

SPECIAL JOINT SENATE COMMITTEE ON GENERAL EDUCATION ASSESSMENT

Recommendations for General Education Assessment

(Legislative)

Implementation: Upon approval by the Senate

Introduction

On November 18, 2015, Chair Ansari and Vice President and Dean Pangborn charged the Special Joint Committee on General Education Assessment to:

- Further implement the assessment of general education outcomes within the institution's overall plan for assessing student learning, and evidence that such assessment results are used for curricular improvement;
- Develop a regular and ongoing assessment plan for (current) General Education, following the principles described in the April 28, 2015 University Faculty Senate's Approved Legislative Report entitled, "Revision to General Education Curriculum;"
- Consult and maintain liaison with the University Faculty Senate Standing Committees on Curricular Affairs and Undergraduate Education;
- Consult and maintain liaison with the Office of Planning and Assessment.

The formation of this special joint committee was, in part, the response to two key events during spring 2015: the University Faculty Senate ratifying a report updating General Education and recommendations from the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) decennial accreditation evaluation.

At the April 28, 2015 plenary meeting, the University Faculty Senate ratified a legislative report entitled *Revision to General Education Curriculum*, which was brought forward by the General Education Planning and Oversight Task Force. The Faculty Senate approved six recommendations pertaining to the General Education Curriculum. Recommendation 2 of the report stated that a regular and ongoing assessment plan for General Education should be developed by the Faculty Senate and University bodies assigned to program assessment, following the principles described in that report. Furthermore, it was recommended that the Faculty Senate should approve the plan and the appropriate Senate committees should use the findings to address areas for refinement and improvement.

The principles described in April 2015 legislative report included the following:

1. Data from selected courses will be used in aggregate for curriculum-level assessment;
2. To the degree possible, data collection for assessment should be meaningfully integrated with the learning activities of a course;
3. To the degree possible, instructors involved in the teaching of General Education courses should be involved in the design, analysis, and interpretation of assessments;

4. Instructors should be provided opportunities to obtain formative assessment data that will enable improvements to the design and delivery of the course. Course-level data will not be used in any faculty evaluations, and will not be made public;
5. Assessment practices must inform the effectiveness of the General Education program as a whole. These evaluations will use institutional level data, aggregated across courses, to evaluate student gains from the start to the end of their studies;
6. Assessment methods should be both reliable and valid measures of student performance in relation to the learning objective being assessed.

On June 25, 2015, MSCHE reaffirmed Penn State's accreditation after an extensive evaluation process during the 2014-15 academic year. Among the team's recommendations, the MSCHE report emphasized Middle States' Standard 14, Assessment of Student Learning. Specifically, the team urged Penn State to "further implement the assessment of General Education outcomes within the institution's overall plan for assessing student learning, and evidence that such assessment results are used for curricular improvement."

Discussion and Rationale

Acting on our charge, the Special Joint Committee on General Education Assessment collected preliminary institutional-, program-, and course-level data to establish baseline data that will inform future General Education assessment processes. The purpose of this preliminary analysis was to better understand current General Education practices across the University, including how institutional assessment may inform curricular decisions and make improvements. This is consistent with the Association of American Universities Survey on Undergraduate Student Objectives and Assessment (2015), which found that assessment information is most useful when it is tied to the curriculum students are learning and can be used to make improvements.

The Special Joint Committee on General Education Assessment is committed to institutionalizing the General Education assessment processes so that progress can be made in tandem with other University initiatives on assessment. There are costs associated with these activities. A cost estimate for implementing the new General Education curriculum, including assessment, was included in Appendix E of the General Education Taskforce report dated April 28, 2015¹. With this in mind, the committee is offering three recommendations for the Senate to consider at this time.

¹ The General Education Taskforce report is Appendix B of the Senate Agenda for April 28, 2015. The cost estimate is Appendix E of the report: <http://senate.psu.edu/senators/agendas-records/april-28-2015-agenda/appendix-b/>

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: A standing Joint Committee on General Education Assessment should be formed to guide the assessment process. The composition of the committee should be as listed below and the committee charge should be in alignment with the duties and principles stated in this report.

The Special Joint Committee on General Education Assessment should become a standing joint committee that will guide regular curricular review and on-going assessment of student learning as it relates to General Education.

The University Faculty Senate, the Office of Undergraduate Education, and the Office of Planning and Assessment should jointly appoint the standing Joint Committee on General Education Assessment. The Associate Vice Provost for Learning Assessment and the chair of the Senate Committee on Curricular Affairs should jointly chair the committee.

