

The General Education Assessment Project at Oakton: Six Years of Assessment

Since 1999, a subcommittee of the Student Academic Assessment Team (SAAT) has implemented a locally developed institutional approach for assessing students' achievements of Oakton's general education objectives. The overall process was essentially the same over the first four years: students responded to prompts that addressed a subset of Oakton's general education objectives.* Prompts were cartoons, newspaper articles, movie clips, essays and graphs. Trained readers scored students' work, using rubrics developed for this purpose. Results can be found on the Oakton Office of Research website <http://www.oakton.edu/resource/oir/>.

In the last two years the assessment approach was changed significantly. Instead of asking students to complete an exercise that was separate from and not graded as part of their regular classroom assignments, actual classroom work related to general education objectives was evaluated in real time. Two Oakton general education objectives were assessed:

- Communicate ... effectively in ... speech
- Work and communicate effectively with people from a variety of backgrounds, individually and in teams

Faculty identified courses in which they gave presentation (speech) or team assignments that met specific criteria for inclusion in the project, and volunteered to have trained faculty and staff observe and evaluate students' work during class sessions.

Over the six-year period, a total of 5,516 student responses to prompts, speeches and teamwork assignments were assessed. Twenty-one percent were scored as high passes, 47 percent as low passes, and 32 percent as no passes. In the first four years we were able to correlate students' assessment results with a number of student attributes. Their English composition competency and, to a lesser extent, cumulative grade point average at Oakton were the two student attributes most frequently associated with general education assessment scores. Not surprisingly, students' with higher levels of competency in composition and higher GPAs received higher assessment scores. In the last two years the number of students assessed prevented this type of analysis.

In considering the findings of this six-year project, these issues should be kept in mind.

- Data about students have limitations. For example, data about credits earned are incomplete because they do not include credits from other institutions.
- Different students participated in the project in the six years; therefore student gains measured through a pretest-posttest design cannot be assumed.
- Oakton's general education assessment project relies on faculty according face validity to the prompts, the classroom assignments and the scoring rubrics.
- How many faculty members actually assign presentations to students, and to what extent do faculty evaluate the quality of students' presentations as part of their course grade (Speech courses were not part of the assessment project)?
- The result of the speech assessments, which showed a high percentage of students achieving passing scores, appears to contradict other data and anecdotal information about students' competence in giving speeches or presentations.

Oakton uses a number of approaches to assess general education learning outcomes: the project discussed in this *In the Abstract*, departmental assessments of courses and programs, a review of general education course syllabi to determine which objectives are addressed in each course, student and faculty surveys of student engagement, and results of alumni surveys. The SAAT is preparing a paper providing an overview of general education at Oakton for distribution early in the Fall 2004 semester and will also work with division deans to organize a faculty discussion about general education and assessment, and what we should interpret from the six years of the project.

* See the reverse side for a list of Oakton's general education objectives.

Oakton's General Education Objectives

Objectives are: to develop the student as an educated person who can and will

- Engage in the process of inquiry and problem solving through the following:
 - Define problems
 - Construct hypotheses
 - Gather, analyze, and interpret data/information using a variety of resources and methods, including technology
 - Explain how information fits within an historical context
 - Differentiate between fact and opinion
 - Compare and evaluate alternate solutions
 - Communicate findings effectively in writing and in speech
- Work and communicate effectively with people from a variety of backgrounds, individually and in teams
- Apply ethical principles to local, national, and global issues
- Recognize skills necessary to build and maintain effective human relationships