

**OSU General Education Assessment Task Group
Report and Proposal
October 2000**

Introduction

In spring 2000, the OSU Assessment Council authorized the creation of a task group to develop a plan for assessing general education at Oklahoma State University - Stillwater. Seven OSU faculty members worked on this task during summer 2000 with assistance from Julie Wallin, Manager of the Office of University Assessment and Jack Vitek, Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs (Table 1 shows task group members). This report provides background on general education assessment at OSU and outlines their proposal for continued Assessment of the General Education Program at OSU.

Background

In 1991, the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education established a policy requiring every institution to “assess individual student performance in achieving its programmatic objectives,” including “mid-level assessment to determine basic skill competencies.” (OSRHE Policy Statement on Assessment, 1996). In response to this mandate, the OSU Assessment Council formed a subcommittee to develop a plan for mid-level assessment. This group conducted a faculty survey of general education goals and adopted the use of the *Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency* (CAAP) standardized exam and a locally developed test of writing and critical thinking skills. These methods were used from 1992 to 1995, but were discontinued because of dissatisfaction with the standardized instrument and a lack of motivation by students to participate in assessment and provide a true measure of their abilities.

From 1994 until 1997, the Mid-Level Writing Assessment Project was employed as a method of assessing mid-level writing competency. Although the study provided valuable assessment of writing skills of OSU students, it did not result in a viable method of assessing mid-level competencies on a continuing basis. The Office of University Assessment also provided funding for mid-level assessment within academic programs, but these assessments also did not yield viable methods for the continuing assessment of general education competencies or holistic assessment of OSU’s General Education Program.

In 1998, a subcommittee of the OSU Assessment Council was again formed to develop OSU’s mid-level assessment. This committee focused on developing ‘assessable’ outcomes for general education that were presented to the OSU General Education Advisory Council in 1999. The Council approved of the idea, but found that the revised learning outcomes were not consistent with the established system for evaluating general education courses.

In early 2000, it became obvious that the development of an effective approach to assessing the outcomes of general education was going to take more effort than could be rendered by the volunteer efforts of faculty members with normal teaching, research and administrative responsibilities. It was also recognized that to be effective the development of an assessment program for general education must be faculty-led, focused on the General Education program as a whole, and must have input from and the support of the General Education Advisory Council *and* the Assessment Council. The result of this decision was the establishment of a General Education Assessment Task Group.

Task Group Activity

The initial work of the task group was to research general education assessment practices at other institutions and related publications. Initial meetings allowed members to become more familiar with established OSU guidelines for General Education, procedures of the OSU General Education Advisory Council, the purpose of assessment, and assessment practices and oversight at OSU. Members of the task group also attended the 2000 Assessment Conference of the American Association of Higher Education to obtain more information about general education assessment practices and ‘lessons learned’ on other campuses. After this initial study period, the task group agreed on several items that form the basis of the current proposal:

- The primary objective of general education assessment is improvement of student learning related to the goals of general education. Assessment should not focus on individual faculty members and assessment data must not be used in faculty evaluation.
- General Education assessment will be carried out under the direction of the General Education Advisory Council and the Assessment Council, and these groups will be responsible for using the results of assessment for making improvements to the General Education program, or ‘closing the feedback loop’.
- Several different assessments and sources of data are required to evaluate student achievement of General Education learning outcomes.
- General education assessment can focus partly on students at the end of their undergraduate program because general education learning outcomes (e.g., communication and critical thinking skills) are emphasized in courses in the major as well as in general education courses.
- Current OSU documents on the “Mission of the General Education Program” and “Criteria for General Education Courses” do not provide adequate information about the expected learning outcomes from the General Education Program. These documents must be revised to proceed with assessment.

Task group members worked in groups to (1) revise the “OSU Criteria for General Education Courses” so that assessable learner outcomes for General Education could be identified, (2) develop a web-based method of gathering data to link general education learning outcomes with individual OSU general education courses, (3) develop a plan for developing an institutional portfolio for general education assessment, and (4) explore classroom-based assessments to assess general education outcomes.

