

The Higher Learning Commission Action Project Directory

Indiana University Northwest

Project Details		
Title	Implementation of the new General Education Program - Assessment of Learning Outcomes	Status ACTIVE
Category	1-Helping Students Learn	Updated 09-06-2011
Timeline		Reviewed 09-23-2011
	Planned Project Kickoff 08-01-2010	Created 03-30-2010
	Target Completion 06-30-2014	Version 2

1: Project Goal

A: Previous action projects, general education reform and centralization of outcome assessment, have now brought us to implementation of our revised General Education program and concurrently systematically assessing student achievement of learning outcomes. Now that our assessment infrastructure has been established, we will focus on assessment to both inform our efforts at promoting student success and as a mechanism for evaluation of the new curriculum. This effort will involve close coordination between the faculty General Education Committee, the College of Arts and Sciences, and the majors inside and outside the College.

2: Reasons For Project

A: General Education reform has taken about 4 years of concerted effort on campus. At the same time, we have been working hard to imbed centralized assessment of student learning outcomes into the culture and infrastructure of the campus. Our new General Education program will be implemented beginning in the fall 2010 for 2014 graduates. At the same time, the campus is focusing heavily on student retention as part of its enrollment initiative and in response to the state of Indiana's "Reaching Higher" initiative. Therefore, it is imperative that now, as we begin full-scale implementation of our new general education program that we make assessment of learning outcomes an integral part of that implementation. It is critical that we treat assessment of learning outcomes as a part of implementation of the new general education program at this opportune time so that assessment doesn't become an "add on." Also, there are bound to be unexpected difficulties or consequences of the new program and it is imperative that we collect, analyze and use data to fine tune the curriculum on an ongoing basis. Finally, a coherent program of assessment will require significant coordination between the College of Arts and Sciences and the majors both inside and outside the college. Developing this work as an action project has proven a successful way for IU Northwest to focus its efforts and maintain active discussion of the work.

3: Organizational Areas Affected

A: All academic units, the Faculty Organization General Education and Assessment Committee, and the office of Academic Affairs will be affected.

4: Key Organizational Process(es)

A: Assessment of student learning outcomes—we will be focusing on assessment as providing measures of both student success and program evaluation.

5: Project Time Frame Rationale

A: Implementation of the general education program will take a full 4 years. By the end of this project, we will have refined our assessment infrastructure, gone through one complete admission cohort (for traditional students), and will have collected data that will inform evaluation. The faculty from all academic majors have identified for each major where assessment of general education learning outcomes will occur. Now it is time for the exact mechanisms to be described and implemented.

6: Project Success Monitoring

A: Success of this AP will be monitored by the Office of Academic Affairs (including the newly established Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Research). Success will require 1). A standard process of evaluation of learning outcomes of foundational courses (Elementary Composition, Public Speaking, Mathematics, and a natural science with a laboratory) and using the results to suggest necessary improvements. This will be the responsibility of the General Education and Assessment Committee; 2). A method of monitoring and communicating assessment of learning outcomes in the Principle 2 Breadth of Learning courses and centralized reporting of the results. This will primarily be the responsibility of the College of Arts and Science; and 3). A method of monitoring and communicating assessment of learning outcomes in the advanced foundation courses and learning outcomes associated with Principle 3 through 5. This will primarily be the responsibility of the academic unit offering the major. The monitoring of these efforts will be centralized in Academic Affairs and reported at least annually by the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Research.

7: Project Outcome Measures

A: Development, implementation, and communication of: 1) an established process by which the General Education and Assessment Committee conducts its assessment work related to learning outcomes in foundations courses and uses that data for improvement; 2) an established process by which the College of Arts and Sciences manages assessment of Breadth of Learning courses, uses the data for improvement and communicates the data to the larger campus faculty; and 3) an established process by which the academic majors (units) conduct assessment work related to learning outcomes in advanced courses and in Principles 3-5, communicates the results, and uses the results for improvement.

