

## INTRODUCTION

### General Education Student Learning Outcomes

#### **Please read prior to reviewing the outcomes.**

The General Education Committee (GEC) was asked by the 2001-2002 Faculty Senate to review the goals of the General Education Program as well as the Assessment Plan for that program. In response, and in acknowledging changing national accreditation requirements, the committee decided to move from a focus on goals to development of specific student learning outcomes. Student Learning Outcomes make clear what we expect students to learn and be able to do following completion of a course/program and also allow for the development of an assessment plan that can more readily assess student learning in the General Education Program.

To begin the process, the committee asked itself: “*What does a well educated UWL student look like? What does this student know? What should the student be able to do?*” Based on the committee’s own discussion of these questions and to initial feedback received from the campus community in the spring 2002 on our very first attempt at writing outcomes, the committee identified six broad outcome areas (see attached). The committee then repeated the above questions for each outcome. For example, “If students have developed effective communication skills, what is it that they should know or be able to do?” The bulleted statements listed below each outcome detail the answers to these questions. This detail also defines the outcome and will guide the development of an effective assessment plan and of assessment tools.

Exactly what is a student learning outcome?

Learning outcomes are clearly stated expectations for what students should *learn* and *be able to do* by the end of a course/program of studies. Learning outcomes include an *action verb* and a *statement of ability*: for example “Students will be able to analyze....” “Students will be able to communicate....” “Students will be able to link....”...Learning outcomes express learning objectives that can be operationalized, observed in performance, and judged using clear, shared criteria (Sharkey, 2002).

Another consideration of the GEC in defining each outcome was a possible move toward a four-year integrated (with the major) General Education program. The feasibility of such a change is being studied. Therefore, within the bulleted items you will likely find a range of abilities, some that may be appropriate for freshmen and others suitable for seniors. If General Education does not become a four-year integrated program some of the higher order skills and abilities may be inappropriate for General Education but they may be suitable outcomes for students in specific majors. Therefore departments may choose to adopt or adapt them as student learning outcomes for their majors.

Additionally, the outcomes were developed with an understanding that the *General Education Program is a university wide program and that no one outcome is the domain of any one department or program or college*. Rather students should encounter opportunities to achieve these learning outcomes through numerous courses across the curriculum and through other out-of-class experiences. Furthermore, the GEC recognizes that to be well-educated, students need to participate in *an inquiry-based liberal arts curriculum*. Therefore, it is expected that students will continue to take courses as part of their General Education that include the arts and humanities, social, physical and life sciences, mathematics and modern languages, and health and well-being.

The attached DRAFT document detailing the definitions of these six outcomes is NOT intended as a document for students. Rather, it was designed with faculty and staff as the target audience. The bullets were intended to give faculty and staff who teach in or are in other ways involved in the General Education program guidelines as to what would be expected of students based on the outcomes addressed in these courses. It is not expected that every General Education course will address every outcome. However, it is expected that every General Education course will address two or more outcomes. In addition, the bulleted items provide guidance for revision of existing courses, the development of new courses, and guidance for assessing student learning.