

Learning Goals Committee Recommendations to Council on Academic Affairs

Background

In response to longstanding concerns about student learning outcome data relative to the university's learning goals, and in concert with the Provost's 2010-2011 priorities for improvement, the Council approved Proposal 11-116R on November 10, 2011, establishing a Council on Academic Affairs University Learning Goals Committee for the purpose of gathering information and data in order to review integration, instructional practices, and the effectiveness of EIU's undergraduate university learning goals. The Committee has been comprised of Council members as well as CASL members, college curriculum committee members, and other campus faculty with expertise or interest in the university's undergraduate learning goals. A time frame of November 2011 through April 2013 was established for achieving the Committee's purpose.

Since its establishment, the Committee and its four subcommittees (Writing, Speaking, Critical Thinking, and Global Citizenship) have:

1. Reviewed learning goal assessment data provided by the Committee for the Assessment of Student Learning;
2. Surveyed the relevant research and practitioner literature;
3. Examined practices of peer and non-peer institutions;
4. Conducted a university-wide faculty survey;
5. Reviewed representative general education and major program syllabi;
6. Studied other relevant data, e.g., from the National Survey of Student Engagement and the Collegiate Learning Assessment within the Voluntary System of Accountability;
7. Presented preliminary findings and sought feedback from seventeen campus councils and committees, including: the Faculty Senate; the Council of Deans; the administrative councils and curriculum committees of the four academic colleges; the Honors Council, the Continuing Education Advisory Council; the Academic Advising Committee; the Council for the Assessment of Student Learning; the Faculty Development Advisory Council; the Council on Graduate Studies, and the Council on Teacher Education.

The information and data gathered in this work have been recorded in the *Council on Academic Affairs Learning Goals Review Report*, as well as supporting documents with detailed results of the faculty survey, the syllabus review, and data from the Committee for the Assessment of Student Learning.

The Committee's time frame stipulated that it present finalized recommendations to the Council on Academic Affairs for adoption by April 2013, with implementation of recommendations to commence in the Fall 2013 semester. As the work of the Committee has progressed, it has become evident that the possible causes of disappointing student achievement in the university's learning goals are both complex and systemic, and that solutions to improve student learning outcomes will need to include curricular, instructional, assessment, faculty development, and administrative facets. Such work will require a great deal of thought, effort, cooperation, and good will from faculty, administration, and staff.

The recommendations described below were developed for the primary purpose of increasing students' communication and critical thinking skills to function in a diverse global society. The recommendations are consistent with:

1. EIU's mission statement, which asserts that the university "offers superior, accessible undergraduate...education. Students learn the methods and results of free and rigorous inquiry in the arts, humanities, sciences, and professions, guided by a faculty known for its excellence in teaching....Throughout their education, students refine their abilities to reason and to communicate clearly so as to become responsible citizens and leaders."
2. The university's recently completed strategic plan in which increasing critical thinking skills and academic rigor were themes within academic excellence.
3. The NCA Higher Learning Commission's accreditation criteria (effective January 2013), which EIU must meet, including that:
 - a. the general education imparts broad knowledge and intellectual concepts to students and develops skills and attitudes that the institution believes every college-educated person should possess;
 - b. every degree program offered by the institution engages students in collecting, analyzing, and communicating information; mastering modes of inquiry or creative work; and in developing skills adaptable to changing environments;
 - c. education offered by the institution recognizes the human and cultural diversity of the world;
 - d. the institution maintains and exercises authority over the prerequisites for courses, rigor of courses, and expectations for student learning;
 - e. the institution demonstrates a commitment to educational improvement through ongoing assessment of student learning; and
 - f. assumed practices of the HLC include that faculty participate substantially in the assurance of consistency in the level and quality of instruction and in the expectations of student performance; also that instructors communicate course requirements through syllabi.