Membership:

1. Associate Vice Provost for Learning Outcomes Assessment - Co-Chair;
2. Chair of the Curricular Affairs Committee - Co-Chair;
3. An associate vice president and associate dean for Undergraduate Education, appointed by the Vice President and Dean for Undergraduate Education;
4. A representative from the Department of Learning Outcomes Assessment, appointed by the Vice Provost for Planning and Assessment;
5. A member of the Graduate Council, appointed by the Vice Provost for Graduate Education and the Dean of the Graduate School;
6. An associate dean from Penn State Libraries, appointed by the Dean of Libraries and Scholarly Communications;
7. A student government representative (either UPUA or CCSG), appointed by the Committee on Committees and Rules; and
8. Six University Faculty Senators, to represent Commonwealth Campuses and University Park Colleges, appointed by the Senate Committee on Committees and Rules.

Duties:

1. The joint committee should work in cooperation with the newly established University-wide assessment working group chaired by the Vice Provost for Planning and Assessment and any subsequently formed University-assessment coordinating body. This will ensure that assessment efforts are coordinated across General Education, baccalaureate degree programs, and other assessments of academic areas (such as engaged scholarship, minors, certificate programs, etc.).
2. Principles to guide the joint committee:
 - a. *General Education assessment should align with the University's overall assessment plan and procedures.*

General Education assessment will be part of the University's ongoing assessment plan. The plan will be developed with input from the Committee on General Education Assessment and the University-wide assessment working group, currently chaired by the Vice Provost for Planning and Assessment, and any subsequently formed University-assessment coordinating body.

- b. *Faculty development related to General Education will be offered regularly and will be informed by the assessment process.*

Faculty development should be offered and, to the extent possible, be coordinated jointly with the Office of Planning and Assessment, the Schreyer Institute for Teaching Excellence, and the proposed General Education support structure recommended by the General Education Task Force in the January 27, 2015 advisory/consultative report entitled *Institutional Support and Resources for General Education*.

- c. *Communication to the University Faculty Senate concerning the findings of General Education assessment should be offered on a bi-annual basis as an informational report.*

Communication to the University Faculty Senate should be offered on a regular basis. Faculty Senators should be updated on the findings of the Committee on General Education Assessment to inform curricular decision-making and to ensure that the feedback and improvement loop is complete.

Recommendation 2: The new standing joint committee should recommend the development of datasets to inform general education assessment. Such datasets should include, but are not limited to:

- 1. A General Education Curricular Inventory that shows patterns of course offerings, student enrollment, and student grades by major and location.**
- 2. General Education curriculum mapping that shows the relationship between General Education and undergraduate majors.**
- 3. General Education course objective mapping that shows the relationship to General Education learning objectives.**

Detailed information regarding each of these datasets can be found in Attachment 1.

Recommendation 3: The new standing joint committee should collect and use data in an ongoing way to examine student outcomes, such as (1) student success (e.g., time-to-degree, graduation rate, and other institutional data) and (2) student learning (e.g., course work, engaged scholarship projects, and other factors that provide evidence of learning). The data should also be used to inform curricular improvement, including but not limited to: (1) decisions about the General Education curriculum, including questions about the

efficacy of pathways to support integrative thinking²; (2) effective assessment practices and processes³, especially those that can be shared across disciplines; and (3) decisions about availability of General Education curricular components across the University, including gaps and trends. The goal should be to develop an analytic assessment plan, supported by data, that informs curricular improvement and evolves over time.

Effective Date

Upon approval of the University Faculty Senate

SPECIAL JOINT SENATE COMMITTEE ON GENERAL EDUCATION ASSESSMENT

- Penny Carlson
- Jacqueline Edmondson, Co-Chair
- Betty Harper
- Patricia Koch
- Jonna Kulikowich
- Kyle Landis
- Nina Safran
- Joseph A. Salem, Jr.
- Keith Shapiro
- Norah Shultz
- Margaret J. Slattery, Co-chair
- Annie Taylor
- Alex Yin

² The Special Senate Committee on General Education Implementation purposely limited students to one of two pathways for integrative thinking with the expectation that assessment would help to inform future decisions about the efficacy of the different pathways relative to the goals for this requirement.

³ Examples of possible effective assessment practices and processes may include selecting appropriate indicators, creating rubrics for various indicators, assigning scores to rubrics, establishing reliability and validity of measurement tools.

