General Education Assessment

Approved by GERC on April 12, 2016; accepted by UCC, and by Academic Affairs on April 26, 2016

Introduction

The General Education Program at Idaho State University prepares students to be life-long, independent learners and active, culturally aware participants in diverse local, national, and global communities. General Education promotes comprehensive literacy—including effective communication, mathematical, and technological skills; reasoning and creativity; and information literacy—and a broad knowledge base in the liberal arts. Through completing the General Education Program, students will be able to communicate effectively and clearly in standard written and spoken language; use mathematical language and quantitative reasoning effectively; think logically, critically, and creatively; and locate relevant sources and use them critically and responsibly.

The Idaho State Board of Education (SBOE) specifies that general education courses “prepare students to use multiple strategies in an integrative manner, to explore, critically analyze, and creatively address real-world issues and challenges. Course work provides graduates with an understanding of self, the physical world, the development and functioning of human society, and its cultural and artistic endeavors, as well as an understanding of the methodologies, value systems, and thought processes employed in human inquiries. General Education helps instill students with the personal and civic responsibilities of good citizenship. General Education prepares graduates as adaptive, life-long learners” (III.N).

Goals of General Education Assessment

This General Education Assessment Plan describes two subjects of assessment: the achievement of general education learning outcomes in each general education course, and the effectiveness of the general education objectives and program overall. Assessment is performed to support the ultimate goal of refining individual courses and the general education program, and the plan outlined below is intended to guide this process while preserving the autonomy of departments to evaluate their own courses.

Overview and Assessment Process Flowchart:

Individual departments are responsible for crafting Course Assessment Plans to assess the general education learning outcomes for all the general education courses they offer. These plans will specify the course materials and student output to be collected, and the procedures for internal review of these materials and subsequent action within the department. After plans are approved by GERC, each department will carry out planned assessment internally, maintaining a collection of materials and filing a brief annual report with GERC summarizing its general education assessment activities. On a rotating 5-year schedule, departments will produce comprehensive assessment reports covering each of their offerings within a single objective. These
reports will be evaluated by an Objective Review Committee (ORC) chaired by a GERC member and composed of departmental representatives specific to the objective under review. This group will report to GERC with recommendations pertaining both to specific courses, and to the program of general education more generally. GERC will respond to these reports. GERC will also perform a comprehensive program-level review of the entire general education program on a separate 5-year schedule.

Departmental Obligations:

Devise Course Assessment Plans: Each department that offers general education courses will develop an assessment plan for each of these courses, and a course assessment plan will be required as part of every proposal to add a new course to the general education program. The plan will describe:

- procedures for collecting course materials such as syllabi, exams, and assignment prompts
- procedures for collecting direct assessment instruments (student work) such as major essays, capstone projects, or major exams
- correlation of assessment materials to specific general education learning outcomes (as opposed to other course outcomes)
- procedures for departmental review of assessment materials
- procedures, guidelines, or rubrics ensuring consistency in the evaluation process, which should encompass all mechanisms through which a department awards general education credit, including substantively different course sections, Early College Program courses, and exam credit.

The template for this plan is Part C of the General Education Course Proposal Form, and is provided in Appendix II. For new general education courses, course assessment plans must be submitted as part of GERC and UCC proposals by September 20 of the academic year prior to proposed inclusion in the undergraduate catalog.

Official versions of approved assessment plans will reside in the GERC online repository where they will be accessible for view by all ISU faculty and staff, and open to suggestions and comments by originating department chairs and their designees. (Suggest/Comment access can be arranged by contacting geremail@isu.edu)

Small changes to specific assessment instruments or processes within the spirit of the original plan do not require modification of the original plan or GERC approval. Significant changes to the assessment schedule, the type of instruments employed, or the selection of learning outcomes addressed should be reviewed by GERC. To request this review, departments should use "suggesting" mode to propose changes in the online document, and indicate on the annual reporting form that changes have been entered.

Execute Course Assessment Plans: As described in their Course Assessment Plans, departments will collect specified course materials—such as syllabi, exams, and assignments—and student work—such as exams, essays, and projects—each semester on an ongoing basis. Even if only one or two learning outcomes are assessed each year, the materials used for any part of the assessment must be collected and maintained during the assessment process in a FERPA-compliant manner. These materials will be reviewed internally within the department, and departments are expected to use these findings to improve both courses and assessment procedures where appropriate.

File Annual Reports: An annual report documenting the activities described above is due to GERC by November 1st each year. The report will include brief summaries of:

- general education learning outcomes reviewed in each course
- materials collected and assessed
- findings and related departmental actions
These reports will be submitted by completing an online form, the content of which is reproduced in Appendix III.

**Compose 5-Year Reports:** The assessment cycle for each objective will be completed every five years, with one or two specific objectives cycling into focus each year. Detailed reports on all courses satisfying the reviewed objectives will be submitted to GERC by January 7th. No Annual Report is required during the year that a 5-Year Report is due, and departments offering multiple courses under a single objective are welcome to collect them in a single report if this is convenient.

