FINAL REPORT

GENERAL EDUCATION FACULTY LEARNING COMMUNITY
2005-06

BY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The G.E. Faculty Learning Community’s (G.E.-FLC) project was designed to explore the literature on general education assessment and select a strategy to assess one Senate approved general education learning outcome in order to address the question: How do we devise a reasonable and reliable way of assessing the G.E. outcomes within the rich mix of major courses of G.E.?

Ten highly diverse junior faculty with expertise in the Humanities, Social Science, Science, Cultural Groups and Women, and Social Responsibility\(^1\) were chosen by their Deans and given assigned time or stipends to participate in a G.E.-Faculty Learning Community, led by Sally Murphy, Director of General Education and Gale Young, Chair of CSUEB-WASC Committee.

CHALLENGES AND EXIGENCIES

The decision to create a Faculty Learning Community to study the assessment of General Education was based on a number of issues at CSUEB, all of which are familiar to campuses throughout the nation. At CSUEB, general education courses are distributed throughout many disciplines and many require the faculty to carry a dual and differing set of responsibilities: to educate and assess students who receive credit toward their major; and to educate and assess other students who will receive credit toward their general education. Even in the sciences where most GE courses do not count for major credit, the commitment to disciplinary knowledge and “coverage” often supersedes the goals of general education learning outcomes. To date many faculty have chosen to teach to and grade assignments based on criteria from the program outcomes for all of the students. To do otherwise would mean that assignments turned in by students in the discipline would need to be graded by different criteria than those taking the class for G.E. And yet, this choice leaves CSUEB without a measurement of what constitutes acceptable levels of learning in general education, and does not allow us to define what is the character and distinction of a general education at CSUEB.

Other challenges exist as well. While G.E. represents 40% of a student’s education, many faculty do not know when a course they are teaching carries G.E. credit. Department chairs often submit courses for G.E. approval. The full or part-time faculty teaching the course may not realize that it serves such a purpose.

Moreover, a decade ago, the Academic Senate mandated the development and assessment of G.E. outcomes and the CSU Accountability Standard 1.1 requires that student learning of core competencies be assessed in the majors and G.E. with evidence reported annually. CSUEB’s reliance on student perception data instead of direct student learning outcome data has placed us close to the bottom in comparison to other CSUs. Finally, WASC Standard Two calls for the faculty to develop academic expectations for G.E. that all graduates will attain, to take collective responsibility for helping students achieve those outcomes at expected levels, to embed the outcomes in standards for

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\(^1\) “Social Responsibility” as an area was added to the G.E.-FLC because it is prominently expressed in the CSUEB Mission and because the CSU encourages Service Learning. The future for the proposed outcome and rubric will be determined at a later date.
evaluation, and to collect evidence of student learning that will be used for making improvements. Evidence is due July 2007.

THE RESEARCH STUDY.

In light of these realities, we proposed a research study and based upon the endorsement from the G.E. Subcommittee, the Provost, and Deans, and in cooperation with the Center for Faculty Development, CSUEB formed the G.E. Faculty Learning Community to spend the year studying issues related to assessing learning in general education programs and to develop and test rubrics as an assessment strategy.

Remaining mindful of the faculty’s concerns, CSUEB’s obligations, our own policies, the CSU Trustees, and the WASC Commission, this study sought to address the question: How do we devise a reasonable and reliable way of assessing the G.E. outcomes within the rich mix of major courses? In particular:

1. Can rubrics be flexible enough to measure the learning of G.E. outcomes in courses that also meet a wide variety of major requirements?
2. Will the evidence from the rubrics provide the university with comparable and meaningful data?
3. Will the use of rubrics for assessing G.E learning provide individual faculty with sufficient academic freedom?
4. What are the workload implications for assessing G.E. outcomes separately from discipline outcomes?

Rubrics were chosen as the method for this research study because faculty at many CSUs and other institutions across the country have found them to be simple and easy to use. Rubrics often do not require any changes in courses or assignments and they allow participating faculty to remain anonymous. And of equal importance, rubrics have the potential to provide CSUEB with comparable and meaningful data about the educational effectiveness of our distributed G.E. program.

Throughout the year the G.E.~FLC
- Met 4-5 times a quarter to develop and experiment with ways to measure the educational effectiveness of our G.E. program;
- Studied the literature on learning and evaluation of G.E.;
- Consulted extensively with faculty teaching in the G.E. areas during the development phase;
- In pairs, designed rubrics that describe the levels at which students are learning one or more of the identified G.E. outcomes regardless of the discipline offering the course.

