

2006-07 General Education Assessment Activity Report

May 11, 2007

Under the leadership of Research Director Charles Halaby and the General Education Research Group (Chuck Halaby, Elaine Klein, Char Tortorice, and Nancy Westphal-Johnson), the University General Education Committee (UGEC) carried out a number of assessment projects in 2006-07. Although most efforts related to the assessment of student learning are likely to be exempt from Federal Human Subjects Research Regulations, as a principle of good practice and in anticipation of the possibility that our results may someday be published, we submit General Education Assessment research protocols to the Social and Behavioral Science Institutional Review Board. Protocol numbers are included with subject headings below.

Assessment Projects, 2006-2007

Completion of Quantitative Reasoning B Study (SS IRB Protocol #SE-2204-0524): The goal of the 2006 Quantitative Reasoning-B study directed by Professor Chuck Halaby was to determine the extent to which satisfying the QR B requirement achieves fundamental general education objectives. At the time of our last progress summary, the final report was not yet available. The final report, "An Assessment Study of the Effectiveness of the General Education Quantitative Reasoning B Requirement at the University of Wisconsin-Madison" was completed by Professor Halaby in November, 2006; a copy is attached here as Appendix A. The study and report were discussed at the December, 2006 University General Education Committee meeting. The overall findings show that students who took a QR-B course reported greater improvement in their QR skills and all students reported gains in critical thinking. These are similar to the results of the parallel QR A study completed last year.

TA Training in Communication B Courses: Lack of staff time to plan and implement the study (including the hiring of a project assistant) led to cancellation of this study. We do not plan to try to undertake it again in the near future.

Communication A Assessment (SS IRB Protocol #SE2007-0025 and #SE2007-0261): Members of the General Education Research Group met over the course of the spring semester, 2006 and summer, 2007 with all of the Comm A course directors and with Abbie Loomis of the Library and Information Literacy Office to plan this assessment project. Under the direction of Chuck Halaby, a survey instrument (Appendix B) was developed to ascertain student self-reporting pertaining to level of improvement in areas related to the Communication A criteria. The study used a stratified sample of incoming first-year students who completed a Comm A course in the fall semester, 2006-07 compared to a like sample of students who need to take a course to fulfill Comm A but did not do so in the fall semester. Survey items asked students to reflect on their overall academic experience in the fall semester on several items directly related to the Comm A course criteria. Costs of the study include survey administration by the UW Survey Center, mailing costs, and pre-incentives of \$5.00 per student. Data collection is complete with a very good 79% response rate. Professor Halaby expects to receive the dataset from the Survey Center in late May and then will consult with Director Tortorice in Testing and Evaluation for the addition of variable information. Analysis should then take place this summer.

Because of the different nature and student population in English 118, the Communication A course for students for whom English is not a native language, a special version of the survey (Appendix C) was administered by the ESL Program in English 118 courses with a paper and pencil form. Results will be tabulated and analyzed over the summer.

Library and Information Literacy Instruction Program SAILS Study (SS IRB #SE-2006-0478): The campus Library & Information Literacy Instruction Program conducted a pre-test of a sample of incoming first-year students enrolled in Comm A courses to document the nature and extent of their information literacy skills. However, there were many complications associated with trying to contact and test incoming first-year students at the starting point of the semester. As a result, the participation rate was extremely low despite the enormous effort of many staff members. Discussion of the project at a UGEC meeting has pointed us in another direction and Abbie Loomis has been able to make plans with the SOAR Program to test the appropriate sample of students as a part of SOAR activities in the summer of 2007.

This is an important study since the needs and skills of our students in this area are developing at a time of great technological flux and change. Many assumptions are made by both faculty and librarians concerning the information-seeking skills (or lack thereof) of our Net Gen students. A pre-test will give us data against which to measure these assumptions. Also while Comm-A librarians have anecdotal evidence of students' skill levels based on their interactions with students during the information literacy module that is a requirement for all sections of Comm-A and on their work with undergraduates at our reference desks, there still is a need to document through a pre-test the exact nature of incoming students' research skill levels. The results of this test will be used by librarians to fine tune not only the information literacy module for Comm-A, but their other instructional efforts for undergraduates, including the Comm-B courses for which they provide instruction. For the 2005-06 academic year, they did 940 instructional sessions for undergraduate courses, reaching 14,525 undergraduate students. Since helping students develop research skills is something faculty also are committed to, the results of the proposed pre-test also will be of use to them. In addition, the pre-test will give both faculty and librarians a benchmark to use in assessing the effectiveness of their efforts to help undergraduate students develop the skills and knowledge base that define an information literate person.

