2003-04 Planning and Review Committee

Consultant Report

I. General Education Component: Social and Behavioral Sciences Component

General Education Coordinator: Bob Evans

PRC Consultant: Janet Polansky

Purpose of the Review: The purpose of this review is to assess the quality of this component of general education at UW-Stout.

Committee Findings: Given the current General Education Committee’s embedded assessment initiative, the Planning and Review Committee believes that the array of courses satisfies the general education component at this time.

II. Abstract

As part of their education in the “general knowledge, appreciation and values” part of general education, UW-Stout students complete nine credits in Social and Behavioral Sciences. The Social Sciences are defined as those that “formulate and verify general hypotheses regarding human behavior” and “deal with the behavior of societal, economic, political, and cultural groups,” while the Behavioral Sciences address “general knowledge about the psychological behavior of human beings, insofar as this knowledge concerns the human being’s relationships to self and to other individuals.” Disciplines represented in the category are sociology, economics, political science, anthropology, geography and psychology. To fulfill the general education requirement in this category, students must have coursework in three of seven available disciplines.

During academic years 1996-2004, departments included in the category developed and utilized pre and post-test assessment tools in designated courses identified as meeting general education requirements for their disciplines. After a few brief meetings between representatives from all units in the group, each department proceeded to design and implement its own assessment process independently from one another. The three departments never met again, so the report represents the individual feedback from each department. There is no collaborative examination of resources, facilities, strengths and weaknesses for the entire category.

Disciplinary and senior-level assessment data documented improved cognitive achievement in all areas reporting. One and three-year graduate follow-up studies report slightly higher scores for “understanding other cultures,” and “interpersonal relationships” among 1998 graduates than for 1996, and one degree higher for “interpersonal relations” than for “understanding other cultures.” The next phase of the Social Science assessment process will consider redesigning designated assessment instruments in the light of first round results. HDFLCES staff will refine its assessment tool and acquire new resources in view of the content objectives, and the Department of Psychology will include the results of this review in its action plan in order to address the issues raised.

Strengths perceived in the program include measurably improved student achievement in several areas as well as staff expertise with assessment measures. Weaknesses lie in the unreasonable length of time required to complete component assessment, lack of cooperation among the constituent departments, and the lack of depth in course offerings within the disciplines. Recommendations to the coordinator are to provide missing data and analysis to complete the
report, maintain positive communications among the constituent disciplines, and maintain an advisory committee representing the total scope of the component.

Recommendations to department chairs are to continue to refine the assessment process and to improve cooperation between the units involved. Recommendations to deans include monitoring departmental cooperation with the assessment process and General Education Assessment Advisor. With these recommendations in mind, the PRC believes that the present array of courses satisfies the general education component at this time.

III. Process Followed for the Current Review:

The assessment process of all categories in this section of general education required participation from the two colleges and three departments comprising the Social and Behavioral Sciences and was to be completed by Spring, 2002. Early in the assessment period the departments decided to develop individual assessment instruments and procedures and ceased to meet as a whole. The Social Science Advisory Committee assessed three of its component categories (Economics, Sociology, and Political Science) during 2001-02, reporting the findings of that process to the Planning and Review Committee in Spring, 2002. [Memos from Committee Chair Dick Tyson dated March 25, 2002 and 2001-02 PRC Consultants Bill Kryshak and Janet Polansky dated May 2, 2002 referring to this interim period are attached as Appendix A and B respectively.] Assessment in the remaining Social Sciences categories (Anthropology and Geography) and the Lifespan Human Development section of the Behavioral Sciences was completed in 2002-03 and reported in the self-study review and appendices being considered here. Results for the remaining category, Psychology, were reported February 2, 2004, in a memo from Tom Franklin, Chair of the Department of Psychology, to Brian Finder which is attached as Appendix C.

