

**THE DIVISION OF UNDERGRADUATE AFFAIRS
OFFICE OF ASSESSMENT**

BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 3, ISSUE 6

December 2003

Interim Report on GER Assessment Pilot
By Mike Carter, Ph.D.

In spring 2003 the Council on Undergraduate Education (CUE) approved “A Proposal for Assessing General Education at NC State.” According to this proposal, the CUE would generate objectives for each category in the General Education Requirements (GERs) that all courses in that category should meet and faculty teaching GER courses would create outcomes designed to enable students to meet the objectives and then would identify means of evaluating those outcomes. The CUE also voted for a plan for implementing “A Proposal for Implementing Assessment of General Education at NC State,” which set forth timeline for executing the assessment of the GERs. Included in this timeline for Spring 2003 and Fall 2003 was a pilot of the assessment procedure, approved by the CUE in recognition that such a revolutionary change in the university’s approach to the GERs should be tested before being required of all faculty teaching GERs.

The pilot was to take place over two semesters. In the first, pilot faculty would learn to create learning outcomes and identify means of evaluating those outcomes as well as generate new course action forms and revise their course syllabi accordingly. In the second semester, pilot faculty would teach their courses by the new outcomes and assess the outcomes, writing a report of the results of the assessment. This is a report of the first semester of the pilot.

Goals of GER Assessment Pilot

1. To identify any problems with the assessment procedure as outlined in the GER proposal
2. To determine if the objectives produced by the CUE would present any difficulties in translating into outcomes
3. To test materials developed for training faculty to create outcomes and identify means of evaluating outcomes
4. To generate assessment materials—course action forms and attached documentation and GER assessment reports—that could be used by CUE members for learning how to evaluate these materials and also for determining the viability of the new assessment procedure
5. To ensure that this assessment process promoted the improvement of GER courses
6. To ensure that GER courses meet the GER objectives set forth by the CUE

Procedure

Fourteen faculty members participated in the first part of the pilot. All volunteered to participate, and those who agreed to complete the pilot received an honorarium.

Participants were selected to ensure representation of all GER categories as well as courses at all academic levels. The category representation was as follows:

- Writing and speaking: 3
- Humanities (history): 1
- Visual and performing arts: 3
- Natural sciences: 3
- Mathematical sciences: 1
- Physical education: 1
- Social sciences: 1
- Science, technology, and society: 1

Courses ranged from 100 level to 400 level. Participating faculty also varied in experience teaching GER courses, ranging from first-year faculty to those who have been teaching at NC State for thirty years. This variation was important because the training materials must be appropriate to faculty at all levels of experience.

All participants but one (visual and performing arts) agreed to complete the two-semester pilot. That one participant attended the training sessions anyway.

Faculty training consisted of two workshops. GER Workshop 1 was given on April 2 and 3, 2003. Faculty could come on the date that was more convenient for them. This workshop introduced participants to the concepts of GER objectives, GER student learning outcomes, and means of evaluating those outcomes. Participants were asked to create GER student learning outcomes and identify means of evaluating those outcomes for their GER courses and to bring these materials to the next workshop.

GER Workshop 2 was given on April 16 and 24, 2003. This workshop focused on the new Course Action Form (CAF), which had been revised to accommodate the new GER assessment plan. Participants learned how to include GER assessment materials—objectives, outcomes, and means of evaluation—in the CAF documentation and how to revise their syllabi to include the appropriate GER materials. Participants were asked to submit new Course Action Forms with appropriate documentation (including revised syllabus) by the end of the semester. The workshop concluded with a preview of the next semester of the pilot, in which they would teach and assess their GER courses according to the new materials they had created.

Results

Of the thirteen participants who agreed to complete the pilot, all but one (science, technology, and society) turned in revised Course Action Forms and syllabi.

What we Learned from First Part of Pilot

1. *To identify any problems with the assessment procedure as outlined in the GER proposal*

At this point, no problems with the assessment procedure have been exposed. One issue that had not been settled before the pilot was whether or not the outcomes for a course should be applied to all sections of the course. This was addressed by faculty during the pilot, and most agreed that the course outcomes should be written generally enough to be applied to all sections.

2. *To determine if the objectives produced by the CUE would present any difficulties in translating into outcomes*

Some participants observed that some of the objectives were vague and needed some translation to understand what they really mean. However, the participants indicated that they would be able to work with the objectives.?

3. *To test materials developed for training faculty to create outcomes and identify means of evaluating outcomes*

The training materials were generally helpful to faculty. Here is what we learned from the pilot:

- There was some confusion about the levels of generality represented by objectives, outcomes, and means of evaluating outcomes. Some faculty conceived of outcomes essentially as assignments. This confusion was largely attributable to the lack a common understanding of the concepts of *objectives*, *outcomes*, and *means of evaluating outcomes*. To address this confusion, we have made the levels of generality for each of the concepts clearer in a revision of the workshop materials.
- Participants needed to move more deliberately through the steps for creating outcomes and means of evaluation. In the original workshop, we went over the three steps for each and then asked participants to do all the steps. We noted some confusion in a few participants. In the revision, we ask faculty to perform one step within the workshop time before going on to the next, which allows us to deal with any confusions at the point they occur.
- Our examples showed one means of evaluation for each outcome-. Some participants wanted to know if they could use multiple means of evaluation, such as a set of assignments related to an outcome. We offer this option in the revision of the workshop.
- We found that the focus on outcomes as what students learn to do in the course and the use of strong action verbs to describe those ways of doing (along with the use of Bloom's Taxonomy) provided participants an effective guide to writing outcomes.

4. *To generate assessment materials—course action forms and attached documentation and GER assessment reports—that could be used by CUE members for learning how to evaluate these materials and also for determining the viability of the new assessment procedure*

- The workshops produced new Course Action Forms and documentation, including syllabi, that can be used to train members of the CUE. The CUE will begin training on the pilot materials in November of 2003.

Pilot Faculty Testimonials on GER Assessment Process

Note: These comments were gathered informally during the 3rd assessment workshops that took place on November 19th and 20th, 2003 for the pilot faculty on how to make use of your assessment data.

- “Engaging in this process is being very helpful to my grading and teaching.”
- “This process appeals to me because it helps me maintain the quality of my course.”
- “When lecturing, I am trying to be more socially scientific to meet the objectives and outcomes such as to think more analytically.”
- “I have found that sharing with students why we are doing this and where it fits into their general education program, is helping them understand the importance of the course.”
- “This process has helped me this semester. I am doing a better job of bringing the important concepts to the top because I have written down what this course should be accomplishing. It helps me help them.”
- “I learned that one outcome was not realistic.”
- “I learned that I have criteria (to evaluate learning) that I didn’t know I had so I have made that criteria clearer.”
- “It is resulting in a better, clearer understanding of concepts. My subjective feedback from students has been good.”
- “As a result of putting the outcomes on the syllabus, when it came time to grade their final paper, I was able to send students to those outcomes. They helped clarify the purpose of the paper.”
- “It helped in supervising the TAs who are teaching the sections such as having them document changes that need to be made to the course each day they teach.”
- “My students are liking the activities and assignments.”

CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS:

Marilee J. Bresciani, Ph.D.

Director of Assessment

Division of Undergraduate Affairs

North Carolina State University

126 Leazar Hall, Box 7105

Raleigh, North Carolina 27695-7105

Phone: 919-515-6433 Fax 919-515-4416

Marilee_Bresciani@ncsu.edu
