

A short history of general education learning outcomes assessment at URI

October, 2008

Why did we start down this road to assess learning outcomes for our general education program? External requirements (NEASC and OHE) for program-level student learning outcomes assessment call for us to determine what our general education core leads to in student outcomes, and to respond to what we have learned. Internally, we are interested: How have integrated skills worked to enhance learning outcomes; what can we celebrate; and what might we want to do differently in general education to get the results we care about?

PREHISTORY:

- Fall 1991: General Education Task Force Report (initiated by Provost Gitlitz): Eight goals of general education at the University of Rhode Island
- Fall 1997: NEASC Reaccreditation Report section on general education notes the lack of approved learning outcomes as one of several problems
- Fall 2000: A Special Commission appointed by the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs reports to the Faculty Senate recommending “integrated skills” to be incorporated into courses that may be used to meet general education requirements.
- Fall 2004: Incoming students are required to meet general education requirements with the eight approved integrated skills fully incorporated into the Core Knowledge and Core Skills general education courses.

CURRENT HISTORY

- June 2004: Provost’s Assessment Retreat yields a draft statement of Expected Student Outcomes
- Fall 2004: Faculty group led by Acting Provost Judith Swift attend the 2004 Assessment Institute at Indiana University - Purdue University Indianapolis
- Fall 2004: Acting Vice Provost Judith Swift et al prepare a draft “Action Plan of the Preliminary Working Group on Student Learning Outcomes”
- December 2004: Commissioner Jack Warner presents a talk titled “The Context for Outcome Assessment – Industrial Age or Information Age Education” to the Faculty Senate
- Spring 2005: Student Learning Improvement Academic Advisory Committee (SLIAAC) is convened by Acting Vice Provost Judith Swift with Deborah Grossman-Garber in support, to provide guidance to the University-wide effort
- February 2005: Kathleen Torrens, Pamela Rohland, and John Stevenson attend the annual AAC&U Conference on General Education Assessment and report back to SLIAAC
- Spring 2005: C B Peters, John Boulmetis, and John Stevenson construct a stratified sample of 15 Core Knowledge general education courses, all taught by senior faculty; they work with the instructors to substitute questions on student perceptions of learning outcomes for the SET

- Summer 2005: Ad hoc group of faculty (supported by the Provost and the Davis Foundation grant), co-chaired by C B Peters and John Stevenson, review all prior statements on outcomes and develop five broad learning outcome statements (identify, recognize, ask, collect, and analyze, to be applied in both academic and non-academic settings) for the Knowledge Core of general education
- Fall 2005: The report of the ad hoc group is endorsed by the Faculty Senate and the five learning outcome statements are accepted for inclusion in the Catalog.
- Spring 2006: Subcommittee for the Assessment of General Education (SAGE), with C B Peters as Chair, is formalized as a subcommittee of the University College and General Education (UCGE) Committee to continue developing and implementing learning outcomes assessment in general education
- Spring and Summer 2006: A small pilot sample of assignments is sought from general education courses in order to refine the learning outcome objectives
- Summer 2006: SAGE members meet through the summer, supported by the Davis Foundation grant, and develop two lines of assessment: (1) a plan to use student assignments and the students' responses to them, with rubrics based on the five approved learning outcomes; and (2) a self-report questionnaire for students to be completed at the end of the semester as an extension of the SET. A stratified sample of 26 courses is developed for both types of assessment.
- July 2006: the Office of Student Learning, Outcomes Assessment, and Accreditation is formed with Deborah Grossman-Garber as Director
- Fall 2006: SAGE implements the data collection strategies planned in the summer; 19 of 26 sampled sections return some assignment and/or student work. C B Peters works with Glen Ramsay to look at archival course data to determine the availability of each of the eight integrated skills, and the proportion of sections taught by continuing faculty.
- March 2007: Deborah Grossman-Garber and John Stevenson present "Assessing the Core" at the annual AAC&U conference on general education in Miami
- March 2007: Student self-report data are made available as frequency distributions by item for each of the Core Knowledge domains
- Summer 2007: Ambitious plans for operationalizing the objectives are developed: assignment review, student self-report questionnaire development (adjunct to regular course evaluation, on an independent scannable form) and sample development (stratified set of approximately 150 courses)
- Fall 2007: the NEASC report includes information on general education assessment
- Fall 2007: The large sample of courses responds with both the student self-report data and the assignment data
- Spring 2008: C B Peters steps down as Chair of SAGE

- April - June 2008: A SAGE subcommittee (Sandy Hicks, Anne Hubbard, and John Stevenson) is convened by Deborah Grossman-Garber to address the two large data sets, with additional help from staff and graduate assistants. Plans are made for summer work (assignment rubric development and self-report survey data analysis), to be reported back to SAGE and additional interested faculty prior to submission to OHE
- June 24 & 26, 2008: Working with Deborah Grossman-Garber and her staff in the Office of Student Learning, Outcomes Assessment, and Accreditation, the SAGE subcommittee formed in April 2008 convenes a larger group (12 faculty plus Bette Erickson from the IDP) primarily consisting of faculty from University committees that play a role in outcomes assessment and/or general education oversight. The 2-day interactive presentation provides the larger group with an opportunity to view results of the initial attempt to refine learning outcome objectives and classify assignments, and to provide input regarding both the definitions and next steps in the process.
- September 8, 2008: John Stevenson, Sandy Hicks, and Anne Hubbard meet with Provost DeHayes and Deborah Grossman-Garber to report on the progress on learning outcomes assessment for general education, and to exchange views with the Provost on future steps.
- October 15, 2008: John Stevenson, Sandy Hicks, and Anne Hubbard present a report on progress to the LOOC, with emphasis on planned next steps and resource needs.
- October 20, 2008: OHE-required report is due on general education learning outcomes.