During the Winter and Spring quarters, 2006, fifty-six (56) faculty volunteers completed the following: piloted rubrics on one assignment per course; turned-in both the evidence from the scoring rubrics and feedback based on their experience using the rubrics; and submitted their reflections on the rubrics’ effectiveness, and their potential to assist the faculty. The G.E.~FLC interpreted data and revised the rubrics for the Spring pilot.

The data from this research study will give the Academic Senate evidence about student learning of G.E. outcomes and faculty feedback regarding the use of rubrics.
This evidence can inform their discussion and decision on how best to assess student learning in our G.E. program.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

Faculty participants: A total of fifty-six (56) faculty used the rubrics in winter (32) and spring (24). Some faculty participated in both quarters.

Students evaluated: A total of 2155 student artifacts (essays, essay tests, oral presentations, multiple choice tests) were evaluated: 820 in winter quarter, 1335 in the spring on one or more indicators of learning outcome acquisition. (These data are totals based on the largest number of student artifacts scored on any one scale each quarter.)

Overwhelmingly, student artifacts demonstrated that most of our students are successfully learning the knowledge, skills, and/or dispositions described by at least one rubric indicator. Failure to acquire at least one of the outcomes ranged from a low of 10.8% (from one indicator for Cultural Groups and Women’s learning outcomes) to a high of 50% (from one of the Social Responsibility learning outcomes). In general, however, approximately 20% to 25% of our students failed on at least one learning outcome in each of the subject areas.

Feedback from faculty: The Faculty Learning Community members received feedback from almost the entire participating faculty group. Comments were solicited on three questions: 1) in what ways was this rubric useful and relevant for assessing the GE outcome(s); 2) What changes would you suggest to improve the usefulness and relevance of the rubric; and 3) Other comments. Responses fell into six categories and the numbers can be found within the text of the dialogue.

The full text responses can be seen in Appendix B. The feedback describes overall positive responses to the use of the rubrics. As is clear from the summary above, the G.E.~FLC received many suggestions for revision of each of the rubrics--only three faculty suggested that rubrics would never work or that the time and the workload was excessive. An unexpected category was Clarity/Helps My Teaching: a number of winter and spring faculty reported that the rubrics helped them identify areas and ways to improve their course planning, their teaching, and their students’ learning.

SUMMARY OF G.E.~FLC DIALOGUE.

As a way to portray the energy and engagement of the dialogues that the G.E.~FLC experienced with each other throughout the year, they choose to write their final report in dialogue with each other. (See next section) The highlights of their dialogue are below.

1. The spirit of a General Education is viewed as being able to see and use enough multiple lenses of inquiry that students graduate as thinking, competent citizens whose knowledge and abilities to critically analyze and communicate will benefit their communities.

2. The fear is that G.E. is seen as hoops for students, a burden for faculty, and an area of silence for the institution. The antidote to this fear is for faculty to see G.E. at CSUEB as a delight, an inspiration, an opportunity and a responsibility to educate others about what they themselves particularly love.
3. The process of creating a rubric deepened the G.E.~FLC’s appreciation for the goal of general education courses and made them rethink the process of grading. While they found that the G.E. outcomes read as “committee-speak”, they also saw the intelligence and relevance of each outcome.

4. Assessment as a university process for evaluating G.E. suffers from two major disconnects: insufficient buy-in to the overall goals of a CSUEB general education; and lack of consensus over whether, what, and how to take responsibility for what students actually learn as a general education.

5. The G.E.~FLC heard and received resistance from faculty volunteers, members of senate committees, and department chairs. The intensity of some faculty’s feelings about assessment sometimes made it difficult for the G.E.~FLC to engage them in an open-minded inquiry. The resistance and concerns fell into four categories:
   a. Assessment as a workload and time issue that threatens to overburden faculty;
   b. Skepticism about “assessment” and dislike of rubrics;
   c. A belief that current grading systems adequately measure both major and G.E. student learning outcomes: and
   d. Concern that more specific assessment data might be used against faculty in hiring and promotion.

