

## FAQ's for the General Education Team

### BACKGROUND

#### 1. Why are we doing this work on Outcomes and Assessments in General Education?

As part of our accreditation process, we are required to determine which competencies our graduates have attained to prepare them for the following phase of their educational and professional careers.

The General Education Task Force (2004-2006) determined fifteen competencies that defined a well-prepared graduate of BC. Our student learning outcomes, expressed in the course outlines, provide the roadmap for assessing those outcomes. The student learning outcomes must be measureable and mapped to the fifteen competencies.

Our task as an institution is to determine, measure, and assess those outcomes **in the form of aggregate data** to create a path of continuous improvement to benefit our institution and our students.

#### 2. How is this General Education project different from past projects?

The biggest difference is that our work has evolved to include precise forms of measureable assessments for General Education courses. One of the team's goals is to develop a mechanism for assessment of student learning outcomes for General Education courses which will be in place for all faculty, full- time and adjunct, to determine the extent to which our students are achieving the fifteen General Education competencies. The team is focused on incorporating a mechanism that is practical, functional and easy to use which will provide accurate and useful data to contribute to a culture of continuous improvement at BC.

#### 3. Who is on the General Education Outcomes and Assessments Team, and how were they selected?

The members on the General Education Outcomes and Assessments Team include ten well-respected tenured faculty who were initially selected from a pool of qualified candidates. They represent five general education area disciplines (Communication, Fine Arts and Humanities, Social and Behavioral Sciences, Physical and Biological Sciences, Mathematics). These candidates, selected from all three campuses, were endorsed by their Associate Deans, Academic Deans and Campus Provosts. There is a Lead Faculty member who is charged with the planning and coordination of the Team's work; as well as the Director of Institutional Effectiveness, the former Chair of the 2004-2006 General Education Task Force; and two ex-officio members: the VP of Academic Affairs and an AVP in Academic Affairs.

#### 4. How is assessment different from evaluation?

An **evaluation** may be limited to a grade or percentage. In some cases, the student may not receive any additional feedback at all; i.e. strategies for improvement, clarification of questions, contextual information. Another limitation is that aggregate data is not available for whole

groups of students allowing the discipline faculty to evaluate results in student learning outcomes and make improvements or adjustments that affect the particular course.

An **assessment** provides feedback to all stakeholders: students, faculty and the BC community to make changes or adjustments as needed on the path of continuous improvement. An assessment provides much more information in context for those stakeholders. Without singling out faculty members or individual students, the experts in each discipline can examine data and make determinations if adjustments or changes are needed.

## **5. What is SACS' role in this?**

SACS (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools) is the accrediting body for our region. The visiting teams are made of colleagues, experts in their respective areas, who are charged with reviewing all aspects of the institution. There is a series of requirements that must be met to demonstrate compliance in all the areas of the institution including Student Affairs, Institutional Effectiveness, Planning and Budgeting, Academic Programs, Human Resources and Facilities among others. The General Education compliance is included in the Principles of Accreditation and is stipulated as Comprehensive Standard "3.5.1." Some aspects of outcomes and assessments in General Education are also included in Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1

*3.3.1 The institution identifies expected outcomes, assesses the extent to which it achieves these outcomes, and provides evidence of improvement based on analysis of the results in each of the following areas: (Institutional Effectiveness)*

*3.3.1.1 Educational programs, to include student learning outcomes (Institutional Effectiveness).*

Please click on the following link to review the entire document regarding Principles of Accreditation:

<http://www.sacscoc.org/pdf/2008PrinciplesofAccreditation.pdf>

## **6. What is "3.5.1"?**

*3.5.1 The institution identifies college-level general education competencies and the extent to which graduates have attained them.*

This is the principle of accreditation that refers specifically to outcomes and assessments related to General Education. In the case of BC, 36 hours of our 60-hour A.A. program are comprised of General Education courses. Since there are general education courses included in all of our certificate, A.S. and A.A.S. programs, compliance regarding outcomes and assessments in general education is critical.

