

Report of the Work of the General Education Task Force, 2007-2008

The General Education Task Force has completed its assigned tasks, and this report summarizes the work accomplished and the resulting recommendations. The Task Force was charged with three tasks for the year:

- Identify college-level competencies that all students are expected to demonstrate.
- Develop and implement a sustainable plan for assessing the degree to which students are attaining the competencies.
- Recommend to the Provost a mechanism for continuing the regular assessment of the competencies, to disseminate the results, and to use the results to improve student learning.

Identifying college-level competencies

The Task Force began its work by reviewing the work of the University Curriculum Committee's sub-committee for general education in spring 2007. That group had developed a list of goals for general education and surveyed the faculty, asking them to rate the relative importance of the goals for Baylor graduates and respond to open-ended questions. The Task Force reviewed the summary report of the survey results and comments. In addition, Task Force members reread Baylor 2012 and pertinent sections of the *Undergraduate Catalog* to ensure that the competencies identified would support both the mission and the goals of Baylor 2012. Members also read and discussed *The Art and Science of Assessing General Education Outcomes* (an AAC&U monograph). The group agreed that competencies should not be tied to particular disciplines, so that graduates in every discipline would be able to demonstrate their attainment.

Following this period of research and discussion, Task Force members individually drafted competency statements, which were compiled and categorized by Institutional Effectiveness. After reviewing the categories, the Task Force divided into sub-groups to develop four competency statements for communication, critical thinking, Christian perspective, and global leadership and service. The four competencies identified for Baylor graduates were:

- Communication: Communicate effectively and clearly, both in writing and in speaking, in a manner appropriate to the subject, occasion, and audience.

The Task Force noted that clear, effective communication includes well-structured, clearly articulated arguments, appropriate word choices, smooth transitions, and adherence to standard conventions.

- Critical Thinking: Be proficient in evaluating evidence, articulating arguments, justifying conclusions, and identifying and presenting multiple perspectives.

Recognizing that critical thinking may be developed and displayed somewhat differently in different disciplines, the Task Force worked to specify elements of critical thinking that are relevant to all graduates.

- Christian Perspective: Demonstrate knowledge of the Christian scriptures and Christian heritage that enables participation in religious discourse.

The Task Force developed this competency to reflect Baylor's mission statement, which includes cultivating students' capacity to assess information from a Christian perspective, as well as Baylor's long-standing general education requirement, courses in Christian scriptures and Christian heritage. Students are expected to demonstrate proficiency in articulating their knowledge of the scriptures and the Christian heritage, to enable them to participate in discourse from a Christian perspective.

- Global Leadership and Service: Demonstrate an understanding of the challenges of a global society with a commitment to social and civic responsibility and service among diverse communities.

The Task Force selected this competency to reflect Baylor's mission "to educate men and women for worldwide leadership and service." This competency is also supported by Baylor's long-standing requirement for most degrees that students develop intermediate-level proficiency in a foreign language.

Developing the Assessment Plan

The four sub-groups of the Task Force then turned their attention to assessment of the competencies. The groups met individually to consider both existing evidence and new means of gathering information to demonstrate how well Baylor graduates have attained the competencies. Task Force members were careful to develop an assessment plan that is ambitious yet sustainable over the long term, one that will provide valid and useful information for improving student learning. Their rationale for developing the assessment plan for each competency is described below.

- Communication: The Task Force agreed that competence in both written and oral communication is best demonstrated in the context of students' work in senior-level courses. Students are more likely to display their best efforts when the work is a class requirement, rather than an artificial writing or speaking assignment strictly for purposes of assessment. Faculty drawn from across the university will evaluate samples of student writing and recordings of oral presentations, using a rubric developed by the Task Force.

Due to the time demanded by this type of assessment, assessment of written and oral communication will be assessed in alternate years.

- Critical Thinking: After extensive reading and discussion, the Task Force determined that critical thinking skills also would be assessed most effectively by examining students' written work within their disciplines. They decided that the rubric developed by the subcommittee for this competency provides enough flexibility to assess critical thinking for students in different disciplines. The Task Force further concluded that combining the assessment of critical thinking with that of writing could be accomplished successfully by rating the papers from senior-level courses for both competencies.
- Christian Perspective: The Task Force supported the subcommittee's recommendation that this competency be assessed at the conclusion of the required religion courses, through a common set of exam questions on key topics. This course-based assessment has been in place for three years, with continuing refinement of the questions. Students in randomly selected sections of REL 1310 and 1350 are examined in the fall and spring, respectively, with multiple-choice questions over key topics within each course.

In addition to the direct assessment of students' familiarity with the Christian scriptures and heritage, some indirect evidence for this competency is provided by students' responses to relevant questions on the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), compared with those from students at peer universities. Baylor administers the NSSE in alternate years.

