Report of the 1804 Task Force convened to consider general education reform at Ohio University

March 15, 2012
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Executive Summary

The 1804 General Education Task Force has completed its charge "to research models, approaches, and best practices to prepare for a university-wide conversation about reforming general education at Ohio University." Over the past eighteen months, the 1804 Task Force reviewed and discussed much of the existing literature and trends concerning general education and liberal education. We are convinced that Ohio University can and must revise its outdated general education program and move it toward a more active, engaging liberal education program that takes advantage of our unique heritage and strengths.

The 1804 Task Force believes a robust and distinctive liberal education program should reflect, as well as shape, the character of Ohio University—enhancing learning outcomes through active application of student knowledge. As the Lumina Foundation (2011) states: “beyond what graduates know, what they can do with what they know is the ultimate benchmark of learning.”

Accordingly, we make the following recommendations:

First, the 1804 Task Force believes that the University should move forward with a revision of its general education program. The current distributive model lacks a coherent, integrated educational philosophy. A new OHIO model of liberal education represents the opportunity to design a curriculum around the explicit goal of providing our students the liberal arts learning outcomes that they need to be successful in their careers and as participating members of society. Such a model might well include deeper learning experiences in addition to breadth, but should in any case incorporate a more systematic set of program learning outcomes and ways of assessing whether or not we are meeting these outcomes.

Second, we recommend that a new task force be constituted to revise the current general education program. In addition, we recommend that the new task force begin by developing, in collaboration with Faculty Senate, an approval process for any new liberal education program. Without a clear path to approval and implementation, a revision cannot succeed.

Third, effective implementation of the new curriculum will require sufficient financial resources both to assist faculty in developing courses consistent with the learning objectives and to support a rigorous assurance of learning system.

Fourth, the set of guiding principles and learning outcomes for a new liberal education program included herein were developed after extensive discussions and review of national best practices as well as a study of the heritage and policies of Ohio University. We strongly recommend their use by the next task force.

Fifth, the 1804 Task Force concluded that a blended model of liberal education would best serve Ohio University to honor these principles and achieve these outcomes. The blended model suggested combines the best features of distributive and core models and adds knowledge application, thus allowing students to benefit from the best elements of each. Our
recommendation is that all students should gain foundational knowledge and skills, cross-disciplinary ways of knowing, doing and being to better understand how people in different disciplines think, and how to appropriately apply knowledge from across disciplines and cultures to address major social issues.

The framework for one version of such a model with the name "The OHIO Way" is included in this report. Although this is only one possible way of configuring the guiding principles and learning outcomes we recommend, it is built on current best practices, the combined disciplinary expertise of the members of the 1804 Task Force and could be implemented through a variety of different course structures.

Introduction

Reform of general education is a significant national issue in higher education. Faculty and administrators, boards of trustees, and employers have been discussing for some time the proposition that the essential knowledge and skills that students learn in their general education courses may be as valuable as what they learn in their major courses. Students currently in our universities can expect to have at least six different careers in their lifetimes. No single major can adequately equip students with the essential knowledge and skills necessary to navigate these diverse career paths, become engaged and informed citizens, and lead rich, fulfilling lives.

Something larger is at stake here, namely that most general education programs do not provide the cross-disciplinary, innovative education that our students need to become leaders in the private and public sectors. Similarly lacking in these programs is a commitment to teach students how to apply the broad, liberal arts knowledge associated with general education to public problems.

Ohio University’s experience with general education parallels the history of general education at similar public institutions. Ohio University’s original educational program required students to complete a core curriculum based on the classical model that included courses in Greek, Latin, mathematics, and rhetoric. With the emergence of disciplines and related majors, Ohio University and similar institutions established general education programs composed of courses that equipped students with a common academic foundation and prepared them for specialized courses in their majors. These early general education programs evolved over decades into various models of general education that include the distributive model currently in place at Ohio University and many other institutions. The distributive model allows students to select their general education courses from a list of approved courses distributed across specific disciplines.

During the last decade, faculty and administrators in higher education, higher education associations, and employers alike have expressed three fundamental concerns about the
quality of general education. The first concern is that the distributive model lacks a coherent educational philosophy, and emphasizes intellectual breadth at the expense of deep learning. Academic leaders such as Bok (2006) trace these problems to the decision by many colleges and universities to convert their general education requirements to the marketplace/cafeteria plan, herein referred to as a distributive model. This model unduly prioritizes schedule above content area, and can also lead to choosing perceived “easy A” courses to maintain or boost GPA.

