GE Section of Standard 2 of BYU–Hawai’i Capacity and Preparatory Report

I. NATURE OF OUR GE PROGRAM/CREATING A CULTURE OF ASSESSMENT

In the university’s 1996 WASC Accreditation, the site team identified the “urgency for a more critical review of general education” and reported that they saw no clear faculty commitment to the program. They recommended that the university develop a “systematic evaluation” based on “broad faculty discussion about the [program’s] principles and goals” (p. 15). The initial result of this charge was university-wide discussion and subsequent reconfiguring of the GE program. By 2000, the administration had initiated its emphasis on developing a university assessment culture, and the General Education Committee sought to involve faculty in the entire process of defining outcomes, developing methods, carrying out assessment, and applying findings to program decision making. The Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, where GE is housed, identified faculty who teach GE as well as those in professional schools and programs who indirectly benefit from GE to compose committees to carry out the development of the assessment process. Each document, outcome, or assessment plan was only developed after discussion and review by many faculty members. Over the past four years, over 50 of about 115 full-time faculty have participated directly in committee work, workshops or training sessions on assessment. In addition, all assessment documents have been sent out to the faculty at large for review and comment.

The most significant of these documents developed by about twenty-five faculty representing a cross-section of the university is the 2001 General Education Mission Statement and its accompanying “Seven Qualities of a Generally-Educated Person,” the explicit outcomes of the GE program. This document was then taken to the faculty as a whole. When many asked “why are we doing this?” the GE Committee purposefully focused its efforts on better defining the qualities of BYUH Generally-Educated Person in its committee discussions and sought ways to inform their thinking through participation at national conferences. What they learned as a committee was then communicated through university faculty meetings. The ideas generated in the faculty committee were taken to instructors, chairs, deans and the President’s Council who then also contributed to a description of the seven qualities. They are: Pursue truth; Communicate effectively; Solve problems; Respond aesthetically; Behave ethically; Integrate socially; Be globally responsible.

Charged by WASC to scale back the hours required for General Education, the university faculty met to evaluate the hours required in each area. In 1998, after a concerted effort, the GE program hours were reduced by 30%. The reduction created an improved balance between major requirements, GE program and university electives. After the concerted effort to reduce the required credits for GE a more collaborative environment and assessment planning began to develop. The first efforts at assessment were to look carefully at the three GE areas of basic skills through which all students pass and complete the requirements. These included English within the category of “fundamental knowledge,” and history and the capstone Interdisciplinary Studies courses within the category of “synthesis”. The changes in these areas best represent the creation of a culture of assessment at BYUH.

The English faculty (both full and part-time) revised in a step-by-step fashion the three required courses for GE offered by the English Department (English 101, 201 and 315/316). Rather than emphasizing these as skilled based courses, the faculty integrated themes according to their expertise to instill a content-rich English education.
The GE Committee and History faculty also worked together to revise the two course synthesis requirement of History 201 and History 202 (World Civilization sequence). Even before 1997, the description in the course catalog declared that these two classes “may be taught from different perspectives but each will be history-based and address the same fundamental questions.” The History 202 was transformed into a “World Communities” course in which faculty from throughout the College of Arts and Sciences presented subjects within the past 500 years of world history and cultural interaction to 200 or more students with multiple break-out discussion sections of 25 students. By involving more faculty, the History Department received administrative support to lower its class sizes while also meeting the goal of teaching the crucial role of a global perspective in the GE program. The History 201 course also became a site for collaboration, drawing on similar goals. In addition to a global historical perspective (prior to A.D. 1500) an information literacy component was added. Library faculty now team-teach with History faculty the steps to research and writing a successful term paper. These collaborative revisions worked with the knowledge that evidence would need to emerge that demonstrated student learning. Excellent teaching occurs because the instructors of the course have united in their efforts to use multiple measures for assessment.

After identifying inconsistencies in delivery and assignments across the interdisciplinary studies courses, the GE committee carefully reviewed what was offered in relation to the original objectives for the course. The committee found through review of syllabi, student evaluations and workshops, that the IDS courses did not always offer the level of interdisciplinary discussion, rigor of thought, or quality of writing originally envisioned. Thus, the committee explored ways to restructure the course and develop a pilot course which would involve three professors in a team-teaching format. These faculty would rotate among three sections meeting at a concurrent class time, each teaching their perspective on a topic to each section in a given week. Thus each faculty member would cover one third of the curriculum for each section. Additional class time was created for moments of synthesis when all faculty were present for a discussion. In the first pilot, professors explored different vantage points on what it means to “Pursue Truth” in their respective fields: science, the humanities, and religion. Another pilot on the same topic is scheduled for Fall 2005, after which the GE Committee will decide if and how to implement further courses based on the same model and explore ways to embed assignments to assess additional G.E. qualities.

Review by the Math Department of their GE requirements in comparison with other universities has led the GE committee to raise the GE math requirement to the level of Math 106 (a course also created in response to the 1997 GE changes) and lower the previous requirement (Math 100) to a pre-college number (Math 97) and level. Math 106 (Mathematical Reasoning, Problem-solving and Applications) has provided one of our most valuable sites for embedded assessment of the quality, Solve Problems.

