

***White Paper on Assessment of Student Learning  
in the General Education Core Curriculum  
at the  
University of Louisiana at Lafayette***

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# CONTENTS

|  | Page      |
|--|-----------|
| <b>I Introduction.....</b>   | <b>1</b>  |
| a) The Federal Commission on the Future of Higher Education  | 1         |
| b) Reaccreditation and SACS requirements for assessing<br>General Education                              | 2         |
| c) Assessing UL Lafayette's General Education Program:<br>short-term answers and long-term possibilities | 3         |
| <b>II Current assessment mechanisms.....</b>   | <b>5</b>  |
| a) Surveys   | 5         |
| b) Freshman English proficiency and exit essays  | 5         |
| c) Other   | 5         |
| <b>III UL Lafayette's General Education Rationale and Learning Outcomes....</b>                          | <b>6</b>  |
| a) Rationale   | 6         |
| b) Learning goals for General Education  | 6         |
| <b>IV Assessing student learning in the General Education Program.....</b>                               |           |
| a) Direct measures: standardized tests   | 9         |
| Standardized Tests Recommended by the Task Force   | 9         |
| Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA)   | 9         |
| Measure of Academic Proficiency and Progress (MAPP)  | 10        |
| b) Indirect measures: surveys  | 10        |
| Survey Recommended by the Task Force   | 11        |
| National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)   | 11        |
| c) Course-embedded assessment  | 11        |
| i) How course-embedded assessment might work   | 11        |
| ii) Implementation in Individual Departments   | 12        |
| d) Collection of objective data  | 13        |
| <b>V Oversight and Improvement of the General Education Program.....</b>                                 | <b>14</b> |
| a) Assessment Officer  | 14        |
| b) General Education Coordinator   | 14        |
| c) General Education Committee   | 14        |
| d) General Education Program Representatives   | 14        |

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| <b>VI Other Long-Term Recommendations for Assessment and Improvement of Student Learning at UL Lafayette .....</b> | <b>16</b> |
| a) Giving General Education an identity at UL Lafayette  | 16        |
| b) Gaining faculty support   | 17        |
| i) Make SACS assessment the topic of a deans/department heads retreat  | 17        |
| ii) Faculty Assessment Meetings  | 17        |
| c) Capstone courses  | 18        |
| <b>VII Assessing the Assessment Process.....</b>   | <b>19</b> |
| a) Status of General Education Report  | 19        |
| b) Assessing standardized tests  | 19        |
| c) Assessing course-embedded assessment  | 19        |
| d) Assessing the goals   | 19        |
| <b>Appendices.....</b>   | <b>20</b> |
| Appendix 1: Suggested Time Line for Activities   | 20        |
| Appendix 2: Process of the Task Force  | 22        |
| Appendix 3: Reports From interviews with department heads  | 23        |
| Appendix 4: Report of telephone conversation with the Assessment Director at SLU                                   | 36        |
| Appendix 5: Goals/competencies/measures matrix   | 38        |

## **I Introduction**

The General Education Assessment Task Force of the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, constituted in June 2006, has been asked to recommend a plan for assessment of student learning in the General Education Program. The short-term purpose of this assessment is to collect data in preparation for the SACS reaccreditation that will take place in a few years. The long-term goal is to improve the General Education Program. The Task Force therefore considered assessment of student learning with an eye to improvement of the program and the institution, rather than with a view to individual students' achievement. Assessment of student learning is the trend these days in higher education and it is certainly something that SACS wants to promote in its member institutions. With the government and the public expressing a need for standardized testing in education in general, and "accountability" in higher education in particular, SACS proposes that if colleges and universities can find ways of assessing themselves within their own contexts, then mandated governmental standards and requirements can be avoided. Assessment is a positive move for UL Lafayette because, implemented successfully, it can involve faculty in the process of improving learning and instruction on an ongoing basis.

### ***a) The Federal Commission on the Future of Higher Education***

In September 2005, the U.S. Department of Education set up a Commission on the Future of Higher Education, "charged with developing a comprehensive national strategy for postsecondary education that will meet the needs of America's diverse population and also address the economic and workforce needs of the country's future." Issue Papers published by the Commission and reports on the Commission's work have brought into focus many of the questions surrounding accountability and national standards which are facing colleges and universities today. The tendency of Charles Miller, Chairman of the Commission, to favor national standards for higher education in line with the "No Child Left Behind" movement in elementary and secondary education, has made the work of the Commission somewhat controversial among those in higher education. When asked if he would propose mandatory testing, Miller said he would not. He does predict, however, that pressure from students, parents, and employers will eventually compel colleges to administer standardized tests in order to provide evidence of learning.

In the summer of 2006 the Commission issued several draft reports for discussion purposes. A revised draft report issued in July includes the following points which are relevant to assessment of the General Education Program here at UL Lafayette. The report

- ♦ warns colleges against moving away from a core curriculum,
- ♦ urges greater emphasis on international education and studying abroad,
- ♦ calls on faculty members to be at the forefront of "defining and helping achieve educational objectives for students as measured by evidence-based assessment,"
- ♦ suggests that the federal government support an effort that would use assessment to compare how much students in different states are learning.

[*Chronicle of Higher Education*, July 7, 2006]

While the draft reports of the Commission have been somewhat controversial, they have galvanized university administrators and accrediting bodies into taking action in order to forestall the issuing of broad federal requirements. A recent SACS message to its membership entitled "Accreditation and the Federal Commission on the Future of Higher Education" lists several areas of change on which SACS feels it might agree with the Federal Commission. They include, "the need for a clearer definition and assessment of student learning; increased attention to academic rigor and standards; better disclosure of the results of accreditation visits; and perhaps more involvement in accreditation processes by public representatives." As the SACS message points out, "the higher education community is well aware of the need to clearly define and assess student learning so that the benefits of higher education can be readily understood by students and the public . . . [I]n 2001 the membership adopted revised standards that require an institution to demonstrate that it establishes and assesses student learning outcomes. Visiting committees rigorously evaluate evidence in support of student learning outcomes."

In the face of the Federal Commission's work and SACS recommendations, it is time for the University of Louisiana at Lafayette to embrace assessment in areas where it is not already in use in a formal, organized way, such as in the General Education Program.

#### ***b) Reaccreditation and SACS requirements for assessing General Education***

The University of Louisiana at Lafayette seeks reaccreditation from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) every ten years. Our next site visit will come in the late fall of 2009 or early spring of 2010. Between then and now, preparation for this visit must occur university-wide. We must be prepared to account for the quality of education at this university.

SACS procedures and accreditation nationwide have changed in recent years. The Department of Education has pressured the Council for Higher Education Accreditation and its constituent members (including SACS) to do more than merely carry out periodic reviews. All accreditation agencies must now ensure that universities can show evidence of student learning. Specifically, SACS requires that institutions "identify college-level competencies within the general education component and provide evidence that graduates have attained those competencies." In other words, the new accreditation format consists of a three-step process: 1. The University articulates goals for student learning; 2. The University administers direct and indirect measures to assess whether these goals are being met; 3. The University uses the data gathered to improve curriculum and instruction.

This process is not news to many UL Lafayette departments and colleges that have recently undergone unit-wide accreditation. Nursing, business, communication and other areas have already put in place a system of measures of student performance for courses within those disciplines. However, for many departments involved in teaching courses as part of the General Education Core Curriculum here at UL, this emphasis on accountability will require a new level of faculty involvement in assessment.

SACS will expect the University to have several years of data in place before we submit our self-study documentation. This implies we must begin a formal process of stating goals, measuring student outcomes and using those measures, in the 2006-2007

academic year. This committee urges the administration to make the SACS accreditation process a priority as early as possible in the fall semester 2006.

***c) Assessing UL Lafayette's General Education Program:  
short-term answers and long-term possibilities***

Assessment in the General Education Program at UL Lafayette should be a continuing process embedded in our institution's culture, the aim of which is the improvement of curriculum, instruction and student learning. This approach is in accord with accreditation philosophy; according to the *Principles of Accreditation* of SACS Commission on Colleges, "The concept of quality enhancement is at the heart of the Commission's philosophy of accreditation; this presumes each member institution to be engaged in an ongoing program of improvement." But this is a long-term goal. We need data from assessment quickly in order to meet deadlines for the upcoming SACS review. With these factors in view, this Task Force recommends administering standardized tests to a sample of students beginning in the 2006/2007 academic year for immediate assessment data gathering. These tests of student performance should measure many of the competencies taught in General Education classes (see Appendix 5). Supplementing these tests we recommend an indirect measure, a survey, in order to assess students' learning environment and engagement with learning here at UL Lafayette. Some competencies do not lend themselves to standardized testing and so course-embedded assessment needs to be implemented. In addition, we have recommended a process whereby data from both standardized tests and course-embedded assessment can be deployed within departments in order to ensure an ongoing program of improvement based on those data.

