



MEMORANDUM

TO: Academic Deans and Department Chairs

FROM: General Education Curriculum Committee

Dr. Herbert Koerselman, Chair

Joy Karega, Assessment Coordinator

DATE: April 28, 2011

SUBJECT: General Education Program Assessment Results (2005-2010)

Assessment of student learning outcomes is a national expectation in higher education, and the expectations are calls for increased accountability. Section 2.7.3 of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools' (SACS) accreditation standards requires in each undergraduate program the successful completion of a general education component that:

- 1) is a substantial component of each undergraduate degree,
- 2) ensures breadth of knowledge,
- 3) is based on a coherent rationale.

Section 3.5.1 of the SACS accreditation standards also requires that "The institution identifies college –level competencies within the general education core and provides evidence that graduates have attained those competencies." Section 3.31 of the SACS accreditation standards requires that "The institution identifies expected outcomes, assesses the extent to which it achieves these outcomes, and provides evidence of improvement based on analysis of the results in each of the following areas: (1) educational programs, to include student learning outcomes, (2) administrative support services, (3) educational support services, (4) research within its educational mission, if appropriate, (5) community/public service within its educational mission, if appropriate."

Based on these standards, in 2005, the General Education Curriculum Committee (GECC) initiated a program to assess student performance in the competencies stated in the preamble of the general education plan: "The general education program at the University of Louisville fosters active learning by asking students to:

- 1) think critically,
- 2) communicate effectively,
- 3) and understand and appreciate cultural diversity.”

Focusing on these three competencies provided a more achievable goal for the initial assessment cycle as opposed to assessing seven different content areas (Arts and Humanities, Mathematics, Natural Sciences, Oral Communication, Social and Behavioral Sciences, Written Communication, and Cultural Diversity), each with multiple outcomes. Moreover, the focus on the three general competencies aided the GECC in compiling baseline data and snapshots of the general education program as a whole. Furthermore, the three general competencies allowed the GECC to demonstrate for SACS its commitment to developing and implementing an effective assessment model for assessing learning outcomes that are listed prominently in the program description. In April 2007, the GECC’s efforts were heralded by the COC-SACS Report of the Reaffirmation Committee: “The direct measures of critical thinking are outstanding, particularly the rubric designed by faculty.”

All university departments offering General Education courses have completed assessment for the first cycle of the Assessment Project. This report summarizes the results for the first cycle, excluding departments with curriculum designs that were not readily assessable using the current assessment model (i.e., Economics, Geography and Geological Sciences).

Critical Thinking Results: From 2005-2008, 1093 student artifacts collected from general education courses across the University were assessed by a diverse range of faculty, instructors, and doctoral graduate teaching assistants using the critical thinking rubric developed by the Assessment Rubrics Subgroup. Out of a maximum score of 4, the average scores were 2.76 for demonstrating recognition of the problem or question, 2.65 for using reasoning, arguments, and evidence, 2.44 for drawing conclusions based on reasons, arguments, and evidence, and 2.39 for showing awareness of multiple points of view, when appropriate.

The 2007 assessment involved only general education courses in mathematics; the critical thinking rubric was revised for this assessment. Therefore, the results of this assessment were not analyzed and combined with the results for cycle one. A total of 211 student artifacts were assessed by a diverse range of faculty, instructors, and doctoral graduate teaching assistants using the critical thinking mathematics rubric developed by the Assessment Rubrics Subgroup. For three of the four competency measures (interpreting mathematical information, applying mathematical models to solve problems, and representing mathematical information), out of a maximum score of 4, average scores ranged from 3.08 to 3.18; the average score for drawing conclusions based on evaluation was 2.87.

The spring 2010 assessment involved only general education courses in the natural sciences; the critical thinking rubric was revised for this assessment. Therefore, the results of this assessment were not analyzed and combined with the results for cycle one. A total of 262 student artifacts were assessed by a diverse range of faculty, instructors, and doctoral graduate teaching assistants using the critical thinking natural sciences rubric developed by the Assessment Rubrics Subgroup. Out of a maximum score of 4, the average scores were 2.83 for demonstrating an understanding of methods of science, 2.79 for constructing scientific understanding of natural

phenomena, 2.83 for applying scientific principles to everyday and lab-based phenomena, and 2.92 for communicating an understanding of vocabulary, materials, and technique used.

Effective Communication Results: From 2005-2008, 864 student artifacts collected from general education courses across the University were assessed by a diverse range of faculty, instructors, and doctoral graduate teaching assistants using the effective communication rubric developed by the Assessment Rubrics Subgroup. Out of a maximum score of 4, the average scores were 2.87 for articulating purpose and employing tone consistent with purpose, 2.71 for clarity and coherent organization, 2.51 for demonstrating analysis or synthesis, and 2.83 for using appropriate conventions and style.

Cultural Diversity Results: From 2005-2008, 692 student artifacts collected from general education courses across the University were assessed by a diverse range of faculty, instructors, and doctoral graduate teaching assistants using the cultural diversity rubric developed by the Assessment Rubrics Subgroup. Out of a maximum score of 4, the average scores were 2.38 for recognizing that culture shapes behavior and attitudes, 2.22 for demonstrating ability to understand the relationship of culture to its environment and history, 2.04 for recognizing cultural groups as internally diverse, and 2.10 for bringing awareness of cultural diversity to the analysis of problems or issues.

Future Plans: The GECC is considering three primary questions, and hopes to engage the faculty in discussion of the following:

- 1) What do the cycle one assessment results tell us about the General Education Program and students' performance in the program with respect to the stated learning outcomes?
- 2) Based on these results, how can we improve the General Education Program and student performance in general education courses with respect to the stated learning outcomes?
- 3) How can we improve the General Education assessment process?