

## General Education Assessment through Educated Perspective Seminars

### Presentation and Facilitated Discussion

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- 1. Conference Theme:** Assessment and Alignment
- 2. Topic/Practice/Strategy:** How Wayne State College utilizes capstone topic/experiential courses called Educated Perspective Seminars (EPS) to assess the four major goals of our General Education program.
- 3. Topic Goals/Purpose:** To share with others the strategies, key practices and challenges of assessment and alignment of General Education course objectives to General Education program goals. Presenters will share campus experiences using direct and indirect measures of assessment. Unique online electronic assessment utilized by both instructors and students will be shared.
- 4. Discussion Outcomes:** Sharing session among facilitators and attendees about their institution's General Education model and assessment practices.
  - *Why are you here at this session? What questions do you have or hope to have answered?*
  - *Share examples of your institution's assessment process and practices related to General Education? What stage is your institution at in this process?*
  - *Utilization of rubrics, electronic/online assessment?*
  - *Direct and Indirect assessment measures used?*
  - *Challenges? Success stories or best practices?*
- 5. Student Perspectives** Share anecdotal and/or actual research information regarding student feedback about General Education assessment.

### 6. Web Links

#### EPS Course Submission Form

[http://www.wsc.edu/assessment/forms/eps\\_300\\_course\\_submission\\_form\\_faculty.pdf](http://www.wsc.edu/assessment/forms/eps_300_course_submission_form_faculty.pdf)

#### Handout

[http://www.wsc.edu/assessment/forms/aac&u\\_presentation.pdf](http://www.wsc.edu/assessment/forms/aac&u_presentation.pdf)

#### Wayne State College Assessment

<http://www.wsc.edu/assessment/>

#### Wayne State College General Education

[http://www.wsc.edu/academic/general\\_education/](http://www.wsc.edu/academic/general_education/)

## General Education Assessment through Educated Perspective Seminars

General Education is the foundation for learning at Wayne State College, located in Wayne, Nebraska. Drawing from disciplines across the campus, the General Education Program fosters intellectual inquiry, personal and professional development, and responsible citizenship as lifetime endeavors. The General Education Program represents a vital, diverse liberal arts approach to the student's undergraduate experience, creating a common framework for more specialized study within a student's major. This paper will focus on the innovative General Education Program assessment being conducted. The process was developed to assess General Education Program outcomes in culminating courses called Educated Perspective Seminars (EPS).

### Background

Wayne State College (WSC) implemented a revised General Education Program during the fall 2008 semester. In alignment with the new General Education Program, a new plan for assessing this program was developed by the members of the WSC Academy for Assessment of Student Learning team. This Academy team is in its third year of a four-year program, working with the Higher Learning Commission/AQIP and the WSC General Education Committee to accelerate and advance efforts to assess and improve student learning. The team used their Academy for Assessment of Student Learning experience to design, coordinate, and implement an innovative approach to the WSC General Education Program assessment. The Higher Learning Commission Academy mentors and peer institutions have provided input and feedback for continual improvement of the assessment plan. Team members have experience teaching General Education Program courses and the new Educated Perspective Seminar (EPS) courses. The team has worked collaboratively with the campus General Education Committee using the Educated Perspective Seminar (EPS) courses to assess and analyze the institution's General Education Program goals. The WSC Network and Technology Services Department created, developed, and implemented an electronic means of data input and reporting for this new assessment process.

The initial assessment plan for the General Education Program was designed to use at least one direct and one indirect measure, following the guidelines developed for all WSC department program assessment plans. A survey conducted by the Association of American Colleges and Universities indicated that nearly half (48%) of institutions surveyed are assessing at both the departmental level and in general education. Fully 94% either are already assessing (52%), or plan to assess (42%), general education learning outcomes across multiple courses. (Bart 2009). The indirect measure selected uses information gathered from a standardized questionnaire; specifically, the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). In addition, locally created surveys are used. The direct measure utilizes ACT's Collegiate Assessment of Academic Achievement (CAAP) and an innovative assessment process using culminating courses of the General Education Program, called Educated Perspective Seminar (EPS) courses. It is in these EPS courses that each of the college's four General Education Program goals are assessed. An electronic data input for the assessment process of the EPS courses was developed locally through collaboration with the campus Network and Technology Services Department and the Academy for Assessment of Student Learning team. The General Education Program assessment process is completed by all Educated Perspective Seminar (EPS) course instructors, with an additional self-assessment component completed by students. The process asks instructors to identify a primary project(s) or activity(ies) from their courses that demonstrates student learning as it relates to the four General Education Program goals. Each general education goal is assessed within the Educated Perspective Seminar (EPS) course by faculty and students.

