

Annual Report, 2011-12

General Education

Summary of Accomplishments

Transition to New Requirements: A substantial amount of time was spent creating materials related to the General Education requirements approved in the spring of 2011 and meeting with departments to answer questions.

Assessment: The Repository Of Assessment Documents (ROAD) was established, creating a process for assessing student writing. Committees reviewed the learning outcomes for three of the four knowledge domains and an initial plan for the assessment of the knowledge domains was drafted.

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.

Transition to New Requirements

This year preparing for the transition to the new General Education requirements consumed the largest portion of the time. The steps needed to prepare for the transition included:

- With the restructuring of the knowledge domains it was necessary to review the database identifying the general education classification of courses transferred from other institutions. For example, a psychology course that was counted towards the Personal and Social Responsibility category would now count as a Social Sciences course. Reclassifying the courses was particularly important in cases where there were “2+2” agreements with community colleges and departments needed to know how the courses taken at the community colleges would fit into the new requirements. Approximately 3,000 courses from Ohio, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia schools were reviewed.
- DARS reports needed to be revised to reflect the new requirements. In this case most of the work was done by Marie Cullen, Director of Degree Audit, but I spent a substantial amount of time working with her on how the reports were organized and checking test reports to see if DARS was accurately applying the new requirements.
- The General Education website needed to be completely revised to incorporate the new requirements. The challenge was to design the site so that information about both the old and new requirements was accessible. Lists of courses included in the new model, a description of the new requirements, a summary list of courses, and forms for submitting courses for approval all had to be created. As a side comment, I have to say that I did not find ContentM easy to

work with; I feel the redesign could have been completed much more quickly with a different program. The revision of the website consumed a substantial amount of time over the summer.

- The section of the undergraduate bulletin describing the General Education requirements was completely rewritten.
- I coordinated the revision of the brochure distributed at SOAR describing the General Education requirements. A student representative on the General Education Committee (GEC), Sarah Lowry, designed a new version of the brochure. Revisions were then made by Jean Engle, Assistant Director of Marketing and Communications, and Kathy Leeper, Coordinator of Graphic Services.
- To fulfill a class requirement a group of students created a short video describing the role of General Education in the undergraduate curriculum. The hope is to have the video shown at SOAR. Adam Earnhardt, Department of Communication, asked the students to work on this topic at my request.
- Materials were created to help faculty and advisors explain the new requirements to students. The package included a “cheat sheet” comparing the 2000 and 2012 requirements, a list of Frequently Asked Questions (this was created by Sarah Lowry, I added a couple questions and answers), a description of the 2012 requirements, and the summary list of courses.
- I meet with the following departments to answer questions about the new requirements: Communication, Criminal Justice and Forensic Sciences, Economics, English, Geography, History, and Psychology. I also discussed the new requirements at meetings of the department chairs and the academic advisors. Finally, I responded to questions from a number of individual chairs and faculty members.
- To track the assignment of International Perspectives credit for students studying abroad I submitted the following course for approval: LASS 2610, *International Perspectives Credit for Study Abroad*.

Assessment

Concerns about the assessment of General Education were noted in the last accreditation review conducted by the Higher Learning Commission and addressing those concerns continues to be a high priority. Two major initiatives were undertaken to advance assessment of general education: the ROAD project and domain assessment.

The Repository Of Assessment Documents (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 following were accomplished over the past year:

- Modifications were made by Computer Services in the user interface of the reviewer section to reduce the likelihood that reviewers would make input errors. Modifications were also made in

the Focus reports used to display the reviewer's scores. Finally, the necessary forms were submitted to make it possible to store the rubric used to score the writing.