The second concern involves assurance of learning. Not only should there be an agreed upon set of learning outcomes for each general education course and the program as a whole, but also an institutional commitment to systematic assessment of whether students are indeed achieving those outcomes. We should strive to impart coherence to the general education curriculum by being intentional both about what we want students to learn in their general education courses and about how those courses are sequenced so that what is learned at one level is the foundation for learning at the next level.

The third concern centers on pedagogy and specifically on supporting faculty in being creative and rigorous in teaching general education courses. While this is true in majors courses, this is not necessarily true in general education courses. Engendering deep learning requires active, engaged teaching at all levels, as well as a dedication on the part of faculty to integrate students’ curricular experiences with their co-curricular experiences, thus providing students with opportunities to actively apply what they are learning.

In response to this national call to reform general education, David Thomas and Ben Ogles received an 1804 grant in spring 2010 to support a task force that would survey the scholarly literature on general education, investigate the various models and best practices of general education, and then share what they learned with the campus community to stimulate a conversation about which approach to general education would best fit the needs, culture, and vision of Ohio University.

Perhaps the most difficult task a campus can undertake is the rethinking of its general education or liberal education program. Such a task must be done with care and with significant faculty support. Accordingly, no change in general education at Ohio University is envisioned before 2015 because it is more important to “get this right” than to get it done quickly.

The 1804 Task Force has completed the first stage of the project and is ready to propose a draft of a new liberal education program for Ohio University that includes guiding principles, a blended model, and the key elements of the proposed new program. The guiding principles articulate a philosophical commitment to developing a new liberal education program that embodies the distinctive features of Ohio University and best practices in general and liberal education, embraces an outcome-based approach that facilitates assessment of student learning, and encourages engaged pedagogies that connect the academic experience with the co-curricular experience.

The blended model suggested here incorporates the advantages of both the core model and the distributive model and adds to them a knowledge application component that, taken
together, should form the basis for lifelong learning as well as enhanced preparation for the multiple careers that each of our students are expected to have.

The key elements of the new program, which follow below, are a statement of principles to guide general education, an affirmation of the importance of assurance of learning, and an articulation of the learning outcomes for general education.

**Guiding Principles**

Utilizing best practices gleaned from a thorough review of literature as well as discussions with leaders at other public institutions that have recently begun or instituted a change in general/liberal education, the 1804 Task Force developed the following guiding principles. It is the expectation of the 1804 Task Force that these principles will inform future conversations as Ohio University considers general education reform:

1. The OHIO Way Liberal Education Plan will reflect the distinctive character, strengths, and history of the University as a community of learners.

2. The OHIO Way will encourage engaged learning pedagogies and approaches consistent with national best practices in general education.

3. The OHIO Way will be based on learning outcomes that span students’ curricular and co-curricular experiences and that will be assessed systematically.

4. The OHIO Way will serve as academic foundation for the deep learning expected of OHIO graduates.

5. The OHIO Way requirements will not take up a greater fraction of a student’s degree requirements than they currently do, and total cost to the University will not exceed current general education expenditures.
Assurance of Learning

Ohio University’s intertwined institutional priorities depend upon the academic success and personal development of its students. This involves both curricular and co-curricular learning and the continuous assessment of both.

The 1804 Task Force began with a presentation by Dr. Mike Williford summarizing the results of the year-long General Education Assessment Task Force (Appendix B). This extensive study expanded upon existing quantitative data routinely collected by the Office of Institutional Research with substantial qualitative information gathered from nearly 150 interviews with students. This information, combined with the review of literature and of best practices, helped inform the approaches and models studied and utilized by the 1804 Task Force.

Assessment to ensure student learning is vital for accreditation and to validate the outcome of an Ohio University education. The 2006 Spellings Commission report, “A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future for U.S. Higher Education,” concluded that there is a need for public accountability in student learning in higher education. The report called for sound performance data “if we are to meet national needs and improve institutional performance” (Spellings, 2006). This need is addressed by our third Guiding Principle, which states, “The OHIO Way will be based on learning outcomes that span students’ curricular and co-curricular experiences and that will be assessed systematically.”
Learning Outcomes

The proposed OHIO Way Learning Outcomes were developed using several key sources and processes. The first step was an internal and reflective process in which the 1804 Task Force sought to identify what makes Ohio University unique and to determine key learning outcomes for a revised general/liberal education plan that best fits Ohio University. The General Education Assessment completed in 2009, Vision Ohio, and the Mission Statement of Ohio University were consulted as part of this process, as was the 2002 proposal to revise General Education at Ohio University.

