

# **AAC&U Institute on General Education Lessons for Fayetteville State University**

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The AAC&U Institute on General Education was divided into three tracks: content, process, and assessment. Members of the team each followed one track.

## ***Track 1: Content***

### **Current Status of General Education at FSU**

All students are part of the University College until they are admitted to a major degree program in the College of Basic and Applied Sciences, the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, the School of Business and Economics, or the School of Education. The University College provides assistance to students from the time they enter the university until they complete the University College Core Curriculum and fulfill all requirements for unconditional acceptance into a major degree program.

The University College Core Curriculum provides the academic foundation for all the undergraduate degree programs at Fayetteville State University. The core curriculum enables students to develop the skills and general knowledge that are essential to success in their respective major programs and careers after graduation. In addition to providing the skills and knowledge that are essential to academic success, the University College Core Curriculum is designed to promote positive human values and encourage a love for learning in all students.

All students are required to complete courses in writing, mathematics, critical thinking, and speech. These courses are designed to help students develop the communication, quantitative, reading, and reasoning skills that are necessary for success in any major degree program. Courses in the natural sciences, the performing and fine arts, and the social sciences introduce students to the methods of inquiry and content knowledge of these various disciplines. Students are also required to complete physical and/or health education.

### **Reflections on AAC&U Institute Track 1: Integrated Approach to General Education**

In Andrea Leskes's presentation, "What do the Cheshire Cat, Yogi Berra, and the Talmud have in common? Or Goals as the Driver of Intentional General Education Practice," there were five major points.

- 1) As Yogi Berra says, "If you don't know where you want to go, you might end up somewhere else." This quote emphasizes the importance of goals when attempting general education reforms.

- 2) Clearly stated general education goals are helpful in determining curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment. Northeastern University and King's college are cited as examples.
- 3) A school's basic value commitments can also affect its goals. For instance, the institutional mission is critical in shaping the general education curriculum.
- 4) The following chart illustrates the connections between mission, goals, curricular design, pedagogy, and assessment:
  - Mission affects Goals/Objectives
  - Goals/Objectives affect Curricular Design
  - Curricular Design affects Pedagogy
  - Pedagogy affects Assessment
  - Assessment affects all of the above
- 5) She listed five roles for general education programs: introductory foundation courses, courses aimed to broaden knowledge, courses aimed to integrate disciplines, courses that translate theory into practice through learning communities, and capstone courses.

Paul Gaston's presentation, "Strengthening the General Education Curriculum," draws an analogy between a lighthouse and general education. He sees general education as "the lighthouse of the curriculum."

The table below summarizes the connection between lighthouses and general education:

LIGHTHOUSE	GENERAL EDUCATION
Appropriately located	Aligned with institutional character
Solid foundation	Grounded in specific values
Workable design	Realistic regarding resources and time to completion
Solid construction	Coherent and aimed at accomplishing key purposes
Reliable fuel source	Dependable, adequate funding
Focused lens	Clearly and widely communicated goals
Clean windows	Clear objectives for program and individual courses
Regular maintenance	Ongoing assessment and periodic review

A large part of his presentation focused on what he called a "c-worthiness" approach to assessment. C-worthiness depends on coherence, continuity, common learning, competency development, and community consciousness. He illustrates this model of assessment with reference to Gustavus Adolphus College, Illinois Wesleyan University, California State University at Monterey Bay, Rice University, Hamilton College, Berea College, and Grinnel College. He ended his presentation with a hands-on curricular design activity.

## Recommendations

## ***Track 2: Process***

In order to accomplish the change process of implementing a university's general education program, the committee must have:

- content knowledge of subject matter,
- use ethical thinking,
- moral reasoning and,
- incorporate diversity in the course design.

When assessing the core curriculum, it is essential to view the strengths and weaknesses, view current goals, objectives and competencies.

When implementing the core curriculum, there must be a certain degree of commitment to professional development. In assessing the over arching need of FSU students, writing and oral communication appear to be the area in which our students lag behind. Therefore, the niche of our university should be to integrate writing across the curriculum. Curriculum mapping would ensure that all students are receiving the skills to write and communicate effectively in a global society; and that the faculty is collaboratively integrating written and oral communication into their teaching strategies.

Therefore, the change process in General education at FSU should consist of a partnership between the administration, faculty and students, based on established goals and principles that are unique to our university. According to Jerry Gaff's presentation this process should include:

- Recognizing the need for general education reform
  - Data collection from students, alumni, faculty
    - Surveys
    - Action Research
    - Needs Assessment
- Organizing the process
  - Identify Leaders
  - Time Frame
  - Implementation Process
    - Clarify the process
    - Collaboration from constituents
    - Professional development
  - Support Groups
    - Interdisciplinary teams
    - Students
- Engaging the faculty
  - Collaborative Learning
  - Integrative Learning
  - Service Learning
  - Multiple Paths to Learning
  - Life-long Learning

- Common educational values
- Developing the framework
  - Staffing
  - Financial resources
  - Assessment plans
- Designing the curricula
  - Shared departmental goals
  - High students and faculty expectations
  - Active student involvement
  - Assessment and feedback
  - Valued added curricula
  - Outcome-based curricula
- Securing approval and implementation.

