

## **Recommendations for a General Education Assessment Program for UTC**

### Background

One of the most significant aspects of the current round of SACS reviews is that institutions of higher education must demonstrate that they have a program in place to assess their general education programs and that the data from the assessment process is being used to drive an ongoing curricular improvement. Since 2004, the General Education Committee at UTC has been grappling with the complex question of how best to meet this obligation. At last, during the 2007-08 academic year, the committee made a series of recommendations to for how to launch such an assessment program. With minor modifications, these recommendations were adopted by the Provost's Office during the Spring of 2008, and in September 2008 the Faculty Senate sanctioned the implementation of the program's first year of activities.

### Guiding Ideas

From the outset, the General Education Committee has worked from the premise that the foundation for all aspects of assessment must be the description of General Education goals, guidelines, and requirements approved by the Full Faculty during the 1997-98 academic year (the "Green Book"). Thus, in formulating competency statements for the program overall and for the component category areas, the Committee strove to achieve maximal fidelity to the objectives expressed in the "Green Book." The Committee presents these statements to the campus community not as a final product, but rather as a working text that can (and likely will) be revised as the assessment activities proceed. (The list of competencies is available at: [www.utc.edu/Administration/GeneralEducation/Assessment/GECompetencies.pdf](http://www.utc.edu/Administration/GeneralEducation/Assessment/GECompetencies.pdf))

The General Education committee's proposals, thus far, concentrate on the area of data collection. While taking due measure of what the faculty are attempting to teach in the courses that have been certified for the General Education curriculum, the Committee has also sought to develop ways to assess student learning in these courses. Since extant standardized tests cannot adequately accomplish this latter goal (there are no tests for several of our categories), the Committee has opted to proceed with course-embedded assessment activities. Admittedly, in the first year, course-embedded assessment poses a few practical hurdles. But in the long run, it promises to provide the greatest amount of information with the least amount of inconvenience to individual faculty members.

Although the push to develop an assessment program has come from SACS, the General Education Committee has come to view it as a valuable opportunity to engage the entire campus community in a broader discussion of what general education is and how it fits into the university's broader mission. For, in fact, what we are developing with the assessment program is not just a means to satisfy SACS missives, but a process for conducting regular, ongoing review of a major piece of the UTC curriculum. Of necessity, formal implementation of the program will need to be placed in the hands of the administration. But this in no way is meant to be an abdication of faculty rights and responsibilities with respect to General Education. The Faculty, represented above all by the General Education Committee, will maintain its oversight role over the entire program. Data from the assessment activities will be shared with the Committee and the Faculty Senate, who will also take the lead in deciding how to interpret and act on that information. Finally, the Faculty will

continue to exercise its prerogatives by being solely responsible for the devising of competency statements and the rubrics used to evaluate them.

### The Program

Data for assessment of General Education at UTC will be gathered through three broad sets of activities.

#### *A. Recertification reviews*

This aspect of the assessment program is already under way and will continue without significant changes. That is, each year, roughly 1/5 of all the courses certified for the General Education curriculum will be reviewed to determine whether they continue to meet their respective category objectives and requirements.

#### *B. Standardized tests and surveys*

Although neither the standardized tests that UTC currently conducts (Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency, or CAAP) nor others that it has considered using cover the whole range of UTC's general education curriculum, the data from them does have real potential for illuminating certain aspects of our program. In addition to gathering the information from the CAAP, the Office of Institutional Research has offered to pilot the MAPP (Measure of Academic Proficiency and Progress) exam in 2008-09 to see whether that information might be more useful. The 2008-09 test group will include not just graduating seniors but also first-year students, to give us a sense of where, on average, our students start with respect to their "general education knowledge." Finally, to help elucidate the degree to which our general education program indeed encourages cooperative and interdisciplinary learning, we will pull in data from the NSSE (National Survey of Student Engagement), which Institutional Research has also conducted on a regular basis. These measurements will also be used to control for those students who take all or most of their general education courses at institutions other than UTC.

#### *C. Course-based assessment: the "institutional portfolio"*

The truly new area of assessment activity will be the effort to assess student learning in our general education courses. To this end, we will be developing an "institutional portfolio," composed of course work from a sample of classes across all six major categories of the general education program: 1) behavioral and social sciences; 2) cultures and civilizations; 3) fine arts and humanities; 4) mathematics and statistics; 5) natural sciences; and 6) rhetoric and composition.

Accordingly, each semester, the "head" of the assessment program will designate the courses and course sections from each category to participate in the assessment activities. For now, 2-3 courses from 3 of the categories will be selected for the Fall Semester (behavioral and social sciences; cultures and civilizations; natural sciences), and courses from the remaining 3 categories (fine arts and humanities; mathematics and statistics; rhetoric and composition) for the Spring Semester. Courses/sections will be chosen largely at random, with the goal of arriving at roughly 100 students for each category.

Instructors whose courses have been selected will be asked to designate the assignment or assignments (most likely a maximum of two) – the course "artifacts" – that will give their students the best opportunity to demonstrate their performance on the set of category competencies. The assessment program head will coordinate with each of the instructors the acquisition of the (ungraded) artifacts.

Three-member scoring teams composed of faculty from across the university will use faculty-approved rubrics to score the artifacts. Evaluation of fall semester artifacts will occur during the spring, and for spring semester artifacts during the fall (or, perhaps summer). The Office of Institutional Research will summarize the results of the evaluations and communicate them to the “Assessment Program Office” and to the General Education Committee.