

## Involving Undergraduates in the Assessment of Learning

From its inception in 2009, the Students Assessing Teaching and Learning (SATAL) program has assisted faculty and administrators with their annual assessments efforts, and thus been instrumental in UCM's Initial Accreditation effort. Through group discussions and exit interviews, SATAL has helped programs gather student self-perceptions of their learning, providing insights into student learning that complement those gathered through direct review of student work.

The data generated by SATAL has provided a number of programs with actionable information on student learning. For example, the Applied Mathematics faculty gained valuable insight into student learning needs that they plan to address by implementing changes in the senior capstone course, group work in upper division classes, and course review. As a faculty noted, "The focus group discussion identified areas that faculty need to address as well as reinforced areas that faculty have already been considering [for improvement]." Physics faculty reported that "the information provided by SATAL was very helpful for understanding the demographic makeup of the Physics majors" by highlighting how effectively the program is attracting students to the Physics major, both in terms of total numbers (relative to the size of the faculty) and student diversity. Overall, SATAL brings student voices to program assessment efforts, generating insights into student need and interests unavailable through simple paper or online surveys.

Through class interviews, videotaping, and surveys, SATAL has also supported course-level assessment, helping faculty to better tailor their courses to meet student learning needs. SATAL has



become a popular service; requests have steadily increased to reach 150 individual or programs served over the last two years.

By providing students' feedback on both course and program progress, SATAL has helped UC Merced academic and administrative units identify what works and what needs to be improved and thus to "close the loop" by taking evidence-based actions. Program directors and Faculty Assessment Organizers (FAOs) have expressed their intentions to continue using SATAL services in support of their annual assessment and program review needs, and SATAL looks forward to supporting them.

## Three Grad Programs WASC Approved!

Cognitive and Information Sciences (CIS), Psychological Sciences and Quantitative and Systems Biology (QSB) have joined Environmental Systems as **standalone graduate programs** at UCM!

Before the campus opened in 2005, the UC systemwide Coordinating Committee on Graduate Affairs (CCGA) approved an Interim Individual Graduate Program (IGP) to incubate our graduate emphases, such as Applied Math, BEST, EECS, MEAM, Physics & Chemistry, Social and Cognitive Sciences, and World Cultures. To become separate, standalone programs, these graduate emphases must receive approval from UC Merced's Graduate and Research Council (GRC), the CCGA, and our accreditor, the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC).

This year, CRTE staff assisted CIS, Psychological Sciences, and QSB in the WASC review process that followed approval by the GRC and CCGA. All three graduate programs start the 2011-2012 academic year fully approved. QSB also is approved for a MS degree. Future MS and MA programs at UC Merced now will be able to get expedited WASC approval, because WASC also has granted UCM fast-track approval for master's degree. The campus expects to see several other graduate emphases seeking CCGA and WASC approval as standalone programs in the next year.