results of this analysis will help inform the activities of the planning grant.

*Institutional capstone inventory:* Whitman's 2007 Self-Study for the NWCCU Accreditation included an inventory of the formats and components of the SAM for departments and programs in our three academic divisions. This inventory will serve as a beginning point for checking with departments and programs about any updates to their SAM formats, and for brainstorming appropriate measures of student learning that capture the varied formats and components.

## PROJECT PLAN

### *Collaborative Workshop with Puget Sound*

Whitman faculty will be encouraged to attend the workshop hosted by The University of Puget Sound in spring of 2011. This workshop will have two functions: 1) to foster task-specific collaboration between two schools that are already collaborating as part of the Northwest Five Consortium; and 2) to share best practices relating to the assessment and learning outcomes in senior capstone experiences.

In addition to travel expenses, faculty who participate in this workshop will receive a \$500 stipend. The receipt of this stipend is contingent on them developing a collaborative draft of the requirements, timeline, review procedures, examples/templates, and guidelines of the internal Request for Proposals for

the Senior Student Learning Grants, the primary vehicle for developing major-specific interventions during the implementation phase of our Teagle project. Workshop attendees will be asked to complete and submit the RFP draft to the Assistant Dean of the Faculty within two months of attending the workshop.

#### *Faculty Focus Groups*

The major-specific faculty focus groups will occur with as many available permanent faculty members in all departments and programs that offer a major at Whitman College (more than 40 majors in more than 30 departments and interdisciplinary programs; ~130 faculty members). These 30-60 minute in-person conversations will take place in convenient and comfortable locations, may be facilitated with help from the Director for the Center for Teaching and Learning, will include the provision of food and drinks, and will include small stipends for all participants (\$25-50 per person). They will occur over the spring and fall 2011 semesters, and be administered, facilitated, and analyzed by the Assistant Dean of the Faculty (with assistance from a student research assistant for invitations, logistics, catering, and RSVPs; and with assistance on data analysis and summary from the Director of Institutional Research and members of the Assessment Committee). The Assistant Dean is qualified to facilitate these because, as a sociologist, she is trained in qualitative interviewing and data analytic techniques; additionally, as Assistant Dean of the Faculty, she is charged with leading campus efforts and communications relating to assessment and accreditation.

The focus group conversations will have two primary purposes: first, to educate faculty in programs who are struggling with being able to articulate clear learning goals for students (and direct and indirect measures thereof) that are present in their version of the SAM, so that learning outcomes can be more consistently communicated and measured; and second, to reflect on ways that student learning can be improved in the SAM. Learning outcomes can be written and oral communication skills (which are outcomes that are communicated at the institutional level), and they can include other outcomes that are specific to major programs.

After faculty members participate in a focus group, the Assistant Dean will disseminate the following items to participants: a statement of the College's goals of the SAM that are communicated at the institutional level, a 1-2 page summary of the discussion's key points (including a description of any learning goals that faculty participants identify as needing improvement), a 1-page set of tips that articulate how to clearly articulate learning goals and construct direct and indirect measures of student learning in the SAM (if this is needed), an articulation of the department's or program's ideas for possible interventions to improve student learning in the SAM, and any other pertinent information. These summaries can serve two sequential purposes: first, the text from the focus group notes can be content analyzed as existing data in preparation for a full "Engaging Evidence" Teagle grant; and second, they can then be used by departments as supporting documents when they submit future annual assessment reports, and if they wish to apply for a future senior student learning grant that may be funded by a Teagle grant. The focus groups will provide a good opportunity for clarification, articulation, and revision of learning goals for programs at various stages of development. This exercise will provide a solid grounding for the implementation of interventions that ultimately will serve to improve student learning in the SAM.

