

REPORT
ON
GENERAL EDUCATION
SUBMITTED
TO
NORTH CENTRAL ASSOCIATION

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In 1988 Youngstown State University provided its students with a distributive model of general education that had not changed in twenty years. When North Central Association visited in that year, the visiting team commented on the lack of a common experience for students, and called for a faculty review that would take into account the latest developments in general education. Ten years later North Central returned, and found that model still in place. But it was clear that substantial work on the reform of YSU's general education had begun with the appointment of a Task Force in 1993, which proceeded to develop a new model. Debate regarding the recommended changes in the general education program had begun at Academic Senate meetings in February prior to the NCA visit, but, unfortunately, did not conclude until May after the NCA team left. Although the Academic Senate's consideration of the new model occurred simultaneously with the NCA review, the visiting team remained concerned about the failure to implement a more current model within that ten-year period, and asked for a written progress report by June, 2001 (see Appendix I). The following report highlights what has transpired since the visit. It is an update on what has happened to Youngstown State University's general education program from May of 1998 to the present.

GER MODEL

The General Education Model (see Appendix II) passed by the Academic Senate May 27, 1998, follows a number of current principles from the general education reform movement. First, it is goal-driven (see Appendix III), thereby allowing key outcomes to be assessed. The preface to the goals provides the philosophical underpinning. Because of the large number of goals, the General Education Task Force, a Senate appointed ad hoc committee, combined them into basic skills and domains. The five domains are natural science, artistic and literary perspectives, societies and institutions, personal and social responsibility, and selected topics (an interdisciplinary category). The Task Force then decided on the number of courses to be taken in each. What resulted was a combination of old and new categories.

Secondly, this new model focused on the building of skills in writing, speaking, thinking critically, use of computers, and basic math. Students have to improve their writing, speaking, and math skills by taking mandated introductory courses. Within the writing sequence of two courses, the students learn to use computer technology for word processing and as a research tool. Follow up on the development of writing, speaking and critical thinking skills occurs through intensive courses. These are any general education, major, minor, or elective courses at the University that have integrated a writing, oral

communication, or critical thinking component. Students have to take two such courses in writing and critical thinking, and one in oral communication. The writing intensive and oral communication intensive courses help to develop skills taught in introductory writing and oral communication courses. The culmination of skill development is a capstone course in the major in which the student conducts research compatible with the discipline and produces reports that demonstrate both oral, writing, and critical thinking skills. The fact that the writing intensive, oral communication intensive, and capstone courses occur in the major provides for a continuation of general education throughout the four years, and also involves the professional faculty in the delivery of general education.

FACULTY INVOLVEMENT

The new model also assures the continuing involvement of faculty in the development of general education. The Academic Senate established in May of 1998 a General Education Committee (GEC) as part of its standing committee structure (see Appendix IV). The committee is composed of six elected faculty representatives, one from each college, five faculty representatives appointed by the Provost from each of the domains, two students, and the Coordinator of General Education, also a faculty member with reassigned time. It has the power to certify general education courses, to make recommendations to the Academic Senate regarding the program, and to establish assessment of student outcomes based on achievement of the goals. The General Education Committee (GEC) began its operation in the fall of 1998.

The commitment of the administration to the continuing development of the general education program is apparent in the creation of the position of a Coordinator of General Education appointed by the Provost. That person receives a reduced teaching load and an administrative contract for the summer. In addition, the Provost provides a budget to maintain an office and to underwrite travel to conventions for committee members. Since 1998, four to six members per year have attended conventions on general education sponsored by AGLS and AACU.

COURSE CERTIFICATION

After the appointment of Bill Jenkins as Coordinator of General Education in July of 1998 and the selection of the committee in the fall, the GEC appointed subcommittees of faculty members from each domain to design criteria that assist faculty in creating courses that address the goals for each domain. After approval of these criteria in March of 1999

(see Appendix V), the committee distributed application forms for each domain. The application forms included two sections, one in which the department responded to each of the criteria, and a narrative in which the department explained how and why the course met the goals of that particular domain. To assist department faculty in the creation of a credible application, there was an appendix to the form that detailed the requirements, goals, and criteria for the domain. The Coordinator then held campus wide workshops for any interested faculty or departments, spoke to Deans Advisory Councils, and visited interested departments. Experts from the English, Philosophy and Communication departments sponsored workshops to discuss how to create courses that integrate intensive components.