6. The G.E.~FLC final recommendations include:
   a. Create a simplified rubric tailored to the G.E. area that will be used as the campus-wide G.E. assessment instrument.
   b. Develop a system of rotation that would cycle through all the outcomes whereby only one learning outcome from each area, each quarter would be assessed.
   c. Provide conditions that support the kind of teaching embodied in the learning outcomes for all faculty.
   d. Continue to build the faculty through tenure track lines because a strong G.E. program requires a strong faculty.
   e. Greater awareness and more effective communication of the G.E. student learning outcomes among faculty
   f. Strengthen the focus on G.E. learning outcomes as a clear part of the G.E. course approval process.
   g. Inform faculty who are assigned to teach a G.E. course of the G.E. learning outcomes early enough so that they can incorporate them into their syllabi. Provide G.E. application documents as model of expectations.

This report and its recommendations will be presented to the Academic Senate in Fall 2006. The Senate and its committees will determine the next iteration of G.E. assessment.
PARTICIPANTS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

G.E. Faculty Learning Community Members

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Luz Calvo, Ethnic Studies   Terry Soo-Hoo, Educational Psychology
Dennis Chester, English   Suzy Wear, Art
Maxine Craig, Sociology   Erica Wildy, Biological Sciences
Keri O’Neal, Human Development  Helen Zong, Engineering

Faculty Volunteers in Winter and Spring Pilot

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  Sally Murphy, Communication, Director of General Education  
  Gale Young, Communication, Chair, WASC Steering Committee
A DIALOGUE

BY


Due to the resistance expressed by faculty and chairs about assessing G.E. courses, the G.E.-FLC faculty, who were untenured at the time of this writing, choose to remain anonymous in the dialogue that follows.

THE SPIRIT OF A GENERAL EDUCATION

The spirit of a General Education is viewed as being able to see and use enough multiple lenses of inquiry that students graduate as thinking competent citizens whose knowledge and abilities to critically analyze and communicate will benefit their communities.

The fear is that G.E. is seen as hoops for students, a burden for faculty, and an area of silence for the institution. The antidote to this fear is for faculty to see G.E. at CSUEB, as a delight, an inspiration, an opportunity and a responsibility to educate others about what they themselves particularly love.

Ideal Purpose of G.E.

I would hope that the spirit of G.E. is to ensure that graduates have some measure of broad exposure to subject matter that would lead to being an educated person in society. G.E. is also a place that various scholarly processes can be developed away from a student's primary subject matter. G.E. should be a way that a university facilitates the emergence of a thinking and generally competent citizen.

When faculty teach G.E. courses they are sometimes torn between the need to provide a course that has substantial depth and the need to provide instruction to students with little subject preparation. Nonetheless one reason faculty gain some satisfaction from teaching G.E. is that those courses give us the opportunity to reach students who, absent G.E. requirements, would never take our courses. Every once in a while we will win someone over to the discipline. Even when we don't, which is most of the time, we can have the satisfaction that students will carry some understanding of the disciplines we love into their other courses and into their lives beyond the university.

I had a professor once who told me she strove to live life as a "dilettante" - she wanted to be known as someone who dabbled in multiple lines of inquiry and never wanted to be so mired down in her own subject matter that she missed all the other fascinating things there were to learn. I always liked this thought - G.E. is a great way to not miss some of the good stuff.

I certainly think that the idea of what constitutes an educated person in this society is an important one. At various periods of time certain cultures defined an educated person as a totally well-rounded person. This meant that he/she needed not only to master certain academic knowledge of science, but also of the arts such as literature, poetry and painting. In addition, the person had to master his/her own body in the form of martial arts or certain sports. This type of idea
The concept of the well-rounded person is perhaps beyond the scope of most universities. However, I am still attracted to the concept of that notion of the well-rounded person. More realistically the goal of G.E. is to be sure that a student possesses 1) a sufficient knowledge base 2) the ability to critically analyze events that leads to effectively making decisions that direct his behavior 3) to be able to contribute positively to society.

The degree to which our grads can effectively engage and lead their communities is a measure of the university’s status as a positive force in society. We cannot expect much without a call to reasonably broad exposure across diverse subject areas and methods of inquiry. That is a big part of the spirit of G.E.

It would be great to be able to communicate this "Spirit" effectively to the faculty teaching G.E. courses. If they are enthusiastic about the course, the students won't be able to help themselves.

The Fears and Burdens of a General Education

I think these statements about G.E.'s ideal purposes are true, but I wonder who G.E.'s audience is. Do students look to the G.E. program (to G.E.)-- to get a sense of the university's purpose or do they just see it as hoops to jump through? Can we say that faculty members look to G.E. for some sort of University guiding principle, when, in fact, most faculty members don't look at G.E. courses as the plum classes to teach?

