

30 March 2012

General Education Task Force Assessment Subcommittee Team (GETFAST) Report

Subcommittee Members

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GETFAST charges:

1. Do our current assessment practices provide the information required by administrators, faculty members, and the student services staff to gauge the impact of the general education program on students and make changes as needed?
2. If not, what additional information is needed and how might it be collected?
3. What resources, if any, might be needed to support a revised assessment process?

Responses to charges

GETFAST charge #1: Do current assessment practices provide adequate information to stakeholders?

The GETFAST met for approximately one hour per week throughout the 2011-2012 academic year. At these meetings, we critically examined current General Education assessment practices at ISU and alternative processes detailed as best practices in the literature. We also consulted with key stakeholder groups on campus, including the Council for General Education, the other General Education Task Force subcommittees, the Assessment Advisory Committee, the Assessment Academy Team, and attendees at the open fora and symposium presentations.

In terms of assessment methods examined, we evaluated the relative merits of the following options (See Sources Consulted section for a list of materials that were used to inform our evaluation):

- Institutional Artifact Portfolio (current)
- AAC&U Essential Learning Outcomes and Values Rubrics (LEAP rubrics)
- Standardized tests (e.g., CLA, CAAP, ETS, MAP)
- e-portfolios (TaskStream webinar)
- Home-grown methods (e.g., COM 110)
- Others (e.g., syllabus review/audit)
- Combinations

Based on these data sources, we concluded that the current Institutional Artifact Portfolio system suits our campus well. This system involves the examination of samples of student work across the Gen Ed program collected systematically over time. In terms of advantages of the

present method, it is non-intrusive, faculty-friendly, familiar to the campus community, conservative of campus resources, and focused on actual student work products. We noted that one major drawback of this system, as with any program-level assessment system, is that it takes time to interpret results and draw conclusions. We identified increased faculty participation in the process as the best way to obtain meaningful data on which to draw conclusions.

GETFAST charge #2: What additional data are needed and how might they be collected?

We recommend integrating data from the following sources to provide a more comprehensive assessment of the General Education program:

- Institutional Artifact Portfolio
- Systematic syllabus audit
- Alumni Survey
- Surveys of Student Engagement

Institutional Artifact Portfolio

We recommend maintaining the Institutional Artifact Portfolio as the centerpiece of the General Education assessment process. This process would continue to involve the systematic collection and evaluation of student work products obtained from every General Education course offered. Although we recommend that the IAP method be retained, we suggest that the rubrics used to evaluate the program be altered. Specifically, we found that the AAC&U Essential Learning Outcomes and Values Rubrics (LEAP rubrics) as well as some well-studied rubrics in use on our campus (COM 110 rubrics) could be adopted for this purpose. Through consultation with key stakeholders, we identified three aspects of the General Education program for assessment every semester, namely written communication, oral communication, and co-curricular experiences. In addition, we recommend adopting the current cyclical approach to evaluating the other goals of General Education. That is, a subset of the final General Education goals would be assessed in any given semester. In addition, we recommend that a brief Teaching Goals Inventory be administered twice during the IAP process: (1) a general evaluation of the course when the instructor registers to participate in the IAP process, and (2) a specific evaluation of the assignment selected for the IAP process when the participation reminder is sent.

Systematic Syllabus Audit

The GETFAST recognized that evaluating student work products provides a measure of student learning, our ultimate goal; however, we also identified that assessing instructor intent as an important component of understanding the value of our General Education program. That is, instructors may be addressing the goals of our General Education program in courses, but this coverage may not be represented in the artifacts we collect through the IAP process. One way to evaluate to whether the General Education goals are being addressed in courses is to

conduct systematic audits of General Education syllabi. We reviewed the extant literature on this assessment method (see Sources Consulted section for a list of materials that were used to inform our recommendation). Based on this review, we recommend that using a syllabus audit similar to the one that was conducted in 2007 at ISU. Specifically, we recommend evaluating the syllabus from every section of every General Education course for each of the relevant General Education goals using a 3-point, Likert-type scale (0=no evidence, 1=developing, 2=established). Inclusion of every section of every course would allow for the examination of patterns of goal coverage.

Alumni Survey

Currently, one- and five-year ISU graduates are invited to complete an Alumni Survey. Some items in this survey could be used to assess alumni perceptions of General Education preparation. We also recommend that specific questions about our General Education program be added to this survey to assess the perceptions of former students. These questions could target the specific goals of the General Education program as well as their overall experiences.

Surveys of Student Engagement

ISU participates in a three-year cycle of assessment of student engagement using the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), the Before College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE), and the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE). These data could be used to supplement our understanding of perceptions of current students' engagement in our General Education program.

GETFAST charge #3: What resources might be needed to support a revised assessment process?

Echoing recommendations provided by other subcommittees, we recommend that a full-time Director of General Education be appointed and serve out of the Provost's office. This director could then coordinate all aspects of the program, including assessment and its interpretation, and coordinate with other units to efficiently manage the whole system. Ideally, the director would have expertise in both quantitative and qualitative research methods, general education instruction, and administration.