Proposal for General Education Assessment at OSU

The following identifies three proposed tasks related to assessment of OSU's General Education Program. The first of these tasks was completed and approved by the OSU General Education Advisory Council.

Task 1. Develop Assessable Learner Outcomes for General Education

A first priority was to develop clearly defined learning outcomes for the General Education Program based on the "criteria and interpretations" established by the General Education Committee in the 1970's. The task group agreed that assessment of general education could not proceed without a document that clearly articulated the criteria and learning goals for the general education curriculum as a whole and for each classification of general education courses (the areas are A-Analytical and Quantitative Thought, H-Humanities, S- Social and Behavioral Sciences, I-Contemporary International Cultures, N-Natural Sciences, and L-Scientific Investigation). The document needed revision to identify learner outcomes, but it also needed to retain its usefulness for evaluating courses that request assigning general education area designation(s).

Working from the programmatic outcomes for general education developed in 1999 and from the accepted criteria for general education courses, task group members drafted revised "Criteria" and "Goals" (i.e., learning outcomes) for the overall General Education program and for each curricular area. This document was reviewed and edited by the General Education Advisory Council. This Council will be asked to approve the final version. This document will serve as a basis for subsequent assessments. The new "*Criteria and Goals for General Education Courses*" is shown in Appendix A.

Current status: The revised "*Criteria and Goals for General Education Courses*" was reviewed and revised by the General Education Advisory Council and is awaiting final approval.

Task 2. Develop a database of General Education courses and their intended learner outcomes

The task group recognized that identifying the general education learner goals that were targeted in each general education course would be useful for assessment as well as for the General Education Committee's review of general education courses. It was recognized that individual general education courses would typically target only *some* of the general education "overall" and "area designation" learner goals, but information about which learner goals are targeted would be useful.

The proposed data collection process requires general education course instructors (or course coordinators or departments heads, if appropriate) to identify the general education learner goals associated with each of their gen ed courses. The resulting database would contain each general education course name, the General Education Goals that are identified as 'primary' or 'secondary' student learner goals within the course, and brief descriptions on how course instructors evaluate student achievement of the identified learner goals (e.g., assigned papers, essay questions on tests, homework assignments, class projects, etc.). Other attributes could be added to the database if requested by the General Education Advisory Council or Assessment Council (e.g., numbers of students enrolled per semester in the course, additional comments from instructors, etc.). The database will *not* include information about instructors.

The task group developed a website that would allow instructors to provide this assessment information about their general education courses. The website requests basic course information (course name, home department, catalog description), the general education learner goals that are targeted in the

course, and information on how student accomplishment of these learner goals is evaluated (i.e., assessment methods used in the classroom). The resulting data would be provided as requested to the General Education Advisory Council and Assessment Council. If approved, the database may be used to:

- Describe the extent to which general education learner goals are covered in the general education course offerings,
- Provide information on instructor's classroom-based methods for evaluating student achievement of general education learner goals;
- Determine what general education learning goals are most and least frequently addressed in general education course offerings, and
- Determine what general education learner goals specific samples or cohorts of students were exposed to in their general education-designated courses by combining information from this database with information from samples of student transcripts.

Although this assessment method does not focus on directly evaluating student learning, the database may provide information useful for evaluating General Education program strengths and areas for improvement at OSU. The data entry process may assist instructors in focusing on general education learning goals, and the resulting database will provide valuable information about classroom-based assessments of gen ed learner goals that already exist. Finally, the database will provide information on particular courses that may be used in the development of an institutional portfolio (Task 3).

Current status: The website to be used for collecting this information needs to be reviewed and approved by the General Education Advisory Council and Assessment Council.

