

GE Proposal Summary

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GE assessment at the course level:

- Program-level attainment of objectives not measured
- No cross-discipline/cross-area discussion/collaboration
- No opportunities for integrated (GE/AP/SS) discussions/contributions
- Compliance driven with little to no impact on the GE curriculum
- GE curriculum is widely viewed as a collection of individual courses rather than a cohesive program that contributes to institutional and program goals for student learning
- Faculty decided unanimously to move to program-level assessment, January 2010

Approach:

- Faculty are the driving force behind program-level assessment
- GE will be assessed at the program level via VWW courses
- Area teams will make meaningful state competency statements
- CASL will align GE competencies with Baccalaureate Outcomes
- Cross-discipline teams will develop 'assignment' and rubric
- With assistance of VWW faculty, CASL will administer 'assignment'
- Cross-discipline teams will apply rubric to student product
- Interpretation/feedback/plans of action will be determined through faculty discussions.
- Course certification process will be aligned with assessment process (both GE & VWW)
- Certificate awards will be distributed to faculty by level of participation

Rationale:

- Shift from compliance reporting to a commitment to improve student learning
- "Catches" student data when students are roughly mid-way through their studies
- Collects *useful and meaningful information* about student learning to inform decision making
- Focus is on assessment as a tool to foster student learning
- Faculty driven/faculty owned
- Collectively produces less demand on individual faculty
- Clearly separates assessment from faculty evaluation
- Inherently creates a meaningful and sustainable system for continuing accreditation requirements
- Directly aligns with course certification/recertification process
- Provides continuity across the curriculum & reveals curricular significance
- Integrates various aspects of students' learning experiences
- Support has already been expressed from ADAC, Honors College, and some departments
- Utilizes services/resources already in place: Banner, Teaching Academy, GE Course Certification Committee

Content of the Assessment:

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GE faculty will collectively identify/develop an assessment activity that provides evidence of student learning on 2-5 objectives that cross disciplines. Each year one activity will be administered in selected VWW courses. Student products will be assessed by faculty teams using rubrics developed by the teams. Activity/objectives will be rotated each year, and all objectives will be assessed over a five (5) year period. When appropriate, a particular objective may be revisited in a condensed timeframe to determine whether changes have had an impact on student learning.

VWW faculty/courses will be identified and approached for participation in the assessment process each year. Representative student work will be randomly selected for use in the assessment process.

Committee for the Assessment of Student Learning (CASL)
Report and Proposal to the Provost
July 28, 2010

Team Participants: Greg Armfield, Julie Fitzsimmons, Amal Mostafa, David Smith, Shelly Stovall, Kassia Wosick-Correa

Framework of NMSU-Las Cruces General Education Program

New Mexico State University-Las Cruces has a General Education Program wherein undergraduate students are required to take a total of 35 lower division credit hours and six upper division (Viewing a Wider World - VWW) credit hours of designated General Education (GE) courses. The State of New Mexico maintains an articulation agreement that ensures that lower division GE course credit received from any institution within the state will be transferable for GE credit at any and all other institutions within the state without question.

The Higher Education Department (HED) of the State of New Mexico has identified five Areas of General Education. Courses meeting criteria for the designated Areas are considered to be part of the General Education/State Common Core (GE/SCC).

- Area I – Communication
- Area II – Mathematics-Liberal Arts; Mathematics-College Algebra; Mathematics-Statistics
- Area III – Laboratory Science
- Area IV – Social & Behavioral Science
- Area V – Humanities and Fine Arts

The GE curriculum is horizontal in nature: Students may elect to take courses in whatever order they desire. The only restrictions are a pre-requisite for Chemistry, and minimal requirements (ACT/SAT/placement test) for ENG 111 and college level MATH. Students may not take upper division courses until they have completed basic skills requirements in English (ENG 111) and Math (college level math).

Background: The HED of NM has determined competencies for general education (GE) courses in the state of NM. Each institution is charged with assessing student learning of these competencies. Currently, NMSU-LC assesses these competencies at the course level: There is no comprehensive assessment of the GE experience as a core/program. In January 2010, the GE faculty at NMSU-LC expressed a desire to move away from course-level assessment of GE (which many find lacks meaning and value) to GE program-level assessment.