- All undergraduate programs were asked to identify which upper-division assignment would be uploaded to the database. The information was collected from all but three departments: Criminal Justice and Forensic Sciences, Geological and Environmental Sciences, and Engineering Technology.
- Approximately 200 ENGL 1551 papers from the Spring and Fall semesters of 2011 were reviewed under the direction of Angela Messenger, Coordinator of the Writing Center.
- The results from the Spring semester were presented at a Roundtable session of the Assessment Council in September. The results from the Fall semester were presented at a joint meeting of the GEC and the Assessment Council in March. In addition, the results were also summarized in an artfully designed poster which was displayed at the Office of Assessment's Appreciation Ceremony in April.
- The analysis of the reviewers' scores showed a strong relationship between the student's scores on the English section of the ACT exam, but no or weak evidence of a relationship between the reviewers' scores and demographic variables. Ordered logistic regression analysis was used to test for relationships between the reviewers' scores and the independent variables. The analysis of the results has prompted discussion by the English department as to how to achieve greater consistency in the final assignment for ENGL 1551. Summaries of the analysis are available on the General Education website.
- In the Spring semester of 2012 several departments uploaded papers from upper-division courses. A small sample of these papers will be reviewed this summer as a trial run of scoring upper-division student writing.

To begin to assess the knowledge domain portion of the general education model the following actions were taken:

- A subcommittee of the General Education Committee (GEC) reviewed the following strategies for assessing knowledge domains: campus-wide exams, portfolios, course-based assessment, and learning communities. After evaluating the advantages and disadvantages of the different strategies (see attached) the sub-committee recommended that learning communities be used to assess the knowledge domains. The decision was endorsed by the full GEC.
- Milton Cox, a nationally recognized expert on learning communities, was contacted and discussions are underway to bring him to YSU in Fall 2012 to conduct a workshop on how to use learning communities for assessment.
- Committees consisting of faculty from three of the knowledge domains (Arts and Humanities, Natural Sciences, and Social Sciences) were organized. The committees: reviewed the learning outcomes for those domains, discussed possible assessment strategies for those domains, and discussed possible criteria for student performance. Each committee met twice.

Other assessment-related activities included:

- Drafted text related to general education for inclusion in assessment reports to the Higher Learning Commission (HLC).
- Participated in the site visit by YSU's mentor for the HLC Assessment Academy (Susan Hatfield) during the Fall semester.
- Attended the annual meeting of the HLC, this also included meeting a meeting with Susan Hatfield and the contingent from YSU.

Miscellaneous

- Determined the domain designation for approximately 500 transfer courses from schools outside the Ohio state system of higher education
- Created a flow chart describing a system to determine whether a course should be counted towards the General Education requirements (see attached)
- Represented YSU at two meetings of the OBR Articulation and Transfer Advisory Council meetings in Columbus
- Served on the following committees: YSU Academy Team, Assessment Council, ad hoc committee for Academic Senate forms
- Assisted departments submitting courses to the OBR Transfer Assurance Guarantee (TAG) system
- Designated the general education domains for hundreds of the new semester courses created as a result of state institutions switching from quarters to semesters
- Served as Chair of the GEC. The committee met 10 times during the academic year to: review proposals to add or reinstate courses, evaluate assessment strategies, discuss the transition to the new requirements and deal with a variety of policy issues. The most substantive policy issue was a proposal, which was approved by the Academic Senate, which required that upper-division courses would only be included in the model when justified by exceptional circumstances. Two other issues were the implementation of International Perspectives credit for study abroad and whether labs taken independently from a lecture course could meet the science laboratory requirement. All the meeting minutes were posted on the General Education website.

Goals and Observations

In the upcoming year the primary goal of the General Education Coordinator will need to make continued progress on assessment of the general education model. To a large extent the ROAD project is relatively mature; the main work will consist of encouraging departments to upload upper-division papers and analyzing the results. Groundwork has been laid for the assessment of the knowledge domains, but given that I will be stepping down as General Education Coordinator in August, that process will largely be shaped by my successor.