Task 3. Development of a University Portfolio to Assess General Education

The General Education Assessment Task Force recommends that the institutional portfolio be used as one method to assess general education at Oklahoma State University. We recommend the institutional portfolio be designed to determine the degree to which students are meeting the six goals of the general education program. We recommend the following plan for development of the institutional portfolio at Oklahoma State University.

- I. The General Education Committee and University Assessment Council will jointly develop a plan to create a group of faculty, General Education Assessment Team, to collect and review “artifacts” of student work that reflect the outcomes expected of students completing the general education program at Oklahoma State University
- II. The General Education Assessment Team will use the institutional portfolio for the evaluation of students' attainment of the goals of general education. The team will assess general education as a whole program, not as individual courses within the designated areas or even perhaps the areas/designations themselves. Therefore, artifacts should be collected on a regular basis from general education courses within each designation and from selected capstone or senior experience courses.
 - A. The General Education Assessment Team will use the artifacts collected from general education courses to assess the extent to which the courses in each designated area are meeting the overall goals of general education. These artifacts also may be used to evaluate how the courses in a particular designated area are meeting the specific goals of the designated area of general education. Results of the artifact evaluation will be forwarded to the General Education Committee, University Assessment Council, home departments of the courses, and faculty teaching the courses.

- B. The General Education Assessment Team will use artifacts collect from capstone or senior experience courses to assess the extent to which students meet the overall goals of general education at Oklahoma State University and apply knowledge and skills they should have acquired from general education courses to the practice of their discipline.
- III. Faculty should submit artifacts that are representative of the skills students actually use to complete course assignments. Artifacts may include, but are not limited to, essays, papers, homework, examinations, laboratory reports, and videotapes.
- IV. The General Education Assessment Team will create faculty teams that will use a scoring rubric evaluate the artifacts.
- A. An interdisciplinary team of faculty should develop the rubric for each overall general education goal. Some of the faculty on the team developing the scoring rubric should have experience teaching general education courses. However, the team should include members from outside the general education courses. All team members should be actively involved in teaching undergraduate courses. Scoring rubrics from other schools may be used as a starting point for developing our rubrics.
 - B. General Education Assessment Team will decide which goals for the individual designations require separate rubrics. Again, a broad base of faculty teaching undergraduate courses from within the area and outside the area should help develop the scoring rubrics.
 - C. Each Rubric Development Team or the General Education Assessment Team will need to develop the outcome standards for each goal.
 - D. Each Rubric Development Team will need to develop criteria for the types of artifacts on which the Rubric Scoring Team will use the rubric. Course instructors will find these criteria important in figuring out whether they have artifacts suitable for submission for the evaluation process.
 - E. A team of faculty (three to five members) for each goal will use the scoring rubric for the goal to score the individual artifacts. Each team member will score the artifact and then an average score will be calculated.
- V. Approximately 100 artifacts should be collected for each rubric area each fall and spring semester. Artifacts collected in the fall should be evaluated during the spring semester; artifacts collect in the spring should be evaluated in the fall. Alternatively, we could use faculty during the summer months (give a stipend/month of salary) to evaluate all artifacts collected during the academic year.
- A. The Office of University Assessment will poll instructors to determine who is willing to submit artifacts from which classes that meet the criteria required for using the scoring rubrics. From those instructors and class combinations, the Office of University Assessment will draw a random sample each semester to obtain the necessary artifacts.
 - B. If drawn, an instructor will submit an artifact that has not been graded from each student in the class to the Office of University Assessment. The Office of University Assessment will then randomly select some subset (say four or five) of artifacts from the set. The office will make a copy of the selected artifacts and return them to the instructor within 24 hours. The Office of University Assessment will code the artifacts and remove any information that would identify the student from the artifact. The Office will keep a record of the code, course

obtained from, and student so additional cross-references and analysis may be made relative to courses the student has completed, college, major, etc.