As a side-note, this was the second time we attempted to conduct assessment on incoming first-year students at the beginning of their first semester on campus. This can be important in order to establish baselines. In each of these assessment projects, we found it was extremely difficult to connect with the students given that they don't immediately begin using University email and are so generally unaware of the campus. In this case, we had the help of Comm A instructors but they also were frequently new to their teaching roles and there was a great deal of confusion. We mention this as a helpful tip for others on campus conducting assessment with this group of students. We have had better results contacting and gaining participation with first-year students later on in the semester and are hopeful that the SOAR environment will also prove useful.

Core Plus Math: Elaine Klein and Nancy Westphal-Johnson held multiple meetings with Clare Huhn of Academic Planning and Analysis and the Provost's Office and also conferred with Chuck Halaby to discuss a study that would look at the variable mathematics preparation of high

school students who ultimately attend UW-Madison. Consideration of such a study was recommended by the Mathematics Department in conjunction with endorsing the UGEC Subcommittee report (chaired by Professor Halaby) on high school math curricula. It is very challenging to identify appropriate cohorts of students who studied “traditional” or “integrated” math through high school. This is due to both the mixed math curricula (and the many variant descriptions of these curricula) offered by UW-Madison feeder high schools as well as the many variables that may be associated with choice of math curriculum (alternatives offered by the school, math interest or aversion, hiring a tutor, etc.). For some time we have been considering whether to examine students who went to the same high school but had different math curricula or to examine students who went to a high school that only offered an integrated math curriculum. Both designs would have drawbacks and could be very labor intensive in terms of identifying students, verifying math curricula, ruling out intervening variables, etc. During our deliberations, the Madison Metropolitan School District announced a comprehensive study of the math curricula in Madison high schools in conjunction with a UW-Madison NSF grant proposal. Currently, we are planning to await results of this study before proceeding further.

General Education Breadth Areas (“Articulation Survey” UWSC-P9478, Nora Cate Schaefer, PI, SSIBB deemed exempt): We now have the full analysis of the instructor articulation survey completed in 2005-06 and will use that as a cornerstone as we consider further work in this important area. Although we did not make the progress in this area that we had hoped to do so given the press of other duties for those of us involved in general education assessment, we do expect to focus many of our assessment efforts in this area in the near future. Our work with the American Association of Colleges and Universities’ LEAP (Liberal Education and America’s Promise) has provided us with outcomes based liberal learning goals and has added great synergy to our work in this area. (The final report will be forwarded as soon as it is available.)

Ethnic Studies Requirement Faculty Focus Groups: This assessment project has been postponed due to campus leaves of key ESR Subcommittee faculty members. We will reconsider activities in this area when they are back on campus.

Dissemination of Assessment Projects and Information: Chuck Halaby, Elaine Klein, and Nancy Westphal-Johnson continue to be the key contacts and spokespersons for General Education Assessment. In this capacity, they were responsible for the following presentations and activities:

- Chuck Halaby and Nancy Westphal-Johnson have made formal presentations on assessment of student learning and its impact on UGEC recommendations to the University Academic Planning Council.
- All three members of this group participated in a formal presentation to the UW System Liberal Arts Deans on the structure and assessment of general education at UW-Madison.
- Elaine Klein has continued her work with the Higher Learning Commission in providing consultation to the Assessment Academy on the topic of general education assessment.
- Chuck Halaby gave a presentation to the Assessment Council about the QR studies he has conducted.
- Elaine Klein and Nancy Westphal-Johnson represented the UGEC in discussions with the Department of Public Instruction as part of the School of Education’s regular certification review.

- As part of the LEAP Project at UW-Madison, Jolanda Vanderwal Taylor and Nancy Westphal-Johnson have made numerous presentations throughout the campus on outcomes-based liberal learning. These presentations culminated in a campus-wide “Advising Summit”, co-sponsored by the UGEC, which was held to provide advisors with strategies for promoting among students a better understanding of a broad and liberal education.

