

Beginning with the End in Mind: **Backward Design** **in General Education Assessment**

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Workshop Goals

Participants will leave with:

- A **planning framework** for developing an assessment strategy that is generalizable to other domains of assessment
- **Instruments and resources** to support “usable” assessment of general education at your institution

Workshop Agenda

- Introducing “backward design” in assessment
- Anticipating the challenges of GE assessment
- Locating and observing the learning
- Analyzing and summarizing outcomes
- Sharing and acting on the evidence

Introducing “Backward Design” in Assessment

Backward Design

Traditional Instructional Design

Choose texts



Develop activities



Make up tests

Backward Design

Backward Instructional Design

Identify intended learning outcomes



Determine appropriate evidence



Plan instruction and practice

Backward Design

Traditional Assessment Design

Choose an assessment instrument



Gather and summarize evidence



Send a report to someone

Backward Design

Backward Assessment Design

Identify intended users and uses



Locate the learning



Choose assessment instrument

Backward Design

The merits of backward design:

- Engagement
- Efficiency
- Credibility
- “Usability”

Backward Design

Who are the principal **users** of the assessment evidence you plan to gather?

Instructors
Current students
Departments
Faculty committees
Administrators
Accreditors
Prospectives/Parents/Public

Backward Design

What are the principal **uses** you anticipate for the evidence once you have it?

Fostering intentionality

Improving courses

Promoting consistency

Revising requirements

Recruiting students

Monitoring and/or demonstrating quality

Backward Design

Now it's your turn...



Anticipating the Challenges of Assessing General Education

Anticipating Challenges

Why is GE assessment so daunting?

- Principled resistance to assessment
- Lower priority of general education
- Program scope and size
- Ambition and breadth of outcomes

Anticipating Challenges

Why is GE assessment so daunting?

- Overlap between GE, institution, majors
- Disproportionate assignment to adjunct or part-time faculty
- Perceived inconsistency of courses
- Students as “snowflakes”

Anticipating Challenges

Why is GE assessment so daunting?

- Individual and institutional learning
- Organizational change

Anticipating Challenges

Change

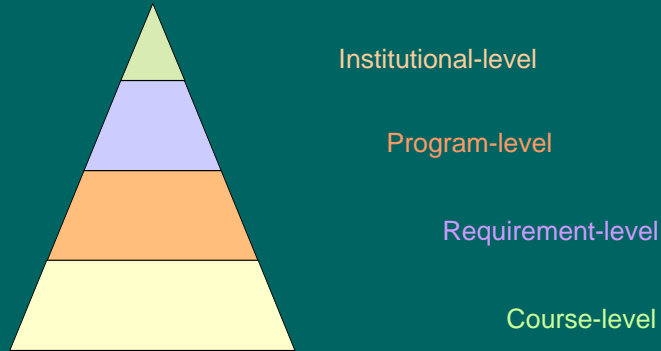
Anticipating Challenges

**Now it's your
turn...**

*What one or two
challenges are most
problematic in light of
the users and uses you
have identified?*



Locating the Learning



Levels of assessment/ Units of analysis

Observing the Learning

“Direct” Assessment

*Evidence of what
students actually
know, can do,
or care about*

“Indirect” Assessment

*Evidence of
learning-related
experiences or
perceptions*

Observing the Learning

Common direct assessment “artifacts”

- Papers of varying length and purpose
- Presentations and posters
- Oral or written examinations
- Analytic journals
- Responses to survey or interview questions that ask for examples of knowledge, practice, or value

Observing the Learning

Common indirect assessment “artifacts”

- Course-taking patterns or transcript analysis
- Responses to survey or interview questions about experiences, perceptions, self-reported progress, or levels of satisfaction
- Reflective journals

Observing the Learning



Where possible, pair direct observations of outcomes with indirect observations of processes and perceptions.



