

2008-2009 Annual General Education Report
to the
University Academic Planning Council
October 29, 2009

In its role as trustee of the campus-wide undergraduate General Education requirements and as agreed at the University Academic Planning Council of December 18, 1997, the College of Letters and Science presents the annual report on the General Education requirements at UW-Madison. This report on committee activities in 2008-2009 is submitted by the Chair of the University General Education Committee (UGEC), Dr. Nancy Westphal-Johnson.

1. ***Implementation of policy: satisfaction of QR-A before taking QR-B.*** When the General Education requirements were first approved, certain aspects of the Quantitative Reasoning requirement were somewhat complicated. While individual schools/colleges have some flexibility in determining when QR-A and B should be fulfilled and in what order, it was strongly recommended that students complete the QR-A requirement within their first 60 credits, and that they complete QR-A before they be allowed to enroll in a QR-B course. To reinforce this sequence of events, it was recommended that approval of QR-B courses be contingent upon those courses requiring satisfaction of QR-A as a prerequisite. There are multiple pathways by which students may satisfy QR-A: by taking a UW-Madison course, by UW System or Advanced Placement test score, or by transferring credit for a course taken elsewhere.

Conversion to ISIS presented difficulty in enforcing course prerequisites, and even when the prerequisite feature became available, this particular prerequisite could not be enforced due to many means by which students can satisfy the requirement. Since this aspect of the requirement could not be implemented, the issue has been raised in the course of efforts to evaluate student performance in QR courses. (The number of students who complete these requirements out of sequence is likely to be small.¹) When departments were consulted about the possibility sequencing the courses, it was believed that students who do not complete QR-A before taking QR-B were not as well prepared for the demands of the second-level course.

In Spring 2009, Assistant Registrar Karen Hanson proposed a mechanism by which the prerequisite could be enforced. In Spring and Summer of 2009, Professor Gloria Mari-Beffa (Mathematics; Gen Ed QR liaison), reviewed the syllabi of all QR-B courses to validate that these courses continue to meet the goals specified for QR-B courses. She also identified courses that explicitly require satisfaction of QR-A by virtue of specified coursework, or that do not require satisfaction of QR-A. In the latter cases, departments were contacted and

¹ In one analysis of two “non-mathematical” QR-B courses offered in Political Science, it was found that out of 398 students who enrolled in the courses since the requirements went into effect and who have since graduated, only 22 took QR “out of sequence”.

asked to consider adding the phrase “satisfaction of QR-A” to the QR-B course prerequisites. Every department contacted agreed to this change. With the assistance of the UGEC, formal proposals to change course prerequisites were submitted to college curriculum committees, and were expedited by the Divisional Executive Committees, which considered these requests as a group action, in deference to the recommendation of the UGEC.

The changes in prerequisites may be enforced as early as the Fall 2009 registration cycle. Registration patterns will be monitored to ensure that implementation goes well.

A recommendation regarding the sequencing of the Communication requirements might also be pursued. If enforcement of QR sequencing is effective and does not have a negative impact on student enrollment and progress, the UGEC may pursue the aspiration to enforce the recommended Communication sequence in the future.

2. *Updates on Activities Related to the Assessment of Student Learning.*

For more information and links to the General Education Assessment Plan, please refer to the “Assessment Reports” link at <http://www.ls.wisc.edu/gened>

- A. The 2008-2009 General Education Assessment Activity Report is attached (Appendix A). That report notes that in 2008-2009, the committee worked to:
 - Identify student learning outcomes, in the form of “statements of purpose”, for courses designated as carrying divisional breadth and ethnic studies credit, and to communicate these expectations more publicly, via the revised *Undergraduate Catalog* description of undergraduate general education. See <http://pubs.wisc.edu/ug/study.html#ger>.
 - Continued discussions of learning outcomes related to the “Wisconsin Experience”, and specifically, how the general education requirements contribute to that experience.
 - Continued discussion of how best to articulate learning outcomes related to the Ethnic Studies Requirement, and to develop projects related to assessing student learning in those areas.
 - As discussed above, review the QR-B course array and recommendations regarding sequencing of QR courses.
 - Consider recommendations for policy and further assessment of student learning arising from the 2007-2008 Communication A study.

