

**General Education Review Committee
Subcommittee for Criteria #4**

DRAFT toward report

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CRITERION FOUR: TEACHING AND LEARNING: EVALUATION AND IMPROVEMENT

The following are suggested items for consideration for analysis and for the report.

1. Process for Assessing Student Learning. *Describe the General Education assessment of student learning process, including student learning plans, reports, and feedback from the General Education Subcommittee on Assessment.*

Overview. Currently, the General Education Subcommittee on Assessment (GESA), which was reconstituted during this past school year, developed “Phase One” of a system designed to evaluate student learning from a programmatic perspective (i.e., assessing how well students are meeting the Gen Ed programmatic learning outcomes). Phase One (2014-15) focuses on the three courses (CTAC 124, ENGL 121, and ESLN 412) in General Education Effective Communication (GEEC), although one course in Quantitative Reasoning (GEQR) will be assessed (MATH 110). After a recent all-day retreat (March 13), the GESA has drafted plans to address learning outcomes in all main categories of the Gen Ed program (Effective Communication, Quantitative Reasoning, Knowledge of the Disciplines and Application of Core Requirements). To continue designing the plans, committee members will attend the University Assessment Institute (April 30-May1) and organize a one-day Gen Ed Assessment Institute (early June).

During this year, GESA has worked with coordinators of the GEEC programs to support the latter’s efforts in preparing assessments and reports that demonstrate how they are meeting expectations of the Higher Learning Commission, particularly “closing the loop” in their assessment processes. Two programs (CTAC 124 & ENGL 121) have submitted assessment reports and the third one (ESLN 412) will in April. GESA will review all reports and send a response to the coordinators.

Phase One

General Education Effective Communication

- CTAC 124 (Doris Fields);
- ENGL 121 (Derek Mueller & Kate Pantelides);
- ESLN 412 (Kimberly Anderson);

General Education Quantitative Reasoning

- MATH 110 (Chris Gardiner & Stephanie Casey)

Writing Intensive courses (Ann Blakeslee) are beyond the scope of the GESA; however, the committee will continue to coordinate efforts to assess student learning in representative WI courses.

Learning Beyond the Classroom (Decky Alexander). Similarly, the LBC is beyond the scope of the GESA; however, the committee will continue to coordinate efforts to potentially demonstrate student learning through LBC credit opportunities.

Strengths. First, learning outcomes were established for all categories of revised General Education program (2007). The previous subcommittee on assessment helped to orchestrate an important initial phase of assessing student learning—analysis of the outcomes and substantive changes to the ones for GEQR. Furthermore, there are faculty and department heads across campus who have critical institutional memory about the purposes for the changes in Gen Ed and the potential role of assessing student learning in strengthening the program over time. This capacity has assisted members of the current subcommittee by offering insights and suggestions.

Next, the GESA has reconstituted and is represented by faculty from four colleges (David Gore, College of Technology; Stephanie Casey, College of Arts and Sciences; Sun Hae Jang, College of Health and Human Services; Matt Hammond, College of Business; and Doug Baker, College of Arts and Sciences), and representatives from College of Education and the Library are planned for fall 2015. The committee members are in the process to help to build capacity among faculty to lead assessment efforts.

Finally, there is data available through IRIM and the Graduating Senior Surveys that can assist in the analysis of student learning; at least the data might offer indicators of success.

Weaknesses

Confusion over What Counts as Assessment. One key weakness is that many stakeholders confuse assessment of student learning with assessment of Gen Ed as a program. Next, the input and reporting systems need clarification (e.g., templates for reporting used this year will be revised as needed for subsequent phases). Although members of the GEAC bring diverse disciplinary backgrounds to bear on the process, many are in their first year of this essential collaborative work, and it will take time to build the necessary knowledge and institutional capacity.

Lack of Capacity to Further Organize and Manage the Gen Ed Assessment System. As the GESA strives to design a sustainable and manageable—humane and doable—system of assessing student learning, committee members recognize the need for additional support (e.g., released time, support for conferences, and training of faculty and lecturers). Currently, there is not enough capacity to adequately complete the planned assessment processes for the 2015-16 year.

Training Across Diverse Programs and Departments. As noted by reviewers of the Gen Ed Assessment Report for 2013-14, the program must demonstrate that it is in the process of “closing the loop.” In order for this to occur, more training of part-time and full-time lecturers, as well as faculty, will be required. Another challenge is that Gen Ed has a large amount of courses from programs across the university, and there is no norm for assessing student learning. An implication is this: if faculty are unclear as to what is needed, then they will not privilege programmatic assessment in any way. Therefore, assessment of student learning is not currently informing programmatic decisions, which is especially needed for continuous improvement.

Opportunities. The key opportunity is to build an assessment system little by little. Because of the past work begun by the previous subcommittee, by the former Office of Instructional Effectiveness and Assessment, and current college assessment systems, many faculty are aware of the need to assess student learning from programmatic perspectives. The incoming course management system, Canvas, offers another potential opportunity because it includes an assessment portal. Similarly, IRIM has continued to offer support, especially through availability of data and timely return of requests.

