

## General Education Committee Meeting

January 27, 2011

Present: Nicole Mullins, Felicia Armstrong, Kevin Ball, Brian Bonhomme, Robert Beebe, Matt O'Mansky, Phil Munro, Rebecca Curnalia, Sarah Lowry, Susanne Miller, and Tod Porter

The committee made editorial changes in the proposal for assessment of writing (see next page); some members indicated that they were disappointed that the number of writing samples that would be uploaded to the repository had been reduced. The members present then voted unanimously to recommend the proposal for approval by the Academic Senate. Members of the committee were asked to comment on the letter to the senate and the draft of the PowerPoint presentation.

The committee then discussed how to distribute the courses across the different knowledge domains. Some of the issues discussed by the committee included:

- Need to ensure that students are exposed to an appropriate breadth of academic experiences
- Need to make the system easy to understand
- Need to make it reasonably easy for students to comply with the rules

The tentative consensus of the committee was to use the following rule:

Students must take two courses from each of the knowledge domains. Two additional courses must be taken from any of the four domains, but the two courses cannot both be taken from the same domain.

The committee agreed to reflect on the rule and continue the discussion at the next meeting.

Submitted by: Tod Porter

## **Assessment of Written Communication for General Education**

To assess students' abilities to communicate in writing, students will be required to upload writing samples to the Repository of Assessment Documents. Prior to graduation, students seeking a baccalaureate degree will be required to upload two samples of their writing.

One document will be from an assignment given in the second English composition course (ENGL 1551). The assignment will be selected by the Composition Program Director. A second document will be a writing sample related to the student's major. Departments or programs will determine the assignment that the student will upload. By the start of each fall semester, starting in 2011, departments or programs must have determined which assignment will be uploaded. Additional documents may be uploaded for program assessment at the discretion of the program. The General Education Coordinator will report annually on each major's rate of compliance with the policy to the Academic Senate.

Both of the writing samples must have been written to complete a graded assignment for a course. The writing samples must be at least 750 words long and should be fewer than 4,000 words and should demonstrate the use of critical thinking. Any guidelines or assignment prompts related to the writing sample should be provided in an electronic format to the students so they can copy and paste those directions into the document being submitted (words in the guidelines or prompts do not count toward the length requirement). Students will be asked to remove any information from the writing sample that could be used to identify them or their instructor.

The rubric used to evaluate the writing samples will be developed by a committee consisting of one representative from each college, the General Education Coordinator, and two additional members appointed by the General Education Coordinator based on their expertise in written communication and critical thinking. The committee will seek comment from the faculty prior to finalizing the design of the rubric.

Only aggregated scores based on the writing samples will be reported to the campus community; scores for individual students and the students of individual faculty will not be released. The General Education Committee shall not calculate scores aggregated by the students' individual programs or departments. Programs have the option of using writing samples authored by their majors for program assessment.

The General Education Coordinator will summarize the results of the scores and submit a report to the Academic Senate annually. In the 2013-14 academic year, the General Education Committee will assess the effectiveness of the writing assessment program and submit a report to the Academic Senate.

To: Members of the Academic Senate  
From: Tod Porter, General Education Coordinator  
Re: Proposal for Assessment of Written Communication  
Date: January 27, 2011

The General Education Committee's proposal for written communication was designed to achieve two goals: encourage and document writing within the major and, for the purposes of General Education assessment, gather writing samples.

The discussion at the meeting made it clear that the Senate did not view the policy as an appropriate way to achieve the first goal. It was suggested that a return to a system of writing intensive courses or a writing across the curriculum program would be more effective. Faculty strongly expressed concern about the minimum required length of the writing samples not matching common practice within certain disciplines. We respect that decision. At some point in the future (probably next year) the committee will have an extended discussion about written communication instruction beyond the composition courses.

The need to make progress on assessment in the area of General Education, however, is pressing. The Higher Learning Commission cited assessment of General Education as a weakness when it conditionally renewed the University's accreditation. Failure to show progress could result in the University being placed on probation, which would be very detrimental to the reputation of the institution and could hamper our ability to recruit well-qualified students. The committee continues to believe that the repository is a cost-efficient means of addressing the assessment issue, and does so in a way that minimizes the burden imposed on the faculty. Therefore, the committee has revised the proposal so that only one writing sample related to the major is required. The minimum length of the writing sample has been reduced to 750 words (approximately 3 pages). This is the minimum length the committee feels is needed to adequately assess student writing. As before, the paper can come from any course related to the major (including the capstone). Departments that choose to ask students to upload additional documents for program assessment would be free to do so.

One other concern expressed in the senate is whether it will be possible to fairly evaluate papers coming from a variety of different disciplines. The following steps will be taken to address those concerns:

- A "best practice" technique to evaluate writing is the use of "anchor papers." An anchor paper is chosen to serve as an example of certain level of quality. In their training reviewers would be asked to read anchor papers so they have similar expectations and score the papers more consistently. Colleges will be asked to submit anchor papers which would then be used in the reviewer training. The reviewers would then have a point of reference as to what is considered a well-written paper for a given discipline.
- A new rubric will be developed by a committee. The committee will include representatives from all colleges to insure that the language of the rubric is appropriate for use across all disciplines.
- Faculty (part-time or full-time) from any department are welcome to be involved in reviewing the writing samples. The one requirement is that reviewers will be expected to undergo training in how to evaluate the papers.
- After a writing sample has been scored by the reviewers the faculty for the student's program will have the option of scoring the document using the same rubric. Comparisons of the scores by the reviewers and the program faculty will be used to monitor whether the scores of the two groups are consistent.

Our hope is that by only requiring one writing sample departments can find a way to incorporate the requirement into their curriculum with a minimal amount of inconvenience and still help to address the very real need to show progress in the area of General Education assessment.