The Educated Perspective Seminar (EPS) courses were developed to provide an opportunity for students to conceptualize the integration of disciplines within the liberal arts program and to utilize the knowledge and skills emphasized in the General Education Program. All Educated Perspective Seminar (EPS) courses incorporate knowledge, concepts, and philosophies from various disciplines by examining a topic of interest relevant to today's citizens. Students from a variety of majors come together in each course, bringing to their assignments and classroom discussions the perspectives advanced in their respective majors. Students must complete 60 hours, including at least 30 hours of General Education Program courses, before registering for an Educated Perspective Seminar (EPS) course. The EPS courses are all 300-level, three-credit-hour courses. All students, including transfer students, graduating from Wayne State College (WSC) must complete at least one EPS course. An EPS course cannot count toward a student's major or endorsement. A listing of Educated Perspective Seminar (EPS) course topics is found in Table 1. All EPS courses utilize a common EPS 300 catalog prefix.

**Table 1. EPS 300 (Educated Perspective Seminar) Course Listing**

<b>Capitalism and Morality</b>	This course questions the assumption that capitalism is ethically sound. We shall study the nature of capitalism as well as prominent normative theories of ethics and justice. We shall then look at various ethical issues in capitalism as it is practiced in the United States, including economic distribution, the nature of corporations, corporate auditing, the responsibility of business to consumers and the environment, and the ethics of advertising. Rather than trying to settle these controversies, we will focus on learning and using the methods philosophers use in trying to settle them.
<b>Clashing Views on Global Health Issues</b>	Health is a fundamental human right - however, the responsibility for securing health is a dynamic interaction between individual action and behavior, environment, culture, public policy and socio-economic status of global communities. Furthermore, there is great local and global disparity between health status, revealing an element of privilege to health and health resources. The ultimate goals of this course are to understand the roles of knowledge, access and culture in determining personal and global health; and to build your capacity to "Think Globally and Act Locally" toward personal, community and global health.
<b>Colonizing Space</b>	In this course we will look at new ideas and new technologies associated with mankind (and womankind) colonizing space. In doing so, we will realize how colonizing space involves and integrates a variety of disciplines, knowledge, and skills emphasized in the General Education program. Activities will include journaling and discussing the legitimacy of information from various media sources, debating the political/economical/ethical issues associated with colonizing space, and creating your own space-faring civilization.
<b>Communication and Ethics</b>	Ethics is an aspect of the practice of communication but leaves open for discussion when and where that ethical aspect may be carried out. We will study a variety of ethical dimensions of communication, read and identify the dialectics of ethical dilemmas (right vs. right) and (right vs. wrong); and ponder issues of integrity, moral courage and character. Course goals include: 1) initiating conversation about communication and ethics, 2) developing a vocabulary for talking about ethical issues, 3) experiencing a degree of comfort in discussing ethical concerns, and 4) conducting a research analysis of the ethical dimension of some aspect of discourse in a context of your choice.
<b>Critical Thinking Concepts and Skills</b>	The course is designed to help students achieve deep and significant learning skills for use in all disciplines. By examining controversial and provocative questions students will consider how we think, why we think, and how we can change the type of thinking we participate in through quality thinking and intellectual growth.
<b>Culture and Literature of the Great Plains</b>	The early 21st Century has renewed our focus on what it means to be an American, but regional identity (or lack thereof) significantly influences our personal identities: how do we see ourselves and how do we present ourselves to others. Though Nebraskans too often think their home as a vacant place on the edge of the map with little but the vicissitudes of a college football program to give it shape, the state and its region have a characteristic history and literature that can define its citizens and provide an agenda for the future.