My goals will consist of relatively short-term items that need to be taken care of between now and August:

- Implement the policy developed at the last GEC meeting regarding which upper-division courses will continue to count towards the general education requirements.
- Continue to assign general education domains to the courses from schools switching from quarters to semesters and other institutions.
- Get approval of a realistic budget for the General Education program for the upcoming fiscal year. Previous budgets did not incorporate the costs of the ROAD project.
- Organize all of the documents created in the last two years so they are accessible to my successor.
- Clarify the terms of the members of the committee. There is some confusion regarding which committee members have reached the end of their terms.
- Provide orientation to the new General Education Coordinator.
- Assist in drafting text relevant to general education for reports to the HLC and the YSU Board of Trustees
- Respond to any remaining questions about the new requirements.
- Begin work on a paper describing the ROAD project.

Observations

I will repeat three observations I made last year and add one more.

- 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. A second issue is that we are obligated by state policy to count courses in the Ohio Transfer Module towards our general education requirements. In some cases these courses are not included in our model. The result is that if a student takes the course elsewhere and transfers the course in it will be counted towards the requirements, but the course would not count for a student taking the course at YSU. This issue will become more noticeable as the number of students transferring from Eastern Gateway Community College increases.
- 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.

- 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 assess general education.
- I strongly believe that the General Education Coordinator should not have responsibility for submitting courses for approval in the state's TAG system. It is not directly related to general education and the process does not involve decisions related to academic policy. The volume of work without that responsibility more than justifies the allocated reassigned time.

General Education Committee

Chelsea Baker

Kevin Ball

Robert Beebe

Brian Bonhomme

Michael Crist

Becky Curnalia

Julie Felix

Jeanette Garr

Sarah Lowery

Matt O'Mansky

Tod Porter (Chair)

