General Education and the Assessment of Student Learning

The General Education curriculum at VCSU is a unique blend of a menu of courses, each enhanced by faculty commitment to the Abilities and skills. That is, each course offered by an academic division identifies the Ability and skill to be developed in that class as well as the specific student projects within the course that upon completion demonstrate competency in that ability. The faculty Curriculum Committee has oversight responsibilities for the General Education curricula and works with faculty to review syllabi, assure breadth of coverage, and affirm commitment to the Abilities’ model.

With continual review, the courses and experiences that make up the General Education curricula reflect the values of the university culture, a commitment to the University’s mission, as well as the expectations of its faculty for all students. Assessment activities provide a means of ensuring the community’s awareness that the curricula is fulfilling its intended objectives.

The Aims of General Education Assessment:

- Promote a learner-centered classroom environment
- Assure a quality General Education program that meets student needs
- Examine University-wide student progress in each of the eight Abilities
- Develop the integration of technology for success

The Eight Abilities and General Education

Almost one-third of a student’s coursework at VCSU is in General Education courses. These courses provide the distinctive mark of the University’s culture and values and set the foundation for a student’s journey into a major and on to graduation. Each General Education course has been targeted to meet one of the Eight Abilities established by the University.

The syllabus for each General Education course is required to list the Ability, skill, and level met in the course, and provides an Ability Project to measure that depth of skill attained in the student’s ability/skill at the requisite level. The Curriculum Committee has assessed an Ability each semester to ensure a four year cycle of assessment. The cycle of the Abilities is as follows: Collaboration, Communication, Global Awareness, Aesthetic Engagement, Problem Solving, Effective Citizenship, Wellness, and Technology Literacy.

Table 2: Rotation of General Education Abilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Ability</th>
<th>Assessed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Spring, 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global Awareness</td>
<td>Fall, 2008</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aesthetic Engagement</td>
<td>Spring, 2009</td>
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<tr>
<td>Problem Solving</td>
<td>Fall, 2009</td>
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<tr>
<td>Technology Literacy</td>
<td>Spring, 2010</td>
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<tr>
<td>Effective Citizenship</td>
<td>Fall, 2010</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wellness</td>
<td>Spring, 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>Spring, 2011</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The Curriculum Committee has concluded that this four year cycle is too slow in gathering sufficient data. Beginning in 2011, all eight Abilities are assessed during the annual Summer Institute.

The Curriculum Committee mapped the General Education courses in 2001 to ensure that students will have completed at least one project in all eight Abilities while taking their General Education Courses. This map, updated in 2010, is also used to assist both students and faculty in understanding the implementation of the Abilities in the General Education program. The Curriculum Committee has developed a rubric for assessing the projects.

The Ability Assessment described in Figure 3 as University-wide Assessment provides for review of student projects at entry, sophomore, and senior levels. The General Education courses provide the materials for the sophomore level review, and a comparison of the entry and sophomore materials allows for an assessment of the General Education program effectiveness.

General Education’s Cycle of Assessment and Revision
The Curriculum Committee writes a General Education program review during the fall semester of the non-catalog year, based on the Ability team reports (discussed on page 13, University-wide Assessment), syllabus reviews, project descriptions, and student surveys. This review, with recommendations for revision, is presented to the General Education Program Faculty, the Vice-President of Academic Affairs, and Academic Policies and Affairs Committee, which then discuss and act on the findings of the program review. The faculty make program decisions, while APAC provides the VPAA with input for budget decisions and strategic planning.

Along with the data collected annually on the eight General Education Abilities, other items are collected, and discussion, revision, and subsequent implementation occur as necessary. The results are disseminated to the General Education faculty, the Curriculum Committee, and APAC.

Figure 3: Assessment of General Education

Principal Indicators for Assessing Student Learning in General Education:

- General Education level Ability assessment provided by the Assessment teams for each Ability, on a four year cycle as established by the Curriculum Committee
- General Education Syllabus template
- General Education Project template including project description, explanation of Ability, skill, and level demonstrated, and assessment tool (rubric).
- General Education Ability Map
- The student’s assessment of his/her progress in the Abilities indirectly assesses freshman, sophomores, and seniors
- Other survey instruments that provide relevant data include: Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory, Online Student satisfaction, the Employer Satisfaction survey, and the National Survey of Student Engagement