

Rhode Island Office of Higher Education
Program Assessment Report
Institution: University of Rhode Island

Program: General Education

Committee Chair: John F. Stevenson

Academic Year Plan: 2008-2009

I. Background

Our most recent set of general education requirements, with courses approved to meet them, was fully implemented in Fall 2004. URI faculty committees have been taking steps to develop and implement assessment procedures for this general education program, beginning in Spring 2005. Student self-report surveys and samples of work from existing courses have been drawn repeatedly. Faculty Senate legislation was passed in the fall of 2005 (see the report to the Faculty Senate, Appendix A) and periodic meetings with broader faculty groups have gradually increased faculty awareness of the approved learning outcome objectives. University funding from the Provost's Office has supported these activities. The Subcommittee on Assessment of General Education (SAGE), initially chaired by C.B. Peters, was approved by the Faculty Senate as the organizational mechanism for furthering this process, and reports to the University College and General Education Committee of the Faculty Senate.

URI and OHE have sponsored a number of capacity-building experiences for faculty at local, regional and national conferences. We have also delivered one national conference presentation of our own novel assessment approach (in March 2007), and we have one accepted for presentation at AAC&U in February 2009. Support from the URI Office of Student Learning, Outcome Assessment, and Accreditation has been essential for much of this activity. Our experience presenting at national conferences suggests that our innovative approach has appeal for other institutions attempting to assess outcomes for general education programs structured with classic divisions of core knowledge, as ours is.

II. Description of General Education Program Requirements

Our current General Education program is a hybrid of two complementary models: (1) the expectation that all students should know about and be able to use modes of thought and methods of inquiry associated with each "core knowledge domain" (e.g. social sciences, natural sciences); and (2) the expectation that all students should graduate with eight strengthened "skills" (e.g. writing, using quantitative data) that can be practiced across the disciplines. Three of these skills have been designated as "core skills" with their own course requirements. All eight are "integrated" in courses across the general education spectrum. See Appendix B for a brief summary of the requirements and the University Catalog or the on-line descriptions at: http://www.uri.edu/facsen/GENED_Program_May04.html and <http://www.uri.edu/univcol/handbook/pdf/2008-2009.pdf> for details of the requirements as they are applied for each of our degree programs.

III. Student Learning Outcomes

Our current learning outcome objectives (see Table 1) reflect an emphasis on the pedagogical expectation that students will learn to engage with and solve problems within the varied perspectives represented by the four core knowledge domains, i.e. identify, recognize, ask, collect, and analyze information to solve problems in both academic and applied contexts. The report to the Faculty Senate in Fall 2005, titled *Learning Outcome Objectives for General Education at the University of Rhode Island* (Appendix A), provides details.

Table 1: Statements of General Education Learning Outcome Objectives
Identify:
Students will be able to:
Identify basic concepts, theories, and developments in literature and the fine arts.
Identify basic concepts, theories, and developments in humanistic inquiry.
Identify basic concepts, theories, and developments in the natural sciences.
Identify basic concepts, theories, and developments in the social sciences.
Recognize:
Students will be able to:
Recognize aesthetic and literary elements and forms in relevant academic and non-academic settings.
Recognize humanistic issues in relevant academic and non-academic settings.
Recognize natural science issues in relevant academic and non-academic settings.
Recognize social science issues in relevant academic and non-academic settings.
Ask:
Students will be able to:
Ask questions appropriate to the modes of inquiry in the fine arts and literature in relevant academic and non-academic contexts.
Ask questions appropriate to the modes of inquiry in Letters disciplines in relevant academic and non-academic contexts.
Ask questions appropriate to the modes of inquiry in the natural sciences in relevant academic and non-academic contexts.
Ask questions appropriate to the modes of inquiry in the social sciences in relevant academic and non-academic contexts.
Collect:
Students will be able to:
Collect information relevant to the questions raised in the fine arts and literature.
Collect information relevant to the questions raised in the Letters disciplines.
Collect information relevant to the questions raised in the natural sciences.
Collect information relevant to the questions raised in the social sciences.
Analyze:
Students will be able to:
Analyze information in order to address questions or solve problems in the fine arts and literature.
Analyze information in order to address questions or solve problems in the Letters disciplines.
Analyze information in order to address questions or solve problems in the natural sciences.
Analyze information in order to address questions or solve problems in the social sciences.

General education programs are often viewed as political compromises among multiple constituencies within a university, without the kind of attention and support that departments give to their own majors. In that context, we believe our plan for defining and measuring the learning outcomes from general education at URI has a number of advantages. Innovations in our evolving general education program can be supported within the assessment framework we have adopted, as long as a general “problem-solving” vision for student learning is maintained. Our approach is responsive to state-of-the-art ideas about liberal learning, e.g. the recent statement in a keynote address by Stanley Katz (faculty chair of the undergraduate program at Princeton): “Most advocates of liberal education deny that a primarily content-based evaluation of what seniors have learned represents an assessment of the totality of the educational experience ... What the liberal educator seeks to develop is the capacity to recognize meaningful problems and to identify the information and modes of analysis necessary to address them ...” (Katz, S.N. (2008) Assessment and general education: Resisting reductionism without resisting responsibility. *Liberal Education*, 94(3)). Consistent with Katz’s perspective, our objectives are not reductionist, and are directly linked to the pedagogical values of our faculty. They also are consistent with Bloom’s widely respected Taxonomy of Cognitive Learning Objectives. We are optimistic that feedback based on these objectives will therefore have a high likelihood of generating genuine faculty interest and support for any needed changes.

