

GECC Assessment Subcommittee

Evaluation of the SU General Education Assessment Campaign, 2006-2009

Summary

The Assessment Subcommittee of the General Education Coordinating Committee (GECC) reports assessment of learning outcomes is taking place at Shippensburg University. During the 2006-2009 assessment campaign, learning outcomes associated with at least 58 courses in the General Education (GenEd) curriculum were assessed in one way, shape or form. Data assembled from an archive of assessment documents (hardcopies only) suggest at least 4478 students participated in the process. It must be noted, however, that the Subcommittee believes the document archive is incomplete, for we know the Library, for example, conducted an assessment of its *Ship to Shore* program and presented their findings to the GECC, yet no hardcopy of its final report or the evaluation subcommittee report exists in the document archive. Therefore, assuming other documents are also missing from the archive, our report can provide only an incomplete, conservative (at best) and biased (at worst) picture of the 2006-2009 GenEd Assessment Campaign.

The Subcommittee built a database to organize data extracted from the document archive. We followed the GECC-approved evaluation protocol (six questions) and created data fields to represent those questions. We spent nearly 16 person-hours reviewing reports, coding answers and entering data into the database. Incomplete and inconsistent data notwithstanding, the Subcommittee can offer several findings.

Table 1 (attached) summarizes assessment results by GenEd category. Our data suggest all courses in the required skills and competencies section were assessed. Among the categories of knowledge, however, Category D is the only one with a complete assessment history. Data indicate fewer than half of all Category C and Diversity courses were assessed. Table 2 (attached) summarizes assessment results by academic department. Our data reveal several departments assessed all of their GenEd courses (Communication / Journalism, Computer Science, Criminal Justice, Economics, Library, Mathematics and Psychology). The work of some departments is not represented in the archive (Business, Education, Music & Theatre, Physics, Social work and Women's Studies).

The Subcommittee attempted to determine, albeit roughly, the "soundness" of each report. It is important to note that the Subcommittee began by recognizing that every department employs experts in their respective fields. We made no judgments about course contents; rather, we looked to see if there was enough complete information available in the report to link each assessment instrument to a set of learning objectives, link assessment instruments to assessment results, and link assessment results back to the learning objectives. If so, the report was deemed "sound".

#1. Too much assessment took place in too little time

Our data indicate not all General Education (GenEd) courses were included in the 2006-2009 assessment campaign, not all departments that participate in the GenEd program conducted assessments, and not all assessments were of equal apparent quality. Yet, many departments attempted to do way too much. They developed the general rubrics provided by the GECC into discipline-specific rubrics. They built new assessment instruments (e.g., exam questions, oral interviews, essays etc.), built new scoring rubrics and had to reorganize and allocate scarce resources to the task. Assessments were deployed to hundreds of students and then scored. Much data were collected, summarized and organized into various forms. Yet, ironically, the time and energy spent learning and formalizing new and shifting assessment procedures seems to have displaced much of the time and effort needed for thorough reflections about student learning. The process is cumbersome. The Subcommittee recommends the GECC abandon the course-based assessment model and adopt a learning objective-based model (and schedule) during our next campaign. A learning objective-based model/schedule would allow departments and programs (and their assessment coordinators) to focus on one particular aspect of student learning each and every year rather than focus on every aspect of student learning during just one semester, every third year. The new approach would provide needed time for reflection, allow informal conversations and workshops to develop among peers, prompt reluctant parties to learn how to better use assessments, and, importantly, promote better balanced workloads.

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#2. The targets were always moving

Our data indicate, clearly, that our assessment protocols and documentation requirements changed over time. First-year results, in aggregate, reflect diverse expectations and some confusion about what was to be assessed and how results were to be reported; second-year results, in aggregate, reflect progress and the demands of a short-lived four-column reporting model; and third-year results reflect more progress and the demands of a five-column reporting model. In short, our initial GenEd Assessment Campaign was conducted inconsistently over time; results obtained during year 1 cannot be compared easily with results obtained during years 2 or 3. The Subcommittee recommends the SU GenEd Assessment Guide (2007) be updated to include a complete and fuller description of the entire process (after revision). The “guide” was printed a year after the first set of assessments were conducted, and not everyone has a copy. All expectations should be highlighted and check sheets provided.

#3. Spirit vs. Letter

Our evaluation revealed a diverse array of assessment instruments and techniques were used throughout the campaign. We also noticed, however, that many course assessments relied solely on vocabulary-based multiple choice or true-false type questions. While appropriate in some contexts, multiple-choice and true-false type questions cannot always provide students with sufficient opportunities to *demonstrate* their attitudes, *apply* their understandings of processes, or *explain* complex models/connections/interactions as some of our learning objectives require.

#4. Several learning objectives are, as they are worded, difficult to assess

Several reports indicated particular learning objectives were difficult to assess. Those associated with the Diversity category, for example, require students to demonstrate attitudes that require deep levels of self-awareness, empathy or personal reflection. One objective in Category D requires students to “demonstrate an international perspective ... under various scenarios” whether or not they have ever traveled outside Pennsylvania. Objectives that contain words or phrases open to many different forms of interpretation are not easy to assess and might not be, as they are worded, meaningful. Such objectives should be reviewed within a context of assessment.

