

Annual Report, 2010-11

General Education

Summary of Accomplishments

Revision of General Education Requirements: The Academic Senate approved a restructuring of the knowledge domains of the general education model. The changes are designed to make YSU's general education requirements more similar to the requirements of other Ohio state universities and to make it easier to assess general education.

Assessment: A system was devised to assess the quality of students' written communication and critical thinking. Examples of student writing from ENGL 1551 and upper-division classes will be stored in the Repository Of Assessment Documents (ROAD). Random samples of the documents will be evaluated using a rubric developed by an ad-hoc committee.

Miscellaneous: I designated general education credit for transfer courses, assisted departments in submitting courses to the state transfer system, and served on a number of committees.

Revision of General Education Requirements

The primary accomplishment of the year was the revision of the knowledge domain requirements of the General Education model. The table below summarizes the two models:

2000 Model	2012 Model
Art and Literary Perspectives	Arts and Humanities
Natural Science	Natural Science
Societies and Institutions	Social Sciences
Personal and Social Responsibility	Social and Personal Awareness
Selected Topics	Domestic Diversity
	Environmental Sustainability
	International Perspectives
	Well Being
Total Knowledge Domain Courses: 11	Total Knowledge Domain Courses: 9

The new model is more similar to the general education models of other public universities in Ohio, which will make it easier for incoming transfer students to meet YSU's general education requirements. The coursework taken by incoming transfer students typically reflects the general education requirements of the institution they are transferring from. Since the new model is more similar to the one used by other public universities, incoming transfer students should find that the coursework they have taken matches well with the new model.

Another advantage of the new model is that it should make assessment of general education easier. One of the challenges of assessing the current model is that the individual domains included such a diverse collection of courses that it was difficult to assess whether the learning objectives of the domains were being met. As noted by the previous General Education Coordinator, Julia Gergits, this problem was particularly severe for the Selected Topics domain and the Personal and Social Responsibility domain. The model is designed to reduce the heterogeneity of courses within the domains, which will facilitate assessment.

The revision of the model could not have been accomplished without the extraordinary dedication of the General Education Committee, which met 25 times over the course of the year (see the list of committee members at the end of this document). Once the committee had completed its proposal a substantial amount of time was spent allowing the campus community to provide input on the model. Faculty expressed their views in six forums (one for each of the colleges), and the General Education Coordinator met with the Deans Council, academic advisors, and representatives of Student Government. After the proposal was approved by the Academic Senate the committee met to reassign courses in the current model to the new domains, two of the meetings were held after the end of the academic year.

Any major revision of general education requires some additional work by the campus community because departments need to review how their curriculum matches the new model. However, I am optimistic that time required in this case will be relatively modest because the total number of courses required was reduced and because the model provides students with a substantial amount of flexibility in meeting the requirements.

Assessment and the ROAD

Concerns about the assessment of General Education were noted in the last accreditation review conducted by the Higher Learning Commission. A major step towards addressing those concerns was taken through the establishment of the Repository Of Assessment Documents (ROAD), which will assist in the assessment of written communication and critical thinking.

The ROAD is a system for storing, retrieving, and scoring samples of student writing. The Academic Senate approved a resolution requiring that students pursuing a bachelors degree submit two documents to the repository – an assignment from the second English composition course (ENGL 1551) and an assignment from an upper-division course in their major.

The student writing samples are scored using a rubric developed by a university committee which had representatives from all six colleges. The scoring of the writing samples is administered by the Writing Center; all full-time and part-time faculty are eligible to apply but the reviewers typically are part-time English composition instructors. Reviewers are paid a stipend.

Students in ENGL 1551 first uploaded documents into the system in the spring semester, as of July 1st reviewers have scored approximately 90 writing samples and there are plans to review an additional 100 samples prior to the end of the summer.

The scores will be used to address a number of research questions; they will provide the campus community with a measure of the quality of student writing in the ENGL 1551 classes and how it is changing over time. As the students currently enrolled in ENGL 1551 take upper-division coursework it will be possible to evaluate how the student's writing has improved (or failed to improve) over their college career. The expectation is that this information will provide the basis for a campus-wide discussion on how to improve the writing skills of our students.

The successful implementation of the ROAD was made possible through the efforts of the Writing Center Coordinator, Angela Messenger, and staff from Computer Services, specifically Robert Forchione, Salem Alemaishat, and Nancy Davidson. Kevin Ball, English Composition Coordinator, and Gary Salvner, Chair of the Department of English, participated in a number of meetings on the design of the ROAD and how to implement the submission and review of student papers.

