

General Education Assessment Strategy and Faculty Teams – A Work in Progress

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Synopsis: This proposal outlines the overall assessment strategy for General Education, as well as a means to create faculty teams to norm and score assessment artifacts as part of the assessment, to create staff teams to administer focus groups, and to collect, interpret findings, and render recommendations and make curricular and pedagogical modifications.

Context and Rationale: General Education is the single largest “unit” within the University of Idaho, providing up to 28% of the baccalaureate degree curriculum for well over 9,000 students. It is a curriculum and student population that emanates from eight different colleges: Agriculture and Life Sciences; Art and Architecture; Business and Economics; Letters, Arts and Social Sciences; Education, Engineering, Natural Resources, and Science. Each semester over 160 University of Idaho faculty members offer over 200 General Education courses. More than any other unit, the General Education curriculum has the greatest impact on the success of University of Idaho graduates as adaptive, lifelong learners.

As the General Education curriculum has undergone revision to reflect “high impact best practices,” critical new components are being implemented. These components include the ISEM 101 Integrated Seminars, implemented Fall and Spring Semesters 2011-12, American Diversity introduced Fall and Spring Semesters 2012-13, the ISEM 301 Great Issues Seminars coming Fall and Spring Semesters 2014-15, and culminating with the Senior Experience during Fall and Spring Semesters 2015-16. As with any new curriculum, assessing student learning outcome competencies is essential. The General Education curriculum must be monitored and if necessary adjusted to provide the best possible pedagogical and curricular content for its students. In addition, the university’s accreditor, the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU), has targeted “the General Education component of undergraduate programs” for assessment for its Fall Semester 2014 accreditation review.

Recalling the Provost Council’s memo of 10 December 2012 and the NWCCU’s directive, the implementation of an assessment strategy is to be a “faculty responsibility.” With a curriculum

entirely developed and sponsored by the faculty from the eight colleges, unlike other university units General Education does not have a dedicated set of faculty lines from which to draw faculty resources and time to implement an assessment strategy.

In addition to outlining a General Education Assessment Strategy, this proposal is seeking to secure a body of faculty (beginning Fall Semester 2013, on ongoing thereafter) to facilitate a viable and sustainable General Education assessment strategy. As a curriculum sponsored by the eight university colleges, it is an assessment to be supported and sponsored by the university's colleges. There is no better way for a faculty to take ownership of and continually improve upon their own curriculum than by having that faculty routinely assess what they do.

General Education Assessment Strategy: As previously developed by the faculty, the General Education Assessment Strategy is designed to focus on evaluating the student learning competencies relative to the University of Idaho Learning Outcomes. The **General Education Learning Outcomes** are the University of Idaho Learning Outcomes. It is not an assessment strategy designed to assess or evaluate specific Gen Ed courses, e.g., ENGL 102 or Gen Ed components, e.g., Humanities, but the over-all learning competencies of our students, as they progress from the first-year, through to their third-year and through to their senior-year educational experiences. It is a competency-focused assessment strategy.

Developed in the fall semester of 2012 (revised 17 May 2013 and 28 October 2013), the Learning Outcomes have been framed and tabulated into the "**Learning Matters – Measurement Rubrics.**" The Rubrics were adopted with modifications from the Association of American Colleges and Universities VALUE Rubrics (Valid Assessment of Learning Undergraduate Education). The Learning Matters Rubrics will be used to norm and score all direct measures and assess all indirect and face-to-face measures. This Rubric was reviewed and approved by ISEM 101 faculty during Spring Semester of 2013, and in an ISEM 101 faculty workshop (27 March 2013) and upon first application by the Faculty Assessment Team (28 October 2013) of this tool for an ISEM 101 assessment. Subsequent modifications to the Rubrics are anticipated, upon application of various assessment measures.

Within the entire General Education curriculum, three pivotal, diagnostic components will be more fully assessed: **ISEM 101 Integrated Seminars, ISEM 301 Great Issues Seminars, and the Senior Experience.** As these three components are being phased in the General Education curriculum over a period of five years, the first assessment initiative will entail a piloted assessment of the ISEM 101s during Fall and Spring Semesters 2013-14. The second phase of General Education assessment will begin with the addition of the ISEM 301 Great Issues

Seminars in the Fall and Spring Semesters of 2014-15. And the third and final phase of the General Education assessment strategy will occur with the addition of the Senior Experiences in the Fall and Spring Semesters of 2015-16.

It is acknowledged and anticipated that enrollment in ISEM 301 seminars and the Senior Experiences will be necessarily made up of UI General Education students, along with students having completed or seeking completing of the SBOE Transfer Core. This latter population enrolled in ISEM 301 as an elective, and in the Senior Experience as a requirement of their major. As a result, we will have an opportunity to measure any differential learning outcome competencies between these two populations.