The PRC examined the two versions of the general education coordinator’s report as well as information from other relevant sources, including the university’s one and three-year follow-up of graduates and the UW-Stout General Education Senior Level Assessment Survey. Questionnaires of key instructors obtained for the review were used to some extent, although responses from instructors outside the disciplines in the category may have been included, and only some key instructors of those disciplines inside the category were collected. Committee members from the Social Sciences were present in 2002 to provide information at the hearing, and deans and committee members from both colleges in 2003.

IV. Previous Review:

None.

V. Previous Recommendations Response

N/A N/A

VI. Current Review:

The social and behavioral sciences category of general education relates to objectives #4, “to think creatively, and analyze critically, synthesize clearly, and act responsibly,” #6, “ideas and values of a multicultural world … and [the demonstration of] sensitivity to sociocultural diversity and the interdependence of groups in society,” #9, “the inter-relationship between the ideological, sociological, and technological adaptive systems and their impact on the human experience and the environment,” as well as #11, on the development of a historical and political consciousness, and
#10, “the development and consequences of the behavior of individuals, groups, and institutions in the context of major social, economic, and political forces.” Specific criteria for each of the two sections appear in the General Education Category Definitions (November 23, 1998).

The Social Sciences are required to be assessed upon one or more of four learning outcomes:

1) Intrapersonal, and/or socio-cultural factors associated with collective action or societal development;
2) Human collectivities, organizations, institutions, cultures, and their infrastructures and interrelationship;
3) Methodologies for conducting inquiry into collective action, societies or cultures; and/or
4) Alternative theoretical frameworks that have been used to offer meaningful explanations of social phenomena.

The Behavioral Sciences area to be assessed upon one or more of the following three:

1) Intrapersonal, interpersonal and/or sociocultural factors associated with human behavior;
2) Methodologies for conducting inquiry into human behavior;
3) Alternative theoretical frameworks that have been used to offer meaningful explanations of human behavior.

Courses currently approved as meeting requirements for the Social Sciences category are:

- **Anthropology**: ANTH 220 Cultural Anthropology; ANTH 250 The Human Past and ANTH 330 Native Americans
- **Economics**: ECON 201 General Economics; ECON 210 Principles of Economics I and ECON 215 Principles of Economics II
- **Geography**: GEOG 104, World Geography
- **Political Science**: POLS 210 American Government and POLS 340 International Relations
- **Sociology**: SOC 110 Introductory Sociology and SOC 225 Social Problems

Courses currently approved as meeting requirements for the Behavioral Sciences category are HDFL 255 Lifespan Human Development and PSYC 110 General Psychology.

**Assessment in the Social Sciences**

Advisory members and key instructors in Social Sciences thought that the component should require more social science credits and more free electives, as well as concern about large section enrollment, crowded classrooms, and the lack of multi-media resources in the classrooms, especially before the laptop initiative implementation and ensuing equipment upgrades.

One and Three-Year Graduate Follow-up survey results: 2,343 collected in 1999 and from 1998 and 1996 graduates respectively. 1998 graduates were reported to be .1 degree more like than those of 1996 to “understand other cultures,” but it is not clear how these results are related to Social and Behavioral Sciences.
General Education Senior-Level Assessment results for the Social Sciences showed respectable levels of appreciation, especially on item #21, deemed more directly related.

Assessment of cognitive achievement of objectives in the disciplines reporting was deemed moderate to high on the pre and post-test comparisons utilized in the Social Science courses reporting. The disciplines will continue to refine assessment methods and use them to strengthen curriculum.

**Program Strengths**

1. Resources and facilities are generally good at present.
   - Key instructor survey

2. Student achievement is positive in the discipline’s assessment reported data.
   - Discipline and senior-level

3. Staff involved demonstrate skill with assessment tools and processes.
   - Coordinator’s report and appendices

**Issues of Concern**

1. Assessment instruments sometimes fail to measure higher-level abilities sufficiently.
   - Coordinator’s report

2. Assessment tools measure objectives for individual courses but not those of the general education itself.
   - Appendices

**Assessment in the Behavioral Sciences**

An assessment of General Psychology was conducted with a pre- and post-test in six sections including four instructors and one on-line course with 105 students participating. On the 39-item instrument, the mean improvement was a disappointing less than two points, consistent across teachers and delivery systems. The Assessment Committee’s final report recommends a thorough revision of not only the assessment procedure, but also the content and consistency of the General Psychology curriculum.