University General Education Committee, 2006-07

Nancy Westphal-Johnson, Letters and Science Administration, Chair

Term Members:

Larry Bank, Civil and Environmental Engineering
 Mark Browne, School of Business
 Cary Forest, Physics
 Jacqueline Hitchon, Life Sciences Communication
 Susan Johnson, History
 J. Mark Kenoyer, Anthropology
 Mary Ellen Murray, Nursing
 Mary Rossa, Communication Arts
 Jolanda Vanderwal Taylor, German

Ex Officio:

Mo Noonan Bischof, Assistant to the Provost, Co-Chair, University Assessment Council
 Aaron Brower, Vice Provost for Teaching and Learning, Social Work (Semester II)
 Richard Brualdi, Math, Quantitative Reasoning Liaison
 Charles Halaby, Research Director for General Education Assessment, Sociology, and Assoc.
 Dean-Soc. Science, L&S
 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
 Sherry Reames, English; Communication Liaison
 Virginia Sapiro, Associate Vice Chancellor for Teaching and Learning, Political Science and
 Women’s Studies (Semester I)
 Wren Singer, Orientation and New Student Programs
 Greg Smith, L&S Student Academic Affairs
 Tim Walsh, Cross College Advising Service

Student Members:

Hilary Minor
 Deborah Meiners



General Education Assessment

Please think about the courses that you took at UW during the fall semester. This includes the lectures, readings, discussion sections, and assignments, as well as any other experiences you had as part of these courses.

How much did any of these courses teach you to do each of the following:

(Please circle one answer for each item)

	Not at all	A little	A fair amount	A lot
1. Deliver a speech or oral presentation?	1	2	3	4
2. Retrieve and analyze information from library databases?	1	2	3	4
3. Select and focus topics for a paper or speech/presentation?	1	2	3	4
4. Recognize logically sound arguments?	1	2	3	4
5. Use language clearly and appropriately?	1	2	3	4
6. Support ideas in a paper or speech/presentation?	1	2	3	4
7. Produce papers or speeches/presentations for a specific audience?	1	2	3	4
<i>(Please continue on the next page)</i>				

APPENDIX B

How much did any of these courses teach you to do each of the following:

(Please circle one answer for each item)

	Not at all	A little	A fair amount	A lot
8. Judge the credibility and soundness of evidence?	1	2	3	4
9. Organize ideas for a paper or speech/presentation?	1	2	3	4
10. Improve your grammar, punctuation, and style?	1	2	3	4
11. Cite sources and avoid plagiarism?	1	2	3	4
12. Use library databases to locate research materials specific to the topic of a paper or speech/presentation?	1	2	3	4
13. Write and revise drafts of a paper or speech/presentation?	1	2	3	4
14. Critique speeches/presentations or papers?	1	2	3	4

Thank you for your help!

Please return this completed questionnaire in the postage paid envelope provided,
or send it to:

UW Survey Center, 630 W Mifflin St. Room 174, Madison, WI 53703-2636.



Student ID Number: _____



General Education Assessment

Please think about the courses that you took at UW this semester. This includes the lectures, readings, discussion sections, and assignments, as well as any other experiences you had as part of these courses.

How much did any of these courses teach you to do each of the following:

(Please circle one answer for each item)

	Not at all	A little	A fair amount	A lot
1. Deliver a speech or oral presentation?	1	2	3	4
2. Retrieve and analyze information from library databases?	1	2	3	4
3. Select and focus topics for a paper or speech/presentation?	1	2	3	4
4. Recognize logically sound arguments?	1	2	3	4
5. Use language clearly and appropriately?	1	2	3	4
6. Support ideas in a paper or speech/presentation?	1	2	3	4
7. Produce papers or speeches/presentations for a specific audience?	1	2	3	4

(Please continue on the next page)

How much did any of these courses teach you to do each of the following:*(Please circle one answer for each item)*

	Not at all	A little	A fair amount	A lot
8. Judge the credibility and soundness of evidence?	1	2	3	4
9. Organize ideas for a paper or speech/presentation?	1	2	3	4
10. Improve your grammar, punctuation, and style?	1	2	3	4
11. Cite sources and avoid plagiarism?	1	2	3	4
12. Use library databases to locate research materials specific to the topic of a paper or speech/presentation?	1	2	3	4
13. Write and revise drafts of a paper or speech/presentation?	1	2	3	4
14. Critique speeches/presentations or papers?	1	2	3	4
15. Understand the expectations U.S. professors have of you?	1	2	3	4
16. Feel more comfortable speaking in your classes?	1	2	3	4
17. Feel more comfortable speaking with your instructors?	1	2	3	4
18. Understand the role of asking and/or responding to questions in the U.S. classroom?	1	2	3	4

Thank you for your help!

Please return this completed questionnaire to the person who gave it to you,
or send it to:

Professor Chuck Halaby
Academic Planning and Assessment
307 E South Hall, 1055 Bascom Mall, Madison, WI 53706.

APPENDIX C