
APPENDIX 2.1

“Where We Are in General Education and How We Got Here”

General Education

CUE May 28 2009

- Where we are in General Education and how we got here.
- Accreditation Expectations.
- The road ahead.

Outcomes:

- We leave with a shared sense of where we are in General Education assessment and reform and how we got here.
- We leave with a clear sense of what we need to do—now through 2011—to prepare for the accreditation revisit.
- CUE members specify any support or information they need to carry out this work.
- We leave with a plan for our next steps.

Gen Ed @ WWU Where We Are and How We Got Here (An incomplete history)

Once upon a time,
Colleges typically used end-of
program assessments, often
with external examiners, to
assess student achievement
and program effectiveness.

Assessment was normative.

The expanding enrollments, programs and majors of the twentieth century made large-scale assessment of learning in academic programs less common and practical. In many areas, such as the humanities, **assessment was no longer normative.**

Between 1960 and 1980, several tributaries of influence emerged:

- Educational theory shifted to focus on the learner and the “processes” of education.
- Advances in computing and statistics led to new tracking and measuring tools.
- Civil rights advocates demanded measurable changes in schools and colleges.
- Business assessment practices and theories, such a “TQM,” became applied to education.

By the 1980s, demands for governmental accountability, educational equity, and learner-based pedagogical practices converged in new higher-education assessment requirements by the federal government, states, accrediting organizations and universities themselves.

The central standards of these requirements:

- Published and measurable student-learning outcomes.
- The assessment of these outcomes.
- The use of the assessment in program improvement.

Acceptance and Resistance

- Faculty in programs where assessment is normative tended to accept the new standards.
- Faculty in programs where assessment was not normative often resisted them.

Accreditation at Western

- In its accreditation reviews of Western, the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU) has continually pushed WWU towards outcome-based assessment standards.

1998 Recommendations

The commission stresses outcomes assessment as essential to institutional planning and evaluation of institutional effectiveness. . .

Commission Policy 2B2 requires institutions to identify and publish expected learning outcomes for each of its degree and certificate programs.

The NWCCU also criticized our decentralized structure.

. . .while there are numerous assessment activities that have been conducted and planned, there is no overall formal institution assessment plan.

However, Colleges and programs used the decentralized structure to their advantage, rapidly building and revising successful plans.

While criticized by NWCCU, our decentralized structure is widely supported by faculty.

Decentralization serves and supports our strong-department structure.

The same structure works against university-wide programs, like General Education. Hence, Gen Ed has come under particular criticism from our accreditors.

The April 1998 review, and all subsequent reviews, drew attention to the GURs:

- The General University Requirements should be reviewed and learning objectives develop for each area. The extent of student learning should be regularly assessed and the information used to improve student attainment of the objective of a liberal education.

Internally, reviews of the GUR program resulted in similar recommendations:

April 15, 2003: General Education Task Force, Final Recommendations

Assessment of Student Learning

The Washington State Legislature and institutional accreditation standards mandate that student learning objectives be articulated and assessed.

Curriculum mapping:

Any GER course should clearly specify the competencies developed. This “curriculum mapping” should articulate where competencies occur in specific courses.

The GETF did generate essential “qualities” that Western students should demonstrate. These qualities were further defined as 11 “competencies.”

The mapping never occurred. Periodically, this causes some consternation.

§ One commissioner echoed the idea that faculty are teaching general education without a clue as to what these competencies should be, and asked what is the responsibility of ACC to direct this.

§ This is a really important step in curriculum design, and why not spell out what standards we are trying to reach.

Current Assessment Plan

A university-wide assessment plan was created.

Western's current assessment plan defines a set of developmental steps leading to 2-phase institutional system for assessing student performance.

These steps include:

- 1) Setting a vision for assessment derived from the Strategic Action Plan;
- 2) Identifying program-level student learning outcomes;
- 3) Providing opportunities to learn (curriculum) aligned with the student learning outcomes;
- 4) Designing and implementing assessments to sample student performance relative to outcomes;
- 5) Collecting, analyzing, and reporting data within and across programs;
- 6) Systematically using data to improve programs and operations.

However

The Plan was never fulfilled in a systematic, university-wide manner for General Education.

NWCCU required an interim report and revisit. The Accreditation Chair recommended that WWU focus its reforms on Gen Ed.

Specifically

The Evaluation Committee notes that there has been inadequate progress on the implementation of key aspects of an institution-wide plan of program assessment. Despite admirable growth in ongoing data collection, campus support, a plethora of reports, the number of robust college-level plans and efforts, investments in staff, and committees, there is a need to close the feedback loop and use the information generated to improve programs and inform resource decisions in a consistent and systemic manner (Standards 1.B, 2.B, and Policy 2.6).

Program Assessment: Two Parts

- There has been inadequate progress on the implementation of an institution-wide plan of program assessment. . .

There is a need to close the feedback loop and use the information generated to improve programs and inform resource decisions in a consistent and systemic manner.

CUE Responsibilities

- 📄 Create a campus-wide GUR assessment plan.
- 📄 Use existing data to improve GUR program.

1) Create a campus-wide GUR assessment plan.

Options:

- Sample E-Portfolios
- Use a Standardized Exam
- Common Capstone Course Assignments
- Sample Senior seminar Papers/Projects
- Aggregate course-level assessments
(Most programs use 2-3 of the above).

2) Use existing data to “Close the Loop” (CTL) Options (others are also possible).

- WELS Data shows
 - Freshmen don't understand value and purpose of liberal education.
 - CTL by communicating value of liberal ed.**
- Accreditors & ACC say
 - SLOs not specified in syllabi.
 - CTL by getting GUR competencies in syllabi.**
- NSSEE data shows
 - Freshman seek more student/faculty interaction.
 - CTL by fostering more student/faculty interaction.**

Questions

- What questions do these expectations raise for you?

**What resources,
information and
support do you need?**

**Dinner Conversation
Topics**

When do you want additional training provided?

- Summer Workshop or
- Training at fall meetings?

What kind of chair?

- A facilitative chair NOT expected to be working extensively behind the scenes and between meetings.
- An “ACC style” chair expected to be working extensively behind the scenes and between meetings.

What is our next step?