

***Lehman College***  
Undergraduate Curriculum Committee

*Spring '05 General Education Workshop*

As a part of the 2003-04 Academic Affairs Strategic Plan, Provost Garro asked the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee to develop the overall learning objectives of Distribution and LEH courses. To accomplish this task, the Committee has sponsored three workshops: two were held in the spring of '04, and the third, on May 13, 2005.

The purpose of all three workshops, as defined in the Academic Affairs Strategic Plan, was “to refine both the objectives of the General Education program and the mechanisms to ensure that these objectives are integrated into specific courses.” Specifically, each Distribution, Natural Science and LEH committee, was given four tasks:

1. Define the over-all learning objectives of the distribution area.
2. Describe the mechanism that will be used to ensure that these objectives are integrated into specific courses.
3. Discuss how to communicate objectives and mechanisms to students and faculty.
4. Discuss assessment of learner outcomes/course objectives.

For the most part, all nine committees considered each of these tasks in the spring '04 workshops. (A summary of these proceedings, titled “Spring '04 General Education Workshops” can be found on the Gen. Ed home page). Participants at this third, '05 workshop, then used these suggestions as springboards into their discussions. Some groups accepted the work already completed and went on to consider “further steps.” Others revised, changed and further expanded on the suggestions. This document summarizes their recommendations.

***Area 1: Individual and Society***

Present: Vincent Prohaska (Psychology), coordinator; Jeneve Brooks-Klinger (Sociology/Social Work); William Campbell (Psychology); Tom Conroy (Sociology/Social Work); Ray Grizzel (Psychology); Miriam Jimenez (Political Science); Mareleyn Schneider (Sociology/Social Work); Cheryl Smith Gabig (Speech, Language and Hearing Sciences).

Recorder: Vincent Prohaska (Psychology).

We spent some time discussing the goals and objectives created last year and ways of linking the presented “competencies” to them. A key issue we addressed, that also was addressed last year, was communication with faculty teaching the courses. The provision of a coordinator for each area was noted with approval. We still hope that a Blackboard-

style platform could be developed for faculty within each area so that they could not only participate in discussions, but also post syllabi and examples of activities and assignments that address the goals, objectives and competencies. In the interim, at least an area listserv should be created. We discussed creation of an “area handbook” for distribution to faculty teaching in area courses. The handbook would contain information about the goals, objectives and competencies; the information about the course in relation to the area that should be included in syllabi; examples of activities and assignments; and, methods of assessment.

In terms of assessment, we focused on collecting the following information:

From faculty: Collect syllabi to show that faculty are aware of their courses’ relation to the area and general education, and the area’s goals and objectives. Syllabi also will show that this information is available to students. At the end of each semester, distribute a survey to faculty to collect examples of activities, assignments, readings, etc. that addressed the goals, objectives and competencies. These examples will provide concrete instances of how the goals, objectives and competencies are being achieved. They also can later be used in the handbook, thus creating an ongoing resource for faculty teaching area courses.

From students: Distribute a generic area survey to students each semester to collect their subjective reports about how the goals, objectives and competencies were addressed in the course and, perhaps to allow them to self-assess their learning.

### *Area 2 : Socio-Political Structures*

Members present 5/13/05: Dene Hurley ( Economics), Chair; Chris Bonastia (Sociology/Social Work); Kevin Pirsch ( Political Science); Esther Wilder, (Sociology/Social Work); M. Victoria Perez-Trios (Political Science); Christa Salamandra ( Anthropology).

While participants in Area II agreed, for the most part, with the recommendations from the two previous workshops for tasks #1 and #2, they also had several suggestions.

For the first ask, over-all learning objectives of the distribution area, they added a phrase to the purpose of the distribution area.

*Purpose: To develop students’ ability to recognize, analyze and understand current political, economic and social structures, issues and relationships in historical context.*

The group also added an item to the objectives, raising their total from six to seven. Revised, it reads:

Students will have the opportunity to develop their abilities to:

- Effectively express themselves, orally and in writing.