Miscellaneous

- Determined the domain designation for approximately 400 transfer courses
- Represented YSU at two meetings of the OBOR Articulation and Transfer Advisory Council meetings in Columbus
- Attended an OBOR meeting regarding credit for veterans in Columbus
- Served on the following committees: YSU Academy Team, Assessment Council, Center for Teaching and Learning, Budget Taskforce, ROAD Rubric committee (chair), General Education Committee (chair), ad hoc committee for Engaged Assessment of Student Learning
- Assisted departments submitting courses to the OBOR Transfer Assurance Guideline (TAG) system

Goals and Observations

Two broad goals, implementation of the new model and progress on assessment of general education, must be pursued in the upcoming year. Each of the two broad goals have multiple components.

Implementation of the New Model

Implementation of the new model will require:

- Responding to any departments who disagree with the committee's domain assignments of courses in the current general education model
- Finalizing the policy for International Perspectives credit through study abroad
- Mapping transfer courses into the new model; approximately 3,000 courses from Ohio, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia schools will need to be reviewed
- Developing forms for departments who wish to submit new courses for inclusion in general education
- A complete redesign of the general education web site
- Revision of the undergraduate bulletin text regarding general education

- Meeting with chairs, advisors, and deans to answer any questions about the transition
- Designing informational materials to make students and faculty to publicize the new model and increase awareness of the role of general education in the college experience

Assessment of General Education

Progress on assessment will require:

- Cajoling departments to develop plans for uploading upper-division writing samples
- Continued financial support for reviewers of the writing samples; an ongoing, dedicated budget line for ROAD reviews should be established
- Creation of a strategy for assessing oral communication, mathematical reasoning and the learning objectives of the knowledge domains
- Providing input into the process used by the Writing Center to review student writing
- Working with Academic Computing Services to refine the user interface of the ROAD

Observations

- One of the responsibilities of the coordinator is to keep the University in compliance with the TAG system. In a modest but not insignificant number of cases the content of the courses offered at YSU do not match the learning outcomes in the TAG system closely enough to receive approval. This raises an interesting policy question. YSU faculty have had primary responsibility for the design of curriculum and have been free to use their judgment in selecting what they believe is the most appropriate content. At the state level, the goal of administering the public universities as a single system requires the standardization of content across state institutions. It is not clear whether the state will seek to somehow force universities to standardize their offerings; the issue is likely to come to a head in the fall of 2012, which is the deadline for institutions to have received approval for TAG courses. The situation is further complicated by the state's charter university initiative, which presumably would give institutions more independence from the Board of Regents. That initiative would seem to be inconsistent with the goal of creating a highly integrated state-wide system. A second problem is that in a small number of cases departments have not been cooperative in providing the necessary documentation even though the course may meet the learning outcomes.
- The ROAD provides a system for assessing writing and ultimately will be valuable in initiating discussions about the quality of student writing, but by itself it will not alter writing instruction at YSU. At some point the conversation will need to shift to a discussion of how to improve student writing, either through a writing across the curriculum program or reviving the writing intensive course requirement.
- The upcoming year will largely be focused on making sure the conversion to the new general education model goes smoothly. However, probably the greatest long-term challenge is assessment of general education. A system for assessing competency in oral communication and mathematical reasoning needs to be developed; the assessment of mathematical reasoning will be more difficult because of the variety of courses students can take to meet the requirement.

The greatest challenge is how to assess the knowledge domain section of general education. Even though the new model substantially reduces the amount of variety within the individual domains it is still true that courses with no common content can satisfy the same learning outcomes, making it difficult to measure whether the learning outcomes have been met. I believe it would be useful to invest funds in sending faculty and administrators to conferences and/or workshops to learn about different ways of how to address this challenge.

General Education Committee

Felicia Armstrong

Kevin Ball

Robert Beebe

Brionna Benson

Brian Bonhomme

Michael Crist

Becky Curnalia

Sarah Lowery

Susanne Miller

Nicole Mullins

Phil Munro

Matt O'Mansky

Tod Porter (Chair)

Peter Reday*

Sharon Stringer

*Unofficially represented WCBA starting in March

ROAD Rubric committee

Kevin Ball

Tammy King

David Law

Angela Messenger

Tod Porter (Chair)

Patricia Sarro

Gail Saunders Smith

W. Greg Sturru

Alan Tomhave