By April of 1999 departments had begun to submit course applications (see sample in Appendix VI). The applications went first to college curriculum committees, and then to the college dean, who reviewed the course and passed it on to the GEC. To establish a positive climate, the committee decided to review courses, but not to reject them outright, at least initially. Courses that generated concerns were returned to departments with explanations of those concerns. The Coordinator offered to meet with faculty who were proposing the course and also encouraged departments to resubmit the proposal. If approved initially or upon resubmission, the course was then circulated for ten working days throughout the campus by placement in deans' offices. Any faculty member, department, or dean could object and come to a hearing in which both sides presented their arguments for and against certification of the course. If a negotiated settlement was not reached, then the GEC voted and reported the result to the Academic Senate. At that time the GEC or any Senator could make a motion for approval. So far no course proposals have reached this final appeal stage (see Appendix VII for Course Approval Procedures).

In the course of the next year over 100 courses were submitted for approval within the domains. There are presently 86 courses that have secured certification, a significant reduction over the previous system that designated entire departmental course listings rather than individual courses. In addition, all of these courses have proved that they focus on goals for the particular domain. Initially, GEC reviewed the departmental proposal and a sample syllabus to determine whether a course appeared to satisfy the goals. The committee recognizes that eventually departments will also have to verify through an assessment procedure that students do reach the goals. One problem that arose, though, was the submission of upper division courses. The new model permitted such courses if they met the domain goals and were broad enough. However, one department chose to submit almost twenty upper division courses.

GEC decided to limit such courses by requiring a prerequisite of a lower division course already certified as a general education course.

PREPARATION FOR THE CONVERSION

The next step was the preparation of advisors and students for the change. An advisory manual was prepared and distributed to college advisors and faculty in the winter of 2000, and workshops were held throughout the winter and spring. All college advisors attended one of these workshops, and over 100 faculty and department chairs attended as well. Bill Jenkins also presented the Manual at the Department Chairs meeting hosted by the Provost. Information for students about how to work with the new system was included in the University Bulletin and the Student Schedule of Classes (see Appendix VIII). Students could read text or consult charts in either source. Particular emphasis was placed upon setting up codes in the schedule of classes that identified which requirement the course satisfied, and in providing the codes to the students for easy access. These codes will also appear on the student transcript (Permrec, a computerized record available to advisors), and in the degree audit system once that is implemented. Finally, incoming freshmen received a brochure entitled "What's In It For Me?" during the spring of 2000 (see Appendix IX, and Appendix X, which includes a brochure on Diversity in general education courses).

To provide easy access to information for all concerned, a Website was set up with a link to YSU's Homepage (<http://www.cc.ysu.edu/ger/>). Anyone could read about the purposes of general education, and examine the goals or the structure of the model. Faculty could also find application forms and the criteria for submission, as well as the membership of the General Education Committee. Finally, the Coordinator posted each course as it was approved under the appropriate domain (see Appendix XI).

INTENSIVE COURSES

In the academic year 1999-2000 the General Education Committee emphasized approval of the regular courses. This past academic year GEC has reviewed intensive courses, whether writing, oral communication, or critical thinking. Each faculty member who teaches such a course is required to instruct students in the basics of that skill by providing feedback through assignments, drafts, editing, etc. Skill development is the goal. Because the writing intensive and oral communication intensive courses were limited to no more than 25 students, they needed to be taught on the upper division level. Hence, each department has to follow through with its majors on the writing and

speaking skills initially taught in the required introductory skills courses. They may also offer critical thinking courses. A problem developed, however, over the oral communication intensive courses. Initially, the General Education Task Force had recommended only two oral communication courses and no basic skill course. The Academic Senate, however, chose to include a basic skill course in oral communication. Because of this change and because many faculty expressed concerns about having sufficient time to provide for content coverage and oral communication presentations, the GEC recommended that the oral communication intensive requirement be reduced to one. It passed the Academic Senate at its April meeting (see Appendix XII). The other intensives will remain at two.

