

Planning for the Assessment of the General Education Curriculum  
Summer 2007 Assessment Working Group

I. Rationale

General education is understood as the central shared curricular experiences for all students regardless of their majors or minors and this criterion is met in the St. Lawrence curriculum by the First Year Program, the First Year Seminar, and the distribution and diversity requirements. Rather than approach a review of the entire general education requirements, the Assessment Committee proposes a first cycle that includes the assessment of specific learning goals in the FYP and FYS and the assessment of learning goals and outcomes in courses that fulfill the diversity requirements. Both the FYP/FYS and diversity requirement reflect changes in our general education curriculum adopted since our last Middle States review. We have split the formerly year-long First-Year Program into distinct fall semester FYP and spring semester FYS courses, and we moved away from one “Non-Western” course required to two courses required in the broader category of “Diversity.” Specifically, we seek to better understand the degree to which the FYP/FYS is achieving specific learning outcomes articulated in its newly revised Philosophy and Goals Statement and the degree to which diversity courses speak to the intended learning goals derived from the 1998-1999 faculty legislation.

II. Expected Summer Agenda

A General Education Summer Working Group will be formed by early May and ideally will include members of the Assessment Committee, the Academic Affairs Committee, the incoming Associate Dean of the First Year, the incoming Associate Dean of Diversity and Social Justice, the Director of the Munn Center for Rhetoric and Communication, a member of the AAC&U Core Commitments group, faculty members who teach diversity distribution courses, and students.

Initially, the summer working group will meet as a committee of the whole to plan an agenda and timeline and to discuss assessment methods but will then likely separate into two groups, each taking one of the general education dimensions as its primary focus.

III. Suggested Questions and Starting Points

The Assessment Committee proposes the following questions and processes as starting points for planning assessment:

Basic Facts about General Education:

- What percentage of student course work is represented by Gen Ed courses?
- What percentage of general education courses are at the 100, 200, 300, 400 level?
- In which semester do the majority of students complete their distribution and diversity requirements?

- How many courses have been offered during the past two years that fulfill the diversity requirement?
- What do enrollment patterns in diversity distribution courses indicate?
- How many students meet the diversity requirement through their participation in study abroad?
- What are the distinctions between the former and current FYP/FYS learning goals?
- What data from the Institutional Research Office should also be considered for this project?

#### Possible Implications:

- Does the early completion of Gen Ed requirements have implications for learning goals in majors and minors?
- What are the connections between diversity requirements in the curriculum and diversity initiatives in the co-curriculum?
- Has the development of new learning goals for the FYP and FYS had an effect on the quality of student work and to what degree do students seem able to achieve the newly articulated goals?

#### Possible Processes:

- Examine the process by which Academic Affairs solicits, reviews, and approves rationales for courses to receive diversity credit (e.g., Form B).
- Connect with colleagues who teach diversity distribution courses and ask them to come together to discuss their learning goals and their assignments in general education courses.
- Request representative samples of both faculty and student course work which these colleagues think demonstrate how students have been exposed to the distribution learning goals in their courses. Examples might include the course syllabi, lecture notes, test questions and students' lab reports, portfolios or other writing, creative, or technology assignments.
- Examine the learning goals of diversity courses for the degree to which they represent the broader diversity distribution learning goals.
- Run student focus groups to learn about students' perceptions of general education and specific general education requirements. (Note: Participants may include students enrolled in summer school courses, the McNair Program, the University Fellows Program, summer CA's, Admissions tour guides, etc.).
- Compare FYP student portfolios from a previous academic year to student portfolios from 2007 (the first implementation year of the new goals).

#### IV. Expected Outcomes

- The summer working group will review any data collected and write a report on their findings and interpretations.

- The summer working group will develop a pilot project to systematically assess learning outcomes in the diversity requirement in Fall 2007.
- The summer working group will compile information on useful direct and indirect assessment measures for future assessment work in the general education curriculum.

Recommended Reading:

Drafts of relevant Middle States Chapter  
AAC&U readings  
Diversity Circle Web site