- Utilize information resources and evaluate the quality of data and information. (Differentiate between data and anecdote)
- Interpret and analyze documents, graphs, tables, and maps.
- Describe the impact of socio-political structures on themselves and their communities.
- **Develop critical reading skills.**
- Apply critical thinking skills in the interpretation and application of information, equipping them to become independent thinkers.
- Become independent, life-long learners.

Members of the May 13<sup>th</sup> workshop also revised and added to the list of mechanisms detailed at the '04 workshops. They now read:

- Include assignments that require the use of library resources. (Include a library orientation in the freshman seminars. Disciplines that require the use of specialized library resources may need additional orientation.)
- Incorporate current socio-economic-political news into the classroom discussion.
- Interpret, analyze, critically evaluate and assess, and present qualitative and quantitative data (e.g. maps, graphs, surveys, as appropriate to the discipline).
- Include writing assignments, especially those requiring submission of a first draft and opportunity for student revisions.
- Hold workshops on plagiarism and other ethical issues
- Give exams requiring a variety of skills and responses (short answer, essay, multiple-choice).
- Create opportunities for students to give oral presentations.
- Integrate collaborative activities into the class, such as student work on group projects or team assignments.
- Invite guest speakers to the class.
- Conduct field trips, when appropriate.
- Incorporate audio-visual materials (documentaries and feature films).

The May 13<sup>th</sup> 2005 workshop discussed the assessment topic further, focusing on application aspects. It was agreed that assessments should be based purely on teaching techniques/strategies and content of the course. The two approaches that were discussed in detail include:

A “standardized” assessment form: This could be a one page survey form which will test the basic knowledge and skills of students to be given at the beginning and the end of the semester. Weaknesses and questions raised over this approach include - (a) who will administer or coordinate or grade the test; (b) how are “other” influences (such as knowledge acquired from non-Gen Ed. Courses) to be controlled?; (c) what percentage of the test will cover quantitative vs. qualitative topics? ; (d) will we be creating the impression that education is all about “standardized testing”?

Evaluate final exams: Finals exams should help reveal skills and knowledge students are expected to have by the end of the semester. However, a concern was expressed that this may be regarded as an infringement of academic freedom.

Finally, if assessment reveals that there are gaps in students' knowledge and skills, what remedial measures should likely be taken?

### *Area 3: Literature*

Members present 5/13/05: Robert Carling (English), Coordinator; Carmen Esteves (Languages and Literatures); Marlene Gottlieb (Dean, Arts and Humanities); Daniel Mozes (English); Ms. Deirdre O'Boy (English); Rona Ostrow (Library); Anna Purves (English); Cynthia Thompson (English).

Faculty Writing Specialist: Carmen Esteves (Languages & Literatures).  
Recorder: Robert Carling.

Since Area III Participants finished discussing all four tasks at the May 04 workshop they decided to focus on what the next steps should be.

- It was agreed that the most important next tasks involve the activities discussed in the third task, Communication of Objectives and mechanisms to faculty and students.
- We recognize that Area 3 has much turnover in faculty teaching the courses, and many part-time faculty, so consistent communication is essential.
- Most of the discussion centered on the creation of an Area 3 Archive (preferably electronic, whose location and format would be determined by the Gen Ed Task Force) and other ways to get model materials and guidance in teaching practices to new and continuing faculty.
- The group recognized that face-to-face mentoring of new faculty can be as important as providing model materials.
- Typical material posted on the Archive site would be:
  - Representative course outlines
  - Model assignments
  - Library information
  - Google links to typical syllabi across the country
  - Advice from experienced instructors on such topics as (1) number and type of texts to use; anthologies versus individual paperbacks; (2) effective assignments and typical pitfalls for students in assignments; (3) strategies for getting the best work from students; (4) use of such devices as study questions, multiple drafts of assignments, revisions; (5) teaching and assignment strategies for writing intensive sections and on-line courses; (6) grading practices; (7) academic dishonesty: cheating and plagiarism
- The group examined sample syllable and model assignments for the following courses:
  - ENG 222, Literary Genres – Writing Intensive (Carling)
  - ENG 223, English Literature (Carling)

- ENG 227, American Literature (Carling)
  - ENG 227, American Literature (Mozes)
  - ENG 234, Women in Literature (Thompson)
  - SPA/LAC 233, Latin American Literature in Translation (Esteves)
- Hard copies of these materials are available to interested faculty members.

