

Assessing General Education Programs

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Academic Program Assessment

An on-going process designed to monitor and improve student learning. Faculty:

- develop explicit statements of what students should learn (SLOs).
- verify that the program is designed to foster this learning (alignment).
- collect empirical data that indicate student attainment.
- assess the data and reach a conclusion about student achievement.
- use these data to improve student learning (close the loop).

Let's focus on each step.

First, the outcomes.

GE assessment focuses on outcomes that:

- faculty are passionate about developing in their students
- describe how students can demonstrate their learning after completing the GE program
- clarify the kinds of evidence faculty should collect to assess learning

How would you assess these outcomes?

- Students who complete our GE program:
- can list major events in American history.
 - can describe major events and trends in American history.
 - can apply their knowledge of American history to examine contemporary American issues.

Types of GE Outcomes

- Short list of broad outcomes
- Longer list of outcomes tied to specific GE requirements

**James Madison University:
16 GE outcomes, such as**

- to perceive and make informed aesthetic choices and analyses about artistic use of sound, movement, and images
- to identify, locate, and evaluate information sources in both traditional and electronic forms

**University of Delaware, Newark:
10 GE outcomes, such as:**

- think critically to solve problems
- engage questions of ethics and recognize responsibilities to self, community, and society at large

**Cabrillo Community College:
45 GE outcomes, such as:**

- Compute – demonstrated by an ability to:
- Use basic numerical concepts, such as: whole numbers, percentages, estimates of math without a calculator
 - Use tables, graphs, charts, and diagrams to explain concepts or ideas
 - Use basic geometrical shapes, such as: lines, angles, shapes, and space

CSU, Monterey Bay
nearly 70 GE outcomes, such as:

Literature/Popular Culture

- Interpret and analyze the significance of time, place, class, and culture in which the works of literature and/or pop-culture were created.
- Describe and analyze the capacity of race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, disability, age, generation, and/or nationality to inspire, inform, and influence writers, artists and audiences.
- Describe connections between works of literature and/or pop-culture, their authors/artists/creators, and the society from which they emerge, and analyze their interactions from multiple perspectives.
- Discuss how the identities of diverse individuals and communities are developed and portrayed, and how critical representations of self and others occur in works of literature and/or pop culture.

The Shorter List of Broad SLOs

- can help shape a campus culture, clarifying learning priorities to everyone—the marks of a campus graduate
- focuses on key indicators of student success that can be monitored and tracked across time
- can lead to important, campus-wide discussion of teaching-and-learning topics, such as how all faculty can help students develop critical thinking

But, for the short list:

- Assessment criteria may be difficult to determine.
- Closing the loop may be difficult.
- Assessment requires strong, on-going leadership and the coordination and cooperation of many departments and individuals.

The Longer List:

- can guide the course certification process.
- can be easily assessed using course-embedded assessment in specific subsets of courses.
- Assessment criteria probably are easier to agree on.
- Assessment can be decentralized because fewer departments and courses are involved in each assessment study.

But, for the longer list:

- the overall assessment task might seem overwhelming and might be reduced to a "check off each box" mentality.
- Assessment may take more time and resources because so many outcomes are examined.
- Assessment might be too focused on details, rather than on major areas of concern; key indicators of student success may not be monitored or tracked.

GE Program Learning Outcomes:

- Should be widely distributed
- Guide course and curriculum planning

Curriculum Alignment

A Cohesive Curriculum

- Coherence
- Synthesizing Experiences
- Ongoing Practice of Learned Skills
- Systematically Created Opportunities to Develop Increasing Sophistication and Apply What Is Learned

GE Curriculum Map

- I = Introduced
- D = Developed & Practiced with Feedback
- M = Demonstrated at the Mastery Level Appropriate for Graduation

Curriculum Map

GE Req.	Outcome 1	Outcome 2	Outcome 3
1	I	I	
2			I
3	D		D
4			D
5			D
GE Capstone	M		D
Majors			M

The Curriculum Map

- Focuses faculty on curriculum cohesion
- Guides course planning
- Allows faculty to identify potential sources of embedded assessment data

Ensuring/Verifying Curriculum Alignment for GE Programs

- Course Certification
- Periodic Course Recertification

Course Certification Might Include:

- Required SLOs
- Required practice of basic skills
- Required prerequisites
- Types of readings (primary vs. secondary sources)
- Types of pedagogy/class size
- Course level (LD vs. UD)
- Qualifications of faculty

Faculty develop a meaningful, manageable, sustainable GE assessment plan.

- Focus on assessing the GE outcomes
- Focus on direct assessment
- Might include some indirect assessment

We don't have to assess every outcome in every student every year!

Assessment Audit

- CCSSE/NSSE Scores?
- Campus surveys?
- Admissions or Placement Test scores?
- Course evaluation forms?
- Syllabus review?

Sampling

- Relevant samples
- Representatives samples
- Reasonably-sized samples

Ethical Issues

- Privacy
- Confidentiality
- Informed consent

Levels of Assessment

- Course Level
- Program level
- Institution level

Properties of Good Assessment Techniques

- Valid
- Reliable
- Actionable
- Efficient and cost-effective
- Engaging to students
- Interesting to faculty
- Triangulation

Sample Assessment Plan

Outcome 3, dealing with quantitative reasoning, will be assessed every fourth year starting in 2008/09 by assessing the quality of students' interpretation of quantitative research findings in the GE capstone course and by embedding relevant questions in final exams in this course. An ad hoc faculty committee will develop and score the test items, and they will develop and apply a rubric to analyze the research interpretations.

Common Direct Assessment Strategies

- Published Tests
- Locally-Developed Tests
- Embedded Assignments and Course Activities: Signature Assignments
- Portfolios

Common Indirect Assessment Strategies

- Surveys
- Interviews
- Focus Groups

Assessing the Evidence

- Direct assessment generally involves the application of rubrics.
- Raters should be normed/calibrated to achieve reliable results.
- Checks for inter-rater reliability: correlations, discrepancies.

Who should assess the evidence?

Closing the Loop

- Celebrate!
- Change pedagogy
- Change curriculum
- Change student support
- Change faculty support

Closing the loop

- requires collegiality and flexibility
- may require the support of administrators, faculty development staff, assessment staff, and/or other campus professionals

Don't forget your adjunct faculty.

Bringing It All Together

- Need for campus-wide conversations
- Findings may have institution-wide implications for faculty/staff development
- Need for a quality-assurance process
- Need for a reporting structure
- Results may have budgetary implications

Some Friendly Suggestions:

- Share ideas for GE assessment within and across campuses.

Without assistance, each of us will not only reinvent the wheel, we'll also reinvent the flat tire.



Some Other Friendly Suggestions

1. Focus on what is important.
2. Don't try to do too much at once.
3. Take samples.
4. Pilot test procedures.
5. Use rubrics.
6. Close the loop.
7. Keep a written record.
