

A Brief History of Assessment of Student Achievement and the Changing Curriculum at Augustana College

Before 1996

The Office of Institutional Research was established at Augustana in 1978. This office is responsible for gathering data about the College and its students. From its inception, it has administered a number of surveys and measures that are intended to provide us with information about our students, faculty, and programs. This office regularly administers surveys of first year students, senior students and alumni, and most recently participated in the National Survey of Student Engagement. The ACT-COMP was administered, and our students' performance on the GRE has also been monitored. Dr. Tim Schermer, the Director of Institutional Research, has regularly provided updates to the faculty and administration on institutional findings and patterns. The Office of Institutional Research was a beginning point for our assessment efforts at Augustana.

Consideration of student achievement by the Augustana faculty began in earnest during the revision and implementation of general education in 1991. The committee that was established at this time began discussion of possible assessment strategies. In the summer of 1994, the Dean, the Director of Institutional Research and a faculty member attended one of the assessment workshops sponsored by James Nichols which provided us with a better understanding of how to approach collecting and using assessment information. In the fall of 1994, our first assessment committee was formed. Composed of seven faculty members, the Dean, Provost and Director of Institutional Research, this group developed the initial philosophy and schedule for assessment of general education and the major programs of study. This was submitted to the North Central Association in May 1995 (Appendix #1). Based on feedback that was received, the Assessment Review Committee was formed and revision of the plan was completed in November 1995 along with the self-study that was prepared for the 1996 NCA accreditation visit (Appendix #2). The report of the visiting team in 1996 asked that a more extensive summary of our assessment outcomes be submitted in 1998 after we implemented the 1996 plan.

1996-1998

The Assessment Review Committee, composed of six faculty members (one per division), the registrar, the institutional researcher and chaired by the associate dean, continued implementation of the plan that had been outlined. In studying the impact of the general education curriculum required of all students, the Committee gathered and analyzed data from several different sources. These included findings from transcript and syllabi analyses done in 1997 and 1998, the ACT COMP administered in 1998, senior surveys completed in 1997 and 1998, alumni surveys from 1995 and 1998, and analyses of senior papers and projects in 1997 and 1998. The Assessment Review Committee also reviewed department plans and results from 27 programs on campus. The report submitted to NCA in 1998 is included in Appendix #3. It provides a detailed description of the strategies that were implemented along with initial conclusions that were drawn. The NCA committee that reviewed this document indicated that our assessment of general education was proceeding well, but urged us to focus more on program assessment. The report to NCA was distributed and discussed by the Educational Policies Committee, the primary curriculum committee of the College.

1998-2000

During the next two academic years, the Assessment Review Committee repeated many of the assessment strategies used previously to identify and confirm patterns of strength and weakness. In terms of general education, in 1999, the ACT-COMP was repeated with a sample of graduating seniors. Senior projects were also collected and analyzed. Results from senior, alumni and first year student surveys were considered. The results of these assessments were presented to the entire faculty at the September, 1999 faculty retreat (Appendix #4).

As is evident from the reports that were presented to the faculty in 1998 and 1999, questions emerged on the impact of our general education requirements. There was an overall sense that while we were good, we could be better. To thoroughly consider our current status and alternatives for curricular revision, over two-thirds of the faculty formed twenty different study groups (called "Think Forces") that met during the 1999-2000 academic year. These groups focused on a wide range of specific issues such as developing abilities to write, speak and think critically, enhancing understanding of the liberal arts, multiculturalism and diversity, and improving our delivery of instruction and curricular structure. The final executive report of these groups is included in the side pocket. It was provided to all faculty at the 2000 retreat. It gave a very compelling assessment of our curriculum and motivated the formation of a General Education Working Group.

In 2000, as ACT phased out the COMP, the Assessment Review Committee considered other nationally normed measures that might be used. The Committee decided upon the Academic Profile from the Educational Testing Service which was administered to a sample of first year and senior students. The Committee also developed a more sophisticated rubric for analyzing student writing and used it to compare papers written by first year and senior students (Appendix #5). The College Senior Survey from HERI was administered to over two-thirds of the senior class. The findings from these sources of information are summarized in Appendix #6. A member of the faculty presented an overview of these findings at the October, 2000 faculty retreat. (The PowerPoint presentation from this session is included in Appendix #7). Results from the 1999 HERI faculty survey were also discussed at this retreat.

In terms of assessment of majors, the Assessment Review Committee continued its work with departments. In 1998-1999, the Committee met with members of each individual program, asking that they summarize their assessment activities and resulting changes in curriculum and instruction. To keep the entire campus informed on assessment practices, a monthly newsletter entitled the ASSESSMENT ADVOCATE was sent to all faculty. Samples of the ADVOCATE are available in Appendix #8. In 1999-2000, department chairs were contacted at the beginning of the fall term about assessment, and asked to submit updates in the spring. In addition, whenever a department or program had a faculty opening, they were required to submit a program review and an updated assessment plan to the Dean's Office before the position search would be authorized. Since 1999, 85% of our programs have undergone such an authorization process. The reviews are on file in the Dean's Office.

2000-2002

The General Education Working met during the 2000-2001 academic year. In the summer of 2001, the group attended the AAHE Asheville Institute on General Education. They first developed a statement of goals and outcomes for our general education requirements (Appendix #9) and then a new set of requirements (Appendix #10). At the 2001 faculty retreat this group presented curricular alternatives to the faculty and asked for further feedback. The ongoing work of this group and accompanying commentary by the faculty was posted on a website. This archive is available at <http://campus.augustana.edu/academic/GenEd/>. New requirements were adopted by the faculty in April 2002, to be implemented in the fall of 2004.

2002-2004

Following the governance provisions approved by the faculty, a permanent General Education Committee was formed in the fall of 2002. Attention was first given to creating a set of new courses for first year students. The Committee articulated a set of expectations for these courses and issued a call for proposal. Faculty developing these courses started meeting in January 2003, and have maintained regular contact since that time. Several members of the General Education Committee serve as liaison to these faculty groups. First year course faculty have developed a set of goals, a statement on plagiarism, and rubrics for assessing writing and speaking, and have identified common texts that have been assembled into a reader. In order to take advantage of our rich learning-living environment, convocation and other campus events have also been planned to complement the first year studies program.

The General Education Committee then defined each of the learning perspectives and specific course requirements. This was done to provide a more intentional framework for the curriculum. That had not been the case with previous distribution requirements. The guidelines for each learning perspective and specific requirement along with an overview of the first year studies program were assembled in a notebook that was provided to each faculty member (AGES notebook). These are also available at the Dean's Office webpage. In 2003-2004, the General Education Committee vetted courses proposed for each perspective or requirement. These were then submitted to the Educational Policies Committee and the Faculty Senate for final approval. In 2004-2005 the General Education Committee will meet with faculty teaching in each perspective to further discuss areas of commonality across departments.

To provide an assessment baseline for the new curriculum, the Assessment Review Committee continued to gather information through a number of measures and strategies. These included analyses of syllabi, evaluation of papers written by first year and senior students as well as surveys of alumni, seniors, first year students and faculty. The National Survey of Student Engagement was administered in 2002 and 2003. In an effort to ascertain the impact of the new curriculum, the Committee will compare findings from these sources of information with information compiled after the new curriculum is fully implemented.

To assist the Assessment Review Committee, the Dean hired an additional consultant during the 2002-2003 academic year. This individual and the Associate Dean met with representatives of every program to discuss current assessment strategies and recommend updates and modifications. In 2003 departments submitted revised assessment plans to the Assessment Review Committee. Status reports were submitted in June 2004.