The development of intensive courses has been greatly aided by the work of a number of individuals. The Provost approved some reassigned time (one course per semester) for a Director of Writing Across the Curriculum, who has conducted numerous workshops. Fortunately, two chairs, one from Communication and Theater, and one from Philosophy and Religious Studies, have assisted the General Education Committee by advising departments throughout the past year on the creation of oral communication and critical thinking intensive course proposals respectively. The General Education Committee has also utilized these individuals as reviewers of proposals, who make advisory recommendations to the committee.

ASSESSMENT

Assessment is a critical part of any general education program. Evaluations of how well students are achieving outcomes based on the general education goals are essential if the general education program is to succeed. At Youngstown State University the Assistant Provost for Planning, Dr. Janice Elias, the Director of Assessment, Marie Cullen, and the Coordinator of General Education, Dr. Bill Jenkins, have taken these principles into account through the joint development of plans for the assessment of general education. Because of the complexity of assessment and the time needed to make the transition in the fall of 2000, those plans are in various stages of development, which is reflected in the report below.

Our staff was cognizant of the need to build any assessment on the work of others and on the best thinking available in the academic community. Hence, each of us has attended a variety of national conferences that have focused on overall assessment or assessment of general education in particular. Sponsoring organizations of those conferences have included the American Association of Higher Education, North Central Association, the Association for General and Liberal

Studies, and the Association of American Colleges and Universities. In addition, we have read published works on assessment, including those by Dr. Trudy Banta and Dr. Peter Ewell. Finally, we had a workshop on assessment of general education outcomes April 3, 1998, given by Dr. Patricia Murphy, NCA Consultant Evaluator and former Dean of Assessment & Institutional Research at North Dakota State University. Approximately 50 people attended (see Appendix XIII for workshop handouts).

BENCHMARKING

Once the general education goals were approved by the Academic Senate in 1994, the Director of Assessment began some assessment even though the implementation of the new model did not occur until the fall of 2000. These efforts were based on a desire to establish benchmarks that compared the effectiveness of the new model to our old. The General Education Committee was interested in seeing how well the old model enabled students to reach the goals of the new model. She devised with the concurrence of the General Education Task Force and Committee two methods for assessment. The first was an indirect measure, a survey of graduating students regarding the new goals.

- This survey was designed to help measure graduating students' perceptions of the contribution of their learning experiences at YSU to growth in each of the general education goal areas.
- The surveys were mailed to graduating students in their last term of enrollment.
- The surveys have been administered every term since summer 1997 Quarter and will continue to be administered each term.
- Results, based on an annual response rate of 25 % or higher, are analyzed yearly.

The survey instrument and survey results are attached (see Appendix XIV). There are mean scores for each goal, and the goals are ranked in order of student perception of achievement. The assessment office will continue to administer the survey yearly, and will compare the results from the first class to finish under the new model in 2004 to earlier results to determine how effective the new model is in improving student perceptions. We expect to see increases in the mean scale in mathematics and artistic and literary appreciation in particular because courses in those areas were not required of all students in the past.

Our second instrument selected was a direct measure, the Academic Profile (ETS). As stated by ETS, the Academic Profile focuses on academic skills developed through general education courses rather than on knowledge acquired about the subjects taught in these courses. It tests college-level reading and writing, critical thinking and mathematics within the context of the humanities, social sciences and natural sciences. Youngstown State University's definition of general education outcomes is consistent with this skill approach; therefore, GEC decided to administer the Academic Profile as one measure of general education outcomes assessment.

The Director of Assessment decided to randomly administer the Academic Profile to senior students prior to the implementation of the new general education curriculum to obtain a benchmark for seniors. The Academic Profile was also administered to incoming freshmen to obtain a benchmark of their knowledge prior to exposure to any general education curriculum. We plan to administer this standardized test for incoming freshmen in the fall of 2002, to outgoing seniors in the spring of 2004 and for incoming freshmen in the fall of 2004. Both tests will occur every two years thereafter. Our first results for both seniors and freshmen are attached (see Appendix XV).