IV. Evidence of Intentional Commitment to Address and Assess Outcomes across the Program

Our Core Knowledge requirements are clearly organized to address the objectives in Table 1. All courses in our general education program must be reviewed by the University College and General Education Committee to assure that the syllabi and course materials will provide opportunities to engage with the modes of thought and methods of inquiry of disciplines in each core area. For details on the evidence we are using to ascertain that students have varied opportunities to achieve those outcomes, see the description of our approach to assessment, which embeds attention to those opportunities by examining syllabi and the assignments within them. Our eight integrated skill objectives have not yet been defined for measurement, and we have not yet addressed the intended outcomes for the three Core Skill areas. However, for the eight integrated skills, intense effort has gone into specifying and requiring course activities to deliver those skills, and syllabi plus supporting materials have been required and reviewed by the University College and General Education Committee to assure that students have an opportunity to practice the skills.

V. Program-Level Assessment Methods and Timing

The plan for assessing general education learning outcomes at URI starts from the Core Knowledge areas (Fine Arts and Literature, Letters, Natural Sciences, and Social Sciences), applying our outcome statements to representative assignments. The first question is: do we provide students with sufficient opportunities to “identify,” “recognize,” “ask,” “collect,” and “analyze” within each of our core knowledge areas? A second question, contingent on our answer to the first, is: Are our students demonstrating acceptable proficiency in completing assignments that reflect our objectives? In addition, we want to determine whether students themselves are aware of these objectives and believe they are being given opportunities to master them. A major step toward answering these questions was taken in the fall of 2007. We began with all of the sections of general education courses offered within each of the seven core areas that semester, stratified by class size, and sampled every fourth section (replacing when we had

already drawn a course for the same instructor). Of approximately 668 eligible sections, we drew 173, or 26%. Of those, 97 instructors (56%) agreed to participate in a self-report survey of students conducted in conjunction with the end-of-semester SET course evaluation. To assess learning outcomes directly, we asked those instructors to voluntarily submit a representative course assignment reflecting important learning outcome objectives for their course, along with the syllabus, and we also asked for them to submit nine examples of student responses to the assignment (three rated highly, three at passing level, and three below passing). Fifty-five assignments were submitted by instructors from 50 sections. We intended to use the sample of assignments and student responses to develop a coding scheme representing our learning outcome aspirations, and to develop rubrics for assessing student work within each core area. This is a time-consuming approach but one that promises pedagogical relevance as we strive to improve our students' learning outcomes as flexible thinkers and problem-solvers across the range of approaches offered by our core knowledge domains.

VI. Expected Level of Achievement

We are still examining the results from our fall 2007 sample, which will be used to establish expectations. The process of faculty engagement for this purpose is now under way. We are asking our colleagues to examine both the prevalence of various types of assignments and the achievement levels of students for these types of assignments. That step is intended to lead to the formal establishment, via appropriate faculty bodies, of normative expectations at both levels.

VII. Actual Level of Achievement

See the discussion below on analysis and interpretation of data.

VIII. Analysis and Interpretation of Data

In the summer of 2008 a SAGE subcommittee undertook the job of refining the classification scheme and drafting rubrics for our learning outcomes. We used the sample of assignments and student responses collected in Fall 2007. Of the 55 submitted assignments, 50 were coded (5 others lacked sufficient contextual information to make a determination of relevant learning objectives); 34 were from Core Knowledge areas, for which the objectives were designed.

Results from the Summer 2008 assignment classification process are reported in Table 2 for Core Knowledge Areas. The findings were generally reassuring, and in some ways more positive than the committee had anticipated: 82% of all classified assignments in Core Knowledge domains called for more than rote memorization ("identification"), and over half called for one or more levels of analysis. Although very few called for students to generate their own original hypotheses or major questions ("ask"), 23% did call for active collection of data (e.g. laboratory investigation, review of relevant published literature, systematic qualitative observation). Many (73%) called for students to recognize which concepts could be used to answer a question or solve a problem, and most of those also called for the student to follow through on applying the concepts to arrive at a solution. As reflected in Table 2, we discovered that "Analysis" was too broad a category, and chose to divide it into three sub-categories in order to better represent the types of assignment choices we found in our data. Table 2 also provides information on the integrated skills judged to be provided by the assignments, but as this was not the primary focus of the sampling method, these results should not be taken to indicate the prevalence of skill-related assignments, even for our sample of courses.

