

Feedback EIU General Education Action Plan (HLC consultant Jan Smith, received 11/17/22)

Thank you for posting two very helpful documents. Great job. Before I reviewed these in depth, I reread your introduction to remind myself of your goals for the workshop. Normally, I would start with a friendly reminder to reconsider your goals as your action plan is quite different from what you originally hoped to achieve. However, as much as we stressed the need to work with the program you have rather than the program you wish you had, as you point out in your summary, having 54 gen ed outcomes and 30 institutional outcomes really puts you in a challenging position to be able to communicate a cohesive general education program and effectively assess this program in a meaningful way. Given your reality, then I think you identify some very appropriate strategies. Great takeaways from the workshop!

Some particular strengths I note in your documents include the following:

- Emphasis on student learning. This is especially commendable given your comment about approaching your next cycle of HLC affirmation. It would be very easy to put focus on compliance, but your work will be much more meaningful and have greater potential for impact when framed around student learning.
- Engagement of students and faculty from the very beginning is a major strength. Your approach of holding focus groups rather than having a small group work on this without campus input is very much on target in order to promote engagement rather than simply dissemination of information.
- Being intentional in efforts to help students (and faculty) understand the value of general education is a great idea as students often have difficulty connecting the dots for themselves.
- Starting with an understanding of the structure and role of general education will not only make assessment efforts easier, but it will help shift focus from compliance to commitment to student learning.
- Recognition of need to reduce and refine the current general education and institutional outcomes will provide a much stronger foundation for assessment.
- Focus on performance indicators has the potential to yield much more helpful information to understand and improve student learning.
- Recognizing current challenges will also go a long way to both informing future assessment processes as well as acknowledging to faculty that you have heard their concerns and are serious about making things less burdensome and more meaningful.
- I really appreciate your attention to infrastructure to support assessment, looking at the role of the general education committee, etc.
- Using beta testing is a very smart approach before you take things large scale.

Your current plan is ambitious and broad in scope, but has the potential to significantly improve assessment of student learning. Here are some questions/things to consider:

- I don't recall how long it is since you last revisited general education/institutional outcomes. If this work is fairly recent, then I strongly encourage you to use the current outcomes as much as possible as foundational to your work going forward.

- Is it helpful to have separate general educational and institutional outcomes? If this works for you, then I certainly encourage you to continue. Otherwise, is there an opportunity to make things more manageable by combining these two areas? If you do opt to combine, don't forget to include co-curricular staff in your early discussions.
- As you think about reducing the number of outcomes, how can you honor previous work? Would the intent of some of the current outcomes work to form the basis of performance indicators and/or could some be dropped down to course level outcomes?
- As I mentioned, your plan is ambitious, albeit on target. Don't be afraid to adjust your timeline as things may take longer than expected. I still think it is important to have a timeline in order to keep things moving forward. But you may want to build in a little more detail and extend the timeline up front.
- Don't forget to build in professional development into your timeline. Faculty and staff will be much more likely to engage in the process if you provide training to ensure they have the tools to be successful.
- Also, build in formal opportunities for discussion of student learning to ensure use of data vs. collection of data.
- As you build out your assessment methods and measures, keep the end goal in mind. How will you use data to understand and improve student learning? This will assist in making sure you are collecting data that will be helpful.
- An undertaking of this scope will require clear leadership responsibilities and support from upper administration. You have a great team, in terms of balance of faculty and administrators. What additional support do you need from senior administration?

I hope you find this feedback to be helpful. Again, you have some great takeaways from the workshop and it is clear you are applying many key concepts covered in the workshop. I wish you all the best with your assessment efforts.