Assessment for HDFL 255, Lifespan Human Development, has been conducted since 1999 with an instrument designed to measure diversity results more effectively. Scores on these questions and overall post-test scores have improved since assessment began in 1997-99.

**Program Strengths**

1. Departmental staff have demonstrated skill and commitment to continuing improvement.
   - Coordinator’s report

2. The Department of Psychology has incorporated assessment into its direct action plan.
   - Coordinator’s report

3. The Department of HDFL has improved its assessment instrument and course textbook in response to feedback.
   - Coordinator’s report
Issues of Concern

1. Turnover among adjunct instructors in HDFL 255, Lifespan Human Development, has made consistent measurement difficult. Coordinator’s report

2. The assessment tool for General Psychology lacked sufficient sensitivity to track change. Department Assessment Committee Report

3. The variety among texts used in General Psych creates challenges for assessment. Department Assessment Committee Report

Recommendations for the General Education Coordinator:

1. Ensure that all departments included in the assessment are equally represented in the process and the final report.

2. Continue to monitor development and refinement of assessment instruments with individual disciplines, but maintain an Advisory Committee with representation from all colleges and departments involved in the category.


4. Identify assessment measures in a way that shows their alignment with general education category criteria.

NOTE: Given the fact that the General Education Committee is in the process of developing/implementing policies and procedures relating to embedded assessments across the general education curriculum, many of the communication issues that have occurred in the past may be resolved. Consequently, these common assessment themes may then lead to open communication among the stakeholders.

Recommendations for the Chairs from the Department of Social Sciences and the Department of Psychology:

1. Continue to work actively with key instructors in developing and refining assessment tools and instructor satisfaction with resources, facilities, and their sense of involvement and identification with the program.

2. Consult with General Education Committee and assessment personnel about best practices.

Recommendations for the Deans from the College of Arts and Sciences and the College of Human Development:

1. Ensure that participating departments cooperate with all colleagues involved in the assessment.

2. Ensure that the Advisory Committee contains adequate representation from all areas involved and maintains an active role in the assessment process and in preparation of the final report, if required by the General Education Committee.
APPENDIX A

DATE: March 25, 2002

TO: Dean Murphy, College of Arts and Sciences
    Dean Wesolek, College of Human Development
    cc: Julie Furst-Bowe, Associate Vice Chancellor
        Robert Evans, Chair, Social Sciences Department
        Janet Polansky, PRC consultant
        Hugh Williamson, PRC consultant
        Sue Beckham, Chair of General Education Committee
        Provost Sedlak

FROM: Dick Tyson, Chair of Planning and Review Committee

SUBJECT: Review of Social and Behavioral Sciences Component for General Education

On Friday, March 15th, the Planning and Review Committee (PRC) reviewed the assessment of the Social and Behavioral Sciences component for general education as required by the Faculty Senate in its charge to the committee. Professor Robert Evans provided a report which included assessment of general education courses in economics, political science, and sociology which he entitled “Social Sciences Categories in Social and Behavioral Sciences Component for General Education.” The PRC finds this to be incomplete since the assessment process and results were not made available to the committee for several courses; these include: General Psychology (110), Lifespan Human Development (195, 255), World Geography (104), and Anthropology (220, 250, 300). Being incomplete, the PRC consultants cannot write their report, and the committee can not make recommendations to the Senate regarding its review of assessment of this component.