Threats. The main threats concern sustainability of the subcommittee, support for the committee, particularly efforts toward building capacity across campus. The workload appears to be greater than a typical standing committee (especially in terms of creating the system, managing it, and choosing and initiating technological resources to archive, etc.). If assessment of student learning is not part of the decision making for Gen Ed, EMU will be missing a key component for continuous improvement and for demonstrating the efficacy of Gen Ed as a viable academic program.

2. Student Success Indicators. Describe the General Education program's student success indicators (e.g., research and creative accomplishments, community engagement, co-curricular learning, or other achievements).

Four categories of student success indicators have been identified:

- *Assessment Data from Phase One (2014-15):* Reports from the above groups in the categories mentioned (GEEC & GEQR) will be summarized and described in the annual report sent to the University Assessment Committee.
- *Student Public Performances* (e.g., Celebration of Student Writing, organized by ENGL 121 coordinator and instructors; and the Undergraduate Research Fair). The GESA, or other committee, could potentially gather a list of student participants in Celebration of First-Year Writing, and other similar types of student performances relevant to Gen Ed. Related, LBC lists of students participating in service learning, or other community projects will be collected also.
- *Grades*, particularly the percentage of students passing Gen Ed courses; however, as the Review Committee has discussed, analysis of the data has multiple implications.
- *IRIM Data* on the percentage of students who continue beyond Gen Ed courses.

Strengths. Through conversations with faculty, department heads and deans, we have learned that there are multiple performances that demonstrate that students are learning, or have learned through Gen Ed experiences. IRIM has data that can be mined for success indicators (e.g., grades, completion rates, etc.).

Weaknesses. Probably the main challenge to gathering data that indicate success is time for committee members to conceptualize the sources and begin and sustain the process for collecting and analyzing data. For example, although ENGL 121 orchestrates the Celebration of Student Writing, does the program compile lists of students who participated and provide some type of rubric for how well students contributed? What data sources actually indicate student success? Right now the GESA has only five members and the time presumably required to gather and analyze data that suggests success appears daunting.

Opportunities and Threats. The main opportunity is for the GESA, along with members from the Review Committee, to conceptualize sources of success indicators and to plan how to collect and analyze data. If these opportunities are not realized the Gen Ed program will potentially be unable to demonstrate how it knows students are succeeding, except by an aggregation of grades or some large-scale data points that only suggest success. Of course, what constitutes “success” should be agreed upon, at least at committee level.

3. Links among Grades, Retention and Completion. *Describe trends in the General Education program evidenced by grading practices, student retention rates, and time to degree completion.*

Most of the GESA and University Assessment Committee efforts center on student learning, not retention and completion. This category will demand planning, particularly to determine what will constitute evidence of trends, or how phrases such as “grading practices” are defined. The following will need to be collected, analyzed and summarized:

- Cumulative grade totals for Gen Ed courses, especially for purposes of analyzing the totals for inferential purposes.
- Retention rates (IRIM)
- Years to completion rates (IRIM)

Strengths. IRIM has data available to analyze on these criteria. (The appendix for this section will include an examples analysis of grades produced by Konnie Kustron & Peggy Liggitt.)

Weaknesses. The time needed for committee members to select and analyze data might demand more time than current members have to devote to this. In other words, more released time may be necessary, or other types of committees might be needed. However, there are university committees working on the strategic plan, which includes retention; therefore, coordination of the different committees might be the wisest answer to this dilemma.

Opportunities and Threats. Faculty and department heads could begin gathering the above types of data and analyze by department. This would distribute the workload and potentially benefit departments as well as the university and its quest to provide useful information to the Higher Learning Commission, among others. If the committees working on assessment of student learning, retention and completion are not coordinated, duplicate work may be done across campus—and it will not necessarily be effective or productive.

4. Gen Ed & Degree Completion. *Describe any roadblocks in the General Education program that appear to impede students’ time to degree completion.*

Through analysis of links among grades, retention, and completion, evidence will be provided that signals roadblocks. In particular, based on analysis of data, a survey might be necessary to gather further information from department heads, Gen Ed advisors, and students, among others.

5. Implications and Recommendations

For example, consider building a process for assessing the efficacy of the Gen Ed outcomes—how can Gen Ed improve?

Recommendations

- Through the website and training of instructors, distinguish definitions of “assess Gen Ed.” For example, assessing student learning toward meeting outcomes is different from evaluating the efficacy of the program as a whole.
- Increase support of GESA.
- Coordinate committees that address assessment of students (this is done through the University Assessment Committee), retention and completion (the latter two are presumably addressed on other university committees).
- Bolster training of instructors in approaches to assessing student learning based on the Gen Ed outcomes.
- Clarify and select what constitutes “student success indicators” so a common language is designed for purposes of evaluating overall program efficacy.
- Generate a sustainable approach to analyzing data on “student success indicators.”
- Select representative data points for evaluating effectiveness of Gen Ed in preparing students for upper level academic work and to support retention efforts.
- Separate indicators of “roadblocks” to completion for purposes of more accurately locating and analyzing data (e.g., assessment of student learning vs. “success indicators” outside of the class).