

PROGRAM ASSESSMENT & REVIEW NEWS

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WORKSHOP ENGENDERS LIVELY DISCUSSION ON GENERAL EDUCATION

What happened in August when 43 faculty members got together in several small groups to discuss general education and assessment?

Lots of good ideas were expressed, recorded on large sheets of paper, and shared with the whole group that reconvened in Reynolds 103 at this three-hour workshop Aug. 26.

A highlight of the workshop was a presentation by Dr. Paul Neill, Core Curriculum Director at UNR. Neill had been external reviewer for the 2009 General Education Program Review, and he shared some of his commendations and recommendations regarding general education and assessment of student learning outcomes at WNC. He identified the development of the interdisciplinary writing rubric, a project with faculty input from many disciplines, as an important step forward in assessment practices. He also suggested that faculty attempt to identify the essence of each general education student learning outcome to help them “make connections between the course content and the general education student learning outcomes.”

After Neill’s presentation, participants broke out into small groups to discuss questions related to general education student learning outcomes, teaching and assessing critical thinking, and assessment of all general education student learning outcomes. Some of the ideas and questions that were recorded during the discussions and reported back to the large group are listed in the related article on the next page: “Small Groups, Big Ideas.”

During the small group discussions, participants were asked if they’d be willing to help plan a Critical Thinking Assessment Project. Members of the General Education Subcommittee and PARC will lead the effort to select or devise and then implement a college-wide assessment of critical thinking skills. The first meeting has been planned for mid-October (see details below).

Members of the General Education Subcommittee and PARC organized this workshop, which began with a brief presentation by Susan Priest and Catherine Boedenauer on the results of the PARC Assessment All-Faculty Survey. The online survey was implemented in May after PARC observed that the college needed a method for tracking assessment practices on campus.

Workshop resources and related articles are available on the Institutional Research website. —cb

Critical Thinking Assessment Project

The two committees have scheduled the first Critical Thinking Assessment Project meeting for 12:30-1:45 p.m. Friday, Oct. 16 in REY 101 (Carson) and VRGH 309 (Fallon). Bring to this meeting ideas for a college-wide assessment project on critical thinking. Information about 4-5 critical thinking instruments will be introduced. For more information, please contact Susan Priest (445-3318, spriest@wnc.edu.) Discussions on the two campuses will be linked via interactive video. —cb

- ◇ **September**
Program Review Teams and Internal and External Reviewers are selected; Academic Program Review Teams begin updating outlines for core courses
- ◇ **October 12**
Administrative Program Review Teams submit to IR additional questions for fall Program Review Survey
- ◇ **October 16**
Critical Thinking Assessment Project meeting 12:30-1:45 p.m. in REY 101 and VRGH 309
- ◇ **November**
Academic Program Review Teams receive the Summary Data Sheet and Course Scheduling Matrix from Institutional Research
- ◇ **November 9-23**
Program Review Survey open
- ◇ **December 18**
Administrative Program Review Teams receive survey data from Institutional Research
- ◇ **January 29**
Northern Nevada Assessment Conference at UNR

SMALL GROUPS, BIG IDEAS

At the fall faculty workshop, participants broke out into small groups to discuss their responses to three questions. Those responses are summarized below.

Do you have concerns about how the general education student learning outcomes relate to your instruction, your program, and your students' goals and objectives?

- There is a lack of consistency between course sections in stating student learning outcomes. Section instructors need to agree on what the SLOs are for a course, what those outcomes mean, and how they should be assessed.
- Other courses besides general education courses address the general education SLOs.
- Are the general education SLOs reasonable, practical, and relevant to all degree areas?
- We cannot state that all graduates have met a set of SLOs if we don't assess them.
- There are still many general education course outlines that have not been completed.
- Certain general education SLOs should correspond to each general education category (requirement).
- Some of the SLOs are multidimensional. If a multidimensional outcome is listed for a course, all aspects of that outcome should be addressed.
- Students don't understand the SLOs when they see them on a syllabus. Those outcomes should be discussed regularly with students.
- The college should have and enforce meaningful prerequisites so that students have the necessary skills to succeed in their courses.
- What is meant by "appropriate technological skills" in the fifth SLO? Should these skills be defined within each program area, or should the expected outcome be the same for all students?
- Generalize the first SLO to "college-level communication skills" instead of "reading, writing, and oral communication" skills.
- Combine SLOs nine ("have an understanding of fine arts or performing arts") and ten ("understand the importance of cultural traditions, diversity, and ethics in the modern world").
- Combine SLO four ("have effective and efficient learning skills") and five ("have appropriate technological skills").
- Combine SLO six ("know the basic principles and processes of government") and eight ("understand and apply social