While standardized tests are more convenient and less labor-intensive than course-embedded assessment, and they provide data that can be seen as more objective and which can be measured against national norms for similar institutions, they also have disadvantages [See page 9, section IV (a)]. In the long term, for purposes of improvement, it is important that assessment methods point to specific strengths and weaknesses that can be related to classroom instruction. In addition, it is important to have faculty involvement in and support of the assessment process, and this is more likely with class-embedded assessment and other methods developed within the university. Consequently, it is our recommendation that in the long term, for purposes of improving the General Education Program, this university gradually move away from reliance entirely on standardized testing and towards methods of course-embedded assessment developed within the departments themselves.

UL Lafayette's General Education assessment plan should be one that ensures

- i) that all departments involved in teaching General Education courses have clearly articulated outcomes, outcomes which mesh with those of the program as a whole,

- ii) that assessment of program objectives has been implemented in a timely fashion in order to gather data for the SACS reaccreditation process,
- iii) that assessment becomes an ongoing component of the General Education Program at UL,
- iv) maximum faculty support,
- v) improvement of instruction and learning as a result of the assessment process,
- vi) ongoing assessment and improvement of the assessment process itself.

## II Current Assessment Mechanisms

In order to develop an assessment plan for UL Lafayette's General Education Program, it was first necessary to conduct an inventory of current assessment mechanisms in place. The following are our findings:

### *a) Surveys*

UL currently administers the Student Opinion Survey (SOS) and the Alumni Survey (both ACT instruments).

Circa 2001 the Board of Regents decided to administer the SOS in all state institutions each spring. For five years the survey was administered in classes selected to reflect the demographics of our undergraduate student population (usually a sample size of about 1,000 students). For several years prior to this, we asked graduating seniors to complete the SOS survey and return it to ACT. As a result, we have some long-term data (though response rates were low). The broad data were analyzed by ACT. In house, we also have gathered college-based data from these surveys and distributed it each year to the deans of the respective colleges. Dr. Bruder has also kept linear data on eight "bellwether" questions that she has shared with University Council and with deans and department heads. Because of Hurricane Katrina, no surveys were administered in Spring '06. The UL system will continue to fund the SOS survey in the 2006/07 academic year.

Dr. Bruder feels that the SOS has been somewhat helpful in pinpointing areas needing improvement (advising, for example). However, the Task Force recommends supplementing this with the National Survey of Student Engagement, a more comprehensive survey that asks students to self-report on 43 aspects of their undergraduate experience. [See page 10, section IV (b) below for details and advantages of this survey].

### *b) Freshman English proficiency and exit essays*

The Freshman English sequence has recently been redesigned around a set of outcomes based on nationally recognized good practices. A proficiency essay is currently administered on the first class day of ENGL101, and an exit essay exam is administered at semester's end in 101 and 102. While these essays could be used as an assessment tool for the Freshman English component of the General Education Program, at present they are used mainly for assessment of individual students.

### *c) Other*

Several departments surveyed have course-level objectives articulated, but few have department-wide formal assessment mechanisms in place for their General Education courses. (See Appendix 3).

### III UL Lafayette's General Education Rationale and Learning Outcomes

SACS mandates that the general education component of an undergraduate degree "is based on a coherent rationale" (*Principles of Accreditation* 2.7.3), and that the institution "establishes and evaluates program and learning outcomes" (3.4.1). The Task Force has therefore developed a proposed umbrella Rationale for UL Lafayette's General Education Program, explaining the overall purpose of the program in terms of what we expect of our graduates. [See item (a) below] Six goals or learning outcomes have been identified that serve this overall purpose, and these goals have been broken down into specific skills or competencies for which evidence of accomplishment can be gathered. [See item (b) below].

#### **a) Rationale**

The following is the proposed rationale for the UL Lafayette General Education Program

*The General Education Core Curriculum at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette is designed to ensure that our graduates acquire the knowledge and skill to live productive lives as responsible and knowledgeable citizens of their region, their country and the world, capable of working effectively with others while displaying openness to different viewpoints and understanding the diversity of human values. We expect our graduates to appreciate the possibilities of human achievement in both the arts and the sciences, recognizing the importance of the arts to society and the salient ethical issues raised by various scientific disciplines, in addition to appreciating the physical world and our impact on it.*

*To this end, our core is founded on the traditional liberal arts and sciences curriculum, providing breadth across the humanities, arts, social studies, and biological and physical sciences, while teaching competence in technology, communication, critical thinking and analytical skills.*

*We hope that, as a result of their understanding of the value of their broad education, our graduates will be life-long learners, regarding their education not only as contributing to their wage-earning potential, but also to their continuing process of intellectual growth.*

#### **b) Learning goals for General Education**

In order to evaluate or assess student learning in the General Education Program, it is necessary to articulate what we expect students to learn from this program. And as noted above, SACS mandates that an institution "establishes and evaluates program and learning outcomes." The Task Force, therefore, took the general competencies that are required by the Board of Regents and meshed them with the skills we understand are currently being taught in our General Education Program. We then established goals for each of the subject areas within the program along with specific outcomes pertaining to those goals. It is these outcomes that will be

evaluated for reaccreditation purposes in the short term, and for improvement of teaching and learning in the long term. (See Appendix 5. It is understood that as the process of establishing assessment within the General Education Program continues, input from faculty teaching in the program may cause these goals to be adjusted.)

Goals and outcomes:

i) Communication: Students should communicate effectively in oral and written English.

Specifically, students should be able to:

- ♦ Write essays that make arguments supported by evidence, while synthesizing and documenting sources.
- ♦ Speak cogently in presenting information or in working in groups.
- ♦ Think critically and read with comprehension.

ii) Science: Students should understand scientific methods, principles and processes and be familiar with salient ideas in the physical and biological sciences, as well as their implications for society and the physical world.

Specifically, students should be able to:

- ♦ Apply key processes and draw conclusions within the natural sciences.
- ♦ Understand scientific reasoning and the nature of progress of scientific knowledge.

iii) Human Nature: Students should be familiar with key ideas about human nature, as well as the history and diversity of human cultures.

Specifically, students should be able to:

- ♦ Comprehend complex concepts in history and the social sciences.
- ♦ Make reasonable judgments within historical and social science contexts.
- ♦ Understand the diverse nature of humanity and respect other cultures.

iv) The Arts: Students should understand the nature and value of literature and the fine and performing arts.

Specifically, students should be able to:

- ♦ Interpret and write critically about literature across several genres.
- ♦ Use primary sources, art works or performances to analyze ideas and issues relevant to the human condition and human values.

v) Quantitative Reasoning: Students should be able analyze quantitative information in order to solve problems and understand the world.

Specifically, students should be able to:

- ♦ Analyze and critically evaluate numerical and graphical data to draw reasonable and valid conclusions.
- ♦ Use mathematical methods and models to solve quantitative problems and to communicate solutions effectively.

- ♦ Appreciate the power of mathematics to describe and model phenomena in the natural world and in human society.

vi) Information Technology: Students should demonstrate effective use of information technologies.

Specifically, students should be able to:

- ♦ Search electronic sources for information.
- ♦ Evaluate and utilize retrieved data to advance arguments.
- ♦ Communicate through electronic media.

## IV Assessing Student Learning in the General Education Program

### *a) Direct measures: standardized tests*

In view of the urgency of gathering assessment data in preparation for the upcoming SACS review, we recommend immediate implementation of some standardized testing in order to produce data in a timely fashion for reaccreditation purposes. Standardized tests should *not* be administered as part of a gatekeeping process to all UL Lafayette students (as was done with the CAAP exam), but instead should be administered to a sample of students. The tests would not be used to evaluate individual students' performance, but to evaluate the program's ability to meet its goals.

As can be seen from Appendix 5, available standardized tests (column 4) can be matched to course subjects (column 3) which in turn correlate to specific competencies and goals the General Education Program is hoping to achieve (columns 1 & 2). The disadvantages of these tests are that (a) the results do not pinpoint particular classes and activities that need to be improved; (b) the tests do not involve direct input from faculty and therefore may be resisted by some faculty; and, (c) some faculty are opposed to standardized testing in principle, because of the perceived need to design classes to match the test, something that is seen as antithetical to a university education. In addition, there is some concern that the students taking the tests would not be invested in doing well since there is no benefit to be gained by the individual student from the result. The advantage of these standardized tests is that they can be implemented quickly and data can be reported in various formats indicating results of our students' learning compared to similar groups elsewhere. Recent design of standardized tests have been greatly improved to test students in problem solving and in synthesizing knowledge.

