

Summative Report General Studies QEP Project

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Overview

The purpose of the present report is to provide an update about the status of the project that was funded in the first round of QEP awards. The \$5000 grant was provided to the College of Arts and Sciences to develop viable systems for General Studies assessment framework and departmental strategies for evaluating the impact of General Studies. This challenge turned out to be one of the areas in which UWF was found deficient during their SACS reaccreditation visit.

Scope of Activity

The magnitude of conversations that had to transpire to help UWF meet its reaccreditation objectives dwarfed the QEP project. Each department contributing General Studies courses had to come up with some specific plans that would allow data collection that could be addressed in the 2007 annual report.

We first developed the concept of “Academic Foundations,” which was a way to bring together General Studies, First Year Experience, the Multicultural requirement, and Co-Curricular Activities. The concept of Academic Foundations then described the basics of what we would expect students to be able to know and do as the result of a high quality general experience at the university.

Chairs of departments that offer General Studies came together to explore efficient ways that we could address the accountability needs of SACS specific to General Studies. We developed a formal strategy for accountability that rested on the development of a matrix across four of the domains of the University Assessment Plan. Assessment designers examined each area (Project Management, Critical Thinking, Communication, and Integrity/Values) to establish four clusters of activity within each area. For example, Critical Thinking outcomes could be characterized as those dealing with Analysis & Evaluation, Problem-solving, Creativity, and Information Literacy. The resulting matrix had 16 different action areas that each contributed to General Studies.

Subsequently, we asked departments to commit to the measurement of just two of the 16 areas. We constrained one of the choices to a particular assessment domain based on the discipline each represented. For example, the Social Sciences selected one area from Critical Thinking and then could choose a second in the same domain or go to a different domain. Communication Arts, Math, and Writing courses were constrained to select an area in Communication (e.g., Writing, Speaking, Quantitative Reasoning, or Tech/Visual Literacy) and then freely choose any other area as their second choice. The Humanities departments were asked to select one area of focus from Values/Integrity (e.g., Academic Integrity, Personal/Cultural Values, Ethical Reasoning, or Diversity Skills) with a second choice from the rest of the matrix. Finally, the Sciences were responsible for one choice in Project Management (e.g., Project Skills, Self-Regulation, Team Work, Service Learning/Civic Engagement) and one other choice from the rest of the matrix.

This strategy became fondly known as the “cover all bingo” strategy. Although we did not intend to monitor individual student progress to ensure that the student participated in all 16 areas, we felt confident that the spread of activities across the four domains would ensure adequate representation in the domains.

Expenses Attached to the Process

We had exquisite help in the process from the two visits made by Dr. Barbara Walvoord, which were paid for out of other CUTLA funding. On both occasions, Barbara was instrumental in shaping how our plan unfolded and worked specifically with many departments to help them develop appropriate measures and plans for gathering and evaluating the data.

Ultimately, the cost of development of the project only resulted in about \$300 worth of duplicating expenses, devoted to helping chairs understand the proposed framework. The remaining, unspent \$4700 has been returned to CUTLA for distribution to another QEP project.

Results of the Work

1. Every department participating in General Studies did develop an assessment plan and most reported activity that evaluated quality in the annual reports of 2007.
2. The SACS reaffirmation was achieved with the reports of the progress made on General Studies. Of course, the data are still fairly limited and we should expect to see continued emphasis of General Studies achievement in annual reports to assist with the scheduled mid-term report that SACS will require.
3. The 2008 Syllabus Review completed by Dr. Claudia Stanny confirmed that the array of activities that we anticipated did seem to be taking place. Of note in the review were the following observations:
 - a. The Analysis/Evaluation subarea of Critical Thinking had the strongest representation of activity in syllabi (132 out of 216). The next highest representation was Writing in Communication (83 out of 216) and Problem Solving Skills in Critical Thinking (77 out of 216).
 - b. The Diversity subarea in Values/Integrity was rather underpopulated (8 out of 216) which reflects the deferral we had done on examining how the multicultural course requirement should fit in Academic Foundations until this year. That work is currently in progress with the faculty Senate.
 - c. Service Learning/Civic Engagement in Project Management had little activity as well. Only 8 out of 216 courses reflected this emphasis and it was thought most of those were linked to the Academic Foundations course that is not a required class. This low attention may need some reexamination.
 - d. Academic Integrity in Values/Integrity also fared poorly with only 8 out of 216 courses reflected this emphasis. This is a bit surprising given how seriously faculty describe their concerns about integrity in the classroom. My hope is that we can figure out some ways to assist faculty to focus on positive ways to teach about integrity so as to

reduce the time they must spend tracking down and punishing offenders.

Future Directions:

1. We anticipate that the Diversity skills sets will need a bit more time to work through due to the involvement of the Faculty Senate. However, several models for fine-tuning our diversity offerings have been proposed. We anticipate that revision will require some debate before we settle on a model and the specific learning outcomes in this area that will complete the planning of the Academic Foundations.
2. Once we have a few years' worth of data, it will be time to begin revising General Studies requirements based on those data. This is one of the most important suggestions made by our consultant, Dr. Walvoord. The data should help us determine where we need to make improvements rather than conducting reforms in the absence of data, a strategy that sometimes lends itself too readily to the whims of whatever committee has been appointed to the task. I am particularly grateful that Dr. Walvoord endorsed letting assessment run a proper course before we begin significant changes.