Project Update

1: Project Accomplishments and Status

A: Link to General Education Timeline for Assessment <http://www.iun.edu/~genednw/timeline/index.shtml>

The timeline above indicates that our Principle 1 Foundations courses were to be evaluated in 2010-11. As we had already evaluated Composition and Mathematics, the General Education/Assessment Committee focused on the following course: COMM-S121 BIOL-L100, CHEM-C101 this year (Principle 1 Foundation). Public speaking is a required general education course and biology and chemistry are the most heavily enrolled scientific reasoning courses on campus. The Committee chairs and Associate Vice Chancellor met with the department chairs and faculty of Biology, Chemistry, and Communication several times in the fall of 2011 to assist in the design of assessment plans. This required substantial time for both the committee chairs and the departments as they had not done this type of assessment previously. Special attention was focused on selecting an assessment method that was sustainable and that provided information to the department that they found valuable as well as data that focused on the general education learning outcomes. All three courses collected data in AY 2010-11 and are in the process of writing up their results which are due in September of 2011. They have all been invited to present their results to the General Education/Assessment Committee in the fall of 2011 and these results will be posted [here \(http://www.iun.edu/~nwacadem/caslo/results/index.shtml\)](http://www.iun.edu/~nwacadem/caslo/results/index.shtml) as soon as they are available.

Letters were originally sent to Dean of College of Arts and Sciences and School of Education in May of 2010 detailing courses to be assessed for General Education this year (Principle 2 Breadth of Learning) requesting plans for assessment by September 15, 2010 and final reports by April 2011 as reported in our previous report. It was then discovered that our timeline called for Principle 2 Assessment for the 2011-12 AY. New letters were generated and we are asking for plans by September 15, 2011 and final reports by April of 2012.

2: Institution Involvement

A: After the General Education Principles were approved by the campus and revisions made to the curriculum of every degree, both the General Education/Assessment Committee and the Office of Academic Affairs continue to be instrumental in maintaining general awareness of the assessment process. Both entities have communicated extensively with the academic units, who in turn have communicated extensively with their faculty regarding these issues. The new 2010-12 (online and printed) Bulletin details the new General Education Principles and includes the changes to the curriculum for the first time and so has become a valuable resource for Academic Advisors. Additionally the Office of Academic Affairs has communicated with the Library, Institutional Research and other core academic support areas regarding the project.

As the committee and the Office of Academic Affairs met with the department chairs involved with assessment of Principle 1 Foundation courses, it became clear that they needed assistance to move their assessment analysis forward in a timely fashion. Therefore, the Office of Academic Affairs has funded a work-study student to assist with Assessment for 2011-12 and will do so again in 2012-13. This student enters de-identified data and performs simple analyses supervised by the home academic units.

The administration will again send two or three individuals who are involved in the process to the Assessment Institute in 2011 to gather additional information on successful assessment projects to bring back to the campus. Any resources obtained at the Institute are cataloged, and the list is available on our Assessment page [online](#) and can be checked out by faculty as needed. While working on the redesign of General Education the Committee remained relatively static. However, with the adoption of the General Education Principles, a cadre of new faculty have joined some of the long-term committee members. These new faculty are outstanding ambassadors back to their academic units regarding assessment issues and have brought fresh new ideas to the committee as well. For example, one of the new members has published extensively on assessment in the field of criminal justice and helped significantly in the design of the public speaking and biology assessments being used over the last year.

3: Next Steps

A: Indiana University and IU Northwest will become part of a study of student learning gains assessment using the ETS Proficiency Profile in AY 2012-13. The following protocol will be implemented with the assistance of the Office of Admissions, Institutional of Institutional Effectiveness and Research, Office of Academic Affairs and the General Education/Assessment Committee:

- Time 1 Entering Cohort (Spring and Summer prior to AY 2012 – 2013): Administer the 2-hour version of the ETS Proficiency Profile in the Fall 2012 entering cohort during campus placement testing, using a sample size of between 300 and 350 students.
- Time 1 Seniors (Spring 2013): Administer the 2-hour version to a sample of 50 seniors on each campus to use for the VSA value-added learning score.
- Time 2 Juniors/Seniors (Spring 2016): Re-administer the long version to members of the Fall 2012 entering cohort who took the first test and have achieved at least junior level standing.