The second step was consultation of respected external sources on general and liberal education. In addition to studying books and articles on general and liberal education and accounts and documents of scores of institutions who have revised general education, 1804 Task Force Chairs participated in the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) national conferences (2011, 2012). In addition to developing a draft of outcomes that best fit Ohio University, The 1804 Task Force reviewed the well-regarded Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP) "Essential Learning Outcomes" developed with hundreds of colleges and universities over the past ten years.

The OHIO Way Learning Outcomes outlined below reflect a merging of LEAP outcomes with those that the 1804 Task Force felt were unique to Ohio University’s mission.

**The OHIO Way Liberal Education Plan: Learning Outcomes:**

Liberal education at Ohio University should prepare students for the complexity and challenge of living and working in the twenty-first century by ensuring that they gain:

- Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Physical and Natural World through:
  - Study in the sciences and mathematics, social sciences, humanities, histories, languages, and the arts
  - Diversity and cultural awareness
  The *focus* is engagement with significant historical and contemporary questions and issues approached from national and global perspectives.

- Intellectual and Practical Skills, including
  - Critical inquiry and analysis
  - Complex problem-solving
  - Creativity and innovation
  - Written and oral communication competencies
  - Quantitative literacy
  - Information literacy
  - Teamwork and problem solving
  - Intellectual curiosity as a foundation for lifelong learning
The focus is intensive and extensive application of the above skills across the curriculum, in the context of progressively more challenging problems, projects and standards for performance; and in co-curricular activities including service learning and learning communities.

- Personal and Social Responsibility, including
  - Civic knowledge and engagement at local, national, and global levels
  - Intercultural knowledge and competence
  - Ethical reasoning and action
  - Foundations and skills for lifelong learning

The focus is fostering citizenship, encouraging active involvement with diverse communities and difference in multiple forms, and learning to make ethically sound choices.

- Knowledge Application and Integrative Learning including
  - Active engagement with real-life problems from multiple perspectives related to significant social issues such as environmental sustainability
  - Advanced accomplishment across general and specialized studies through original research and/or creative activity, education abroad, community service projects, peer education projects, internships, and co-ops

The focus is applying knowledge and skills through various means to research and creative activity and to consequential public problems and social issues.
General/ Liberal Education Models

General/liberal education programs are guided by philosophical commitments contained within rational curricular structures. When envisioning a program, both elements must be combined to fit the needs of the University. In terms of goals, general/liberal education can seek to introduce students to perennial human questions, charge disciplines with the task of equipping students with a broad array of knowledge and methods of understanding the world, and educating students to take part in larger community life. Although these can be viewed as distinct aims, they also can be fruitfully combined in efforts to accomplish multiple aims for students.

A variety of broad structural models exist for general/liberal education programs. We discuss two of the major approaches to general/liberal education categorization below. The first is Core, Distributive, and Individualized. The second approach includes Great Books, Scholarly Discipline and the Effective Citizen approach (Appendix C).

Core, Distributive, Individualized, and Blended

Core
In the earliest days of Ohio University, the entire curriculum was oriented around a core set of classes including Greek, Latin, rhetoric, and other classical foundations. Although our university has moved away from such an approach, general education models at other universities identify a common set of courses that all students take. For example, at Farleigh Dickinson (http://view.fdu.edu/default.aspx?id=12) students enroll in four courses: global challenge, perspectives on the individual, cross-cultural perspectives, and the quest for freedom. The basic idea of the core model is that essential skills like reading and writing, critical thinking, communication, and others are incorporated into classes that also address ways of knowing and being.

Key Advantage(s): A core set of courses can facilitate a unified understanding of what general education is supposed to accomplish. Because of the consistency in experience, identifying assessable outcomes for all students is more feasible.

Key Constraint(s): The identification of a core can be difficult in terms of achieving a consensus. This approach also eliminates students’ freedom of choice with respect to course selection. The disciplinary structure of modern universities is not perfectly aligned with a core approach likely emphasizing interdisciplinary approaches.
Distributive
As Ohio University moved away from a core model, academic units were asked to identify key competencies, bodies of knowledge, and philosophical understandings that could comprise a broadly distributed general education curriculum; today that approach has resulted in our Tier-based program requiring the accumulation of certain skills and broad exposure to a variety of disciplinary perspectives. Although all Ohio University students are required to take courses throughout a distributed Tier II curriculum, they are free to select from broad lists of courses based on interest, availability, and other such considerations.