### **Standardized Tests Recommended by the Task Force**

#### Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA)

The Collegiate Learning Assessment exam measures critical thinking, analytical reasoning and written communications by evaluating students' responses to multifaceted, complex, and vague situations. Two writing assignments (specifically a "make-an-argument" prompt and a "break-an-argument" prompt) are evaluated by an automated scoring technology developed by Educational Testing Service (ETS). The most innovative aspect of the CLA is the performance task. Students are presented with a problem and several sources of material. They are required to examine, understand, and integrate this information. Their written responses are then graded by a team of trained raters.

One of the recommended testing strategies of the CLA is a value-added approach. A sample of first-year students is compared with a sample of seniors at our university. There is then assessment of how much the students have learned while at the institution. Also, campus comparisons can be provided by CLA.

The cost of the value-added tests (100 freshmen and 100 seniors) is \$6,300. There is a \$20 fee per student if a larger sample size is desired.

### Measure of Academic Proficiency and Progress (MAPP)

The Measure of Academic Proficiency and Progress exam measures college-level reading, mathematics, writing, and analytical reasoning. This rather difficult test of the Educational Testing Service does not measure knowledge, but rather taps the students' skills gained from General Education courses. The MAPP is a multiple-choice test in which the student responds to readings in the context of the humanities (e.g., poetry, fiction, nonfiction), social sciences (e.g., economics, political science, psychology), and natural sciences (e.g., biology, chemistry, physics). Certain questions gauge critical thinking, others writing, and some reading skills. The mathematics section measures quantitative skills.

A possible testing strategy of the MAPP is a value-added approach. A sample of first year students can be compared with a sample of seniors at our university. The university would then assess how much the students have learned while at our institution. Because of the changing enrollment requirements, ACT scores would need to be controlled for the two samples. ETS offers comparative data with other similar institutions, from entering freshman to seniors with more than 90 semester hours.

Based on the MAPP website information, the cost of the standard form (120 minute test) is \$15.50 per test and the abbreviated form (40 minute test) is \$13.50 per test. ETS has an optional essay with the MAPP for \$5.00 per test, but this skill is assessed by CLA exam and also by course-embedded composition assessment. As of August 17, 2006, the Task Force has been unable to acquire a sample MAPP test for review.

It is recommended that the MAPP be given every two years to give time to respond to the multiple indicators identifying strengths and weaknesses in the curriculum. A long term strategy in assessing these skills is for the university to develop course-embedded measures.

*N.B.* An 80-seat assessment laboratory will be available in Moody Hall in Spring 2007 for online tests.

### ***b) Indirect measures: surveys***

While indirect measures such as surveys will not provide data on students' learning *per se* in the General Education Program, they will measure student behaviors and institutional actions that have come to be understood as indicators of success in college. To the extent that "good practices" measured by these surveys are in place, student learning is expected to occur.

## Survey Recommended by the Task Force

### National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)

The National Survey of Student Engagement is an indirect assessment tapping student activities such as classroom participation, faculty interaction, and extracurricular activities. Since it is different from the Student Opinion Survey (SOS), this survey could be administered in addition to it. Inasmuch as the NSSE provides information about student activities in and out of the classroom, it offers information that can lead to very specific changes to improve student learning. This survey can be administered at the end of the freshman year and at the end of the senior year to gauge the value added.

Questions on the NSSE include (a) frequency of experiences, e.g., “included diverse perspectives (different races, religions, genders, political beliefs, etc.) in class discussions or writing assignments”; (b) mental activities, e.g., “applying theories or concepts to practical problems or new situations.”; (c) quantity of reading and writing; (d) number of homework problems, (e) challenge to do best work; (f) frequency of enriching activities, e.g., “attended an art exhibit, gallery, play, dance, or other theater performance”; (g) quality of relationships with people at the institution; and (h) other satisfaction and demographic queries.

Based on the NSSE website information, the institutional fee for an undergraduate enrollment of more than 12,000 students is \$7,500. *The deadline for registering to administer NSSE in spring 2007 is September 21, 2006.*

### ***c) Course-embedded assessment***

Writing instructors and others in the humanities generally feel that standardized tests cannot reliably assess writing ability and other competencies. Therefore, for courses that do not teach competencies that lend themselves to standardized testing, class-embedded assessment can be implemented. These courses include: composition, literature, interdisciplinary humanities, history, communication, visual and performing arts.

The advantage of class-embedded assessment is that there is a direct link between the data gathered and student learning/instruction in specific courses. Consequently, a specific plan of action to improve instruction and learning can be based on data collected in this type of assessment. In addition, faculty have a stake in developing the assessment method. The disadvantages of class-embedded assessment are that (a) it does not measure students against groups outside of this university; (b) it is more labor-intensive than standardized testing; and, (c) implementation of this type of assessment will take some time to develop and implement in most cases.

#### ***i) How course-embedded assessment might work***

Uniform goals/competencies need to be put in place for these courses within each department, goals that mesh with the overall General

Education Program goals/competencies and that are expressed in terms of what we want *students* to be able to do, rather than what we as teachers expect to do ourselves. Then, for each General Education course, each department would design a generic essay question to be included on the final exam or an assignment to be embedded in the course, across all sections, that tests these stated competencies.

The question would be standardized as to format not content. Thus, literature courses covering different periods, for example, could assign the same kind of question/assignment, but one that was applicable to any course content. An exam essay question might ask: *using specific examples from the works you've studied this semester, discuss ways in which analysis of the use of metaphor contributed to your interpretation of the text.* A committee would then assess a sampling of these essays annually. The assessment would be based on preset rubrics, with results being reported to the University's General Education Committee. An annual meeting would then be held, within the department, of instructors teaching General Education courses to discuss assessment results, compare them to previous years' results, and to share ideas for improvement where weaknesses are evident. The initial departmental discussions to decide upon uniform course goals/competencies, design of a standard assignment and rubrics with which to assess the assignment would themselves be an important and constructive steps to improving standards within those departments teaching General Education courses.

#### ii) Implementation in Individual Departments

For class-embedded assessment to be effective, not only in reporting data, but also in improving instruction and learning, it is necessary for departments to meet, discuss and decide upon the most advantageous method of assessment to be used within that department. It is highly recommended that a University Assessment Officer, or other faculty member who understands assessment possibilities, aid in this decision making process.

Mathematics could begin course-embedded assessment of the quantitative literacy goal by including some common questions on final exams in some sections of the college algebra courses (105/100). The student responses will then be evaluated by a committee using a grading rubric for each question. As the faculty become more experienced with this method of assessment, this process would be expanded to include other General Education courses within the department.

Freshman English could begin class-embedded assessment using the entrance and exit essays currently administered.

See reports from interviews conducted by the Task Force with Department Heads for specific class-embedded assessment ideas relating to each department. (Appendix 3)

***d) Collection of objective data***

Objective data collection could also be used to assess the General Education Program. To assess the success of students' engagement with technology, such information as Moodle usage, on-line data base usage tracked by the library, and other information could be used.

## **V Oversight and Improvement of the General Education Program**

As has been stated, the ultimate goal of assessment, beyond the immediate requirements for reaccreditation, should be improvement of curriculum, instruction and learning. Data collected through assessment should point to strengths and weaknesses in students' learning and indicate whether students are attaining specific competencies. Instructors can then make adjustments at the classroom level to bring about improvement. In order for this process to take place, a structure needs to be set up within the university that designates those responsible for ensuring the ongoing implementation of the assessment plan. Following are our recommendations for building that structure:

### ***a) Assessment Officer***

The Task Force strongly recommends hiring/assigning an Assessment Officer to be responsible for implementing the university's ongoing assessment plans in General Education and other programs. In order to meet the goals of the upcoming SACS reaccreditation, we recommend that this person be hired as quickly as possible. As central liaison for all university assessment efforts, this person would ensure that the three-step assessment process is implemented consistently across campus.

### ***b) General Education Coordinator***

Appoint a General Education Coordinator from the faculty [preferably with course release] to oversee not only assessment of the General Education Program, but to provide information to faculty and students about this program, to create an identity for this program [see page 16, section VI (a)] and to ensure that this program is continually assessed and updated. This person would work closely with the Assessment Officer in ongoing plans for assessing the General Education Program and would be assisted by the General Education Committee (see below).