4: Resulting Effective Practices

A: General Education Assessment is a common institutional practice. While our process is not, we believe, groundbreaking, we hope it will be successful on our campus. We are still in the early stages of this project, but we are using the same process we used in creating our General Education plan. We have broad representation from the academic units on the General Education/Assessment Committee, we have support from the Office of Academic Affairs for the process and we are moving forward at a pace that is comfortable for our campus. There is a division of responsibility, with the committee focusing more significantly on the foundational general education experiences, while the academic units themselves are creating and implementing the assessment measures for the breath of learning courses. This has increased the number of people directly involved in the process and engendered greater buy-in by the campus community.

5: Project Challenges

A: As this is a new experience for our campus (our first campus-wide General Education Principles and Assessment Plan) we feel like we are still feeling our way through the process. The General Education/Assessment Committee as well as the Office of Academic Affairs are excited about the implementation of the plan, but the increase in work for the academic units and individual faculty makes it not as appealing a process for all. We continue to work to support both the individual academic units and faculty working on assessment with information, work-study assistance, and moral support along with encouragement that the results they gain are not just of use in improving the general education experience for our students but within their individual disciplines as well. Additionally, while we are moving forward on measuring student learning, we still need to increase our attention to closing the loop – taking the feedback and making substantive and important changes that will continue to enhance the student learning experience. Each year the departments/academic units provide program learning outcome assessment results and these reports include a section on what steps have been taken based on the results, so the programs are becoming acclimatized to working in this fashion. Also, the campus has been trained in Franklin Covey's *The Four Disciplines*, and its emphasis on setting goals, developing lead measures, meeting regularly to discuss progress and implementing change based on those measures. However, the Institutional Effectiveness Steering Committee is creating a plan to communicate more effectively on the key aspects of continuous quality improvement, which should help not just with Student Learning Outcome Assessment but all aspects of university function.

Update Review

1: Project Accomplishments and Status

A: During the first stages of this Action Project, Indiana University Northwest (IUN) is making good progress towards achieving the goal of assessing and validating its general education learning outcomes, with assessments for Principle 1 courses underway and plans in place for the assessment of Principle 2 courses. This is an important goal, which is not only vital to Helping Students Learn (AQIP Category 1), but also impacts the college's ability to Measure Effectiveness (AQIP Category 7).

Although IUN encountered some significant, and perhaps unexpected, time commitment challenges while working with faculty and department chairs in the creation of initial assessment plans (presumably during the fall of 2010), the time spent in these first phases is important. The college is to be commended for its initial efforts to create effective assessment methods and tools that will result in meaningful data, which will be vital to the ultimate success of using the assessment results for continuous improvement. Also, time spent meeting with faculty promotes the exchange of ideas, acceptance of assessment efforts, and faculty buy-in to a process that is often viewed as simply more work. The care that IUN has taken in getting this Action Project off the ground demonstrates the college's commitment to general education assessment, as well as its commitment to Valuing People (AQIP Category 4) and Leading and Communicating (AQIP Category 5).

The assessment process as described here follows a distributed model, focusing on student achievement at the course level. IUN was wise to select a few highly-enrolled courses to target for assessment, which enables the college to focus its efforts in a manageable way. It is also wise to set deadlines and publish results on the web to encourage participation and accountability. The proposed timeline was developed in 2007, with a logical progression of first assessing Foundational courses, and then progressing through Breadth of Learning courses, and on to advanced courses. To date, IUN has followed this timeline closely, but the college shouldn't hesitate to change the timing if circumstances and feedback warrant.

