

Assessing General Education learning outcomes at Rowan University: A report of the findings of the Learning Outcomes Assessment Committee

Over the past several years the Learning Outcomes Assessment Committee (LOAC) has focused on the general education programs on the Rowan campus responding to the charge of recommending an approach to assessing the student learning outcomes from the program.

Before being able to effectively recommend assessment measures, the committee needed to identify the desired learning outcomes of Gen Ed. Working within the existing program design. The committee focused on the bank-wide level and identified two possible approaches – either (1) identify student learning outcomes for each bank through a series of hearings and similar efforts or (2) determine what the existing expected outcomes were bank-by-bank by surveying existing faculty teaching general education courses. The latter approach was selected.

With the aid of Institutional Research and Planning office, five surveys, one for each of the five Gen Ed banks, were prepared (see Appendix A) and distributed to faculty identified as teaching courses designated as general education in the two semesters making up one academic year. Completed surveys were grouped by bank and the findings were classified into several categories and arranged in tables presenting the findings for each bank created. After a lengthy process of gathering feedback from the various academic programs in the five banks, the committee took on the task of interpreting the findings of the survey.

It rapidly became apparent that while there were discipline-based differences between the banks, there was much more in common than different. Overlaying one discipline-specific grid over other discipline-specific grids yielded five learning outcomes common to all the banks. These are:

- Students should be able to demonstrate the ability to recognize and understand the different “ways of knowing” that characterize each of the four disciplines. “Ways of Knowing” encompasses ways in which truth is discovered and pursued in various disciplines; for example, in science, truth is discovered using the scientific method.
- Students should be able to demonstrate critical thinking and problem solving skills across all of the disciplines. Evidence of critical thinking may be understood as demonstrating the ability to
 - find analogies and other kinds of relationships between pieces of information,
 - determine the relevance and validity of information that could be used for structuring and solving problems and distinguish it from invalid or non-applicable data,
 - find and evaluate solutions or alternative ways of treating problems.

- Students should be able to appreciate and demonstrate communication and expression skills in each of the various disciplines. Appreciating and demonstrating communication and expression skills may be understood as
 - demonstrating a working knowledge of discipline-specific terminology,
 - identifying various discipline-specific rhetorical strategies,
 - expressing appropriate discipline-specific sentiments and truths in the language and conventions of the discipline.

- Students should be able to demonstrate their understanding and appreciation of how knowledge and practices in various disciplines are similar to and different from those of other disciplines. Further students should be able to demonstrate their ability to integrate knowledge from one discipline to others.

- Students should be able to demonstrate their mastery of written and spoken communication skills.

For the committee to move forward with considering how the Academic Division should approach assessing student learning outcomes in general education, several conditions need to be met:

1. The Senate needs to approve of these outcomes as those appropriate for Rowan University's General Education program. The Senate resolution must then be approved by the Provost.

2. The Senate Curriculum Committee needs to put in place a process whereby those courses proposed for inclusion in the General Education Banks indicate how the proposed courses will teach the skills and content necessary for students to reach the desired student learning outcomes.

It is necessary to add that the learning outcomes identified in this report do not constitute the entirety of the outcomes of Rowan's General Education program. They do not address several other outcomes such as exposure to multi-cultural/global literacy issues or information literacy. Rather, these outcomes reflect the existing practice of the Rowan General Education Program to require students to gain exposure to a variety of disciplines.

Appendix A

This is a sample of the letter and survey distributed to faculty teaching courses in the Gen Ed Banks – in this instance the Fine Arts Bank

Dear Colleague,

The Rowan University Senate Committee on Learning Outcomes Assessment invites all faculty teaching a general education course to participate in the “Rowan University General Education” survey.

You have been identified as an instructor of record for at least one general education course in the Arts bank offered in fall 2005 or spring 2006.

The General Education Task Force proposed learning goals for each of the banks. The purpose of this survey is to assess the degree to which these goals reflect the specific learning objectives of the general education courses you are currently teaching.

Please rate the importance of each goal listed on the other side of this page. **Assess each goal's importance to what you deliberately aim to have your students accomplish**, rather than the goals' general worthiness or overall importance to the Arts bank's mission. There are no “right” or “wrong” answers.

Please return your completed survey May 8, 2006 in the enclosed envelope to:

Learning Outcomes Assessment Committee
c/o University Senate Office
Campbell Library
Campus

Thank you for your participation!

Your discipline: _____

Indicate whether each goal is:

- (5) a goal you always/nearly always try to achieve
- (4) a goal you often try to achieve
- (3) a goal you sometimes try to achieve
- (2) a goal you rarely try to achieve
- (1) a goal you never try to achieve

Record your response in the space following each goal statement.

1. Students will develop and demonstrate critical awareness of the general principles of aesthetics which are common across the arts, including balance, symmetry, structure, rhythm, and proportion.

5 4 3 2 1

2. Students will demonstrate awareness of major figures or contributors within at least one area within the field who are models of excellence.

5 4 3 2 1

3. Students will demonstrate the ability to access and use information sources that will enable continuing growth and development of knowledge about the field that was the focus of the course

5 4 3 2 1

Identify other goals do you try to achieve in your course that are not mentioned above:

All things considered, what knowledge, skills, or abilities should a student acquire by the time s/he has completed the Arts Bank? Please use the space below to share your thoughts. Use additional sheets as necessary.