Gen Ed News

UA General Education Program Review Task Force

The General Education Program at UA was created and operationalized in 1998. For that time, it was a progressive move to re-categorize the general education courses into the two tiered system, along with foundation courses. However, it has now been 20 years since that model was put in place, with little or no change, and it is time to review the program and determine if change is warranted. Therefore, the Senior Vice-Provost for Academic Affairs has brought together a group of people from across the institution to review our current General Education Program. The charge to the Review Committee is as follows:

- Collect UA data needed for a review of general education (GE).
- Collect and review literature about the goals of GE in undergraduate education; review and discuss how should GE contribute to the overall learning outcomes from a college education.
- Summarize current structure, requirements, and policies for our UWGEC.
- Collect information on the structure, requirement, and policies of the GE programs of peer institutions.
- Collect data on GE courses that were offered over the last five years including enrollments, grade distributions, etc.
- Review our proposed GE assessment plan and procedures; review any outcomes that are available.
- Collect survey information from GE faculty, dept heads, assoc. deans, deans, undergraduates, advisors, and appropriate administrators.
- Collect data from focus groups with faculty, advisors, and undergraduates.
- Provide analysis for what has been learned from the review.
- Provide suggestions for change to the existing program based on the findings from the review.

Committee Members:
- Cindy Rankin, Co-chair
- Jim Baygents, Co-chair
- Barbara Mckean
- Dennis T Ray
- John R Pollard
- Lilly Weyers
- Lisa K Elfring
- Meredith A Aronson
- Pamela A Perry
- Pia F Cuneo
- Roxie L Catts
- Susan Miller-Cochran
- Thomas A Fleming
- Amy V Fountain
- Elaine V Marchello
- William T Neumann
- Jane Hunter
- Melissa A Fitch
- Fabian R Alfie

D2L Did you know?

With the course site request tool (http://csr.d2l.arizona.edu) you can manage your own course sites. You can remove existing sections from a course site and add them to another or create a new course site with the removed section.

If you were assigned a new section after the initial course site was requested, you can easily add that section to the course.

The following help page provides instructions on how to manage sections for existing course sites:

Editing submitted course site requests

As always, you can get help from our D2L team in the following ways:

Phone: 626-6804 (8am - 5pm M-F)

Request for Help Form

Help Pages: http://help.d2l.arizona.edu
Writing Tip of the Month

Guiding peer review with peer review prompts

Peer review can help students become better writers, readers, and collaborators. However, without guidance students can feel overwhelmed and default to providing only surface-level feedback on mechanics and grammar. Creating specific peer review prompts helps students concentrate on providing meaningful, content-driven feedback that is useful for revision. Here are a few guidelines for creating peer review prompts to help students focus on big-picture issues:

Emphasize the role of peer reviewer-as-reader. Create prompts that ask the peer reviewer to respond to the writing from a reader’s perspective.

An example prompt might be: Read through the lab report once in full. In your own words, summarize the research question and primary findings.

Align the peer review prompts with the assignment criteria and learning objectives. Create prompts that help peer reviewers provide insight into how the writer meets these in their work.

If an assignment objective is to compare and contrast the State’s use of war during two different historical periods, an example prompt might be: Identify one contrast the writer made between the two wars they researched and explain how this contrast added to or clarified your understanding of the relationship between the State and war.

Prioritize and limit the number of peer review prompts so students can devote more time to providing quality feedback on a few aspects. Create peer review prompts that elicit feedback on how the writer accomplished specific aspects of the assignment.

An example prompt might be: Identify one place where quantitative data provided clear evidence for the writer’s claims. Identify another place where the use of quantitative data is confusing or does not support the claims. Explain how these uses helped and hindered your understanding as a reader.

Resources


The OIA offers several online, self paced tutorials that are available through D2L. A list of available tutorials and descriptions, along with enrollment instructions, are available at this Tutorials page.
A couple of years ago I did a literature review on rubrics and learned that there’s no consensus on what a rubric is. Some experts define rubrics very narrowly, as only analytic rubrics—the kind formatted as a grid, listing traits down the left side and performance levels across the top, with the boxes filled in. But others define rubrics more broadly, as written guides for evaluating student work that, at a minimum, lists the traits you’re looking for.

But what about something like the following, which I’ve seen on plenty of assignments?

- **70% Responds fully to the assignment (length of paper, double-spaced, typed, covers all appropriate developmental stages)**
- **15% Grammar (including spelling, verb conjugation, structure, agreement, voice consistency, etc.)**
- **15% Organization**

Under the broad definition of a rubric, yes, this is a rubric. It is a written guide for evaluating student work, and it lists the three traits the faculty member is looking for.

The problem is that it isn’t a good rubric. Effective assessments including rubrics have the following traits:

**Effective assessments yield information that is useful and used.** Students who earn less than 70 points for responding to the assignment have no idea where they fell short. Those who earn less than 15 points on organization have no idea why. If the professor wants to help the next class do better on organization, there’s no insight here on where this class’s organization fell short and what most needs to be improved.

**Effective assessments focus on important learning goals.** You wouldn’t know it from the grading criteria, but this was supposed to be an assignment on critical thinking. Students focus their time and mental energies on what they’ll be graded on, so these students will focus on following directions for the assignment, not developing their critical thinking skills. Yes, following directions is an important skill, but critical thinking is even more important.

**Effective assessments are clear.** Students have no idea what this professor considers an excellently organized paper, what’s considered an adequately organized paper, and what’s considered a poorly organized paper.

**Effective assessments are fair.** Here, because there are only three broad, ill-defined traits, the faculty member can be (unintentionally) inconsistent in grading the papers. How many points are taken off for an otherwise fine paper that’s littered with typos? For one that isn’t double-spaced?

So the debate about an assessment should be not whether it is a rubric but rather how well it meets these four traits of effective assessment practices.

*From Linda Suskie Blog: A Common Sense Approach to Assessment and Accreditation*
*Posted on January 28, 2018 at 7:25 AM*
This book is meant for the student, not the instructor, and can be a life-changer. This book provides the student with a toolkit for learning. It describes reliable and evidence-based techniques that the student can easily adopt. The student will learn about diagnosing any shortcomings in his/her own study techniques, and to shore up those shortcomings, as well as learn about effective ways to learn and build understanding. The student will discover how to increase comprehension of reading assignments by taking steps to engage in active reading, to increase understanding by posing and answering deep level questions, and to increase learning by studying as if he/she were going to teach the assigned material to the class. With this book, the student will gain the insights and concrete techniques that are the foundations of effective learning and studying.

The book is written without jargon and in a style that relates to the student’s experiences. We recommend this book for any student who wants to improve their study skills.

(Adapted from the foreword written by Mark McDaniel.)