

Final Team Report – North Carolina A&T State University
AAC&U General Education Institute on General Education
May 26, 2004

At the time of our application to participate in the AAC&U Institute on General Education was submitted (February, 2004) our team had defined three specific goals to be accomplished: (1) develop a preliminary general education program structure; (2) develop general education course and program assessment plans; and (3) develop a coherent general education governance structure. In the time between our application and attendance at the Institute in May we made substantial progress on two of the three goals: we had developed a preliminary general education program structure patterned after Portland State University's University Studies program and identified a governance structure incorporating a University Studies Dean and a Faculty Roundtable to assess course inclusion and program assessment. Therefore, we modified our Institute work plan to focus on issues related to goal number two: (a) developing fully defined learning objectives consistent with the four primary "pillars" of our preliminary revised general education structure and the revised learning objectives endorsed by the faculty in spring, 2004; (b) developing performance indicators to measure *what* students are learning; and (c) developing rubrics to measure *how well* students are meeting the prescribed objectives.

Action Items from Institute Work and Consultation with Institute Faculty

As noted above, our focus during the Institute was on refining our understanding of the assessment component of the revised general education program. In addition, as a result of consultations with Institute faculty, we developed an extensive list of "action items" that will ensure widespread diffusion of Institute-related ideas on our home campus and that will enable us to move forward thoughtfully, intentionally, and efficiently in the next phase of our general education review and revision process: development and implementation of a new general education curriculum.

1. Adjustments to our conceptual model of general education. Based on our Institute consultation with Terry Rhodes of Portland State University, we refined our understanding of the Portland State University general education model in two key areas: (1) the nature of the freshman and sophomore-level inquiry courses, and (2) the rubrics used to assess student development throughout the general education curriculum. Terry noted the key feature of the freshman-level inquiry courses in particular. Students take three theme-linked courses that meet for a full year, with additional academic support provided by upper-level students. Faculty members teaching these courses work closely together to provide a true interdisciplinary (as opposed to multi-disciplinary) learning experience for students. Terry also explained how rubrics are used to assess students' developmental progress in the key knowledge areas that form the pillars of the Portland State University model. A single rubric is used in each knowledge area and students are expected to perform at different levels within this rubric at different points of their academic development. For example, in a numerical writing rubric ranging from 1 (ineffective writing) to 5 (highly effective writing) (with appropriate, explicit performance indicators), a student might be expected to perform at a "2" level by the end of the first year, at a "3" level by the end of the second year, and at a "5" level by the time they graduate. This type of rubric highlights the developmental nature of the learning process across

a student's academic career and promotes continuous improvement throughout the curriculum, including into the major.

Action Item 1: begin to share the revised general education curriculum structure and assessment plan with all stakeholders this summer (administrators), at the start of school year (Faculty-Staff Institute), and continuing at the start of the academic school year (new and returning faculty).

Action Item 2: Focus on ways of increasing the interdisciplinary emphasis of our proposed general education program – and align with current FUTUREs initiative to remake the university as a “student-centered, interdisciplinary university.”

Action Item 3: Identify and consult with faculty members who would be willing to develop theme-based, interdisciplinary, linked courses at the freshman level, with an emphasis on communication skills. Provide course release or stipends to reward these faculty members for being “first movers.” Publicize their successes.

2. Clarity on role of rubrics in general education program assessment. In consultations with Peggy Maki and Barbara Wright, we achieved greater clarity on the role of performance indicators and rubrics in assessing program-level goals and objectives and were provided with a number of real-world rubrics used by colleges and universities around the U.S. The issue of developing rubrics to assess learning outcomes of the revised general education program was the central focus of our team at the Institute; in particular, determining how to effectively craft, implement, and utilize performance indicators and rubrics to provide information to departments on what is expected of course proposals submitted for inclusion in the general education program, to provide guidance to the proposed Faculty Roundtable in how to assess these proposals, and to provide a basis for assessing the performance of general education courses after the new curriculum structure is implemented.

Action item 1: begin to develop performance indicators and rubrics for one of the four knowledge areas in our preliminary general education model, as a model for further development by the Faculty Roundtable group.

Action item 2: develop a plan to use faculty committees headed by members of the proposed Faculty Roundtable (along with students, graduates, and other stakeholders) to develop rubrics for the three remaining knowledge areas in our preliminary general education model.

Action item 3: begin to develop a handout that will outline a process for departments to use when proposing courses for inclusion in the revised general education program – a process that requires departments to link course goals to the general education program goals and provide an effective assessment plan that focuses on generating information that can be used to improve student learning outcomes over time.

3. Departmental implications/roles in general education revision. Following AAC&U president Carol Schneider's advice, we plan to meet with all departments on campus to promote continuing faculty discussion of the revised general education program and their role in this program. We must emphasize that general education belongs to everyone. Based on work by Peggy Maki, we will also encourage departments to begin to develop assessment “maps” to link departmental goals and objectives to course content and pedagogy, as well as general education proficiencies, in an effort to uncover gaps in academic preparation and outcomes, with the aim of continuous improvement.

Action item 1: In September, visit each department to continue discussions about the implications of general education revision for their department and alignment of departmental goals and objectives, as well as assessment practices, with those of general education.

Action item 2: Develop heuristic program “map” to illustrate developmental linkages within the general education program, from “introduction,” to “reinforcement,” to “emphasis” of learning objectives within the program, throughout the four developmental levels in our proposed general education program.