#### *Area 4: The Arts*

Members present 5/13/05: Wm. M. Hoffman (JCT), co-ordinator; Anne Bard (JCT); Herb Broderick (Art); Sandra Deminco, Library.

Recorder: William M. Hoffman.

Members of Area IV revisited and revised all four tasks.

1. Over-all learning objectives of the distribution area:

The goal of our introductory courses in the arts is to familiarize students with a medium of creative expression, be it music, theatre, dance, or art. We seek to train students to look at a work of art, and to learn to listen. We also wish to enable students to participate in aesthetic experiences, in several ways. At times they may be engaged in the actual creation of a work of art (a scene written for a theatre class, a song in music, for example), but for the most part, we plan to continue to facilitate students' attendance at performances and exhibitions at the College, as well as at museums, galleries, theatres and concert halls in New York City, or introducing students to the literature of drama or the other arts..

Another goal is to incorporate into our basic courses as many modalities as possible that address the need for skills development in our students, particularly where the need is greatest, among our entering freshmen and transfers, populations that our distribution areas serve.

2. Mechanisms for integration of objectives into courses:

The arts have the capacity to promote expression, as well as critical thinking, in students by providing a great opportunity for arguing a wide spectrum of points of view. Since they deal with tangible elements - works that can be seen, heard, felt - they supply the raw material for phenomenological analysis and for interpretation of the human condition. In the long run, the study of the arts on the undergraduate level can be the beginning of a lifelong appreciation. In the short term, the arts provide a fertile platform for the development of writing skills.

We recommend that faculty teaching introductory courses give the kinds of assignments that will help students acquire mastery in writing, and in critical thinking. This can include oral expression, short, frequent essays; writing-intensive work (such as three-to four page research papers) and, very importantly, library projects, in cooperation with the library staff.

One further mechanism for advancing our objectives has to do with funding. If monies could be allocated for students in our basic Arts courses to be introduced to the rich cultural life of New York City, attendance at concerts, theatres, museums - an experience that can serve as an excellent springboard for academic writing - could be more widespread among our freshmen and transfer students.

3. Communication of objectives and mechanisms to students and faculty:

The designated advisor for distribution courses in each department should meet with faculty to discuss common objectives. In addition, each area in the arts should communicate its assignments/research needs directly to the library, so that the library staff can be in a position to help students become more resourceful in accessing information via the computer, an essential life skill.

4. Assessment of learner outcomes/course objectives:

In the teaching of the arts, we deal with three main components: historical fact, the nature of the art itself, and lastly, self-expression in that art. Therefore, as a measurement of student achievement, it is appropriate to include a portfolio of written and/or artistic work, in addition to the standard grading of tests and papers.

### **Area 5: Comparative Culture**

Members present: Bertrade Banoum (Curriculum Committee); Jim Jervis (Black Studies); Galina Letnikova (Library); Elhum Haghighat (Sociology/Soc Work); Judy Duncker (Political Science); Bernadette Garam (Sociology/Soc Work).

Recorder: Bertrade Banoum

Members excused: Maria Lagos (Anthropology); Xavier Totti (LAPRS); Patricio Lerzundi (MLJ), Kofi Benefo (Sociology/Soc Work)

The focus for the May 13 workshop was Assessment of Outcomes. However, because three new members joined our group, it was necessary to re-visit the recommendations made in the two previous workshops. As a result, an addition was made under the rubric

**2. Mechanisms used to integrate these objectives into specific courses:**

bullet # 4 should now read:

- Incorporating regular writing assignments and integrating data analysis.

