Update on Assessment, Biology Department March 16, 2010

As described in our assessment document from Fall 2009, at this time, we have chosen to focus on **Assessment Indicator 9, Analytical Skills**. This particular assessment indicator ties in with several of our learning goals for students, including:

 Content Goal 3. Our students will acquire scientific investigation skills in laboratory and field

 courses necessary to apply the methods that biologists use to answer biological questions.

 Process Goal 1. Our students will develop enhanced critical thinking skills.

This assessment indicator also ties in with possible new competencies for students who are interested in careers in health fields, as set forth in “Scientific Foundations for Future Physicians,” Report of the AAMC-HHMI Committee, 2009, including:

 Competency E1. Apply quantitative reasoning and appropriate mathematics to describe or explain

 phenomena in the natural world.

Actions since Fall 2009:

We have continued a discussion within our department as to how we can better work with our students to improve their analytical skills. The department chair has had preliminary discussions with faculty members in mathematics about a possible new course in biostatistics or biometrics, with focus on experimental design and interpretation of actual biological data sets as well as introduction or reinforcement of some basic statistics.

The department met on January 14, 2010, to discuss possible changes to our departmental curriculum. The major topic of discussion at this meeting was the possibility of increasing our introductory course sequence from two courses (BIOL 195 and BIOL 210) to three courses (adding a requirement that all students take a course in Genetics). Genetics does require some analytical skills and would increase exposure of our students to a variety of concepts that are central to biology.

We will be administering the ETS Field Test in Biology to all of our senior majors and minors in mid-March (March 22 and 23), and we should have the results by the time we must turn in our final assessment for this year.