It probably is true that many students see G.E. as hoops to jump through in getting their degree, and many faculty members view it as non-specialist information for disinterested/unmotivated/unsophisticated students.

I teach in the G.E. program but it wasn't until this year that I even figured out what the learning outcomes were and that we should be designing our curriculum to include these. No one ever said anything to me about it one way or the other and I guess I never really studied the CSUEB G.E. website. So, I agree that effectively communicating the "Spirit" and even the design of the G.E. program to the faculty would be very helpful.

I think we would be wise to remember that the freshman students come to us after the High School curriculum, which, more and more with cuts in funding, is "all G.E." The courses feel similar as things they just have to get through.

In writing about his own experiences as an undergrad in Columbia University's common core classes, contemporary novelist Adam Mansbach said taking the required core meant that all of Columbia's students had forgotten the same things. G.E. is, of course, supposed to mean more than this, but it can only do so if it increases its presence in the minds of student body and faculty.
I often think students have negative views about taking G.E. courses - that they are viewed as just additional hoops to jump through in order to get a diploma. And it is true that these courses must be taken. But from talking to students it is often in these courses that they are exposed to and learn about subjects that they normally would miss. I can specifically recall a student who was taking an Astronomy class - she was so excited to tell me about what she'd learned. This had nothing to do with her major; this was for her General Education.

The G.E.-FLC experience, especially at the beginning, made me reflect back on some of the lasting effects of my own G.E. experience. I do many Grad Checks for my area and my part time interest is to look at the student transcripts for interesting G.E. courses. I've had some great conversations with students about what they learned in those courses! Unfortunately, this happens as they are about to graduate... :(  

I get a lot of students from a variety of disciplines through G.E. as well. I currently have an engineering major in my upper division African American Sexuality course who is finding ways to critically deal with issues that have arisen in the midst of a long term intercultural relationship that he is in. This particular student claimed that my class was his first opportunity to read critically rather than merely for information. This is not an uncommon story. Because of G.E. I get many science and math majors who come to find out that we're engaged in very legitimate and challenging forms of inquiry in the social sciences and humanities. I've even found students who were later willing to double major. This happens in particular when I get students who are involved in the health fields.

You know, this is so interesting because sitting on CIC for the past year, I have had the opportunity to review many a G.E. course proposal. And man! There are so many courses that have been proposed in fields other than my own that look so interesting! I am actually kind of bummed that I don't have more time to take some of these courses myself. I think I didn't appreciate those opportunities when I was a student - I was just checking off boxes on my way to graduation. I just hope that at least some students appreciate the chance that the G.E. requirements give them to explore topics outside of their major field of interest.

I have found it helpful to know what the students who eventually get to my major area have done/learned previously. Knowing more about what students study and learn in their G.E. courses could enhance Upper Division courses and solidify their overall education. For example, in a visual narrative assignment if I could draw on the stories they had read, fiction or non-fiction, in other classes and disciplines, then students could discuss in class the narratives they had in common.

In retrospect, I know that as an undergrad the G.E. courses meant a lot to my overall education. We have to somehow remind each other to view and become acquainted with the array of interesting offerings outside our discipline so we can encourage students to see G.E. courses as a rich opportunity.
CREATING RUBRICS ~ THINKING ABOUT STUDENT LEARNING

The process of creating a rubric deepened the G.E.-FLC’s appreciation for the goal of general education courses and made them rethink the process of grading. While they found that the G.E. outcomes read as “committee-speak”, they also saw the intelligence and relevance of each outcome.

Our process began when we divided up into pairs according to our academic division. Having us work in pairs was a good thing. It made the task much more manageable. Also, knowing it was pilot program took some of the pressure off.

The wine Sally and Gale provided took some of the pressure off, too.

I agree, but so did knowing it was a pilot! I think it made some of the volunteers relax a bit too, although maybe we would have had more participation if it hadn’t been a pilot.

Yes. Knowing all along that the process was a pilot made it much easier to ask my colleagues to volunteer. I always felt as we conducted the pilot that it would be all right if we decided that the method we were testing did not work.

After dividing into pairs, each dyad worked to familiarize themselves with the stated learning outcomes for their area and to create a rubric for evaluating student achievement of the outcomes.

