

Assessing General Education and Acquiring Faculty Buy-In

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Assessing General Education: Issues Summary

Understanding PURPOSES	Writing LEARNING OBJECTIVES	Choosing INDICATORS of Learning	Mobilizing ACTION on Findings
<p>Do we want to assess . . .</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The general education program? ▪ General education goals? <p>Are we doing this . . .</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To be accountable? ▪ To improve teaching and learning? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Do they depict learning? ▪ Are they for the long haul? ▪ Do they apply to all students? ▪ Do they tell the whole story? ▪ Do they represent teaching commitments? ▪ Are they REAL? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Which learning should we measure formally? ▪ Which should we assess informally? ▪ Do our indicators measure the learning we want to study? ▪ Can we trust what our indicators seem to show? ▪ Can we act on them? ▪ Are our measurement plans sustainable? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Who may be asked to act on findings? ▪ Will we seek agreement on major issues up front? ▪ How will we know if improvement plans are implemented?

What do we believe about . . .

The relationship between assessment and teaching?	Teaching general education courses?	The risks and opportunities of assessment?	Who should respond to assessment findings?
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Understanding the PURPOSES of Assessment

WHAT do we want to assess . . .

- The general education program? (the curriculum, its delivery, its specific contributions to student learning)
- The degree to which students are attaining general education goals? (irrespective of how or where they do so)

WHY are we doing this . . .

- To be accountable? To whom? What are their expectations for student learning, for institutional success in achieving such learning, for kinds of evidence provided to document learning?
- To improve teaching and learning?

What do we believe about . . . the relationship between assessment and teaching?

How would faculty at your institution answer the following question? Put an X anywhere along the line beneath each answer to indicate how many faculty would select it. (NOTE: They can select more than one answer.)

Which of these best describes the relationship between assessment of general education and teaching?



“Documentation. Assessment provides evidence of student learning for those who aren’t in the classroom—administrators, accreditors, legislators. But not for teachers—we already know what our students are learning.”

no one

everyone



“Inspection. Assessment is a way of checking up on what teachers are doing in courses and how well we’re doing it.”

no one

everyone



“Feedback. Assessment helps teachers decide what to teach and how to teach it.”

no one

everyone



Other:

no one

everyone

Writing LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Do our objectives describe learning—not what faculty or students will do, but what students will learn?

Are our learning objectives for the long haul? Do they describe learning we expect to endure long after students have completed general education courses?

Do learning objectives for general education courses apply to all students (not just future majors)?

Does our list of learning objectives tell the whole story? What have we left out? Why have we omitted it?

Writing LEARNING OBJECTIVES (cont.)

Do our learning objectives represent our teaching commitments? Are we prepared to work actively in support of each learning objective?

Are these learning objectives REAL? Do they express our true hopes for student learning?

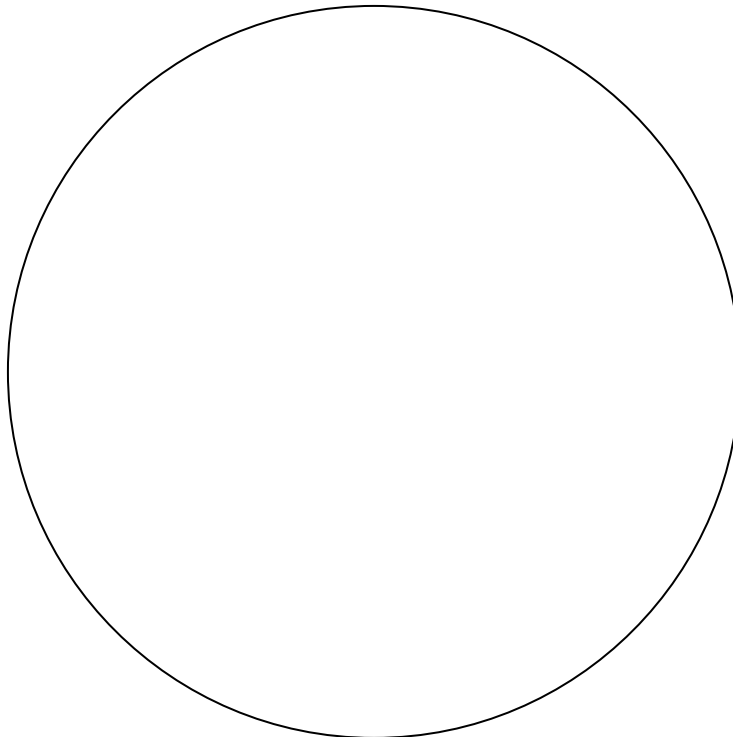
What do we believe about . . . teaching general education courses?

Below are some ways of understanding a teacher's job. Draw a pie chart that shows the portion of faculty at your institution who identify with each of these points of view.