#5. Assessment data and reports can be collected and archived more effectively and efficiently

As noted above, the archive contains hardcopies only. Softcopies that were not printed or filed (perhaps still stored digitally or purged from email inboxes) were unavailable to us. A better document management system is needed for collecting, organizing and managing the thousands of pages we have now and will have next time.

Other recommendations

6. Instead of assessing multiple courses at once, data should be obtained from assessing a specific learning objective during a given semester (or year). For example, assessing student’s abilities to “apply critical thinking skills” could be assessed in the fall of 201x; the “demonstration of numerical reasoning” during spring 201x; etc. The entire campus could focus on one theme at the same time. It would make PR easier.
7. Assessment coordinators in each department or program must receive support. The workloads associated with planning and deploying multiple assessments; collecting and summarizing data; and completing and tracking paperwork must be compensated or mitigated in some way; training is required.
8. Programs/assessment coordinators should be able to submit data and reports using forms (database) or document management software. This way the information will be received following a uniform approach and allow reports to be generated automatically. The software should allow programs to upload ancillary documents such as rubrics, instruments and key assessments. Permission properties could control access.
9. Assessment coordinators should be allowed to track, via the same database or document management software, the status of their reports once they are submitted to GECC. This way if a report is missing something, the coordinators can be notified and will be able to resubmit accordingly.

Table 1: Summary of General Education assessments, by category.

General Education	Participation		What was assessed?			Summary of archived assessment documents				
	Courses	Cross-listed with Diversity	# Courses (%)	# Sections	# Students	Report form? (%)	Narrative summary? (%)	Assessment instrument? (%)	Five-column report? (%)	Seem sound? (%)
WIFYS	1	0	1 (100)	34	677	(100)	(100)	(100)	(100)	(100)
Mathematics	10	0	10 (100)	19	470	(70)	(20)	(60)	(20)	(100)
World History I & II	2	0	2 (100)	80	320	(50)	(50)	(100)	(50)	(100)
Human Communication	1	0	1 (100)	3	85	(100)	(100)	(100)	(100)	(100)
Library / Ship to Shore	1	0	1 (100)							
Category A (sans Math)	7	0	3 (43)	4	134	(67)	(100)	(100)	(67)	(100)
Category B	40	2	21 (53)	34	1029	(86)	(86)	(100)	(76)	(90)
Category C	20	0	7 (35)	18	322	(57)	(71)	(100)	(57)	(57)
Category D	7	1	7 (100)	21	745	(100)	(100)	(100)	(100)	(100)
Category E	5	3	2 (40)	16	451	(50)	(100)	(50)	(50)	(100)
Diversity	11	-	3 (27)	7	245	(67)	(67)	(67)	(67)	(67)

Table 2: Summary of General Education assessments, by academic department.

Participation			What was assessed?			Summary of archived assessment documents				
Department	# Courses in GenEd	# Courses in Diversity	# Courses (%)	# Sections	# Students	Report form? (%)	Narrative summary? (%)	Five-column model? (%)	Assessment instrument? (%)	Seem sound? (%)
Art	6	1	3 (50)	0	102	(100)	(0)	(0)	(100)	(0)
Biology	7	0	2 (29)	3	36	(0)	(0)	(0)	(100)	(0)
Business Management	1	1	0 (0)	0	0	-	-	-	-	-
Chemistry	3	0	1 (33)	6	0	(0)	(100)	(0)	(100)	(0)
Communication & Journalism	1	0	1 (100)	3	85	(100)	(100)	(100)	(100)	(100)
Computer Science	2	0	2 (100)	4	73	(100)	(100)	(100)	(100)	(100)
Criminal Justice	1	1	1 (100)	0	48	(0)	(0)	(0)	(0)	(0)
Economics	3	0	3 (100)	6	190	(100)	(100)	(100)	(100)	(100)
Education	2	2	0 (0)	0	0	-	-	-	-	-
English	5	1	4 (80)	44	967	(100)	(100)	(50)	(100)	(100)
Geography & Earth Science	9	2	7 (78)	21	693	(100)	(100)	(100)	(100)	(100)
History & Philosophy	7	0	3 (43)	80	381	(33)	(67)	(33)	(100)	(100)
Library	1	0	1 (100)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Mathematics	10	0	10 (100)	19	470	(70)	(20)	(20)	(60)	(100)
Modern Languages	29	0	16 (55)	27	702	(75)	(100)	(100)	(100)	(100)
Music & Theatre	3	0	0 (0)	0	0	-	-	-	-	-
Physics	5	0	0 (0)	0	0	-	-	-	-	-
Political Science	2	0	2 (100)	7	280	(100)	(100)	(100)	(100)	(100)
Psychology	1	0	1 (100)	12	308	(100)	(100)	(100)	(100)	(100)
Socialwork	1	1	0 (0)	0	0	-	-	-	-	-
Sociology & Anthropology	4	1	1 (25)	4	143	(0)	(100)	(0)	(0)	(100)
Women's Studies	2	1	0 (0)	0	0	-	-	-	-	-