4. Incremental approach to general education program rollout. Discussions with Institute consultants, in particular Terry Rhodes, reinforced our understanding that an incremental approach to implementing the revised general education program is the most effective way to provide focus to the process and promote an intentional, thoughtful, and manageable rollout of the program, while allowing faculty to adjust to the new structure in course design, pedagogy, and assessment.

Action item 1: Make Provost aware of the need for an incremental approach, beginning with freshman-level courses, and seek her approval.

Action item 2: Focus initial assessment efforts on one knowledge area (out of four) in our proposed general education model (most likely communication or critical thinking).

5. Need for increased faculty development. There is a clear recognition of the need for increased faculty development to (1) encourage the development of innovative, interdisciplinary courses consistent with the goals and objectives of the general education program, (2) educate faculty on the role of assessment as a tool for formative feedback and improvement of learning outcomes, (3) promote the use of structured, collaborative, active-learning-based teaching pedagogies. The director of the Academy for Teaching and Learning is currently working with faculty on redesigning general education courses and will be leading faculty in a number of hands-on initiatives during the 2004-05 academic year aimed at preparing faculty to actively participate in the implementation of the revised general education curriculum beginning in fall, 2005. ATL activities will especially target new faculty members and those teaching freshman and sophomore-level courses and will focus on how students learn and effective teaching strategies to promote that learning.

Action item 1: development of faculty reading groups centered on the text, “How People Learn,” with implications for general education program development, implementation, and assessment, along with associated discussion groups.

Action item 2: new faculty orientation linked to general education program revision

Action item 3: work with faculty on developing linked interdisciplinary-themed courses

Action item 4: offering workshops by visiting scholars and A&T faculty in the areas of teaching, learning, and assessment of learning.

Action item 5: develop set of interdisciplinary, ongoing faculty learning communities focused on issues related to general education revision, including effective pedagogy, assessment of learning outcomes, interdisciplinary learning, etc. Use faculty from these faculty learning communities to lead campus workshops and discussions on their specific topic.

6. Mid-year administrators' general education retreat. Administrators need to understand how the revised general education program, governance structure, and assessment will affect Schools/Colleges, departments, and allocation of resources. We propose a one day working retreat to engage administrators in an initial dialogue on these issues.

Action item: plan for a mid-year (December or January) administrator retreat including Deans, department heads, the Provost, the Chancellor, Admissions staff, Center for Student Success staff, the Registrar, and Student Affairs staff.

7. Continuous Communication. In addition to visiting individual departments, we plan to hold a series of Town Hall meetings to share the revised general education structure, governance, and assessment model. In addition, it would be beneficial for us to begin distributing a regular (bi-monthly?) general education newsletter highlighting progress in the general education revision, implementation, and assessment process.

Action item 1: hold Town Hall meetings in early fall outlining revised general education structure, governance, and assessment.

Action item 2: begin publishing a regular general education newsletter informing faculty and administrators of progress in the general education revision process.

8. Development of clear timeline and tasks. Given the need to implement the revised general education model in fall, 2005, it is imperative that we outline a timeline of tasks that will ensure meeting that deadline.

Action item: develop detailed outline of specific tasks and dates for implementation of revised general education model by fall, 2005.

9. Participation in job description for Dean of University Studies and new faculty teaching in the general education program. It is imperative that the person hired for the new Dean of University Studies position (1) be familiar with and advocate current general education reform efforts currently underway in the United States focusing on intentional learning and the teaching methods and curricular structures that promote this type of learning; (2) be familiar with and advocate assessment processes that promote continuous improvement linked to the general education learning objectives, (3) work collaboratively with other Deans to promote an intentional, developmental learning process throughout the curriculum, and (4) be devoted full-time to the implementation, monitoring, assessment, and improvement of the general education curriculum. The GECCRC should be involved in the development of job descriptions for both the Dean of Undergraduate Studies and new faculty members who will be teaching in the revised general education program.

Action item: develop a job description for the new Dean of Undergraduate Studies position, participate in the hiring process, and work with the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences to develop job descriptions for new faculty hired in the College who will be teaching general education courses.

10. Prepare for new team of campus leaders to attend AAC&U conference on assessment and General Education Institute next year to provide continuity in the general education revision process and include more faculty in the revision process. Possibly include non-faculty representatives to participate along with faculty.

Action item: ensure Faculty Roundtable group (to be formed in September as faculty representatives from each of the Schools/Colleges) participation in AAC&U sponsored conferences. Develop narrative application outlining progress made on action items from this year's Institute, assess current and future needs, and develop an action plan for continuing the general education implementation and assessment process in the following year (2005-2006).

11. Plan and implement a campus-wide "Focus on Learning Day" to highlight faculty initiatives linked to general education revision, course development, pedagogical innovation, student learning outcomes, experiential learning initiatives, etc. We would like to include a panel of AAC&U General Education Institute faculty to lead a high-impact event showcasing multiple facets of general education revision. This would provide a culminating experience for NC A&T's year-long theme of "Focus on Learning" in 2004-2005, an initiative led by the campus teaching and learning center, and allow the team attending the Institute this summer to evaluate the progress made since the Institute.

Action item: contact Institute faculty regarding potential participation in this activity and plan ways of showcasing NC A&T faculty work related to the theme of the event. Make this an annual event.