I spent a good deal of time thinking about the learning outcomes for my G.E. requirement. In the end, I came to appreciate the way that these learning outcomes were crafted. It was also interesting for me to see ways that my own courses satisfied the outcomes.

I think you’re right. Thinking through the meaning of G.E. outcomes in the undergraduate curriculum showed me some of the strengths and weaknesses of G.E. at CSUEB. As someone who does not teach G.E. courses and in fact had rather negative experiences of G.E. courses as an undergraduate, I had questions about the function and purpose of G.E. courses. So it was an interesting experience to enter the process of exploring what G.E. courses are supposed to be about and how to measure their learning outcomes. As is true for many other situations, the process of being engaged and involved in the process of this exploration led me to have a genuine appreciation for the idea of G.E. courses.

My partner and I had an interesting task in developing a rubric for outcomes not specifically stated by G.E. We enjoyed the process of determining what the University’s call to social responsibility could mean and how it might be reflected. It was a fine scholarly challenge to create the indicators and levels of the rubric.

Yes, the rubrics were interesting because they made me think about grading in a new way.

Designing the rubrics took some effort. In the first pilot, our group created rubrics for two of the learning outcomes and each outcome contained several
indicators. In the second round, we simplified and chose just one outcome and one indicator. The rationale for this is that assessment can be based on a "sample" and that it would be too onerous to assess all students for all outcomes using all the indicators.

But it was effort that paid off. In our group, for example, “social responsibility” is one of those terms that "sound good" and most people will agree that it is a positive goal. However, when we sit down to define what this means it becomes evident just how difficult it is to define. It is very difficult to avoid cultural norms and values in defining this term. Terms such as democracy, fairness and equality are so tied to cultural values that it is difficult to avoid bias in translating these terms to goals or learning objectives. However, I feel this is the very task that we need to commit ourselves to. Our Social Responsibility rubric is a big step in right direction but much more needs to be done. Now the University needs to decide if it wants to just state this as a goal in the Mission Statement, or is it committed to its true implementation.

Making the rubric fit for all of the humanities courses required some serious manipulations of the document. In other areas, I’m not so sure, though. For the Cultural Groups and Women course, I found the rubric fairly well targeted my subject and it was time-consuming.

From my point of view, it was difficult for the rubric to encompass all the courses that it needed, e.g. literature, Beginning Dance, Chinese, and other languages. The outcome itself had to be very general. Writing an effective rubric that can address every G.E. course for a given area was difficult. It may be faulted for being too generalized or too specific and not applicable to each course.

Given that I rarely teach lower division G.E. courses, the G.E.~FLC filled in a body of information and taught me about the desired outcomes. I also learned, happily, that I was already addressing the outcomes even though I was unaware of it. I did have to find evidence for this, but that wasn’t too onerous of a task. Also, I wonder if this means that the outcomes themselves are actually articulated in an effective manner. What I mean is, even though as I read the outcomes, I think they come across as committee-speak, inelegant and dry. The fact that I had incorporated them in my courses even though I was not initially trying to address them seems to speak well for them. I guess this is making me re-think my first assumption that the outcomes needed major revision.

I found it interesting to think about grading. I don’t think I’ve ever experienced anything like this – nor do I recall ever being trained in “how to grade.” So for the first time I actually thought about what an “A” or a “B” or a “C” etc., looks like. This was a useful exercise that encouraged a level of thought I had not given to my courses previously. I was able to carry this into my own classroom and create specific standards (I didn’t make a rubric but I did make a list of what I thought certain grades should look like...well I guess that was kind of a rubric then) for my grading.

After creating the rubrics, the G.E.~FLC recruited faculty teaching G.E. courses in the winter and spring to utilize the rubrics on one assignment.
This process taught us humility. Most of us don't teach G.E., or at least that wasn't a prerequisite to participating in the learning community. Possibly that made us more open to ideas and certainly more understanding when faculty were not eager to participate in the rubric process.

Let me tell you a composite narrative of my experiences with approaching faculty especially the new faculty. With the start of the quarter fast approaching, Lisa sits down to prepare her syllabus. What would she say to her students? How would she get her points across? As a new faculty member, she was nervous. Looking in the course catalog, she found a brief description of the class she was to teach, but it was too broad to be truly helpful, and the syllabi from previous instructors who had taught the class gave her a pattern to work from, but didn't allow her the opportunity to bring her own individuality to the way she taught the course. Where else could she turn to get a better idea of what her course was meant to do? And then, in the university catalog, she found the description of the G.E. program and structure. The stated outcomes for her area gave her a broad grasp of what it was her course should do. She began to write her syllabus with new direction and purpose.