Key Advantage(s): A distributive model provides students with substantial freedom of choice in terms of selecting courses, which can potentially increase benefits in terms of motivation and achievement. Distributive models also are well aligned with university structures and, consequently, are easy to staff and sustain.

Key Constraint(s): Because distributive models allow students to select from a wide range of courses, the coherence of the general education program suffers. Students’ learn a little about a lot, and have no meaningful connective threads tying courses together.

Individualized
The individualized model is perhaps the most radical of general education structures. In this model, every student’s general education program is unique. Each student works with an advisor to select courses that will supplement the major. Although not widely used, especially in institutions at our size point and with our mission, the Ohio University Honors Tutorial College enacts an approach that is similar to a more individualized general education program.

Key Advantage(s): individualized approaches provide maximum freedom of choice for students. This approach can align students with faculty who have shared interest, which can result in meaningful, long-term mentoring relationships.

Key Constraint(s): Individualized models are difficult to assess because expected outcomes are unique to each student. This type of approach is also difficult to implement because it does not provide a predictable enrollment pattern, which creates staffing uncertainty and enrollment instability. This type of approach may only be suitable for very small, liberal arts institutions where most faculty are broadly trained generalists.

Blended
Although the structural models identified above are represented across higher education, few institutions enact pure versions of these models, opting instead for blended structural approaches capitalizing on advantages of each. By their nature, blended model approaches are varied and often reflect unique aims and objectives for particular institutions. Generally, blended models require all students to take some core classes and then allow selection of courses within categories for other requirements. In what follows, common types of blended models are described.
• **Core + Distributive.** Recognizing the simultaneous need for a common set of skills, coupled with a need for exposure to diverse perspectives, the Core + Distributive model requires students to take a common set of foundational courses and to select additional courses from a defined set of categories. This approach allows the university to define a common foundation for students while also allowing students from varied backgrounds and with varied interests to shape aspects of their general education curriculum.

• **Distributive + Themes.** A contemporary version of the Distributive model attempts to address some of the inherent weaknesses of the basic distributive model. Since the distributive model allows for the selection of courses within a set group of categories, a potential consequence is that the courses are fragmented and disconnected. In the distributive plus themes model, students still select courses from categories, but there is an attempt to connect the courses across categories around central themes. The themes may be a limited set, but typically are meant to be modifiable based on contemporary issues. An example of the Distributive – Thematic model is University of California at Chico (http://www.csuchico.edu/catalog/cat07/05Degree/05ge.html).

**Great Books, Scholarly Discipline and Effective Citizen**

**Great Books**
The Great Books curriculum approach develops a list of essential texts needed for an educated person such as Plato's Republic, or Dante's Divine Comedy. It emphasizes an interdisciplinary approach and often includes a very high faculty-student interaction utilizing small discussion groups. It originally started at Columbia and was soon after adopted at University of Chicago.

Key Advantage(s): Students encounter major authors and major issues in Western Civilization directly in small classes.

Key Constraint(s): This approach can only be successful in institutions with very low student-to-faculty ratios.

**Scholarly Discipline**
The Scholarly Discipline approach is a distributive model which lays out a list of acceptable courses from competing departments. Students take a series of introductory classes which help students understand the basic concepts of the discipline and how scholars in this discipline analyze and solve problems. These disciplines represent the way that the university is structured in terms of departments and colleges.

Key Advantage(s): Students experience breadth of knowledge, they are introduced to different lens or perspectives of how separate academic disciplines view issues.
Key Constraint(s): This approach tends to be seen as less coherent presenting discrete discipline experiences. Students are left to make their own connections between the disciplines.

**Effective Citizen**

This model advocates that general education should prepare students to live well and to fully participate in the world of the 21st century. Therefore general education should provide a context about the world and its issues and then the student develops more specialized knowledge in the major and electives. Courses are designed to communicate relevant information and its implications for modern life, helping the student to develop skills and values required for effective citizenship.

Key Advantage(s): Students are helped to develop a broad understanding of the connections between the disciplines and societal issues. There is more coherence to the learning and they are helped to understand the importance of the discipline to the larger issues faced by society.

