



**Blazing a Path and Not Getting Burned:
Developing Assurance of Learning Objectives in General
Education**

**Presented by
Valerie Whittlesey
Mary Lou Frank
Marlene Sims
Amy Howton
Jan Phillips
and
Tom Doleys**

Kennesaw State University

**2005 AAC&U General Education and Assessment Conference
February 19, 2005**

Scenario 5: Negotiating Meaning of Assessment Terminology in General Education

The General Education Council at Kennesaw State University experienced difficulties regarding the interpretation of assessment terms. Although the charge for the General Education Council has been to assess the entire General Education program, representatives from various disciplines, who served on the Council met to discuss terminology and interpreted words used in our Global Learning Outcomes from various disciplinary perspectives. For example, colleagues from the English Department wanted to take more ownership in the goals and outcomes that related to their discipline and were concerned that they were not satisfactorily represented in the overall program. This perception of ownership from a disciplinary perspective caused misunderstanding in the use of assessment terms. What has successfully worked in this situation is Odgen and Richards’ Social Constructionist model of meaning where meaning of terms is negotiated among communicators (Adler & Rodman, 2003). To demonstrate how this theory works and has worked for the Kennesaw State University General Education Council, the following paragraph contains an exercise in negotiating meaning of assessment terms during the assessment process.

Discussion:

Read the Global Learning Outcomes and paraphrase them in your own words. Then read what you have written to the members of your table and note any differences in word choice and meaning as you carry out this exercise. Then list the various words that differed from your colleagues as you were rewriting the learning outcomes. Be prepared to negotiate the meaning of these terms and explain why you chose them.

Notes:

Reference:

Adler, B., & Rodman, G. (2003). Understanding Human Communication. (5th ed.)
New York: Oxford.

Scenario 6: Determining Which Student Learning Outcomes to Assess

You are a member of a relatively large faculty (30 full & part-time) in a department that has responsibility for one of the university's General Education course offerings (GENED 1000). While all department faculty teach the GENED 1000, only 20 members of the department are full-time faculty (tenure and tenure-track). The others are part-time/adjunct faculty – many of whom will teach the course for only one or two semesters before moving on.

As the department representative to the university's General Education Council, you have been asked to collect data concerning GENED 1000 as part of the university's mandated assurance of learning process. Specifically, you have been asked to indicate which of the General Education Program's Specific Learning Objectives (SLOs) are currently being met in the course. Beyond that charge, you received no other instruction or direction in to how to proceed.

Discussion:

After considering several data collection techniques, you settled on a brief survey in which each department faculty member will be asked to identify which SLOs are being met in their course. (see below). As you think about how to secure and compile the requested information, several questions occur to you...

What data am I looking for? Should I ask faculty to identify which SLOs *they are meeting in their course* or should I direct them to identify only those that *they think they can assess*? This is particularly germane for SLOs under GLO #4. What are the ramifications for the choice I make?

Whom should I ask? Which department members should I survey about the course? Should I survey *all faculty* – regardless of employment status. Doing so would give us the most comprehensive picture possible of what is being accomplished in GENED 1000? Or, should I instead survey *only full-time faculty*, since they are the only faculty who we can assume will be present though the entire assessment process? What are the ramifications for the choice I make?

How should I compile the data? What constitutes a “department response”? Should I include a SLO in my report to the Gen Ed Council if *a single* faculty indicates it is being met in his/her course? Should I include a SLO if *a majority* of surveyed faculty members indicate that it is being met? Or, must *all faculty* members agree that a SLO is being met for it to be reported as such? What are the ramifications for the choice I make?

Others? Can you think of any other challenges raised by the process?

Notes:

General Education Goals and Outcomes

Approved Spring, 2004

1. Demonstrate knowledge and understanding in the General Education areas: Humanities, Fine Arts, Science, Mathematics, Technology, Social Science, and the Essential Skills (Written and Quantitative Skills). (Knowledge)
 - 1.1 Students will identify core knowledge and key concepts in the general education content areas. (Knowledge)
 - 1.2 Students will analyze current and/or significant issues in the specific general education content areas. (Knowledge/ Skill)
 - 1.3 Students will apply knowledge and perspectives from the General Education content areas to real world situations. (Knowledge/Skill)

2. Demonstrate proficiency in communication. (Skill)
 - 2.1 Students will employ computer technology, including email and the Internet, for both local and global communication needs. (Skill)
 - 2.2 Students will communicate discipline-specific knowledge effectively and appropriately to context, using oral, written, and/or graphical delivery modes. (Knowledge/Skill)
 - 2.3 Students will receive, understand, analyze, and interpret the communication of others. (Knowledge/Skill)
 - 2.4 Students will develop and support a position using qualitative, quantitative, visual, textual, and other forms of evidence. (Knowledge/Skill)
 - 2.5 Students will develop and express arguments that recognize and consider opposing points of view. (Skill/Attitude)

3. Demonstrate skills in inquiry, critical thinking, and problem solving through scholarly and/or creative activity across the general education disciplines. (Knowledge/Skill)
 - 3.1 Students will identify and critically assess different modes and styles of argumentation. (Knowledge/Skill)
 - 3.2 Students will gather, analyze, and synthesize information specific to the general education disciplines. (Skill)
 - 3.3 Students will use technology appropriately to facilitate learning and problem solving. (Skill)
 - 3.4 Students will construct informed judgments about disciplinary specific works. (Skill)
 - 3.5 Students will solve single and multiple-step problems through different modes of reasoning. (Skill)
 - 3.6 Students will analyze and solve problems not previously encountered. (Skill)
 - 3.7 Students will use analytical thinking to draw logically consistent conclusions. (Skill)
 - 3.8 Students will produce discipline-specific original works using acquired skills and knowledge. (Skill)

4. Demonstrate an understanding of ethics, diversity, and a global perspective.(Knowledge/Skill/Attitude)
 - 4.1 Students will identify commonalities and differences within and across societies. (Knowledge)
 - 4.2 Students will identify personal biases and values and how these may influence interaction/relationships with others. (Knowledge/Skill)
 - 4.3 Students will identify the consequences of their personal actions. (Attitude)
 - 4.4 Students will explain the significance of diversity in a global society. (Knowledge)

4.5 Students will explain the importance of acting as informed, responsible citizens and members of the global community. (Knowledge/Attitude)

4.6 Students will analyze a given context from **more than one perspective*. (Skill/Attitude)

4.7 Students will integrate values and ethical considerations into decision-making. (Attitude)

4.8 Students will evaluate the impact of events and changing conditions within the natural environment. (Skill)

*Note: Revisions to Outcome 4.6 have not been approved by the Council.

Lessons Learned at KSU

1. Depending on campus culture, the term “assessment” may need to be replaced with a more appropriate term, such as “assurance of learning.”
2. The coordinators of the campus effort need to have credibility for it to be effective.
3. Involving faculty in the process can ensure investment in the process.
4. It is important to have a meaningful process so that it is helpful to faculty.
5. To obtain faculty buy-in for the assessment chosen, it is more important that the instrument actually assess the stated learning outcomes than that it be readily comparable to other similar institutions.
6. Listen to all feedback and then move ahead. At some point, discussion must end so progress can be made.
7. Develop a long-term model. This can become a part of the institutions culture rather than another “mandate.”
8. Work on the specifics but keep your eye on the long term goals.
9. Develop connections with others across campus and on other campuses. Learn to see things from more than your departmental perspective. Gain a university vision.
10. Keep a sense of humor. Sometimes, it is what will keep you going.
11. Work with a group rather than on your own. Even misery is better shared!