### ***c) General Education Committee***

In order to ensure that the General Education Program continues to thrive and that assessment and subsequent improvement of this program continue to be implemented, a General Education Program Committee should be formed [perhaps a subcommittee of CAAS, or perhaps selected from General Education Program Representatives. See (iv) below.] This committee, chaired by the General Education Coordinator, would also ensure that the General Education Program acquires an identity at UL Lafayette [see page 16, section VI (a)].

### ***d) General Education Program Representatives***

At the college and/or department level (depending on department size), assign a faculty member to be the General Education Program Representative. The General Education Representative would help to create an identity for program within the college/department and ensure that General Education goals (see Appendix 5) are articulated and implemented at the classroom level. This person would guide the assessment process at the local level and be responsible for

accumulating data. (Though data collection could, perhaps, be done by department heads/assistant department heads in some units.) These data, along with plans for improvement based on the data, would be reported to the General Education Committee who would then pass the information on to the University's Assessment Officer. The departmental representative would also ensure that the results of ongoing assessment were deployed at the local level for improvement of instruction. This would be done by conducting annual meetings at which faculty involved in teaching General Education courses discuss assessment and share ideas for improvement.

*N.B.* In implementing this plan, it is recommended that release time be considered for the above responsibilities taken on by faculty members, at least until these plans have been implemented and become an ongoing part of life at the university.

## **VI Other Long-Term Recommendations for Assessment and Improvement of Student Learning at UL Lafayette**

### ***a) Giving General Education an identity at UL Lafayette***

Currently, students involved in taking General Education classes at this university are not being apprised of the reasons for taking such a diverse curriculum; the purpose and coherence of the General Education Program is not explained for them or for faculty teaching these classes. According to a report issued by the Association of American Colleges, students taking general education classes "should experience a coherent course of study, one that is more than the sum of its parts" ("Strong Foundations" iv).

In order to give UL Lafayette's General Education Program a coherent identity and in order to help students understand the purpose of such a program, we recommend the following:

- i) Place a statement of the rationale of the General Education curriculum and its goals in the university's *Undergraduate Bulletin*. Identify in the *Bulletin* courses that can be taken for General Education credit.
- ii) Create a General Education webpage and include a link on the University's website to that page. That page would include contact information for the General Education Program Coordinator and Departmental Representatives, the rationale for the program and list of the programs goals, a list the classes that can be taken for General Education credit, and the schedule for General Education classes each semester along with information for advisors. This page would ensure that students and faculty understand what the General Education Program is and why these classes are required.
- iii) Each department should articulate goals for each of its General Education courses and publish these goals with each course syllabus. These course goals should incorporate the University's Gen Ed goals where appropriate.
- iv) In the long term, in order to have courses designated in the Bulletin as General Education courses, a department should commit to incorporating at least four of the following proposed "learning elements" into those courses: writing, speaking, working collaboratively, information literacy, reading comprehension, diversity, critical thinking.
- v) A question in the SOS in 2007 should gauge students' understanding of the General Education core curriculum. Asking the same question again in a few years would assess whether the ideas recommended here have been helpful.

***b) Gaining faculty support***

SACS seems to agree with assessment experts in asserting that an institution's faculty must be an integral part of the assessment process in order for it to be successful in achieving the ultimate goal of improvement. Standardized tests are seen by some faculty (especially in the humanities) as antithetical to the learning process that is the hallmark of a university education. These tests do not necessarily produce data that directly relate to classroom activities for purposes of improvement. Consequently these tests do not always have faculty backing. Without faculty backing the results of these tests will not lead to ongoing improvement of instruction. The long-term plan for assessment of the General Education Program should involve faculty more and more in adjusting articulated goals for the program, decision making on assessment methods, and sharing and discussion of ideas for improvement. In order to gain faculty support, the Task Force recommends the following:

i) Make SACS assessment the topic of a deans/department heads retreat  
Although this committee has crafted goals and competencies for the core curriculum, and has suggested measures, we anticipate that all faculty who teach core courses should have an opportunity to comment on and alter our suggestions. They will be responsible for implementing the SACS process and the ongoing assessment program. Hence the committee recommends that the process of implementing these changes begin with a retreat for deans and department heads. The changes must be made at the department level, and led by the department head, although some coordination from Academic Affairs office will no doubt be necessary to ensure uniformity of approach. Our committee has considered only the core curriculum; beyond that each department will also need to show that its graduates are meeting goals and competencies that they must articulate and measure.

*This is a major change in how the University goes about its work. Major changes take time, and we haven't much time, given our need to generate data in the 2006-2007 academic year.*

ii) Faculty Assessment Meetings

It is recommended that a meeting/series of meetings be held across campus for those faculty who are involved in teaching General Education classes at UL Lafayette. The purpose of these meetings would be to explain the benefits of assessment and to ensure that faculty understand that assessment is not used to evaluate their performance but is an opportunity to share ideas on improvement of instruction and of student learning. This would also be an opportunity to get feedback from faculty on ways in which to implement the ongoing assessment plan.

It is important to remember that:

- Faculty need to be convinced that assessment is good for the university and that assessment focuses on program effectiveness and is not about evaluating individual instructors.
- While all faculty members should be involved in improvement, not all faculty members in a department need to be involved in assessment. Specific faculty members should be responsible for assessment.
- Assessment data can usually be gathered from a sample of students/sections.
- Assessment methods need themselves to be assessed on an ongoing basis to make sure the most effective methods are being used, and faculty need to be a part of that process.

*c) Capstone courses*

Some universities use capstone courses in the major fields to assess whether general education skills [e.g. writing, reading with comprehension, etc.] have been built on by students in their years in the classroom. Assessment data from such classes can be used to assess "value added" by a student's university experience. Capstone courses in each discipline would, of course, also be helpful for major field assessment. (Some disciplines currently have a capstone course. Others, such as History, are working on developing such a course.)

## VII Assessing the Assessment Process

### *a) Status of General Education Report*

In order to assess the state of our General Education Program before and after assessment and improvement plans are implemented, it is recommended that UL Lafayette produce a Status of General Education Report. This report would include early assessment results, and other data, much of which is already available: e.g. This university already has available grade distributions, withdrawal rates comparisons, and SEI based evaluations. If such a report were repeated in approximately 5 or 6 years, a comparison would suggest ways in which assessment and improvement plans could be adjusted. This report would also include objective data such as Moodle usage, percentage of international students and other information that could be used to assess the success of our program. [SLU produced such a report and it is available on their website.]

### *b) Assessing standardized tests*

The committee anticipates that the assessment process will change over time, moving from standardized testing, to a system that utilizes more “home-grown” assessment measures. Assessing the assessment process is an essential component of the plan, and the first step is to re-evaluate the assessment tools for appropriateness. After the first set of data is analyzed, there should be an investigation to consider if the CLA and the MAPP each provide the needed information. (This is especially true of the MAPP since the committee is not certain that the MAPP is the best instrument to measure the achievement of some of the goals, in particular, those relating to science reasoning and quantitative literacy. However, it is adequate for short-term assessment.) A second decision to be made is the answer to the question, “Do the CLA and the MAPP actually provide different information?” The university must then decide if it will continue to use one or both of these exams. At the time of writing this report, the Task Force has been unable to obtain a copy of the MAPP test for review.

### *c) Assessing course-embedded assessment*

For competencies that are being measured with course-embedded assessments, the questions and/or rubrics used should be re-examined for reliability and validity. Gradually, more competencies should be measured with course-embedded assessments. In addition, some competencies will be assessed with usage data. The type of data collected for such assessment should be re-examined for effectiveness.

### *d) Assessing the goals*

The committee created goals and competencies based on the existing General Education Core Curriculum. These goals and competencies should be re-evaluated periodically to determine if they are aligned with the philosophy of the university and with competencies actually being taught in General Education classes. If it appears not to be so, then these goals and competencies must be adjusted.

