



NORTHWEST
NAZARENE UNIVERSITY

**2016 Recommendation 3
Ad Hoc Report**

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Institutional Overview

NNU received five recommendations following our Year Seven Evaluation in 2016. As requested by the NWCCU, the University responded to recommendations 1, 2, 4, and 5 in an Ad Hoc Report submitted as a part of our Year One Self-Evaluation in 2017. These four recommendations have been fulfilled. The NCCCU requested that the University respond to recommendation 3 as a part of our Mid-Cycle Review. This Ad Hoc Report provides an update on progress the institution has made over the past three years to address recommendation 3.

Recommendation 3

The Evaluation Committee recommends that the institution implement the newly developed General Education assessment plan in order to assess student learning outcomes for those programs and utilize said assessment for continuous improvement (Standard 2.C.10).

Introduction

Since receiving this recommendation in 2016, the General Education (GE) Council has spent significant effort working on the revision and assessment of the GE program. The primary role of the GE Council has been to finalize and implement the assessment plan, and then continue the work of ensuring that the outcomes are assessable at the program level, as well as within individual courses in the program. All of this work has required continual training, updating of our communication and reporting methods, as well as some recalibration of our expectations for what we want in terms of the assessment process.

GE Assessment Plan

The [initial assessment plan](#) developed by the GE Council offered a way forward for assessing individual assignments in existing GE courses. However, the GE Council quickly realized the need for a better plan with clearer goals and a higher degree of accountability. As a result, based on the collective feedback of members of the GE Council, faculty, and administration, the GE Council developed a new [assessment plan](#) that included an assessment matrix with a schedule of when each GE outcome would be assessed. To initially implement the matrix and ensure that all GE outcomes were reviewed in a timely manner, each of the GE outcomes were scheduled to be reviewed during either the 2018-19 or 2019-20 years. Following these reviews, each outcome will be reviewed within a three-year cycle, with accountability structures and feedback loops built into the plan.

Implementation of GE Assessment Plan and Outcomes

Initial Implementation: The Need for Good Processes and Training

To implement the plan, the GE Council strategically began working on assessment at the instructor level. The assessment process had been accomplished in the past by having instructors complete a written form and submit it to the GE Council. This resulted in a few reports being submitted, but not to the extent that the GE Council had hoped would happen.

In order to successfully implement the assessment plan, the GE Council realized they would need to provide a more accessible way for instructors to complete and submit their course assessments. In response, the GE Council began by working with our instructional design and technology department to utilize Canvas, our learning management system, to facilitate this process. In addition, the GE Council created an [online form](#) that instructors could complete and submit each semester so there would be a record of their assessment work.

Alongside developing a user-friendly approach for submitting assessments, the GE Council also made it a priority to train individuals on the value, as well as the necessary road map, for completing the ongoing

assessments. This training was provided through on-site professional development work days, as well as [video training](#) offered via Canvas and email applications. Initial training revealed a significant amount of misunderstanding, confusion, and frustration regarding the entire process. As a result, the GE Council decided that more hands-on work would be required to help implement the assessment plan. Therefore, members of the GE Council were assigned to work with specific departments to facilitate completion of assessment requirements. Having these individuals come alongside departments to assist with the assessment activities has been well-received and created positive results.

Faculty engagement with assessment, both at the course and university level, continues to be enhanced by additional dedicated times for working on assessment. Time is allocated during our faculty workshops each fall to introduce new GE instructors to the assessment process (and provide a refresher for experienced GE instructors) and to confirm that the University outcomes and assessments are embedded in their upcoming courses. The value of the GE assessment process is emphasized and technical questions are addressed. To ensure that GE instructors were adequately equipped to complete their assessment forms for spring 2019 courses, we allocated time during the afternoon session of our spring 2019 faculty assessment day for GE Council members to work with GE instructors to help them complete and submit their assessment forms for spring semester GE courses. Guiding GE instructors through the process of submitting their assessment forms this past year has laid the groundwork for what we believe will create a successful pattern for the future now that they have a better understanding of the expectations and process.

Learning from Assessments

Early in the process, one of the first issues that the GE Council became aware of was that not every current instructor in the GE program was clear on which GE outcome was assigned to their course. As a result, the GE Council designed a cross-listing of all [GE courses with GE outcomes](#) that included all the pertinent information and this was shared with instructors. The GE Council also created a "[course](#)" [within Canvas](#) that introduced faculty to the GE program and some of the basic information about teaching in the program.

