

**University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Team
AAC&U General Education Institute
Application**

NARRATIVE STATEMENT

Need:* What is your current general education model and what has motivated a desire for reform? Have assessment results prompted the review or do you need help creating an assessment plan? What work already has been accomplished and by whom? What resource or political issues are at play in the process? Has a unified vision of the planned reform emerged?

The Current Model

The goals of the general education requirements at UWM, formulated in 1984, are stated as “General education should provide opportunities to develop a strong foundation of verbal and quantitative skills; to understand the roles of methods and processes and their constraining effects on thought; to gain cultural and historical perspectives on the world; to develop consciousness of self in relation to tradition; to appreciate creativity, including the creation, testing, and application of ideas; to see how ideas relate to social structures; and to understand how values infuse both action and inquiry.”

To meet these goals, the current general education requirements at UWM are organized into a blend of competency and distribution requirements. The **competency requirements** assure basic student competencies in English composition, mathematics, and foreign language. The **distribution requirements** provide a broad body of knowledge in the arts, humanities, natural and social sciences, and cultural diversity (added in 1989) as a foundation for specialization. The competency requirements may be met by either achieving a specified score in a placement examination or by successfully completing coursework. The distribution requirements are met by successfully completing courses designated as general education courses in each area. The distribution requirements may also be met by completing an alternative curriculum referred to as Cultures and Communities (developed in 2001), a set of courses that emphasizes diversity and cross-cultural literacy, multicultural arts, global studies, and the cultural contexts of science, health care, and technology.

Motivation to Reform

At UWM, the concept of general education as a *program* has not taken root; rather, the discussions have centered on individual courses with general education designation. At UWM, we talk about “general education requirements” rather than a “general education program”. There has not been any institutional level review of the general education requirements since they were formulated in 1984.

Efforts to assess student outcomes with respect to the goals of the general education requirements have been sporadic and limited to assessment done at the course level. Without assessment results, it is not possible to answer questions about the general education requirements such as: Are they effective in preparing students for the 21st century? Are the requirements appropriate for the specializations in the array of disciplinary fields of study pursued by UWM students? Questions such as these arise both from an internal reflection as well as from the need to be accountable to various constituencies served by the University. The

road to reform begins with the assessment of the (in)effectiveness of the current general education requirements.

Accomplishments

In 2004 as part of their preparation on the upcoming 10-year site visit by the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, a set of specific course learning outcomes for courses with general education designation was generated. Based on this work, the oversight faculty body for undergraduate programs, the Academic Programs and Curriculum Committee, has an ad hoc requirement for course level assessment plan for new or revised general education courses. Despite the efforts to incorporate these goals into departmental curricula, progress has been spotty and has not involved all departments offering general education courses.

In the general context of program assessment, all departments have been asked to produce assessment plans that include direct and indirect measures of student learning outcomes as defined by programmatic goals. The Center for Instructional and Professional Development (CIPD) has assisted departments in this endeavor in four different ways:

1. Providing support and follow-up for workshops by Barbara Walvoord, a nationally recognized expert on course and program assessment;
2. Organizing multi-section workshops on assessment for individuals and chairs, using local models;
3. Providing consultation to departments as requested; and
4. Securing grant funding and implementing a program for supporting the development of revised syllabi and assignments that specifically link student learning goals to general education program and distribution goals.

A conference on general education (“General Education at UWM; Is it still 1984?”) is planned for April. Pre-conference activities include: a campus survey of attitudes and beliefs about general education, submissions from grant recipients and other faculty of statements of belief, and sample assignments that articulate specific student learning goals.

A particular type of course that carries general education credit is the Letters and Science Freshman Seminar. These courses, offered mostly in the Humanities and Social Sciences, give special attention to student learning outcomes and their assessment. CIPD provides specific professional development activities in syllabus design, pedagogy, and assessment to Freshman Seminar instructors. Our assessment data show that first-year students who were enrolled in Freshman Seminar courses had a higher overall academic achievement and their retention rates are higher than students who did not take Freshman Seminar. This program will be expanded to 50 sections (1000 students) in 2007-08. CIPD is taking the opportunity to design a collaborative assessment project that will provide information about individual courses as well as about the Freshman Seminar program itself. We are in a position to use the Freshman Seminar model to energize, focus, and develop general education at UWM. We think Freshman Seminars tell us something important about teaching in general education, and that a reinvigorated general education can inform us about how best to teach Freshman Seminars.

Resources

The campus has recently established an Assessment Council with a charge to facilitate the continuous quality improvement of learning, instruction and curricula based on assessment of student learning outcomes. The Assessment Council has representation from all schools and colleges within UWM and brings new energy to the campus discussions on outcomes assessment and the sharing of best practices. In support of the work of the group, the campus has now subscribed to a web-based assessment reporting tool to make it easier for faculty to document the actions taken in assessment and in making improvements based on assessment results.

The Center for Instructional and Professional Development is the principal source of support for individuals and programs seeking to advance the practice of teaching through systematic study of student learning. CIPD organizes resources and programs in response to campus initiatives and provides consultation across the spectrum, from graduate students to experienced faculty, from basic skills such as syllabus design to the research projects of the scholarship of teaching and learning.