We then turned to

**3. Outcomes Assessment:**

Students: Bearing in mind the competencies defined for Lehman College, we stressed

- Measuring the **development** of students' skills and competencies over the course of the semester by
- Conducting a **pre-course assessment** based on a variety of diagnostic tests

- Conducting **continuous assessment** throughout the semester, with emphasis placed on multiple revisions of writing assignments to measure progress.
- Conducting a **post-course assessment** based on exams including writing assignments, responses to readings and viewings, data analysis, oral presentations, debates, team projects, portfolios, research projects.
- Developing students' **self-assessment** tools: their own statement of their achievement of the course objectives

Faculty: Measuring achievement of the Distribution Area objectives through

- Faculty self-assessment of their course achievement of the defined objectives
- Exchange of syllabi, then development of Distribution-Area-5 Syllabi database
- Construction of a Comparative Culture Website, with Library IT support
- Development of a Comparative Culture Blackboard component with Library and ITC support.
- Information sharing about Distribution Area 5 and latest developments in the field of Comparative Cultures.

### *Area 6: History*

William Seraile (Black Studies), Coordinator; Tim Alborn (History); Stephen Garrin (History); Geoff Johnson (History); Mel Maskin (History); Kate Mazza (History); Janet Munch (library).

Recorder: Tim Alborn.

#### 1. Over-all learning objectives of the distribution area.

The group decided to add a sentence to the '04 statement that " In Historical Studies students should learn how to locate sources, both printed and online, which are appropriate to college-level assignments." It should be immediately followed by the sentence : "We need to recognize that given the present availability of online resources at Lehman, many historical topics will require students to consult at least some printed sources, such as books or magazines published before 1970, to gain a sufficient understanding of the period they are studying."

#### 3. Communicating these objectives and mechanisms to students and faculty.

Two paragraphs are to be added to the '04 statement.

A consistent policy on plagiarism and citation methods needs to be communicated to students at the beginning of the semester, both on the syllabus and as part of a class discussion. Some basic standards need to be established across distribution areas, as well

as within them, to avoid the problem of students receiving mixed signals in their different courses.

Writing assignments should be presented to students in written (not oral) form, and instructors should be encouraged to exchange these with each other and with the library's subject specialist. Syllabi should likewise be exchanged in this manner. Communicating course specifications with library staff in this way will enhance their ability to assist students; to consult with instructors on designing effective research assignments; and to assess specific research sources needed to support the course objectives.

#### 4. Assessing learner outcomes/ course objectives.

Replace existing paragraph in the previous draft with the following:

As a group, we were not certain how assessment of instructors can best be implemented in a distribution area where instructors answer to different department chairs. Many of the relevant personnel issues at present are handled by the department making the appointment. We consequently left this matter for discussion at a future meeting, and focused instead on assessment of students' performance.

At the beginning and end of the course, instructors should consider asking a set of written diagnostic questions regarding such topics as geography, library skills, and historical and cultural literacy. These should be adapted to specific courses (e.g., ability to identify important points on a map of Latin America in a course on Latin American history), and they should be open-ended enough to avoid the appearance of condescension. Instructors should also consider assigning an open-ended essay question at the beginning and end of the semester concerning the students' learning goals and reasons for taking the course. This would enable the instructor to evaluate progress in students' writing as well as their intellectual growth during the course, and it would enable the students to assess the course's success in meeting its goals.

### **Area 7: Knowledge, Self, Values**

Members present, May 13, 2005: Julie Maybee (co-ordinator, Philosophy); David Gantz (Philosophy and College Now Program); Marci Gallo (History); David Fletcher (Middle and High School Education);, Susan Voge (Library).  
Comments sent by e-mail prior to meeting: Rosalind Carey (Philosophy); Luis Rodriguez-Abascal (Philosophy)

Recorder: David Gantz and Julie Maybee

#### *1. Implementing Goals and Objectives*

In our earlier reports, we put implementing goals and assessing skills together into one item, since they seem to go hand-in-hand. We still think you cannot assess a course

unless you know what you're implementing, but we discussed these tasks separately anyway.

