V. Assessment Inventory for Academic Areas

The University's academic assessment plans address the goals, objectives and learning outcomes set forward in the Student Success Plan, which in turn reflects the University's mission and Student Success goals. Critical to these plans are the learning outcomes set for each program. Thus, all academic departments finalized and submitted to the Provost program-level learning outcomes during the Spring 2005 semester as the first step in drafting a University-wide assessment plan. After several years of implementation, areas were asked to review, confirm and update their learning objectives. As of Spring 2008 they are:

The General Education Program

Half of an entering first time student's undergraduate program is devoted to general education courses. The foundation to a William Paterson University education is centered in these 60 credits. The general education program is especially important to the College of Humanities and Social Science where so many of the General Education courses reside.

The University's goals for the GE program are:

To enhance fundamental learning skills.
To foster effective written and oral communication.
To foster critical and creative thinking.
To foster student engagement in the leaning process through experimental and experiential pedagogy.
To foster an understanding of interdisciplinary learning modes and awareness of commonalities across disciplines.
To develop the individual for meaningful and satisfying participation and productive citizenship in an increasingly global economy and technological world.
To develop a commitment to diversity, equity and multiculturalism.
To encourage the development of humanistic values through an understanding of their history, current problems and applications.
To introduce fundamental concepts and methods of a variety of disciplines to non-majors.
To encourage an appreciation of arts and literature.
To encourage an understanding of the physical and natural world and our complex society.
To develop the capacity for lifelong learning and healthful living.

The expected Student Learning Outcomes of the General Education Program, in the form either of "knowledge" or "skills," are:

Knowledge

A. Students will be able to analyze major concepts and evaluate methodologies in a variety of disciplines.
B. Students will be able to evaluate and apply the following modes of inquiry:
    1. Experimental Method – The empirical verification of hypotheses.
    2. Historical method – An analysis of what has been written in the past and about the past with attention to remnants and traces of handiwork surviving from the past. (from the International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences)
    3. Aesthetic Mode – A study of the behavior and experiences in creating art, in perceiving and understanding art and in being influenced by art. (from the International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences)
    4. Observation Method – The acquisition of knowledge through exploration and observation. (from the International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences)
    5. Rational Mode – The exploration of the logical implications of a priori assumptions, and, in particular, the formal manipulation and application of abstract models.
    6. Intuitive Mode – The use of non-linear/non-sequential thought processes (e.g., speculation, cogitation and serendipity) to develop insights as well as create new paradigms and discoveries.

C. Students will be able to analyze and interpret works of literature and the arts.
D. Students will be able to analyze and interpret contemporary global issues.
E. Students will be able to describe and evaluate technology and its impact on the environment and society.
F. Students will be able to demonstrate awareness of various cultural traditions and commitment to diversity and equity in society.
G. Students will be able to illustrate and define connections between the major concepts and issues in the humanities, social and behavioral sciences, and the physical and natural sciences.
H. Students will be able to analyze and evaluate political and economic principles and their relationship to the development of a diverse international community.
I. Students will be able to describe and interpret major health and social issues as they relate to physical fitness and wellness.

Skills

As an outcome of study in General Education courses and the Program as a whole the student will demonstrate the ability to:

A. Accumulate and examine information
   This general skill includes the ability to:
   1. Plan the search.
   2. Use various methods (e.g. print, computer or web-based, oral, etc.) for gathering information.
   3. Understand and extract relevant and credible information.
   4. Sort, read critically and evaluate information.
B. Analyze information and data
   This general skill includes the ability to:
   1. Formulate hypotheses and strategies for analysis.
   2. Specify information which might confirm or challenge those hypotheses.
   3. Apply techniques, rules, models and/or quantitative skills to solve a variety of problems.
   4. Use technology to analyze information and data.
   5. Critically evaluate the interpretations presented by others in terms of their assumptions, logical inferences and empirical evidence.
   6. Draw conclusions based on all of the above.
C. Present information to varied audiences and for varied purposes
   This general skill includes the ability to:
   1. Organize information and effectively use information technology.
   2. Express one's own ideas in written, oral, quantitative and graphic forms which will be intelligible, correct and persuasive to a variety of audiences.
   3. Communicate basic information in at least one additional language.
D. Work Collaboratively
   This general skill includes the ability to:
   1. Use the interpersonal skills necessary to be an active and effective participant in a group.
   2. Contribute through involvement to achieving the goals of the group.

Assessment Tools for GE

Three years ago the HSS GE coordinators developed an **assessment instrument** with the help of then director of the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Dr. Dona Fountoukidis, and the Dean's active involvement. The assessment tool is based on the NSSE model and its categories. Specifically, the instrument is based on the University-wide Learning Outcomes Objectives for the GE Program. The instrument seeks the students' perspective on the effectiveness of the particular course in meeting the University's goals for the program as a whole.

The GE coordinators distribute the course assessment forms during Fall and Spring semesters. More than 2,000 students have participated in the GE assessment in the last two academic years. The results are subsequently

discussed by the Council and the coordinators seek ways of improving the courses and of addressing gaps in our effectiveness in meeting the University's goals for the program.

Beginning in the fall of 2004 the distribution of the survey was expanded to include the general education courses outside of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences. The two surveys were nearly similar; the non HSS survey had a few revised questions.

GE Assessment Findings and Their Use for Program Improvement

Assessment of General Education is one of the longest running assessment projects on campus. Their assessment activities have been in place for several years and data has accumulated over the past few years so that results are available for program improvements. The Dean of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences is heavily involved in general education assessment and the following comments are taken from her Annual (2004-2005) Assessment Report.