Table 2. Classification of General Education Assignments into Learning Outcome Objectives¹

Core Knowledge Areas						
	Fine Arts	Literature	Natural Sciences	Social Sciences	Letters	Total
Total number of assignments in classification sample	2	3	8	10	11	34 ²
Learning Outcome Objectives						
Identify	1	2	8	10	10	31(91%)
[Identify ONLY]	0	0	0	4	2	6(18%)
Recognize	2	3	8	5	7	25(73%)
Ask	1	1	0	1	1	4(12%)
Collect	1	2	3	2	0	8(23%)
Analyze-1: Apply	1	2	6	5	6	20(59%)
Analyze-2: Analyze	1	1	1	5	7	15(44%)
Analyze-3: Critically Evaluate	1	0	2	4	3	10(29%)
Integrated Skills						
Reading complex texts	0	2	2	2	8	14(41%)
Writing effectively	1	2	2	3	5	13(38%)
Speaking effectively	0	0	0	1	1	2(06%)
Examining human differences	0	0	0	6	2	8(23%)
Using quantitative data	0	0	6	1	0	7(20%)
Using qualitative data	0	0	0	1	0	1(03%)
Using information technology	0	0	1	2	0	3(09%)
Engaging artistic activity	2	2	0	1	0	5(15%)

¹ Exercise conducted to refine the definitions of learning outcomes for general education; sample was volunteer instructors from a larger stratified sample of general education courses offered in Fall 2007.

² Of the total sample of 55 assignments, 16 were from Core skill areas and are not included in this table, and 5 were deemed uncodable without additional information.

Results from the student self-report survey are still being analyzed, but these also convey a useful perspective, i.e. what do students think they are learning in their general education courses? See Appendix C for brief highlights of these findings and three summary tables. A large percent of the respondents (86.6%) indicated that they “strongly agree” or “agree” with the statement that they understand the purposes of the general education program at URI. Another positive finding is the extent to which students perceived their English Communication courses as providing opportunities for skill learning and problem solving far beyond their most direct purpose, that of helping students to increase their mastery of writing and speaking English.

IX. Actions

With support from the Office for Student Learning, Outcomes Assessment, and Accreditation, the SAGE subcommittee that worked with the Fall 2007 samples convened a larger group of faculty representing various relevant University committees in late June, 2008 for a 2-day meeting, to report their findings and solicit input on next steps. Representative assignments were shared to illustrate the application of the coding scheme. Recommendations from that meeting included: (1) solicit input from representative faculty from each of the Core Knowledge Areas; (2) identify model assignments for each learning outcome objective; and (3) broaden the communication of the assignment-based system via deans and department chairs.

Meetings were also held with Provost DeHayes in September 2008 and LOOC in October 2008 to report on progress and maintain dialogue on our approach to general education assessment at URI. The student survey findings (Appendix C) have been reported to the LOOC Subcommittee for Promoting University-Wide Engagement, with the recommendation that part-time instructors be included in all activities designed to encourage faculty engagement with the assessment process, outcomes, and recommended actions.

SAGE has resumed work this fall to keep the assessment process moving forward, with 10 members drawn from many departments contributing to general education. Next steps for this process involve work by SAGE, following recommendations from the faculty group convened this summer, to create core knowledge focus groups for refinement of the coding scheme. Preparations for convening these groups are under way. These groups will also further the operationalization of the objectives via rubrics for assessing student work. A first draft of rubrics is provided in Appendix D. Simultaneously, as we recommended, the University College and General Education Committee plans to undertake educational activities with colleges, departments and instructors to culminate in syllabus representation of the learning outcomes by the fall of 2009.

X. Timetable for Reassessment

Our strategic goal is full implementation of a cyclic process of assessment in general education within the next three years. Based on our experience we have recommended to LOOC a policy calling for drawing samples of assignments every two years, focusing on selected core areas in rotation. The cycle will include reports on activities submitted annually to UCGE and the Faculty Senate, and reports of findings and recommendations submitted biennially for both internal and external review. Each step will include feedback on what we have learned, with recommendations, so that “completing the loop” will be an ongoing process.

In the spring of 2009, SAGE will continue to: refine decision rules for classifying assignments, based on focus group input; define rubrics starting from the existing sample of student work;

design a new sample of courses and assignments with a random sampling approach for Fall 2009; clarify expectations for what is to be included in the materials provided by course instructors (e.g. type of assignment, time in term, number of student responses to assignment, syllabus, and rubric); and begin to address Integrated Skills and Core Skills.

Assistance from the Learning Outcomes Oversight Committee (LOOC) will be necessary to: review the approval process for general education reports to OHE, including timing, disclosure, and reporting format; consider resource needs for general education assessment; consider the long-term cycle for program assessment in general education, and integration with Wabash, FSSE, and NSSE; implement campus-wide programs to engage faculty with assessment and close the loop; and attend to the incorporation of general education assessment findings in the planning and budgeting process. Three members of the SAGE committee are also on the LOOC, and there is also member overlap between SAGE and the University College and General Education Committee.

Appendix E provides a more detailed view of plans for coming years.