What we have discovered is that Youngstown State University's former model did assist our students in the improvement of reading, writing, critical thinking, and the use of mathematical data. ETS placed us in the comprehensive category, which contains 57 other universities for the senior surveys and 45 for the freshmen surveys. We were not initially sure how to compare our results, particularly since some of these schools were more selective. We finally concentrated on the average ACT/SAT score for actual freshmen. After calling each school to find out this information, we were able to place Youngstown State in the lower 35th percentile for the senior list of schools and the 29th percentile for freshmen schools. What could be expected then was a below average score for incoming freshmen, which proved to be the case (see the chart on entering freshmen's skills dimension subscores and the total score). That below average score, however, was not reflected in the data from seniors as they scored close to the mean (see the chart on graduating seniors' skills dimension subscores and the total score). Given that such tests have a statistical error and the reality of sampling difficulties, it would appear that students have a value added advantage in choosing to attend YSU because scores move from below average to average. Thus, the results demonstrated not only that our old general education program improved students in the skills area, but also that the program improved their ranking relative to the other comprehensive universities. YSU students increase from freshmen to senior was generally double the

increase in the average of the comprehensive schools. We expect to continue with this test as our first set of freshmen under the new model graduate in 2004. The intention is to compare the gains registered. The assessment team recognizes the limitations of such standardized tests, but believes that, if used with multiple methods of assessment, the Academic Profile will give us some indication of how well we are performing when compared to other schools.

FIRST YEAR

Our University implemented the new general education model in the fall of 2000 for incoming freshmen and for any previously enrolled student who chose the new model. At the same time we switched to semesters from quarters. These changes produced much extra work for faculty, who not only had to redesign their regular courses and shepherd them through the curriculum process, but also to submit general education course proposals that demonstrated the concurrence of their course(s) with the overall goals and purposes of the new model. The General Education Committee decided, given the constraints on faculty time, to review general education course syllabi as a means of evaluating faculty follow through on what had been promised in the course proposals. Subcommittees of the General Education Committee examined each of the syllabi to determine if the syllabi contained the following: 1) a statement that the course satisfied a particular domain requirement, 2) a statement of the goals met by taking the course, and 3) consistency in follow through on the course as proposed. Nearly a half of them did not have any statements. Hence, they were asked to include them in the spring semester syllabi. Most did demonstrate an ability to follow through on what had been promised in the application form. The Coordinator is presently reviewing the spring syllabi. From preliminary review there is a substantial improvement. Reports were sent to each department regarding the fall syllabi; a similar report will be sent regarding the spring syllabi prior to the fall semester.

BASIC SKILLS

The assessment experts that we encountered extolled the virtue of not assessing everything at once. Therefore, we decided to begin with the skill courses in writing, oral communication, and basic mathematics. Each department was to construct an assessment procedure for its basic skill course. All of these departments came up with a process, which mathematics employed in the fall semester and writing in the spring semester.

In the fall semester Dr. Neil Flowers was responsible for the assessment of Math 2623, the Survey of Mathematics, which is the general education course for many entering students (see Appendix XVI for math's assessment procedure). As coordinator of the course, Flowers developed a "what to cover" document for the instructors. He collected and analyzed samples of student quizzes, tests, final exams, and writing assignments. There was also a before/after student questionnaire. From these documents he concluded that the course was enabling students to develop a conceptual knowledge of mathematics as it might be used by the average person/citizen, the prime goal of such a course. He also highlighted its efforts to develop student-writing skills. There will be more work in the upcoming year on the refinement of the assessment process, particularly in the sampling area and in the use of the findings.

The English Department has for many years undertaken an annual evaluation of its basic writing courses. That process has focused on improving instruction. A report on the process from Dr. Julia Gergits is included in this report (see Appendix XVII). That process is a good one, but it did not focus sufficiently on student outcomes, in particular the goals to be reached by students in each of the classes. Thus, they will redesign the student evaluation form to include student opinion regarding the goals for the courses, collect student portfolios rather than teaching portfolios, and make recommendations relative to the teaching of the courses, rather than directing the evaluations toward individual faculty members.

The Communication Department has not yet implemented an assessment procedure, but they did spend the year examining the process. The department intends to use the tapes of student performance as a means of evaluating the program. A faculty evaluating committee will review the student performance across the various sections by sampling tapes from each of the classes. They have devised a set of criteria, and will make judgments based on how well students meet the criteria. From this data they will make recommendations for improvements in the delivery of the classes.