We revised the draft of the General Education goals with a focus on assessment and clarity. This revised version is attached. We also recommend that professional development be built into the program to enhance faculty/staff buy-in, understanding, and participation. It may also help to provide incentives for developing syllabi and assignments that address the goals of General Education. Efforts should also be made to foster the culture of participation in the General Education assessment process. Finally, we recommend that the program be given a new name.

Sources Consulted

Allen, M.J. (2006). *Assessing General Education Programs*. Bolton, MA: Anker.

- This book is a pragmatic guide for developing, aligning, and assessing general education programs in meaningful, manageable, and sustainable ways. It presents a variety of approaches to help readers understand what other campuses are doing and develop a repertoire of methods so they can make informed decisions about their own programs (from the book description).

Association of American Colleges & Universities. (2010). [*Rising to the Challenge: Meaningful Assessment of Student Learning*](#). Washington, DC: Author.

- Analyzes the validity and reliability of the MAPP (Proficiency Profile), CLA, and CAAP. Also discusses the VALUE rubrics.

Association of American Colleges & Universities. (2012). *Assessing Liberal Education Outcomes Using VALUE Rubrics*. Peer Review, Volume 13 (4)/Volume 14 (1).

- Issue of Peer Review that provides frameworks and examples of how to use the VALUE rubrics in assessing general education outcomes.

Arum, R., & Roksa, J. (2011). [*Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses*](#). Chicago: University of Chicago.

- Uses CLA data to posit that due to a variety of social, policy, and economic reasons, students are drifting through college with little to show in the way of learning outcomes. Identifies factors prior to and after college that correlate with CLA scores. Other articles about this issue:
 - o Glen, D. (2010, September 19). [A Measure of Education is put to the Test](#). *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 57, A1-A9.
 - o Glen, D. (2011, January 18). [New Book Lays Failure to Learn on Colleges' Doorsteps](#). *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 57.
 - o Glen, D. (2011, February 13). [Scholars Question New Book's Gloom on Education](#). *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 57, A1-A11.
 - o Jaschik, S. (2011, January 18). '[Academically Adrift](#).' Inside Higher Ed.
 - o National Public Radio (NPR). (2011, February 9). [A Lack of Rigor Leaves Students 'Adrift' in College](#). Includes audio content.

Bers, T. (Ed.). (2010). *Assessing Student Achievement in General Education (Assessment Update Collection)*. San Francisco: Wiley.

- A compilation of articles from the Assessment Update journal/newsletter edited by Trudy Banta.

Bresciani, M.J. (Ed.). (2007). *Assessing Student Learning in General Education*. Bolton, MA: Anker.

- An overview of general education assessment programs from a variety of colleges and universities.

Crawford, B.E. (2003). 21st Century Learning Outcomes Project. *Journal of General Education*, 52, 266-282.

- Case study from Hocking College.

Eder, D.J. (2004). General Education Assessment within the Disciplines. *Journal of General Education*, 53, 135-157.

- Framework for connecting the disciplines to general education through assessment.

Francis, P.L., & Steven, D.A. (2003). The SUNY Assessment Initiative: Initial Campus and System Perspectives. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 28, 333-349.

- Overview of SUNY's new process for the assessment of general education.

Gaston, P.L., & Gaff, J.G. (2009). *Revising General Education: Avoiding the Potholes*. Washington, DC: AACU.

- Listing of 50 things to consider when revising general education, with several pertaining to assessment.

Hamilton, S.J. (2003). A Principle-Based Approach to Assessing General Education through the Majors. *Journal of General Education*, 52, 283-303.

- Case study from Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis.

Jenkins, J.A. (2002). General Education in the University of Massachusetts Amherst: A New Rationale. *Higher Education Policy*, 15, 45-54.

- Case study from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst.

Laird, T.F.N., Niskode-Dossett, A.S., & Kuh, G.D. (2009). What General Education Courses Contribute to Essential Learning Outcomes. *Journal of General Education*, 58, 65-84.

- Uses data from the annual Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE) to discover the degree to which faculty structure their courses to promote general education learning outcomes and how those outcomes are emphasized in practice.

Leskes, A., & Wright, B.D. (2005). *The Art & Science of General Education Outcomes: A Practical Guide*. Washington, DC: American Association of Colleges & Universities.

- A brief overview of general education assessment.

Marinara, M., Vajravel, K., & Young, D.L. (2004). Making Sense of the 'Loose Baggy Monster': Assessing Learning in a General Education Program is a Whale of a Task. *Journal of General Education*, 53, 1-19.

- Case study from the University of Central Florida.

Meacham, J. (1996). *Assessing General Education: A Questionnaire to Initiate Campus Conversations*. Washington, DC: AACU.

- Overview of important assessment questions to ask pertaining to general education.

