

## October 2<sup>nd</sup> Open Faculty Meeting Grove Forum

### Issues Discussed

**The main driver for reform is the new Middle States standards, which requires assessment of student learning for each and every standard.**

**Another driver for reform is the inability to assess our current program.**

FM - Challenge from HCS that the method used to count the number of learning objectives was misguided. It was up to faculty teaching the course how to tease out the objectives in a way appropriate to the course material and discipline. The question was asked whether doing this on a competency-base made assessment more straightforward.

*The question then came up several times – is this really an assessment problem or a program problem and shouldn't we first figure out what is going on programmatically and fix that before upending the entire thing? In essence, come up with better assessment of our current program rather than changing our program to assess it.*

GEC – The new Middle States Standards require assessment of competencies that our current program does not address. So, at a minimum, the current program needs to be updated to reflect these additional competencies. Without restructuring the program at all, more learning objectives need to be added to an already cumbersome set. Restructuring the program is the best option because doing so would allow us to re-focus on student learning and streamline the program by including the missing learning objectives and reconsidering/purging extant learning objectives that are cumbersome or nearly impossible to assess.

FM - If it is a question of program assessment vs. student learning assessment? (i.e., that we cannot assess student learning given the way our objectives are currently written?)

GEC – The current program was assessed in 2009. What we learned then is: a) the current structure of our GenEd program places an extraordinary burden on faculty to assess completely (owing to the extremely large numbers of stated and embedded learning objectives); and b) many of our learning objectives are nearly impossible to assess consistently across the program (owing to the *post-hoc* way that learning objectives were created ~ after the program was created and not necessarily aligned with student learning, but aligned with departmental turf).

FM - If a new program goes through, it was emphasized that the GEC Assessment and Program Committee had to provide guidance on how to assess, including instruments, time frames, etc.

GEC – Of course. It is a best practice to assess one or very few learning objectives each semester, program-wide. This practice allows the campus community to collaboratively seek clarification and guidance (and the GEC to provide both), and to normalize expectations about baseline, above average, average, and below average competency levels across the curriculum. Ideally, time frames would be linked with our normal 5-year and 1-year program review cycles.

## Discussions about assessment in general.

FM - When first year experience is implemented, that would be the beginning point of assessment for the Gen Ed program – old or new?

GEC – This is an open question.

*One point was made about identifying specific classes that were not [helping students to achieve the desired learning objectives] and whether or not the Gen Ed Committee could go back to that class specifically. I was unclear about the answer – GEC does the assessment in other programs and individual courses are not targeted.*

*Institutions that are doing well in terms of assessment, are they using standardized instruments? Discussed the Values Rubrics written by the AACU. It was noted that the effort by the Program Committee in devising rubrics was frustrating and forcing all competencies into a 3x3 matrix was arbitrary, misinformed about pedagogy, and did not pay heed to the learning objectives. It was noted, when HCS said they used their professional organization's rubric, that it was inappropriate for GEC to force something else.*

GEC – The Program Committee does not have any authority “to force” anything; only to make recommendations to the GEC, which department representatives on the GEC vote to ‘approve’ or ‘not approve.’ Last year, the Program Committee solicited advice from multiple departments regarding how they currently assess student learning. Some gave their advice. Any miscommunication about “forcing” was unintentional.

*This moved to a discussion about the difference between having a rubric that measured whether a competency had been learned vs. whether the competency had been well used. The example was the English department rubric. It is not appropriate for a non-English department to have a rubric that measures if the student ‘learned’ how to write, but that it would be very useful to have a rubric to evaluate how well a student wrote (practiced).*

*The distinction it seems:*

<i>I – Competency Introduced</i>
<i>P – Competency Practiced</i>
<i>A – Competency Assessed *** Just my thought.</i>

**Another driver for reform was a general trend away from content-based programs to competency-based, with the explicit aim of encouraging cross-disciplinary courses.**

FM - First question was whether competencies were being generated internally or externally.

FM - Second, if different disciplines are receiving the same tag, how is assessment possible?

*Discussion ensued about departments receiving a tag getting together to standardize assessment of the competencies.*

*The question then came up about incentives to change over to this system. The Middle States transition from 3-legged stool to the full '4-legged chair' was discussed. [A faculty member] expressed the concern that when learning is assessed cross-disciplinarily that there was potential threat to discipline standards and integrity.*

*Concern expressed that there was a general movement emphasizing national outcomes and objectives, national instrumentation for assessment that ignored discipline standards. The Core Curriculum moves up to university.*

*{Remember, our CBA is built on the 3-legged stool so the Middle States 4-legged-chair comes into direct contradiction with our contract.}*

### **The Elephant in the Room (Digging a Big Trench then Digging it again... Retrenching!)**

*After presenting the 'Retrenchment' vs. 'Gen Ed Reform' slide, many challenges arose on that point. There was a need for you to update the chart as several schools did in fact have retrenchment letters on the table post-gen ed reform.*

*GEC – During the Oct. 2 session, some of the dates on the slide in question reflected the issuance of “general” retrenchment letters while other dates reflected the issuance of retrenchment letters to “individual” faculty members. The data on the slide were corrected before the Oct. 8 session to reflect only “individual” letters (using data sent by Mary Rita DuVall @ State APSCUF).*

*FM - One suggestion on this point was to seek a letter from the President/Provost that NO faculty jobs would be lost as a result of Gen Ed reform.*

### **Suggestions**

*FM - To achieve the goal of reducing the program size, consider eliminating one science requirement and re-think the diversity requirement.*

*FM - Another suggestion was made to bring Middle States here and ask them for guidance in terms of whether we are going in the right direction or not. {I talked to Sara about this today and she said Middle States will no do it without an enormous cost outlay to the school.}*

*GEC – This was an idea that surfaced at both sessions. We consulted with Dr. Sara Grove and she reported that Middle States will not visit campus or provide such guidance without enormous cost to the university. Nor will they “pre-approve” anything before their review.*

### **Other Topics**

*A great deal of frustration was expressed in that everyone keeps hearing that something was coming but no program draft ever emerges. Difficult to have an actual discussion when there is nothing on the table. People would like to see alternative programs.*

*GEC – The GEC has been frustrated by the release of new accreditation standards and the “general” retrenchment letter, both of which required rethinking and, hence, slowed the process.*

GEC – Take a look at the NIU-Plus program @ Northern Illinois Univeristy (NIU), which is a new general education program that’s been designed around a clear set of 8 student learning objectives.

FM - There is an incompatibility between PASSHE and Middle States in terms of what they want from their Gen Ed curriculum: Middle States, competencies; PASSHE, content oriented. The question was whether AAAT or GEC Assessment could work with departments to blend the two requirement sets together. Page | 4

FM - If/when new program comes out, the Tags/objectives must be very very clearly laid out and each and every step about grandfathering in courses, assessment rotations, etc. must be very explicit.

Meeting ended.

*These are the notes to the best of my ability to write fast and to remember!*

*Cynthia B.*

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FM - Idea expressed by a faculty member

GEC - Idea expressed by the General Education Council

*Italicized* text indicates a summary of a discussion or ideas expressed by the note-taker.