When implementing curricula and education reform, it should be a community of committers; which ultimately should develop into a community of learners. All faculty and students should be a part of the learning experience.

General education reform or change does not take place by informal communication, such as, e-mail or memos, but through personal contacts with faculty, administration and students.

Faculty development is the key to program implementation and success.

Areas of concern when consideration core curriculum and general education reform:

- Set high aspirations and expectations,
- Develop strategic plans that are unique to individual university,
- Timing is essential
- Campus culture and values
- Professional development
- University's Image
- Research

### **Current Process at FSU**

The review of the University College Core Curriculum was initiated by the University College Advisory Board in the Fall of 2004. The Board voted to create a Core Review Committee and appointed Dr. Greg Rich to convene the Committee. In order to secure faculty support, Dr. Rich decided to ask department chairs to recommend a method for appointing representatives to the Committee. The chairs recommended that the committee consist of three faculty members each from the College of Basic and Applied Sciences and the College of Humanities and Social Sciences; two faculty members each from the School of Education and the School of Business and Education; one representative each from the Faculty Senate, the University College, the Student Government Association, Student Affairs, and the University College Advisory Board. The manner of nomination was left to the various units.

The Committee so constituted met in February of 2005. Its first action was to write a proposal to send a team to the AAC&U Institute on General Education. The team would consist of one faculty member from each of the four colleges and an administrator. That proposal was

accepted, the Chancellor agreed to fund the travel, and the team participated in the Institute in May 2005.

Should the process proceed to the stage of a curricular recommendation, it will have to go to the Faculty Senate. The Faculty Senate requires curricular proposals to originate with faculty and go first through an academic department and then through a college curriculum committee before going to the Senate Academic Affairs Committee. If the proposal is approved by the Academic Affairs Committee, it can go to the Faculty Senate for consideration.

### **Lessons from the Institute**

Track 2 of the Institute was devoted to the process of general education reform. The presenters have stressed the following points:

- The process must be inclusive. All constituencies need to be heard.
  - Inclusion must begin BEFORE specific changes are recommended. Having a committee produce a finished product is a recipe for failure.
  - Potential critics as well as supporters must be heard early and often. Do not attempt to evade them.
  - The faculty currently teaching in the core curriculum should be included, but they should not be given a veto over proposals. Interdisciplinary forums are better suited to a process of general education reform.
- The process must be adapted to the particular mission and structure of the institution.
- The process must include a general time frame.
  - Almost no general education reforms have been completed within one year.
  - Some go on for five, six, or seven years. This is usually for lack of a realistic time frame.
- Although the Committee should avoid beginning with a full-fledged plan, it should enunciate general educational principles and learning goals.
  - These should be subject to revision through hearings.
- The process should include successive iterations and multiple alternatives.
- The process should be presented for parliamentary approval (i.e., the Faculty Senate) only AFTER a substantial consensus (or at least a majority) has been achieved informally through the iterative process.
- Institutional and financial issues need to be included in the plan.
- Implementation needs to be planned as carefully as development.

### **Recommendations for FSU**

1. The AAC&U team should report to the Associate Vice Chancellor for Enrollment Management upon its return. The report of the team should be forwarded to the Chancellor, Provost, and deans as well. The interests and concerns of these officers should be solicited before the team makes its report to the University College Advisory Board.
2. The team should report to the University College Advisory Board as early as possible in the Fall 2005 semester. The Board should consider and hopefully approve some version of the following process:

3. The Core Review Committee should announce to the Colleges, the Faculty Senate, and the Student Government Association that it is undertaking a review of the University College Core Curriculum. It should invite the participation of the members of these organizations in a series of hearings on ways to improve the Core Curriculum to be held during Fall 2005.
  - a. The announcement should be accompanied by an explanation of the history of the project and of the proposed process.
4. The following hearings should be scheduled:
  - a. Overview of the current Core Curriculum and of emerging models.
  - b. Communication skills: Writing.
  - c. Communication skills: Oral Communication.
  - d. Communication skills: Multimedia?
  - e. Research skills.
  - f. Analytical skills: Quantitative reasoning.
  - g. Analytical skills: Critical thinking.
  - h. Analytical skills: Problem-solving.
  - i. Content areas: Humanities and Performing Arts
  - j. Content areas: History and Social Sciences
  - k. Content areas: Natural Sciences
  - l. Content areas: Health and Physical Education.
  - m. Content areas: Ethics and Citizenship.
  - n. Content areas: Diversity.
  - o. Pedagogy / Integrative Issues: Learning Communities
  - p. Pedagogy / Integrative Issues: Experiential/Service-Learning
  - q. Pedagogy / Integrative Issues: Sophomore Seminar
  - r. Assessment.
5. After the hearings, the Core Review Committee should create a draft of a proposed general education program. This program should be discussed at another series of hearings.
6. After the second set of hearings, the Committee should submit the proposal to the University College Advisory Board, hopefully no later than the end of Spring 2006.
7. The University College Advisory Board should approve the Committee proposal and submit it to the Faculty Senate at the beginning of Fall 2006.