<b>Economic Perspectives of Social Issue</b>	Students will apply an economic perspective to critically examine issues, challenges and current trends related to employment, education, politics and government, social problems (poverty, hunger, homelessness, and crime), diversity, and globalization. The course requires research, writing assignments and discussion, that utilizes the NIF (National Issues Forums) or similar models to examine issues from a variety of perspectives, resolve conflict, and build consensus.
<b>Endangered Languages: Issues and Solutions</b>	Most of the world's languages are in danger of dying out within the next generation or two. The aim of this course is an understanding of the diversity of endangered languages, and of issues surrounding language loss and language preservation projects. We will approach this goal from several directions. During the first part of the semester we will investigate the variety of human languages: their history, their division into language families, the social and cultural factors affecting their usage, their similarities and differences in sounds and grammar. During the second part of the semester we will study language loss and revival. How have thousands of languages come to be lost or endangered? Why is this an important problem? Why are languages valuable – to their speakers, to linguists, anthropologists, and historians, and to societies? What methods have been tried to strengthen or revive endangered languages, and how well have they worked? During the third part of the semester we will look in more depth at one endangered Native American language, Omaha-Ponca, and students will research a language of their choice. There is no language prerequisite for the course.
<b>Environmental Ethics</b>	Environmental Ethics philosophically inspects religious, economic, political, and health issues that impact us and our planet as a result of human generated waste and pollution. Environmental Ethics is also concerned with allied issues such as race, class, gender and globalization. Environmental Ethics deals with our relationships with nature which have been mainly degrading and destructive. Environmental Ethics is an interdisciplinary course that encourages thinking across cultural, historical, and knowledge boundaries.
<b>Leadership Styles</b>	People with college educations are expected to be leaders at their workplace and in their community. In this course, students will discuss a variety of examples of leadership to learn some theories of leadership development and the leadership process. We will also see that leadership in different venues takes very different forms: being a leader in a business is very different from being a leader in education or a leader of your community. Additionally, students will take several personality inventories and leadership assessments to determine their leadership strengths and weaknesses to improve their leadership skills.
<b>Nature and Culture of the Great Plains</b>	Many people living on the Great Plains have little understanding of its nature and culture. To develop a greater understanding of the Great Plains, this class explores the past, present and future of the region through the lens of natural history and the social environment. The ultimate purpose is to develop a sense what is unique about the Great Plains and to consider its problems and prospects.
<b>Peace Studies</b>	Inner peace, interpersonal peace, and world peace will be explored through several disciplines including counseling, economics, history, literature, political science, psychology, and sociology. Conversations on peace: inner peace, peace in our individual spheres (as students, teachers, professionals), and world peace will be incorporated. Emphases will be on alternatives to approaching conflict and the building of peace.
<b>Technology and Society</b>	A study focusing on the nature of modern technology and how technological developments have affected human culture and individuals in society. The content concentrates on Electronic media and Energy and their interaction with society. Issues of both local and national interest are included. Students will develop and refine their own ideas and opinions through readings, lectures, discussion, videos, debates and writing assignments.

## Procedures

Faculty members interested in teaching Education Perspective Seminar (EPS) courses must first submit a completed General Education Course Submission Form (See Table 2) and proposed course syllabus to their department chair and dean for approval before advancing the proposal to the General Education Committee. The General Education Committee provides oversight on all EPS course approvals. Educated Perspective Seminar (EPS) courses proposed for General Education credit must meet each of the four General Education Program’s learning objectives and pass two readings of the General Education Committee to be adopted.

