

## **Progress Report on General Education Assessment, 2009-2010**

### **Long Range Assessment Plan:**

The 2008 five-year “Assessment Plan for General Education at UW-Madison” articulates the strategy for assessing student learning within the UW-Madison’s General Education Requirement. For 2009-10, assessment projects focused on Ethnic Studies, Communication A, and QR-B. This focus diverges somewhat from the cycle for assessment proposed in the 2008 plan, indicating delays encountered with respect to planning projects to assess student learning with respect to the Communication A and Ethnic Studies requirements. Both projects have proven to be somewhat more challenging than originally envisioned; however, we are optimistic about the plans for 2010-2011.

Professor and Associate Dean Chuck Halaby provided guidance to the UGEC and consultation on assessment efforts in 2009-2010, in his role as Research Director for General Education Assessment and chair of the General Education Assessment Subcommittee. This year, the subcommittee conducted its work in consultation with the Ethnic Studies Subcommittee and the Communication A Course Directors Subcommittee of the UGEC. Dean Halaby also served as the UGEC representative on the University Assessment Council. We take this opportunity to salute Dean Halaby’s many contributions to general education assessment as he rotates out of the role of Research Director beginning in 2009-10.

### ***Assessment Projects, 2009-10***

#### **Quantitative Reasoning Studies:**

##### ***QR-A as a prerequisite for QR-B:***

Professor Gloria Mari-Beffa, QR liaison, and Assistant Dean Elaine Klein completed the review of QR-B courses that began last year, as reported in the 2008-09 progress report. The review was undertaken to determine that all current QR-B courses meet the stated criteria for QR-B courses, and to ensure that all of these courses require satisfaction of QR-A as a prerequisite. The course syllabi of 78 QR-B courses were obtained and reviewed. Professor Mari-Beffa corresponded with departments offering QR-B courses for which there were questions about meeting the QR-B criteria or about enforcing QR-A as a prerequisite, and some courses were revised to align with the QR-B criteria. Of the 78 courses, 30 did not specifically require QR-A as a prerequisite. Upon further investigation it was determined that some of these courses had other prerequisites that required completion of QR-A. The remaining courses agreed to add “Satisfaction of QR-A” as a prerequisite. One course elected to have the QR-B designation removed. Assistant Dean Klein worked with Curricular Services to enforce the prerequisite, by creating a student group into which students are placed when they satisfy QR-A; when they do so, they may register for QR-B courses.

### *QR-B Project Assessment*

The completion of the QR-B syllabus review and enforcement of the QR-A prerequisite makes possible the next stage of a plan to assess directly student learning in “non-mathematical” QR-B courses. In Summer 2010, Professor Mari-Beffa will invite faculty to identify (or, if necessary, create) a "quintessentially QR-B" problem that will be embedded into an exam or assignment they give at the end of the course. Instructors would submit all responses to this question and Professor Mari-Beffa would select a random sample from each course. The course instructor, Professor Mari-Beffa, possibly the General Education Assessment Research Director, and outside raters would then review the students' work to determine proficiency in QR-B related learning outcomes.

### **Communication Studies:**

#### *Communication A*

As indicated in the assessment funding request for 2009-10, the Comm A course directors group (which has since become a recognized subcommittee of the UGEC) determined a need for benchmarking and background work in the area of placement, criteria for 21<sup>st</sup> century literacies, course structures, assessment techniques and technologies as a precursor to undertaking direct assessment of student learning outcomes in Communication A. Ross Benbow, whose work as a General Education Assessment Project Assistant was made possible through the UGEC assessment funding grant, devoted substantial time to contacting and studying peer institutions about these topics, and the subcommittee is working to complete the background work needed to conduct a direct assessment of student learning in the requirement.

The Comm A Course Directors Subcommittee's work has now advanced to a point at which we will be requesting funding for a direct study of Comm A student learning outcomes for 2010-11.