#### *SAM Evaluation Tool Refinement*

Whitman College has a recently-developed informal, voluntary, and intermittently used paper evaluation tool for seniors to complete that measures their self-reported learning outcomes related to the SAM experience (Pilot Implementation, during 2009-2010 and 2010-2011). Email survey feedback on this tool from faculty members in 2009 and 2010 shows that it is already in a format that is applicable across most majors, and that it adequately measures students' learning processes well. Additionally, individual major programs have increased their implementation of individually-authored evaluation forms to indirectly

measure student learning in the SAM. However, because of the inconsistency with which self-assessment of student learning is gathered, it is difficult to systematically analyze learning goals of the SAM, whether it is the institutional level goals of written and oral communication skills, or major-specific learning goals.

Because the College is committed to creating a more uniform and useful evaluation tool of the SAM (a task that is included in the job description of the Assistant Dean of the Faculty, who is the author of the initial evaluation tool), it is important to carefully develop the best tool and implement it in the most effective and informed way. We therefore wish to improve this tool by hosting focus groups of students and faculty members to refine the questions and ensure usability.

The SAM evaluation tool focus groups will be held in a comfortable and convenient location on campus where participants will be able to access an online evaluation and hold a discussion at the same time. Participants will be provided with food (for students) and small stipends of \$100 (for faculty and staff). Two student focus groups with 5-10 students each, and two faculty focus groups of 5-10 participants each, will be held during the spring 2011 semester. Additionally, it may be the case that software or an online survey creation subscription to facilitate different usability options during the focus groups may need to be purchased. Questions that will guide the group discussions will focus on the following topics, among others: timing of disseminating the evaluation tool (depends on when grades are turned in), wording of questions, effectiveness of capturing learning goals, usability, efficiency, and flexibility for including additional major-specific and SAM format-specific questions. The Assistant Dean of the Faculty, along with a student assistant and staff members in Whitman College Technology Services, will co-author the focus group interview questions. The facilitator of these focus groups will be one of these people. If necessary, consultation about the evaluation tool and the focus groups will occur between WCTS, the Director of the Center for Teaching and Learning, and the Assistant Dean of the Faculty.

Once the SAM evaluation tool is refined, we hope to implement it efficiently and begin aggregating data collected so that departments can have easy access to data that could inform any interventions they may wish to implement to improve student learning in the SAM. These interventions could include items proposed in the Senior Student Learning Grants, if that phase of our project is implemented. A visual representation of the project is included in Appendix A; a timeline is outlined in Appendix B.

*Interventions.* The eventual primary intervention that we hope to more clearly define, both in terms of learning outcomes and scope, is the creation of Senior Student Learning Grants. The faculty who attend the workshop at Puget Sound in the spring of 2011 would help craft the RFP for these grants, and, in doing so, will include a requirement that departments who apply must clearly articulate which learning goals they need to improve, what the precise intervention will be, why the proposed intervention will serve to directly impact the identified learning goal, and how they will measure whether the intervention is successful. The full description of interventions, along with the RFP for the Senior Student Learning Grants, will be included in the full proposal that is submitted after the planning grant.

*Ongoing Assessment.* Internally, Whitman College will record nationally normed senior exit survey data measuring written and oral communication skills during the planning stage. Department and program assessment reports will continue to contain major-specific assessment data (that may be quantitative or qualitative or both), but the PIs, with assistance from the Assessment Committee, will aggregate the results of these during the planning phase. The goal of improved communication about assessment in the SAM will be assessed by content analyzing the notes and reports from the focus group interviews with faculty, identifying places where improved communication was needed, and doing a qualitative follow-up with departments. Any newly collected data will be housed within the Office of Institutional Research and/or the Provost and Dean of the Faculty office, and will be included on an already-existing online data and document repository available to members of the Assessment Committee.

*Dissemination.* For the planning phase, information about the project will be made available to faculty members by posting data summaries, deadlines, and descriptions of the planning grant on the Provost and Dean of the Faculty website, or on the faculty-accessible link connected to this site. In any call for participation in focus group discussions, the goals of the grant will be made known to faculty members in writing and in person.

The collaborative will prepare a full proposal that is based on efforts from the planning phase and submit it to Teagle. Additionally, through work being done with the Northwest Five Consortium grant from Mellon, our two schools will report informally about progress being made regarding the Teagle planning grant.