- Global Leadership and Service: The Task Force acknowledged that this competency will be challenging to assess, but its importance in support of Baylor's mission makes it an integral one for our students. In exploring ways students might demonstrate this competency, Task Force members discovered a number of existing sources of rich data about students' work related to this competency:
 - Faculty in Modern Foreign Languages assess students' proficiency in writing, reading, speaking, and listening at the end of the required fourth-semester course each semester, using guidelines established by the American Council of Teachers of Foreign Languages. The percentages of students achieving the desired proficiency levels are examined.
 - Baylor's Civic Education and Community Service Program offers service learning courses that require a minimum of two hours per week of community service. The program tracks the number of students enrolled and the number of hours of community service provided.
 - The Office of Student Activities maintains a database of student involvement in volunteer service and fund-raising activities, both on

- campus and in the larger community. The number of hours of service and amount of funds raised are examined.
- The Office of International Programs surveys students following their study-abroad experiences to gain insight into the effects of living abroad. Students' reflections are examined for evidence of understanding of and commitment to global community.
 - Institutional Research and Testing administers the National Survey of Student Engagement every other year. The Task Force identified questions related to competence in global leadership and service, and Baylor students' responses are compared with those from students at other private research universities.

The assessment plan for the four competencies is summarized in the tables that follow:

Communications competency: *Students are able to communicate effectively and clearly, both in writing and speaking, in a manner appropriate to the subject, occasion, and audience.*

How assessed	When assessed	Assessed by	Criteria for success
Faculty examine a representative sample of 200 papers written for senior-level courses, using a standard rubric	Papers collected fall and spring terms; Assessment occurs in May, every two years	Representative faculty, who receive a stipend for their work	All papers will be rated at least Minimally competent, 75% will be rated Competent or higher, 25% will be rated Highly competent
Faculty examine a representative sample of 100 oral presentations recorded in senior-level courses, using a standard rubric	Between the spring and summer terms, every two years (alternating with writing assessment)	Representative faculty, who receive a stipend for their work	All presentations will be rated at least Satisfactory, and 25% will be rated Excellent

Critical Thinking competency: *Students are proficient in evaluating evidence, articulating arguments, justifying conclusions, and identifying and presenting multiple perspectives.*

How assessed	When assessed	Assessed by	Criteria for success
Faculty examine a representative sample of 200 papers written for senior-level courses, using a standard rubric	Papers collected fall and spring terms; Assessment occurs in May, every two years	Representative faculty, who receive a stipend for their work	All papers will be rated at least Minimally competent, 75% will be rated Competent or higher, 25% will be rated Highly competent

Christian Perspective competency: *Students will demonstrate knowledge of the Christian Scriptures and Christian Heritage that enables participation in religious discourse.*

How assessed	When assessed	Assessed by	Criteria for success
Student responses to exam questions administered in the required religion courses	Annually – REL 1310 in Fall; REL 1350 in Spring	Undergraduate coordinator, Department of Religion	Students will answer correctly 70% of the questions within each area examined.
Student responses to selected questions on the National Survey of Student Engagement	Spring term, every two years	Institutional Research and Testing	Baylor students will score higher on the selected questions than students in the “Selected Peers” comparison group.

Global Leadership and Service competency: *Students will demonstrate an understanding of the challenges of a global society with a commitment to social and civic responsibility and service among diverse communities.*

How assessed	When assessed	Assessed by	Criteria for success
Faculty assess students in the 4 th semester foreign language classes for proficiency in speaking, listening, reading, and writing	Spring term, annually	Modern Foreign Languages faculty	At least 75% of students will achieve the ACTFL guidelines for Intermediate proficiency on all four competencies.

How assessed	When assessed	Assessed by	Criteria for success
Office of International Education survey of students studying abroad	Annually	Office of International Education staff and faculty	At least 75% of students will give reasons for studying abroad and reflections on benefits they gained that reflect a global commitment.
Student responses to selected questions on the National Survey of Student Engagement	Spring term, every two years	Institutional Research and Testing	Baylor students will score higher on the selected questions than students in the "Selected Peers" comparison group.
Student Activities' records of student volunteer service hours in community and abroad	Annually	Student Activities and Institutional Effectiveness staff	Each year, at least 50% of Baylor students will engage in volunteer service activities; at least 25% will complete 10 or more hours.

Implementing the Assessment Plan

The Task Force directed the initial implementation of the assessment plan in Spring 2008. A complete description of the assessment conducted and the findings was included in the monitoring report submitted to SACS in late August.

Recommendations to the Provost

The General Education Task Force recommends two primary actions for the Provost, one related to institutionalizing the process of assessing general education outcomes and one addressing the perceived need among a number of Task Force members to review the current general education requirements. The recommended actions are:

- Identify or create an ongoing faculty committee with representatives from each academic unit and ex officio members from Institutional Effectiveness and Institutional Research and Testing. Charge the committee with:
 - Examining the assessment results annually;
 - Directing additional analysis of the results, if needed;
 - Disseminating results to the appropriate constituents;
 - Recommending any needed action based on the results;
 - Continuing regular assessment of the college-level competencies;

- Ensuring a regular report summarizing the assessment process is prepared.

The Task Force included some Undergraduate Curriculum Committee members who indicated that the UCC's new responsibilities for overseeing curricular changes would not allow that body to assume the recommended duties.

- Consult with the Faculty Senate leadership to determine the faculty's level of interest in forming a representative committee or task force charged with:
 - Examining the broader goals for general education and their relationship to the current basic degree requirements;
 - Determining the efficacy of the current requirements for developing the competencies expected of all students;
 - Recommending any needed curricular revisions to the Provost.