Recent History of General Education Review

As directed in the 1996 WASC accreditation report, we have thoroughly reviewed and revised our general education program, making it more streamlined and integrated, focusing on developing those qualities in students we feel most effectively meet the mission of the University. Over a course of more than two years, an interdisciplinary committee on general education assessment (involving more than 20 faculty members across disciplines, with input and review from the faculty at large) drafted a new Mission Statement on General Education, which defines the three pillars of a BYU–Hawai’i education (religious, general, and major education) and the seven qualities of a generally-educated person, which we have chosen as the main outcomes of our general education program. These qualities are as follows:

Qualities of the Generally Educated Student

Pursue truth. The student will seek to learn truth through a variety of discovery processes, search for knowledge, and be able to synthesize and analyze information.

Communicate effectively. The student will be able to demonstrate throughout the curriculum the abilities to read and listen with understanding and express complex ideas in spoken and written forms.

Solve problems. The student will be able to think innovatively and apply appropriate strategies for resolution of life’s problems.

Respond aesthetically. The student will be able to respond with sensitivity and discrimination to various creative forms.

Behave ethically. The student will be able to purposefully define personal values, apply ethical and religious principles in making moral judgments, and accept the consequences of decisions.

Integrate socially. The student will develop understanding of various perspectives, elicit the views of others, and be able to integrate successfully in collaborative environments.

Be globally responsible. The student will recognize the interdependence of global forces and local contexts, learning to act with an understanding of the social and environmental issues that shape the world.

University-Wide Ownership through Assessment

In defining these qualities, the committee sought to cultivate a university-wide vision and ownership of the general education program, an objective that the current General Education Committee plans to fulfill through effective assessment of these qualities as outcomes. Such assessment should lead to more effective curriculum planning and development and more meaningful resource allocation to strengthen both the students’ education experience and the
faculty’s ability to effectively deliver general education courses and instill the seven qualities. Then a liberal education at BYU–Hawai‘i can become a true collaboration among the three pillars, which

frees students from narrowness . . . , empowers students to make critical judgments . . . , and develops sensitivity to cultures other than one’s own . . . , [enabling] students to grow, and to continue to grow, in appreciation of the broad range of human intellectual and artistic endeavors.¹

Subcommittee on “Communicate Effectively.” To begin the process, the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and the General Education Committee appointed a subcommittee to develop an assessment plan for Communicate Effectively. The subcommittee focused on the writing element of the quality because of the availability of students texts for use in identification of specific outcomes related to writing and to develop an assessment rubric. The Subcommittee first wrote an initial draft of outcomes, then a Writing Assessment Group (WAG) developed a rubric through reading student papers from the upper-division GE courses. In this process, the group defined and negotiated the characteristics of effective student writing and analysis, as demonstrated in that group of student papers.

Shift toward Embedded Assessment. Although the General Education Committee was pleased with the rubric developed by the subcommittee, the intense and extended work invested by that subcommittee made clear that appointing subcommittees for each quality, though bringing university-wide involvement, would soon “burn out” those serving on the subcommittees and would be less than expeditious. Instead, the GE Committee will work with the faculty who contribute to the general education curriculum to identify which courses support which of the seven qualities. This process will lead the Committee to work with faculty across departments to identify and develop embedded assessment, encouraging faculty input and ownership. By working the specific qualities/outcomes into their syllabi and assignments, the faculty will facilitate incorporating the language of the General Education qualities into university culture, making the endeavor a university concern, not just another program, and will help achieve assessment goals in a more timely manner.

Assessment Timeline. Over the next three years, in preparation for the WASC accreditation visit, GE assessment will focus on the following three qualities, based on faculty input: Communicate Effectively, Solve Problems, and Be Globally Responsible. By the WASC visit, we should have initial data from which we can evaluate the effectiveness of the GE program in achieving these qualities in our graduates, as well as redirecting our efforts toward those qualities which the program doesn’t as effectively support. Over the next five years, we will identify assessment sites and instruments for the other four qualities.

¹ from The Association of American Colleges and Universities, Greater Expectations Update (Number 3).
General Education Timeline 1996-2004

1996  WASC recommends reduction of general education requirements
      GE committee begins review of GE requirements

1997  GE committee participates in Asheville Institute on General Education
      New general education requirements approved
      Implementation work commences (English and History faculty begin process of
      extensive course revisions)

1999  Revised English 101 and 201 offered

2000  Ad Hoc GE assessment committee charged with developing plan for GE assessment
      World communities course begins (revised world civilizations (HIST 202),
      interdisciplinary faculty)
      Revised English 315 offered

2001  GE Committee participates in Asheville Institute on General Education
      GE Mission statement written identifying qualities of generally educated person
      “Communicate effectively” subcommittee begins assessment work, decides to focus on
      written communication first (becomes WAG writing assessment group)

2002  GE committee reconfigured from at-large to stakeholder representation
      Workshop for interdisciplinary studies course instructors to facilitate more shared
      outcomes in the GE capstone courses.
      WAG generates and tests rubric to assess GE capstone writing and research.

2003  WAG uses rubric to assess GE capstone writing and research
      “Solve Problems” subcommittee develops rubric.
      IDS instructor workshop to introduce embedded GE assessment into IDS courses
      IDS subcommittee makes proposal for restructuring IDS courses. Course themes to
      rotate through qualities of generally educated person, providing rotating
      opportunities for assessment on each theme.

2004  Faculty surveyed on understanding of and attitudes toward GE program
      Faculty and theme (pursue truth) for revised IDS pilot identified
      All sections of HIST 201 offered as Information literacy-enhanced
      “Solve problems” subcommittee conducts first round review using draft rubric
      WAG plans summer assessment of capstone writing