

Annual Report
General Education Coordinator
May 2002

In accordance with the Guidelines for Annual Reports, this document will first set forth accomplishments relevant to the Academic Affairs goals, then will review other major accomplishments as well as obstacles to progress, and will close with a summary of the five outcomes assessment steps.

Accomplishments

The only work of this office directly relevant to any of the four major Academic Affairs goals pertains to Goal #3, Diversity. During the previous year, we completed a study of all calendar year 2000 graduates (baccalaureate) to determine how many had completed coursework thought to include a significant component of diversity in American cultures. We learned that only about 40% of all graduates had taken one of these courses. Meanwhile, the Campus Climate Survey, given in May 2001 and reported on just this spring, found that over half the respondents felt that there should be some course requirement related to diversity issues.

In response to these results, I have worked closely with Rita Smith-Wade-El from the Commission on Cultural Diversity and with the General Education Review Committee (GERC) on the drafting of changes to the curriculum requiring that students take at least one diversity-related course during their undergraduate coursework. Discussion of this requirement is scheduled for Faculty Senate in September 2002.

Many of the other accomplishments of this office pertain to the central thrust of my position, outcomes assessment. While progress has not been speedy (see obstacles discussed below), the last year has seen significant strides made in assessing two of the major general education objectives. During the spring of 2002 we began full implementation of the plan to assess the critical reasoning objective (Gen Ed Objective #2). The plan called for testing of a random sample of students who had completed 60 credits using the Tasks in Critical Thinking (TCT; from ETS). With the cooperation of the Registrar's Office and the Office of Institutional Research, a sample of 120 students was selected and then contacted and offered early registration privileges in return for their cooperation in completing the 90-minute test. Thirty-eight students eventually completed the testing. A grant was written and funded to train faculty readers on the scoring of the TCT. The training and scoring was successfully completed on May 29, 2002. A second sample to provide sufficient numbers for a reliable assessment will be drawn in the fall and the testing procedures developed this spring will again be utilized. Our multi-method approach for assessing critical reasoning also involves the scoring of course-embedded artifacts. Artifacts were collected from sections of two courses this spring in order to pilot-test rubrics that have been identified. This pilot-testing was also part of the grant proposal but its completion has been delayed until later this summer.

The second objective being assessed (Gen Ed Objective #4) pertains to written communication. Again I prepared a grant proposal to fund the establishment of a work group to finalize rubric development and pilot-test the assessment process. This group met from January through April to develop a rubric and plan for assessment that has been presented to the GERC with implementation expected next year.

Work has also continued, with less of my direct involvement, on the pilot-testing of assessment procedures for mathematical reasoning (Gen Ed Objective #1), information literacy (Gen Ed Objective #3), and coherence (Gen Ed Objective #13).

Also related to the work on assessment was attendance at the Middle States Conference on Accreditation and Quality Assurance in December 2001 as part of a team of four from Millersville.

A last major accomplishment of this past year was the development of a General Education website and a tutorial for students (and faculty) to use to familiarize themselves with the varied requirements of our Gen Ed curriculum. The tutorial was developed collaboratively with Dr. Paul Specht, Acting Director of Academic Advisement. The website was implemented with staff support from Web and Multimedia Services.

Obstacles

In all honesty there have been three notable barriers to fully reaching some of the aspirations of this office. First, the time limitations of the one-quarter-time release position have hampered progress. The assessment of the Gen Ed objectives is a broad and far-reaching task that is both difficult and time-consuming. Without an Assessment Director or other staff support, there are inadequate resources to carry out anything beyond the rather piecemeal and slow process that has typified progress over the past two years. The extension of the Coordinator's position through a six-credit summer release this year will help with the workload but will not solve the fundamental problem.

Related to this first barrier is a second – the lack of faculty buy-in. As a means to facilitate the assessment of Gen Ed objectives, faculty involvement was sought through a program of available grants, announced both last spring and again this spring. To date, only the two grants initiated by me have been submitted and funded. It has also been difficult to achieve faculty buy-in through service to the combined GERC/AOAC committee and on the various assessment projects that Committee has initiated. Without a real sense of perceived ownership of General Education on the part of faculty and with little incentive or reward for efforts to assist with assessment, sufficient involvement of faculty in the process of Gen Ed assessment will continue to be a struggle.

The last major obstacle is my own inexperience. Though familiar with Gen Ed at Millersville, I have little knowledge of general education issues in the larger sense. Much of my professional development during the first year in my position was geared towards assessment. While I've slowly gained some comfort in that aspect of this position, I have

not had the time to develop a better understanding of general education beyond Millersville. With my recent involvement with the Asheville Institute on General Education, I have begun to appreciate some of the larger issues in liberal education and the reform of general education. This summer and the next year will need to allow me time for further reading and study if I am to more fully meet the expectations people have of a Coordinator of General Education.

Outcomes Assessment

The General Education program is currently conceived within a framework of 16 objectives related to a student's learning. In order to help ensure that students' programs move them toward the fulfillment of these objectives, we have surveyed all departments about each of the Gen Ed courses that are currently taught. We have only begun to compile the results of this survey and still have many gaps in responses, but this project is designed to help us assess to what extent the Gen Ed curriculum actually covers by intention the objectives the faculty have set forth. This survey also will help to identify existing assessment activities that may provide artifacts for course-embedded assessment of Gen Ed learning outcomes.

As outlined above, the direct assessment of learning outcomes is taking place in selected areas. These assessments are yet to generate any positive evidence of the achievement of learning outcomes. Likewise, it is too early still to have put the results of these assessment activities to use in improving curriculum and instructional practices, thought that is clearly the intent of our assessment system.

Conclusion

In summary, progress has been made on two of this office's chief goals for the year: assessment and "public relations". As documented, assessment activities have proceeded at a slow but steady pace. Increased "public" awareness of General Education has been raised through the advent of the website and tutorial. Additionally, as Coordinator, I have tried to be a visible presence in numerous campus activities, including programs at the Center for Academic Excellence, the Learning Communities and First-Year Experience initiatives, and new faculty orientation.