## *Appendices*

### **Appendix 1: Suggested Time Line for Activities**

- ♦As soon as possible: Appoint/Hire University Assessment Officer

#### **Fall 2006**

- ♦Register with NSSE by Sept 21, 2006 for administering survey in spring 2007
- ♦Appoint General Education Coordinator
- ♦Appoint General Education Committee
- ♦Appoint General Education Departmental Representatives
- Beginning of semester:
  - ♦Circulate proposed goals to deans and department heads.
  - ♦Hold meetings with colleges/departments who will be involved in class-embedded assessment in order to involve faculty and receive input on most advantageous assessment methods. [Departments to conduct course embedded assessment include: freshman English, literature, Interdisciplinary Humanities, History, Performing Arts, Visual Arts]
- ♦In October, hold a deans and department heads retreat to inform them of the plans for Gen Ed assessment. Refine goals and competencies based on feedback gained at this meeting.
- ♦Ask Departmental Representatives to begin developing standard departmental goals for Gen Ed courses, which should be congruent with university-wide Gen Ed goals and competencies.
- ♦Make arrangements for CLA testing in Spring

#### **Spring 2007**

- ♦Hold meetings with colleges/departments who will be involved in standardized testing in order to explain the assessment process, receive input and get faculty on board.
- By beginning of semester:
  - ♦include goals on syllabi
- By end of semester:
  - ♦Develop website for General Education Program
  - ♦Complete Status of General Education Report
- ♦Implement standardized testing—CLA
- ♦Implement survey—NSSE

#### **In Summer 2007**

- ♦Gather and analyze assessment data. Departments will have to decide what constitutes acceptable student performance when analyzing these data.

- ♦ Re-evaluate the assessment tools for appropriateness.
  - For example:
    - a. Consider if the CLA and MAPP provide the needed information and if the information provided by each is different. Decide if the university will continue to use one or both of these exams.
    - b. Re-evaluate the rubrics used for course-embedded assessments.
- ♦ Re-evaluate the goals and objectives to determine if they accurately represent the vision of the university and actual classroom instruction.
- ♦ Submit the results to various departments and request that they provide a plan for improving their courses to help the university meet the stated goals. (Some suggestions are listed on the goals documents—See Appendix 5)

### **Fall 2007**

- ♦ First departmental meetings on both course embedded assessment and standardized testing to evaluate data and share ideas for improvement
- By beginning of semester:
  - ♦ Include Gen Ed pages and identify Gen Ed classes in on-line *Bulletin*
- ♦ Implement standardized testing—MAPP

### **Spring 2008**

- ♦ Implement pilot course embedded assessment for Freshman English, English Literature, Interdisciplinary Humanities, History, Performing Arts, Visual Arts

### **Fall 2008**

- By beginning of semester:
  - ♦ Departmental meetings on both course-embedded assessment and standardized testing to evaluate data, share ideas for improvement
  - ♦ Include learning elements in all Gen Ed classes
  - ♦ Implement standardized testing—CLA

### **Spring 2009**

- ♦ Implement survey—NSSE
- ♦ Implement course-embedded assessment for Freshman English, English Literature, Interdisciplinary Humanities, History, Performing Arts, Visual Arts

### **Fall 2009**

- ♦ Departmental meetings on both course embedded assessment and standardized testing to evaluate data, discuss results and share ideas for improvement
- ♦ Implement standardized testing—MAPP

## Appendix 2: Process of the Task Force

The Task Force met weekly through the summer. Each committee member worked individually through the week on various components of the committee's task: crafting goals and competencies, investigating possible measures, seeking additional information from other universities' accreditation documents, getting further information from upper administration. The committee followed the process suggested in Barbara Walvoord's *Assessment Clear and Simple*, (and consulted Catherine Palomba and Trudy Banta's *Assessment Essentials*). We began by articulating goals for the core curriculum. In doing so, we assumed that the core curriculum itself was unlikely to change dramatically in the coming years, because the UL Lafayette core is a close fit to that prescribed by the Louisiana Board of Regents. Hence our goals for the core curriculum tried to subsume all courses within the core. Our goals also address the SACS mandate that the general education component reflect a coherent rationale, growing out of the University's mission statement (item 2.73 in the SACS *Principles of Accreditation* document). We arrived at six goals, which capture features of all the core courses. The goals are the leftmost column of the General Education Assessment Matrix, which is the kernel document of the committee's work. This Matrix can be found in Appendix 5. Goals are necessarily broad, abstract and difficult to measure. But they imply objectives, or student competencies, which was the committee's next task. We devised competencies that extended from each goal, and which take the format, "Specifically, students should be able to:"

The committee crafted 16 competencies, which appear in column 2 of the General Education Assessment Matrix. These competencies reflect measurable skills students should have upon completing various components of the core curriculum. The component core curriculum courses are themselves listed as the third column of the matrix. The committee's articulation of competencies reflected both the goals from which they emerge, as well as the SACS mandate that these goals and competencies be measured.

The committee then discussed measures for each competency. These are listed as column 4 of the General Education Assessment Matrix and are discussed at greater length elsewhere in this report. The committee felt that "home-grown" measures like embedded assessment were preferable to standardized tests. However, devising campus-produced measures will take considerable time to devise, and faculty involvement has not yet begun. But we must begin generating assessment data in the coming academic year. Hence the committee has recommended three standardized tests (MAPP, CLA and NSSE) to measure the proposed set of goals and student competencies. We foresee, however, that some or all of these standardized tests will eventually be replaced or supplemented by more campus-produced measures.

Next, the committee did an assessment audit of the core curriculum. We surveyed the heads of all departments that offer core courses, to see what goals and measures were already in place. The department-by-department interview results can be found in Appendix 3. Finally, the committee considered how departments might utilize the suggested measures to improve curriculum and instruction. However, this part of the process is very speculative, as each department will no doubt wish to establish benchmark parameters for whether core curriculum goals and competencies are being met by the department's courses. And it will be up to each department to utilize those data to improve the core courses they offer.

Catherine A. Palomba and Trudy W. Banta. *Assessment Essentials*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999.

Barbara Walvoord. *Assessment Clear and Simple*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004.

## **Appendix 3: Reports From Interviews With Department Heads**

*Interviews conducted by Kerry Carson*

### **Dr. Buddy Himes, Director – School of Music**

Dr. Himes is quite involved in the accreditation process and serves on visiting teams for evaluation of other Schools of Music. All the courses for majors are monitored for accreditation purposes. However, the courses for non-majors are not subject to the same scrutiny as those for majors. Music appreciation courses for non-majors primarily include MUS 300 (A Survey of Styles), MUS 301 (A Survey of Choral Music), MUS 303 (An Introduction to Jazz) and MUS 304 (Broadway and the Lyric Theater). Two courses are offered to reflect the cultures indigenous to Acadiana. These include MUS 360 (Louisiana French Folk Music) and MUS 362 Creole and Black Music in Louisiana.) MUS 302 (The Music of France) is for the study abroad program and is rarely offered. In addition to these courses, there are applied music courses that non-majors take including marching band, orchestra, jazz ensemble and wind ensemble. Objectives for all non-major courses vary by instructor and are not subject to the types of assessment required by SACS.

### **Mr. Brian Kelly, Head – Visual Arts**

Mr. Kelly provided extensive materials from their accreditation process. Non-major students are allowed to choose from a wide variety of courses in visual arts. All courses have specific objectives spelled out. The most common courses taken by non-majors are VIAR 120 (Appreciation of Visual Arts), VIAR 121 (Survey of Visual Arts) and VIAR 122 (Survey of Arts). There are also the 300-level visual arts including VIAR 303 (Introduction of Printmaking), VIAR 375 (Introduction to Metalwork and Jewelry), VIAR 380 (Introduction to Ceramics) and VIAR 396 (Introduction to Photography). VIAR 215 (Art in Education) is taken by education majors and involves the development of lessons. Given the variety of courses open to students, a more generic assessment of underlying skills needs to be assessed by the university in order to comply with SACS expectations.

### **Mr. Robert McKinney, Director – School of Architecture and Design**

The School of Architecture and Design must respond to three accreditation agencies, but none require the same type of outcome assessment as SACS. DSGN 121 (Survey of Design) is a new course for non-majors that some take in place of visual arts that introduces significant historical precedents and theories that have impacted 20<sup>th</sup> century design. Some non-majors take ARCH 221 (History of Architecture) which is the critical study of history and theory of architecture, industrial design and interior design. Specific learning objectives are offered for this course. A third course, ARCH 476 (Louisiana Architecture), has not been taught recently.

### **Dr. Anthony Greco, Head – Department of Economics & Finance**

The Moody College of Business offers ECON 300 for non-majors. The business college accreditation body, AACSB, requires objectives for all courses, and this particular course

strives to develop economic literacy necessary for responsible citizenship. Dr. Greco indicated that it was planned to conduct a course-embedded assessment of ECON 300 during 2006-2007. However, the details of this assessment have not yet been formulated.

**Mr. Neil Vanderpool, Head – Department of Performing Arts**

An interview could not be arranged with Mr. Vanderpool due to his illness.