VI. The Office of University Assessment will compile, analyze, and report the results in an aggregate as a measure of the success of the General Education Program.

VII. Once compiled, the Office of University Assessment should report the results to the University Assessment Council and General Education Committee. The Office also should provide the results to the faculty teaching the general education courses so that the faculty could make any changes (if and when necessary).

Current Status: The development of a university portfolio to assess general education needs to be reviewed, discussed, and approved by the General Education Advisory Council and Assessment Council.

Table 1. Members of the 2000 General Education Task Group

Jeffrey Beck, Assistant Professor, Hotel and Restaurant Administration

Dennis Bertholf, Professor, Mathematics

Paul Bischoff, Assistant Professor, History

Nigel Jones, Associate Professor, Architecture

Lona Robertson, Assistant Dean, College of Human Environmental Sciences, and Associate Professor, Design, Housing, and Merchandising

Joe Schatzer, Professor, Agricultural Economics

Julie Wallin, Manager, Office of University Assessment (ex officio member)

Jack Vitek, Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs (ex officio member)

Eric Angevine, Professor, School of Architecture (former member)

Appendix A. General Education Courses Area Designations – Criteria and Goals *(revised)*

Background Information:

OSU Catalog Information on General Education (to be revised)

“Oklahoma State University is committed to producing graduates who have a depth of knowledge in their major fields of study and a breadth of knowledge outside their majors. The best graduate is one with a mastery of a specific subject matter and a solid and diversified general education. With this commitment to breadth and general education, the following philosophy was adopted in 1978:

The role of General Education at Oklahoma State University is to assist the student in the pursuit of general knowledge and in the development of skills and attitudes conducive to a lifetime of enlightenment. It must stimulate intellectual curiosity, original thought and expression, the capacity for critical analysis and problem solving and the ability to make conscious value judgements consistent with personal needs and the public interest. It must be a blend of the timely and the timeless and assist the graduate to live and function in a rapidly changing complex and cosmopolitan world.”

Oklahoma State University, University Catalog 1999-2000, p.9.

Accreditation

OSU is accredited by the NCA and to maintain that accreditation must meet certain criteria. In particular in the “Criteria for Accreditation” criterion number 3, considers whether “the institution is accomplishing its educational and other purposes” and refers specifically to the assessment of General Education:

“In determining appropriate patterns of evidence for the criterion, the Commission considers evidence such as:

- educational programs appropriate to an institution of higher education:
 - courses of study in the academic programs that are clearly defined, coherent, and intellectually rigorous;
 - programs that include courses and/or activities whose purpose is to stimulate the examination and understanding of personal, social, and civic values;
 - programs that require of the faculty and students (as appropriate to the level of the educational program) the use of scholarship and/or the participation in research as part of the programs;
 - programs that require intellectual interaction between student and faculty and encourage it between student and student.
- **assessment of appropriate student academic achievement in all its programs, documenting:**
 - **proficiency in skills and competencies essential for all college-educated adults;**
 - **completion of an identifiable and coherent undergraduate level general education component;**
 - mastery of the level of knowledge appropriate to the degree granted.
 - control by the institution’s faculty of evaluation of student learning and granting of academic credit.”

For the full text of Criterion 3 visit www.ncacihe.org/validity/criterion3.html

General Education Courses Area Designations – Criteria And Goals

I. All General Education course must meet the criteria and achieve several, but not necessarily all, of the goals listed below:

A. Criteria:

1. All courses with a general education designation are intended to meet the needs of students in all disciplines without extensive prerequisites.
2. All courses with a general education designation will include, to the extent possible, written composition, oral discussion, and graphic components.*

*Graphic components include drawings, diagrams, graphs, maps, photographs presented via slides, overheads, or computer.

