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 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.