**Ms. Jennifer Hightower – Campus Diversity Director**

Ms. Hightower was in agreement with the committee's written objective to "understand the diverse nature of humanity and be respectful of other cultures." She offered to be engaged in the SACS process to help with this objective.

**Dr. Charles Triche, Director – Dupre Library**

Dr. Triche was asked if it was possible to measure students' ability to search for information through electronic sources. He indicated that the use of all electronic databases was tracked by the library. Presently, the count includes both faculty and students. However, because all must log on to access these databases, he felt confident that a program could be written to separate out student use.

Each department representative interviewed was given a draft of the goals and competencies. The questions asked were those agreed upon by the committee:

- 1) Which courses in your department are taken for General Education Core? Which do most students take?
- 2) Has your department articulated goals for these courses? Have any individual instructors articulated goals?
- 3) With emphasis on the scientific reasoning and quantitative literacy goals, do these goals/competencies fit with what your classes are trying to do? Do you have any suggestions for changing the goals or competencies?
- 4) Are there any mechanisms currently in place that could be used to assess student learning? Can you suggest other ways to assess student learning? Would you like to examine a review copy of the MAPP when it arrives?
- 5) Can you think of ways in which the results could be used to improve student learning?

**Common Information:**

In response to Question 2:

All of the departments responded that each general education course has a syllabus that includes a list of topics to be taught. Many also have a list of problems as assignments. Most have a single statement about “the purpose” or “the goal” of each course. However, in general, there are no articulated departmental goals and measurable competencies for the general education courses. Most stated that some individual faculty members do include goals and competencies on their class policies.

In response to Question 3:

All representatives are in agreement with the goals and competencies. However, due the wide variety of mathematics and science courses in the core curriculum, they all expressed concern about actually measuring the competencies.

Partial response to Question 4:

Each person expressed an interest in examining the review copy of the MAPP. Most are concerned that the test may not suit our needs but are willing to try it first rather require individual departments to immediately begin creating assessment tools.

Partial response to Question 5:

Most have committees in charge of the courses and are willing to ask these committees to look into creating and implementing changes if the data indicates a need.

**Mathematics – Dr. Roger Waggoner, Head and Ms. Donna Fatheree, Director of Freshman Mathematics**

1) Gen Ed Courses:

One algebra course from among MATH 100, 105, 107, 109 and one other course from

MATH 110 or above or STAT 214. Most students who are not in science nor in engineering take 105/100 and a second mathematics course from STAT 214 (Elementary Statistics), Math 201 (Decision Mathematics), or MATH 206 (Mathematics of Finance). 4) This fall, the department is adopting *MyMathLab* in its College Algebra classes (105/100). This web-based assignment management program can be customized as the department wishes. Also in MATH 109 (Pre-Calculus Algebra), some instructors have piloted the use of “E-Instruct”. With this system, students have clickers allowing each student to answer a question posed in class and instant information is given to the instructor. In addition, comprehensive final exams are required in nearly all mathematics courses. The Mathematics Department is willing to include some common questions on final exams with committee grading.

- 5) Some suggestions of departmental activities for improving student learning:
- immediately begin writing goals for most of the general education courses and post each set with the department syllabus for the course in fall 2006.
  - ask each of the various standing committees responsible for the courses to look into methods for improvement and change when the data indicates a need.
  - offer faculty development workshops especially for teaching assistants, adjunct faculty, and new faculty.
  - generate supplemental exercises and problems that emphasize the competencies.

### **Physics – Dr. John Meriwether, Head**

1) Gen Ed Courses:

Any physics course although most take PHYS 160 (Astronomy of the Solar System) or PHYS 170 (Astronomy Beyond the Solar System). Students whose curricula require a science laboratory take the sequence PHYS 207/208 (Introduction to Physics I and II), which have college algebra rather than calculus as a prerequisite. (These are primarily Biology and Pre-Med majors.)

2) Some physics courses have standard articulated goals

4) Physics has WebAssign that allows students to do assignments and provides tracking information for the teacher. WebAssign, developed in North Carolina, has conceptual questions, relational problems, and some quantitative reasoning with use of graphs. Many courses use standardized exams and comprehensive finals. However, PHYS160/170 do not have comprehensive final exams.

5) Dr. Meriwether is very familiar with the process of SACS accreditation. He said the department would be willing to make changes if the data indicate a need. A department committee would create and implement departmental activities for improving student learning.

### **Biology – Dr. Peggy Alciatore, Department Administrator**

1) Gen Ed Courses:

Any biology course although most take BIOL 121/122 (Biological Principles and Issues I and II), which have associated laboratory courses BIOL 123/124. Some take BIOL 304 (Plants and Human Affairs).

4) Some faculty give pre-tests and post-tests in their classes.

5) There is already an existing committee overseeing BIOL 121/122. She will ask this

committee to begin articulating goals for the courses. In addition, the committee would lead the department in implementing any necessary changes.

### **Chemistry – Dr. R. “Pete” Braun, Head**

#### 1) Gen Ed Courses:

Any chemistry course may be used although science and engineering majors take CHEM 107/108 (General Chemistry I and II). From 60 to 90 students enroll in each section of a general education chemistry course. In the fall, the department offers six sections of CHEM 107. Nursing and Health Sciences majors enroll in one of four sections of CHEM 125 (Survey of General, Organic and Biological Chemistry). Three sections of CHEM 101/102 (Survey of Chemistry) and two sections of CHEM 212 (Survey of Chemistry for Education Majors) are also offered each fall.

2) Dr. Braun suggested a change in the wording of the Scientific Reasoning Goal and the committee followed his recommendation.

4) He was especially skeptical that the MAPP could measure whether or not the stated competencies are met. The department's final exams are screened by their accreditation agency. They require that no multiple-choice exams be given.

5) He said the department would be willing to make changes if the data indicate a need. A department committee would create and implement departmental activities for improving student learning.

### **Renewable Resources – Leon Labbe, Head**

#### 1) Gen Ed Courses:

Currently most students take RRES 150 (Plant Science) and, if needed, the associated laboratory, RRES 151. The department currently offers three sections with 50 students each. RRES 220 (Animal Science) will also satisfy requirement for a biological science, while a course on the environment will serve as a physical science.

5) The courses have recently been revised to satisfy general education requirements. The existing committees would lead the department in implementing any necessary changes.

### **Geology – Dr. Carl Richter, Head**

#### 1) Gen Ed Courses:

Any geology course although most take GEOL 105 or GEOL 106. Enrollment in these courses reaches 200 students per section. The department offers five sections of GEOL 105 and two or three sections of GEOL 106. Education majors take Geol 225 (Introduction to Earth Science).

4) Scantron graded exams are given in GEOL 105 or GEOL 106.

Some faculty individually give an end of the semester survey to their classes.

The department uses “E-Instruct” – Students have clickers that allow each student to answer a question posed in class and instant information is given to the instructor.

5) He said the department would be willing to make changes if the data indicate a need. A department committee would create and implement departmental activities for improving student learning.

*Interviews conducted by Christine DeVine*

**Department of History and Geography**  
Contact: Dr. Robert Carriker, Dept. Head

Assessment Interview 7/11/06

Following are Dr. Carriker's answers to our questions. However, he expressed strong reservations about the assessment process moving forward without these questions being asked of his faculty as a whole. He feels that the VP's Office and/or the Task Force should meet with the faculty to get their input on these issues.

Dr. Carriker also expressed strong opposition to standardized testing, especially in the humanities, feeling that the idea of making course goals and ultimately, therefore, the courses themselves fit the profile tested in such standardized tests is antithetical to the idea of a university education.

1) *Gen Ed Courses within your department:*

101, 102 (World Civ); 110 (Global Problems); 221, 222 (U.S. History)

2) *Goals/Competencies in place:*

The department has recommendations for standards in place for each of its courses that include writing requirements, understanding historical sources, a comprehensive final exam, etc. These are in effect articulated goals and competencies even though not labeled as such.

3) *Goals/Competencies compared to those written by Task Force::*

Dr. Carriker agreed with our goal/competency for History:

Students should be familiar with key ideas about human nature, as well as the history and diversity of human cultures. Specifically, students should be able to:

--Comprehend complex concepts in history and the social sciences

--Make reasonable judgments within historical and social science contexts.

He felt that History's recommended competencies also fit to some extent with parts of our Communication goal (#1). He also felt that perhaps History should include wording from the above goal in the catalogue for the Gen Ed History classes in order to make these goals more explicit to faculty and students. Dr. Carriker would be willing to include this Gen Ed goal on syllabi for these courses [if his faculty agrees].