This assessment strategy will seek to develop a sustainable, adaptable, and authentic assessment strategy, fine-tuning direct and indirect measures, scoring procedures and norming the rubrics, analysis techniques, write-up procedures, and dissemination avenues that ultimately result in curriculum actions and adjustments. Results from the **piloted** Fall and Spring Semester 2013-14 assessments will be used to improve the content and pedagogy of subsequent ISEM 101 seminars, as well as assessment strategies and activities for future General Education applications.

The members of ISEM 101 faculty met in an assessment strategy workshop during Spring Semester 2013 (27 March 2013). They reviewed and commented on the strategy, as well as the measurement tools, the norming and scoring procedures for use of the Learning Matters – Measurement Rubrics. The workshop culminated with an exercise in norming and scoring of an artifact.

The General Education assessment strategy will entail a combination of four assessment tools, including: 1. assessment artifacts, 2. focus groups, 3. syllabi review, and 4. senior and alumni surveys.

As the ISEM 101 Integrated Seminar is a baseline first-year student experience, as well as a foundational gateway experience for the entire General Education, the ISEM 101 assessment strategy will entail two critical **assessment artifacts** (direct measures), along with student and faculty focus groups and syllabi review (indirect and face-to-face measures). A **15% random sample size** will be drawn from the enrolled populations, e.g., of a 900 ISEM 101 student population, 135 students will be randomly drawn for assessment artifact purposes. A 15% random sample size will be used in sampling the ISEM 301 and Senior Experience populations. Scoring of the first and second assessment artifacts will be based upon the Learning Matters –

Measurement Rubrics. The evaluation of the additional library literacy component in both the first and second artifacts will be based upon an adapted rubric developed by the Library staff involved with the AiA initiative.

The first ISEM 101 assessment artifact will be based upon the university's Common Read, a beginning-of-the-semester assessment. All first-year students are asked to read the Common Read prior to arrival to campus. Then during the first two weeks of their ISEM 101 seminar (be it Fall or Spring Semesters), instructors will set aside one session for a discussion of the book, linking the title's themes with the ISEM Learning Outcomes. Discussion questions are designed to stimulate an engaged academic exchange, while also being linked to the ISEM Learning Outcomes. Immediately following the seminar discussion students will then be asked to write a 1,100 to 1,250 word essay, the topic of which will focus on the Common Read themes and the ISEM 101 Learning Outcomes, with students asked to reference the sources used in constructing the essay. An assessment of library literacy competencies will also be assessed. We currently do not have a viable direct measure of entering-level first-year student Learning Outcomes competencies. This assessment will serve as a critical baseline to evaluate subsequent changes in student Learning Outcomes competencies in ISEM 301 and the Senior Experience.

The second ISEM 101 assessment artifact will entail an end-of-the-semester project and include a Library Literacy assessment. The University of Idaho was chosen by the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) to participate in their new "Assessment in Action: Academic Libraries and Student Success" program. Focusing on evaluating first-year student use of the library and library literacy, this second assessment artifact will integrate the ACRL assessment needs with an end-of-the-semester ISEM 101 assessment. The students will be asked to write a 1,250 to 1,500 word research essay with an annotated bibliography of three sources, the topic of which will be drawn from a theme of their particular ISEM 101 section, and linked with ISEM 101 Learning Outcomes, and requiring library research to complete. This AiA Academic Libraries and Student Success initiative is under the direction of Diane Prorak, reference librarian.

As **focus group assessment** (an indirect, face-to-face measure) is also sought for the ISEM 101 assessment, a small sample of students (two sets of 6-8 students) and faculty (one set of 6-8 faculty) will be selected for this purpose. These focus groups will be run and recorded by staff from the CLASS Dean's office.

The third type of assessment tool will be a **review of course syllabi** (indirect measure), reviewing learning activities integration with learning outcomes, as well as with humanities and social science, library literacy and over-all pedagogy. As reviewed and approved by UCGE, all General Education proposed courses are to address the specific disciplinary criteria relevant to proposed course, along with including the University Learning Outcomes and Learning Activities that align with those Learning Outcomes. Evaluation of syllabi, collected randomly from throughout the entire General Education Curriculum, will help assure that students understand and engage in an integrated curriculum. Course syllabi from all components of General Education should include the University of Idaho Learning Outcomes and should identify that the course is part of the General Education curriculum (in addition to any requirement within a major). The assessment will be conducted by the Director of General Education.

The final assessment tool will be the **senior survey and the alumni survey** (indirect measure), administered through the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment. The surveys include sets of questions that access and score the five General Education Learning Outcomes. The assessment will be administered by the Assistant Director of Institutional Research and Assessment, and the results correlated with and included in the over-all General Education Assessment data and reports.