Allocation of resources for general education has been a challenge in an under-funded urban research campus where there is a fierce competition for fiscal resources. The challenge can be better managed with a clear definition of general education program outcomes and articulation of its connection to departmental majors. Possible strategies include reallocation and a student-supported separate fee for general education (the latter following a precedent at another UW campus).

Goals:* What high priority tasks do you expect your team to work on during the Institute? These should be the tasks that, if advanced substantially during the Institute, would lead your team and campus to judge your efforts a success.

The team hopes the Institute will enable the members to develop strategies that will mobilize an under-funded urban research campus to direct its energies and institutional commitments to the general education curriculum. Through discussions with workshop leaders and participants, we hope to improve our abilities to redefine the overarching educational philosophy for general education so that we have a leaner, tighter, and much more coherent curriculum. Subsumed in this goal is our desire to learn to analyze campus political and cultural opportunities and barriers to reform general education and develop effective strategies to overcome the obstacles.

In the area of assessment, the team would like to engage in discussions on strategies and techniques to connect program level assessment to course level assessment and vice versa. We would like to learn about effectively translating sound general educational principles into student learning outcomes that can be actualized and assessed within courses, and to synthesize course level assessments into a program level assessment for general education.

The team would also like to learn of effective models of structure for housing general education program at institutions like UWM and learn successful strategies for allocating resources for general education.

Leading the faculty at UWM to make progress on the issues described above is the key to reforming general education at UWM. The Institute cannot have come at a more opportune time for our campus to capitalize on the momentum for general education reform that is building through the discussions on general education at various forums.

Team characteristics:* In what ways do your team members reflect the range of concerns surrounding general education reform on your campus? How do they reflect the diversity and the various interest groups on your campus?

Our team was chosen on the basis of institutional history at UWM, college/university influence, and their ability to affect budgetary and curricular decision-making, specifically in relation to the general education curriculum. The team includes faculty and staff who are from a variety of disciplines.

Dev Venugopalan has been at UWM for 23 years as a faculty member in the College of Engineering and Applied Science. In his administrative role as Associate Vice Chancellor, he coordinates faculty development programs, accreditation activities, assessment, and academic program reviews at the campus level. In his prior role as Associate Dean in Engineering, Dev coordinated the efforts for accreditation of the programs by the Engineering Accreditation Commission of ABET.

Tony Ciccone is a Professor of French and also directs the Center for Instructional and Professional Development, the campus-wide source for workshops, programs and consultation on teaching and learning issues. He and his staff have designed retreats for Freshman Seminar instructors, workshops for individuals and departments on assessment, and provided support for the campus Access to Success initiatives. He co-chaired the Criterion 3 subcommittee for the NCA Accreditation visit. Tony has been at UWM for 33 years.

Charles Schuster has been at UWM for 22 years and is currently serving in his eighth year as Associate Dean of the Humanities in the College of Letters and Science. He has previously served as Director of English Composition and as Director of the Freshman Seminar Program. He serves ex officio on many campus and L&S committees, including the L&S Academic Policies and Curriculum committee. As Associate Dean, he oversees curriculum and budget for seven academic departments and multiple centers, majors, and certificate programs.

Scott Emmons, Professor of Music Education and Associate Dean of the Peck School of the Arts, has served as Chair of the campus University Committee (Executive Committee of the UW-Milwaukee Faculty Senate) and as president *pro tem* of the UW-Milwaukee Faculty Senate. He has also served as a member of the UWM Academic Policy and Curriculum Committee, the curriculum review committees for the Physics, Business, Film, and Art departments, and the Criterion 3 subcommittee for the NCA accreditation visit. In addition, Emmons has functioned as UW-Milwaukee's UWS OPID Faculty Representative.

Susan Stalewski is a Clinical Associate Professor in the Medical Technology Program housed in the College of Health Sciences. She has been at UWM since 2000 as a member of the instructional academic staff. Her teaching responsibilities include the delivery of two general education courses. Professor Stalewski is an active participant in several Scholarship of Teaching and Learning initiatives on UWM campus, including the use of student response systems and podcasting to enhance student learning. She is also currently collaborating with faculty and staff on a project that is evaluating student learning in general education courses.

Susan is the chair of a task force charged with implementing quality initiatives and policy in distance education for the College of Health Sciences.

Contributions:* What do you believe your institution can contribute to the Institute?

Our team can share our experiences with respect to general education. We can provide examples of the syllabi and assignments that faculty and academic staff have developed specifically for general education courses through a grant project designed to develop a general education program. Discussions as part of this project have helped us frame the issues of general education particular to evolution of higher education at an urban research institution. We can also contribute our experience in designing and implementing professional development for freshman seminar instructors. Some of the work of our Center Scholars in Teaching and Learning, the campus SoTL project, is also pertinent to issues of assessing improvement in student learning through active learning pedagogy and technology innovation (e.g., student response systems, podcasting, course management systems) in large lectures in general and in general education courses in particular.

Participants might also find interesting our processes for academic program changes and the challenges we face as a growing urban public research institution.