#### *Communication A and B (sequence)*

In the course of discussions about sequencing of QR-A and QR-B, the UGEC and Comm A Course Directors Subcommittee considered also a concern that students should also take the communication courses in sequence. This is not currently required, as it is with the QR requirements which explicitly state that the courses must be completed in order (A before B). Since we lacked data on the number of students who take courses out of sequence and also have several questions concerning student satisfaction of the Comm A requirement in general, Associate Dean Nancy Westphal-Johnson sought the assistance of the Office of Academic Planning and Analysis. Clare Huhn, APA Policy and Planning Analyst, conducted preliminary studies that suggest that only 2% of students may take the courses out of sequence; based on anecdotal evidence, many of those who do are admitted into FIGs courses after careful review of their previous coursework in communication and writing preparation. The UGEC decided to wait until the full report from Ms. Huhn is available before making a final decision about this issue although,

given the small number of students affected, and the large workload associated with reviewing syllabi and enforcing prerequisites, it is likely that imposing a sequencing rule on Communication A and B is not the best use of limited resources. It is expected the UGEC will receive the full report by the beginning of the 2010-11 fall semester.

### **Ethnic Studies Requirement:**

As noted above, the UGEC received assessment funding for a project assistant position who has been working to advance the assessment of student learning in two areas: Communication A and Ethnic Studies. Ross Benbow has been working with the Ethnic Studies Subcommittee to identify, and ultimately, assess student learning outcomes in the Ethnic Studies requirement. While we had originally planned to conduct focus groups with faculty and academic instructional staff who are involved with ESR courses, the ESR Subcommittee recommended instead that we undertake a “March 12-like event” to foster conversation about faculty and staff learning goals in ESR courses as well as best practices for teaching in such courses. Assistant Vice Provost Mo Noonan Bischof authorized the change in funding that had been set aside for focus groups and incentives to support this event instead. (Please see the attached agenda) This event filled to capacity with 38 ESR instructors and/or department chairs/faculty representatives of departments with a large concentration of ESR courses. By all accounts, the event was highly productive and very useful in creating a cross-campus discussion of learning outcomes in ESR. We were not able to accommodate all who were interested and thus held a follow-up session as part of the campus-wide Teaching and Learning Symposium. This discussion attracted twenty faculty and instructional staff, some of whom attended the first event and others who could not. Again, this discussion was by all accounts productive and highly engaging. At both events, many faculty and instructional staff asked that we hold similar discussions in the future since they highly valued interaction with peers on these topics. A final synthesis of the two discussions is currently being prepared.

### **Learning Outcomes for Breadth:**

Due to the press of other projects, we have not yet been able to hold focus groups of faculty and instructional staff around the area of learning outcomes in breadth areas. At the same time, the work of faculty and staff in various areas, such as that found in the focused attention given to the Humanities during the “Year of the Humanities” has moved some groups on campus to a greater awareness of breadth areas. We hope, in the next conversation about essential learning (the strategy we have used in our “March 12 events”) to capitalize on these efforts. For example, the next conversation might focus on “Essential Learning in the Humanities”, in an event that would bring together faculty and staff from across the campus for synergistic conversation from which we will be able to distill statements of desired learning outcomes.

## **Website and Communications:**

The General Education website conversion to a CMS format was finished this year. The revised website is easier to navigate, thus making our assessment studies and findings more readily available. See [www.ls.wisc.edu/gened](http://www.ls.wisc.edu/gened).

## **Dissemination of Information on Assessment Projects and Student Learning:**

Several members of the UGEC have engaged in discussions of General Education and Essential Learning at UW-Madison across campus and beyond the boundaries of campus.

- Mo Noonan Bischof, Elaine Klein, and Nancy Westphal-Johnson presented a workshop at the UW System Presidential Summit entitled “How do We Assess Essential Learning Outcomes?” While this session highlighted work at UW-Madison, it also allowed for participants across the UW System to discuss approaches and issues at their own institutions.
- The Convergence Group wrote an article for the current Winter 2010 issue of Liberal Education, “Liberal Education and Institutional Identity: The University of Wisconsin-Madison Experience”. This essay discusses the need for each institution to take ownership of the essential learning outcomes of liberal education in its own distinctive way as UW-Madison had done through the Wisconsin Experience.
- Vice Provost Aaron Brower joined with UW System Colleague Rebecca Karoff to present “High Impact Practices and the UW-Madison Experience” at the UW System Presidential Summit. Vice Provost Brower was also a co-presenter of “Closing the Achievement Gap with an Emerging Hybrid Classroom Model” and “Closing the Achievement Gap Through Course Reform in Introductory Chemistry” at the same conference.
- Wren Singer and colleagues in the Center for the First Year Experience gave a presentation entitled “Engaging First-Year Students in Large Lectures” at the UW System Presidential Summit and followed this with a presentation entitled, “Engaging First-Year Students in Large Lectures: The Teaching Assistant Experience” at the UW-Madison Teaching and Learning Symposium.