

Proposal for the Direct Assessment of General Education

Prepared by Summer Work Group (2013):

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I.- Preamble: Background and Contexts for the Direct Assessment of General Education

The General Education program is a key part of our students' intellectual development. It constitutes a significant part of student and faculty work, yet we do not know how well students are meeting program goals. While the direct assessment of General Education is required by external reviewers, its greater value is its potential to enhance the work we all already are devoting to this vital program.

Recent History of General Education Assessment at IWU

Over the last few years, Curriculum Council (CC) has revived assessment of the General Education program following a period of assessment inactivity. To date, these activities have included administration and analysis of student surveys, faculty review of Category/Flag goals and criteria, development of an assessment calendar to ensure continued periodic review of each Category/Flag, and transferring the student surveys from paper format to a labor-saving electronic format using Qualtrics. As these processes unfolded and the campus prepared for and then received feedback from the 2012/2013 Higher Learning Commission accreditation, it became clear that the Council's next priority should be direct assessment of the General Education program and the meaningful use of assessment data in improving the program (closing the loop). After considering our campus structure and Chapter 4 of *Assessment Clear and Simple: A Practical Guide for Institutions, Departments, and General Education*, 2nd ed. by Barbara E. Walvoord, CC proposed that situating direct assessment of General Education within schools, departments, and interdisciplinary programs (academic units) could be more effective and faculty-focused than centrally administered assessment.

A Direct Assessment Plan Outlined by the 2012-2013 Curriculum Council

The approach outlined by the 2012-2013 CC involved campus-wide direct assessment of a small subset of the General Education Categories/Flags each year. Using tools developed by faculty

teaching within the category or under the flag, individual instructors would assess their classes and be able to use their findings right away to improve student learning. Academic units would have responsibility for aggregating and discussing the data, and then passing it along to CC, the Assessment Committee (AC), and the Associate Dean for further analysis. This approach was considered because it was seen as a way to facilitate closing the assessment loop; it made use of existing organizational structures (academic unit as opposed to new administrators or committees); and it kept the cycles of direct and indirect assessment synchronous, thus offering richer information. CC established a summer work group to develop this outline into a proposal.

A Revised Approach

While the summer work group and 2013-2014 CC have maintained much of the plan as outlined by the 2012-2013 CC, we now propose category- and flag-based, rather than department- or program-based, aggregation of data. In this revised approach, individual faculty teaching within a category or flag will pass along their assessment data to a category/flag Assessment Facilitator instead of their chair, director, or departmental assessment liaison. This revision was made for the following reasons:

- It emphasizes the fact General Education is a program unto itself, respecting and highlighting the importance of each category/flag. Moreover, the data collected are to be used for improvement of the curriculum and its delivery and are NOT to be used in any way for the review of personnel. The Assessment Facilitator helps to keep University wide program assessment separate from departmental review of teaching.
- It manages workload issues. The plan CC gave to the summer work group put more responsibility on chairs, directors, academic units, and the Curriculum Council. The revised approach gives a willing faculty member the opportunity to organize a category/flag's assessment efforts for compensation, thus simplifying the process for others.
- It streamlines the reporting process. The plan CC gave to the summer work group required that numerous short reports be submitted to the Curriculum Council each year, whereas the revised approach condenses each category/flag's efforts into a single report to be used internally and for required external reporting.

In consideration of these advantages, the summer work group recommends the following:

II.- Proposal for the Direct Assessment of General Education

Once every five years, instructors teaching within each General Education category/flag, assisted by an Assessment Facilitator, develop and implement direct assessment tools to measure the extent to which students are meeting category goals. The Assessment Facilitator collects data from the individual instructors and drafts a summary report to be shared with those instructors who submitted data and passed along to AC and CC for further analysis and consideration. All

instructors teaching in the relevant category/flag also meet with the Assessment Facilitator to review feedback and discuss ideas for the improvement of student learning within the category. The overall process is described in further detail below and is presented in chart form as Appendix A. A calendar for rotation through the categories and flags is presented as Appendix B.

The data collected through this process will be used 1.) by individual instructors to assess their students' progress toward meeting General Education category goals and thus inform their teaching and 2.) by the University to assess the General Education program. The data may also be used to inform curricular and professional development initiatives at the university level or within academic units. These data concern student progress toward General Education category goals and should not be used to inform any personnel decisions, including reviews by the Promotion and Tenure Committee and the rehiring of contingent instructors.

Responsibilities for Instructors Teaching within a General Education Category/Flag

Semester 1 (Spring)

- Select an Assessment Facilitator (full time faculty nominate and elect a tenure-line faculty member to serve in this role.)
- Meet with fellow instructors teaching in the relevant category/flag and the Assessment Facilitator to design direct assessment tools. Broad participation in this process will be needed to ensure that the tools developed are easily integrated into each department's General Education courses.

