

## **1. Session Information:**

### **Title:**

Advancing Campus Interest in General Education Curriculum via Assessment

### **Description:**

This session presents Cleveland State University's experiences in implementing a faculty driven approach to General Education Assessment. The session covers the following: evolution of the assessment program, difficulties faced in implementation, and the current plan for General Education improvement that builds on what we have learned from prior assessment efforts.

### **Target Audience**

The audience for this session includes faculty and administrators who have responsibility for General Education assessment.

## **2. Supporting Information:**

### **Rationale for the Proposal**

The proposed presentation is of value for participants at the Higher Learning Commission's annual meeting because it would provide the audience with suggestions for rekindling their campus community's interest in shaping their General Education Requirements (GER) through assessment. This presentation uses practices adopted at Cleveland State University to provide examples of strategies that will energize faculty to recapture their General Education curriculum.

Faculty who provide instruction within the General Education fields recognize that their courses have common objectives and themes. However, a universal problem on campuses is that over time the diffusion of responsibility for GER leads to inadequate attention of faculty in disciplines keeping their course content aligned with common themes represented in a curricular cluster. The danger of prolonged neglect is that the faculty teaching these courses lose a sense of GER objective in linking their courses to the overall GER structures professed by the University. Soon the campus community's grasp of key GER issues such as "What is taught in a cluster?" and "How it is being taught?" begins to slip, which in turn leads to a lack of coherence in the curriculum. Once this happens, faculty resist the imposition of any institutional mandate for assessment, and use prerogatives of academic freedom to abstain from using the results of standardized assessments that are conducted on their campus.

This presentation on General Education assessment describes how Cleveland State University's faculty go beyond using standardized tests, such as ACT's CAPP and ETS's Academic Profile, by working in voluntary assessment teams. The work of these teams helps the University maintain programmatic coherence, insures high learning outcomes for students, and keeps it abreast of on-going curricular reform that is essential for a robust GER program.

### **Statement of Learning Outcomes or Goals**

Audience is exposed to particulars of designing and implementing a faculty driven General Education assessment program that strengthens the curriculum in tandem with assessing the learning outcome of students in given GER clusters.

### **The Issues to Be Addressed in the Session**

#### **Faculty Studies in Assessing General Education Clusters and Student Outcomes**

These studies, sponsored by the Provost's Office, create structures and processes where faculty teaching in a given GER emphasis can come together as a working group to address General Education learning outcomes. The design of these studies builds on recommendations of prior GER assessment teams' exercises in 2000-01. Prior attempts at assessment had concluded that if direct samples of student

learning such as tests, essays, and samples of verbal or written responses to classroom examination were used in assessing GERs, then it was essential that there be the following:

- (1) Congruence between curricular design and assessment strategies;
- (2) Uniformity within the student work assessed; and
- (3) Consensus concerning criteria used for assessment.

These challenges with prior efforts at assessment were addressed. Now, as described below, faculty interact both before and after the GER assessment.

#### Composition of Committee, Schedule, and Duration of Each GER's Assessment:

At Cleveland State University these groups consist of 4 to 5 faculty members who teach courses in a specified GER cluster. Participation in the study is voluntary. The studies involve a few planning meetings prior to teaching GER courses, collecting learning outcomes while teaching the course, and reconvening the following semester to report findings. A sample schedule for assessing GER courses in Fall requires faculty to meet for up to 2 days in the Summer prior to teaching the GERs, and extend their effort into the following Spring to conclude findings. A schedule for assessing Spring GER courses requires faculty to meet for up to 2 days in the Fall prior to teaching the GERs, and extend their work into the following Summer to conclude findings.

Each year 2 of Cleveland State University's 8 GER fields undergo review, resulting in a process for review of all GER fields on a 4-year cycle.

#### The Three Phases of Assessing GERs

*Phase 1* – This step fosters discovery of the range of current understanding of the curriculum and pedagogical practices within the GER field prior to assessing student work. In this phase the group meets at predetermined times to discuss relationships between course syllabi, teaching strategies, what students learn, and how learning can be assessed in the classroom. A key aspect of this phase is that faculty select and agree to administer at least one common assessment module in their course. For example, this could be a 30-minute essay test involving at least 500 words, which is to be scored by at least 2 faculty members.

*Phase 2* – The next semester the group conducts classroom assessments and collects direct measures of student learning.

*Phase 3* – In the semester following data collection the group reconvenes to discuss their findings and prepare a brief report on what they have learned. If necessary they make recommendations for realigning the GER curriculum across departmental and college boundaries. Based on their experiences they also prepare a handbook for use by other faculty teaching courses in their GER cluster. Such a handbook could include sections on "What We Teach", "How We Teach", and "What Students Learn."

#### Availability of Professional Development Funds for Summer Portion of Study

A sum of \$2,000 in professional development funds is available to each review team for their effort during the summer.

#### Participating Faculty Volunteers Agree to the Following:

- Administer a 30 minute assessment module in GER class
- Are encouraged to but not required to include material in courses to help students develop critical thinking common to a given GER
- A sample of essays drawn from each participating class are scored by faculty participants. Two or more faculty members score each exam.

#### Analysis and Conclusion of Study

- Faculty report and interpret findings of learning outcomes in their classes
- Prepare a faculty handbook to be used as a reference by others teaching in the same GER cluster.

**Presenter's Relationship to the Topic**

Gitanjali Kaul is Vice Provost for Planning and Assessment with responsibility for facilitating GER assessment on campus. Jeffery Ford is Interim Associate Dean of Arts and Sciences, the college which houses the most GER courses. He has been involved with assessing samples of student work for this initiative as early as 2000.

**How Long the Program Has Been in Operation**

The first study on direct assessment of student learning in GER courses was sponsored in 2000. Since then the program has evolved and changed considerably.

**3. Format of the Session:****Format and Style**

The session will include power-point presentations by both presenters.

**Plans for Engaging Participants**

Participants will engage in brief small-group exercises in which they select a GER from their institution and strategize on how they would motivate faculty to engage in assessment.

**No financial support is requested.**