- B. The assessment of student learning in the general education curriculum is an important component for institutional accreditation by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. Necessarily, UGEC members spent considerable time and effort preparing for the April 2009 site visit.

- The committee held several discussions of the HLC criteria for accreditation that concern student learning and assessment, as well as HLC's statements on General Education and on Assessment of Student Learning, and the "Six Fundamental Questions" about student learning.
- Committee members were encouraged to discuss these topics with other committees and groups, the better to disseminate broadly information about institutional efforts to evaluate the effectiveness the Gen Ed Requirements. These discussions reinforced that at UW-Madison, "assessment of student learning" serves multiple purposes: to ensure student access to required courses, to use institutional resources wisely, to match the intention of requirements to the effects achieved, and to evaluate and improve student learning.
- To assist colleagues preparing the self-study submitted to the HLC as part of the accreditation review, Nancy Westphal-Johnson and Elaine Klein prepared a comprehensive list summarizing all assessment activity undertaken since the last site visit (Appendix B).
- Hard copies of all UGEC agendas, meeting minutes, and assessment plans, proposals and reports for the past ten years were assembled for the resource room. These materials included an overview of these activities, which sought to provide a candid reflection on the state of assessment of General Education at UW-Madison (Appendix C).
- The General Education Requirements website was reorganized and updated (<http://www.ls.wisc.edu/gened>) in response to feedback received about presenting results of our assessment projects to greater effect. In Fall 2009, a more comprehensive revision of the website will be unveiled, with an updated appearance and with information organized in a more "user-friendly" format.

We were pleased to learn that the work of the UGEC contributed to the overall success of UW-Madison's site visit.

- C. Directors of the courses that meet the Communication A requirement continued to meet to discuss mechanisms for assessing student learning in these courses. These meetings led to a proposal submitted to and approved by the University Assessment Council to hire a Project Assistant in 2009-2010 who will help the group assess learning in this area.
- D. Professor Sherry Reames (English), who served for many years as the Gen Ed Communication Liaison, retired. In that role, she helped implement and sustain the requirements. She worked to resolve technical details with colleagues from the Office of Admissions, the Registrar's Office, advising units, and L&S Administration; and she worked with departments seeking to create courses that meet the Communication requirements. Throughout, she helped ensure that courses not only meet the criteria, but also that instructors teaching the distinctive Comm B requirement understand the value added to the course and to students' long-term educational development. The UGEC is grateful for her service and

dedication.

In 2009-2010, Professor David Zimmerman (English) will assume the role of UGEC Communication Liaison.

3. *Essential Learning and Continued Discussion of the Wisconsin Experience.*

- A. On March 12, 2009, the UGEC and several other offices and units revisited a discussion convened a year earlier with forty members of the faculty and staff who teach or influence large courses that serve our newest students (first-time, first-year and new transfer students). The 2008 session focused on two questions that were intended to provoke discussion across and within disciplinary boundaries; the 2009 discussions focused on whether these instructors had changed their teaching strategies to more explicitly to address values of liberal education in their courses. These discussions revealed continued support for the Essential Learning Outcomes and the Wisconsin Experience, and instructors of these “key courses” try to incorporate these ideas into their courses.
- B. A subcommittee of the University General Education Committee served as the review panel for student essays submitted in the third annual UW System Liberal Arts Essay contest. Gillian Stoddard Leatherberry (Political Science), whose essay discussed “The Spaces Between: Liberal Arts and Citizenship” was one of the three finalists, marking the fourth time a UW-Madison student has submitted a winning essay. (See <http://liberaleducation.uwsa.edu/scholarship/index.htm> for more information about this year’s contest and links to past winning essays.)
- C. In January 2009, members of the UGEC (Nancy Westphal-Johnson, Elaine Klein, and Mo Noonan-Bischof) participated in the Annual Meeting of the Association of American Colleges and Universities, presenting a session on “How Do We Assess *Essential Learning*?” The session was well attended and stimulated conversations with colleagues across the UW System, who are also engaged in the challenging question of how we can assess broadly construed learning outcomes, within the context of locally developed General Education and other requirements.
- D. UGEC member Jeff Russell (COE) presented (for information only) the COE2010 plan to the UGEC. That plan, in keeping with ABET accreditation standards, emphasizes the need for liberal learning in the context of an Engineering degree. In addition, he and his colleagues Sarah Pfatteicher and Daniel Kleinman presented for UGEC discussion a model for incorporating liberal education goals into a limited curriculum, via the new Interdisciplinary Certificate in “Integrated Studies in Science, Engineering, and Society”. This program offers students in the sciences an integrated approach to placing science and engineering studies into social and cultural contexts. Both projects reinforce the value of an integrated approach to liberal education, and of the distinctive experiences we can