### ***Track 3: Assessment***

#### **Current Status of Assessment at FSU**

Fayetteville State University administers the rising junior examination as part of its system of educational accountability. The examination assesses student proficiency in English, mathematics, science, and social studies, and three cross disciplinary cognitive reasoning competencies upon the completion of the University College Core Curriculum. All students who enter the university with fewer than 60 credit hours are required to complete the rising junior examination before being unconditionally admitted to the upper division.

PRAXIS I fulfills the rising junior examination requirement for students majoring in teacher education programs (See School of Education.) The rising junior examination is administered

each year. Currently, there is no fee to take the exam. Eligible students will receive notification of the requirement to take the examination at the completion of a minimum of 42 semester hours of course work.

### **Observation Between-Teams**

#### ***University of Michigan – Flint (Susan Gano-Phillips & Christine Waters):***

- The university has 17 General Education goals which they have found to be difficult or not workable when considering assessment. A large number of goals are difficult due to the fact that they are not usually collaboratively met by all schools in the university. Their research has shown that a good number of General Education goals is between 5 and 10 (preferably between 5 and 7).
- A major problem with assessment is that faculty have not bought into how it will benefit them so they delegate the assessment that has been mandated.

#### ***North Georgia College State University (Donna Gessell & Robert Orwig):***

- They had no formal assessment process; rather, they made outcomes based on what they thought they should assess.
- After much deliberation, they settled on the C-Base test for their assessment exam.

### **Peggy Maki: Principles of and Practices in Assessing Students' Achievement of GE Learning Outcomes—The Big Picture**

- The ways we actually learn will be the same ways we assess.
- If we look along the way instead of at the end, we have a better chance for valid assessment.
- When assessing students, we should not use tricky verbs such as appreciate and understand in our questions.
- We must use methods of assessment that capture the desired student learning—methods that align with pedagogy, content, and curricular design.
- Compile Learning Outcome Statements: “A sentence that describes what students should demonstrate, represent, or produce based on how and what they learn. It also emerges from our educational practices and is developed through consensus. The learning outcome statement relies on active verbs, such as create, compose, calculate, develop, build, evaluate, translate, etc., that target what we expect students to be able to demonstrate. It should be aligned with curriculum and it should be based on intentionality.”
- There should be intentionality across the Institution:
  - Institutional-level outcomes such as GE outcomes
  - Program- or department-level outcomes
  - Course/Service/Educational Experience outcomes
- Learning Maps help us determine coherence among our educational practices that enables us to design appropriate assessment methods. They also provide a visual representation of students' journey.
- Learning Maps signify collaboration. We are all contributors to student learners.
- There should be NO DISCONNECT between methods used and the inferences we can make.
- Correct assessment positions students to respond with desired outcomes.

### **Barbara Wright: Improving Learning Through Assessment—What Really Matters**

- Align the methods we use with the complexity of what we expect.
- When assessment is done correctly, it gives **us** the opportunity to learn as well as giving that opportunity to the students.
- We need to connect what we are doing with the things that students care about and are committed to.
- Good assessment is:
  - educative – for teachers and students
  - authentic – close to what students care about and will be doing when they leave the classrooms
  - robust – multiple methods; use a combination to get to the things we care about
  - useful – get to what we are looking for and don't want to be redundant
  - sustainable – don't want to keep testing the same thing all the time over and over again.
- One set of concerns should not drive the whole assessment process.
- Assessment should not consume too much time and resources of the students and teachers.
- Should look at integration rather than separation.
- **Refer to Assessment Loop – pg. 2:** What kind of evidence do we gather using a method that makes sense for the questions we are asking?
- Reliability means you get the same score or similar score even with different graders or if the same person takes the test at different times in different circumstances.
- **NOTE:** **Excellent handouts from this session that need to be reproduced for everyone.**

### **Recommendations**

- Compile goals and objectives we want at the end of our GE curriculum
- Assess what we need to do to get there
  - Then, with matrix, particular courses to cover what
- The matrix may also be part of the assessment