

Joining the Past and the Future: Getting Prepared for General Education Assessment Development

Yang Zhang
Director of Institutional Research
Edgewood College

Edgewood College (Madison, WI)

- Founded in 1881 by the Dominican Sisters of Sinsinawa.
- Edgewood is an all women college until it became coeducational in 1970.
- Total enrollment is around 2500, with 2000 undergraduate level students and 500 master and Ed.D. students.
- Majors: education, business, nursing, psychology...
- Edgewood College is accredited by Higher Learning Commission since 1958.

Edgewood College and HLC

- HLC accreditation team visited the college in March, 2008.
- Edgewood College was accredited for another full ten years, but the accreditation team required the college to submit a general education assessment plan by April 15, 2011.
- General education and assessment in general became college priorities in 2008-2008 academic year.

General Education Gets Defined in Different Ways

- General education gets defined in different ways – philosophically, historically, or structurally. General education is also defined differently at the institutional level.

What is General Education

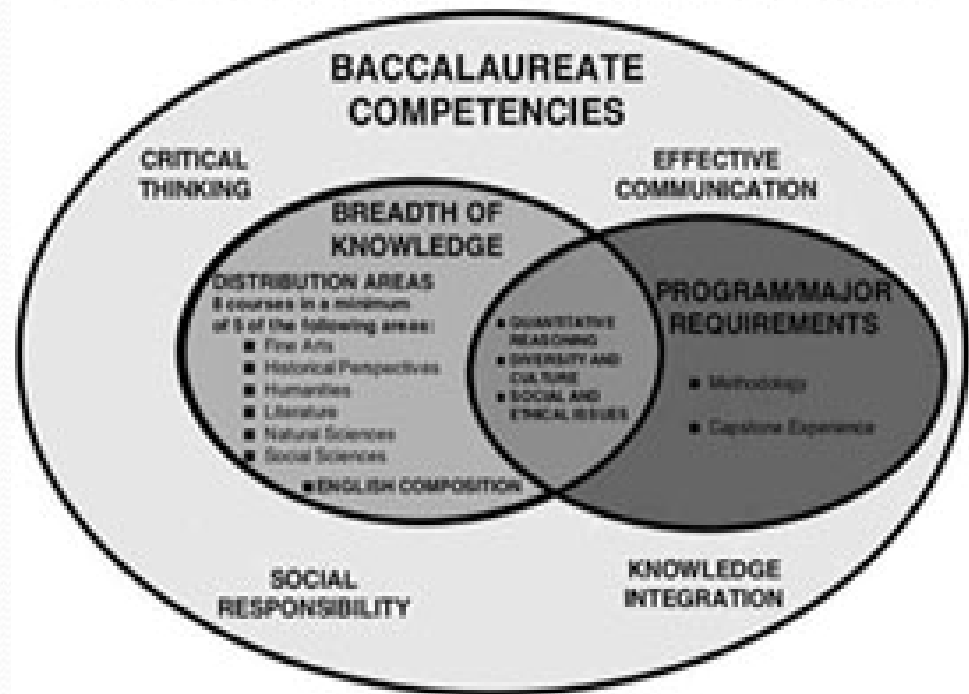
- From a practical view, general education is a formal component of undergraduate education (usually a program of courses in the arts and sciences) outside of the major, specialization, or discipline all students are required, so they can get a broad educational experience.
- Coursework in general education can be grouped into themes and clusters “to better communicate the relationship between the different subjects, skills, and fields of knowledge contained therein.”

Coursework in general education can be grouped into themes and clusters across subjects.

A Bachelor's Degree represents both training in a special field and also the skills and knowledge to meet life's varied challenges responsibly, intelligently and creatively.

General education is an ongoing adventure of discovery, adaptation, and challenge.


THE BASIC COMPONENTS OF GENERAL EDUCATION



-----Lehman College GenEd Structure

Why Do We Need to Assess GenEd?