B. Goals:

1. Students will communicate original thought in written composition, speech, and graphic representations.
2. Students will identify, evaluate critically, and seek solutions to complex problems.
3. Students will use the tools of mathematics and physical or biological sciences to solve problems and interpret the results.
4. Students will have knowledge of the relationship between historic and contemporary issues and will understand contemporary issues with sensitivity to a rapidly changing, diverse, and complex world.
5. Students will have an understanding of the beliefs that guide human actions and their consequences.
6. Students will have an understanding of how the content knowledge from general education courses applies to the practice of their discipline and to other disciplines, to society, and to their own lives.

II. General Education Area Designations

Analytical and Quantitative Thought (A)

1. Criteria:

- a. Courses designated “A” incorporate the study of systems of logic and the mathematical sciences
- b. The courses will place primary emphasis on the development of the intellect through inductive and/or deductive processes. Its aim should be broader than proficiency in techniques and should include appreciation of how the processes can supplement intuition and provide ways to analyze concrete problems

2. Goals:

- a. Students will use quantitative, geometric, or logical models to solve problems.
- b. Students will use logical systems and mathematical information to draw inferences from them.
- c. Students will give appropriate multiple representations (symbolical, visual, graphical, numerical, or verbal) of logical or mathematical information.
- d. Students will estimate, analyze, or check solutions to problems to determine reasonableness, alternative solutions, or to determine optimal methods or results.

Humanities (H)

1. Criteria:
 - a. Courses designated “H” concentrate on the nature and development of the ideas, beliefs, arts, and literatures that animate different cultures rather than technical approaches to the arts.
 - b. Courses designated “H” place primary emphasis on beliefs - philosophical, moral, and aesthetic—that have formed and inform the lives of individuals.
2. Goals:
 - a. Students will describe the significance of ideas, beliefs, the arts, and literature in historic and contemporary cultures.
 - b. Students will demonstrate such understanding through extensive written work in exams or papers.

Social and Behavioral Sciences (S)

1. Criteria:
 - a. Courses designated “S” concentrate on human behavior in relation to the social and physical environment in space and time.
 - b. Courses designated “S” place primary emphasis on human interaction, its consequences over time, and theoretical constructs.
 - c. Courses designated “S” are normally based on human observation rather than philosophical, moral, and aesthetic cultural developments.
2. Goals:
 - a. Students will develop generalizations about society over time and identify theoretical structures to account for change.
 - b. Students will recognize the role of empirical observation and analysis in the development of the social sciences.

Contemporary International Cultures (I)

1. Criteria:
 - a. Courses designated “I” emphasize contemporary – of the current time in the context of the discipline - cultures outside the United States. Courses concerning ethnic and cultural minorities within the U.S. do not qualify.
 - b. At least one-half of course materials must relate to contemporary, not historical, cultures.
2. Goals:
 - a. Students will be aware of one or more contemporary cultures external to the United States.
 - b. Students will understand how contemporary international cultures relate to the existence of a complex modern world system.

Natural Sciences (N)

1. Criteria:
 - a. Courses designated “N” feature the systematic study of natural processes and the mechanisms and consequences of human intervention in those processes.
 - b. Courses designated “N” place primary emphasis on the subject matter of one or more basic physical or biological sciences in a broadly integrative fashion.
2. Goals:
 - a. Students will use the language and concepts of science appropriately and effectively.
 - b. Students will use the methodologies and models of science to select, define, solve, and evaluate problems in biological and physical sciences.
 - c. Students will evaluate evidence, interpretations, results, and solutions related to the physical and biological sciences.
 - d. Students will understand the scientific inquiry process.

Scientific Investigation (L)

1. Criteria:

- a. Courses designated “L” must include the equivalent of at least one semester credit hour of laboratory experience aimed at interpreting scientific hypotheses.
- b. Courses designated “L” emphasize scientific inquiry and experimental methodology.

2. Goals:

- a. Students will identify scientific problems, formulate hypotheses, conduct appropriate experiments, and interpret results.
 - b. Students will communicate procedures, results and conclusions to others.
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