NJCU

6 December 2019

GECAP met on 5 December 2019 and makes the following report. This report includes two action items.

We're in our fifth year of the new General Education program. We've much of which to be proud. We've created a smaller program that is tiered to allow students to hone the essential skills we've identified as key to success at NJCU and beyond. We've integrated a capstone component that culminates in the opportunity for students to present cutting-edge creative and scholarly work at a public research forum.[1] And we've prioritized assessing student learning outcomes, creating a lot of data for analysis and interpretation.

At the same time, some of our aspirations have not been fully realized. We're not doing as much interdisciplinary collaboration as we originally envisioned. While we're offering courses in all the learning outcomes, we're not ensuring students are getting each of those outcomes at least twice in their coursework. Moreover, we have a lot of exceptions and workarounds to ensuring students get each mode of inquiry twice in their Tier I and II courses. Finally, we've produced a lot of assessment data, but, as you'll see below, it's proven to be a boondoggle vis-à-vis analyzing and interpreting it for closing-the-loop initiatives.

The strengths of the new program outweigh the weaknesses. That said, there are some revisions we can enact to address these areas of weakness and improve the program measurably for all. Today we put forward two motions.

Motion 1: We recommend a new assessment plan that makes assessment the responsibility of GECAP. Furthermore, we recommend expanding the size of GECAP to 11 members.

We need to implement a new assessment plan. While we realize this would be our third assessment plan in five years, there is a better way to yield better data. As you know, our practice now is that faculty members self-assess signature

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[1] For 2020, the General Education Symposium will be expanded to two days.

assignments using VALUE rubrics.[2] The faculty commitment to this process is laudable. But since there is no norming, the data are not necessarily highly reliable. Let's face it, it's preposterous to think that through norming sessions we'll get over 230 faculty members on the same page about how to measure specific criteria.

Our alternative is to make assessment the responsibility of GECAP. As a Senate-elected faculty body, GECAP ensures that assessment remains a faculty responsibility.

Here's our plan. Instead of assessing all student learning outcomes every semester we start assessing only two a year. We also want to make the collection of a sample of signature assignments for assessment the responsibility of the Office of Institutional Effectiveness.[3] Collection will occur at the end of each fall term. As part of this process, the Director of General Education will scrub all submissions of identifying information to preserve student and faculty anonymity.

In the spring, GECAP will use revised VALUE rubrics (see Motion 2) to assess the sampled signature assignments. The Director of General Education, in coordination with the Office of Institutional Effectiveness, will prepare a report based on the assessment results. GECAP and the Director of General Education will discuss the results and create an action plan to improve Tier-level achievement levels (as needed). Starting in the second year of the new assessment plan, GECAP will be charged with taking a sample of General Education syllabi covering the prior year's learning outcomes and assessing them, making general recommendations as needed. To accomplish this work we need to expand the size of GECAP. It should have at least eleven members (four from College of Arts and Sciences, two from the College of Professional Studies, two from the College of Education, two from the School of Business, and one at-large member).

The new assessment protocol would go into effect in fall 2020, the expanded GECAP having been elected at the Senate's spring reorganization meeting.

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[2] You can find the rubrics here: https://www.njcu.edu/academics/resources-services/general-education
[3] PACC serves as a good model for how to enrich the relationship between GECAP and the Office of Institutional Effectiveness.

Assessment Plan[4]	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6
Fall	Collect WC/CTPS Data	Collect ITL/QL Data Syllabus Review WC/CTPS	Collect CEIK/OC Data Syllabus Review ITL/QL	Collect WC/CTPS Data Syllabus Review CEIK/OC	Collect ITL/QL Data Syllabus Review WC/CTPS	Collect CEIK/OC Data Syllabus Review ITL/QL
Spring	Data Analysis Action Plan (as needed)	Data Analysis Action Plan (as needed)	Data Analysis Action Plan (as needed)	Data Analysis Action Plan (as needed)	Data Analysis Action Plan (as needed)	Data Analysis Action Plan (as needed)

Motion 2: We recommend revising the VALUE rubrics to measure no more than three criteria per learning outcome.