ATTACHMENT 1: EXAMPLES OF DATASETS THAT CAN INFORM CURRICULAR DECISION-MAKING

The following datasets were created as a pilot to inform initial efforts to assess General Education. These may serve as tools for future assessment of General Education. They may help to establish an initial framework that can be used for ongoing assessment of General Education curriculum at Penn State.

1. General Education Inventory

The General Education Inventory is a dataset designed to examine the enrollment of courses that have a general education designation (i.e., writing and speaking, quantification, health and physical activity, natural sciences, arts, humanities, and social and behavioral sciences). The dataset is constructed from information in the student transcript database and allows us to better understand the General Education course-taking patterns of Penn State students.

Examples of questions that can be answered using this dataset (not an exhaustive list)

- a. Which General Education courses have the highest enrollment?
- b. When are students taking General Education courses during their undergraduate program?
- c. What is the grade range and average for General Education courses?
- d. What General Education courses are students in particular majors, colleges, or locations taking?

2. General Education Curricular Mapping

The General Education curricular mapping dataset is designed to examine the role of General Education courses in a program from a department perspective. A broad sample of program coordinators were asked to provide a list of the required and suggested General Education courses for their majors. The dataset allows for the assessment of General Education courses relative to those required for a major. It will inform with curricular planning.

Examples of questions that can be answered using this dataset (not an exhaustive list)

- a. Do General Education courses complement or provide depth to the student's academic major?
- b. What amount of flexibility do our programs/majors provide in terms of allowing students to explore within General Education?
- c. Do students have opportunities to experience all seven learning objectives by design of the General Education program?

3. General Education Course Objectives

This dataset maps the General Education learning objectives to General Education courses. This allows for examination of courses relative to the seven learning objectives approved by the Faculty Senate in 2015.

This dataset currently contains preliminary information gathered from 60 general education course sections (45 unique courses). These courses were specifically selected because they were the top enrolled general education courses for the 2014-15 academic year. In the future, it will be populated by course information that is reviewed and approved by the General Education subcommittee of the Senate Committee on Curricular Affairs and will include information about both the General Education Learning Objectives as well as the Foundation or Knowledge Domain criteria.

Examples of questions that can be answered using this dataset (not an exhaustive list)

- a. What learning objectives and foundation or domain criteria are being taught in each General Education course?
- b. What are some of the more common practices in place for helping students reach those General Education learning objectives and Foundation or Knowledge Domain criteria? What are some of the signature practices or indicators?
- c. Do gaps exist with regards to the coverage of General Education learning objectives across the University's General Education course offerings?

JOINT DIVERSITY AWARENESS TASK FORCE

US/IL Courses Survey Recommendations

(Legislative)

Implementation: Upon approval by the Senate

Introduction:

At the January 29, 2013 University Faculty Senate meeting, then Chair Larry Catá Backer invited student representatives of the Penn State Student Diversity Awareness Task Force to address the University Faculty Senate in the wake of the nationally publicized Chi Omega Mexican theme party in the fall of 2012. The resulting conversation provided a point of convergence with efforts among faculty and administration to focus more comprehensively on issues of diversity at the university, and the role of diversity education and practice at Penn State. “Penn State President Rodney Erickson and 2012-13 Senate Chair Larry Backer called for the formation of the joint task force following the Jan. 29 Senate meeting, in response to a request made by members of the Student Diversity Awareness Task Force.” (“[Penn State forms Joint Diversity Awareness Task Force](#),” Penn State News, April 29, 2013). The Joint Diversity Awareness Task Force (JDATF) was charged by then University Faculty Senate Chair Larry Catá Backer and then Interim Provost Robert Pangborn on April 16, 2013. The Task Force prepared an Informational Report to (1) provide a record of the work of the JDATF since its formation, (2) describe ongoing work that ought to be addressed going forward, and (3) consider approaches that may be useful in enhancing the diversity mission of the University by a joint task force of this kind (JDATF, Informational Report, “[Progress to Date and Steps for Moving Forward](#)”, Agenda App. K, April 28, 2015).

In light of these recommendations, the JDATF was reconstituted by Senate Chair Ansari and Provost Jones on April 29, 2015 and tasked as follows:

SUBJECT: Reinstatement of the Joint Diversity Awareness Task Force with New Charge and New Membership

Penn State values diversity among administration, faculty, staff and students and has made a commitment to promoting and enhancing diversity. Penn State believes that a shared commitment to teaching, research and service within a diverse environment fosters collegiality and advances the University's central mission. We take as our starting point the policy objectives of our university leadership. In the Imperative, Demographics and Diversity, President Barron has