

Overview of Recent Activities in the College of General Studies Assessment of Student Learning 2009-2014

All departments within the CGS participated in its formal assessment project. Since the academic year 2008-09, learning outcomes found in our BA/BS graduate profile ([Academic Senate, Certification 46 2005-2006](#)) have been used in shaping formal assessment process in the seven General Education competencies identified above.

Academic Year 2009-10

During the academic year 2009-10, formal assessment activities centered on four departments in the CGS: English, Physical Sciences, Biological Sciences, and Social Sciences. The English Department assessed written communication skills in lower-level courses by administering the ESLAT (English as a Second Language Assessment Test) to students completing first-year courses in English. Based on the analysis of these results, entrance profiles were developed for each of five levels. These profiles assist in placing students and measuring learning progress. In addition, they serve as resources for developing course content and level-specific rubrics. The CGS Departments of Physical Sciences and Biological Sciences both conducted pilot projects focusing on scientific reasoning skills. Lab reports were examined using a rubric designed to evaluate competency in scientific research and quantitative analysis. The Department of Social Sciences also conducted a project to assess social responsibility skills during this period. Professors developed their project around issues of social concern, such as environmental awareness, national heritage, gender problems, and ethics. In the Humanities Department, assessment involved an exercise on creativity, but it was later changed to critical thinking.

In each of the aforementioned CGS departments, professors discussed and collaboratively developed the methodology for the assessment project and the rubrics used to evaluate results. Broad participation and the division of tasks among numerous professors, reflective of a growing culture of assessment, resulted in increased understanding of both the goals of formal assessment and the specific challenges that students face with respect to specific competencies. This improved on past assessment efforts.

Academic Year 2011-12

In the academic year 2011-12, the college-wide assessment process in the CGS entered a new stage. Professors in charge of assessment projects and department directors were trained by staff of the Office for the Assessment of Student Learning. Together they developed curricular matrices including, learning objectives, instructional activities, and evaluation criteria. Instruments for measuring student learning were created and expected outcomes were developed and aligned with course syllabi in all departments. Professors developed course content and assignments that reinforced student learning in the areas that had been identified as challenging for students in pilot projects.

Pilot projects, which were conducted in all CGS departments, were important for several reasons. First and most obviously, they provided results that assisted in identifying specific problems. For example, findings evidenced that hypothesis writing in science courses and

grammar skills in English courses required attention. Second, findings from pilot projects informed faculty discussions about how to address areas of concern before larger projects were implemented. Professors discussed the findings and developed strategies for addressing areas in which student performance was weak, often coming up with short- and long-term strategies. Third, pilot projects provided insights that were useful in improving assessment instruments.

Academic Year 2012-13

To ensure the systematic implementation of assessment processes and further strengthen the teaching of General Education courses, a General Education Competencies Assessment Committee (GECAC) with representatives from all departments and the CGS Library was established in 2012-13. Institutional support for this project is very strong, as all members of this committee receive either a teaching reduction or additional compensation.

GECAC has developed a standard protocol for three distinct stages of assessing student learning in the area of General Education. In general terms, during the first stage of the three-year assessment plan, learning objectives, measures, instruments, and expected outcomes were established. In the second stage, activities are implemented and assessment data collected and analyzed. Assessment results are also discussed at various levels: at meetings of the CGS curriculum committee, GECAC, and departments. Transformative actions are proposed and implemented during the third stage, which begins in either the following semester or at the beginning of the next academic year. At the end of the cycle, coordinators, committee members, and professors reflect on and evaluate the process and make suggestions for improving the following three-year cycle.

After the initial assessment of information competencies, the GEAC administered a survey for CGS professors during the academic year 2012-13. This was done to assess faculty opinions about teaching in this area and help interpret the data that was initially collected. A total of 79% stated they assessed student learning in the area of information competencies, and 92% stated that the integration of information literacy competencies to the curriculum had been successful. Findings confirmed that students are prepared to use a variety of sources and search strategies but have problems evaluating the validity of their sources and citing information as stipulated in MLA and APA style guides.

Academic Year 2013-14

Transformative actions were implemented in all CGS departments during the academic year 2013-14. These included out of class workshops for students and workshops on specific topics for individual classes.