2: Institution Involvement

A: IUN has made a concerted effort to involve most, if not all, constituencies in Academic Affairs in this initiative. The college's efforts in ensuring inclusiveness underscore its commitment to Valuing People (AQIP Category 4) and Leading and Communicating (AQIP Category 5). Garnering faculty support and buy-in are critical to the success of general education assessment and IUN is wise to devote time and energy to accomplishing this. Adding new members to the General Education/Assessment Committee not only brings fresh ideas and insights, but also increases the numbers of faculty who will champion the cause.

The extensive communication campaign coupled with institutional support (providing student clerical assistance, funding conference attendance for involved parties) speak to the importance that the college is placing on this initiative. In addition to participation in the Assessment Institute, IUN might consider bringing a general education assessment consultant to campus. A consultant can provide information, guidance, and instruction to many people in a short time through open forums, faculty training sessions, and formal presentations. Such an effort on the college's part would also underscore the significance of this initiative to the campus community. The roster of Assessment Institute presenters and organizations such as The IDEA Center can provide good leads to consulting services.

3: Next Steps

A: IUN's decision to participate in the ETS Proficiency Profile is a good one, as it will give the college comparative data on more than 400 institutions and 500,000 students nationwide and will simultaneously allow the institution to demonstrate its program effectiveness for the Voluntary System of Accountability. The ETS Proficiency Profile results can be coupled with the data garnered through the assessment of student learning at the course level to give the college a clear picture of the effectiveness of its general education program.

The timing of this is advantageous to this Action Project's timeline. The initial ETS testing in the Fall of 2012 will have afforded IUN enough time to develop its own assessment plans and to gather course-level assessment data from Principle 1 and Principle 2 courses. The Spring 2013 ETS testing is still midway through the Project's proposed 2014 end date, which gives the college ample time to review the ETS results along with the in-house assessment data and make any warranted changes to its general education program-- the closing of the assessment loop. And, the 2016 ETS re-test will help to ensure ongoing assessment after the Action Project ends. These factors make IUN's participation in the ETS Proficiency Profile an added-value in attaining the goals of this Action Project.

4: Resulting Effective Practices

A: IUN has developed a process that employs several of the hallmarks of the AQIP process: involvement, leadership, people, and collaboration. By devising a plan that involves a broad swath of the institution's academic community, the college can engender broad-based ownership of general education assessment. The college has provided leadership through the Office of Academic Affairs, including institutional support for clerical needs and faculty development. IUN has also ensured representation by a number of faculty and other staff on various committees at various stages of the initiative, and the intentional division of responsibility results in collaborative efforts to accomplish the goals of this Action Project.

It is telling that the college is "moving forward at a pace that is comfortable for our campus." This indicates a sensitivity to the character of the college and its faculty and students. IUN may want to document the approach and steps taken in this initiative, noting the things that worked as well as those that didn't, to aid in future institution-wide assessment efforts.

5: Project Challenges

A: IUN is aware that assessment is not yet fully embedded in the campus culture and operation, especially with faculty. The college may discover ways of helping faculty, who in general truly want to help students succeed, view assessment as a benefit rather than just additional work. The methods employed thus far -- encouraging open communication, providing the opportunity for feedback, recognizing faculty autonomy in the curriculum, supporting faculty development and training -- are all positive steps that should be continued. Additional strategies to ease the transition might include peer training and support, on-campus consultation, or informal group discussions with faculty by representatives from the Institutional Effectiveness Steering Committee.

The ongoing challenge with this, or any other assessment initiative, is to perpetuate the activity once the "project" is completed -- creating a culture of continuous improvement. IUN is aware that there is still work to be done in "closing the loop" and making changes for improvement. Once this process is actively ongoing and those improvements are easily observable, creating that culture will be easier. The steps that IUN has taken thus far is a great start.