

DRAFT – July 17, 2007
General Education Assessment Task Force

Background: General Education is the largest single academic program at the university and affects every undergraduate student. A significant gap in the program is the lack of an effective way to assess and improve the program. Despite many attempts to assess general education, the General Education committee (GEC) has been unable to develop and implement a comprehensive assessment plan since the program was approved by the senate in 1991.

In March 2007 the Faculty Senate asked the GEC to submit a timeline for a “comprehensive and systematic assessment plan” for general education. On April 12 the senate approved the proposed time table for general education (copy attached). The time table includes a

plan for course embedded assessment as well as standardized measures to provide baseline data along with indirect measures of both student and faculty/staff perceptions of the program. Part of the timeline requests that faculty senate submit a budget request to appropriate parties to support required and necessary assessment efforts.

There was discussion on the cost of the standardized assessment instrument versus the gains. Also discussed was course embedded assessment feeding into future APR reports and the issue of having students take assessment seriously.

(Minutes of the April 12, 2007 Meeting of the Faculty Senate)

In addition to Faculty Senate concern, the North Central Association (NCA) focused on general education assessment in their 2006 re-accreditation evaluation. NCA evaluators indicated that general education assessment is “particularly problematic,” and has asked UW-L to submit a report in January 2009, that explains how we have addressed weaknesses in assessment.

Clearly, UW-L needs to establish and implement a *solid and realistic* plan for assessment of general education learning outcomes that can be used to monitor and improve the quality of the curriculum and student learning.

General Education Assessment Task Force. The GEC time table for implementing assessment does not constitute a comprehensive assessment plan. Moreover, the time table identifies new forms of assessment (e.g., standardized tests and course embedded assessment) that have significant costs and implications for implementation. The university needs a more thorough and comprehensive plan that puts the pieces together and describes what assessment will be done, how it will be done, who will do it, and how the results will be used to improve the program.

In response to requests from the GEC for help in planning and implementing assessment, the Provost's Office proposes a task force that will develop a comprehensive plan to assess general education learning outcomes. The task force will incorporate the ideas proposed in the GEC time table and will consult with the GEC as the group develops the assessment plan. The Faculty Senate Executive Committee and the Director of General Education have endorsed forming a task force.

The task force will consist of a small number of faculty members who will develop an assessment plan in summer 2007. The members will be individuals who

- are familiar with assessment of student learning at the program level
- have some degree of assessment expertise
- have carried out assessment of student learning at the program level in their home departments and/or general education
- are willing and able to work intensively during July and August
- are interested in developing a solid and realistic plan for the University

Charge to the Task Force. The task force will develop a comprehensive plan to assess general education learning outcomes that describes:

1. General education learning outcomes.
2. Assessment methods, including the instruments that will be used and the types of data that will be collected.
3. How the assessment procedures will be implemented. Who will be responsible for administering the assessment plan, coordinating the assessment procedures, collecting and analyzing the data, and summarizing and reporting the results.
4. How assessment results will be used to make decisions intended to improve the program. Who will review the results? In NCA's terminology, what are the "mechanisms to use assessment data for systematic improvement?"
5. The rationale/reasons/justification for the various components of the plan (e.g. Why use course embedded assessment? Why use the Collegiate Learning Assessment? Why use surveys of students and faculty? What is the justification for how students will be selected for participation in standardized tests?).
6. Potential problems, challenges and implications for implementation and/or issues that need to be resolved in order to implement the plan (e.g. What types of materials, support and training might be needed to help instructors and departments learn to do course embedded assessment? How can the GEC promote university-wide buy in of the plan? What kind of incentives will be used to get good faith participation by students?).
7. The types of resources needed to implement the plan and estimate of costs.
8. A time table for implementation of the assessment procedures.

As the task force carries out its work it should:

1. Review existing models of general education assessment.
2. Use the general education assessment time table approved by the Faculty Senate as a starting point.
3. Regularly update the GEC members and the provost as the plan develops and solicit feedback from GEC members.

Deadlines. The task force should distribute a complete draft of the plan by August 23 to members of the GEC and the Provost. The plan should be reviewed and discussed thoroughly at the General Education Retreat to be held Wednesday, August 30. Based on feedback from the GEC the task force should revise the plan and prepare a final version for final action by the GEC and Faculty Senate.

Task Force Members

1. Carmen Wilson, psychology and coordinator of the task force
2. Scott Cooper, biology
3. Sandy Grunwald, chemistry
4. Deb Hoskins, women's, gender and sexuality studies & honors program
5. Emily Johnson (consultant), director of general education