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Introduction
The general education program at Palm Beach State College is designed to prepare students for lifelong intellectual pursuit and responsible participation in a complex global society through a core curriculum that incorporates values, shapes attitudes and offers students a depth and breadth of learning that transcends the content of any one specific discipline. College faculty developed and approved six general education learning outcomes which represent the fundamental aspects of the expected competencies of the general education core. These six general education learning outcomes are:

- **Communications**: Develop effective communication skills for a variety of audiences.
- **Global Awareness**: Exhibit a sense of social, cultural and global responsibility.
- **Critical Thinking**: Engage in purposeful reasoning to reach sound conclusions.
- **Information Literacy**: Demonstrate the ability to find, evaluate, organize and use information.
- **Scientific and Quantitative Reasoning**: Apply mathematical and scientific principles to solve real-world problems.
- **Ethics**: Demonstrate the ability to make informed decisions based on ethical principles and reasoning.

In order to determine if students are achieving the competencies of the general education core, an annual assessment of these six learning outcomes is conducted. The methodology of the assessment process is described below.

Methodology
Since 2009, the College has employed a holistic approach to general education assessment with the philosophy that the effect of a general education program should be demonstrated across the curriculum and not only in general education courses. In addition, Palm Beach State has triangulated its measurements of direct and indirect measures. Recognizing that all measurements have inherent limitations, gathering multiple lines of evidence provides more reliable evidence of student learning.

There are three distinct components to the College’s current assessment plan for general education, allowing the College to have a broad view of the learning process. The first component consists of Scenarios which are internally-developed instruments that require students to provide written responses to complex situations. The second component is the ETS Proficiency Profile, a nationally normed standardized exam. The third component consists of a variety of institutional measures that provide indirect evidence of student learning and achievement.

Scenarios
The first component of the assessment process consists of problem-based assessments, termed “Scenarios”. The scenarios were developed by faculty serving on the General Education Committee (subsequently referred to as the Committee). The scenarios require students to respond in writing to
situations that address each of the College's learning outcomes. The Committee also developed rubrics to score each of the scenarios. The scenarios are designed to emulate real-world situations where students demonstrate learning competencies by taking a position in response to the scenarios' ambiguous situations by balancing competing interests and ideas presented in the scenarios.

During fall 2012, the scenarios were administered in a random sample of classes in which the mean number of credits completed by the students in the class equaled or exceeded 35 semester hours. Therefore, the probability that the students responding to the scenarios had completed most or all of their general education requirements was maximized. Scenarios were administered in 23 classes to 523 students. Within each selected class, the scenarios were randomly distributed so that each student received one of the six types of scenarios.

Prior to scoring the scenarios, the committee participated in a workshop on holistic grading. During this session, the committee established rangefinders and arrived at agreement on how grades were to be assigned. Each scenario was read by two committee members and was scored using a rubric based on a 5-point scale. In the event that two readers disagreed on the scoring by two or more points, a third reader was brought in to resolve the discrepancy.

**ETS Proficiency Profile**

The second component of the general education assessment process is the administration of the ETS Proficiency Profile which provides data on criterion-referenced proficiency levels for three skill areas; Communications, Critical Thinking and Quantitative Reasoning. During the fall 2012 semester, 17 additional classes were selected utilizing the same criteria used to select classes for the scenario administration; 403 students took the exam.

**Institutional Measures**

The third component of the general education assessment process is comprised of gathering institutional measures that indicate student achievement of the general education learning outcomes. The three measures that comprise this component include results from the Graduating Student Survey, results from the Community College Survey of Student Engagement and the percent of students who received a grade of “C” or higher in the general education courses that support the outcome.
Results

Scenarios
As shown in Figure 1, the average scores of the six scenarios, out of a total possible score of 5, ranged from a low of 2.6 (critical thinking) to a high of 3.4 (global awareness). The three outcomes the students scored lowest on are critical thinking (2.6), communications (2.9) and information literacy (2.9).

Figure 1

Viewed in a different way, Table 1 shows these same results as the percent of students who scored at the various levels of performance. The column on the far right reveals that the percent of students who performed at the highest level, scoring a “4” or “5”, was extremely low for Information Literacy and Critical Thinking.

Table 1
Scenario Scores
Fall 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Percent Scored 1 and 2</th>
<th>Percent Scored 3</th>
<th>Percent Scored 4 and 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communications</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Thinking</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethics</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global Awareness</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Literacy</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scientific and Quantitative Reasoning</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 2 shows the differences in overall scenario scores by degree type. Not surprisingly, the students enrolled in the bachelor’s degree program outperformed those respondents enrolled in the A.A and A.S. programs. The B.A.S students also scored higher than those in the “Other” category, which includes transient students.