- Improve curriculum and program
- Improve teaching and learning



The GenEd Assessment Initiative at Edgewood College: History and Background Information

- The development of new GenEd curriculum, learning goals, and assessment (1996 - 2008)
- GER, UCC, APEC, Assessment Taskforce

Major Committees

- General Education Review Committee (GER): developed some GenEd goals (submit a set of GenEd goals in 2006, did not pass).
- Undergraduate Curriculum Committee (UCC): completed goals (passed in February, 2008) and partly completed the new GenEd curriculum.
- Assessment and Program Evaluation Committee (APEC): lead the academic program assessment since 1996 (including GenEd assessment initiative), focusing on departmental assessment report and program evaluation.
- Edgewood College Assessment Taskforce (11/3/2008)

Assessment Tools Used in the Past

- Department which teach appropriate general education courses are responsible to develop that piece of general educational assessment.
- National standardized tests for reality check.
- General Education questions asked in Alumni Surveys.
- Human issues project is used to check students' writing and critical thinking skills.

What worked in the past

- APEC helps faculty to understand the importance of assessing students' learning outcomes and become supportive to assessment efforts.
- Establish procedures for departments to track assessment efforts and program evaluation, and have departments hold accountability of their practices.

What didn't...

- General education assessment and academic assessment in general were kept within the academic departments.
- Authority was moved back and forth among committees.
- Assessment results were kept within APEC and academic departments.
- GenEd assessment plan was not built into the goals and curriculum.

Joining the past and the future

- New GenEd goals were approved in March 2008.
- Higher Learning Commission accreditation requires a three year GenEd assessment progress report (2008).
- New GenEd curriculum will start in fall, 2009. Some courses are taught in fall, 2008.
- General education and assessment are two of the three college priorities in 2008-2009.

Successful stories in other colleges & universities

- Franklin Pierce College
- American University in Washington, D.C.
- Cascadia Community College
- Hamline University
- The State University of New York College at Fredonia

How to Move the GenEd Assessment Forward?

- Advance Leadership
- Planning for Greater Coherence
- Reflect the College's mission and values
- Create an effective, realistic, and cyclical assessment plan
- Cultivate an Assessment Culture on Campus

Leadership in Assessment

- Leadership is a key factor to ensure the success of general education assessment initiative. “Assessment must be made a priority over an extended period of time by central and local leaders” (Gray, 1997).
- “Leaders...are those persons or groups who can mobilize human, material, and symbolic resources toward specific ends... Mobilizing resources in any social system depends upon the ability of leaders to direct the behavior of others (D. M. Rosen, cited in Curry, Gray, 1997). ”

Advance Leadership

- Identifying the authority: where does the ultimate responsibility rest; what is the role of each group (APEC, UCC, Assessment Taskforce, chairs, deans, administration); absolute consequences for departments who fail to deliver assessment reports and program reviews.
- Expand the composition of APEC or create a higher level assessment committee, and bring in input from administration, student services, and institutional research.
- Planning for greater coherence.

Reflect the College's Mission and Values

- Make sure that the new GenEd assessment plan upholds the College's mission and values.
- Develop a set of institutional strategic learning goals to guide GenEd assessment and other assessment practices on campus.

Create an effective, realistic, and cyclical assessment plan


- Assessment is not a practice with a start date and end date.
- Assessment goals should relate directly to the college's mission.
- Outcomes should be explicitly stated, measurable, and relate to the general education goals.
- Achievement of these outcomes should be assessed against targets or benchmarks
- The results of the assessment should be communicated
- “Closing the loop”: The results used to make changes to improve performance and effectiveness, allocate resources, and inform other decisions related to the unit's area of responsibility.

Create an Assessment Culture on Campus

- Clear messages need to be sent to faculty and students that assessment is necessary, beneficial, and can be simple and workable to provide meaningful information to guide decision-making and improve student learning.
- Assessment results and improvement/changes should be shared on time through multiple communication channels.
- Use assessment results to allocate resources and create policies to recognize excellent assessment efforts.

Future

- General education and assessment are college priorities.
- Resources and administrative support will be provided to this initiative.
- The newly developed College Assessment Taskforce will identify the needs and provide guidance to GenEd assessment initiatives.
- If efforts can be made to clarify the leadership structure, create a coherent and cyclical assessment plan, and engage faculty and students in assessments, general education assessment should be carried alone successfully.



Thank you, questions?