



General Education Assessment Review (GEAR) Group

Review Process Guidelines

I. Introduction

The General Education Assessment Review (GEAR) Group has been established upon the recommendation of the Provost's Advisory Task Force on the Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes and has been formed jointly by leadership from the University Faculty Senate, the Faculty Council of Community Colleges, and System Administration.

Comprised primarily of faculty from throughout the University, GEAR also includes students, campus chief academic officers, and campus professional staff (particularly from Institutional Research). GEAR is chaired by Dr. Patricia Francis, Assistant Provost for University Assessment and Academic initiatives, Office of Academic Affairs. GEAR's web page, which includes a summary of its activities as well as many useful resource and reference materials, may be accessed at <http://cortland.edu/gear/>.

Members

Robert Axelrod	Associate Professor of Speech, Rockland Community College
Pat Belanoff	Professor of English, University at Stony Brook and President, SUNY Council on Writing
Susan Bello	Assistant Dean of Institutional Research, Nassau Community College
David A. Carson	Professor of History and Social Studies, College at Buffalo
Frances Dearing	Assistant Dean of Assessment, Academic Support and Placement, Westchester Community College
Mary Jane Feldman	Professor, Director of Institutional Research, Niagara County Community College
Joseph Flynn	SUNY Distinguished Professor of English, Alfred State College
Patricia Francis	Assistant Provost for University Assessment and Academic Initiatives, SUNY System Administration
Kellie Gervais	Student Member, University at Albany
Robert Golden	Provost and Vice President, Academic Affairs, College at Plattsburgh
Tina Good	Assistant Professor of English, Suffolk Community College
Joseph Hildreth	Professor of Art, College at Potsdam; President, University Faculty Senate
Milton Johnson	Assistant Professor of Speech Communications, Finger Lakes Community College; Vice President, Faculty Council of Community Colleges
Robert Jubenville	Professor of Life Sciences, Mohawk Valley Community College
Jack Meacham	SUNY Distinguished Teaching Professor of Psychology, University at Buffalo
Patricia Pietropaolo	Assistant Provost Liaison to Community Colleges, SUNY System Administration
Runi Mukherji	Professor of Psychology, College at Old Westbury
Kimberley Reiser	Professor of Biology, Nassau Community College; President, Faculty Council of Community Colleges
David Rule	Vice President for Academic Affairs, Orange County Community College
Peter Sinden	Professor of Sociology and Anthropology, Director of Campus Assessment, College at Fredonia
Melanie Vainder	Professor of English and Technical Communications, Director of General Education, Chair of the Assessment Advisory Board, SUNY Farmingdale

II. Goals

The GEAR Group's goal is to work with campuses as they develop their campus-based plans for assessing student learning outcomes in General Education, following the guidelines contained in the Task Force report. GEAR intends to function as a resource and a colleague, making itself available to campuses to the extent that they would welcome and in ways that they feel would be helpful, engaging them in a dialogue as they develop their assessment plans. In its "process review" of campus General Education assessment plans, GEAR will focus exclusively on the campus's assessment processes and procedures, not the assessment outcomes themselves.

III. Process

Each campus is responsible for determining the particular structure and content of its campus-based General Education assessment plan, following its own existing governance processes.

The task of developing and implementing a campus-based assessment plan for General Education should fall primarily to the faculty members who teach in the program, with the assistance of professional staff and students when appropriate. (Indeed, it may well be the case that on some campuses a full-time staff and/or faculty assessment person may be in a leadership role.) Campus-based assessment plans should be submitted to, and approved by, the campus's Faculty Senate or Faculty Council prior to being submitted to the GEAR Group for formal review.¹

GEAR's Expectations of Campus General Education Assessment Plans

In its initial review of campus assessment plans, the GEAR Group will use eight criteria in evaluating a plan's comprehensiveness and rigor. In addition to reflecting widely recognized best assessment practices in higher education, these criteria are consistent with the general guidelines included in the Task Force Report, the expectations for assessment of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, and regulations proposed by the New York State Education Department as part of its Quality Assurance Initiative in Higher Education.

In its initial review, the GEAR Group will seek to ascertain for each campus plan that:

- 1. The objectives for student learning in General Education relate directly to the student learning outcomes defined in the *Implementation Guidelines of the Provost's Advisory Task Force on General Education*.**² The GEAR Group is likely to agree that this criterion is met if all outcomes from the *Implementation Guidelines* are reflected in the campus' statement of General Education learning objectives for its program. (It is important to note that campuses may also include additional learning objectives that are specific to their own program.)
- 2. Programmatic activities intended to accomplish the campus' objectives for student learning in General Education are described.** The GEAR Group is likely to agree that this criterion is met by the campus providing GEAR with its guidelines or procedures for designating courses as General Education courses.
- 3. The measures developed to assess student learning are designed to provide credible evidence of the extent to which students have achieved the learning outcomes or skills stated in the objectives.** The GEAR Group is likely to agree that this criterion is met if, for each learning objective, appropriate assessment measures have been established for determining the degree to which students have mastered the objective. In judging the appropriateness of a specific measure, the GEAR Group will rely on answers to the following questions:
 - Will it *directly measure* student learning (i.e., as differentiated from the *perception* that learning has taken place)?
 - Will it measure the objective it is intended to measure (i.e., will it have reasonable *face validity*)?