promote in the context of a “Wisconsin Experience”.

- E. Building on past activities in reaching out to colleagues across campus, the “Convergence Group” (many of whom are members of the UGEC) was invited to submit a lead article in to the AACU flagship publication. The article is currently in press, and will be published in the Winter 2010 edition of *Liberal Education*.

Respectfully submitted by:

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University General Education Committee, 2008-2009

Chair: Nancy Westphal-Johnson, Associate Dean, Letters and Science Administration

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John Curtin, Psychology
Christina Greene, Afro-American Studies,
also, Ethnic Studies Review Committee
Jacqueline Hitchon, Life Sciences
Communication
Barbara Ingham, Food Science
Jim Johannes, School of Business
Susan Johnson, History, also, Ethnic Studies
Review Subcommittee
Clark Landis, Chemistry
Jeff Russell, Civil and Environmental
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Judy Switzky, Social Work
Jolanda Vanderwal Taylor, German

Ex Officio:

Mo Noonan Bischof, Assistant to the
Provost
Aaron Brower, Vice Provost for Teaching
and Learning, Social Work
Chuck Halaby, Research Director for
General Education Assessment,
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Social Sciences, L&S
Brad Hughes, Writing Center and Writing
Across the Curriculum
Elaine Klein, L&S Administration
Sarah McDaniel, Library & Information
Literacy Instruction Program
Gloria Mari-Beffa, Math, Quantitative
Reasoning Liaison (Semester II)
Sherry Reames, English, Communication
Liaison
Wren Singer, Center for the First-Year
Experience
Greg Smith, L&S Student Academic Affairs
Tim Walsh, Cross College Advising Service

Student Members appointed by ASM

Hilary Minor
Kimberly Mueller

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Susan Johnson, History, Chair
Mark Kenoyer, Anthropology
Elaine M. Klein, L&S Administration
Hilary Minor, Student member from ASM
Michael Olneck, Educational Policy Studies
and Sociology
Tori Richardson, Assistant Dean, L&S
Student Academic Affairs

General Education Research Committee

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General Education Assessment
Committee, Sociology, and Associate
Dean for Social Sciences, L&S
Elaine M. Klein, L&S Administration
Nancy Westphal-Johnson, Chair, Associate
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Letters and Science
Jim Wollack, Testing and Evaluation
Services

May 26, 2009

Progress Report on General Education Assessment, 2008-09

Implementation of new Long Range Assessment Plan

2008-09 was the first year of our new long-term assessment plan for general education based on the framework provided by the essential learning outcomes of liberal education. Our assessment efforts continue to emphasize program level learning goals with the goal of reviewing each broad GER area in a sequential way while at the same time taking advantage of opportunities that arise or pressure points that need to be addressed.

General Education Assessment Subcommittee: Associate Dean Professor Charles Halaby continues to serve as the Research Director for General Education and as Chair of the General Education Assessment Subcommittee. He also represents general education on the University Assessment Council. In 2008-09, Professor Halaby provided further analysis and advice concerning the Comm A requirement and in determining what assessment strategies might work best in assessing student learning related to the ethnic studies requirement (see below).