The task of advocating the GE program does not fall alone on the Committee. Leadership and financial support from both the Academic Vice-President and Dean of College of Arts and Sciences facilitated improvements to the GE program. This included drafting a new rationale for membership on the GE Committee with new members receiving professional development in national GE discussions. The Academic VP appointed faculty members who were willing and prepared to assess the GE program. The Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences reorganized the College under the direction of the VP for Academics into disciplinary departments with separate budgets, placing direct responsibility for program success on the department chair and disciplinary colleagues.
II. REFLECTING ON ASSESSMENT

What We Learned
We have learned much from this process of involving faculty in assessment. First, such collaboration provides uneven progress. A faculty survey reveals that at least 1/3 of the faculty claim to not be aware of the Seven Qualities of the GE Mission Statement, to not feel that the mission statement helps them teach more effectively, and to not know about assessment standards for general education. A surprising 66% say they haven’t participated in the assessment development process, though the GE committee has identified over 43% who have participated in training or committee work directly. Faculty perception (and misperception) of the process is often blurred by ever-changing faculty assignments, competing departmental agenda, and differing levels of faculty involvement and understanding. However, the progress we can mark validates our need for faculty contributions.

We also discovered how valuable administrative support can prove in involving faculty. Our administration has sent groups to national conferences or workshops. These efforts not only provided training, but with time together away from other university responsibilities, the participants drafted or finalized outcomes, assessment plans, or other documents. Significant products resulted from conferences in Asheville, Cincinnati, Chicago, and Philadelphia. Though costly, the contribution of these conferences toward the developing of our assessment process made them worthwhile. The administration also has supported course development budgets, training sessions and workshops, assessment groups, and other efforts to develop and strengthen the GE program and its assessment. Each of these have facilitated wider faculty involvement.

The most significant thing we learned about faculty involvement, however, was to not overextend the demand we place on faculty. While we are pleased with the products that have involved faculty over the past four years, we came to realize that we were wearing them out. Many faculty, including most of the GE Committee, serve on other demanding university committees besides completing GE assessment tasks and the responsibilities faculty bear in their respective academic units. We have determined to be more selective in how we use our faculty in the assessment process.

What We Will Do in the Future
While wide faculty involvement enabled us to generate a statement of outcomes to guide our GE assessment, functional rubrics to assess capstone writing and problem solving, and other valuable products to facilitate assessment, we realized that we cannot put as much faculty energy into each of the outcomes we need to assess. We will involve faculty in other ways. First, we will mostly rely on embedded assessment, which will allow faculty to contribute to the assessment process, but without serious reassignment of time. We are also considering new, perhaps more inviting, ways to engage faculty. For example, we can selectively use them to lead occasional discussion faculty groups or to facilitate student or faculty focus groups for assessment. We can also invite faculty to consult with the GE committee as experts in their areas.

What we have accomplished so far in assessing and redirecting our general education efforts has been due to the valuable but somewhat demanding participation and critique from our faculty.
By finding new ways to employ our faculty’s expertise and energy in the assessment process, we can strengthen our program without draining or alienating our most important resource.

III. ASSESSMENT OF GENERAL EDUCATION QUALITIES

As stated in the Institutional Proposal (October 2003) submitted to WASC, GE assessment was to focus on two of the “Seven Qualities of a Generally-Educated Person”: Communicate Effectively and Solve Problems. What follows reports our progress and demonstrates our capacity to assess these qualities as well as introduce the initial assessment for a third quality, Pursue Truth, which resulted from earlier assessment of the interdisciplinary studies course. After discussing these three qualities, this section will conclude by reviewing other course assessment in development and identifying increasing capacity to deliver and assess the GE program.

Communicate Effectively

Capstone Writing The GE Committee chose to assess first the writing component of the quality Communicate Effectively because of the availability of student texts to use in identifying specific outcomes related to writing and to develop an assessment rubric. A subcommittee wrote an initial draft of outcomes, then a Writing Assessment Group (WAG) developed a rubric through reading papers from the Interdisciplinary Studies courses (IDS), considered the GE capstones. The group defined and negotiated characteristics of effective student writing and analysis, as demonstrated in that group of student papers. The group also recognized the inconsistency of writing assignments in IDS classes, leading to an overall review of the course. Since that time, a WAG has convened in 2003 and 2004 to assess GE capstone writing from advanced writing courses (ENG 315 and 316), and have rated each random sample of papers as averaging in the acceptable range in each of the four characteristics of Analysis, Coherence, Language, and Documentation. Eight-two percent of the papers averaged overall in the “Acceptable” range. Average scores were slightly lower overall in 2004 (about 7-8%). The 2005 WAG will assess senior theses from majors which fill the GE advanced writing requirement with their senior seminar and thesis. The GE Committee anticipates that after this year, the WAG for GE capstone writing will convene every two or three years.