¹ Though GEAR encourages campuses to engage in dialogue throughout the plan's development process.

² See Appendix D of the *Final Report of the Provost's Advisory Task Force on the Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes*, at <http://www.sysadm.suny.edu/provost/whatsnew/asmtfinalreport.pdf>.

- Will the plan provide assurances that the measure is reliable, particularly with respect to the ability of two independent scorers to rate it similarly (i.e., will it have *inter-observer reliability*)? While this issue is less important for objective measures (e.g., multiple choice exams), it is critical for qualitative approaches (e.g., portfolios), which do not yield “one correct answer.”
 - Will the data that are reported be representative? It may not be feasible for campuses to assess all students on a particular measure, nor is it necessary. The campus assessment plan should therefore make it clear how representative sampling of students will be assured when collecting assessment data.
4. **The plan proposes standards to which student performance relative to the learning outcomes in the objectives can be compared.** The GEAR Group is likely to agree that this criterion is met if campus assessment plans include, for each learning objective, the standard defining what level of student performance the faculty considers as “exceeding,” “meeting,” “approaching,” and “not meeting” standards.
 5. **The anticipated results of the assessment are able to affirm the degree to which the learning objectives have been achieved and thus make it possible to identify areas that need to be addressed in order to improve learning.** The GEAR Group is likely to agree that this criterion is met if it is clear from the assessment plan that mechanisms exist for sharing assessment results with appropriate faculty and staff and for making programmatic improvements based on the assessment results (if necessary).
 6. **The assessment plan has been reviewed and approved through the appropriate curriculum and faculty governance structures.** The GEAR Group is likely to agree that this criterion is met if the assessment plan includes a section describing the process through which the plan was developed and approved on the campus prior to being shared with the GEAR Group.
 7. **The plan adheres to the timetable established by the GEAR Group and agreed to by the University Provost.** The GEAR Group is likely to agree that this criterion is met if it is clear that the assessment of all of the General Education learning objectives in the Knowledge and Skills Areas and Competencies will be completed within a three-year cycle. (The campus plan should include the schedule for the assessment cycle.)
 8. **The assessment process includes provisions for evaluating the assessment process itself and disseminating assessment results to the appropriate campus community.** The GEAR Group is likely to agree that this criterion is met if processes are described in the assessment plan for evaluating the assessment process once complete, making changes in the process if necessary, and sharing assessment results with the appropriate campus community.

Initial Review

GEAR will receive and critique campus assessment plans and approve those that meet its expectations for effective assessment; campuses will be advised in writing of revisions that would likely lead to approval, as appropriate. GEAR will place a strong emphasis on the extent to which campuses demonstrate they will use assessment results to improve their General Education programs.

Timeline

1	General Education Assessment Review (GEAR) Group formed.	January 15, 2001
2	Collaborative dialogue with campuses as they develop their General Education Assessment plans: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The GEAR Group encourages early submission of draft campus plans and will engage the campus in dialogue and initial review, if requested to do so; • Draft plan readied for discussion by campus Faculty Senate or Faculty Council; • Approval by campus Faculty Senate or Faculty Council; • Unified campus response presented to GEAR Group. 	March 1, 2001–February 28, 2002 March 1, 2001–July 15, 2001 October 1, 2001 (suggested) November 15, 2001 (suggested) January 31, 2002 (preferred)
3	Review and approval of campus General Education Assessment plans by the GEAR Group. Campus plans are due no later than March 1, 2002. Campuses that have already discussed their plans with GEAR during the period from March 1, 2001 to January 31, 2002 would likely receive an expedited response.	Ongoing from March 1, 2002, to May 31, 2002
4	Implementation of General Education assessment on all SUNY campuses on a three-year cycle.	Fall 2002
5	Initial Annual Report on campus-based assessment of General Education from campus Chief Academic Officers.	June 1, 2003
6	First annual SUNY Best Practices in Assessment conference.	Fall 2003

Ongoing Review

After the initial review process, the GEAR Group will review campus General Education assessment plans on a biennial, staggered basis, applying the same criteria as above, with greater emphasis on how campuses are using assessment data to improve their General Education programs.

IV. Reporting

GEAR will establish a clear protocol and a standardized reporting format—consistent with the recommendations of the Provost’s Advisory Task Force on the Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes—for campuses to use to report assessment results in General Education to System Administration for the purpose of accountability. This annual report, to be submitted by the Chief Academic Officer at each campus directly to the Office of the Provost, will include specific information on its students’ progress in mastering the learning outcomes outlined in the *General Education Implementation Guidelines*.³ System Administration will use these data—in accord with the Utilization and Reporting of Assessment Results principles in the Task Force report—in the preparation of summary reports to external stakeholders for accountability purposes.

V. Summary

The GEAR Group will continue the long tradition of involving existing faculty governance and curriculum review structures on individual State University campuses in the process of assessment. This involvement of SUNY faculty was central in the early 1990’s when the State University was playing a leadership role nationally in the assessment movement, and it has certainly characterized the deliberations of the Task Force on the Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes that has provided the *raison-d’être* for GEAR.

Approved by GEAR: October 16, 2001
Membership Updated: October 14, 2004

³ Reported results should indicate the percentage of students exceeding, meeting, approaching, and not meeting the delineated learning outcomes. (A draft reporting form is attached.)