Talking with the faculty doing the pilot was helpful. I sat down with one participant and helped to figure out ways to apply the rubric to the course when it didn't seem to fit at first. It gave me a greater appreciation for the breadth of G.E.'s mission.

I learned that for the faculty who volunteered to pilot the rubrics there was a substantial disconnect. In many cases it seems that they focused on the tedious paperwork rather than on the opportunity to inquire into general education, its assessment and expected outcomes. In my opinion the university needs to demonstrate leadership in G.E. in order to help faculty focus on the importance of teaching and assessing our General Education outcomes.

I also became aware of the disconnect between the G.E. approval process and G.E. instruction. It seems that it is fairly common that the faculty assigned to teach G.E. classes are unaware of the specific objectives that are supposed to be met by G.E. courses. Nonetheless, I think many faculty volunteers participating in this process ultimately found that a good part of lower division G.E. was included in the content of their courses anyway. Others seemed surprised. Their participation in the pilot caused them to wonder if the current G.E. objectives attempted to cover too much ground. An example of this is the requirement that students demonstrate oral communication skills. At least a few faculty felt that when teaching large classes they could not provide every student an opportunity to develop his oral communication skills. A few were unfamiliar with the expectation that their students would have to demonstrate the ability to understand the professional applications of theories and were unsure how to incorporate that outcome into their course content and assignments. A few of the faculty remarked that they enjoyed the process of thinking about how well their courses fulfilled G.E. requirements. I think these kinds of discussions were one of the best outcomes of the project.
RESISTANCES AND CRITIQUE
The critique of assessment as a university process for evaluating G.E. appears to suffer from two major disconnects: insufficient buy-in to the overall goals of a CSUEB general education; and lack of consensus over whether, what, and how to take responsibility for what students actually learn as a general education.

The notion that the outcomes read as “committee speak” is right on. I completely agree. The outcomes do not read as thought they were written from “the ground up.” I wonder if there can be a process to further refine the language of the outcomes to better reflect the language of our daily interactions with students and our regular processes of assessment? Furthermore, an open process that all faculty could participate in might enhance “buy in” and give G.E. less of a sense of a MANDATE from above and more the sense of a CONSENSUS decision. Whaddya think?

Doing so, I think, would require greater involvement by departments. But it’s not simply a matter of getting more input into framing one outcome. I think this is the kind of thing where too many cooks will spoil things. I think rather than looking for one set of outcomes that will cover all the G.E. courses in the humanities, we would have to fragment things into smaller units, each with its own set of outcomes. The problem then is that the universal aspects of our university start to deteriorate.

When one lays out what one would like students to gain from an educational experience, it is easy to get carried away attempting to describe as broad and as deep an array of outcomes as might be possible. To most scholars, the IDEAL is very attractive. But, when it comes down to the pragmatics of assessment, it is difficult to determine what should be assessed and particularly how complex the assessment should be. Should it be that a student demonstrates a varying quality of a defined characteristic, or the student demonstrates adequate amounts of some percentage of a collection of characteristics? Also, building assessment to be used by others is a definite challenge.

The content of the resistance that the G.E.~FLC heard from faculty volunteers, members of senate committees, and department chairs fall into four categories:

• Assessment is a workload and time issue that threatens to overburden faculty;
• Skepticism of the concept of “assessment” and dislike of rubrics;
• A belief that current grading systems adequately measure both major and G.E. student learning outcomes; and
• Concern that more specific assessment data might be used against faculty in hiring and promotion.

The intensity of some faculty’s feelings about assessment appeared to make it difficult for the G.E.~FLC to engage in an open-minded inquiry and influenced their decision to dialogue anonymously.

Professors that we approached for each of two pilot runs with rubric implementation unanimously voiced concerns regarding the time required to participate in the pilot study.
I agree that time commitments seemed to be a major hurdle for many of the volunteers working with the rubrics.

You know as I think about the concerns expressed by faculty they certainly aren't unusual ones. I know I always feel pressed for time and have too many things on my plate.

I too, found time to be a common complaint among the faculty I approached for all of the same reasons that have already been stated. Moreover, I found huge resistance toward the concept of assessment in general. One of the issues centered on the fact that many folks find the definition of assessment and the process of assessment so ambiguous and so unattainable that it would be impossible to successfully do it; so why bother?

