

Statement from the GEAR committee

Presented by committee chair Elisabeth Harrington at convocation on August 19, 2013

When the GEAR committee formed in August of 2012 we had one simple task: *Assessment*. Our mission was to create an easy system for assessing student learning outcomes in General Education courses that would provide useful information about student learning.

Slide #1: Who We Are and Who we will become

GEAR

General Education & All-University Requirements

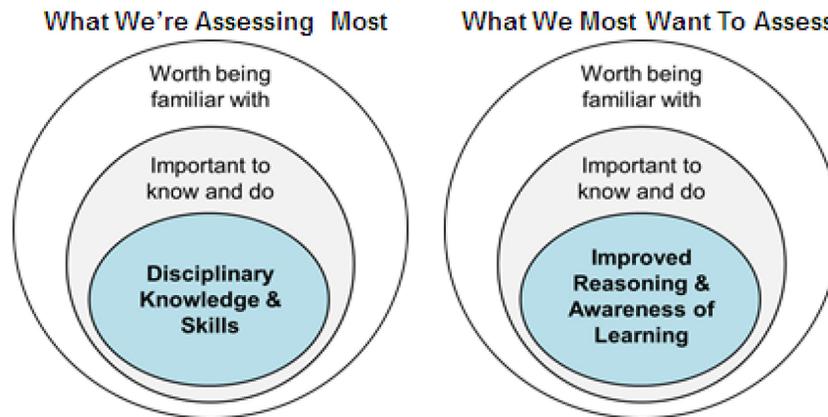
Who are we?

Faculty members from History,
Communication, Art, Music,
Mathematics, Physics & Education,
and the Director of Educational
Effectiveness

The slide above indicates our current GEAR committee membership. But, if you are a staff member or student in the audience, please don't think that you are excluded from the conversation about GE. Over the coming months we will be seeking input from co-curricular offices on campus, such as Diversity and Inclusion and the Learning Center. We will also be inviting student representatives to join the committee. The General Education curriculum will serve all of our undergraduate students, therefore we need input from everyone on campus to ensure its success

Slide #2: Assessment and Backward design

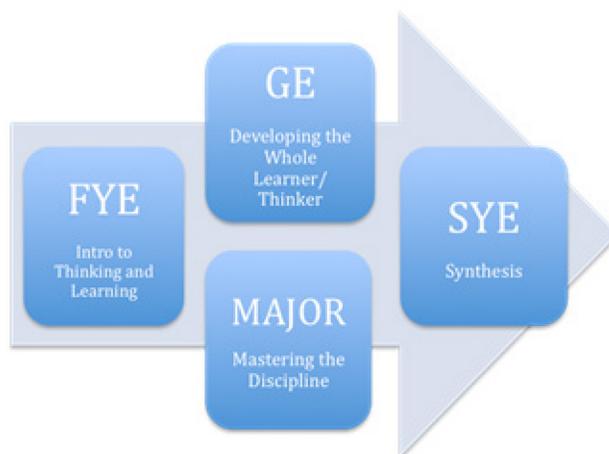
What we learned from our workshops with faculty last year:



In order to design an appropriate system of assessment, we first needed to determine what we wanted to assess. With more than 30 current learning outcomes for General Education the task seemed monumental at first. Our director of Educational Effectiveness, Ed Nuhfer, introduced a new word to us that helped us focus our attention on the bigger picture first. The word was *Metadisciplines*. We spent time learning about the *frameworks of reasoning* or *ways of knowing* associated with each metadiscipline. For example, what do all courses in the Arts have in common? What is the “Artist’s way of knowing,” and, in turn, what would the most important learning outcomes be? We discussed this in conjunction with the General Education areas A-E outlined in our CSU executive orders (1033 in 2008, replaced by 1065 in 2011), while simultaneously asking the bigger question: *What do we want every HSU graduate to be able to do when they leave here?* We asked our colleagues this same question at informal GEAR workshops last year. Through this approach of *backward design*, we discovered that faculty agree almost unanimously that the abilities most important for student success are *higher level reasoning* and their own *awareness of the learning process*.