Following these initial steps, the GE Council began working with faculty to ensure that the GE outcomes were included in their syllabi and other course documents. The initial stage was to require that each professor teaching in the GE program had the correct GE outcome(s) listed in their syllabus. The results of this work have been positive, with more instructors clearly including the GE outcome in their syllabi. To take this one step further, the GE Council worked with different departments to create [syllabus guidelines](#) for GE courses that could be utilized by instructors and departments. The ultimate goal is for instructors to use a GE program syllabus template for all GE courses so that the GE outcomes are presented in a clear and consistent manner, making them easier for students to understand.

Implementation of the assessment plan required that instructors in the various sectors of the GE program submit reports about individual courses to the GE Council. Initially, these reports only provided basic information about the course and how many students performed at certain levels on the outcome assessment. These types of reports were not particularly helpful in achieving the type of growth the GE Council desired. However, as the GE Council continued to work with various departments and methods were revised, the reports began to provide more useful information and reflect increased student learning as measured by the outcomes.

After several cycles of implementation, the English department and science departments proposed changes to the initial GE outcomes/rubrics. These departments felt that the GE outcomes and rubrics as written were not manageable and did not accurately assess the type of learning they were aiming for. The English department, after assessing their [ENGL1030 courses](#) and their [3000-level writing courses](#), decided that it would be helpful to make some changes to the [IP2 and HU1 outcomes rubric](#). This

revision has provided better assessment of the student mastery of the outcomes. The science departments believed that S1, which stated, “*Students will be able to comprehend and to apply the basic principles of science and methods of scientific inquiry,*” should be changed to two outcomes. The reasoning for this was derived from [early reports](#) from the assessment work of the S1 outcome. The new [S1](#) now assesses student mastery of scientific theory and practice within the science guild, while the new [S2](#) assesses student mastery in the laboratory experience. The initial results of this move have been promising with faculty better able to assess student mastery of both outcomes.

The GE Council also realized that courses for the first-year program, Cornerstone, and final-year program, Capstone, were not being assessed well or in coordination with each other. Review of the Cornerstone and Capstone courses after fall 2018 revealed that the Cornerstone course was not sufficiently focused on the University values. In response, the Cornerstone and Capstone instructors created a [proposal](#) to have a single outcome for both courses that would be assessed during the first and last years of the students’ NNU experience, which was approved by the GE Council. This led to an updated course description for Cornerstone and is expected to lend coherence to the GE program. Instructors who teach Cornerstone courses gather at the end of each semester to complete the assessment process and discuss student feedback as a means to improve the next iteration of the course. As a result of this feedback, significant changes have been made to the structure of the Cornerstone courses over the past two years, with the latest iterations focusing more clearly on the theme of service and university mission. In addition, a Capstone director position was created to provide oversight for assessing the GE outcome met through the Capstone courses and ensure better inter-rater reliability among the faculty members scoring student papers for each of the courses. This effort resulted in producing new outcomes for the [Capstone rubric](#). The Capstone courses have now come more fully in line with the mission of the GE program and have better oversight from the director, who facilitates the [assessment process](#) for those courses.

Another significant change that came about as a result of the GE assessment process relates to our Survey of Art and Music course (ARDE1010/MUSC1010) that fulfilled a humanities requirement. The course was jointly taught for half the semester by a faculty member from the music department and the other half of the semester by a faculty member from the art and design department. The challenges with the course were initially brought to the GE Council by faculty who taught the course and felt students were struggling to meet the GE outcome for the course, [HU1](#), which states, “*Students will understand and appreciate visual, musical, and literary art based on the historical, political, and socio-cultural contexts in which they emerged.*” Logistical issues of having the course split in two also contributed to the course’s ineffectiveness in meeting the GE outcome. As is the case with the possibility of changing any long-standing course, there was a significant desire to make sure a change was not made too quickly. The revision process took into account [the end of semester evaluations](#) of the course, as well as interviews and [rationale statements](#) from the faculty members impacted by the change. Ultimately, the GE Council approved the recommendation to split the course into two separate courses that would be offered to students as options to fulfill part of their HU1 requirements. [Initial feedback](#) from the change have been positive, as students have shown some improvement in their ability to meet the HU1 outcome and students have expressed higher satisfaction related to the two courses.