Appendix A

LEARNING OUTCOME OBJECTIVES FOR GENERAL EDUCATION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND

Charge, Organization, and Membership

The following represents a summary of the work of the Ad Hoc Committee on General Education Learning Outcomes. The committee was established by invitation from Interim Vice Provost Judith Swift in consultation with Deborah Grossman-Garber, College of Life and Environmental Sciences; John Stevenson, Department of Psychology; and C. B. Peters, Department of Sociology and Anthropology. The committee was charged to develop learning outcome statements for the University's General Education Program. The committee consisted of the following members:

Nedra Reynolds, Director, College Writing Program
Mary MacDonald, University Library
Emily Anderson, Undergraduate Student
Carter Johnson, University Assessment Office
David Heskett, Department of Physics
Julia Johnson, Department of Communication Studies
Anne Hubbard, College of Continuing Education
John Montgomery, Department of Mathematics
Judy Van Wyk, Department of Sociology and Anthropology
Pamela Rohland, Student Disability Services
Cheryl Foster, Department of Philosophy
John Stevenson, Department of Psychology, Co-Chair
C. B. Peters, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Co-Chair

The committee gathered for an organizational meeting with Dr. Peggy Maki, the University's consultant on Outcomes Assessment in May 2005. Following that meeting, the committee met seven times through Summer 2005, working as a committee of the whole.

Background and Process Assumptions

The University's General Education program presents daunting challenges for student outcomes assessment. Although the program is knitted together by seven "core" areas and eight "integrated" skills, there are no particular course requirements and only minimal skills requirements that all students are required to meet. Although the consequences of this flexibility serve the University's students and programs well, they make writing specific, content-rich General Education outcomes statements impractical. Further, flexibility of the General Education program makes it equally impractical to assess individual students – programs of study that satisfy the General Education requirements are infinitely variable in both content and skills.

Outcome statements are not meant to add components to the University's General Education program. Rather, they merely operationalize the goals and objectives already articulated in the Framework of the program. In a sense, the outcome statements state in clear language what students will know and be able to do if the General Education program meets the goals the faculty have set for it.

Against that backdrop, the Ad Hoc Group on General Education Outcomes Assessment made the following decisions regarding the process of General Education outcomes assessment and the nature of the General Education outcomes statements.

- The process of General Education outcomes assessment should be directed at the program itself rather than at individual students. The outcome statements contained in this document were drafted on the assumption that the program would be assessed through the collection of "artifacts" (assignments, activities, examinations, papers, etc) that embodied particular outcomes, along with student responses to those artifacts. The artifacts would provide a gauge of how often students were given the opportunity to develop the cognitive outcomes and the samples of student responses would provide a sense of what constituted adequate performance.
- The draft outcome statements recognize that the University's General Education Program serves two primary functions. First, it provides students the opportunity to gain the knowledge and skills necessary for success in further studies at the University. Second, it provides students the opportunity to gain the knowledge and skills necessary to their roles as thoughtful and engaged citizens in a diverse and complex world. Accordingly, each outcome statement implies that students will be able to perform the designated cognitive task in both academic and non-academic settings.

Rationale for General Education Learning Outcome Objectives

The General Education Program at the University of Rhode Island provides all students with a set of opportunities to gain content

knowledge and master skills across a specified set of domains. Content knowledge is provided in four core areas (Fine Arts & Literature; Letters; Natural Sciences; Social Sciences) and skills are provided in three additional core areas (English Communication; Foreign Language and Culture; Mathematics) as well as eight embedded skills (writing effectively, etc.).

Each of the Core Areas and Integrated Skills are described in the General Education section of the Undergraduate Catalog as well as in Faculty Senate materials. These descriptions provide essential information about what students are expected to gain from completion of the General Education requirements at the University. The Learning Outcome Objectives are intended to reflect those expectations and provide a broad framework for the more specific aspirations associated with each Core Area.

Furthermore, the knowledge and skills acquired in completing General Education requirements are expected to have lasting consequences. These include both facilitation of success in subsequent specialized study at the University (i.e. majors and minors) and competence for the role of thoughtful and engaged citizen in a diverse and complex world.

By the time of graduation, students are expected to integrate knowledge and skills from general education with learning in the major and the whole array of academic, co-curricular, and non-academic learning experiences fostered by the University.

To judge the effectiveness of the General Education program, the faculty have identified five relatively proximate learning outcomes from students' direct experience with the courses taken to meet General Education requirements. Beyond these proximate objectives for the General Education program are expectations for added learning resulting from specialization (major, minor) and the integration of the totality of the undergraduate experience. The latter are defined and measured by departmental objectives for their majors.

Characteristics of General Education Learning Outcome Objectives

There are five general learning outcome identified by the committee. These outcome statements:

- Can be seen as a sequence of increasingly challenging cognitive tasks, moving from the relatively simple “identification” of concepts, theories, and developments to the use of those concepts, theories, and developments in an “analysis” to address questions or solve problems.
- Can be manifested with relatively highly structured problems likely to be presented in General Education courses as well as in the more sophisticated lines of inquiry directed at applications to self-selected and/or ill-defined problems likely to be found in advanced study.
- Address both the content (knowledge) and skills components of General Education, as the skills are essential for completing work representing mastery of the defined cognitive tasks. Special note should be made that “human differences” skills are expected to be manifested in work used to document learning outcomes across the five cognitive tasks.
- Delimit relatively broad categories of cognitive work, and are best seen as designators for sets of related tasks. For example, “identify” names a category of tasks that also includes “define,” “list,” “articulate,” and so on. Similarly, “analyze” encompasses such tasks as “interpret,” “evaluate,” and “apply.” It is important to recognize that disciplines often use differing terminology to refer to these tasks.
- Can be assessed by applying faculty-generated standards to products (“artifacts”) resulting from activities and assignments in General Education courses.
- Call for ability to apply learning in both academic and non-academic settings, in keeping with the two primary roles of General Education described above (foundation for academic specialization and engaged citizenship).