Figure 2

![Scenario Averages by Degree](image)

Figure 3 demonstrates the scenario scores for traditional classroom vs. distance learning students. It is important to keep in mind, however, that Palm Beach State College has a very small percentage of its students who complete their education entirely on-line. Almost all of the students at the College who take distance learning classes also enroll in traditional, on-campus classes. In order to derive a working definition of distance learning students for the purpose of this comparison, it was determined that those respondents who were enrolled in at least one distance learning class during the term the Scenarios were administered would comprise the distance learning group. The respondents in the classroom group were enrolled in only traditional classroom settings. As Figure 3 demonstrates, there was no difference in achievement between these two groups.
Figure 4 shows the trend of the average scenario scores over the past three years. The results for the Personal Development learning outcome are only displayed for one year, because this learning outcome was discontinued as a result of the general education review that took place in spring 2011. Because the scenarios and rubrics have undergone revision, it is difficult to compare scores from year to year. For example, the Information Literacy scenario was completely rewritten for the fall 2011 administration which caused a drop in score from 3.7 to 2.9. The Quantitative Reasoning scenario was also rewritten at the same time, causing a similar drop. During this current assessment cycle, the rubric for the Global Awareness scenario was revised, which caused what appears to be an increase in student achievement, but in reality is most likely the result of a different measurement.
ETS Proficiency Profile

As Figure 5 demonstrates, Palm Beach State College students scored slightly below the 50th percentile on the ETS Proficiency Profile when compared to the national norms for similar institutions.

**Figure 5**

![Palm Beach State College ETS® Proficiency Profile Compared to National Norms](image)

Figure 6 compares the scores of the respondents who are enrolled in at least one distance learning class to the scores of those who are enrolled in only traditional classes. Distance learning students performed slightly better than those respondents who were enrolled in only face-to-face class settings.

**Figure 6**

![ETS® Proficiency Profile Classroom vs. Distance Learning](image)
Figure 7 indicates that the B.A.S. students performed slightly higher on the ETS Proficiency Profile than did the A.A. and A.S. students. Those in the “Other” category, which include transient students, also scored slightly higher.

**Figure 7**

![Figure 7](image)

Figure 8 displays the three-year trend for the ETS Proficiency Profile scores. Similar to the results for the scenarios, the scores for the ETS Proficiency Profile have remained stable over the last three years.

**Figure 8**

![Figure 8](image)
California Critical Thinking Skills Test
As part of the College’s Quality Enhancement Plan, the California Critical Thinking Skills Test was administered in a random sample of ENC 1101 classes during the spring 2012 semester. During the following fall semester, the administration of this test was incorporated into the overall general education assessment and was consequently administered in five randomly-selected classes where the median number of credits completed was 35 or greater. As seen in Figure 10, the scores for the fall sample are higher than those for the prior spring. Consistent with the results for the ETS Proficiency Profile, the respondents in the fall semester performed at around the 50th percentile.

Figure 10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Palm Beach State College</th>
<th>California Critical Thinking Skills Test</th>
<th>Spring 2012 and Fall 2012 Results Comparison</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Average</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Analysis &amp; Interpretation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2012</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2012</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: For Fall 2012, the Total score = the 52nd percentile relative to the national norms.*

Institutional Measures
The College’s institutional measures provide indirect evidence of student achievement. These are measures that examine course grades, and students’ self-reported data on how engaged they are and how much they feel they have learned while at the College.

Community College Survey of Student Engagement
The Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) is a national survey which asks students to assess their own experience at their college on a variety of different student engagement factors. CCSSE was administered to a random sample of students at Palm Beach State in 2007 and 2011. In both implementations, the College’s scores met or exceeded the results from other large colleges on those questions that related to the achievement of general education learning outcomes.
**Course Success Rate**

Figure 11 shows the percent of students who received a grade of “C” or higher in the relevant general education courses. In all cases, for each of the three years the benchmark of 80% was exceeded.

![Course Success Rate in Relevant General Education Courses](image)

**Graduating Student Survey**

Prior to graduation, every student is asked to complete a survey that asks for ratings on a variety of aspects of the student’s experience while at the College. In this survey students are asked to report on how much they feel their classes at the College contributed to the growth in their learning for each general education outcome. The results, seen in Figure 12, demonstrate that not only has the benchmark been exceeded each year, but that the level of student rating has also increased over time for every learning outcome.
Improvement Strategies
After a thorough review of the data, the General Education Assessment Committee selected Communications as the learning outcome to target for improvement. Numerous improvement strategies were developed by the committee and reviewed and approved by the Academic Deans’ Council. Final approval for the implementation of the recommended strategies was given by the Executive Leadership Council. The strategies are as follows:

**Gordon Rule Policy** – A policy will be developed to address the standards of written English expected in all Gordon Rule writing courses. This policy will be developed by the General Education Committee with opportunities for all faculty to provide input. Once approved, the policy will be put into effect for the fall 2012 term.