The assessment process has also helped the institution evaluate and develop courses in other sectors of the GE program. The communication studies department, as well as the philosophy and religion department, have had relatively robust assessment processes in the past and have paved the way for others with their work. The communication studies department is a model for other departments to follow, both in their assessment of individual courses and as a group working on inter-rater reliability. The Intro to Public Speaking course (COMM1210) has multiple sections and the faculty representative to the department from the GE Council has done an excellent job of continually helping ensure that the various instructors are informed about how the course fits within the GE program and how they are to assess the GE outcome

in their individual course. The [most recent assessments](#) show that even though this is an established course, they are still working to improve student learning. The philosophy and religion department, which has outside accreditation through its graduate program, has also done an excellent job of continual assessment and revision of its courses in the GE program. Of particular significance is the Introduction to Biblical Studies course (BIBL1100), which has revised its multi-section assessment tool, the Bible Content Exam, to more effectively [assess student learning](#). Originally developed by a former faculty member as a mastery learning tool, the current faculty have adapted the exam to serve as a pre and post course test to examine student proficiency in content matters at both the beginning and end of the course. A further change is planned for fall 2019 when the exam will be broken into smaller chunks and used as pre and post unit tests. These changes were made as a result of [post-semester assessment meetings](#). A faculty member teaching philosophy has also used the assessment tools within Canvas to continually revise his [argumentative paper](#) and improve its alignment with stated outcomes for both his course and the GE program.

Other departments are also conducting assessment work that will benefit their courses. The business department has continued to [evaluate](#) and revise its economics offerings, including proposing the restoration of Analysis of Economic Issues (ECON 1050), a course that has been taught in years past that would help students meet the GE outcome, as well as provide students with a better grasp of economic principles. The history department is continuing its [assessment](#) of offerings with the intent to improve student learning and growth of involvement in their department by non-majors. The kinesiology department also continues to improve its [Fundamentals of Wellness course](#) (KINE1000), and after receiving feedback from student-athletes, [proposed](#) that student-athletes be allowed to count their participation in varsity sports as a means to fulfill the kinesiology activity elective in the GE program. The proposal was adopted in an effort to help student-athletes, especially transfer students, complete this GE requirement and graduate in a timely manner.

Areas of Growth and Opportunity

The implementation of the assessment plan has resulted in considerable growth for the GE program the past few years. While the institution has made important strides toward more effectively fulfilling its mission through the GE program, there are still some important areas that need attention.

Onboarding Faculty to the GE Program/Updating the GE Handbook

One of the areas assessment has shown we need to improve is related to how we onboard faculty who teach GE courses and, specifically, how we keep them informed about changes to the GE program. One thing the GE Council discovered through the assessment process is that very few faculty were aware of the [General Education Handbook](#). Thus, the GE Handbook was made available electronically and published in a web format so it is easily accessible. Additionally, the GE Council is working to develop onboarding training to help equip new and returning faculty who teach in the GE program.

Student Participation and Understanding in Assessment

The GE Council also believes that students should have an understanding of the GE program, and specifically, how each course they take in the program is integrated into a larger picture of NNU's mission to "instill habits of heart, soul, mind, and strength to enable each student to become God's creative and redemptive agent in the world." Much of the assessment process has relied on instructor work through the development and revision of courses and assignments. The GE Council is continuing to explore the possibility of implementing e-portfolios or other methods, such as tracking software, to help students better understand the GE program and track their progress through it.

Academic Restructure

The institution is currently making a transition from a two-college academic structure to a "seven college" system. One of the challenges of the previous structure was having a GE Council that served the

traditional undergraduate programs and a separate GE Council that served the non-traditional adult professional undergraduate programs. Although efforts were made to coordinate the work of these two GE Councils, communication between the two councils was lacking at times, which created inconsistencies in the implementation of the GE assessment plan. In the new academic structure, we anticipate that these two GE Councils will be merged, providing greater efficiency and consistency in the assessment of the GE program throughout GE courses offered to traditional and non-traditional undergraduate students.

Areas in Need of Future GE Assessment Work

Finally, though the GE Council's efforts have improved understanding of and response to the assessment plan, there are two areas still in need of greater assessment work. The Honors College, which has several courses that fulfill GE requirements for participating students, needs clear assessment of its courses. This will require work with a variety of departments, as well as the director of the Honors College. However, this is necessary to ensure that all students participating in this growing endeavor are able to meet the GE requirements and outcomes. The other area is the [CF3](#) outcome addressed in upper division theology and biblical studies courses. The College of Theology and Christian Ministries (CTCM) is in the process of undergoing a significant curriculum overhaul and the faculty agree that the CF3 courses need a more effective way to assess the GE outcome assigned to all those courses.

Summary

Since our Year Seven Evaluation in 2016, the GE Council has taken significant steps to implement the GE assessment plan and improve the GE program. Regular assessment of courses in the GE program is taking place on a consistent basis. The GE Council has set up structures for, and regular reviews, the various sections of the GE program. In the past three years, significant changes have been made at both the course and program level based on regular assessment. These processes and the results they've produced give us hope about the future of our GE program as we continue to consider the best way to fulfill the mission of the University.