Goals: The goals of the NMHEAA GE Team were to gain clarity on the alignment of GE assessment with institutional goals for student learning and to draft an action plan for transitioning from course-level assessment to GE program-level assessment. Consequently the team deemed it necessary to conceptualize a framework, infrastructure and process for GE program assessment that is meaningful and valuable to faculty and students, that engages faculty across traditional discipline divisions, that integrates both curricular and co-curricular elements, and is used by the campus community to facilitate improved student learning.

Plan: To develop and implement a sustainable, integrated assessment process that focuses on student learning and relies on evidence of learning to guide curricular development.

Evaluation of the Current Situation:

NMSU maintains a lower division GE curriculum that identifies nine (9) learning objectives. Because of articulation agreements for transferability of GE courses within the state, the Higher Education Department (HED) of the State of New Mexico has identified 4-6 learning outcomes for each Area of the GE/SCC that are to be met and assessed. Courses accepted for the GE/SCC are deemed 'substantially equivalent' by the state.

Upper division GE courses (VWW) are not included in the GE/SCC, and are not subject to the articulation agreement. All VWW courses include NMSU-LC required components that qualify them as VWW courses.

The State of New Mexico Assessment Task Force was developed to ensure institutions are reflective in their teaching of GE, and are actively assessing in order to continuously improve student learning. As such, each institution in the state is at liberty to self-determine their approach to GE assessment – at the course level, by Area, or at the GE program level.

NMSU's current reporting format to the HED through the NM Assessment Task Force for GE/SCC assessment is at the course-level. There are serious concerns with this process.

- 1) Course-level assessment is not synonymous with GE assessment.
- 2) Because of the horizontal nature of the GE curriculum, most GE courses include enrollment of first semester freshmen through graduating seniors (basic English and Math being the exception). As such, course-level assessment findings are not indicative of the impact of the GE core on student learning.
- 3) Because focus has been at the course-level, there has been little to no cross-discipline discussion or collaboration.
- 4) Current GE assessment is compliance driven, and findings have little to no impact on the GE curriculum.
- 5) GE curriculum is widely viewed as a collection of individual courses rather than a cohesive program that contributes to institutional and program goals for student learning.

Envisioned Results: An integrated, collaborative approach to learning and assessment in the GE curriculum communicates value and appreciation for the variety of experiences in the GE core that contribute to the success of student learning in all Areas of the SCC. Shared responsibility for learning fosters collaboration in creating optimal learning experiences for students, both inside and outside the classroom. When faculty perceive their courses as contributing to a common goal, they are more likely to communicate to students how knowledge and skills developed in one course are applicable across the curriculum. As faculty collectively focus on student acquisition of key skills, knowledge and values, there is an increased likelihood that students will attain and retain desired knowledge, skills and values.

Guiding Principles: Assessment of the GE should be faculty driven. Collaboration and consensus are key to establishing a successful process for GE assessment. While program-level assessment may present greater challenges in securing meaningful changes to individual courses initially, the potential for significant impact of program-level assessment to the GE curriculum far outweighs the limited potential of course-level assessment. The long-term potential for impact far exceeds the short-term perceived risks.

Approach (also see Timetable and Benchmarks below):

- 1) Assessment requirements will be aligned with course certification processes (in cooperation with the General Education Course Certification Committee [GECCC]). Course approval (certification/recertification)
 - requires inclusion of evidence of assessment of student learning at the course level,
 - includes participation in GE assessment processes over the course of a 5 year cycle, and
 - requires NMSU adopted language for GE competencies (objectives) on all syllabi.
- 2) General Education objectives will be aligned with university-wide baccalaureate outcomes.
- 3) Area teams will facilitate
 - the adoption of NMSU language to define SCC criteria/outcomes,
 - area meetings,
 - the dissemination of findings from assessment, and
 - documentation of discussions, conclusions, and resultant actions to be taken by area faculty.