5-Year Reports will describe the overall findings from the assessment process, including a description of the processes, a summary of the findings, recommendations for changes to be made to courses or to learning outcomes, and details regarding any changes already made. These reports should take into account the information included in the Annual Reports, but should go beyond these to provide a complete assessment of each course as fulfilling the general education objective.

Each 5-Year Report should include:

- A description of the methods used for assessment of each learning outcome, including an explanation of why these particular methods were chosen.
- An explanation of how the analysis was performed, including an appendix with copies of any rubrics developed for the purpose.
- A discussion of the major findings.
- A discussion of changes made and recommended on the basis of this assessment.
- An overall evaluation of the assessment process itself, explaining what was and was not effective, and providing recommendations for changes to the plan in the future.
- Access to assessment materials themselves, either as appendices or by other arrangement.
- Grade distributions within each course, and discussion of these data. (This information will be used by Objective Review Committees to compare course offerings within an objective, not to assess learning outcomes.)
- Other data relevant to assessing the effectiveness of each course.

Although comprehensive, this report should be limited to seven pages, excluding appendices. A template is provided in Appendix IV. All materials reviewed as part of this report must be retained by the department for future use in the General Education Assessment process. This report and related materials will be used as part of overall assessment of the general education program.

**Appoint Representative(s) to Objective Review Committee(s).** Objective-wide course review and preliminary program-level assessment will be performed by committees including one representative from each department or program involved in the given objective. Departments will appoint representatives to these committees when filing their 5-Year Reports.

**GERC Obligations:**

**Approve Course Assessment Plans:** These reports will be reviewed by GERC, which may provide feedback on their content and request revisions prior to approving them. Upon approval, copies will be sent to UCC, and then Academic Affairs for appropriate recordkeeping.

**Review Annual Reports:** GERC will review all annual reports and will vote to accept them as complete. GERC will then inform the departments of any questions or observations about the report. Upon acceptance, annual reports will be forwarded to UCC for approval and filing with Academic Affairs.

**Convene Objective Review Committees:** During the same year that 5-Year Reports are submitted for a given objective, GERC will appoint a chair from among its own members and solicit one representative from each
department offering a course within the objective to form an Objective Review Committee (ORC, described below).

**Respond to ORC Reports:** Members of GERC will review the findings in the ORC Reports (described below) and discuss all of the recommendations made. GERC will then determine whether to pursue any changes to the general education courses, to the general education objectives, or to the stated learning outcomes for any of the objectives, appending GERC recommendations to the ORC Report and forwarding it to UCC. Any recommended changes to learning outcomes for objectives established by the Idaho State Board of Education will eventually be forwarded to ISU’s representatives on the SBOE’s general education discipline groups.

**Assess General Education Program Comprehensively:** In addition, every 5 years GERC will use ORC Reports as starting points for a comprehensive review of ISU’s general education program. This review will consider the effectiveness of all objectives in meeting the overall goals for general education, and whether course offerings in each objective are sufficient to meet student needs. Findings will be described in a Comprehensive General Education Assessment Report to be approved by UCC and filed with Academic Affairs. If changes are deemed appropriate in the current objectives, a more extensive campus-wide review would ensue.

**Objective Review Committee Obligations:**

**Assemble with Appropriate Membership:** For each objective, an Objective Review Committee (ORC) will be formed every five years to evaluate the courses of the objective and its learning outcomes. The membership of each ORC will include one representative from each department or program that offers a general education course in the objective, who will be recommended by the department chairs of these units. A representative from GERC will serve as the chair of the ORC, and should convene the committee at the beginning of spring semester. Each ORC will have a minimum of 3 members; GERC will recruit any additional members needed in consultation with department chairs.

**Review Assessment Materials:** Objective Review Committees will review, at a minimum, the 5-Year Departmental Objective Review Report and Annual Reports from each department. These will include syllabi for all unique sections of all courses meeting the objective, assignments and exams used in course assessments to determine if students are meeting expectations, and descriptions of any other modes by which students are awarded credit for these courses. ORCs may also use previous ORC and GERC reports, when available, and may request additional materials.

**Compose Reports:** After performing the review described above, each ORC will reach findings as to whether the courses currently in its objective have been adequately assessed, whether these courses are fully meeting the learning outcomes, and whether the learning outcomes themselves are in keeping with the spirit of the objective. These findings and resulting recommendations will be reported to GERC following the template provided in **Appendix V.** Reports from ORCs are due to GERC and to the Associate Vice President for Undergraduate Affairs by March 1st.

**The Uses of Assessment Results**

The assessment results are to be used primarily at the department level to identify courses that should be modified in order to better meet the requirements of general education, or removed from the GEM curriculum because of poor alignment with its learning outcomes. Objective-wide review may also result in either of these recommendations. In addition, program assessment may lead to recommendations to adjust the learning outcomes for an objective or to eliminate an objective altogether. The specific findings of the assessment process will direct the next steps in the process—whether recommendations are made to an academic department, to Curriculum Council, to Academic Affairs, or to the State Board of Education.

In addition, a description of the assessment process and its results will be provided to the Associate Vice President for Institutional Effectiveness who is responsible for ensuring that ISU is meeting the accreditation...