4) *Assessment in place:* None

5) *Assessment Ideas:*

The ideas we discussed were embedded assessments such as a question on the final exam that would be specific to each course/section but would take a generic format to test the stated competencies. A rubric would be set up with which to evaluate a sampling of these essays.

6) *Improvement:*

Once a year a department committee would evaluate a sampling of these exam essays and write a report to a university committee. The information would be compared year by year and, in a department meeting, faculty would share ideas about how to improve the competencies in these essays.

Comments:

- 1) History has a course [490] that is in the process of becoming the capstone course. However, Dr. Carriker felt that it would not be useful to assess Gen Ed competencies in this capstone course since the skills required at this point in a history major's career are not just different in degree from freshmen, but in kind.
- 2) Dr. Carriker also suggested that an additional History course should be included in the Gen Ed curriculum.

***English Department***

Assessment Interviews 7/10 & 7/17/06

Contacts:

Dr. Marcia Gaudet

Dr. Jim McDonald

- 1) There are three groups of classes within the English Department that are taken for Gen Ed requirements:

- Literature: mostly 201-206 (historical surveys or genre courses)
- Freshman Writing : 101/102 or 115
- Communication: 223 (Creative Writing),  
360 (Advanced Exposition),  
365 (Tech Writing).

Literature:

- 2) *Goals/Competencies in place:* Course-level objectives in place. These courses will be the focus of the English Department faculty retreat this coming academic year. At that time goals could be agreed upon by the faculty.

- 3) *Goals/Competencies compared to those written by Task Force::*

Need to add to our competency as follows:

Be able to write about and discuss literature critically

- 4) *Assessment in place:* None

- 5) *Assessment Ideas:*

Uniform outcomes need to be put in place for these literature courses, outcomes that mesh with the Gen Ed goals/competencies. There could be a generic essay question on final exam or embedded in course as a standard assignment that tests agreed upon competencies. A committee would then assess a sampling of these on a yearly basis and report to a university committee. Instructors [who teach 4/5 classes] are most likely to teach these classes and therefore to be members of this assessment effort. Some

compensation is necessary for this committee work such as a summer course pay to assess the standard assignments at the end of the school year and write a report.

At present, it is unrealistic, with literature classes of 38 to 40 students, to expect instructors [who may be teaching 4 or 5 classes] and grad students [who are teaching 2 sections and taking three classes] to give students instruction and practice in the kind of writing needed to achieve the Gen Ed competency in literature because grading and writing comments on 38 to 40 essays per section takes more time than these instructors have. Consequently, instructors are inclined to rely on quizzes and short answer questions, which do not practice the competencies we're looking for. Consequently these classes should be capped at 30 students.

6) *Improvement:*

Annual department meeting of instructors teaching these literature courses to discuss assessment results and share ideas for improving.

*Comments:*

Dr. McDonald is in favor of a capstone class for English majors. This class would take a broad look at literature through a theme. Class size would have to be fairly small and would admit only seniors. [No grad credit for such a class.] Dr. Gaudet feels that this should not be implemented at the same time as the Introduction to Literary Studies class [for majors] that is currently in the works.

*Freshman English Sequence:*

2) *Goals/Competencies in place:*

ENGL 101: The purpose of English 101 is to introduce students to the critical thinking, reading, and writing skills required of them in the academy by focusing on rhetorical awareness and argument. All assignments for English 101 are designed with the following outcomes and goals in mind:

In the course of writing thesis-driven essays, students will:

- Engage in writing as a recursive process
- Recognize the structures of argument
- Use writing and reading for learning, thinking, and communicating
- Respond to the needs of various audiences
- Discuss appropriate voice, tone, and level of formality
- Integrate their ideas with those of others

At the end of English 101, students should be able to write thesis-driven argument papers. “Argument” in this context is broadly defined to mean a claim with which reasonable people could disagree and that is supported with appropriate evidence.

ENGL102:

The purpose of English 102 is to build on the writing skills students learned in English 101 by focusing on academic research. Each section of 102 is based around a cultural

theme. All assignments for English 102 will be designed with the following outcomes and goals in mind:

In the course of writing thesis-driven research essays students will:

- Engage in writing as a recursive process
- Develop essays around a specific purpose
- Explore the nature of academic discourse and examine what “counts” as evidence in academic writing
- Integrate outside sources into their own writing
- Apply the appropriate conventions of citation style and mechanics
- Read a text by a minority writer or writer from outside the U.S. and/or write about a multicultural topic

3) *Goals/Competencies compared to those written by Task Force::*

The more detailed Freshman English outcomes do mesh with the Task Force goals and competencies.

4) *Assessment in place:*

There is a mandated proficiency essay [first class day] and an exit essay exam for ENGL102. However, this exam is currently used only as a criterion for grading students.

5) *Assessment Ideas:*

- a) a standard research assignment, a sampling of which would be assessed by a committee.
- b) a portfolio to be assessed by a committee including self-assessment by student
- c) comparison of proficiency [first-day] essays and exit essays in order to assess "value-added" in Freshman English.
- d) observation of group discussion for purposes of assessing oral competency [this would require training of instructors to train students and to assess students in this process. It could also include some student participation in assessment.]

6) *Improvement:*

In all of the above cases, the department committee would report to a university committee and would also meet with instructors in order to share ideas about improvement.

In option (b), the most effective approach would be for all instructors to be assessing portfolios from other instructors. This approach is constructive in bringing about discussions of standards on an ongoing basis, it shows instructors how their students are matching up to other students taking the course, and brings about an awareness of pedagogical methods.

This option would require workshops for instructors in order to help maximize the usefulness of such a method. Instructors' time in such workshops would have to be paid in order to make them mandatory.

This portfolio system could be extended to include pieces from the student's major and then would be evaluated again in the senior year. One portfolio option is to require portfolios from entering freshman as part of the application process. Portfolios would include a couple of pieces from high school and a timed essay done here at the university. The portfolio system therefore could include three stages:

- 1) entering freshman
- 2) end of freshman year
- 3) graduation

The first and last stages would have to be evaluated by an interdisciplinary faculty committee.

*Other suggestions and comments:*

1) *Freshman English class size:* It is unrealistic to expect that teachers of Freshman English [who are usually instructors teaching 4/5, grad students or adjuncts] will be able to read and comment on multiple drafts of essays in order to practice students in the skills necessary to achieve the Gen Ed objectives. Studies show that 19-23 students is the maximum class size for composition classes in which it is possible to expect achievement of goals. Beyond 23, instructors cannot give students' work the attention it requires. The English Department therefore recommends a cap on Freshman English classes of 23 students. Since almost all incoming freshmen take the Freshman English sequence, the lower class size will also play a part in helping retention of students going into their second year, since in a smaller class students can feel more comfortable in bonding with other students and with their instructor.

2) *Writing in the Disciplines:* a program that would encourage writing in all disciplines. This could consist of a Writing Fellows Program. Fellows [undergrad English majors and MA students] would be paid to work with professors in other disciplines to give feedback to students on the writing assignments in their classes. The English Dept. already has courses set up to train Fellows. But a grad student in composition and/or a faculty member would need course release time to organize and head up such a program and integrate it into the university.

3) *Writing Center:* The Writing Center could play a larger role in helping students at UL Lafayette to continue to practice and build on writing skills learned in Freshman English. A full time Writing Center Director [tenured or tenure-track faculty member who teaches only one class per semester] could provide the on-going training of writing center tutors [undergraduates and MA students] to provide a level of service unattainable at present. In addition, with additional resources, satellite WC tutors and/or on-line WC tutors could provide support for students at all levels within the university.

4) *Service Learning*: Service learning could be incorporated into some sections of freshman English. English will be hiring two instructors in the fall 2006 semester who both have service learning experience at LSU.

LSU has a competitive grant for developing a service learning course [Approx. \$3,000 for expenses/salary.]

5) *Writing Program Evaluation*: Dr. McDonald and Dr. Gaudet would both be in favor of an outside evaluation of the new Freshman Writing sequence after two years of operation. The Council of Writing Program Administrators has a consultant-evaluator service that helps colleges and universities develop and assess their writing programs. Operating on a method similar to regional accreditation agencies, WPA evaluations have several stages. WPA requests a written program self-study, sends a team of two trained consultant-evaluators to campus for interviews and on-site evaluation, and then compiles a final report. A six-month follow-up report from the campus completes the process.

WPA consultant-evaluators are leaders in the field of composition. All are experienced writing program administrators with a national perspective on composition teaching and program administering. As evaluators, their primary goal is to determine a program's unique strengths and weaknesses, not to transform all writing programs into clones of their own. They recognize that every program must retain its individual character, serve a particular community, and solve special problems.

