

2005-06 General Education Assessment Activity Report

May 4, 2006

Under the leadership of Research Director Charles Halaby and the General Education Research Group (Charles Halaby, Elaine Klein, Char Tortorice, and Nancy Westphal-Johnson), the University General Education Committee (UGEC) carried out a number of assessment projects in 2005-06. A summary of each project is provided below.

Assessment Projects, 2005-2006

1. **QR B Study directed by Professor and Associate Dean Chuck Halaby.** The goal of the 2006 Quantitative Reasoning-B assessment is to determine the extent to which satisfying the QR B requirement achieves fundamental general education objectives. The basic research aim is to estimate the contribution of QR B course work to student progress in the acquisition of quantitative reasoning skills. The data for the study are generated by a cross sectional survey that ascertains student self-reports pertaining to their level of improvement on key dimensions of quantitative reasoning skill and knowledge (see attached instrument in Appendix 1). The core of the analysis consists of rigorous comparisons of the quantitative reasoning outcomes achieved by two groups of students, those who enrolled in their first QR B course during fall semester 2005-06, and those observationally equivalent students who had not yet enrolled in their first QR B course. With proper analytical and statistical controls, these comparisons will yield an estimate of the effect that satisfying the QR B requirement has on quantitative reasoning proficiency.

The main features of the study design are as follows:

- *Target population:* freshmen and sophomores who were required to take a QR-B course, but had not yet satisfied the requirement as of the beginning of fall semester, 2005-06.
- *Sampling design:* stratified random sample of 160 students each from among those who did and those who did not take a QR-B course during fall semester, 2005-06.
- *Dependent variable:* a scale measuring quantitative reasoning skill/knowledge.
- *Data collection instrument:* a mail survey administered by the University of Wisconsin Survey Center.
- *Objective:* compare students who did to those who did not take QR-B on their mean levels of post-semester 1 self-assessments of QR skill.
- *Logistics:* During the first week of spring semester, 2005-2006, students were sent by mail a questionnaire along with a \$5.00 cash pre-incentive for completing and returning it.

The expectation is that the analysis will be completed during early summer 2006, with a report to follow shortly afterward.

2. **General Education Awareness and Articulation Web Survey of Faculty, Instructional Academic Staff, and Teaching Assistants.** A web survey of approximately 1,500 faculty, academic staff, and teaching assistants who taught a QR, Communications, Ethnic Studies, or breadth course in the fall semester, 2005-06 is currently in the field. The survey instrument was written by a UGEC subcommittee with assistance from the UW Survey Center. Survey respondents are asked to provide their perspective on the appropriate requirement(s) and to indicate whether and how they articulate the larger course goals in their course and, if not, what barriers they may face in this respect. The purpose of the survey is two-fold; one, to gain baseline information about instructor awareness and perceptions and, equally important, to draw attention to the possibility of being more intentional about these larger course goals in the context of a particular course. We expect to receive an analysis of the survey results from the UW Survey Research Center early this summer (see survey instrument attached as Appendix 2).

The instructor survey, coupled with what we learned from students in the mini focus group project last year, will serve to identify areas for which clearer communication about the role of these courses in conveying a broad education would be useful. The UGEC has been working with the campus AACU Liberal Education and America's Promise Project as well as with the UW System Advisory Group on the Liberal Arts; both of these projects provide a basis for future work to be undertaken to forward better understanding of both the GER breadth goals (which are liberal education goals) and the broader role of liberal education in American education. A project that has been discussed extensively is one in which instructors would be asked to include information about the broader course goals on their syllabi; that project will likely be included in a future Gen Ed assessment request.

3. **TA Training in Communication B courses:** This study, to be undertaken by Brad Hughes of the Writing Center and Writing Across the Curriculum, is currently still in the planning phase. We request carry-over funding for this course; Dr. Hughes currently expects to work on the project this summer.
4. **General Education Breadth Areas and Transfer Student Issues:** Both the General Education Program and Academic Planning and Analysis lacked the staff capacity and time to carry out these assessment projects this year. No funding had been set aside for these. We are proposing the General Education breadth study for next year. We are putting the study concerning transfer student issues on hold for the time being with the realization that our available staff resources can only stretch so far.
5. **Planning for Comm A Assessment:** Members of the General Education Research Group met over the course of the spring semester with all of the Comm A course directors and with Abbie Loomis of the Library and Information Literacy Office to plan possible assessment studies of the Communication A course. No funds were expended in this fiscal year. Please see our assessment proposal for 2006-07.

Dissemination of Assessment Projects and Information: Nancy Westphal-Johnson gave presentations on the general education assessment program at both the Council of Associate

Deans and the University Academic Planning Council. Chuck Halaby made a presentation on last year's QR-A study to the University Academic Planning Council.

University General Education Committee, 2005-2006

Nancy Westphal-Johnson, Letters and Science Administration, Chair

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Brad Hughes, Director, Writing Center and Writing Across the Curriculum

Elaine Klein, Assistant Dean, L&S Academic Planning, Program Review & Assessment

Abbie Loomis, Coordinator, Library & Information Literacy Instruction Program

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Student Member:

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