**Educational Videos** - A series of videos will be developed, similar to “Rotten Riting”. The purpose of these videos will be to help faculty who do not teach composition to be able to incorporate grading writing into their curriculum. In addition, the videos will be designed to help faculty understand the importance of the assessment process and what their role is. This will be a multi-year project.

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1 Critical Thinking is targeted for improvement through the activities of the Quality Enhancement Plan Implementation Team.
**Writing Workshop** - Professor Daniel McGavin will be holding a workshop for faculty who teach Gordon Rule classes. The intent of this workshop is to assist non-composition faculty to incorporate writing expectations into their curriculum. Participants will review their current assignments to ensure that they have measurable outcomes, concrete directions and a rubric in order to be able to hold students accountable for the quality of their writing.

**College Writing Program** – Common learning outcomes and a rubric were developed for all three composition classes – EAP 1684, ENC 0025 and ENC 1101 – and incorporated into the syllabus and curriculum for each course. In this coming year, tools will be developed to assist faculty in developing the skills to effectively utilize the rubric.

**Revision of Scenarios and Rubrics** – The committee will revise the scenarios so that they align with their respective rubric to allow for analytic grading.

**Information Literacy Module** – This module was developed as a result of the findings of a prior assessment cycle. It is the intent of the committee to pilot this module in several ENC 1101 classes.

**Student Learning Center/Faculty Communication** – A subcommittee will explore the concerns of faculty and SLC staff and assist in the development of processes and procedures to enhance the relationship between what is learned in the classroom and how support is provided in the lab.

**Linked Courses** – Sections of ENC1102 and SPC1017 will be linked to combine research and presentation skills. The common theme is how technology, specifically the Internet, affects critical thinking, reading, writing and oral communication processes.

**Academic Development Day** – Dr. Mark Taylor will spend half a day with faculty on March 19, 2013, providing them with hands-on methods for “flipping”, i.e., reducing time spent teaching content in the classroom (students learn the material outside of class time) to allow for more engagement and higher level learning to occur inside the classroom.

**Planning for Academic Success** – Dr Mark Taylor will spend the morning with students on January 25, 2013 discussing strategies for enhanced learning.

**Writing Symposium** – On February 1, 2013, there will be three presentations: 1) Assigning and Assessing Multimodal Composition for Critical Thinking – Michael Neil, Florida State University; 2) Facilitating Multilingual Students’ Success in the Composition Class – Dana Ferris, UC Davis; and 3) Reading, Writing and Thinking: Accessing Difficult Texts - Linda Hirsch, CUNY.

**Safe Assign** – the College will be piloting the use of the Blackboard product Safe Assign in a number of classes during the spring and summer terms and rolling it out to the entire College in the fall. Because this product is easier to use than Turnitin.com, it is anticipated that faculty use will increase.
**Future Directions**

After four successful cycles of administering the scenarios and ETS Proficiency Profile, the General Education Committee looked to the future for ways to address the limitations presented by these particular instruments, specifically, student motivation and direct connection to the curriculum. In order to address these issues and augment the assessment process, the College will incorporate embedded assessment into its overall assessment plan. A pilot was conducted during the fall 2012 semester at which time random samples of student writing were collected from Gordon Rule classes. During the spring 2013 semester, those samples will be graded for writing ability, utilizing the rubric developed for the College’s composition courses. It is anticipated that this pilot will provide information not only about the level of student writing, but also about the process itself. The lessons learned from this pilot will be the basis for the development of a college-wide plan to include embedded assessment in the overall assessment of the General Education learning outcomes.
General Education Assessment Committee: 2012-2013

- Dr. Jennifer Campbell, Director, Institutional Research and Effectiveness*
- Tcherina Duncombe, Professor I, Biology
- Robin Fiedler, Associate Professor, English
- Dr. Robin Hoggins-Blake, Professor I, Bachelor’s Program
- David Knopp, Associate Dean, Business and Computer Science*
- Marcie Pachter, Associate Professor, Speech
- Karen Pain, Manager, Quality Enhancement Plan*
- Dr. Ginger Pedersen, Dean, Curriculum and Educational Technology *
- David Pena, Director, Library Learning and Resource Center
- Dr. Ana Porro, Professor III, Mathematics
- Helen Shub, Chair, Manager, Outcomes Assessment*
- Debra-Anne Singleton, Manager, Student Learning Center*
- Warren Smith, Associate Professor, Economics
- Melissa Stonecipher, Associate Professor, English
- Patrick Tierney, Associate Professor, English
- Connie Tuisku, Associate Professor, Librarian

*Non-faculty, non-voting members of the committee