4) Integrated GE teams will consist of a cross selection of faculty from each area plus one member from student services. They will

- develop student assignments,
- develop rubrics, and
- assess student products.

5) Reporting to the State of NM HED

- An annual comprehensive report will be submitted to the State of NM HED each fall.

6) Certificate Awards for faculty contributions (sustaining/accomplished/distinguished contributor) to institutional ideals of meaningful assessment of student learning. Contribution venues include participation in NMHEAA Summer Retreat team(s), area-level meetings, integrated GE teams, open forum discussions, feedback contribution and response implementation at the course level.

7) Proposal must be approved through faculty discussion and consensus.

Synopsis of the Assessment:

Integrated GE teams will collectively identify/develop an assessment activity that provides evidence of student learning on 2-5 objectives that cross disciplines. Each year one activity will be administered in selected VWW courses. Student products will be assessed by integrated GE teams using rubrics developed by the teams. Results will be presented to faculty in open forum and area meetings for review and discussion. Discussions will determine appropriate interpretation of the findings, as well as suggestions to address any areas for improvement in student learning or in the assessment itself. Further discussions will facilitate a plan of action, based on assessment findings and interpretation. A final report will be drafted, and will highlight responses to the assessment as well as plans for any curricular or other changes. In ensuing semesters, documentation of implemented changes will be collected, as well as evidence of any changes in student learning.

Activity/objectives will be rotated each year, with the intention that all objectives will be assessed over a five (5) year period. However, when appropriate, a particular objective may be revisited in a condensed timeframe to determine whether or not changes have had an impact on student learning. Likewise, if significant issues are identified, it may be necessary to focus institutional attention on a particular set of outcomes for an extended amount of time.

VWW faculty/courses will be identified and approached for participation in the assessment process each year. Representative student work will be randomly selected for use in the assessment process.

Timetable and Benchmarks:

| TASKS | RESPONSIBLE PARTY | TIMELINE 2010-11 | STATUS |
|--|----------------------------|------------------|--------|
| Draft proposal to ADAC for feedback and discussion | Shelly Stovall | June 28, 2010 | X |
| GE Team meeting to finalize draft | Team | July 8, 2010 | X |
| Draft proposal to Provost for approval to present to faculty | Shelly | July 28, 2010 | X |
| Proposal presented to Dept. Heads | Shelly-Dept. Head Meetings | Aug. 2010 | X |
| Proposal to faculty through Area meetings Feedback and adoption Identify Area Leaders | Shelly w/CASL Area Rep. | Sept. 2010 | |
| Open Forums for VWW Faculty | | Sept. 2010 | |
| Solidify GE Leadership Team (CASL, Area-Team leaders, Student Support Staff, Student Rep) | | Sept. 2010 | |
| Develop Integrated Teams* (Area Reps & Students Support) for: Statement of core competencies Develop rubrics Develop student assignments Assess student products <i>*NOT Leadership Team – should be faculty in addition to leadership team as well as student support representation</i> | | Oct. 2010 | |
| Standardize syllabus statement of consent for using student product for purposes of assessment of student learning | Leadership Team | Oct. 2010 | |
| Align GE Core competency statements with baccalaureate outcomes | Integrated Teams | Nov. 2010 | |
| Distribute competency language for course syllabi | | Nov. 2010 | |
| Develop Assignment for Assessment Implementation | Integrated Teams | Nov. 2010 | |
| Develop rubrics for evaluation of student product | | Nov. 2010 | |
| Identify cooperating VWW Faculty | | Nov. 2010 | |
| Implementation – gathering student evidence | VWW Faculty | Feb. 2011 | |
| Evaluate student evidence – documenting findings | Integrated Teams | Mar. 2011 | |
| Open forums to discuss findings, interpretation & implications | | Mar. 2011 | |
| Documentation of implications & actions | | Apr. 2011 | |
| Area and GE open forums on actions to be taken | | Apr. 2011 | |
| Final report/distribution/action follow-up | | May 2011 | |
| Final Report to HED | | Sept 2011 | |
| PROCESS CONTINUES... | | | |

Additional Information Required:

- List of all GE courses by Area
- List of all VWW courses