Key Constraint(s): This approach tends to be more difficult to implement where faculty are more committed to their specialties and discipline. It requires more cooperation between the disciplines as faculty help students to see the broader picture of implications and connections between the disciplines.
The 1804 Task Force unanimously recommends that Ohio University consider a Blended Model of Liberal Education best illustrated in Figure 1.

**Models for Liberal Education**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Great Books</th>
<th>Scholarly Discipline</th>
<th>Effective Citizen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provides pivotal ideas from the classics.</td>
<td>Provides multiple methods of inquiry.</td>
<td>Provides knowledge to contribute to public good.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The OHIO Way**

Adapted from Newton (2000).

**Figure 1.** Models for Liberal Education. This approach—regardless of which model is ultimately adopted—will retain the strengths of a distributive/scholarly discipline model while adding elements of the effective citizen model that encourages students to apply knowledge for the public good.
Example of a Possible Blended Model

Rationale
Ohio University students are not simply visitors passing by on their way to a distant destination: they are citizens in a community rich in culture, history, and tradition. As the first institution of higher learning in the Northwest Territory, Ohio University led efforts to anchor education to the development of the western frontier in our young democracy. The founders of Ohio University understood the value of higher education for building “the peace, order and prosperity of society” and devoted scarce resources to provide educational opportunities within the fledgling community.

At Ohio University, we remain committed to developing each student’s promise to contribute to the wider purpose of the public good -- regardless of their major(s). By combining the culture and personal attention of a small, residential institution with the opportunities of a large public research university, Ohio University immerses students in a shared community of learning that builds character while preparing them to address challenges locally, nationally, and globally. The OHIO Way embodies this 200-year legacy, creating the foundation for participation in and advancement of a community devoted to advancing Ways of Knowing, Ways of Doing and Ways of Being.

The OHIO Way
Ohio University students will demonstrate competencies in the following areas by attaining the following outcomes:

Foundational Ways of Knowing, Doing and Being

Written Communication
• Communicate ideas clearly in writing.
• Demonstrate rhetorical strategies appropriate to the purpose, audience, context, and form.
• Construct an appropriate thesis and organize supporting claims.
• Demonstrate knowledge of genre conventions for written texts, including style, tone, documentation, format, and structure.
• Represent evidence gathered through research in a written text.

Oral Communication
• Construct a purpose and thesis appropriate for diverse audiences and occasions.
• Represent evidence gathered through research in oral communication.
• Organize evidence and develop claims in support of a specified purpose and thesis.
• Use effective verbal and nonverbal delivery skills to enhance a message.
• Create and integrate effective visual representations to enhance a spoken message.
Analytical, Critical, and Ethical Reasoning
• Identify the central argument(s) contained in multiple forms of media.
• Find, critically evaluate, and use information from a variety of sources.
• Interpret and critically evaluate numerically based information intended for public audiences.
• Evaluate arguments and ideas presented by others in relation to diverse ethical, moral, and social principles.

Cross-disciplinary Ways of Knowing, Doing and Being

Global and Domestic Culture and Diversity Issues
• Analyze differences and similarities between diverse peoples, cultures and perspectives.
• Recognize cultural forces that affect social and cultural norms locally and globally.
• Develop an informed understanding of key global economic and political issues.

Introduce methods and perspectives through the lens of key academic disciplines (in alphabetic order):

Fine Arts
• Explain the ways in which artistic expression reflects and influences the culture and values of its time and place.
• Use the appropriate vocabulary to articulate the techniques, forms, styles, etcetera of an art form.
• Develop an informed, reflective, critical evaluation of examples in an art form.

Humanities
• Recognize how texts and cultural practices express understandings of human experience and its meaning.
• Participate in humanistic analysis and argumentation.
• Articulate ideas about what it means to be human using cultural, ethical, and philosophical perspectives.

Science and Technology
• Describe ways in which knowledge is generated from the careful observation and analysis of the physical world.
• Evaluate implications stemming from a scientific perspective of the natural world.

Social Sciences
• Describe ways in which knowledge is generated from a analysis of individual, group and/or societal-level phenomena.
• Apply social science theory and methods to analyze a contemporary or historical social or cultural issue.
• Evaluate implications stemming from a social scientific perspective of human behavior, culture, or society.