With Social Responsibility we had a peculiar case. There was not a group that we were trying to cajole, but rather a willing director of Service-Learning. We were dependent on whether or not service-learning courses were being offered.

The resistance expressed from faculty volunteers for the rubric as well as faculty on committees and in departments included:
1. When did Social Responsibility become an assessable outcome? What is Social Responsibility? It is stated where? etc.
2. Oh, God, not more work on top of everything else we do.
3. I HATE rubrics. (What are they again?)
4. Another evaluation--the university bureaucracy in my classroom. No way.

I agree that most folks would rather not participate. Some members of the faculty were overwhelmed with the packets, possibly an emotional response to the articles that were not mandatory. When the process was explained, they were more likely to participate.

It's unlikely that this is a practical approach. If this becomes a common occurrence, you would have to have one person appointed to "encourage" folks to get it done.

There was considerable resistance expressed by department chairs. In addition to the usual complaints about adding to the workload of faculty, we also heard:
1. Concern about whether evaluations would go into faculty tenure files and whether results would be used against faculty in the tenure process. Would faculty respondents lie or manipulate results?
2. Given the number of instructors who teach G.E, how might this distort results?
3. Concern regarding how results might be skewed based on different assessment instruments; and whether there should be a space on each rubric for faculty to delineate specific assessment tools used
4. A very general and widespread concern regarding the use of rubrics - a very bad word!!

When we presented the G.E~FLC pilot process to the college, for the first time, there was visible sneering (from at least one Chair). Again, I think this response is one that is commonly felt by faculty, staff and administrators across
campus. Nevertheless, that didn't make us feel particularly comfortable with the process and it didn't give us much hope that we could count on support/help from the Chairs.

It seemed also that there was an initial reaction from the Chairs that we were insulting their capability to assess their own students on grading alone. We had to get them to further understand the difference between the course assessment/program assessment and student assessment. Most of the Chairs had more experience in the classroom than the majority of our committee. I think it helped eventually for them to see a new perspective and that the process itself could strengthen their own programs.

I too encountered the question of why grade assignments were not an appropriate assessment tool. The impression I continue to receive is that the idea of assessment threatens some individuals who feel that since their grades cannot be used as the assessment tool, then this whole process is an attack of sorts on their style/method of grading.

I also found it interesting that we had to distance ourselves a little bit from the project by affirming that we were not “rubric-advocates” per se, and even admitting that we were skeptical to some extent about the efficacy of rubrics. It seemed like this put them a little at ease and gave us an aura of "objectivity," a still powerful fiction in academia.

Let’s talk about the disconnect between the goals of G.E. and the everyday practice of teaching G.E. courses.

After my service in this Learning Community, I am not convinced that G.E. is fully integrated in the business, ethos, and daily work of being a CSUEB professor. There is a tremendous sense of G.E. as an "alien" presence, and G.E. prerogatives remain largely misunderstood across the university. Part of this is certainly owing to the language of the outcomes, often lacking clarity, often needlessly verbose, frequently repetitive, and often obtuse.

I agree. In many cases departments and instructors have ignored the Student Learning Outcomes that they have claimed to teach in their G.E. courses. There are lots of reasons for this, but as a result, class assignments may not conform well to assessment of G.E. So G.E. assessment creates "more work." Somehow, we need to assure that G.E. instructors are clear on G.E. Student Learning Objectives.

Faculty are used to having to write proposals to get G.E. credit for their courses. Many departments are dependent on G.E. to get students into their classes. One recommendation might be to require faculty to state upfront—when they submit their classes for approval—how they are going to assess learning outcomes. Having just completed a bunch of these proposals myself, I know that they are already quite onerous. On the other hand, I found myself *designing* or redesigning my courses so that they would specifically meet the Student Learning Objectives...which I suppose was the point.
A separate problem is built into the attempt to develop one assessment method to fit the range of courses included in the G.E. program. Assessment methods that are determined by outside forces can be particularly threatening or irritating to those who have developed their own comprehensive student evaluation.

I think this is a really important point. Somehow each individual department has to become more closely involved in the assessment process, either by designing the assessment tool themselves or by some other method.

I can see that but I still think it would serve most of the faculty if we can develop an assessment procedure that does not require each department to develop its own system but rather allows the faculty to draw on their existing class assignments for G.E. in the process of G.E. assessment.