Here is the list of skills and objectives that we agreed in earlier meetings should be addressed by Area 7 courses (the list below is copied from the "*Spring '04 General Education Workshops*" report):

*Skills and Objectives:*

1. The ability to analyze selected, important texts, including their logical structure
  2. Critical thinking, including the ability to relate personal experience to meanings of texts and themes
  3. The ability to formulate fundamental questions about the meaning and significance of the world and human life
  4. To develop an awareness of elements of intellectual history and the students' places in it
  5. Writing aimed at reflection, clarification and argumentation
  6. Oral expression, rearticulating arguments and modes of thought
  7. Library/research literacy skills introducing students to scholarship in the discipline
- Two further skills/objectives are recommended, but not required:*
8. Teachers should be encouraged to design courses that develop students' computer literacy skills
  9. Teachers could be encouraged to address the basic data/numerical literacy skills required for the CPE

One question that came up in comments received by e-mail was whether this list of skills is mandatory for each class. We did seem to think that it was mandatory for each class to address skills 1-7 in some way or other (8 and 9 are merely recommended), but how these skills would be addressed by each course would be up to the individual instructors. There is flexibility on method, but not so much on the goals to be achieved.

We need to develop and produce a document that presents the skills to be developed and could be handed out to every Area 7 instructor—an "Area VII Learning Objectives" handout. This document should break down the skills into a list of smaller tasks that, when put together, achieve the skills. The list of tasks could then be used to develop a rubric to be used by instructors and/or students to assess whether the skills have been achieved (once again, implementation flows directly into assessment, or, rather, assessment piggy-backs on implementation—but more on assessment shortly). The document would thus present the skills and how to implement those skills in tasks.

We used as our model the Library's handout on "Information Literacy Skills" that was included in our packet at the meeting. We also took some inspiration from the list of competencies that was also included in our Workshop packet.

Here are some thoughts we had on how the skills could be broken down into tasks on an "Area VII Learning Objectives" document. The list of tasks we have here is suggestive only and is by no means intended to be exhaustive:

1. The ability to analyze selected, important texts, including their logical structure

The student can:

- Pick an argument out of a text
- Give an example that illustrates the argument
- Identify the thesis of the text
- Write an abstract which captures the main idea of a text

2. Critical thinking, including the ability to relate personal experience to meanings of texts and themes

The student can:

- Identify a counter-argument to the argument being analyzed
- Invent a counter-argument
- Come up with an example that suggests the argument being analyzed is correct
- Come up with an example that suggests the argument being analyzed is **incorrect**
- Give an example from his or her life that illustrates a theme

3. The ability to formulate fundamental questions about the meaning and significance of the world and human life

The student can:

- Generate a question relevant to the text that could be turned into a one-page essay
- Identify the fundamental theme or value addressed by a text

4. To develop an awareness of elements of intellectual history and the students' places in it

The student can:

- Identify the time-period to which a text belongs
- Identify elements of intellectual history associated with time periods to which texts belong

5. Writing aimed at reflection, clarification and argumentation

Here the document would list types of writing and writing skills that demonstrate objectives 1-4.

6. Oral expression, rearticulating arguments and modes of thought

Here the document would list types of oral expression and oral skills that demonstrate objectives 1-4.

7. Library/research literacy skills introducing students to scholarship in the discipline

Here the document would rely on the library modules developed by the Library. Tasks here include being able to use an on-line database, being able to identify credible texts and so on.

The committee thought that we should spend some time prioritizing these goals and objectives.

## *II. Assessment*

One general question that came up about assessment in e-mail comments that were sent to the committee was what would count as the success or failure of a course. It was generally agreed that students' positive progress toward the achievement of a skill—rather than achievement itself—would be considered success in a course. Students come in with a variety of academic problems at a variety of levels, and we cannot expect every course to solve every student's individual problems with respect to these skills.

As we said at the previous workshop, Lehman students' performances on the CPE should be considered a sign of progress for Area 7. In looking at these statistics, however, it will be important to distinguish students who came to Lehman as Freshman from students who came to Lehman as transfers, since transfer students are often exempted from the distribution requirements.

