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# POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR ASSESSMENT OF THE GENERAL EDUCATION PROGRAM

*The General Education Committee*

March, 2014

## BACKGROUND

The General Education Committee (GEC) is a standing committee of the Faculty Senate at UW-L. GEC is responsible for administering the General Education Program and is specifically charged with “conducting a systematic review of the General Education Program by examining existing courses on a regular, rotating basis, and recommending curricular changes.”<sup>1</sup> The systematic assessment of the General Education Program is important to UW-L students, faculty, and departments, and aids UW-L in the level of quality assurance necessary for accreditation by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC). For a summary of some of the history of General Education Assessment at UW-L, please see Appendix A.

This document describes the policies and procedures developed by Faculty Senate and GEC regarding assessment of courses included in the General Education Program.

## ASSESSMENT OVERVIEW

GEC has identified a set of student learning outcomes (SLOs) that students completing the General Education (GE) program should achieve. The UW-L GE SLOs are based on the University of Wisconsin System’s Shared Learning Goals, which were in turn developed using the Essential Learning Outcomes put forth by the Association of American Colleges and Universities. The UW-L General Education SLOs thus demonstrate our institution’s engagement with ongoing educational reforms and our adoption of best practices with regard to program-level assessment.

The SLOs for the UW-L GE Program are as follows:

Students will demonstrate knowledge and abilities relating to:

1. human cultures and the natural world;
2. critical and creative thinking;
3. aesthetic perspectives and meaning;
4. effective communication;
5. interaction in intercultural contexts;
6. individual, social, and environmental responsibility.

These are broad learning outcomes for the program as a whole, not for individual courses. For each course, departments must select one of the broad GE SLOs and then write a course-specific SLO. To facilitate the development of high-quality, measurable learning outcomes, the General Education Assessment Committee (GEAC) website will provide information about course-specific SLOs that could fall within each of these broad GE SLOs.

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<sup>1</sup> Faculty Organization and Bylaws Section H, article 2.

## POLICIES

1. Every General Education course will be assessed every two years. General Education Assessment thus operates on a two-year cycle.
2. Every Department or Program which offers a General Education course will submit a General Education Assessment Plan to GEAC during the spring semester preceding the start of a new assessment cycle.
3. If a General Education course will not be assessed during a given assessment cycle, the Department or Program offering that course must apply for a waiver from GEC, which (if approved) will exempt the course from assessment for that cycle.
4. In addition to the course-level data, the GEC will make use of other relevant institutional data streams, including the results of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA). The UW-L Assessment Coordinator will assist the GEC in developing reports from these sources for their use.

## PROCEDURES

1. GE Assessment Plans: Due during the spring before the start of a new assessment cycle
  - a. Department completes a GE Assessment Plan (see Appendix B), indicating for each course the semester when it will be offered, which of the six GE SLOs will be assessed in the course during the upcoming two-year cycle, and the semester and year during which that assessment will occur. Departments are free to assess each course during any semester and year they choose within the two-year cycle.
  - b. The GE Assessment Plan is submitted to GEAC, and accepted if complete.
  - c. GEC will send Assessment Plans back to the Chairs for review one year after their submission. Any changes should be noted on a revised GE Assessment Plan and returned to GEAC.
  - d. If the revision results in a Department or Program becoming non-compliant with any GE Assessment Policies, a waiver must be applied for from the GEC.
2. Form A: Due no later than October 1 of the academic year of assessment
  - a. Department writes a course-specific SLO that falls within one of the six GE SLOs.
  - b. Department develops an assessment task to assess the course-specific SLO.
  - c. Department develops an assessment rubric to classify all students in all sections of the course with respect to the course-specific SLO, based on their performance on the task. For assessment rubrics which will require a great deal of time to evaluate, classifying the performance of a random subsample of students may be appropriate; this approach should be described in detail in Form A.
  - d. These items are documented for purposes of General Education Program Assessment by submission to GEAC on Form A. GEAC must review and approve the Form A prior to the implementation of the assessment.
3. Form B: Due no later than July 1 of the academic year of assessment
  - a. Department coordinates instructors to assign the task to all students in all sections of the course.
  - b. Department uses the rubric to classify students' performance on the task.
  - c. Department analyzes the results and indicates whether changes to curricula, pedagogy, assessment task, or assessment rubric are warranted.

- d. These items are documented for purposes of General Education Program Assessment by submission to GEAC on Form B.
4. Form C: Due no later than July 1 the year following Form B submission
  - a. Department documents any changes that were actually made to curricula, pedagogy, assessment task or assessment rubric. This document must directly address the items included on Form B and is submitted to GEAC on Form C.

