

## **Application from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee for the 2008 AAC&U General Education Institute**

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM) is in the process of reforming the general education program. The campus had a team attend the Institute in 2007 and is in the process of implementing some of the recommendations from the team that attended last year's Institute as outlined below. In advancing campus discussions on general education and the LEAP initiative, we have identified challenges. We will greatly benefit from participating in the 2008 Institute by engaging in discussions with peers and the Institute faculty in shaping the strategies to overcome the challenges.

### **Need:**

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."

These are addressed through a combination of competency and distribution requirements.

The motivation for the reform comes from both internal and external factors. Discussions among faculty are taking place on the need to improve general education outcomes. The desire to be among the academic leaders in preparing students for the 21<sup>st</sup> century challenges appears to be taking the campus towards the goals articulated in the LEAP initiative. Some faculty are motivated because it is the right thing to do for the students. Others are motivated from the inherent satisfaction that comes from enhanced academic achievement of students. Institutional responsibilities with respect to accountability add another dimension to the discussion.

A team from UWM participated in the 2007 General Education Institute and in this current year, we have had further and broader campus discussions on defining the general education outcomes for the campus aligned with the LEAP essential outcomes. The work of the team from last year's institute is guiding the progress on campus in reforming general education. A task force has been appointed by the Provost to lead the campus discussions and the agenda for this year is to define the campus outcomes for general education and propose alternative models for achieving these goals. We are in the process of defining general education outcomes for the campus aligned with the LEAP essential outcomes.

One challenge in getting the faculty body as a whole (represented by the Faculty Senate) to adopt these outcomes is in overcoming the resistance to change which is perceived to increase faculty workload and to infringe on academic freedom. We need effective strategies to address these issues. Another challenge is related to resource issues – specifically the perception that reforming and streamlining general education may lead to departments losing student credit hours and consequently resources. While we are working on addressing these issues, there is a general sense that we could improve on our strategies to effectively navigate through this politically-challenging course.

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 work of the task force on general education will overlay on the work of the Assessment Council to effectively integrate the general education outcomes into the various programs.

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.

### **Goals:**

The team hopes the Institute will enable the members to develop strategies that will help us to fine tune the strategies to accomplish the reform of general education. Through discussions with workshop leaders and participants, we hope to learn to analyze campus political and cultural opportunities and barriers to reform general education and develop effective strategies to overcome the obstacles.

Framing the general education outcomes in a way that makes it easy to integrate them with the disciplinary outcomes and competencies is a key factor in obtaining faculty approval of the reform. The team members would like to improve our abilities to lead the campus discussions in this regard.

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.

### **Team characteristics:**

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.

Jennifer Watson <add material here>

Lee Ann Garrison <add materials here>

William Bristow <add materials here>

John Tang Boyland <add materials here>

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.

**Contributions:**

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 (clickers), 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.