What is a teacher's main job?

- (A) To convey information about a subject.
- (B) To create an educational experience for students, without any expectation regarding what each student will learn.
- (C) To help students gain particular knowledge, insights or abilities.
- (D) Other: _____

Complete a PIE chart that shows how many faculty identify with each of these points of view.



Beliefs about teaching general education (cont.)

Below are some possible aims of general education courses. First indicate what you think about these aims, as follows:

- Write a "+" sign next to aims you believe are important for such courses.
- Write a "-" sign next to aims you think are not appropriate for such courses.
- Write a "?" next to aims about which you're unsure.
- Put a star next to the aim you think is most important.

Then put an X anywhere along the line beneath each answer to show how many faculty at your institution would agree with you.

A general education course should . . .

_____ **Serve as the first course in the major, upon which other courses will build**

_____ no one everyone

_____ **Introduce students to a scholarly discipline**

_____ no one everyone

_____ **Create educated persons**

_____ no one everyone

_____ **Foster active, responsible citizenship**

_____ no one everyone

_____ **Teach knowledge, insights and skills useful to all students, especially those unlikely to take another course in the subject**

_____ no one everyone

_____ **Arouse interest in and appreciation for a subject or activity**

_____ no one everyone

_____ **Foster the personal growth of students**

_____ no one everyone

_____ **Other:**

_____ no one everyone

Choosing INDICATORS of Learning

Which learning should we measure formally, through . . .

- testing (locally developed exams or those supplied by vendors)
- examining samples of student work—papers, speeches, projects, portfolios
- surveying students about their learning

Which learning should we assess informally? For instance . . .

- Conducting periodic meetings at which faculty discuss their perceptions of students' attainment of learning objectives
- Asking employers about your graduates' knowledge and skills

Do our indicators measure the learning we want to study?

- Do they evaluate the learning we're interested in or merely what's easy to measure?
- Do they require students to demonstrate learning or merely invite them to do so?

Choosing INDICATORS of Learning (cont.)

Can we trust what indicators seem to show about student learning?

- Student motivation
- Sampling

Can we act on what indicators tell us about student learning?

- Is the information they provide sufficiently detailed to guide action?
- Can we break out findings for use by particular academic departments and teachers?

Are our assessment plans sustainable?

- Cost in time and money
- Where course-embedded, fit with actual teaching practice
- Ease of data entry, analysis, storage and retrieval

What do we believe about . . . the risks and opportunities of assessment?

Think of a general education course you're familiar with: _____.

In the space below draw three circles:

- (1) Draw a large circle that represents **everything you want students to learn** in the course.
- (2) Draw a smaller circle within the large one that represents **the most important things** you hope students will learn.
- (3) Draw a circle that represents **the learning you currently assess**. (NOTE: Part of this circle may lie outside the large circle if you assess some things you don't care if students learn.)

Imagine these circles represent your entire general education program. What risks and opportunities does your drawing imply?

Mobilizing ACTION on Findings

Who may be asked to act on findings?

- Course instructors and department chairs
- Academic support staff
- General education oversight committee
- Administrators

Will we seek agreement on major issues up front?

- Purposes of the assessment
- Program and course learning objectives
- Indicators of learning
- Who will participate in evaluating findings and deciding if action is needed?
- Who will participate in creating improvement plans?
- Calendar for assessment and reporting

How will we know if improvement plans are being implemented?

- Who is expected to do what, when and how?
- Will action on plans be voluntary?
- Who will follow up on implementation efforts? When? How?

What do we believe about . . . who respond to assessment findings?

To what degree would faculty at your institution agree on answers to the following question? Put an X anywhere along the line beneath each answer to indicate how many faculty would select it. (NOTE: They can select more than one answer.)

Who should have a voice in defining the purposes of general education courses?



“The individual course instructors.”

no one

everyone



“Students.”

no one

everyone



“All faculty who teach the course (as a group).”

no one

everyone



“All faculty in the department that offers the course.”

no one

everyone



“Other departments whose students take the course.”

no one

everyone



“The institution as a whole or its general education committee.”

no one

everyone

Beliefs about who respond to assessment findings (cont.)

To what degree would faculty at your institution agree on answers to the following question? Put an X anywhere along the line beneath each answer to indicate how many faculty would select it. (NOTE: They can select more than one answer.)

Who should have a voice in deciding how general education courses are taught?



“The individual course instructors.”

no one _____ everyone



“Students.”

no one _____ everyone



“All faculty who teach the course (as a group).”

no one _____ everyone



“All faculty in the department that offers the course.”

no one _____ everyone



“Other departments whose students take the course.”

no one _____ everyone



“The institution as a whole or its general education committee.”

no one _____ everyone