

## *2005-2006 Assessment of the General Education Baccalaureate Competencies*

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### *Abstract*

The 2006-2007 graduating class participated in a variety of discipline-based and some interdisciplinary capstone experiences that demonstrated their achievement of the four Baccalaureate Competencies: Critical Thinking, Effective Communication, Social Responsibility, and Knowledge Integration. Reviewing a completed three-year cycle, this report summarizes faculty reflections on students' work toward development of the Baccalaureate Competencies and makes recommendations for the next three-year cycle of reporting.



## **Introduction**

In the University of Cincinnati's General Education Program, faculty assess learning by evaluating student achievement of the four Baccalaureate Competencies: Critical Thinking, Effective Communication, Social Responsibility, and Knowledge Integration. This assessment takes place primarily within the program/major capstone requirement, where faculty use discipline-specific rubrics to measure student achievement of these four Competencies. Data produced by this process will, over time, yield meaningful information on student learning, achievement of the Baccalaureate Competencies as well as the effectiveness of the unit capstone experiences. We know already, for instance, that some faculty have made significant changes in their capstone courses based on the first round of capstone assessment data collected at the end of the 2004-2005 academic year.

(Note: In general, this report continues the work that the previous Director of General Education, Dr. Janice Denton, of Raymond Walters College, began during the 2004-2005 academic year. This report is modeled on Dr. Denton's first report, issued February 2006.)

## **Results**

Students who entered the University beginning Fall 2002 and graduated in 2006 with a Baccalaureate degree completed the entire General Education Program. The following report details findings from assessment of the Baccalaureate Competencies as measured in the capstone course/experiences of the graduating students.

## **Summary**

The 2005-2006 graduating class participated in a variety of discipline-based and some interdisciplinary capstone experiences that demonstrated their achievement of the four Baccalaureate Competencies: Critical Thinking, Effective Communication, Social Responsibility, and Knowledge Integration. Such experiences included original research projects, major research papers, field work, construction of portfolios, clinical projects, design projects, senior showcase concerts and productions, management of theater productions, student teaching, senior recitals, and internships. Students worked both collaboratively and individually to complete such projects.

As you can see from the attached spreadsheets, faculty generally rated students' achievement of the Baccalaureate Competencies in the 4-5 range, at the top of the provided scale. Such scores represent significant achievement by students of the four Competencies.

### Social Responsibility

Faculty and assessors making comments about students' achievement of the social responsibility competency reported at times that this measure was extremely difficult to assess. Faculty are



committed to considering how they might work with students on understanding this particular competency, both in light of particular disciplinary and professional ethical standards and in terms of larger social implications and ramifications of knowledge production and dissemination.

#### Knowledge Integration

Knowledge Integration proved another competency difficult to measure. Many faculty assess this competency only in terms of students' ability to integrate skills, information, and content across a specific discipline's sub-disciplines. Attention to *multi-disciplinary* or *inter-disciplinary* possibilities of knowledge integration remain difficult to structure in capstone courses, though some exceptions exist.

#### Critical Thinking & Effective Communication

These Competencies generally seem to be the most easily assessable, and faculty generally report a high degree of achievement, as students demonstrate their ability to work through and solve a variety of problems and communicate their results in a variety of formats, many of them electronic (including PowerPoint, web sites, and other e-venues).

In general, faculty believed that our capstone courses are successful in helping students not only achieve the Baccalaureate competences but also demonstrate mastery of discipline-specific skills sets and knowledge content. Many faculty are committed to reexamining on a regular basis the rubrics used to make their assessments in order to fine tune their measures of students' learning. Faculty who have made substantive changes from 2004-2005 to 2005-2006 report being pleased with the changes made.

#### **Recommendations**

Students should know **up front, at the beginning of each capstone course or experience, what the Baccalaureate Competencies are and that they will be assessed with regard to their work toward achieving the Competencies.** The General Education Director has been working in conjunction with other offices and units (particularly the CET&L) to help promote broad awareness of the Baccalaureate Competencies in *all* General Education courses. It is imperative that the Competencies be clearly defined and that assessment measures be clearly explained at the beginning of each capstone experience, especially given that the capstone as a whole is assessed in relation to students' achievement of the Competencies.

As we collected and analyzed data, it became clear that faculty instructing capstone courses were not uniformly, across all colleges, the ones filling out and submitting capstone assessment reports. It is imperative that **faculty themselves complete yearly capstone assessments.**

Faculty should also use **the comments section** of each assessment form to elaborate on details of students' work toward achieving the Competencies, as well making clear any **changes that have been made to course and program curricula based on former assessment.**

The General Education Director and the Vice President for Research should work closely together to make sure that students undertaking research-intensive projects are not stymied by



unnecessarily difficult Institutional Review Board protocols. Some faculty reported a lessening of interest among students in conducting research because of “IRB issues,” such as the arcane and convoluted way in which IRB protocols are sometimes discussed.

The General Education Director, in conjunction with the CET&L, should offer ongoing workshops in helping faculty (and staff) work through designing curricula, assignments, and experiences that will foster students’ development of the two “tricky” Competencies: social responsibility and knowledge integration. As we experiment broadly with *interdisciplinary capstones* and the development of more complex *experiential and service-learning components within the capstones*, these Competencies should become easier around which to organize pedagogical experiences, and they should also become easier to assess.

While the Baccalaureate Competencies are defined on the General Education Website (<http://www.uc.edu/gened>), many units have made more specific definitions and rubrics for the Competencies to demonstrate the skills and knowledge content they hope to engender in their students. Since rubrics then vary from unit to unit and college to college, **faculty completing the capstone assessment forms should submit their individual rubrics whenever reporting out capstone data.** Doing so will demonstrate the discipline-specific and context-specific dimensions of our assessment measures.

### Next Steps

At the end of the 2006-2007 academic year, faculty teaching capstone courses or directed capstone experiences for their students will report out, through their Associate Deans, on their assessment of students’ achievement of the Baccalaureate Competencies. Faculty and Associate Deans will also complete a three-year reflection on how capstone experiences have been re-designed, enhanced, or invigorated by consideration of capstone assessment data. Demonstrating the complete feedback loop—collecting assessment data and highlighting specific programmatic and pedagogical changes based on consideration of that data—is crucial for the development of our major programs, for fostering high-quality General Education experiences for our students, and for putting students at the center of what we do as instructors, researchers, scholars, and academics. It is imperative that each college report out completely and thoroughly on its capstone efforts. This commitment to student learning ensures academic excellence and highlights the quality of the UC undergraduate degree.