Institutions pay the travel and accommodations cost for the consultant-evaluator team, plus an honorarium, currently \$1500, and an administrative fee.

6) *Service Learning*: Service learning could be incorporated into some sections of freshman English. English will be hiring two instructors in the fall 2006 semester who both have service learning experience at LSU.

LSU has a competitive grant for developing a service learning course [Approx. \$3,000 for expenses/salary.]

7) *Diversity*: at present the requirement is vague and includes readings by minority writer or writer from outside the U.S. and/or writing about a multicultural topic. There will be workshops in the English Dept. with Jennifer Hightower at the beginning of the fall 2006 semester and the diversity goal/competency to be achieved in Freshman English will be articulated more clearly over the course of this year.

8) *Identification of General Education Program*: The term Core Curriculum is a term relevant to university administrators rather than students, and General Education suggests something nebulous, while possibly being confused with General Studies. A new name would give the program a sense of a reenergized new beginning, a coherent identity and the possibility for students to grasp its import and purpose. Following are some suggestions for a new name for this program:

- ♦ Foundational Studies
- ♦ Study Across the Disciplines
- ♦ University Studies
- ♦ Common Studies

***Humanities Program***

7/11/06

Contact: Dr. Lisa Graley

1) *Gen Ed Classes:*

HUMN151 and 152 are most commonly taken for the Gen Ed requirements, but any Humanities class qualifies.

2) *Goals/Competencies in place:* None except as stipulated in the Bulletin.

3) *Goals/Competencies compared to those written by Task Force::*

Requested that we rewrite our competency as follows:

Students should be able to use primary sources, art works or performance to analyze ideas and issues relevant to the human condition and human values.

4) *Assessment in place:* None

5) *Assessment Ideas:*

Humanities classes could include a mandated essay [either for exam or homework] that would pose a question such as the following:

Analyzing specific examples, studied this semester, in order to show how they reflect the ideas and values of the cultures/groups focused on in this class.

Once a year a team of three instructors from the Humanities Program would evaluate a sample of these essays according to a preset rubric to assess whether students were, in fact, acquiring the competency shown above.

6) *Improvement:*

a) The Coordinator of the Humanities Program would mandate that the above goal/competency would be included on all Humanities syllabi.

b) At the beginning of the Spring 2007 semester, the Coordinator would hold a meeting in order to inform instructors about the assessment program, and solicit ideas for a) achieving the goal/competency, and, b) improving assessment.

c) Once a year thereafter, the Humanities Program would hold a meeting of all instructors that would discuss the assessment results and share ideas as to how the assessment results can be improved.

d) After three years, the meeting would also include a brainstorming session on how the assessment of this competency could be improved.

*Interviews conducted by Mike Maher*

**Criminal Justice (Dr. Craig Forsyth)**

CJUS 101; 203, 204, 305, 330 and 345 are commonly taken by students to fulfill their core curriculum requirement. No formal goals or measure are in place. Dr. Forsyth looks at student performance in 203; 204; and 205 as an indication of how each component is taught in 101, but he acknowledges, "That is a very crude idea since all I have to go with are aggregate grades and individual curriculum sheets of what grades they earned in each class."

**Political Science (Dr. Donn Kurtz)**

POLS 110 and 317 are most commonly taken for core-course credit. Courses have goals but no formal measures beyond grading for individual students. Dr. Kurtz notes that standardized testing is available for political science learning, but it's expensive and the department has never used it.

**Sociology/Anthropology (Dr. Kathleen Handy)**

Core courses are Soci 100, Soci 308, Soci 309 and Soci 411 In Anthropology, the requirements are Anth 201, Anth 202 and Anth 303. No written goals or measures.

**Communication (Dr. Michael Maher)**

CMCN 200 is commonly taken to fulfill the core requirement. The written goals for the course center around the student's ability to make oral presentations and to work in groups. The course includes graded speeches and testing of students' understanding of the principles of communication. However, assessment is by the instructor only. Embedded assessment by other faculty would be easy to do with a sample of students, as all students are required to make oral presentations on complex topics.

**Psychology (Dr. Theresa Wozencraft)**

PSYC 110 is the most commonly taken core course. It has no formal goals or measures currently. However, the department is designing a two-semester sequence of general psychology courses for majors and minors. The department will be working on formal goals and objectives for these courses. The American Psychology Association has recently developed standards for the undergraduate curriculum as a whole, which include assessment. However, no standardized test exists for the introductory course. Therefore any future assessment will likely have to be home-grown.

Dr. Wozencraft finds SEI evaluations are insufficient evidence for assessing whether course goals are being met. She uses her own questionnaire to assess her own instructional goals. She offers that the department could work with other departments for which PSYC offers service courses, to see what those departments' goals are for the course. She suggests that a portfolio system might be possible to allow evaluation of curricular strengths and weaknesses. She adds that her faculty should meet to draw up goals and objectives for their courses, ensuring that they meet APA guidelines. Finally, Dr. Wozencraft feels that the social science goal crafted by the committee "sounds too psych- and anthropology-oriented." She thinks sociology, political science and other social sciences might be better represented by a term other than human nature. But she did not suggest an alternative.

## **Appendix 4: Report of telephone conversation with Assessment Director at SLU**

Interview conducted by Christine DeVine on July 25, 2006 with  
Dr. Michelle Hall, Director, Office of Institutional Research and Assessment,  
Southeastern Louisiana University

In advance of my conversation with Dr. Hall, she referred me to SLU's "Report on the Status of General Education". Completed in September 2002, this report gives a great deal of information concerning General Education at SLU and the methods currently employed to assess this program. Much of the information included in the report would be currently available at UL Lafayette [e.g. grade distribution in Gen Ed classes over a period of years, withdrawal rates, SEI questions regarding instruction in these courses, etc.] and would provide a base against which future assessment data could be measured. I would therefore strongly recommend such a report be constructed at UL Lafayette. [see [www2.selu.edu/documents/docs/Gen\\_Edu\\_Assessment.pdf](http://www2.selu.edu/documents/docs/Gen_Edu_Assessment.pdf) for SLU's report]

### Assessment of General Education

Because virtually all students at SLU take freshman Math and English composition classes, [as at UL Lafayette, other requirements are distributed widely through other departments] assessment of student learning at SLU in the General Education Program has focused mainly on these two requirements. The methods consist of the following:

Math: To ensure continuity of instruction and assessment, departmental group final examinations are given in both MATH 160 and MATH 161.

Freshman English Composition Sequence: At the conclusion of each term, students submit a portfolio containing a selection of their best and most polished writing, along with a brief introductory document and a timed final essay exam written in class on an unprepared topic.

### Standardized Tests

Dr. Hall strongly recommends course-embedded assessment as opposed to standardized testing. Some years ago, SLU administered Academic Profile (ETS) but did not find it helpful for the following reasons:

- Students were not motivated either to show up to take the test, or to do well on the test
- The data gathered through this test did not relate directly to improvements that could be made in the classroom

### Surveys

SLU uses NSSE (since 2002) and alumni surveys. Since NSSE is administered to both freshmen and seniors, it can measure "value added."

### Improvement

The Math and English Gen Ed course assessment [and all major field assessment] is designed and carried out at the department level. Use of this data for improvement is also,

therefore handled at the department level. Records of data collected and improvements implemented are kept in departments, then, when another Status Report is completed by the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment, this information will be reported to that office to be included in that report.

### Diversity

The issue of diversity has been ongoing for some years at SLU. It has been a requirement in all major field assessment plans, and questions on diversity have been included in faculty/staff surveys, alumni surveys, etc.

### Computer Literacy

Dr. Hall feels that computer literacy is a given these days for students entering university and that if students are becoming proficient in English and Math, they are necessarily computer literate.

### SACS

There were no problems for SLU's General Education Program in the SACS reaccreditation process.

### Conclusion

The impression I received from Dr. Hall was that SACS does not require standardize testing for Gen Ed curricula, and that course-embedded assessment is far more effective than standardized testing if the purpose is to provide ongoing feedback for improvement of instruction and student learning. Assessment in all fields has now become a fact of life at SLU. Assessment plans—for both Gen Ed and major field—are designed by departments, implemented by departments and the data collected by departments—except, of course, for surveys. Some departments find standardized testing most appropriate.

Once faculty "buy in" to assessment, then assessment becomes a part of everyday life. But having assessment designed and implemented at the department level assures much stronger faculty participation and therefore improves the possibility for improvement.