**Advanced Integration of Ways of Knowing, Doing and Being**

**Knowledge Application and Creation**
Actively engage problems from multiple disciplinary perspectives related to significant social issues/themes including, but not limited to:
• Environmental Sustainability
• Social Justice
• The Influence of Technology

**Knowledge Integration and Synthesis**
Actively engage in at least two “high-impact”* learning experiences including:
• study abroad
• service-learning
• original research and/or creative activity
• internships
• community-service projects
• peer education programs (mentoring, tutoring)

Knowledge application practices should reflect growing intellectual curiosity and set a foundation for lifelong-learning.

[NOTE: Students will develop expertise through a **capstone** experience within their major.]

Next Steps

The following key steps are anticipated in the evolution of this document:

1. Develop with the Faculty leadership, the Educational Policies Committee of the Faculty Senate and the University Curriculum Council a clear process for vetting and adopting a revision to our current general education program. This process must be envisioned as a multi-year effort that at best can result in a new program being implemented by August, 2015.

2. A second task force is envisioned that utilizes the above input for a more detailed proposal.

3. Begin conversations across the campus that include the following:
   - University Curriculum Council,
   - Educational Policies and Student Affairs Committee of the Faculty Senate,
   - Academic Affairs Council of the Student Senate
   - Forums within each college.
   - Create a website that can assist in gathering input from the campus community.
   - Other forums as appropriate.
References


WEBSITES:
AAC&U: https://aacu.org/
Akron: http://www.uakron.edu/advising/docs/GEN-EDUC.pdf
http://www.uakron.edu/itl/ssp/academicPlans1.php
http://www.uakron.edu/itl/ssp/casual.php
Auburn: http://www.auburn.edu/academic/provost/undergrad_studies/
Bowling Green: http://www.bgsu.edu/offices/generaleducation/
http://www.bgsu.edu/offices/assessment/
http://www.bgsu.edu/offices/assessment/page31434.html

Cincinnati:  http://www.business.uc.edu/bba/curriculum/degreerequirements
Cleveland:   http://www.csuohio.edu/academic/gened/
            http://www.csuohio.edu/academic/gened/summarytable.html
            http://www.csuohio.edu/offices/assessment/success/gened.html

Farleigh

George
Mason U:    http://www.gmu.edu/depts/provost/gened/index.html

Kent:
Miami:      http://www.miami.muohio.edu/academics/core-curriculum/index.html
Shawnee:    http://catalog.shawnee.edu/preview_program.php?catoid=41&poid=700
University
of California
at Chico:    http://www.csuchico.edu/catalog/cat07/05Degree/05ge.html
Youngstown: http://www.ysu.edu/ger/summary.html
Appendix A: List of Task Force Members

Hugh Sherman, Dean, College of Business (co-chair)  
David O. Thomas, College of Fine Arts (co-chair)  
Kelly Broughton, Assistant Dean for Research and Education, University Libraries  
Erin Burke, Undergraduate representative  
Howard Dewald Interim Dean, College of Arts and Sciences  
Laurie Hatch, College of Arts & Sciences  
David Ingram, College of Arts & Sciences  
Ryan Lombardi, Associate VP for Student Affairs  
Wendy Merb-Brown, Director, Learning Community Programs  
Beth Quitslund, College of Arts & Sciences  
Darin Ridgway, Russ College of Engineering and Technology  
Elizabeth Sayrs, College of Fine Arts  
Scott Titsworth, Interim Dean, Scripps College of Communication  
Danny Twilley, Patton College of Education  
Debra M. Benton, University Registrar (ex-officio)  
David Descutner, Executive Vice Provost and Dean, University College (ex-officio)  
Linda Lockhart, Manager, Communication (ex-officio)  
Michael Williford, Associate Provost for Institutional Research (ex-officio)  
Benjamin M. Ogles (year 1 Co-Chair)  
Maíri Adams, Graduate Assistant
Appendix B: OHIO 2010 Assessment Executive Summary

Interim Report of the General Education Assessment Working Group
September 2010
Executive Summary

This report presents a summary of findings from assessments carried out to date by the General Education Assessment Working Group. The Working Group was charged by the Executive Vice President and Provost to collect and organize assessment data on Ohio University's general education program. Sources of data included the Survey of Alumni; ACT Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency (CAAP) standardized tests of English writing, mathematics, and critical thinking; structured interviews of students; and a survey of faculty.

General education learning objectives were identified by Ohio University faculty in 2007 from an analysis of current curricular offerings: http://www.ohio.edu/learningobjectives/. This was an AQIP action project, part of Ohio University's accreditation by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC), that shows how we incorporate continuous improvement into the curriculum. This assessment project is another AQIP action project, and it has received strong encouragement from the HLC.