### **Form A**

Departments must write a course-specific SLO that falls within one of the broad GE SLOs. They then define an assessment task that the student must complete. The task may take on a wide variety of forms (answering multiple choice or fill-in-the-blank questions, solving mathematical equations, drawing charts or plots, giving artistic performances or interpretations, giving oral presentations, writing a dramatic narrative or technical analysis, etc.) but must measure the students' performance with respect to the course-specific SLO and must be clearly documented.

Departments must define an assessment rubric to classify students' performance on the assessment task. For purposes of General Education assessment, rubrics must describe five levels of performance. These five levels have been standardized across the University and are listed below. Note that there is no standardized definition of these categories beyond what is implied by the names themselves; the assessment rubric is what actually provides the course-specific meaning for each category.

- Exemplary
- Proficient/More than satisfactory
- Competent/Satisfactory
- Underdeveloped/Less than satisfactory
- Unsatisfactory

The assessment task and assessment rubric together comprise the assessment tools. The GEAC committee will review and approve the assessment tools before the assessment task is administered. The purpose of this review is to help ensure that the assessment tools will produce useful and credible data about the GE SLO. Additional information regarding GEAC's review of Form As is available through their website. If GEAC determines revisions are needed prior to approval, the submitting department is notified and must resubmit Form A after addressing the concerns raised by GEAC. The department may alternately decide to appeal the GEAC revise/resubmit decision (see Appendix C). The departmental appointee is responsible for submitting Form A.

### **Form B**

The department decides when and how to use the assessment task and who will apply the assessment rubric to classify students' performance. Departments may elect to have each instructor score the results for his or her sections of the course, or assign all of the scoring to a small group. If your department chooses to use a pre and post-test, report the results of the post-test in the rubric. An important feature of effective assessment is that instructors use the criteria consistently when they evaluate student learning. Large variations in the use of criteria can damage the credibility of the results. Finally, the department will report the proposed changes that will be made to improve student learning outcomes in the course, if any. A change might be made to the course curriculum, pedagogy, or the assessment process in response to assessment outcomes. GEAC does not evaluate

Form B submissions. GEAC simply reports on participation rates and compiles the Form B submissions in reports to GEC and Faculty Senate. The departmental appointee is responsible for submitting Form B.

### ***Form C***

The department will collectively analyze the assessment results and use these results to make improvements to student learning in the course. The department will report the changes made to improve student learning outcomes in the course, if any. The department or program is responsible for making such determination. GEAC does not evaluate Form C submissions. GEAC simply reports on participation rates and compiles the Form C submissions in reports to GEC and Faculty Senate. The departmental appointee is responsible for submitting Form C.

## **WAIVERS**

A course will be granted a waiver by the GEC, exempting it from assessment for a given assessment cycle, if it is not taught during that period. GEC will also grant a waiver when circumstances exist under which assessment cannot reasonably be expected to occur. Should such circumstances arise, the Department Chair or Program Head should contact the Chair of the GEC with a written request explaining the basis for the waiver. The GEC Chair will arrange for a representative of the Department or Program to appear before a meeting of the GEC to further explain their reasons for requesting the waiver. The GEC will determine whether or not to grant the waiver by majority vote.

## **USE OF ASSESSMENT REPORTS FOR REVIEW OF THE GENERAL EDUCATION PROGRAM**

The GEC will review the reports provided by the GEAC and the UW-L Assessment Coordinator in their ongoing review of the GE program. When the results of this review indicate need for further study of or possible refinements to the program, the GEC will take appropriate steps to ensure that the data being generated are used by faculty to improve student learning. Likewise, when the results of the review indicate successful achievement of learning outcomes, this will be noted and communicated to the faculty.

## APPENDIX A: Some History Regarding General Education Assessment at UW-L

In May 2006, during a site visit of the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) for purposes of national accreditation, the HLC report identified the General Education Program as an area of concern. Specifically, the report included a section entitled, in HLC language, “student learning and effective teaching,” having a subsection entitled “Evidence that one or more specified Core Components need organizational attention.” One of the three items under this subsection related directly to assessment of General Education: “While there is a process with both direct and indirect measures to evaluate student learning at the program, department, and university levels, these processes are not sufficiently rigorous in either the undergraduate programs, especially in General Education, or graduate programs. The current system does not provide effective mechanisms to assess academic programs with the goal of using assessment data for systematic improvement.”