Assessment Projects, 2008-09

Continuation of Efforts to Identify Learning Outcome for Breadth: Building upon the work of the L&S Curriculum Committee in revising their catalog statements about breadth requirements in that college, we have also been able to better articulate the role of breadth in general education in the new catalog. The press of budget issues in the current academic year has deflected staff time from being able to hold the meetings and student focus groups envisioned in last year's proposal and we will be carrying over that funding into 2009-10.

Continued Discussion of Essential Learning Outcomes with Faculty and Others: Vice Provost Aaron Brower, along with the Convergence Group, and in partnership with UGEC, held two follow up sessions with faculty and instructional staff about learning outcomes this semester. We will be working further with the Convergence Group to plan sessions at the department and unit level this coming year and plan to reach out to units at the boundary between the public and the campus such as the Admissions Office, the Communications unit, and the Parents Program.

Ethnic Studies: We are, frankly, struggling with how to best assess student learning outcomes for the ESR since the ESR criteria focus on the attributes of courses that meet the requirement. As a result, the faculty aspirations regarding *student learning* must be inferred from these descriptive criteria. Though we have made progress in identifying realms of ESR learning, we have not yet been able to reframe the requirement from the viewpoint of student learning, which will be essential to assessing learning outcomes. Professor Susan Johnson has provided us with an interim report with benchmark data and

information from an initial perusal of syllabi from her own department. Follow-up from the benchmark study seems to indicate that, while some institutions have similar requirements to our ESR, they have not yet made progress on assessment of student learning in (as opposed to student satisfaction with) their programs. Research Director Halaby joined Professor Johnson and other members of the General Education Research Subcommittee in meeting with John Stevenson, Director of the UW Survey Center. We have discussed various possible large-scale studies of students and/or instructors. We will carry over the funding provided for that study with the Survey Center and will also be requesting the assistance of a project assistant in this area and in the Comm A area.

Communication A: The Communication A course directors, including others from related units (Testing and Evaluation, Center for the First Year Experience, Library and Information Literacy Instruction Program) met throughout the year to discuss placement and assessment among other topics. We recognize that a direct assessment of the learning outcomes of the Comm A course is needed in the near future. At UW-Madison, such a study would likely also involve looking at similar learning outcomes in students who were exempt from the Comm A requirement based on placement test score, AP credit, or college level work before attending UW-Madison. Comm A courses on the UW-Madison campus include instruction in writing, oral communication, and library/literacy information skills. Increasingly, we are also recognizing the role of Comm A as an important element of the first-year experience for many of our students. Given these comprehensive learning outcomes and the fact that some students are exempt from this requirement, it is likely that any direct assessment of Comm A learning outcomes will require a large and complex study. This requires that we be very aware of progress made in assessment and related areas at peer institutions so that we are able to avoid costly mistakes. For this reason, we will be requesting support for a project assistant position in 2009-10 since no staff members have adequate time available to devote to this work.

QR-B: As called for in our 2008-09 assessment funding proposal, we have gathered QR-B syllabi for review by the QR liaison, Professor Mari Gloria-Beffa. In 2009-10, Professor Mari-Beffa and Professor Halaby will be directing a review of the syllabi to determine whether the courses designated as meeting the QR-B requirement continue to do so. The review may also involve a panel of qualified “raters” to determine if the concept of “quantitative reasoning” is conceptualized as a set of skills that can be applied broadly.

Dissemination of Information on Assessment Projects and Student Learning: We have engaged in a variety of projects related to communication with others about student learning in General Education.

- Mo Noonan Bischof, Elaine Klein, and Nancy Westphal-Johnson presented a workshop at the Association of American Colleges and Universities national meeting entitled, “How Do We Assess Essential Learning Outcomes?” While this was an interactive session that engaged participants to think about issues related to the topic at their own institutions, it also allowed us to

highlight some of the on-going work at UW-Madison in general education assessment.