Ideally, each course in a revised General Education program would focus on one learning outcome and students would take at least one Tier I and Tier II course in each to build their skills. However, that would mean enlarging the size of the program, which no one has the stomach for. Our current two outcomes per course approach is unduly challenging. Indeed, trying to cover two learning outcomes with five or six measurable criteria for each presents extraordinary challenges for faculty members, and, by extension, students. It's too much to expect faculty members to help students meet Tier-level competencies on 10 to 12 different criteria in just fifteen weeks. Thus, we need to ask to what extent we are setting up students to fail with this overly-ambitious approach. If faculty members are able to focus their efforts on the three most essential skills associated with each of the six learning outcomes, we believe that it will benefit both faculty members and students. Faculty members will be able to design more focused course activities around the outcomes and students will, as a result, get a sharper outcomes-based experience. We need to make the teaching and assessment of learning outcomes more manageable and meaningful for all parties involved.

We recommend that these three criteria be used for each of the six learning outcomes.

Written Communication
1. Content Development (Uses appropriate, relevant, and compelling content to illustrate mastery of the subject, conveying the writer's understanding, and shaping the whole work.)
2. Sources and Evidence (Demonstrates skillful use of high-quality, credible, relevant sources to develop ideas that are appropriate for the discipline and genre of the writing.)

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[4] Yellow highlighted tasks would be the responsibility of the Office of Institutional Effectiveness. Blue highlighted ones, those of the Director of General Education and GECAP.

3. Control of Syntax and Mechanics (Uses graceful language that skillfully communicates meaning to readers with clarity and fluency, and is virtually error-free.)

Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving
1. Explanation of Issues (Issue/problem to be considered critically is stated clearly and described comprehensively, delivering all relevant information for full understanding.)
2. Evidence (Information is taken from source(s) with enough interpretation/evaluation to develop a comprehensive analysis or synthesis. Viewpoints of experts are questioned thoroughly.)
3. Student's Position (Specific position [perspective, thesis/hypothesis] is imaginative, taking into account the complexities of an issue. Limits of position [perspective, thesis/hypothesis] are acknowledged. Others' point of view are synthesized within position [perspective, thesis/hypothesis]).

Information and Technology Literacy
1. Determine the Extent of Information and Technology Needed (Effectively defines the scope of the research question or thesis and the technology needed to access and/or utilize information. Effectively determines key concepts. Types of information and technology selected directly relate to the concepts or answer research question.)
2. Evaluate Sources and Applications of Information Critically (Chooses a variety of information sources appropriate to the scope and discipline of the research question. Selects sources and determines applications after considering the importance [to the researched topic] of the multiple criteria used (such as relevance to the research question, currency, authority, audience, bias or point of view.)
3. Application of Information Literacy and Technology Resources (Demonstrates a superior understanding of how to use the World Wide Web and other technology resources to access, process, and utilize information.)

Quantitative Literacy
1. Interpretation (Provides accurate explanations of information presented in mathematical forms. Makes appropriate inferences based on that information.)
2. Application/Analysis (Uses the quantitative analysis of data as the basis for deep and thoughtful judgments, drawing insightful, carefully qualified conclusions from this work.)
3. Communication (Uses quantitative information in connection with the argument or purpose of the work, presents it in an effective format, and explicates it with consistently high quality.)

Civic Engagement and Intercultural Knowledge
1. Diversity of Communities and Cultures (Demonstrates evidence of adjustment in own attitudes and beliefs because of working within and learning from diversity of communities and cultures. Promotes other's engagement with diversity.)
2. Civic Identity and Engagement (Provides evidence of experience in civic-engagement activities and describes what she/he has learned about her or himself as it relates to a

reinforced and clarified sense of civic identity and continued commitment to public action.)
3. Civic Action and Reflection (Demonstrates independent experience and *shows initiative in team leadership* of complex or multiple engagement activities, accompanied by reflective insights or analysis about the aims and accomplishments of one's actions.)