science principles").

- Keep SLO five ("have appropriate technological skills") because that is a relevant outcome.
- Combine some SLOs into fewer, overarching outcomes.
- Is it our job to create good citizens or just good workers?
- Are there general education courses that shouldn't be classified as general education courses?
- Involve part-time faculty more with decisions about the curriculum.
- Combining SLOs could reduce clarity and faculty agreement on the appropriateness of an SLO for a given course.
- Employers want employees who can read and communicate in writing. Without these skills, employees won't advance, and they may not last in the position.

How do you measure students' competence in critical thinking skills?

- Critical thinking is defined and demonstrated in different ways in different disciplines.
- Assess critical thinking skills at the beginning and end of a program using an online exam (Nursing).
- Use common test questions across courses and course sections.
- Early Childhood Education students apply ECE concepts in the development of philosophies and entire cultures.

How are you assessing general education student learning outcomes in your classes? What are other ways that we could assess general education student learning outcomes?

- Use pre- and post-assessments.
- Use a skills checklist.
- Observe students as they perform tasks.
- Have students keep journals.
- Ask students to reflect on (self-assess) their own learning and development.
- Assess a particular SLO across courses and course sections.
- Many instructors may be assessing general education SLOs without realizing it.
- Use optional question #15 on the student course evaluation as an indirect assessment of an SLO (ask students to reflect on their own learning in terms of an outcome).

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CRITICAL THINKING RESOURCES

Here are a few Web resources on the subjects of critical thinking teaching and learning:

[COLLEGIATE ASSESSMENT OF ACADEMIC PROFICIENCY \(CAAP\)](#)

The CAAP Critical Thinking Test from the American College Testing (ACT) Program was designed to measure students' skills in "clarifying, analyzing, evaluating, and extending arguments."

[CRITICAL THINKING ASSESSMENT TEST \(CAT\)](#)

This tool, developed at Tennessee Tech University with partial support from the National Science Foundation, assesses critical thinking and real-world problem solving skills. A narrated overview is provided.

["CRITICAL THINKING: A STATEMENT OF EXPERT CONSENSUS..."](#)

A link to this 20-page article by Peter A. Facione is also posted on the "Workshops" page on the IR Assessment website.

[CRITICAL THINKING BASIC CONCEPTS AND UNDERSTANDINGS ONLINE TEST](#)

Fellows at the Foundation for Critical Thinking developed this test which measures five dimensions of critical thinking.

[MEASURE OF ACADEMIC PROFICIENCY AND PROGRESS \(MAPP\)](#)

This test assesses four core skill areas including critical thinking. The [Voluntary System of Accountability \(VSA\)](#) has selected this test as a gauge of general education outcomes.

[NPEC SOURCEBOOK ON ASSESSMENT, VOL. 1: DEFINITIONS AND ASSESSMENT METHODS FOR CRITICAL THINKING, PROBLEM SOLVING, AND WRITING](#)

This document from the National Postsecondary Education Cooperative contains comparative information about tests used to assess critical thinking, problem solving, and writing.

["TEACHING CRITICAL THINKING: SOME LESSONS FROM COGNITIVE SCIENCE"](#)

Copies of this six-page article by Tim van Gelder were also handed out at the Aug. 26 workshop.

[VALUE: VALID ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING IN UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION](#)

This project is part of the AAC&U's Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) initiative.

Critical Thinking VALUE Rubric: <http://www.aacu.org/value/rubrics/pdf/CriticalThinking.pdf>