The Survey of Alumni revealed high levels of satisfaction with the different components of the general education program (Tier I freshman writing; Tier I junior writing; Tier I quantitative reasoning; Tier II breadth of knowledge; and Tier III synthesis). Students indicated the greatest satisfaction with Tier II.

The Interview Project asked a sample of seniors about their educational experience at Ohio University and a sample of freshmen about the expectations they held for their Ohio University education. General Education learning objectives and coursework were a particular focus of these interviews.

- The purpose of a college degree and general education were seen as similar by the student interviewees: Seniors and freshmen agreed that a degree helps one to get a better job, makes a person a well-rounded individual, and broadens understanding (beyond a single major course of study) and ability to problem solve and communicate more effectively with diverse groups. Seniors also mentioned a degree demonstrates work ethic and preparation for membership in society. Freshmen reported that a degree provides a broad skill base to use in a career and in life in general. They also indicated a degree prepares a person for a career that is interesting and is not just about earning more money.
• Students view general education as an important part of their education that will help them as they transition into their career after graduation. Students understand the purpose of general education as something that gives them a well-rounded broad based knowledge with specific skills in the areas of writing, oral communication, technology and mathematics. Both seniors and freshmen described general education courses as a core knowledge base that employers and others expect graduates to have and both classes thought general education courses were helpful in deciding on a major.

• General education can help students become successful because the courses help to develop the skills identified with success. For seniors and freshmen, success relates to being a good communicator and working well with others, being motivated and working hard. Seniors and freshmen expected to gain exposure to different subjects and knowledge outside their major and become better communicators through completion of general education courses.

• A significant finding resulting from the senior interviews identified out of class activities such as study abroad experiences, internships, community service activities, and public speakers hosted by the institution as being very influential to the intellectual growth and development of our students.

• While there are many similarities between freshmen and seniors, seniors are more focused on their major and their future careers, whereas freshmen are more focused on finding their major and determining what they need to do well to be successful in college. Freshmen also seek careers that are interesting while seniors focus more on good pay.

• As reflected in the quantitative analysis on Survey of Alumni results, students in different academic programs demonstrate different outcomes. These differences indicate that students in different fields of study will, by the nature of that field of study, graduate with slightly different general education learning outcomes. This analysis does not prove that some students are not receiving the skills, knowledge or learning outcomes, but rather that due to the nature of their chosen field of study, the focus may be more prominent on certain outcomes than it is on others.

• Seniors expressed a desire for a greater variety of general education courses. Students indicated that they wished they could have taken a different mix of courses or at different quarters. This theme was related to the choice of major. Students discussed changing their major as a result of choosing their first major prematurely with general education giving them opportunities to explore other majors. Choice of electives was related to these themes, with students expressing a desire to take different courses that were not required. The least intellectually compelling question provided material to supplement the change themes. Students expressed dissatisfaction with instructional methods that did not engage them in learning. Combining themes, students expressed frustration with courses that were poorly taught, not challenging, or presented with an apparent bias.
Presumably these frustrations could be interpreted as changes they would make in the ways their courses were taught. A few students indicated that they would make no changes at all. Students wished they would have taken a greater variety of courses in and beyond general education, and they expressed a desire for greater engagement in the classes they did take.

- During the interviews students were asked to complete surveys on two different sets of learning objectives, which were mapped from Ohio University's general education program. One set of objectives mapped learning objectives from the Survey of Alumni and asked seniors to rate how effective Ohio University had been in helping them develop each one. The other set of objectives was derived from the NSSE instrument and asked seniors to rate how much Ohio University contributed to their knowledge, skills, and personal development in each one. (Please see p. 6 for the summary charts of students’ responses to these questions.)

- Following from these sets of learning objectives, one subgroup examined the objectives that Ohio University seniors said they have gained most and least from their college education, and the reasons they gave for having selected those objectives. This analysis focused on seniors' relative ranking of learning objectives, in terms of the skills and types of knowledge the students felt they had gained most and least, relative to other learning objectives listed in the surveys.

- The learning objectives identified most frequently by seniors as those they have gained most from their education include core liberal arts skills in analytic thinking, written and oral communication; job or work-related knowledge/skills and the ability to work effectively in teams; and several learning objectives related to lifelong learning and personal development.