Oral Communication
1. Organization (Organizational pattern [specific introduction and conclusion, sequences material within the body, and transitions] is clearly and consistently observable and is skillful and makes the content of the presentation cohesive.)
2. Language (Language choices are imaginative, memorable, and compelling, and enhance the effectiveness of the presentation. Language in presentation is appropriate to the audience.)
3. Delivery (A variety of types of supporting materials [explanations, examples, illustrations, statistics, analogies, quotations from relevant authorities] make appropriate reference to information or analysis that significantly supports the presentation or establishes the presenter's credibility/authority on the topic.)

This change would go into effect in the fall of 2020.

Future Considerations

First, GECAP needs to investigate and make recommendations on how we're going to ensure students receive exposure to all six learning outcomes in the General Education program. As part of this investigation, we may need to reconsider having a modes of inquiry requirement altogether. This investigation will take place in the spring of 2020.

In its current form, any discipline can create a course in any mode of inquiry. We have one department that requires its majors take 21 credits of General Education in its own department. Other departments require majors to take three to nine credits of credits in their own department. Departments are also offering courses in all or nearly all the modes of inquiry. The Department of History, for example, offers courses in three of the four modes.[5] Political Science offers courses in all four. Majors with more than fifty credits get a nine-credit exemption from General Education, so do College of Education students. What does this mean for the disciplinary breadth of students' general education experience? GECAP needs to answer this question.

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[5] Creative Process and Production, Social and Historical Perspectives, and Language, Literary, and Cultural Studies.

At this point, we have two major options. The first option might entail a tighter regulation of which courses can count towards which mode of inquiry, limiting the number of General Education credits that can count towards a major, or some variation thereof. The second is to phase out the modes of inquiry requirement altogether and replace it with a requirement that students get each learning outcome at least twice over the course of the program.

A major benefit of this latter approach is that it is in line with recommendations made in the Middle States self-study. In Standard 3 "Design and Delivery of the Student Learning Experience," the working group (of which faculty had the largest representation), the working group asserted, "NJCU can continue to monitor the General Education program to ensure that students have the opportunity to develop competence in all the learning outcomes. At least as much priority can be given to outcomes as to modes of inquiry in scheduling and program development."[6]

Logistically, it is impossible to require students both to complete the current modes of inquiry requirement as well as a new student learning outcomes requirement. We need to consider all of our options. At this time, the members of GECAP do not agree on an answer. A more thorough investigation will give us the evidence we need to make a sound recommendation.

Second, we need to develop a process for recertifying General Education courses. This entails ensuring that all General Education courses being taught continue to fit the mode(s) of inquiry associated with them as well as demonstrate that skill-building activities are focused on the course's two designated learning outcomes. GECAP will work with GEEC in the spring of 2020 to develop a recertification process and bring it to the Senate for a vote.

Third, we need to expand our General Education online offerings with an eye to making it possible for students to complete the entire General Education program online. Currently, we offer between 40 and 50 courses online. Mathematics offers a couple of online sections Math AUR's each term, but the English Department currently does not offer any AUR's online. Only one Tier III course has been offered online (and is being offered in multiple sections this coming spring). The ability to complete General Education online will allow us to accept undergraduate students beyond easy driving distance to our campus.

Fourth, we need to continue to enhance our professional development offerings to further encourage the use of high-impact practices and skill-building activities across the General Education curriculum.

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[6] Draft of Standard 3 "Design and Delivery of the Student Learning Experience," 27 October 2019, 17.

Finally, we need to work on recapturing the interdisciplinary spirit of the original General Education proposal. We can do this by revisiting the thematic blocked courses that we experimented with at the program's inauguration.[7] Now that learning communities for first-time, first-year students has been identified as a key part of the university's student success strategy, faculty members can leverage this opportunity to work with colleagues to reintroduce extant thematic blocks as well as develop new ones.

Respectfully submitted,

Jason D. Martinek
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[7] In these thematic blocks of two or three courses, faculty members would explore a shared theme through different disciplinary lenses.