Oral Presentation The next step in assessing Communicate Effectively is to evaluate oral presentation skills. The GE Committee has developed a rubric, tested and revised it by evaluating oral presentations from the IDS pilot course. This rubric will now be used to assess oral presentation skills by Winter 2006 (recording of presentations will begin in Fall 2005), by which time a sufficient corpus of student presentation can be gathered from senior seminars and ENG 315/316. We will convene oral presentation assessment groups for at least two years to provide us a reliable sample for assessment.

Restructuring of Learning Centers After the 1997 revision of the GE program, the GE committee realized that the streamlining of GE requirements which reduced speech and writing classes required more structured learning support systems. At BYU–Hawai’i, this meant strengthening the existing learning centers–The Reading/Writing Center, The Speech Center, and The Language Center. To strengthen their positions as university-wide support centers, the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences moved these programs from individual departments to direct
line administration to the Dean, giving the center directors budgetary control. This administrative shift has provided greater university access to the centers especially as GE courses such as the World Civilization series has identified among its outcomes the quality of *Communicate Effectively* and IDS courses have required oral presentations.

Not only has the restructuring strengthened the GE program’s ability to deliver and support its curriculum, but we also will begin to use these centers in assessment, as we are beginning to work with the Reading/Writing Center to develop means to assess reading. We may also be able to use the Speech Center in assessment of oral presentations.

*Solve Problems*

In 2003, a committee convened to develop a rubric to assess the quality *Solve Problems*. A rubric was tested and revised during in 2004. One concern that arose was that one of the main groups of stakeholders in this quality, the GE faculty from Exercise and Sport Science (EXS), were not able to participate in the development, especially since most who teach the GE EXS courses are part-time faculty who are not paid for such work. Progress has paused while the GE committee attempts to solve this problem. Nonetheless, a corpus of data has been collected from embedded assignments in GE Physical Science and Mathematics courses which will be assessed in Fall 2005.

*Pursue Truth*

As mentioned above, after noting inconsistencies in delivery and assignments in interdisciplinary studies courses, the GE committee carefully reviewed what we were offering in relation to the original objectives of the course. It found that courses did not always offer the level of interdisciplinary discussion, rigor of thought, or quality of writing originally envisioned. Thus, the committee decided to try to restructure the course and develop a pilot program which involved three professors to team-teach the class. They would rotate among three sections meeting at the same time, each teaching their “discipline” to one section for one third of the semester. In the first pilot, professors explored what it means to “Pursue Truth” in their area: science, the humanities, or religion. Another pilot is scheduled for Fall 2005, after which the GE Committee will decide how to implement our findings into the IDS requirement.

The pilot allowed us to assess three sections by embedded assessment (which can be used to assess *Pursue Truth* or *Communicate Effectively*), student surveys, and oral presentations (which were used to develop and test the Oral Presentation Rubric). From what we have seen so far, we are hopeful that the newly configured IDS class, originally viewed as the GE Capstone, will ultimately prove one of our most valuable sites of GE assessment. This will include developing additional pilot courses to focus on selected qualities yet to be assessed.

IV. OTHER COURSE DEVELOPMENT TO SUPPORT ASSESSMENT CAPACITY

*GE Courses Developed from 1997 GE Restructuring* Several new courses were created in response to the 1997 restructuring of general education. As these courses have come under review by individual departments, they have provided new sites of assessment to support GE
assessment. For example, the World Communities (HIST 202) faculty met in March 2005 to review their writing assignments. In the process, they developed a shared rubric for the major paper in the course. This rubric and the assessment that will follow can provide support to GE assessment of *Communicate Effectively*. In addition, the nature of the assignment and other elements of the course clearly provide means for assessing a fourth quality, *Be Globally Responsible*. Review by the English department of ENG 101 (originally designed and taught in 1999) has led to stronger emphasis on teaching research (supporting both *Communicate Effectively* and *Pursue Truth*). Review by the math department of their GE requirements led math faculty to create the Math 106 course, “Mathematical Reasoning, Problem-Solving, and Applications.” This new course has served as the primary location for developing the rubric for the *Solve Problems* quality and will continue to provide a valuable site for embedded assessment.

**Freshman Learning Community** To strengthen student retention and the freshman academic experience, the College of Arts and Sciences developed the Freshman Learning Community for Fall 2003, grouping new freshmen in sections made up of 50% international students and 50% U.S. mainland students. Students in each community enroll in three general education courses together (limited to only those in the community) during their first semester. Our first communities included courses in Freshman English, Intercultural Communication, and Conceptual Physics. In subsequent communities we have included Introduction to Biology for the science course and Introduction to Psychology in the social science category. Initial course and program assessment indicate that this program can provide significant data relating to *Integrate Socially* and *Be Globally Responsible*. The English and physics courses also provide possible sites for assessing *Communicate Effectively* and *Solve Problems* respectively.

The culture of assessment and evidence of student learning at BYUH will have its challenges. There is, for example, the difficulty of advocating for the GE program without a separate GE Budget. The administrative structure of a University wide program and yet administered by the CAS (with few of the faculty from the three Schools teaching within the GE program also) can be a future item for discussion. The small college size may limit the GE Committee’s reach (i.e. EXS 177 is a GE requirement but the GE Committee involvement is minimal), and with greater assessment responsibility there is no budget for general education faculty development.