- The general education website (www.ls.wisc.edu/gened) was substantially updated this year as called for in our 2008-09 assessment funding proposal to provide for better navigation and presentation of information, including assessment reports and findings. We anticipate that more work will be needed to convert the website to the campus Content Management System model, where the GER website is likely to play a role in “serving” official information about the requirements to other campus websites that will draw upon commonly shared information. Some funding from 2008-09 remains for the purpose of the development and production of advising and outreach publications. We expect these to be web-based publications and they will be part of the conversion to the CMS system.
- As noted above, in conjunction with the Convergence Group, we expect to make more contact in 2009-10 with groups at the boundary of the campus and the public.
- Finally, as a component of our preparation for the decennial reaccreditation site visit by members of the Higher Learning Commission Consultant-Evaluator corps, we have compiled a set of historical documents (committee rosters, meeting agendas and notes) and assessment reports related to General Education. These materials (amounting to several hundred pages of text, contained in five three-ring binders) reflect considerable attention to assessment of student learning in the General Education program.

Table 7. Assessment of General Education Since 2000—Major Projects

Year	Study Topic or Requirement	Study
2008	Communication: Information Literacy	<i>Standardized Assessment of Information Literacy Skills.</i> Goal: To obtain baseline data on information literacy skills among incoming first-year students. Results: Although results revealed high level of preparation for students admitted to UW–Madison, sample size problems suggested the need to reevaluate use of this instrument and the study design.
2007	Communication-A (Comm-A)	<i>An Assessment Study of the Effectiveness of the General Education Communication ‘A’ Requirement.</i> Goal: To determine whether students in Comm-A courses report gains in specific communication skills targeted by Comm-A courses. Results: Students reported significant gains; students in ESL versions of Comm-A report competencies equal to those reported by native speakers of English. Study also provided opportunity to improve administrative processes for calibration among Comm-A courses.
2007	Breadth	<i>UW–Madison General Education Requirements Survey.</i> Goal: Obtain baseline data on instructor awareness/value for the general education requirements Results: Instructors teaching in areas of the curriculum that are regularly assessed report greater understanding of and value of breadth requirements. The study revealed a disconnect between divisional areas, and highlighted the need to engage instructors in dialogue about liberal education and breadth.
2006	Quantitative Reasoning B (QR-B)	<i>Student Perceptions of Learning in Quantitative Reasoning B Courses.</i> Goal: To understand student perceptions of quantitative learning in non-math/statistical/computational QR-B courses. Results: Confirmed strong learning in mathematical skill areas; however, the study identified a need to address “quantitative critical thinking.”
2005	Quantitative Reasoning A (QR-A)	<i>Two Assessment Studies of the General Education Quantitative Reasoning ‘A’ Requirement” (I) How the QR-A Requirement Affects Mathematical Proficiency; and (II) How the QR-A Requirement Affects Student Self-Assessments of Quantitative Reasoning Skills and Preparation for Future Courses.</i> Goal: To measure student learning in light of learning goals identified for QR-A, using survey of student perception of skills and pre/post test. Results: Study demonstrated strong learning gains in post-test. The study also identified a strong correlation between student perception of skills gained and their demonstration of skills gained, which strengthens confidence in use of perception-of-learning surveys as a strategy for assessing student learning.
2005	Communication-B (Comm-B)	<i>Administrative Analysis: Comm-B Course Credit Transfer.</i> Goal: To ensure appropriate transfer credit into UW–Madison. Result: New courses were developed to award transfer credit for content without also granting credit for distinctive Comm-B pedagogy.
2005	Ethnic Studies	<i>Review of Ethnic Studies Course Array (May 2005)</i> Goal: To implement revisions to ethnic study course criteria. Result: Descriptive guidelines and student learning outcomes for courses meeting the ethnic studies requirement were established. Course syllabi were evaluated to calibrate course array to learning outcomes. The oversight and administration of the requirement was improved.
2004	Communication-B (Comm-B)	<i>Administrative Analysis: Student Comm-B Course-Taking Patterns.</i> Goal: To identify “redundant” Comm-B credit. Results: Reduced curricular redundancy in Comm-B course array; identified transfer-credit issues.
2002	Ethnic Studies	<i>Review of the Ethnic Studies Requirement (March 2000–May 2002).</i> Goal: To review this decade-old requirement and evaluate student understanding of learning goals, identify administrative issues. Results: Twenty-three recommendations were approved, including recommendations to revise the requirement and course criteria, define and assess student learning outcomes; and to convene an implementation committee to enact the changes.
2001	Communication-B (Comm-B)	<i>Communication-B Study: Outcomes Associated with the General Education Communication-B Requirement.</i> Goal: To evaluate student learning in Comm-B courses. Result: Recommendations to adjust course criteria, provide more resources to support oral communication instruction, and expand requirement to take Comm-A. Several recommendations were enacted.