In addition to keeping an eye on CPE performance, we should produce a rubric that is tied to the goals and objectives for Area 7 that can be used to assess students' progress in the skill areas.

The rubric should involve both a pre- and a post-analysis, according to which students works is assessed at the beginning of the semester, and then re-assessed at the end. One way this could be accomplished would be by requiring students to produce formal portfolios with tables of contents and work that was done throughout the semester.

The committee spent some time discussing the need for there to be a “transparency of assessment.” Not only must there be a rubric to assess student progress, but this rubric should be clearly communicated to the students. We should be clear in each course about what we expect from the students and should communicate these expectations clearly to the students. We need to tell students what we are going to assess them on and how we will assess it. Instructors assess students on a variety of levels. On one level, for instance, we will assess students in terms of the skills and objectives, but we also assess students in terms of the content of a course. Some committee members argued that instructors should always assess students in terms of both skills—writing such as grammar and syntax, for instance—as well as content. Others argued that they sometimes assess particular assignments in terms of only one or the other. We do not need to agree on this issue, however, so long as we each make clear to our students how we will be assessing assignments in our courses.

Making our expectations and criteria of assessment clear to students could involve a pre- and post-analysis. After explaining to students what we are looking for, we could ask them to write something briefly about how they think we will be assessing them. Such an assignment could be useful in letting the instructor know how well the students understood his or her description of his or her expectations. At the end of the course, we could then ask the students to write about what they thought they were in fact assessed on during the course. Such a technique could be used by instructors to clarify thoughts about what and how to assess students.

One question that came up during the discussion was whether we would need to have assessment rubrics that are discipline-specific—one for History courses, Philosophy courses, and so on. There was no general agreement on this issue.

### *Natural Sciences*

Members present: 5/13/05: Marc Lazarus (Chemistry); Tony Garro (Provost & VP/AA); Bill Tramontano, (Dean, Natural and Social Sciences).

Discussions centered around the development of more LEH 300 courses.

### *LEH 300 AND 301*

Members present: 5/13/05: Richard Blot (JCT), co-ordinator; William Bosworth (EGGS); Grace Bullaro (ENG), Kerry Charron(TSW), Madeline Ford (Library), Sharon Freedberg (SOC/SWK, WST); David Hyman (MID/HS EDU); Levitt, Jane (HAS); Miriam Lahey (HAS).

After Grace Bullaro provided an initial review of what had occurred at the last workshop we launched into a rather freewheeling discussion of a number of issues facing both students and faculty in the LEH courses. One major concern was getting clear the primary purpose of the LEH courses and this relates directly to the question of the differences, if any, between the transfer students and the “homegrown” students. It seems as if many of the transfer students who have not had general education courses before coming to Lehman see the LEH courses as in some sense remedial. This is clearly what they are not intended to be, although there is some confusion when it comes to address the inadequacies in LEH students writing abilities. (What are the writing needs of the LEH students? What can be expected in an upper-level (330 level) course outside the major? What should be expected? What should be required?) The questions pertaining to writing can also be put to issues of content as well.

Do the students have inappropriate expectations? Do the faculty? What are our expectations as faculty? How do we transmit our expectations to students? How do we evaluate the courses? Are we to assess competencies or specific knowledge? Or both? Many thought that LEH courses must be challenging. There must be a questioning of students’ attitudes and values. (But, of course, this is true of education as a whole, not solely LEH.) There was some discussion of whether students should or should not take an LEH course in their first semester after transfer.

There was general consensus that LEH should serve as a capstone to general ed. and not as a gatekeeping mechanism where academic first aid is administered.

There was also consensus that LEH faculty need to share information, especially after self-assessment. Faculty might share what they intended to in the course, what they actually did, and to what extent is succeeded. The gen. ed. website might be used for this purpose.

There were no final conclusions reached. The discussion remained open and all acknowledged the need to revisit the questions on a later date.