This HLC report included another section related to, in HLC language, the “acquisition, discovery, and application of knowledge,” having a subsection entitled “Evidence that one or more specified Core Components require Commission follow-up.” This section stated, “there is no plan for the systematic assessment of the learning goals associated with the general education curriculum, an essential first step toward determining the effectiveness of the general education program.”

Faculty responded to the HLC report, at least in part, by developing a plan for the assessment of the General Education Program. Faculty Senate formed an ad-hoc committee, the General Education Assessment Committee (GEAC), to execute the assessment plan and report to both GEC and Faculty Senate. GEAC became a standing committee in the fall of 2011. Also in fall 2011, the HLC accepted the third and final Monitoring Report from UW-L, approving the University’s responses to the problems identified in the 2006 report.

## APPENDIX B: General Education Assessment Plan

Department/Program	
Department Chair/Program Head	
Assessment Coordinator	
Date updated/submitted	

Please fill in the table with the requested information for each of your Department's or Unit's General Education courses. Form A must be approved by GEAC prior to conducting the course assessment; at the latest they must be submitted by October 1 of the academic year during which the course will be assessed. Form B is due by July 1 of the year of the assessment. Form C is due by July 1 of the following year.

GE Courses (prefix and #)	Anticipated terms offered*	SLO to be assessed (#)	Term of assessment	Form A submission year (October 1)	Form B submission year (July 1)	Form C submission year (July 1)

\* During the upcoming two-year cycle. If you do not expect the course to be offered, indicate so by entering "none."

### GE Student Learning Outcomes:

Students will demonstrate knowledge and abilities relating to:

1. human cultures and the natural world;
2. critical and creative thinking;
3. aesthetic perspectives and meaning;
4. effective communication;
5. interaction in intercultural contexts;
6. individual, social, and environmental responsibility.

## APPENDIX C: Procedures for the Appeal of a GEAC Revise/Resubmit Decision

### SCOPE

This document describes the policies and procedures invoked when a department or program appeals the General Education Assessment Committee's request for revisions to a Form A submission.

### BACKGROUND

The General Education Committee (GEC) is a standing committee of Faculty Senate that is charged, in part, with "conducting a systematic review of the General Education Program by examining existing courses on a regular, rotating basis, and recommending curricular changes." GEC is therefore empowered to construct policies and establish procedures for conducting systematic reviews. The General Education Assessment Committee (GEAC), by contrast, is authorized to execute the assessment program that GEC has established. GEAC is not authorized to make policy regarding the General Education program. For this reason, any appeal of GEAC's request for revisions to Form A will be made to GEC.

### PROCEDURES

When GEAC acts to request revisions for a Form A submission, the submitting department or program should seek to resolve the concerns raised by GEAC and resubmit a form that sufficiently addresses those concerns. If interaction between the department and GEAC fails to lead to an agreeable resolution, the submitting department or program may appeal GEAC's request for additional revisions to GEC. An appeal to GEC involves the following steps:

1. The appellant notifies the chairs of both GEC and GEAC of the appeal. The appellant must submit a written response to the GEAC request for revisions that describes the basis for the appeal. The written response is expected to directly address the concerns raised by GEAC in their request for revisions and to clarify those points that prevented resolution during interaction that took place subsequent to GEAC's request for revisions.
2. The chair of GEC arranges for a hearing of the appeal to be added to the agenda of a regular GEC meeting.
  - a. The appellant has the right to send representatives to the GEC hearing in order to represent the appellant's position.
  - b. GEAC has the right to
    - i. Submit a written response to the appeal that gives the basis for the request for revisions. The response is expected to directly address the concerns raised by GEAC in their request and to clarify those points that prevented resolution during interaction that took place subsequent to GEAC's request for revisions.
    - ii. Send representatives to the GEC hearing in order to represent GEAC's position.
3. When GEC hears the appeal, the standing motion is made "to support the appeal." In other words, the standing motion is to override the request for Form A revisions. Since the appeal is specifically related to the GEAC action to request revisions, GEC will entertain no other motion with respect to the appeal. The appeal cannot be divided nor can aspects of Form A be acted on separately from the whole.

4. There are only two possible outcomes
  - a. The motion “to support the appeal” is approved. In this case, Form A is approved for use in the assessment of the general education program as submitted.
  - b. The motion “to support the appeal” fails. In this case, the appellant must revise Form A, addressing the concerns identified in the GEAC request for revisions.
5. As with any action of a standing committee, the action of GEAC to request revisions may be taken to Faculty Senate. It is unlikely that Senate will entertain any such appeal that has not first gone through the appeals process described in this document.