

SECTION II: Report of the Assessment Working Group

The Assessment Working Group (AWG) was formed for the purpose of making sure that we build into our new curriculum the means to assess its effectiveness once implemented. Assessing the new general education will allow us to know what is working and what is not working towards our overall goal of helping students become engaged citizens. The AWG began its work by reviewing materials on good practices for assessing general education. Five members of the AWG attended a five day Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U) institute on the assessment of general education. The first task of the AWG was to work with the Criteria Working Groups to make sure that the general education learning objectives developed by each group were assessable. The AWG also served as editor for the materials produced by the Criteria Working Groups. Early on, it was agreed that the criteria documents did not need to be exactly the same, but that each group would use a consistent template. The AWG did make changes in the final versions of the criteria for the purpose of clarity and consistency.

The report from the Assessment Working Group provides the faculty with the general principles to be used in the future assessment of the new general education program. Once the criteria and implementation timeline have been approved, the AWG will develop suggestions for the actual methods that might be used to assess each of the learning objectives. Once again, it is important to remember that we anticipate an assessment process for the purpose of determining whether our goals in general education are being met and if the individual requirements are helping students toward our goal. The AWG is not suggesting that individual courses or individual students be regularly assessed. The AWG understands that the courses meeting the various criteria will be reviewed at the time of submission to the approval committee, and a process of reviewing the courses from time to time may be put into place to ensure that the course criteria are being met over time. The actual process of course approval and review will be developed by the Educational Policy and Curriculum Committee (EPCC).

After the discussion on August 27, 2009, the AWG will work with the Criteria Working Groups on assessment methods and means of collecting data, develop a timetable for the review of the components of the new general education program and then send its work to the Assessment and Program Review Committee (APRC). Once the APRC approves the assessment plan, it will go to the full faculty for final approval. APRC will take over the responsibility of the regular assessment of the new general education program when we move into the implementation phase of the new curriculum

General Principles of Assessment
Assessment Working Group, June 2009

1. Assessment results are not used to evaluate individual faculty members. Assessment focuses on programs even when the data comes from individual courses.
2. While we understand the need for summative learning gains assessment for comparative purposes, our emphasis is on improving student learning.
3. We are aware that collecting and analyzing assessment data takes time, and we will work to minimize the amount of time needed while retaining the reliability and validity of the data.
4. Evidence of student learning should be collected continually and analyzed periodically.
5. We recognize the value of both quantitative and qualitative assessment. Best practice suggests that where ever possible, both should be used.
6. Direct assessment methods should be used as primary evidence. Indirect assessment should be used to supplement the findings of the direct assessment.

Direct assessment methods are those that require students to demonstrate expected learning outcomes. Student papers, presentations, and performances are all examples of direct assessment methods.

Indirect assessment methods are those that are mediated by the person responding. Surveys, interviews, and focus groups about what students think they learned, what they thought helped them learn, or how satisfied they were with the learning experience are examples of indirect assessment methods.

7. In order to make the assessment process manageable, sampling methodologies will be used.
8. It is not enough to merely collect data. Data need to be analyzed, interpreted, and used to improve student learning.

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Work Students Complete in Class: student work intended to illustrate achievement of learning outcomes for a class can be collected. Anything that a student can do for a course could be included: papers, video or audio recordings of presentations or performances or exhibits, recordings of a class discussion, tests, portfolios, team projects, etc.

Common Assignments: The same assignment is used across multiple courses to illustrate the same learning outcomes. All courses with a specific designation would thus be required to give at least one assignment in the course that is common across all courses.

Local Tests: tests designed in relation to Simpson's curriculum, as opposed to generic, commercially available tests. The Simpson faculty would write the test. Format may vary; need not be multiple choice, as in most commercial tests.

Commercially Available, Standardized Tests:

- *Measure of Academic Proficiency and Progress* (MAPP) test assesses 4 core skill areas: critical thinking, reading, writing and mathematics.
- Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) assesses 4 skills: critical thinking, analytic reasoning, problem solving, and written communication.
- *A variety of other standardized tests are described online at <http://www.liberalarts.wabash.edu/study-instruments/>*

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Surveys: Common method of gathering information from people on a wide variety of topics (personal characteristics, expectations, experience, attitudes, values, behaviors, perceptions, satisfaction), generally in the form of a questionnaire, which may be distributed in hard copy or online or – less often – administered by phone.

Interviews: One-on-one conversations designed to elicit a variety of information; may range from highly structured (much like an orally conducted survey) to open-ended and exploratory.

Focus Groups: structured, in-depth, group discussions of specific topics, guided by a trained moderator and generally audio taped, videotaped, or recorded by an assistant moderator.

The above materials were drawn from Dr. Barbara D. Wright's handouts at the 2009 AAC&U Institute on General Education, May 30-June 3, 2009.