

IV. A Student Outcomes Assessment Plan for General Education

The general education program consists of lists of courses in 16 different areas that meet criteria established by Executive Order 595. A learner centered model would focus on intellectual skills and learning outcomes rather than courses. As an assessment plan was developed, the general education committee considered if the current distributional model should be modified to be more learner centered. We also recognized that the university and the major programs of study have expectations of the general education program. As part of the assessment plan, these characteristics and expectations need to be articulated, and in ways they can be measured need to be developed. Then a process needs to be put in place to gather and evaluate data. The Qualities Desired of Graduating Students (QDOGS) task force assisted in this effort.

The assessment plan was developed using the following guiding principles:

1. Assessment should be based on the mission and goals of the general education program.
2. Assessment of learning outcomes needs to be a campus wide effort involving the entire university community as well as alumni and employers.
3. A diverse array of assessment measures appropriate to each discipline should be used on an ongoing basis.
4. Assessment should address basic skills initially and expand over time to address higher order outcomes of the program.
5. Realistic assessments should be embedded in all courses.
6. The goal of assessment is program improvement. Data should be used for this purpose.

Components of the plan

Mission and goals.

Since the GE program is designed by campus faculty within parameters established by the system, it must respond to changes proposed by the CSU. A revision to EO 595 has been drafted and is anticipated to be presented for endorsement in early 2008. In the absence of more information about such changes, that process is ignored in our discussion. There are a few recommendations however that can be made. We believe that the campus should:

1. Develop a clear mission statement for GE.
2. Identify and implement a plan for communicating the purpose of GE to multiple constituencies including faculty, staff (especially advisors), community colleges and high school counselors.
3. Develop a communication plan that will a clear explanation to students about "why I should take this course"
4. Develop a method to communicate changes to the GE program to appropriate parties
5. Consider how to improve the catalog statements on majors and general education to better integrate the two.

Learning outcomes. A campus wide effort was made beginning in April of 2007 to revisit the current list of learning outcomes in each area, reduce the number of outcomes, gain a campus wide consensus on them, and focus on competency rather than content. A series of workshops were held (one for each GE sub area) in September of 2007 with the objective of examining goals and learning outcomes for each area. These workshops will be continued through academic year 2007 and early 2008 until this goal is reached.

National instruments

The university regularly administers nationally normed surveys to various campus groups. These include the HERI Freshman, Faculty, and College Student Surveys; the National Survey of Student Engagement; an Alumni Survey; and others. Each of these may have questions relevant to assessment of general education or provide opportunities to add such questions. The committee agreed to examine the results of these surveys to identify information that might help assess the GE program.

Embedded assessment

Rubrics for evaluating writing and critical thinking have been developed (see Appendix 6). Faculty will be encouraged to use these as embedded assessment tools to monitor performance and progress.

Portfolio analysis-the QDOGS group recommended that a portfolio be developed by all students. Such a portfolio can be used to demonstrate a student's competency in the various General Education areas. The general education committee will work with the QDOGS task force on implementation of a portfolio approach to assist in the assessment of general education.

Course level changes. Faculty should consider how they would change the course if it was considered as a "terminal" rather than an entry level course. In many cases, GE courses will be the last course students take in the discipline and in addition to providing students with an understanding of the "ways of knowing" and how the field or discipline relates to other academic areas; they should also be tied to the overall education of the student and should connect to the issues of the day. General education courses should offer opportunities for reflection as well as active learning. The General Education committee will review the guidelines/criteria for approving courses to incorporate these into the process. They will also review course syllabi to see how these match up with the model syllabi that have been approved

Program level changes. While the purposes of the various areas of the GE program have been established by the CSU, we wish to assess whether or not the purpose(s) articulated for each of the areas is clear, widely known, and supported. We will conduct a survey of faculty, advisors, and students to answer these questions. Based on the results, we may wish to develop a communication plan or suggest modifications to the CSU statewide academic senate. In addition, a revision to Executive Order 595 is expected in early 2008. The committee will need to review these changes and make necessary changes to the current GE patten to reflect those changes.

Delivery mechanisms. GE courses have been delivered in lecture, laboratory and activity formats and in recent years on-line. Recent efforts have been made to develop learning communities. Little is known about the differential effects of alternative formats in a given course. We will assess the impact of learning communities relative to other delivery mechanisms in specific courses.

V. Plan for Next Review Period

A. Recommended Changes to the Mission and Goals of the Program

Convene the faculty teaching in each GE Area to revise the Area objectives and develop common Student Learning Outcomes for approval by the University community. Review GE course proposals for alignment with the accepted Course objectives and SLO's. To be completed Spring 2008.

B. Effectiveness of Instructional Program

1. Student Learning Outcomes as Developed in the Program's Student Outcomes Assessment Plan (SOAP)

The SOAP will include the SLO's developed from the GE faculty groups, as approved by the Faculty Senate. Each Area within GE will be asked to create an assessment plan, which will then be aggregated and modified for consistency by the GE committee. After consultation with the Q-DOGS task force the GE committee will explore the use of student portfolios for assessment purposes.

GE courses will be reviewed for inclusion of expected SLO's with supporting learning activities before addition to the GE Area.

2. Curriculum

a. Structure/Coherence of Instructional Program

-The GE program committee will continue review of existing GE courses for alignment with the SOAP developed in the GE committee and approved by the Faculty Senate. Any revisions to the program required by revisions to EO 595 expected in 2008 will be made and incorporated into the SOAP.

-The GE program committee will monitor the existing areas of GE for student enrollments to ensure sections are available to meet enrollment demands.

b. Cooperative Efforts with Other Academic Programs-Joint Degrees, Services Courses, General Education Courses

-GE Committee will seek methods to foster learning communities within the GE course Areas to promote the achievements of this instructional design established by Fresno State institutional research.

-Service Learning will be encouraged within the GE curriculum courses.

3. Recruitment, Retention, and Student Services

-The GE committee will seek methods to provide equal opportunity for all courses in GE to recruit an adequate number of students to maintain the course offerings

-The GE program committee will continue review of existing GE courses for retention of enrolled students and make recommendations subsequent to the findings on retention.

4. Community Interactions (Professional, Disciplinary, Industry/Regional)

G.E. program review Nov 1, 2007

-GE Committee will ask for information from the CAN [Campus Advisors Network] about the perceptions of the Fresno State GE program

C. Resources

1. Financial/Budgetary

- The committee will seek annual funding for development of persons serving on the committee to further the functions and quality of the GE program
- The committee will seek a method to establish a central location for development materials of use for GE course proposers and committee members.

2. Faculty/Staff

a. Adequacy and Availability

- The GE Committee will seek full membership for the committee representing all elements of the University community.

b. Professional Development/Travel Support

- The committee will seek annual funding for development of persons serving on the committee to further the functions and quality of the GE program
- The committee will identify, with administrative assistance, appropriate opportunities for committee members to attend professional development aligned with GE initiatives

3. Implementation and Currency of Technology

- The GE committee will foster technology use by GE faculty and GE courses.

4. Other:

a. Space-Classrooms, Laboratories, Offices

The GE committee will review course proposals, and current courses for adequate environments for teaching and learning in GE.

b. Library Assets

The GE committee will meet with Library staff to determine adequacy of the resources and methodologies to acquire materials in support of the GE program

V. Additional Issues