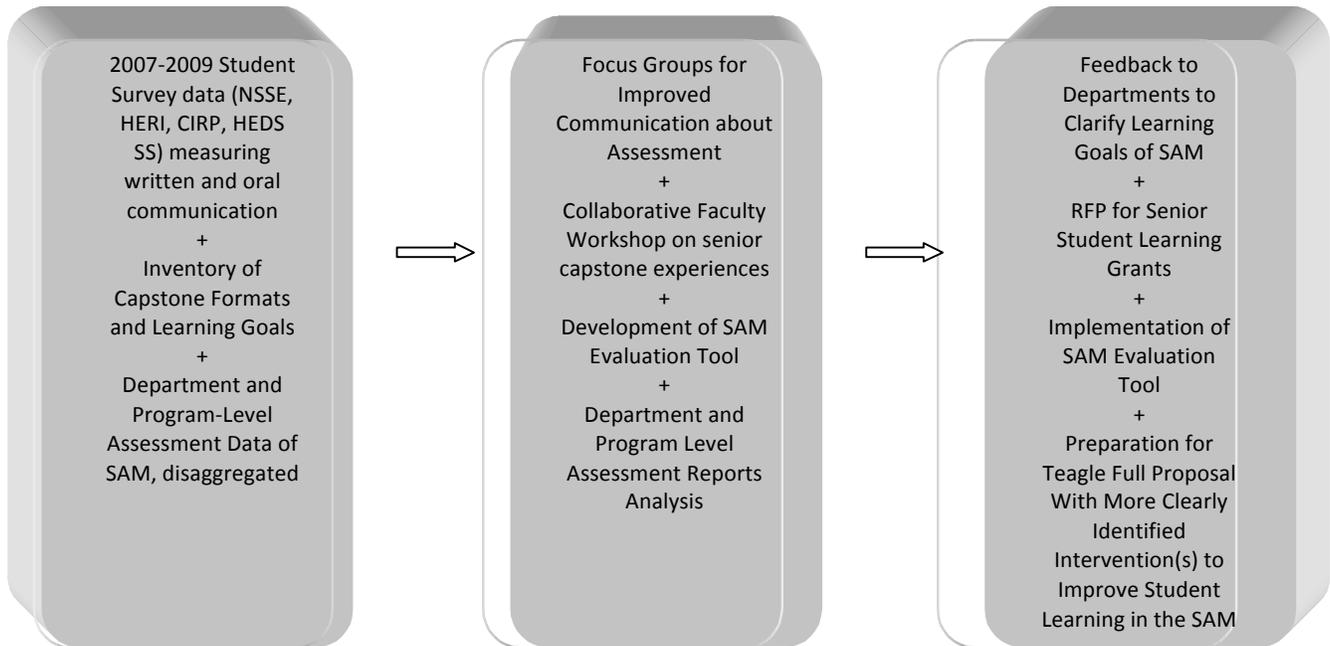
#### ENGAGING CAMPUS CONSTITUENCIES

This project both requires and assumes faculty support for the planned efforts, since the project fits into the College's strategic plan (*Building on Excellence*) that was drafted by the Committee of Division Chairs, a representative elected body of the faculty. The drafting of this planning document was based upon consultation with faculty members via open forums and Division meetings during 2009-2010. The specific roles that faculty members and other constituencies (students, administrators, technology services, etc.) will play are outlined in Appendix C, with a note that one of the primary goals of the planning phase is to engage more faculty in the project.