Statements of General Education Learning Outcome Objectives

Identify:

Students will be able to:

- Identify basic concepts, theories, and developments in literature and the fine arts.
- Identify basic concepts, theories, and developments in humanistic inquiry.
- Identify basic concepts, theories, and developments in the natural sciences.
- Identify basic concepts, theories, and developments in the social sciences.

Recognize:

Students will be able to:

- Recognize aesthetic and literary elements and forms in relevant academic and non-academic settings.
- Recognize humanistic issues in relevant academic and non-academic settings.

Recognize natural science issues in relevant academic and non-academic settings.
Recognize social science issues in relevant academic and non-academic settings.

Ask:

Students will be able to:

Ask questions appropriate to the modes of inquiry in the fine arts and literature in relevant academic and non-academic contexts.
Ask questions appropriate to the modes of inquiry in Letters disciplines in relevant academic and non-academic contexts.
Ask questions appropriate to the modes of inquiry in the natural sciences in relevant academic and non-academic contexts.
Ask questions appropriate to the modes of inquiry in the social sciences in relevant academic and non-academic contexts.

Collect:

Students will be able to:

Collect information relevant to the questions raised in the fine arts and literature.
Collect information relevant to the questions raised in the Letters disciplines.
Collect information relevant to the questions raised in the natural sciences.
Collect information relevant to the questions raised in the social sciences.

Analyze:

Students will be able to:

Analyze information in order to address questions or solve problems in the fine arts and literature.
Analyze information in order to address questions or solve problems in the Letters disciplines.
Analyze information in order to address questions or solve problems in the natural sciences.
Analyze information in order to address questions or solve problems in the social sciences.

Tentative Steps Toward Approval and Implementation

We recommend the following process in order to build on the work of the committee and the draft learning outcomes contained in this document.

- Fall '05: Faculty Senate Executive Committee endorses the plan to proceed using the proposed statements of objectives and the general approach outlined below.
- Fall '05: Faculty Senate Executive Committee appoints a planning committee (nominally a subcommittee of the UCGE Committee, with some representation from that committee as well as other selected members)
- Fall '05 - Spring '06: The General Education Subcommittee on Learning Outcomes Assessment is charged to accept the general approach and the proposed statements, with procedural modifications as needed. The subcommittee develops more specific plans for implementation and presents them to the Faculty Senate for approval.

Although there are any number of ways to proceed with outcomes assessment for general education, a plan like the following may be workable.

- Spring '06: The Subcommittee selects two core areas of general education for initial development. Using the learning objectives, the Subcommittee draws more specific examples from currently approved general education courses in those two core areas. These examples will be assignments, papers, projects, examinations, that provide “artifacts”, i.e. student work products, that could be used to assess success at the objectives. The committee uses the descriptions of the core areas to refine and clarify meaning of the objectives for chosen core areas.
- Spring '06: The Subcommittee recruits several general education course instructors from the selected core areas whose assignments are good exemplars. These instructors help to draft rubrics defining acceptable and unacceptable levels of student performance on the objectives.
- Summer '06: Faculty who have drafted rubrics review the course assignments for the two chosen core areas to assess how well we are doing at creating opportunities and expectations for students in line with our outcome objectives. That is, do the assignments themselves provide opportunities for students to learn and demonstrate the objectives?
- Summer '06: The subcommittee selects one core area for an initial pilot application of objectives and rubrics.

- Fall '06: In one core area (e.g. the Natural Sciences) instructors are asked to identify at least one assignment that meets an objective and to provide a random sample of student work (e.g. 10%) on that assignment. Alternatively several of the largest classes from that core area provide random samples for all of their assignments.
- Spring '07: Instructors from another core area are asked to provide similar work samples.
- Summer '07: Faculty groups receive modest compensation for rating products against rubrics for the two chosen core areas.
- Fall '07: A report on the summer findings is released and another core area is sampled. The results of the report are used to identify appropriate changes in the delivery or structure of general education if called for.
- Spring '08: A fourth core area is sampled
- Summer '08: Faculty groups receive modest compensation for rating products from those two core areas against rubrics
- Fall '08: A report of the summer findings is released. The results of the report are used to identify appropriate changes in the delivery or structure of general education if called for.

