

Executive Summary of the Final Report of the General Education Task Force

Committee Charge. At our first meeting, the Provost charged the committee with the following tasks:

1. Determine the expectations/competencies/outcomes of the general education program provided to students and determine if the current general education model fulfills these objectives.
2. Determine one area of general education to be assessed and explore ways to assess student learning outcomes.

Responses to Charge.

1. Studied existing general education goals for each general education bank and revised those goals to both streamline and make them more easily assessable.
2. Developed a course based comprehensive assessment model for the communications bank. The model was not exercised.

Recommendations.

1. We recommend that the model developed for the communications bank be piloted in order to smooth out procedural, logistical, and other details in preparation for extending general education assessment to all banks.
2. We recommend that assessment models be created for each of the general education banks and that the university support implementation of the resulting models.
3. Finally, we recommend that the university create and fill the position of director of general education so as to facilitate the accomplishment of the tasks required to fulfill our second recommendation.

Task Force for General Education Final Report for Dr. Helen Giles-Gee

The committee members are Jay Harper co-chair, Richard Scott co-chair, Fred Adelson, Kate Boland, Nathan Carb, Douglas Cleary, Christy Faison, Erin Herberg, Phillip Lewis, Thomas Monahan, Ann Phillips, Estelle Resnik, Connie Rosenberger, and Carol Welsh.

James Newell, co-chair, resigned from the committee in May 2002. Members joining at the end of the 2001-2002 academic year are: Lorin Arnold from Communication Studies; Kate Boland from Institutional Research; Erin Herberg from Composition & Rhetoric; Phillip Lewis, Marketing (and the new chair of the Senate Curriculum Committee); and Ann Phillips from Secondary Education/Foundations of Education (new chairperson of the Learning Outcomes Assessment Committee.)

The committee met on the following dates:

- January 3, 2002 Charge meeting
- January 16, 2002
- January 28, 2002
- February 15, 2002
- March 4, 2002
- April 18, 2002
- April 25, 2002
- May 3, 2002
- May 17, 2002
- May 21, 2002
- October 10, 2002
- November 7, 2002
- December 12, 2002

Committee Charge. At our first meeting, the Provost charged the committee with the following tasks:

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4. Determine one area of general education to be assessed and explore ways to assess student learning outcomes.

Reviews of existing documents from previous committees. One of the first tasks completed by the committee was to review previous Glassboro State and Rowan efforts at assessment of general education. Specifically, the committee read and discussed the September 1995 report, "Assessment in General Education." This document provides a brief history of general education assessment at Glassboro State College and Rowan University and then proceeds to provide a set of shared goals [Page 7] that should be

attained by all general education courses along with a set of four to eight goals specific to each of the five general education course banks. The report concludes with a pilot attempt to assess the outcomes of general education courses in each of the banks. These assessments are diverse in approach, method, and comprehensiveness.

Our discussion of the document resulted in a decision by the committee to try to streamline the goals by reducing the number of goals for each bank to no more than three and by ensuring that the resulting items were, in fact, goals rather than objectives. To ease this task the committee co-chairs assigned each committee member to one of five groups, appointed a group leader, and assigned the group with the task of writing revised goals for one of the banks. The entire committee then engaged in an extended discussion of the revised goals. The discussions led to revisions of the draft goals, which were then circulated to the deans and department chairs for comment.

Revised goals. The list of streamlined goals for each general education course bank follows. In creating this set of goals the committee members attempted to differentiate between the concept of goal on the one hand and objective on the other. Specifically, we endeavored to focus on broad outcomes rather than on more specific objectives. At the same time we attempted to compose a set of goals that is operationally assessable.

Arts Bank

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

Communications Bank

1. Students will develop the ability to write a structured, well-reasoned, ordered and grammatically correct document appropriate to the intended audience.
2. Students will develop the ability to give an oral presentation that is well reasoned, ordered, correct and appropriate for the intended audience.
3. Students will develop the ability to research and properly reference the work of others.

History/Humanities & Literature

1. Students will demonstrate an understanding of literature and how literature can be analyzed from different perspectives (e.g. cultural, historical, psychological).
2. Students will demonstrate a well-rounded view of history including the political, economic, artistic and biographical conditions that are related to historical change.

3. Students will develop an understanding of systems of thought and language.

Science and Mathematics

1. Students will demonstrate an ability to identify and apply fundamental concepts in science and math.
2. Students will demonstrate an ability to collect, interpret and verify lab data.
3. Students will demonstrate an ability to analyze data.

Social and Behavioral Sciences

1. Students will demonstrate an understanding of major concepts, theories, and methods in one or more of the social and behavioral sciences.
2. Students will demonstrate an understanding of the development of human society as it relates to culture, geography, and language in the context of an emerging interdependent, global community.
3. Students will demonstrate an ability to apply basic methodologies used in the measurement of social and behavioral science.

Determined a specific bank to begin the assessment process. The committee concluded that one of the problems inherent in assessing whether or not students completing the Rowan general education program are, in fact, attaining its goals is the diversity of courses comprising each of the banks. So as to ease our initial attempt at devising an approach to assessment, the committee decided to begin the task of developing an assessment program for each of the banks with the communications bank. The rationale here is simple. There are relatively few courses in the bank and there is an existing program of assessment that has been in place for many years. In the fall of 2002, the committee began developing a framework for assessment of the Communication Studies bank.

