

Faculty General Education Advisory Committee

General Education Assessment Report

Approved by Faculty Senate 7 May 2009

Introduction

According to the 2006 Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) report, “Identifying and Exploring Issues of Compliance,” insufficient evidence demonstrating attainment of general education competencies ranks third among non-compliance issues, with 61% of institutions cited. The current assessment process at Morehead State University does not provide the accurate picture of student proficiency in general education that SACS requires. With our current structure, we cannot determine where value is added to the educational experience and whether our students are prepared to work and live in a global, complex society. Tracking and measuring student progress throughout the entire general education program is critical, and resources to accomplish this are required.

Definition of General Education Assessment

Assessment is the process by which academic institutions evaluate student progress in learning and success in achieving educational goals. General education assessment—both at the course and program levels—is anchored by student learner outcomes. Achievement may be assessed directly by measuring the changes, progress and/or gains that occur with students, or indirectly by using self-reporting perceptions obtained through surveys or other indicators such as employment, employers' satisfaction and the percent of students who continue their education in graduate or professional programs.

Purpose of General Education Assessment

The purpose of general education assessment is to ensure a cycle of continuous improvement in teaching and learning. To attain this goal the collection and analysis of assessment data must be ongoing, consistent, and reported in a timely fashion. Information obtained through course and program assessment must be utilized to enhance course content and teaching strategies, as well as to guide faculty development, academic advisement, and student services. Responsibility for assessment will be shared by faculty and a general education assessment unit.

Confidentiality of assessment data will be maintained. Assessment data will never be used to publicly punish or embarrass students, faculty, courses, or the institution either individually or collectively. The institution, through the general education assessment unit, will publicly disseminate assessment data only through aggregate reporting.

Course and Program Levels of General Education Assessment

Course level assessment is the use of course-based assessment instruments (exams, papers, presentations, projects, performances, portfolios, etc.) to evaluate how well students have met general education student learning outcomes. General education course proposals must include strategies to facilitate this process and faculty are responsible for implementing the appropriate strategies in the general education courses they teach. The results of these assessments are provided to the student as part of the learning process, are calculated into a student's course grade, and are used by faculty on an individual basis to improve teaching strategies. Course assessment instruments are sufficiently flexible to accommodate diverse disciplines.

General education is more than a collection of courses; it is an academic program. Like all academic programs, general education needs to be continually reviewed to ensure that it is current, meeting its goals effectively, and contributing to rigorous student learning. **Program-level assessment** of general education is intended to provide useful and timely information about aggregate student achievement of general education learning outcomes that allows faculty to identify areas of success and areas that can be improved. Methods of program-level assessment for general education include both direct and indirect measures:

(a) Course-Embedded Assessment

Course-embedded assessment is the use of course-based assessment instruments (exams, papers, presentations, projects, performances, portfolios, etc.) to evaluate how well students have met general education student learning outcomes with an eye towards the effectiveness of the program at large. For course-embedded assessment to provide aggregate data useful at the program level, specific student learner outcomes must be assigned to each course and certain instruments designed to assess these outcomes must be shared across course sections. While student performance will be graded as part of the course, samples of student work will also be collected and evaluated by other faculty teaching the same course, or groups of courses requiring the same student learner outcomes, using agreed upon rubric components that measure progress towards those outcomes. The intent of this approach is not to question any particular grade assigned, but rather to obtain data on student achievement that can be used to improve the content and delivery of general education courses. It should also be noted that course assessment instruments are not limited solely to those used for program assessment. Faculty should employ both shared general education program and individual assessment strategies in their courses.

Course embedded assessment has several advantages: (1) assessment and consequent improvement of teaching and learning are in the hands of faculty; (2) data gathering and interpretation are flexible enough to encompass the needs of diverse disciplines; (3) students are

motivated to perform at an optimal level because the assessment impacts their grade; and (4) students are not required to complete additional exams or assignments.

(b) Portfolios.

Portfolios refer to collections of student work used for both student reflection and assessment purposes at the course and/or program levels. Not limited to cross-sectional “snapshots,” portfolios provide evidence of students’ longitudinal progress in an individual course or across their undergraduate careers. Portfolios are also sufficiently flexible to include diverse types of work. For this strategy to be successful, the institution must invest in appropriate electronic storage and retrieval, as well as faculty development.

(c) Capstones.

Capstone courses are designed as cumulative and integrative measures of students’ attainment of general education and/or discipline-specific goals. These courses require students to demonstrate the ability to integrate the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of general education with their chosen discipline to applied academic, professional, and/or community activities and projects.

(d) Standardized tests.

These tests are norm-referenced and provide data that can be useful for comparison among courses, in programs, and with other institutions. Meaningful norm-referenced testing requires significant resources, particularly to collect longitudinal data for comparison.

(e) Locally developed comprehensive oral/written examinations on course content.

These exams are created by MSU faculty and can be open-ended, integrative, and adapted to specific assessment needs.

(f) Surveys.

Standardized or locally developed surveys can provide useful data on various stakeholders’ perceptions of students’ skills, knowledge, and experiences.

ASSESSMENT PLAN FOR GENERAL EDUCATION

AT MOREHEAD STATE UNIVERSITY

The Morehead State University General Education program will be assessed primarily through direct measures (e.g., course embedded assessment) of student progress towards general education learner outcomes. Direct measures may be supplemented by indirect indicators such as employment information, percentage of students who continue their education in graduate or professional programs, and student self-reported perceptions provided by internal and/or external surveys (e.g., National Survey of Student Engagement [NSSE]), including integrative component surveys. Direct measures will be utilized for both course and program assessment; indirect measures may also be effective for program assessment. It is critical that appropriate resources be allocated for faculty development, assessment data management, and longitudinal studies if attainment of general education competencies is to be adequately measured and the data obtained effectively applied to enhancement of teaching and learning in general education. Specific resources required are listed in **Appendix A**.