DOMAINS

YSU has created five domains in its new general education model. They are: natural science, artistic and literary perspectives, societies and institutions, personal and social responsibility, and selected topics. In the upcoming year we plan to ask each department that teaches a course in one of these domains to develop an assessment procedure. The General Education Committee and the Director of Assessment will review these plans, and provide feedback on their validity. Some of the general

principles of assessment that will be shared with these departments include: basing assessment on student outcomes based on the general education goals, using multiple measures, having faculty involved in the assessment, using the data gathered to make recommendations for improvement of the courses, and reporting the results to the campus. In the following year a number of the departments will begin a cycle that will ultimately include all departments. The department will report to the General Education Committee, which has the power to make recommendations, and also to decertify the course for general education. The General Education Committee will give the departments with weak processes a limited opportunity to improve or face possible decertification.

INTENSIVE COURSES

The YSU model also requires students to take courses that integrate writing (2), speaking (1), or critical thinking (2). Such courses do not have to be general education courses. Since many of these courses will be in the major or minor, a provision developed to tie the major or minor to the general education goals, YSU has not had freshmen students taking these courses, and so has yet to work on developing an assessment procedure. However, GEC will begin to do so in the upcoming year by asking faculty experts in these areas to recommend procedures. The General Education Committee and the Director of Assessment will again review the recommendations, and suggest appropriate changes. Some departments will begin implementing their assessment plans in the fall of 2002. To assist departments in the formulation of their plans for oral communication intensive courses, Dr. Rebecca Rubin, Professor of Communication Studies, at Kent State University presented a workshop this past spring, April 16th, on assessing classroom oral presentations. Approximately thirty faculty members attended this workshop. Workshop materials are attached (see Appendix XVIII).

Although YSU does not have all of its general education assessment procedures in place, it does have a plan for implementation. Moreover, the General Education Committee has begun assessment in some of the skill areas and some benchmarking. It is our intention to continue over the next few years to achieve full implementation of an assessment plan.

CONCLUSION

Since 1998, Youngstown State University has made substantial progress toward the creation of a general education model based on the principles prevalent in the current literature. As a result, in August,

2000, YSU smoothly and successfully converted from quarters to semesters and to the new general education model. The only work that remains to be done is a follow through on the assessment plan.

APPENDIX I

NCA COMMENTS ON YSU GENERAL EDUCATION, 1998

APPENDIX II

GENERAL EDUCATION MODEL

APPENDIX III

PREFACE AND GOALS OF GENERAL EDUCATION

APPENDIX IV

GENERAL EDUCATION COMMITTEE AS APPROVED BY ACADEMIC SENATE

APPENDIX V

GENERAL EDUCATION CRITERIA FOR EACH DOMAIN

APPENDIX VI

SAMPLE APPLICATION FORM FOR NATURAL SCIENCE DOMAIN

APPENDIX VII

COURSE APPROVAL PROCEDURES APPROVED BY ACADEMIC SENATE

APPENDIX VIII

UNIVERSITY BULLETIN AND SCHEDULE OF CLASSES INSERTS FOR STUDENTS

APPENDIX IX

BROCHURE FOR STUDENTS ENTITLED “WHAT’S IN IT FOR ME?”

APPENDIX X

BROCHURE FOR STUDENTS ENTITLED “LEARNING ABOUT DIVERSITY”

APPENDIX XI

**LIST OF GENERAL EDUCATION COURSES
ARRANGED BY DOMAIN**

APPENDIX XII

ACADEMIC SENATE ACTION ON ORAL COMMUNICATION INTENSIVE COURSES

APPENDIX XIII

**HANDOUTS
DR. MURPHY'S WORKSHOP**

APPENDIX XIV

STUDENT PERCEPTION SURVEY RESULTS

APPENDIX XV

ACADEMIC PROFILE RESULTS FOR SENIORS AND FRESHMEN

APPENDIX XVI

MATHEMATICS ASSESSMENT PROCEDURE

APPENDIX XVII

ENGLISH DEPARTMENT ASSESSMENT PROCEDURES

APPENDIX XVIII

DR. RUBIN'S WORKSHOP HANDOUTS