**Table 2. EPS Course Submission Form**

[http://www.wsc.edu/assessment/forms/eps\\_300\\_course\\_submission\\_form\\_faculty.pdf](http://www.wsc.edu/assessment/forms/eps_300_course_submission_form_faculty.pdf)

After approval and prior to the term the course is offered, Educated Perspective Seminar (EPS) instructors are mentored on the assessment procedures by the Academy for Assessment of Learning team. This is accomplished through a group meeting of all EPS course instructors for the upcoming term. As the program continues to evolve, this mentoring will be conducted by experienced EPS course instructors with special meetings scheduled to provide the addition of networking time for all EPS instructors.

The Educated Perspective Seminar (EPS) course instructor is asked to identify course project(s) or activity(ies) that address the four goals of the General Education Program. Table 3 indicates how instructors assess each student’s achievement of that goal on a rubric using a five-point scale (4 – *Exceptional/demonstrates mastery of goal*, 3 – *Competent/demonstrates proficient progress toward goal*, 2 – *Acceptable/demonstrates satisfactory progress toward goal*, 1 – *Emerging/demonstrates limited progress toward goal*, 0 – *Deficient/failed to demonstrate progress toward goal*).

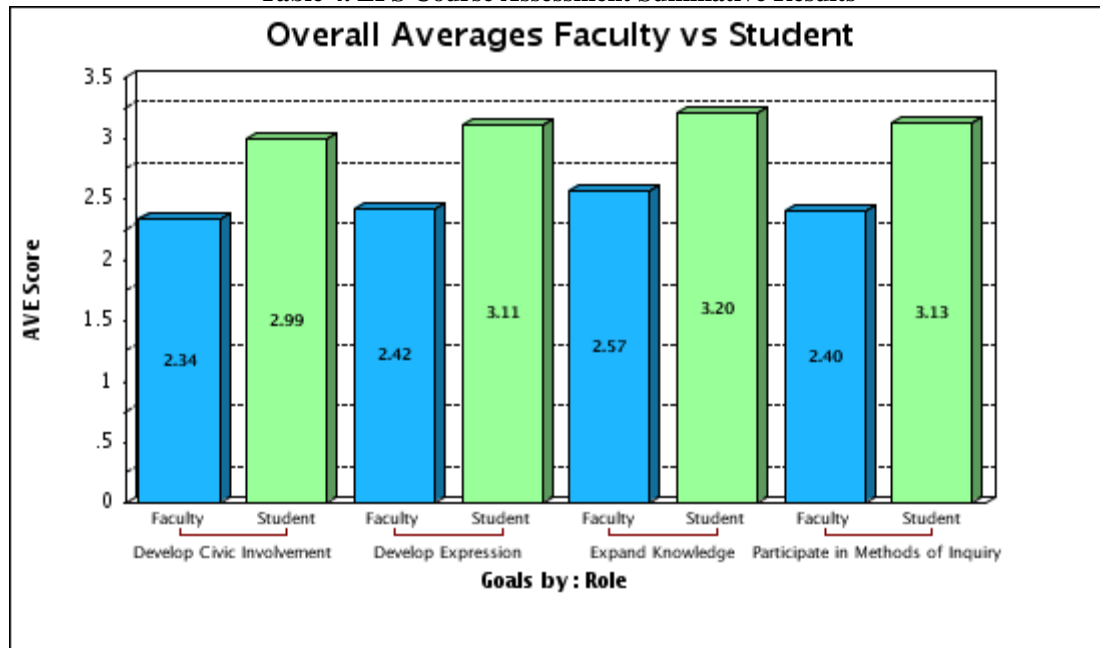
**Table 3. EPS Electronic Course Assessment**

Students also self-rate their achievement on each goal using the same rubric. Faculty and students are also given an opportunity to reflect on their experiences with the four general education goals evaluated in their EPS courses. The results are compiled using an electronic General Education Program goals assessment process and reported electronically to the Office of Assessment for data collection. The Network and Technology Services Department created this electronic means of data input and uses WebFocus software for reporting. The institution's General Education Committee continues oversight of the assessment process by analyzing the data reports and adopting changes to continuously improve student learning.