Observing the Learning

The dual goal of sampling:

Representativeness

and

Manageability

Observing the Learning

Populations from which you can sample:

- ❖ Entire student body
- ❖ Specific classes of students (all first-years, all sophomores)
- ❖ Students or work samples in key courses
- ❖ “Multi-stage” – GE requirement → GE course → Key assignment → Selected papers

Observing the Learning

Who chooses?

- Instructors
- Students
- Dept chairs or other admins
- Fate!

How?

- Random
- Purposive
- “Coalition of the willing”
- Combination

Observing the Learning

Sampling examples:

- Institutional GE portfolio (Illinois State)
- Student-compiled portfolios (Carleton)
- All instructors, one course each (Avila)
- Department volunteers, 1-2 assignments (St. Olaf)
- Course portfolios (George Mason, William and Mary)

Observing the Learning

Now it's your turn...

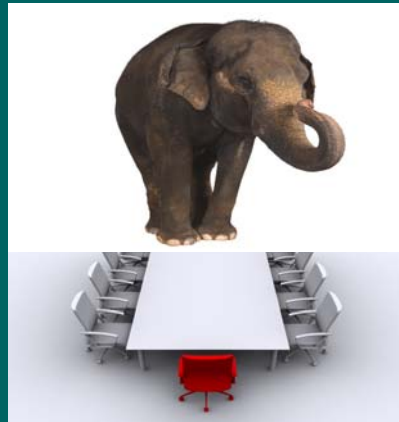
What GE assessment "artifacts" would be most compelling and actionable for your intended users, and how might you gather them?



Analyzing and Summarizing

But wait!! Aren't we analyzing student work all the time anyway? What's the difference between

grading
and
assessment?



Analyzing and Summarizing

Grading
summarizes
many outcomes
for
one student

Assessment
summarizes
one outcome
for
many students

Analyzing and Summarizing

<i>Students' work :</i>	<i>Your focus:</i>
A weaving	A strand
A football game	Blocking
A concert	Dynamics
A house	The beams

Analyzing and Summarizing

The purpose of an assessment instrument is to provide **systematic, summarized information** about the extent to which a group of students has realized one or more intended learning outcomes

Analyzing and Summarizing

Options to consider:

- **Adopt** an instrument developed elsewhere
- **Add** to something you're already doing
- **Adapt** something you've borrowed
- **Invent** something new and do a pilot project

Analyzing and Summarizing

Adopting instruments developed by others:

- ❖ **VALUE rubrics**
- ❖ **Research Practices Survey**
- ❖ **Collegiate Learning Assessment**

Analyzing and Summarizing

Adding to something you are already doing:

- ❖ Adding GE-specific items to institutional-level questionnaires (e.g., RPS, NSSE, HEDS senior or alumni surveys)
- ❖ CLA in the Classroom

Analyzing and Summarizing

Adapting borrowed instruments to reflect GE-specific learning outcomes:

- ❖ Rubrics
- ❖ Course questionnaires
- ❖ “Intended Learning Outcomes Inventory”

Analyzing and Summarizing

Inventing something new:

- ❖ Suggestions for rubric development
- ❖ “Essential Learning Outcomes Assessment” questionnaire
- ❖ General Education assessment pilot project

Analyzing and Summarizing

Now it's your turn...

Which of these approaches to gathering evidence of student learning might be a good fit for the intended uses and users you identified?



Sharing and Acting

Suggestions:

- ❖ *Ask people to report on likely actions, not just methods and results*
- ❖ *Encourage collaborative interpretation*
- ❖ *Summarize and highlight*
- ❖ *“Triangulate” (Ex: Make-an-Argument)*

Sharing and Acting

Subject: Assessment news you can use

- **Effective writing** – High priority, lots of experience
- **Effective speaking, global understanding** – High priority, little experience
- **Indicators of learning** – Students rely on internal monitors rather than faculty feedback

Sharing and Acting

Now it's your
turn...

*What audiences and
venues are most
important for you, given
the users and uses
you've identified?*



A final thought....

Aim for assessment
that is....

*Meaningful, Manageable
and
Mission-driven*