Appendix B

University of Rhode Island Learning Outcomes

As a consequence of the interaction between General Education and major programs, the University of Rhode Island expects that all programs will lead students toward:

- the ability to think critically in order to solve problems and question the nature and sources of authority
- the ability to use the methods and materials characteristic of each knowledge area with an understanding of the interrelationship among and the interconnectedness of the core areas
- a commitment to intellectual curiosity and lifelong learning
- an openness to new ideas with the social skills necessary for both teamwork and leadership
- the ability to think independently and be self-directed; to make informed choices and take initiative

General Education Learning Outcome Objectives

In academic and non-academic settings, with respect to fine arts and literature, humanities and Letters, the natural sciences, and the social sciences, students will be able to:

• identify basic concepts, theories, and developments;	• collect information relevant to the questions raised; and
• recognize issues, as well as aesthetic and literary elements and forms;	• analyze the information in order to address the questions or solve problems.
• ask questions appropriate to the modes of inquiry;	

General Education Core Knowledge Areas

Artistic and literary expression and interpretation (**Fine Arts/Literature**)

Wisdom and traditions of the past and present in a global setting (**Letters**)

Interrelationships of the natural world (**Natural Sciences**)

Human behavior in social, economic, cultural, and political contexts (**Social Sciences**)

General Education Core Skill Areas

Mathematical and quantitative skills and their applications (**Mathematical/Quantitative Reasoning**)

Writing and speaking in English (**English Communication**)

Communicating across cultures (**Foreign Language/Cross-cultural Competence**)

General Education Integrated Skills

Each course in General Education must incorporate opportunities to practice three (3) or more of the following: reading complex texts, writing effectively, speaking effectively, examining human differences, using quantitative data, using qualitative data, using information technology, and engaging in artistic activity.

Appendix C

Report on Student Survey of General Education

In the Fall of 2007, approximately 150 Kingston General Education sections were selected in a stratified random sample to participate in a student survey of the URI General Education program. The sections' instructors were sent a letter from Vice Provost Pasquerella soliciting their participation in both administering the one page survey and in submitting assignments and representative student work to the Subcommittee on the Assessment of General Education (SAGE). Ninety-seven sections returned the completed surveys.

Approximately 62 Providence sections were selected in a stratified random sample as well. The returns from sections that sent completed form are awaiting analysis.

Included in [the full] report are the following:

- Student Assessment of URI General Education Survey Form
- Frequency and Percent of Instructor Type for Sample of 97 Kingston General Education Sections, By Type of Course, Fall 2007
- Frequency distributions for 3,558 Student Responses from Sampled Kingston Sections, Fall 2007, Questions 5 – 11 (perceived effects on abilities related to Core Knowledge objectives)
- Frequency distributions for 3,558 Student Responses from Sampled Kingston Sections, Fall 2007 - Survey Question 12 (perceived opportunities to practice eight integrated skills)
- Percent of Student Responses for "Strongly Agree" and "Agree" from Sampled Kingston Sections, Fall 2007, Questions 5 – 11, by General Education Category (Core Knowledge and Core Skills)
- Percent of Student Responses for "Quite a Bit" & "Some" from Sampled Kingston Sections, Fall 2007, for Question 12, by General Education Category (Core Knowledge and Core Skills)

Some Highlights:

Of the sample sections, 41.2% are taught by tenure-track faculty. The 9 sections in the Mathematics/Quantitative Reasoning category had the highest proportion taught by tenure-track faculty (55.6%), while the lowest proportion of classes taught by tenure-track faculty were in the English Composition/Writing category (ECw) (20%).

The students' responses to the questions indicated they tend to agree with the questions in the survey. A large percent of the respondents (86.6%) indicated that they "strongly agree" or "agree" with the statement that they understand the purposes of the general education program at URI. However, 30.3% "disagree" or "strongly disagree" with the statement that their interest in this area of study has increased as a result of taking this course and in the M/Q sections, this percent rose to 50.6%.

Students reported that they had the opportunity to practice a number of skills in their general education courses, although the results were mixed. Students reported (74.4% and 73.7%) that they had "quite a bit/some" practice writing effectively and reading complex texts. However, over half (54.5%) of the total respondents reported having no opportunity to practice speaking effectively in their sections, and only 12.7% of the respondents in the Natural Sciences sections reported having "quite a bit/some" practice in this skill. A significant proportion also reported no opportunity to practice engaging in artistic expression (48.1%), using quantitative data to analyze situations (42.7%), and using information technology (41.5%) in their sections. However, students reported "quite a bit/some" practice in using information technology in the English Composition (77.1%), English Composition/Writing (73.5%) and the Math/Quantitative Reasoning Sections (67.4%).

The sample used in this analysis is not a random sample and may not accurately represent the entire experience students have in the general education program, but the results will be useful to help guide future discussions within the SAGE committee.

Frequency and Percent of Instructor Type for Sample of 97 Kingston General Education Sections, By Type
of Course, Fall 2007

Instructor Type	Total		Fine Arts		Letters		Natural Sciences		Social Sciences		Math/ Quantitative		Foreign Language/ Cultural		English Comp		English Comp/ Writing	
	n = 97		n = 17		n = 21		n = 10		n = 16		n = 9		n = 15		n = 7		n = 10	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Tenure Track	40	41.2	5	29.4	8	38.1	5	50.0	8	50.0	5	55.6	5	33.3	2	28.6	2	20.0
Per Course Instructor	18	18.6	5	29.4	5	23.8	0		1	6.2	2	22.2	4	26.7	3	42.9	2	20.0
Lecturer (ad hoc, temp, leave replacement)	25	25.8	1	5.9			4	40.0	5	31.2	2	22.2	5	33.3	2	28.6	3	30.0
Performing Arts Contract	1	1.0	1	5.9	0		0		0		0		0		0		0	
Other	13	13.4	5	29.4	5	23.8	1	10.0	2	12.5	0		1	6.7	0		3	30.0
Total - Other than Tenure Track	57	58.8	12	70.6	3	61.9	5	50.0	8	50.0	4	44.4	10	66.6	5	71.4	8	80.0

