

REPORT ON GENERAL EDUCATION ASSESSMENT FOR FRANCIS MARION UNIVERSITY

ELIZABETH NORMANDY
JANUARY 6, 2012

General Impressions

Francis Marion University has developed a solid system for the assessment of its General Education Program. The University has an appropriate set of student learning goals for the program (developed in 1995) as well as a suitable mission statement. These are closely connected to the General Education Curriculum that emphasizes the acquisition of fundamental knowledge and skills.

The General Education Assessment Plan outlines the role of the Institutional Effectiveness Committee in coordinating General Education assessment activities and reviewing all assessment reports. The Chair of the Institutional Effectiveness Committee, Dr. Charlene Wages, compiles the General Education Assessment Report from the reports submitted to the Committee. The Academic Affairs Committee reviews and evaluates the General Education Report and refers any concerns to the appropriate department or school. The Chair of the Academic Affairs Committee, Dr. Rebecca Flannagan, prepares a report on the General Education Report for the Faculty Senate. Academic departments are responsible for assessing the skills associated with specific General Education goals.

These processes of evaluation and review are detailed in a flow chart. An ad hoc committee has been created to review the General Education goals and the assessment process for the purpose of proposing possible changes and modifications. The Committee is considering changes to the wording of the General Education goals, the addition of objectives to some goals, and a reduction in the number of goals.

Surveys of students and faculty are a major method used to measure how well the General Education programs prepares students for further course work. The University also makes extensive use of the results of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). Departmental assessments include exams, portfolio analyses, and quizzes undertaken by the Departments of Mathematics, Psychology, and Biology.

The General Education Assessment Plan includes a provision for the periodic review of the design and implementation of the General Education Program by outside reviewers. Their evaluations will become a part of the yearly report of the Academic Affairs Committee.

Possible Action Items

General Education Goals

1. Consider revising General Education goals that contain more general language about what students will understand to achieve more a more specific designation of what students will know, be able to do, or value. Or consider adding more specific objectives to the existing generalized goals. This should make the goals or objectives more measurable and facilitate the selection of assessment methods.
2. Consider doing a curriculum-mapping project to determine where in the General Education curriculum the skills and knowledge that students are required to achieve are being taught. This could result in a refining of the assessment plan relative to the involvement of the academic departments and in the use of specific assessment methods.
3. Consider undertaking a syllabus review for a selection of the courses included in the General Education Program. The purpose of this exercise would be to determine the alignment of individual course goals and objectives with the goals of the General Education Program. This could contribute to the refinement of General Education goals and to the use of better assessment methods.

General Education Assessment Methods

4. Consider the addition of more direct methods of assessment, such as standardized tests and course-embedded assessments, to supplement the use of surveys. This should give a more complete and detailed picture of what students have actually learned in addition to their perceptions of what they have learned.
5. Consider ways to provide more guidance to academic departments in the selection of assessment methods. This could involve more direct assistance from campus assessment experts or the provision of more opportunities for training in assessment for departmental representatives.

Closing the Loop

6. Consider improving the ways in which assessment data is used to make changes to courses and programs. This may involve making modifications to assessment plans and procedures so as to designate a responsible person or to create new steps in the flow chart for the General Education Assessment Plan.