Following are the **fifteen competencies** as listed in the BC catalog:

### **Expected Educational Results**

The College believes that a well-educated person is one who possesses the intellectual capabilities, skills and behaviors to

1. Read with critical comprehension
2. Speak and listen effectively
3. Write clearly and coherently
4. Think creatively, logically, critically, and reflectively (analyze, synthesize, apply, and evaluate)
5. Demonstrate and apply literacy in its various forms: technological, informational, mathematical, scientific, cultural, historical, aesthetic, and environmental
6. Apply problem-solving techniques to real-world experiences
7. Apply methods of scientific inquiry
8. Demonstrate an understanding of the physical and biological environment and how it is impacted by human beings
9. Demonstrate an understanding of and appreciation for human diversities and commonalities
10. Collaborate with others to achieve common goals
11. Research, synthesize and produce original work
12. Practice ethical behavior
13. Demonstrate self-direction and self-motivation
14. Assume responsibility for and understand the impact of personal behaviors on self and society
15. Contribute to the welfare of the community

## **7. What does it mean to be put “on monitoring”?**

If the institution is not in compliance with one of the principles of accreditation, it may be put on monitoring. “Monitoring” means that SACS will be “watching” the institution’s actions and progress on the issues related to the monitoring status. It includes a formal statement that the institution is on monitoring status and time lines for complying with a number of recommendations and expected results. In the case of General Education, SACS will be looking for results that prove our graduates have attained the fifteen competencies stated in our catalog for General Education. Once we receive the formal notice of monitoring, the clock will begin running and we will have to comply with the request or face much more serious consequences for our institution.

## **PURPOSE**

### **8. How will this process advance the mission of the college?**

The general education outcomes and assessment initiative seeks to facilitate an institutional self-examination of our compliance with our mission statement. The assessment initiative also examines our progress and demonstrates evidence of faculty-driven best practices and provides indicators for continuous improvement.

### **9. What if we fail to do the General Education Assessment?**

Failure to engage in this initiative will result in the following:

- A lack of precise measures to determine compliance with our mission statement
- A lack of institutional benchmarks to compare our achievements to our ideals

When on monitoring status, failure to comply within the stipulated time frame of two years may result in sanctions and in commission actions to deny the college’s reaffirmation, eventually removing BC from membership. The loss of accreditation would be disastrous for all members of the college community.

## **PROCESS**

### **10. What is a student learning outcome (SLO)?**

“Student learning outcomes or SLOs are statements that specify what students will know, be able to do or be able to demonstrate when they have completed or participated in program / activity/course/project. Outcomes are usually expressed as knowledge, skills, attitudes or values. SLOs specify an action by the student that must be observable, measurable and able to be demonstrated” (University of Rhode Island).

Student learning outcomes are included in all BC course outlines, available on line, and form an integral part of the course syllabus.

**11. Why were the ten courses selected for Term I and how were the student learning outcomes (SLO's) selected for those courses?**

For the first phase of the pilot, courses were selected from the five major General Education areas (communication, humanities, social/behavioral science, physical and biological sciences and mathematics). Courses that had the largest student enrollment were preferred; however, in some cases, courses with smaller enrollments were selected because of the disciplines taught by the Team members.

The team members working with assigned courses conferred with other faculty members teaching the same pilot courses. As a discipline group, they selected specific student learning outcomes from the course outlines for assessment.

**12. Are nontraditional methods of delivery (e-learning, web-enhanced, blended and fully on-line) and different types of courses (honors) included in the pilot sections?**

Yes. For the pilot, different methods of delivery and types of courses were included for a more well-rounded representation of courses. Eventually there will be a random selection of sections chosen to be assessed.

**13. Were both full-time and adjunct faculty considered for the pilot sections?**

Yes. Since the process will involve random selection of courses sections, it was important to include both full-time and adjunct professors.

**14. Do all instructors involved in the pilot study have to assess the same SLOs and use the same assessment tools?**

Yes. For the purpose of the pilot study, all the instructors agreed to use the same SLOs and the same assessment tool across their sections to produce aggregate data. Using the same assessments produces data that represents the college without identifying individual faculty members or students.

**15. Who has created the assessments for the SLOs (student learning outcomes) for the pilot sections in Term I and Term II?**

The assessments are being created by General Education Assessment Team members who are faculty in the discipline in consultation with faculty colleagues from all campuses.

**16. Are pilot courses going to be expanded college-wide for Term II and for the next academic year?**

In order to meet the requirements for accreditation by SACS, the General Education Assessment Team plans to assess additional courses in Term II of this year and in all likelihood, an additional set of courses for the next academic year.