"In recent HSS surveys, we have learned that three-quarters of all students surveyed were of the opinion that they had learned very much or quite a bit from their General Education courses. According to the surveys, the courses met the University goal of helping students develop critical thinking skills. Approximately two-thirds of all students reported that the courses contributed to their ability to evaluate information critically, to pick out the most important points from a large quantity of information, and to organize facts in order to support a point of view. In students' estimation, the courses emphasized analysis of the basic elements in an idea, experience or theory, and making judgments about the value of information, arguments or methods. Another two-thirds were of the opinion that the courses helped them understand the basics of the particular discipline and that they helped them learn to listen to the views of others with an open mind.

The surveys have shown persistently troubling areas. During the past two years, students have given the lowest scores to questions dealing with the courses' success in helping them develop skills in the following areas: familiarity with current events and civic engagement, library and research skills, oral presentations, and team work. Only 25.2% of all students surveyed were of the opinion that the courses helped them very much or quite a bit in developing library research skills. Similarly, only 35% felt that the courses had helped them keep informed on current events, and 38% felt the courses had helped them develop the ability to speak clearly and effectively in front of a group. Three-fifths of our students were of the opinion that the courses had not done enough to help them become good citizens or to work effectively as a member of a group. Another area that needs continuous attention is writing. Although the College continues to give priority to integrating writing in its courses, fewer than 57% of the students surveyed were of the opinion that the courses had helped them learn to express themselves effectively through writing. Although this is considerably higher than the scores for library skills, etc, the coordinators agreed that this area needs persistent attention. To that end, a Writing Across the Curriculum component has been integrated in the General Education Training, held every August for new full-time and adjunct faculty. In addition, new full-time faculty are strongly encouraged to participate in the two-day training offered by the WAC program.

On the basis of the GE surveys, two meetings were set aside in the spring to discuss strategies for improving those areas in which students suggested that our GE courses were not meeting the University's learning objectives. Some coordinators proposed model lessons to address those areas. For example, Philosophy's coordinator developed a model for a scavenger hunt as a library assignment. The Psychology coordinator developed strategies for student oral reports in large GE classes. Other strategies discussed included setting up a GE website with model lessons and continuing to address these issues in pedagogy workshops."

The Senate General Education committee slightly revised the survey and administered it to students in general education courses in other Colleges. Results from this survey corroborate the H& SS findings.

One of the results from the survey findings is the formation of the University's Information Literacy Committee to address some of the concerns raised by the results.
The learning outcomes for colleges and departments reflect those of the major programs as well as building on the stated general education outcomes. These plans reflect a large part of the University's assessment plan.

The General Education program is currently being revised. The new program will also include assessment activities of the new student learning outcomes. Until then individual **general education course assessment activities are found in their respective departments**.

GE Science Courses

PHYS 110 While it was felt that students performed reasonable well on the SLOOs assessed in PHYS 110, it was none-the-less proposed that implementation of further classroom demonstrations or additional lab exercises covering the assessed topics be considered to strengthen the coverage of these particular area in the class.

CMHL 120 The Public Health department piloted implementation of standardized examination questions across sections in CMHL 120 Current Health Issues. The analysis of resulting data has allowed both optimization of the instrument and has identified the need for greater emphasis on specific aspects of course content.

Over the last 6 years, the department has completed a full rotation of major course assessments, and began emphasizing GE course assessment two years ago. The department's current assessment plan has a clear time-line for continued assessment at the course and program level.

For GE, based on assessment results of CMHL 120 Current Health Issues from 2005-2006, the department has systematically moved toward more standardization across sections of this GE requirement. This includes the implementation of core examination questions made this year which will help drive content standardization, as well as serve a valuable assessment function.

ENV-110 & 115 The department has emphasized GE assessment in previous years, developing a GE assessment plan and a course-embedded assessment instrument. This year there were extensive discussions about the effectiveness of the GE assessment plan and instrument.

No new changes to GE courses were made this year, but past changes have included a rock and mineral study web site developed as a cooperative project between the department and the Science Enrichment Center, and new lab manuals for both GE courses (ENV-110 & 115). A proposal to standardize grading across GE courses sections was also proposed.

Math140 All 112 students in the GE course Math140 (Quantitative Math I) from four fall 2007 sections participated in an assessment study. Students were assessed on the following three content areas: i) Cost Revenue Applications, ii) Linear Programming Graphical Method, and iii) The Simplex Method. SLOOs were assessed by evaluating solutions to questions embedded on the final exam. The average for all three SLOOs was 72.4%, with a breakdown of Cost Revenue Applications (86.5%), Linear Programming Graphical Method (57.4%), and Simplex Method (71.4%). The linear programming graphical method problem was the least significant problem assessed, and the simplex method problem was the most significant with respect to the concepts and material that are central to the course. It was concluded that student performance was weakest on the linear programming graphical method problem because it introduces a new approach to solving problems and less time is spent on this topic in the course. Since students performed reasonably well on both of the more important content areas, it was concluded that the assessment results were satisfactory. These results will be presented to the department for further discussion and analysis.

A fall 2006 assessment of Math 111 showed that learning outcomes in this course were not being achieved. Furthermore, it was concluded that the course SLOO's did not closely correlate with the course curriculum, and that the final exam may not have been the best venue for proper and complete assessment of the course outcomes. Because of these results, and overall performance of students taking the Math110/Math111 sequence, the department has been working to make substantial changes to both Math 110 and Math 111. As of this year, the course content for both of these courses has been revised and new course outlines are being prepared to reflect the changes.

Racism and Sexism in the US," "Women's Changing Roles"

In Spring 2007, surveys were conducted in introductory courses, three sections of "Racism and Sexism in the US," and one section of the "Women's Changing Roles." These surveys were handed over to the Dean's office.