#### CAMPUS DECISION-MAKING

Because this is a planning grant, we hope to use the faculty focus groups, collaborative workshop, and development of an online SAM evaluation tool to identify specific ways that assessment efforts at Whitman can more directly assist departments and programs with curricular planning. When departments apply for eventual Senior Student Learning Grants and implement their major-specific interventions, they will use the results thereof to shape decisions about major requirements and course offerings. In addition, as a result of a reduction in teaching load from 6 to 5 courses per year, curricular planning and revision has begun to require more thorough justification from departments and programs. Any work that is completed as a result of this planning grant will provide an important foundation for programs that wish to request curricular changes. Finally, by more clearly identifying the overarching and major-specific learning goals of the SAM, members of the Admissions and Development offices can more clearly articulate the unique features of a Whitman education to prospective members of the Whitman community.

**Appendix A: Planning Stage Steps for “Engaging Evidence in the Senior Capstone” – Whitman College**



**Appendix B: WHITMAN TIMELINE**

2009-2010 Academic Year	
Fall 2009	Departments/programs submitted annual assessment reports, focusing learning goals and direct/indirect measures on the SAM.
Spring 2010	Several departments/programs offer feedback on SAM evaluation tool draft.
	Committee of Division Chairs, in consultation with faculty, drafted <i>Building on Excellence</i> planning document, which called for more effective assessment and an improved evaluation tool for the SAM.
2010-2011 Academic Year	
Fall 2010	Assistant Dean of the Faculty began work; work began for the newly appointed Assessment Committee.
	Engaging Evidence Planning Grant proposal submitted.
	Departments/programs submitted annual assessment reports, focusing learning goals and direct/indirect measures on the SAM and other parts of their curriculum.
Winter-Spring 2011	Teagle Foundation releases funds; planning grant period begins.
	Plan May workshop, selecting participants, preparing materials.
	Call for participation in Puget Sound Workshop to Whitman faculty members.
	Consortium project leaders correspond regarding updates, revisions and progress reports.
	Attend workshop on using assessment data effectively for chairs/directors (or their delegates) – open to collaborative and NW5C partners.
	Conduct faculty and student technology focus groups on senior online evaluation tool.
	Begin faculty focus group discussions on SAM
Summer 2011	Develop new online evaluation tool for SAM; analyze focus group discussions with feedback.
	Workshop participants develop RFP for Senior Student Learning Grants.
2011-2012 Academic Year	
Fall 2011	Complete faculty focus group discussion on SAM.
	Analyze focus group discussions with feedback.
	Finalize RFP for Senior Student Learning Grants
	Implement online SAM evaluation tool.
	Puget Sound and Whitman collaborate to prepare full <i>Engaging Evidence</i> proposal for October deadline.

## Appendix C: Campus Constituencies' Involvement

Constituency	Involvement
Faculty will be involved by...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participating as PIs on the project (Janning is a faculty member)</li> <li>Submitting departmental annual assessment reports</li> <li>Participating in focus groups to improve communication</li> <li>Participating as permanent members of the Assessment Committee</li> <li>Participating in collaborative workshop</li> <li>Participating in drafting the RFP for Senior Student Learning Grants</li> <li>Participating in focus groups to develop and assess usability of the SAM online tool</li> </ul>
Whitman College Technology Services will be involved by...	Facilitating the faculty and student focus groups to develop and assess usability of online SAM evaluation tool
Office of Institutional Research will be involved by...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participating as PI on the project (Christopherson is IR Director)</li> <li>Facilitating nationally normed senior exit surveys</li> <li>Analyzing Whitman-specific data</li> <li>Participating as a permanent member of the Assessment Committee</li> </ul>
Academic Resource Center Staff will be involved by...	Participating as a permanent member of the Assessment Committee
Center for Teaching and Learning will be involved by...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Director assisting with focus groups</li> <li>Participating as PI on the project (Spencer is CTL Director)</li> </ul>
Provost and Dean of the Faculty Office will be involved by...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Managing the Project (PI Janning is Assistant Dean of the Faculty)</li> <li>Seeking ways that the Teagle Grant may complement other collaborative efforts for the Northwest Five Consortium's work with the Mellon Foundation</li> </ul>
Students will be involved by...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assisting the PIs with data collection, management, analysis, and writing, as well as focus group planning</li> <li>Participating in existing evaluation processes relating to the SAM</li> </ul>