**17. Will the process of outcomes and assessments be expanded to all general education courses eventually? What about non-general education courses?**

There are more than 200 General Education courses at BC. SACS does not require an assessment of all of them, simply a representative sample. The goal is to determine that graduates have attained competency in the general education program.

As far as specific non-general education course outcomes are concerned, some may be assessed, but the real goal is to demonstrate institutional effectiveness in all educational programs including the A.S., A.A.S. and certificate programs. General Education courses form the cornerstone of the B.A.S., B.S and A.A. programs.

**18. How can I participate in the pilot program?**

Contact the team member who is in your discipline or general education area. Their names and contact emails are listed on the roster (at the end of this document).

## **RESULTS**

**19. Will final recommendations be made by the General Education Assessment Team and to whom?**

It is the desire of the General Education Assessment Team to use aggregate data to help BC identify student success in attaining the General Education competencies and also in identifying areas that need improvement. The data would also help to improve course outlines and provide evidence of best practices in the classroom.

**20. As a result of this work will the fifteen competencies be revised or will any of the competencies be eliminated?**

As the General Education Assessment Team moves through the process of the outcomes and assessments initiative, it is possible that some competencies may require more precise wording or greater integration with learning outcomes in course outlines. As a result of this process, the competencies may be more closely aligned with BC's goals as a learner-centered institution.

## **CONCERNS and BENEFITS**

**21. Who will have access to the raw data?**

The discipline team member will have access to the raw data. All identifiers, such as course reference numbers and names, will be removed.

The data collected from assessment of measurable and specific student learning outcomes stated in BC course outlines will be mapped to the fifteen competencies to show that graduates have attained those competencies.

After the raw data is collected, it will be submitted to Institutional Research for summary reports. Results and reports will be delivered to the discipline team member for analysis and recommendations.

**22. Will the data be used to evaluate faculty?**

Absolutely not! Since all identifiers will be removed from the raw data and all reports will be summary reports, it will be impossible to identify specific courses, students or faculty. It is the goal of the General Education outcomes and assessments initiative to evaluate student learning only, not faculty performance.

Any change involving the evaluation of faculty by administration would have to be bargained with UFF.

**23. Is UFF involved?**

Absolutely! The UFF Executive Committee has already met with General Education Assessment Team members and is apprised of the assessment process. Updates will be shared with the Executive Committee of UFF at any time they deem it necessary. This initiative is designed to be transparent and accessible. Outcomes and assessment results will be shared with discipline faculty, the Faculty Senate, Associate and Academic Deans, Leadership teams and the college at large.

**24. How much influence does the Administration have on this initiative?**

The General Education Assessment initiative is faculty-driven. The process and the assessment format have been agreed-upon by the discipline faculty teaching the pilot courses. The aggregate data will be submitted to Institutional Research to generate the reports from all sections. These data will be anonymous and will not be tied to reference numbers or individual names. Analysis and recommendations will be conducted by the respective discipline team members.

**25. Is there a standardized test for doing assessments and is BC moving toward an “FCAT” for the college?**

No, absolutely not! This is not the goal of the General Education Assessment Team nor is it of BC.

**26. How will identities (student sections, instructors, locations) be safeguarded?**

The General Education Assessment Team members will collect all data, remove identifiers and submit aggregate data only to Institutional Research for summary reports.

**27. How much more work will this be for the faculty?**

Many faculty members are already doing this work within their normal assessments of student learning (embedded test items, performance reviews, research papers, short essays). Establishing

the Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) to be assessed needs to be a deliberate process ideally agreed-upon by the discipline faculty with ample time prior to the start of each Term. The amount of work required by the participating faculty member is minimal: using or including the agreed upon assessment for each of the student learning outcomes (3) with the coordinating Gen Ed team member, collecting the raw data and delivering it to the Team member during the semester on the due dates. The Team member will hand over the aggregate data, stripped of any identifiers to IR who will produce the reports.

### **28. Do I have to do this?**

The goal is to be inclusive. Faculty are encouraged to participate in the pilot course assessments if their sections are randomly selected. Next academic year all course sections of all general education courses may be eligible for random sampling. Instructors will be given ample prior notice and appropriate peer mentoring will be provided. If a faculty member's course is selected, participation will be critical to this initiative.

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### **Glossary of Learning and Assessment**

Please click on the following link from Valencia Community College to access the glossary:

**<http://www.valenciacc.edu/slo/glossary.cfm>**

<b>General Education Team</b>				
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