Benchmarks: With assessment points of ISEM 101, ISEM 301 and Senior Experience, and using the Learning Matters-Measurement Rubrics, it is anticipated that assessment artifacts will score the following: for first-year students a mean score ranging between 0 (not meeting Benchmark 1) and Milestone 2; for sophomore-junior students a mean score ranging between Milestone 2 and 3; for senior students a mean score ranging between Milestone 3 and Capstone 4. These anticipated results will be adjusted as piloted assessment data is compiled. The Learning Matters Measurement Rubrics will also be applied to measuring focus group responses.

Faculty Team Formation: With a sample size 15%, if the ISEM 101s have an enrollment of 900 students (Fall semester 2014), a random sample 135 students will be conducted, acquiring 135 assessment artifacts (or four sections of 34 students). To effectively score assessment artifacts, a faculty team will be required. For Fall Semester ISEM 101s, eight faculty volunteers will be asked to norm and score the 1st artifact. After norming two of the artifacts together as a team, the 135 artifacts will be divided among the eight faculty members, with each member assigned to score a total of 17-18 (3-4 page) artifacts. Scheduling a time convenient for all team members, scoring sessions will be held in three hour blocks, with the team members scoring the artifacts together, applying only two learning outcomes metrics at a time in order to provide focus and consistency. When all five Learning Outcomes have been evaluated in all

artifacts, the eight members will record and collate the total scores (and address any unique or challenging artifacts). This activity will be completed during the first half of Fall Semester. For Spring Semester, this same team will refresh the norming procedure and then score the 1st set of artifacts derived from Spring Semester ISEM 101s.

During Spring Semester a second team of 8 faculty volunteers will be assembled. This team will norm and score the 2nd artifact collected during the ISEM 101s from Fall Semester, but will do the norming and scoring during the first half of Spring Semester.

This proposal for a pilot assessment of the ISEM 101 Integrated Seminars seeks to obtain 16 faculty to create two assessment teams (eight faculty for Fall – Spring, eight more faculty added for Spring), with each team member norming and scoring 17-18 short essays during their team sessions each semester.

If successful, and given any modifications to the pilot initiative, two more eight-member teams will be formed to norm and score the ISEM 301 assessment artifacts and the Senior Experience assessment artifacts. This will create a total of four eight-member norming and scoring assessment teams by Fall Semester 2015.

Provost Appointment: The necessary faculty members will be recruited as “volunteers,” officially appointed through the Provost’s Office. The Director of General Education and the Assistant Director of Institutional Research and Assessment will solicit volunteers, and a request for volunteers will also be extended to the eight Associate Deans sponsoring the General Education curriculum (with either they themselves or one of the faculty from their respective colleges volunteering). A letter of appointment from the Provost will be sent to each team member.

Function and Duties: Using the VALUE Rubrics to assess and evaluate, the faculty of each eight-member team will be solely responsible for the scoring/norming/initial analysis of the assessment artifacts from ISEM 101s, ISEM 301s and the Senior Experience. They will not be required to perform any other duties or assume any other responsibilities, though their volunteered expertise and time will be welcomed for any aspect of the assessment.

The Director of General Education and Assistant Director of Institutional Research and Assessment will be responsible for initiating and developing, and based upon assessment results, modifying the actual assessment strategy. These two individuals will also be responsible for analyzing and interpreting scored assessment artifacts, focus group results,

surveys, syllabi reviews and other measurements, as well as making recommendations on General Education curricular changes, and disseminating this information in a timely fashion.

Summary of Assessment Team Growth:

Fall 2013 – one team of 8 members in place (1 team – ISEM 101), for a total of 8 members

Spring 2014 – two teams of 8 members each in place (2 teams – ISEM 101), for total of 16 members

Fall 2014 – three teams of 8 members each in place (2 teams – ISEM 101; 1 team – ISEM 301), for total of 24 members

Fall 2015 – four teams of 8 members each in place (2 teams – ISEM 101; 1 team – ISEM 301; 1 team – Senior Experience), for a total of 32 members

For additional information and updates:

<http://www.uidaho.edu/class/general-education/faculty-advisor-information/assessment>

Update Modifications (6 June 2014):

After consideration of the lack of a random sample from ISEM 101 sections (Fall '13), given the time commitments of staff and lack of quality response from student participants, the Focus Groups for ISEM 101 have been discontinued.

Given the difficulty in developing an assessment artifact that measures all five learning outcomes, that was comparable with *Tomatoland*, the Common Read, *Stealing Buddha's Dinner*, was not made into an assessment artifact. No direct measure will be made of the 2014-15 ISEM 101 students. The efforts of the General Education Assessment Committee will focus only on the ISEM 301 assessment artifacts, for both fall and spring semesters. It is being deliberated that in the future, the ISEM 101 and ISEM 301 assessments will be alternated each year.