Assessment Model for Communications Bank. At our October 10, 2002 meeting the committee formed a sub-group to take on the primary responsibility of developing the communication bank assessment model. Members of the sub-group are: Dr. Lorin Arnold, Ms. Kate Boland, Dr. Erin Herberg, and Dr. Ann Phillips.

On October 28, 2002, the sub-group distributed a detailed, comprehensive draft assessment model for the communications bank. At our November 7 meeting the sub-group presented an overview of their work to the entire committee. An extensive discussion followed the presentation. The sub-group agreed to revise their model in light of the discussion.

On December 3, 2002, the sub-group distributed a revised draft and executive summary of their assessment model. At the final meeting of the entire committee on December 12, 2002, the committee approved the model as revised.

Overview of the Communication Assessment Model. The departments of Composition and Rhetoric and Communication Studies have three learning outcomes for the General Education Communication Bank. These are:

1. Students will develop an understanding of spoken and written communication as complex, multi-step processes which requires rhetorical choices, including purpose, message, and audience.
2. Students will demonstrate the ability to write and speak effectively in a variety of discursive and persuasive genres.
3. Students will demonstrate the ability to research, evaluate, and incorporate source material into written and spoken communication.

Assessment for the bank is carried out within each of the courses comprising the bank. The assessment devices used in each of the courses are administered to a random sample of students chosen using sampling methods appropriate to the population being sampled. The assessment devices are as follows:

College Composition I. The department assesses this course using portfolio review of a random sampling of student work. The assessment instrument is a ten question Portfolio Evaluation Form that the course instructor and a second reader complete for each observation in the sample of student work. We have included a copy of the evaluation form in the executive summary and overview attached to this report.

College Composition II. For College Composition II students write a research paper as part of the requirements for the course. The department selects a random sample of students for inclusion in the assessment pool. The course instructor and a trained second reader use the Research Evaluation Form as an instrument to evaluate the research paper. Each student selected for inclusion in the sample completes a self-reflective statement concerning the paper he or she has written. We have included a copy of the Evaluation Criteria for College composition II Research Papers in the executive summary and overview attached to this report.

Public Speaking. Assessment of Public Speaking outcomes also employs a random sampling of students taking the course. The Assessment Committee completes a nineteen question Public Speaking Portfolio Evaluation Form [form is included in the attached executive summary] using speech outlines collected from the student as the data source for each member of the sample. Additionally, the department selects three sections of the course at the beginning of the semester for inclusion in the assessment process. Students in these sections take a pencil and paper exam graded by members of the Assessment Committee. Data from the speech outlines and the exams comprise the basis for the assessment.

Assessment Plan for General Education Communication Bank. The department assesses each of the three courses comprising the bank biennially. After the data collection phase just outlined, the departments in the College of Communication and office of Institutional Research tabulate the data. After completion of data tabulation, each department and its Assessment Committee meet to discuss the results and compare

current with past results. After these discussions the departmental Assessment Committees meet to gauge the degree to which the department's course offerings are meeting the general education objectives. Finally, the department uses the results of the assessment process as a source of information to inform curricular and assessment improvements, thereby completing the crucial feedback loop.

Director of General Education

As the committee worked to complete the tasks outlined in the charge, one thing we came to appreciate is the scope and complexity of general education assessment. We believe that to provide continuity, expertise, and guidance in this assessment the university needs to create a new position of director of general education. To that end the committee developed the following justification and position description.

In keeping with best practices in the delivery of undergraduate education, which emphasizes performance-based assessment, it is imperative that Rowan University demonstrate an ongoing assessment of its general education program. To respond to expectations of the current assessment environment, we recommend that the university establish a new position—a director of general education to provide oversight of this important aspect of a student's educational program.

The director should be a tenured associate or full professor who would be responsible for recommending appropriate assessment tools, overseeing ongoing assessment, and sharing assessment feedback with the appropriate committees and individuals. The director of general education must be committed to the ideals of a liberal education and have knowledge of assessment techniques. The director will be responsible for general education reports needed for various accrediting bodies, for example Middle States, NCATE, and ABET.

We envision that this individual would regularly consult with both chairpersons and deans. The director will monitor the number and distribution of general education sections offered each semester to evaluate whether freshman and sophomore students can complete our program in a timely manner. The director will work closely with the chairman of the Senate Curriculum Committee and within the existing senate governance structure to review proposed changes to the general education curriculum.

The director will work closely with the office of the Associate Provost for Academic Affairs in matters dealing with accreditation and program reviews as they affect general education policies. We suggest that the director should receive six credit hours of load reduction per semester to assume this task.

Next Steps

Although we believe that our committee met its charge with success, there is much more to do. To that end, we wish to outline a few recommendations for the next steps that need

to be taken by the university in order to ensure that we have a valid and reliable set of processes for assessing the general education program at Rowan.

We recommend that the new position of director of general education be formally approved and the first director named. Additionally, we recommend that the model developed for the assessment of the communication bank should be piloted in order to give the university the kind of knowledge that can come only from going live with the process proposed in the model. As a result of that experience we will gain knowledge that will be invaluable in avoiding mistakes and maximizing the effectiveness of our procedures as we move to enlarge the assessment program to include all of the banks. Finally, we recommend that assessment models be designed and implemented for each of the remaining general education banks, a task that we believe will be much more difficult than the development of the communication bank assessment model.

The committee chairs previously sent the following documents: [not included here]

Executive Summary of the Model

Full Proposed Model