- The learning objectives that seniors most frequently identified as those they have gained least include community and civic engagement; voting in local, state, or national elections; liberal arts skills in the areas of artistic/creative expression and appreciation, numeracy, applying scientific methods to understand the natural and physical world; and understanding people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds, and oral communication. (Hence, oral communication emerged both as one of the top-ranked objectives that seniors said they had gained most from their Ohio University education, and also as one of the top-ranked objectives that other senior students said they had gained least from their education.)

A parallel survey also was conducted to learn faculty members’ evaluations of learning objectives at Ohio University:

- The learning objectives that the faculty sample evaluated most frequently as important for students to gain included analytic thinking, writing skills, job or work-related knowledge
or skills, and the ability to learn effectively on one’s own. These learning objectives also emerged as top-ranked learning objectives that seniors felt they had gained most from the university. Similarly, learning objectives related to artistic/creative expression, the ability to apply scientific methods to understand the natural and physical world, the ability to participate in community service activities, and voting in local, state, or national elections emerged as lower-ranked learning objectives in both the faculty and senior samples.

Recommended next steps include:

- The ACT CAAP test data need to be analyzed in relation to the richer body of student interview and survey data in response to the USO Chancellor's recommendation to emphasize comparative testing of students. Participation in the Voluntary System of Accountability also requires regular administration of a standardized test such as the CAAP.

- While the general education curriculum seems to be accomplishing most of the learning objectives to some degree, it isn’t presented to students in a way that makes it memorable or easy to understand. Presenting general education to students so that they could grasp and explain to each other would help them better understand why they are taking the classes they are taking. A common framework for the general education program, communicated consistently by advisors and Bobcat Student Orientation, is needed.

- We believe it would be very helpful to disseminate findings from this assessment project and provide avenues for university-wide conversations concerning possible core learning objectives for Ohio University. The apparent general pattern of congruence between responses provided by the faculty and senior samples included in this study could provide a helpful jumping-off point for such conversations.

- General education assessment is one of Ohio University’s AQIP action projects. The University's continued accreditation through HLC depends, in part, on our commitment to continuously assess general education. Ohio University is undertaking major projects that will compete for attention (academic restructuring, PeopleSoft implementation, and the transition from quarters to semesters). These shorter-term projects should not distract Ohio University's longer-term commitment to assess the quality of its academic programs. Ohio University faculty need to continue to digest the findings in these assessments before embarking on major changes that go beyond incremental changes that these data suggest. Ohio University faculty also need to be involved in the ongoing assessment of general education.
The following charts summarize seniors' responses to the lists of learning objectives mapped from Ohio University’s general education program:

**Seniors’ Ratings of Value of Learning Objectives from Survey of Alumni**

**Seniors' Ratings of Ohio University's Contribution of Learning Objectives from NSSE**
### Appendix C: Three Models of General/Liberal Education

#### Table 1. Three Models of General Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Great Books</th>
<th>Scholarly Discipline</th>
<th>Effective Citizen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key insight</strong></td>
<td>Focus on the perennial human questions</td>
<td>Disciplines as the accumulated wisdom and ways of understanding the world humankind has developed over the centuries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Role of the university</strong></td>
<td>Handing on the tradition</td>
<td>Vigorous developer/extender of the knowledge and methods of the academic disciplines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Substance of curriculum</strong></td>
<td>Pivotal ideas/ authors of Western tradition</td>
<td>Key concepts and methods of inquiry as defined by the disciplines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ideal graduate</strong></td>
<td>Classically educated through encounters with classic works and authors</td>
<td>Beginning practitioner of the disciplines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Emphasis</strong></td>
<td>Unity</td>
<td>Method</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Breadth/depth</strong></td>
<td>Broad review of the substance of the Western tradition</td>
<td>Sharp introduction to the range of basic disciplines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Source of coherence</strong></td>
<td>Unified by a historical review of key responses to the perennial questions</td>
<td>The individual student piecing together the mosaic of the disciplines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Faculty</strong></td>
<td>Broadly educated generalists</td>
<td>Disciplinary experts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Likely locations</strong></td>
<td>Liberal arts colleges/special programs in larger universities</td>
<td>Research-oriented universities with strong departments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Orientation</strong></td>
<td>Looks to past for enduring ideas and values to form and guide students in the present</td>
<td>Instills an understanding of the intellectual treasures and scholarly methods that are society’s intellectual heritage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inspiration/advocates</strong></td>
<td>Hutchins/ Adler/Bennett/ Cheney/Bloom</td>
<td>Bruner/Phenix/ professional disciplinary societies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>