Course Embedded Assessment. The primary direct strategy for General Education assessment at both the course and program level will be course-embedded assessment, as it offers both a versatility and specificity that can be adapted to all General Education learner outcomes. The preconditions and principles of this assessment are outlined below.

1. Each General Education course must address the assigned learner outcomes and include an assessment plan that specifies strategies for measuring those outcomes in the course proposal. All faculty who teach a general education class will be required to attend a workshop that will prepare them to develop this plan. Training will be provided on identifying tools of assessment that align with the general education student learning outcomes designated for the class(es) that they teach. Instructors will work together to develop general course syllabi for multiple-section courses and/or course section syllabi, as well as those assessment instruments that will be common to each course and/or section. Models of assessment materials can be made available for faculty teaching general education courses to assist in course development. The intent is to empower faculty to embed general education assessment within course assessments. An important element of the training will be instruction in the development and use of grading rubrics or scoring guides for various assessments. Faculty will devise rubrics that align class assessments with the general education outcomes. Certain portions of class assessments will be used to assess general education outcomes, but not all assignments or test questions will align with a category outcome.

2. In order to determine progress toward student learner outcomes, faculty teaching a core course or course group will agree upon pre- and post-assessment instruments and rubrics. Random samples of pre- and post-assessments will be collected from faculty by a General Education assessment unit. The unit will assemble data so as to track individual courses and/or sections of courses within a particular category as part of a cycle of continuous improvement. Appropriate resources for assessment responsibilities will be provided. See Appendix A below.

3. The most efficient way to manage the collection of course-embedded assessment data is through software designed for this purpose. The university will (1) identify appropriate options for electronic storage and retrieval among those currently used by other institutions, (2) allow faculty to review these options, (3) use faculty feedback to select the option that best meets the general education program's needs, and (4) implement and maintain this software. All faculty who teach general education courses will receive training that prepares them to use this software.

4. An analysis of data for all student learner outcomes will be compiled and distributed to faculty by the General Education assessment unit annually.

5. If progress related to a given student learner outcome is found by the appropriate assessment committee to be particularly successful, then a plan will be implemented to promote that success. If progress is found by the appropriate assessment committee to be inadequate, then a plan will be recommended by faculty to address the inadequacy. This analysis should be comprehensive, evidence based and sensitive to all factors related to individual sections, courses, and student learner outcomes. Faculty collaboration will take place annually for this purpose.

6. Assessment data will be collected from the First Year Seminar and compared to data collected from the General Education Capstone for longitudinal General Education program analysis. Assessment data, based on oral and written examination of course content, will also be used to measure student progress towards integration of General Education skills. Therefore, data will be collected and student learning tracked through these courses.

Standardized Testing. Resources will be made available for meaningful standardized testing of General Education.

Indirect Measures of Assessment. The General Education assessment unit will be responsible for the collection, analysis, and interpretation of indirect data relevant to

general education. Data should include employment information, percentage of students who continue their education in graduate or professional programs, and student self-reported perceptions provided by internal and/or external surveys (e.g. National Survey of Student Engagement [NSSE]). Appropriate surveys will be designed and administered by faculty teaching the General Education Capstone.

Appendix A

Resources Required for Successful Implementation of Assessment Plan

The FGEAC, in both the "General Education Curriculum and Courses Distribution Proposal" and the "General Education Assessment Plan" recommends significant changes to the way we devise, implement, and assess the General Education Program at Morehead State. Based on best practices and directly linked to collaborative teaching and intentional student learning outcomes, the new curriculum requires an unprecedented infusion of university resources in addition to faculty time and energy. If we are to be successful, we must alter our current workload calculation processes and methods of assessment and we must emphasize and provide faculty development and training. If resources are not available implementation as planned is not possible.

1. Faculty training to prepare them to (a) develop common assessment instruments, (b) develop and use common rubrics in assessing student learner outcomes for program assessment, (c) use the software selected for management of student sample work, and (d) use assessment data to revise courses and/or teaching and learning strategies in continuing courses so as to facilitate progress toward student learner outcomes.
2. Appropriate faculty workload adjustments to effectively participate in faculty development related to assessment and to participate in the development of common assessment instruments and rubrics for program assessment, evaluating sample student work using a common rubric, reviewing assessment data, and working together with other faculty to revise courses and/or teaching and learning strategies in continuing courses so as to facilitate progress toward student learner outcomes.
3. Workload adjustments and/or other compensation for those faculty not teaching a General Education course who may be recruited to review sample student work using a common rubric for General Education program assessment.
4. Assessment data management needs, such as appropriate software and secure and confidential data storage capabilities.
5. Staff and other resources for the general education assessment unit and the academic units that will have responsibility for (a) collection of data, (b) management of data, (c) analysis/interpretation of data, and (d) disseminating assessment data and analysis/interpretation to faculty in a timely fashion.
6. Resources for standardized testing and longitudinal studies that provide appropriate data for accurate and effective program assessment.

7. Faculty development for those teaching the First Year Seminar course that will facilitate interdisciplinary faculty collaboration.

8. Appropriate faculty workload adjustments for those teaching the First Year Seminar in consideration of the additional time and skills that will be required to teach an interdisciplinary course with intensive assessment responsibilities.