Peter Reday

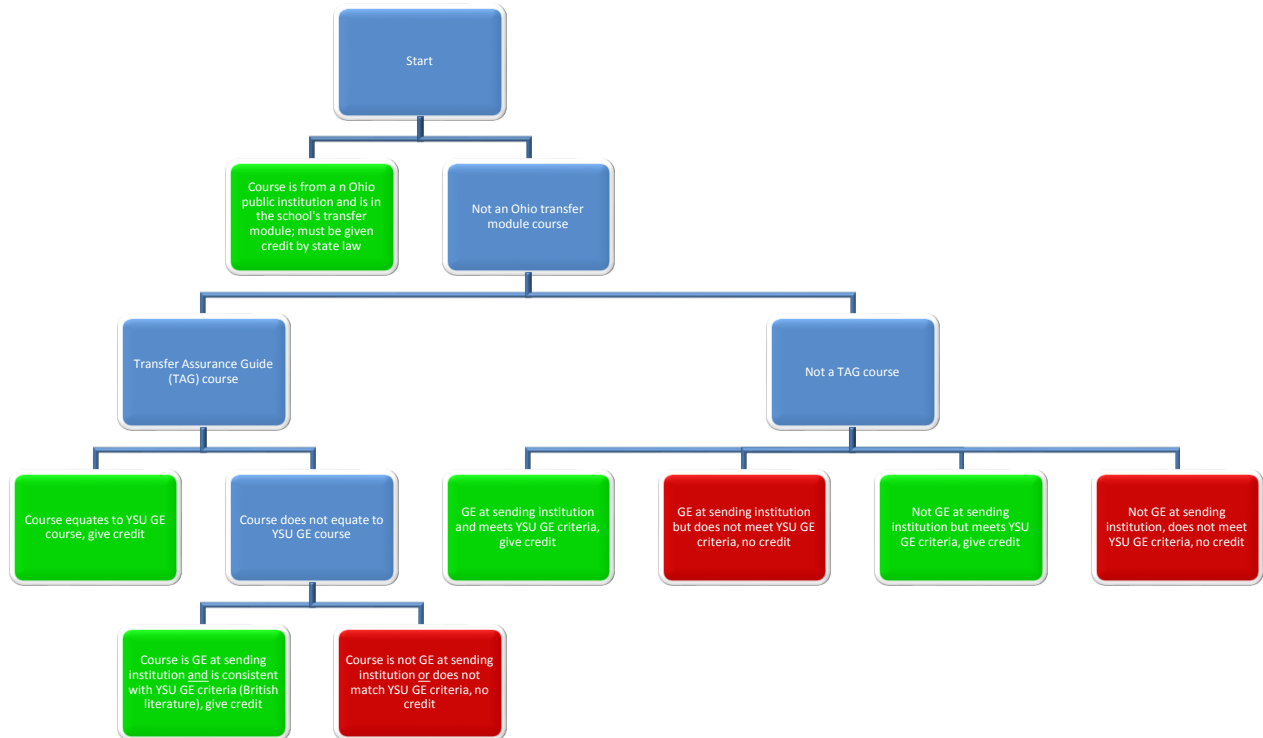
Zara Shah-Rowlands

Sharon Stringer

W. Gregg Sturuss

Alan Tomhave

Decision Tree for General Education Credit for Transfer Courses



Assessment of Skill Learning Outcomes

Option	Description	Pros	Cons
Program level assessment	Programs are asked to include assessment of writing, critical thinking, oral communication and quantitative reasoning in their reports	All programs should have included writing, oral communication, and critical thinking in their capstone, this would leverage work already done in many departments	Departments will vary in their emphasis on certain learning outcomes. Given each department will take a different approach it will be difficult to aggregate the results to create a picture on how well students are performing campus-wide. Department-level initiatives often have compliance problems
University level testing	Students are given nationally-normed test on different skills	Nationally-normed test allows for comparisons with other institutions, centralized testing relatively easier to administer	Difficulty in motivating students to take the exam, may have difficulty getting participation from a randomly-selected sample, making results unreliable. Cost of exam.
Portfolios	Students put artifacts into a portfolio which are then evaluated by faculty reviewers	Creates a process by which evidence is gathered from all students at different points of their academic career.	Cost of a portfolio system. Would need to train faculty, students and provide tech support. Would need to create a system to evaluate artifacts (possible cost for evaluators?)
Assessment by providers	Responsibility for assessment falls primarily on departments offering the skill courses	Departments have expertise and motivation to do assessment. ROAD largely takes this approach with Writing Center reviewing 1551 papers. Communications department has been gathering data on student performance in COMST 1545.	No assessment of students at the end of the program because skills courses are typically taken by lower-division students (ROAD tries to address this issue with upper-division paper). Need to find out what data math is gathering.

Assessment of Knowledge Domain Learning Outcomes

Option	Description	Pros	Cons
Course-based assessment	Departments do assessment of the courses they offer in the general education program.	Provides accountability that the courses are teaching the material that addressed the learning outcomes. Assessment will be undertaken by people most familiar with the course.	Garnering participation by departments may be difficult; this was a failure the last time it was attempted. Measures will vary widely across departments.
University-wide testing	Students are given a common exam	Centralized administration increases probability that assessment will be undertaken.	Not sure what a knowledge domain exam would look like given the wide variety of courses students can take to meet the requirements. Same problems as mentioned in skills section.
Portfolios	Students put artifacts into a portfolio which are then evaluated by faculty reviewers	Creates a process by which evidence is gathered from all students at different points of the year.	Same problems as mentioned in skills section. Unclear if there are enough campus resources to scale up ROAD.
Sunset provisions	On a regular schedule courses are reviewed for continued inclusion in general education	Provides an incentive for departments to remain conscious of general education learning objectives and to gather data, discourages “bloating” of general education	Significant increase in the workload of the General Education committee and for departments. What would the committee do with a department with a key course that did not participate?
Learning communities	Faculty within the different knowledge domains save student artifacts and then meet to evaluate evidence that learning outcomes were met.	Allows departments in the different domains to try to better clarify what the learning objectives mean. The approach is flexible, which is helpful in dealing with the variety of courses taken in the domains.	No one at YSU has experience with this form of assessment.