Millet, C.M., Stickler, L.M., Payne, D.G., & Dwyer, D.A. (2007). [*A Culture of Evidence: Critical Features of Assessments for Postsecondary Learning*](#). Princeton, NJ: ETS.

- A comprehensive overview of a variety of assessment instruments for higher education. Part of a three-part series.

Penn, J.D. (Ed.). (2011). *Assessing Complex General Education Student Learning Outcomes (New Directions for Institutional Research No. 149)*. San Francisco: Wiley.

- Chapters present examples of outcomes, methods, and instruments for assessing specific general education outcomes.

Pike, G. (2006). Assessment Measures: The Collegiate Learning Assessment. *Assessment Update*, 18, 13-16.

- General information about the CLA.

Ratcliff, J.L., Johnson, D.K., & Gaff, J.G. (Eds.). (2004). *Integrated General Education (New Directions for Higher Education No. 125)*. San Francisco: Wiley.

- Chapters present case studies and examples of changes to general education curriculums and how colleges and universities are responding to them.

Ronco, S.L., & Brown, S.G. (2002, Summer). *Finding the 'Start Line' with an Institutional Effectiveness Inventory*. Association for Institutional Research (AIR Professional File #84), Tallahassee, FL: AIR.

- A general overview of inventory processes.

Shavelson, R. (2009). [*Measuring College Learning Responsibly*](#). Stanford, CA: Stanford University.

- Differentiates and makes a distinction between assessment of persistence, engagement, achievement, propensity to learn, and learning, and discusses assessment approaches for each construct. Focuses on resolving the dual nature of assessment for accountability and improvement.

Steedle, J., Kugelmass, H., & Nemeth, A. (2010). What Do They Measure? Comparing Three Learning Outcomes Assessments. *Change*, July/August, 33-37.

- Summarizes, compares and does validity testing of the three instruments. It concludes that the three instruments are not compatible and that content validity is not significantly correlated. However, slightly higher correlations were found when looking at the same traits (critical thinking, for example).

Stone, J., & Freidman, S. (2002). A Case Study in the Integration of Assessment and General Education: Lessons Learned from a Complex Process. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 27, 199-211.

University of Iowa, Center for Teaching & Learning. (n.d.). *Teaching Goals Inventory database*. Online: <http://tinyurl.com/2bf54y>

- Based on the Teaching Goals Inventory, from T.A. Angelo & K.P. Cross. (1993). *Classroom Assessment Techniques: A Handbook for College Teachers*. San Francisco: Wiley.

University of West Florida. (2011, May). *Guidelines for Curriculum Maps*. Online: http://uwf.edu/cutla/curriculum_maps.cfm

- An overview of three types of methods for curriculum mapping.

Walvoord, B.E. (2010). *Assessment Clear and Simple: A Practical Guide for Institutions, Departments, and General Education*. San Francisco: Wiley.

- Ch. 4 (pp. 80-100) and mapping tools and rubrics in the appendices provide concise and brief overviews of general education assessment.

Wehlburg, C.M. (Ed.). (2010). *Integrated General Education (New Directions for Teaching & Learning No. 121)*. San Francisco: Wiley.

- Chapters present case studies and examples of general education assessment.

Yin, A. & Volkwein, J. (2010). Assessing General Education Outcomes. In *Assessing Student Outcomes: Why, Who, What, How?* (New Directions for Institutional Research 2009 Assessment Supplement), pp. 79-100. San Francisco: Wiley.

- Presents a comprehensive model of general education assessment.

GETFAST Revisions to the General Education Goals

Upon the successful completion of the General Education Program, students will have gained

- **knowledge of diverse human cultures and the physical and natural world, allowing them to**
 - use theories and principal concepts, both contemporary and enduring, to understand technologies, diverse cultures, and the physical and natural world (*no rubric; ISU 1, 10, 11*)
 - explain how the combination of the humanities, fine arts, natural and social sciences, and/or technology contribute to the quality of life for individuals and communities (ISU)
 - experience and reflect on global issues

- **intellectual and practical skills, allowing them to**
 - make informed judgments (*critical thinking*)
 - analyze data to examine research questions and test hypotheses (*quantitative literacy; ISU2*)
 - report information effectively and responsibly (*information literacy*)
 - write in a variety of genres, contexts, and disciplines (*written communication; ISU2*)
 - deliver purposeful presentations that inform attitudes or behaviors (*oral communication; ISU2, 4*)

- **personal and social responsibility, allowing them to**
 - participate in activities that are both individually life-enriching and socially beneficial to a diverse community (*civic knowledge and engagement; ISU7*)
 - interact competently in a variety of cultural contexts (*intercultural knowledge*)
 - demonstrate ethical decision making (*ethical reasoning; ISU5*)
 - demonstrate the ability to think reflectively (*foundations & skills for life-long learning; ISU3, 8, 9, 12*)

- **integrative and applied learning, allowing them to**
 - identify and solve problems (*problem solving*)
 - transfer learning to novel situations (*integrative learning; ISU3, 8, 9, 12*)
 - work effectively in teams (*team work*)