At its last accreditation review of UW-Stout, the North Central Association noted (among other things) that we had no regular process for assessment of general education objectives. As a condition of continued accreditation, UW-Stout responded in this area with a plan developed in 1996-97 for such assessment (see “UW-Stout Guiding Principles for GE Assessment”). It called for the Provost to assign a Dean who then would select a coordinator and committee for assessing each of the seven general education categories. Each committee was required to develop instruments for assessing cognitive (“knowledge and skill”) achievement of general education objectives for courses meeting the GE requirements. The measures are to include varying degrees of hierarchies of learning. The assessment instrument is to be administered with sufficient frequency and the results fed back into the improvement of student learning and instruction. Finally, it calls for the PRC to annually review one of the categories in its seven-year review cycle.

The PRC would like to know why it has received an incomplete report and how and when it will be able to proceed with its responsibilities. The consultants and I are available for your assistance as needed.
APPENDIX B

DATE: May 2, 2002

TO: Dick Tyson, Chair
    Members of the PRC

FROM: Janet Polansky and Bill Kryshak

SUBJECT: PRC Consultant Report: General Education Social and Behavioral Sciences Component

We do not have a consultant’s report on the Social/Behavioral Sciences Component of General Education because we have not yet been presented with a complete draft of the report. In addition, we have not been called on for any real consultation during these proceedings. At present, I believe the separate colleges have been asked to develop separate reports, if we read Dick’s memo to Mary correctly.

We find this situation extraordinary, and not in the spirit of our review process or of General Education itself. The intention of the review and of assessment is to address the component as a whole, not as disparate units. While the several disciplines may choose separate assessment tools to generate data, the analysis and synthesis of the outcomes and how they meet the program objectives as a whole should be with one voice. The coordinator is entrusted with the responsibility of incorporating and expressing that one voice. This has not happened in this instance.

Further, the assessment seems now to be more in disarray than ever. The two colleges involved show little promise of being able to resolve their differences and produce a complete report. The PRC chair has had to take on the role of coordinating the different departments in hopes of getting a result, which, given the fact that he himself represents one of the disciplines involved, is entirely outside the scope of his responsibilities.

Committee ought to insist that the disciplines involved produce a report they can all buy into. We do not think it is in the best interests of the review process to be confronted with two different reports, with no doubt differing, even conflicting, conclusions and recommendations. In view of how this has developed, we certainly can appreciate Mary’s offer to do a separate report for the disciplines housed in her college, but this does not set a good precedent for future assessment or for collaboration between the colleges in the years to come. The committee should expect compliance with its initial request for a report comprising all disciplines represented in the category and conclusions affirmed by all stakeholders.

We recommend that our committee request the Provost to act as a facilitator in this matter, meet with the deans of the respective colleges, and ask them to develop a plan by which a single complete report might be presented by September, 2002.
APPENDIX C

DATE: February 2, 2004

TO: Dr. Brian Finder

FROM: Tom Franklin, Chair
Department of Psychology

SUBJECT: *Assessment of General Psychology in the General Education Component*

During the fall of 2003 the Department of Psychology conducted an assessment of the extent to which General Education Objectives within the Social and Behavioral Sciences category are met through instruction in General Psychology. This assessment was conducted on a pre-test to post-test basis for six sections of General Psychology, including four different instructors and one on-line course. A total of 105 students participated in the assessment. The test instrument was developed in 1997, the first time the General Education Assessment took place.

Results from the fall 2003 pre to post assessments were disappointing, but instructive. On the 39-item instrument mean improvement from pre to post measures was an average of less than 2 points. This measure of change was consistent across teachers and delivery systems.

The Department of Psychology Assessment Committee was responsible for conducting and evaluating this assessment process. Their report recommends a thorough revision in not only the assessment procedure, but also the content and consistency of General Psychology curriculum. That committee report is being incorporated into a department action plan in order to address the issues raised through this assessment process.

Members of the department were somewhat concerned about the relatively small change in test scores over the fall semester. However, this process is creating the kind of feedback needed to make continuing improvements in our curriculum and evaluation processes. Our next assessment of General Education Objectives in the Social and Behavioral Sciences category will be a very different process based on this experience.

Copy: John Wesolek, Dean
Department of Psychology Assessment Committee