## Results

**Direct Measures of Assessment.** Preliminary freshman data results from the fall 2009 Collegiate Assessment of Academic Achievement (CAAP) Essay Writing Exam indicate a local mean score of 3.0 compared to the national mean of 3.2, indicating the local norm is slightly below the national norm. (This freshman-level data from CAAP is supported by similar data from our indirect measure discussed below). Educated Perspective Seminar (EPS) course assessment data provided by EPS course faculty from the first three academic terms indicates that students are performing slightly below the *Competent* level of 3.0 for each of the four General Education Program goals. Students' self-assessments were higher than faculty for each of the four goals. (See Table 4). This data has led the campus to begin creating rubrics for the various performance levels identified to assure that similar expectations and criteria for scoring exist throughout the campus when assessing the EPS project(s).

**Table 4. EPS Course Assessment Summative Results**



**Indirect Measures of Assessment.** Several of the 2009 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) survey items have been evaluated and aligned with the General Education Program goals. For example: WSC Goal 1 is to "Develop Expression: Foster communication skills that facilitate effective expression of ideas (e.g. writing, speaking, reading, listening, and visualizing)" and the results have been mixed. For instance in the NSSE item regarding making presentations in class, the WSC scores were above the mean NSSE score reported for our institution (WSC freshmen and seniors 2.48 and 3.13 respectively; combined Carnegie Class and peer institutions 2.35 and 2.76 respectively). Yet in the NSSE item: *Number of written papers or reports of 20 pages or more* indicated that for both freshmen and seniors surveyed, WSC scores were slightly below the mean scores (WSC freshmen 1.20 to 1.30 and WSC seniors 1.55 to 1.60) for Plains Public, Carnegie Class and combined NSSE 2009 survey institutions comparisons. Another 2009 NSSE item on writing, NSSE item: *Number of written papers or reports of fewer than 5 pages* indicated freshman scores (3.10 to 3.15) were slightly below the mean scores for Plains Public, Carnegie Class and combined NSSE 2009 survey institutions comparisons, but the senior scores (3.49 to 3.18) were above the mean scores. Regarding our General Education goal of expanding diverse perspectives our freshman scores were above the NSSE combined Carnegie Class and peer institution score, yet our senior scores were below. Regarding our General Education goal of developing a sense of civic responsibility and community

involvement, our freshman NSSE scores were below the Carnegie Class and peer institution score yet our senior NSSE scores were significantly above.

### **Conclusion**

Because the initial baseline assessment findings (CAAP and NSSE) suggest WSC students are not meeting the communication-writing goals for the General Education Program, while students self-assessed themselves as meeting these goals at the *Competent* level, we will primarily be focusing our attention on enhancing writing skills through our General Education Program.

Several academic program departments have reviewed their program assessment data and also concluded that student writing performances in a number of majors need to be improved. To improve a student's writing, one department took a twenty-page term paper project and divided it into four parts for submission at various dates during the semester. It is hypothesized that the relatively short turnaround time of these papers, combined with ongoing critique, will aid students in producing improved writing/content/analysis each time they hand in a new section of their paper. Through assessment measures, the General Education Committee will continue to monitor and analyze data to determine additional strategies necessary to improve student writing.

The WSC Academy for Assessment of Student Learning team, in collaboration with the campus General Education Committee, has assessed learning outcomes in culminating Educated Perspective Seminar (EPS) courses in the General Education Program. The team has incorporated Higher Learning Commission Academy mentor and Academy Cohort peer feedback and evaluation into this assessment process. The team has completed a full Plan-Do-Study-Act cycle of ongoing, continuous, improvement using this process. The institution is now three years into this cycle of continuous outcome assessment. The process will be continually monitored, assessed and revised to improve student learning at Wayne State College.

### **Note**

Higher Learning Commission Academy for Assessment of Student Learning members: Patricia Arneson, Gwen Jensen, James O'Donnell, Phyllis Spethman, Suzanne Sydow, Keith Willis, and Tamara Worner.

### **Reference**

Bart, Mary. 2009. Faculty Focus. *Learning outcomes assessment standards revealed in survey of academic leaders*. <http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/educational-assessment/learning-outcomes-assessment-standards-revealed-in-survey-of-academic-leaders/>.

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