Percent of Student Responses for "Strongly Agree" and "Agree" from Sampled Kingston Sections, Fall 2007, by General Education Category

Survey Questions 5-11	Total Responses N=3558	Fine Arts/Lit n=630	Letters n=794	Social Science n=650	Natural Science n=604	M/Q n = 246	Foreign Lang/ Cultural = 315	English Comp n = 140	Eng/Writing n = 184
As a result of taking this course, I gained improved knowledge of the facts, concepts, vocabulary, and/or methods used in this area of study.	91.3	91.3	91.1	95.5	90.2	84.7	89.4	97.7	91.2
As a result of taking this course, I improved my ability to ask meaningful questions by making use of concepts and methods from this area of study.	79.8	78.1	77.1	86.9	77	69.3	79.3	88.6	87.4
As a result of taking this course, I improved my ability to find useful information and/or do research in this area of study.	76.1	74.1	72.5	82.8	74.1	66.9	73.4	95	93.3
As a result of taking this course, I improved my ability to apply concepts to solve problems or analyze situations in this area of study.	82.2	67.8	77.5	90.8	83.5	85.1	78.1	84.1	86.8
My interest in this area of study has increased as a result of taking this course.	68.5	74.5	66.2	75.8	64.2	50.6	72.4	61.4	69.8
I gained knowledge in this course that will help me better understand events, developments, and/or discoveries in the world around me.	82.5	78.6	71.5	93.3	84.1	62.9	79.7	86.4	84.1
I understand the purposes of the general education program at URI.	86.6	85.7	83.5	90.8	86.6	87.9	84.2	94.3	92.9

Percent of Student Responses for "Quite a Bit" & "Some" from Sampled Kingston Sections, Fall 2007, for Question 12, by General Education Category

The required readings, assignments, papers, projects, exams, etc. in this course gave me the opportunity to practice and/or use the following skills:	Total Responses N=3558	Fine Arts/Lit n=630	Letters n=794	Social Science n=650	Natural Science n=604	M/Q n = 246	Foreign Lang/ Cultural = 315	English Comp = 140	Eng/Writing n = 184
Writing effectively	74.4	73.8	88.4	86	43.9	36.4	89.9	90.7	97.8
Speaking effectively	43.4	64.3	42.9	36.8	12.7	23.3	82.7	95.7	66.9
Reading complex texts (primary sources, critical commentaries, journal articles, works of art, etc.)	73.7	70.3	83.6	86.6	63.5	35.6	76	80.7	89
Using quantitative data to analyze situations (using numerical tables, graphs, etc.)	55.1	32.2	37.4	60.3	85.6	96.2	34.7	50	57.1
Using qualitative data to analyze situations (using narratives, case studies, essays, etc.)	69.2	59.7	73.7	85.3	56.2	56.5	65	76.4	92.9
Examining human difference (race, gender, language, etc.) in various settings.	68.6	72.4	80.8	87.6	37.6	32.6	78.8	74.3	76.9
Using information technology (web-based assignments, PowerPoint presentations, etc.)	56.4	45.7	58.2	59.3	47.1	67.4	59	77.1	73.5
Engaging in artistic expression (using the creative process in the fine arts, etc.)	49.7	79.2	48.7	56.8	21.5	21.2	57.6	51.4	68.7

Appendix D

Learning Objective Task Description: Students demonstrate effective [thinking/cognitive processing] by:

Outcome Objective	Exceeding	Meeting	Approaching
<p>Identifying facts, vocabulary, definitions, terms, concepts, people</p>	<p>Correctly identifies or recalls most or all (e.g. 80% or more) of the requested factual information</p>	<p>Correctly identifies or recalls much (e.g. 70%) of the requested factual information</p>	<p>Correctly identifies or recalls some (e.g. 69% or less) of the requested factual information</p>
<p>Recognizing concepts or tools relevant for application to a task</p>	<p>Selects most or all (e.g. 80% or more) relevant concepts for solving a problem; shows thorough awareness of what principles, methods, and concepts are relevant to a problem situation</p>	<p>Selects many (e.g. 70%) relevant concepts for solving a problem; grasps the main points for making the connections to the problem, but misses some</p>	<p>Selects few (e.g. 69% or less) of the relevant concepts for solving a problem; misses a number of useful connections of concepts and/or misses the main “key” that could unlock the problem</p>
<p>Asking questions or framing hypotheses relevant to the task</p>	<p>Converts an ill-defined problem situation into a question (or questions) that can be addressed within the discipline; does this with a high degree of efficiency, accuracy, and thoroughness</p>	<p>Converts an ill-defined problem situation into a question (or questions) that can be addressed within the discipline; does this with mixed or moderate degrees of efficiency, accuracy, and thoroughness</p>	<p>Misses the major discipline-linked question(s) that could be derived from an ill-defined problem situation; focuses on irrelevant aspects; misses major aspects of the problem; and/or poses the wrong question</p>