Yes. I certainly would not have had a problem with discussing assessment strategies on the G.E. applications. I wonder if you find the G.E. forms themselves - to the extent that there is a form- something that needs to be improved in order to clearly articulate or resonate G.E. outcomes and goals? In other words, do you think that the current forms for G.E. credit clearly reflect underlying G.E. outcomes? Should portions of G.E. outcomes be directly quoted in the forms, forcing faculty applying for G.E. to respond directly to the specific language of G.E?

I agree! The "forms" could be *much* more user-friendly.

Right. G.E. evaluation and implementation has to be more organic to the traditional grading practices of faculty, indeed more organic to the quotidian tasks of CSUEB faculty.

I agree that whatever path is taken, it needs to be a process that is easily understood by all and not too time-consuming.

One way to make the process more efficient would be to use sampling. In any one round of assessment we could ask if the students learn one outcome rather than having to assess learning of all outcomes over the course of the quarter. We might recommend then that G.E. assessment be based on random or semi-random sampling of student learning in G.E. courses.

**RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION**

**Faculty participants** A total of fifty-six (56) faculty used the rubrics in winter (32) and spring (24). Some faculty participated in both quarters.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural Groups and Women</th>
<th>Sciences</th>
<th>Humanities</th>
<th>Social Sciences</th>
<th>Social Responsibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Students evaluated  A total of 2155 student artifacts (essays, essay tests, oral presentations, multiple choice tests) were evaluated: 820 in winter quarter, 1335 in the spring on one or more indicators of learning outcome acquisition. (These data are totals based on the largest number of student artifacts scored on any one scale each quarter.)

Results  Overwhelmingly, the faculty’s data demonstrated that most of our students are successfully learning the knowledge, skills, and/or dispositions described by at least one rubric indicator. Failure to satisfactorily demonstrate the learning described by at least one of the outcomes ranged from a low of 10.8% (on one indicator for Cultural Groups and Women’s learning outcomes) to a high of 50% (on one of the Social Responsibility learning outcomes). In general, however, approximately 20% to 25% of our students failed on at least one learning outcome in each of the subject areas.

Feedback from faculty  The Faculty Learning Community members received feedback from almost the entire participating faculty group. Comments were solicited on three questions: 1) In what ways was this rubric useful and relevant for assessing the GE outcome(s)? 2) What changes would you suggest to improve the usefulness and relevance of the rubric? 3) Other comments? Responses fell into six categories and were distributed as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adds Clarity/Helps Teaching</th>
<th>Fit with Course</th>
<th>Revise Rubric</th>
<th>Time and/or Workload</th>
<th>Usefulness</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The full text responses can be seen in Appendix B. The feedback describes overall positive responses to the use of the rubrics. As is clear from the summary above, the G.E.~FLC received many suggestions for revision of each of the rubrics but only three faculty suggested that rubrics would never work or that the time and the workload was excessive. An unexpected category was Clarity/Helps My Teaching: a number of winter and spring faculty reported that the rubrics helped them identify areas and ways to improve their course planning, their teaching, and their students’ learning.

RECOMMENDATIONS

❖Okay, to sum it up, we set out to develop an instrument to use to assess G.E. but along the way we discovered that there is not enough awareness of the G.E. student learning outcomes among the faculty who teach G.E. These outcomes were approved by the Senate as principles that would guide the program but they have somehow faded into the background. We recommend that the outcomes be a clear part of the course approval process and that faculty who are assigned to teach a G.E. course be made aware of the learning outcomes early enough so that they can incorporate them into their syllabi.

❖We recommend that a simplified rubric, tailored to the G.E. area, be used as the campus-wide G.E. assessment instrument. In any given quarter only one learning outcome would be assessed for each area in a system of rotation that would cycle through all of the outcomes.

❖Yes we must devise a useful instrument for most faculty who teach G.E. courses and more effectively communicate the Student Learning Outcomes;
however, the university has to provide conditions that support the kind of
teaching embodied in the learning outcomes. Throughout this study we heard
from the faculty about the pressures of their workloads and realize that that
affects the kinds of assignments they give, how open they are to change and how
involved they will be with assessment. We have to make recommendations that
address these broader issues, e.g. a strong G.E. program requires a strong faculty
and so G.E. is one of the reasons the university must continue to build the faculty
through tenure track hires.