Resolution

WHEREAS, the Council on Academic Affairs has the responsibility and authority for making recommendations to the President relative to academic regulations (Article II) and general education requirements for all undergraduate degrees (Article VII.A.2.a.2); and

WHEREAS, the Council is also concerned with the maintenance of desirable standards in the university's curriculum (Article VII.A.1.c.3); and

WHEREAS, the Council's bylaws specify that the Council may have standing committees, subcommittees, ad hoc committees, and any other committees deemed necessary by the Council (Article VI);

THEREFORE, the Committee proposes to the Council that it adopt the following recommendations and forward them to the President:

1. That the Council on Academic Affairs, in accordance with Article VI of its bylaws, establish a standing Committee on General Education and University Learning Goals, the composition of which will be determined by the Council to ensure participation by all CAA members, as well as representatives from campus curricular councils, faculty learning goal experts, general education instructors, other units (e.g., CASL, Faculty Development, etc.), and undergraduate students. The specific tasks to be accomplished as listed below are to be conducted under the aegis and with the final approval of the Council.
2. That this committee be charged initially with the implementation of the following plan, which is focused on improving student learning outcomes at the university through systemic increase in academic rigor and improvement of curricular, instructional, and assessment practices in both the general education and major programs.

A. Year One (2013-14)—Reinvigorating the University’s Learning Goals

1. Fall 2013

- a. Finalize and adopt, after circulation to the university’s curricular bodies, proposed changes and/or additions to the undergraduate learning goals.
- b. Revise CAA Course Proposal Form to support systematic inclusion of the university learning goals in all new and revised undergraduate courses.
- c. Examine higher education syllabus best practices; then review and revise the existing CAA syllabus policy.
- d. Study and possibly revise university program review process and format to emphasize the importance of curricular, instructional, and assessment practices supportive of higher student achievement of the learning goals.
- e. Develop resources supportive of a Spring 2014 series of workshops on:
 - 1) Academic rigor
 - 2) Writing and reading
 - 3) Speaking and listening
 - 4) Critical thinking
 - 5) Global citizenship
 - 6) Quantitative literacy
 - 7) University learning goals in the majors

2. Spring 2014

- a. Present workshop series listed above; sharing resources with faculty through website and physical distribution
- b. Study general education approaches to facilitate systematic support of learning goal achievement, including the freshman year experience; curricular revision of key, foundational general education courses; and more systematic inclusion of learning goals throughout general education segments

B. Year Two (2014-15)—Aligning the General Education Curriculum

1. Fall 2014
 - a. Revise curriculum of key, foundational general education courses to ensure introductory competence in learning goals during freshman year.
 - b. Develop common, consistent expectations for course rigor and student achievement of learning goals within segments of general education program.
 - c. Partner with CASL to develop plan for assessment within general education courses.
2. Spring 2015
 - a. Present workshops on revision of general education courses and expectations for general education segments.
 - b. Study models for discipline-based capstone and assessment practices supportive of learning goals.
 - c. Study current adoption of learning goals within majors and discipline-based capstone and assessment practices at EIU.
 - d. Develop framework for more systematic extension of learning goals into upper division courses and program assessment practices within major programs.

C. Year Three (2015-16)—Extending the Learning Goals into the Majors

1. Fall 2015 and Spring 2016
 - a. Implementation of general education changes developed in Year Two.
 - b. Design continuous General Education review system.
 - c. Work with departments to implement framework for extension of learning goals within major programs.

D. Year Four (2016-17)—Institutionalizing Learning Goal Improvement

1. Fall 2016 and Spring 2017
 - a. Implement department plans for extending learning goals in major programs.
 - b. Implement monitoring, assessment, and refinement of general education practices.
2. Spring 2017
 - a. Plan for five-year (Fall 2017) follow-up study (faculty survey, syllabi review, NSSE, VSA, etc.).

E. Year Five (2017-18)—Assessing Impact

1. Replicate CAA Learning Goals study of 2012-13.

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On Behalf of the CAA Learning Goals Committee - April 15, 2013