<p>Collecting information relevant to address the task – e.g. data; literature sources</p>	<p>Uses appropriate sources (literature or sample); cites/describes sources correctly; is careful, thorough, specific, accurate, and precise in recording and presenting information</p>	<p>Uses some appropriate sources; cites sources; is careful enough in recording and presenting information to have a reasonably accurate overall perspective on the problem</p>	<p>Misses the most important sources; uses inappropriate sources; does not cite, or incorrectly cites sources; is sloppy, imprecise, incomplete in ways that may lead to a significantly distorted perspective on the problem</p>
<p>Analyzing 1 <u>Applying</u> concepts to address the task</p>	<p>Applies relevant concepts thoroughly and correctly to solve a problem</p>	<p>Applies some but not all of the relevant concepts to solve a problem; achieves only part of the correct answer after applying the concepts</p>	<p>Concepts are misapplied; incorrect use of concepts leads to incorrect answer</p>
<p>Analyzing 2 <u>Deconstructing</u> an argument by indicating claims and/or evidence; <u>synthesizing</u> evidence from multiple sources</p>	<p>Correctly describes the logic and/or evidence used to convey an argument; distinguishes between facts and inferences; accurately compares and contrasts positions; effectively builds a cogent synthesis</p>	<p>Generally follows the reasoning of the argument but misses some elements of the argument; correctly describes some important aspects of the evidence and logic but not all; builds a reasonable synthesis but misses important points</p>	<p>Argument is misunderstood; synthesis is ill-conceived or not present</p>
<p>Analyzing 3 <u>Evaluating</u> support for claims; <u>justifying</u> conclusions</p>	<p>Critically evaluates and justifies conclusions by examining strengths and weaknesses of an argument</p>	<p>Demonstrates some ability to critically evaluate and justify conclusions by examining strengths and weaknesses of an argument; misses some important strengths or weaknesses</p>	<p>Does not take an evaluative position or takes a position on weak evidence; does not defend position when called for or conclusions are not supported by evidence</p>

Appendix E

Next Steps in General Education Learning Outcomes Assessment at URI:

Proposed Process for Continuing Progress

September, 2008

Subcommittee on Assessment in General Education	UCGE	LOOC
<p><u>Fall, 2008:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SAGE establishes membership for 2008-09 via UCGE (seeking representation from various disciplines including fine arts and natural sciences; approximately 10 in total) • SAGE reviews report to OHE • John Stevenson is confirmed as Chair via FSEC • SAGE is oriented to the current state of progress on assessment • SAGE convenes focus groups representing disciplines grouped by core knowledge domain; these groups consider the assignment classification criteria and propose elaboration specific to each core area to operationalize the objectives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summer work group reports progress with examples of assignments • UCGE calls for regular reporting from SAGE • UCGE develops communication plan for promulgating new learning outcome objectives and syllabus expectations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LOOC reviews approval process for general education report to OHE, including timing, disclosure, and reporting format • LOOC considers resource needs for general education assessment
<p><u>Spring, 2009:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SAGE principals present at AAC&U conference • SAGE develops refined decision rules for classifying assignments • Rubrics are defined/refined with a sample of student work • A new sample of courses and assignments with a random sampling approach is designed for Fall 2009 • Expectations for what is to be included in the materials provided by course instructors (e.g. type of assignment, time in term, number of student responses to assignment, syllabus, and rubric) are clarified • Integrated Skills and Core Skills are addressed • Progress is reported to UCGE 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UCGE ratifies planned SAGE steps • UCGE ratifies classification rules • UCGE promulgates learning outcome objectives and syllabus expectations across the campus, meeting with deans, departments, instructors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LOOC considers the long-term cycle for program assessment in general education, and integration with Wabash, FSSE, NSSE

<p><u>Summer 2009:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summer-recontracted faculty (1) initiate plans for fall 2009 sample; (2) refine rubrics specific to core knowledge areas; (3) develop proposals for assessing integrated skills and core skills 		
<p><u>Fall, 2009:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Syllabi from a representative sample of Fall 2009 general education courses are reviewed for (1) statements of learning outcome objectives, and (2) assignments designed to achieve them • Proposals for assessing core and integrated skills are reviewed and approved • SAGE reports findings and recommendations to UCGE 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UCGE requests and receives a report from SAGE on progress • UCGE reviews rubrics for evaluating student work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LOOC implements campus-wide programs to engage faculty with assessment and close the loop
<p><u>Spring, 2010:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A representative sample of student work from Fall 2009 is evaluated with rubrics drawing on discipline-specific expertise • Conclusions are reported to UCGE, including recommendations for standards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UCGE acts on findings regarding syllabus review • UCGE acts on findings from rubric application 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LOOC attends to the incorporation of general education assessment findings in the planning and budgeting process
<p><u>Summer, 2010:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summer-recontracted faculty assess for integrated skills 		