Preface

Reflections on Assessment in General Education

Spring 2009

Nancy Westphal-Johnson & Elaine M. Klein

The history of the General Education Requirements and assessment appears in the 2008 General Education Assessment Plan. In that document, the University General Education Committee (UGEC) described an assessment strategy that draws upon the interests of our faculty, staff, and other expertise available among the campus community. Program-level assessment projects are designed to ensure that those efforts do not fail due to limited personnel or strained financial resources. Faculty oversight is provided by the UGEC, by faculty leaders in GER assessment projects, and by the University Academic Planning Council. The overall emphasis is to have a sustainable, flexible, and efficient assessment program. Assessment efforts at UW-Madison use various approaches, including quantitative social science research practices (e.g., database analysis, surveys, comparison of pre-/post-test) and qualitative approaches (e.g., focus groups, portfolio analysis). No single tool, test, or method will suit the array of learning goals identified above. GER Assessment projects are designed to balance these demands, as well as to obtain accurate and useful information efficiently. The plan outlines efforts that are both on-going and episodic, with the goal of reviewing each broad GER area more or less in sequence, while also standing ready to take advantage of new opportunities that arise or to respond to urgent demands. This approach ensures continued monitoring of overall progress in areas where assessment results have already led to changes to the curriculum (Communication, Ethnic Studies), while also providing resources to carry out a variety of specialized projects in different time periods and phases. All of these features reflect our campus values and are consistent with our campus culture, which is essential for effective assessment at UW-Madison.

When we reflect on how assessment of General Education in 2009 differs from what might have been observed in 1999, we see several key differences:

- At the time of the last site visit, we had not yet grappled with the challenges inherent in working to assess requirements that were written before institutions focused on student-centered learning requirements. Managing this shift while trying to obtain genuine measures of student learning continues to be a challenge.
- Early attempts to assess student learning tended to focus on matters essential to effective administration, rather than on student learning. As we made more progress, we began to address the quality and nature of student learning. Today, although administrative concerns must always be addressed, we focus much more on learning.
- We learned from the highly successful Communication B study that successful work in assessment which provides useful information about student learning can change attitudes toward assessment. That foundation helps us to improve upon

our work. As a result, we're now working harder to communicate effectively about what we know about student learning.

- The 2008 plan reflects this continually evolving understanding of how to effectively measure, improve, and communicate about student learning in General Education. The plan includes - for the first time – statements describing student learning outcomes for each general education area, and connects the requirements to the broader campus-level outcomes found in *The Wisconsin Experience*.

Today, we are working toward integrating the existing General Education Requirements into the broader (and more student-centered) learning outcomes articulated as the *Wisconsin Experience*. We welcome the extent to which the AAC&U “Liberal Education and America’s Promise campaign has provided synergies within the university that help us connect to what we value most about student learning – and which help us identify what we need to understand about how well students achieve that learning.

Please feel free to take this page with you if you find these observations useful. If you have questions or comments, please contact:

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