Slide #3: Integrated Model and Your Input

GENERAL EDUCATION-An Integrated Model



At the same time we were studying *metadisciplinarity*, and how this approach could help us streamline the assessment process, we began to realize that some changes in the way General Education was delivered to students might be necessary in order to ensure that they were improving their reasoning skills and becoming reflective learners. In fact, a resolution was passed by the University Senate this spring calling for a task force to reform General Education at HSU. We answered that call, and began looking at options for constructive change.

Meanwhile, we had already been designing a visual model of our ideal Liberal Arts education curriculum with General Education as an integral part. You'll notice the model also includes a high-impact First Year Experience (Freshman year experience) and Senior Experience (Capstone) where synthesis of undergraduate learning occurs. We are very excited about both of these aspects, and will be exploring them in the coming months with input from all of you.

This model is also the idea we took with us to the 2013 Institute on General Education and Assessment hosted by the American Association of Colleges and Universities (or AAC&U) and held at the University of Vermont this past June. Together with teams from 40 other colleges and universities, we spent five days participating in workshops, consulting with AAC&U faculty mentors, and engaging in conversations about best practices for General Education and General Education Assessment. Our experiences at the Institute confirmed our faith in this integrated model and raised exciting possibilities for how General Education could contribute to student success at HSU.

Slide #4: Possibilities for Student Success

How could an integrated General Education model contribute to student success?

- Graduation and retention
 - High unit majors
 - Assessment simplified and more meaningful
 - New possibilities for interdisciplinary teaching and learning
 - Increased awareness among students, faculty and staff of our common goals
 - Support for the HSU mission to foster lifelong learning
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- We are all aware that our graduation and retention rates are not what we would like them to be.
 - Students in high unit majors often have difficulty meeting the requirements of General Education and graduating in a timely manner.
 - We are all tired of assessment, and we are craving an easier way to assess that will truly help our teaching and students' learning.
 - Several of us on the committee are also very excited about the possibilities an integrated general education and assessment model might present for interdisciplinary teaching.

An integrated model can help address all of these points, while helping to strengthen our connection to each other within our extended community of learners and supporting the HSU vision and mission.

Slide #5: Involvement and Your Input

How can you become involved?

- Participate in the GEAR listening tour this fall
- Attend GEAR workshops
- Visit the website and submit feedback
- Engage in conversations with faculty, staff and students about General Education

In these few moments, I have shared with you our overall vision for integrating General Education more cohesively into the undergraduate curriculum at HSU. We shared our detailed plan with President Richmond, Provost Snyder and Vice Provost Burges after returning from Vermont this summer. We will present our plan to the Integrated Curriculum Committee and the University Senate during the first weeks of the semester, and look forward to sharing it with all of you very soon.

In the meantime, we need your help and input! This fall we will engage in a listening tour, during which we will visit individual departments and ask you to share your thoughts about General Education.

We will continue to offer GEAR workshops to discuss our vision with you and to share with you some of the tools for assessment we have been exploring this past year. On the Green sheet you will find an example of one such tool in the form of a Critical Thinking Rubric that was adapted by a member of our committee to fit multiple courses within the History major. We are in the process of updating the GEAR webpage to include links to all of the AAC&U VALUE rubrics, as well as information about our upcoming workshops and short and long-term vision for reform. You will also find a link there to submit your feedback. We promise to read it!

We encourage you to continue to have conversations about General Education. *What is most important to each of you?* Talk about it with your co-workers, and especially with your students. Reforming our General Education curriculum and designing a sustainable assessment system is a fluid process—one that must develop and embrace positive change if it is to meet the needs of our students in a rapidly changing world. The task is too important to rush through just so we can check a box saying we have an assessment system in place.

General Education is the common denominator in an undergraduate Liberal Arts education. Designing a system that promotes student success and reflects our uniqueness as a university requires time, patience and input from all of us.

You'll be hearing from us. Please respond! *Thank you.*