Note: Where possible, CC believes that it would be advantageous for all instructors teaching within a category to agree on a common set of assessment tools, as this would facilitate the aggregation and comparison of data. If, however, instructors teaching within some categories are unable to generate one set of tools that fits their disparate courses, flexibility will be necessary. In these cases, it may still be possible to use course-specific tools that preserve some category-wide structure or components. In all cases, the tools used must address student progress toward each of the category's goals, must be developed and posted as part of the category-wide process initiated by the Assessment Facilitator, and be reviewed by the Assessment Committee.

Semesters 2-3+ (Fall-Spring-May)

- In courses within the relevant category/flag, use the collectively developed tools to directly measure student learning.
- Submit a one-page report on the data collected to the category's Assessment Facilitator. The report should answer the following questions:
 - Who was assessed? (All students in class? A random sample?)

- What method/tool was used to assess each goal?
- What are the results (in summary form) of the assessment?
- What are the initial conclusions and ideas for action?

Semester 4

- Meet with fellow instructors teaching in the relevant category and the Assessment Facilitator to review the AF's draft report. It is particularly important that instructors discuss the extent to which goals are (or are not) being met and how the data might be used to improve student learning and inform future assessment efforts. When opportunities for improvement are indicated, instructors teaching in the category should share their plans for adjusting their own courses as well as any ideas they may have for improvements at the department/program or all-university level. The Assessment Facilitator will incorporate these ideas into the report where they will inform efforts by individual instructors, academic units, and CC to make improvements and close the assessment loop. Thus, the assessment process will identify areas needing improvement, but instructors are responsible for responding within their own courses and any formal curricular changes will arise from faculty in the academic units, or from CC, following Illinois Wesleyan's usual Curriculum Development Handbook procedures.
- Consider feedback that the AF receives from the Assessment Committee on his/her final report and how that might inform further assessment efforts.
- Follow through individually, within academic units, and/or within the General Education category/flag to effect proposed changes.

Responsibilities for an Assessment Facilitator

An Assessment Facilitator (AF) assists with student learning assessment for a particular category or flag of Illinois Wesleyan University's General Education program. The AF convenes instructors teaching within the category, assists with the design of direct assessment tools, helps to organize and encourage data collection efforts, aggregates the data, and reports on these assessment efforts to relevant groups, including instructors teaching in the category, the Assessment Committee, and Curriculum Council.

Being an AF is a four-semester commitment, but the work is periodic, not constant. AFs are selected, convene relevant instructors, and help to design direct assessment tools during the spring semester *prior to* the year in which the relevant general education category is to be assessed. Assessment data are gathered during the following academic year, during which time the AF's main responsibilities are to help organize and encourage data collection efforts. Aggregation and draft report writing occur in time for convening the category/flag instructors early in the following fall semester, and a final report is due in November.

Semester 1

- January: Attend an orientation session with members of the Curriculum Council.

- January/February: Convene instructors teaching within the relevant General Education category/flag in order to assist instructors teaching within the category in identifying or developing tools appropriate to the category. AFs will be supported in their work by representatives of CC, the Assessment Committee, the Associate Dean of Curricular and Faculty Development, and the Assistant Vice President for Institutional Research, Planning, and Evaluation.*
- February/March: Post the newly developed assessment tools for review and comment by all instructors teaching within the category/flag and revise if necessary.
- April 2: Submit a one-page Action Plan to the Assessment Committee. An Action Plan consists of:
 - What tools will instructors in your category use to directly assess each learning goal? Why?
 - Do you believe, based on the information posted on Illinois Wesleyan's IRB webpage, that the proposed assessment activities are exempt from IRB review or require it? (As only the IRB may grant exemptions, the Assessment Committee will assist those Assessment Facilitators requesting exempt status for their proposed assessment activities by annually filing a request for exemption on their behalf.)
- May: Employing feedback from the Assessment Committee, finalize and disseminate assessment instruments to instructors teaching in the category.

*Note: This document provides a default model for developing assessment tools, implementing them, aggregating the data, and using it for curricular improvement. If instructors teaching in a category/flag believe that a different model would better serve their area, their Assessment Facilitator can petition the Assessment Committee (by March 1st of Semester 1) to implement a different style of Action Plan. Any alternative model must still assess all of the category goals directly, and the data collected must still lead to clear opportunities for improvements in student learning.

Semesters 2-3+

- Fall-May: Regularly remind instructors that they need to perform assessment using the designated tools, collect assessment data, etc.
- Fall-May: Assist instructors with collection of data (i.e., give advice, suggestions, feedback).
- January: Collect very brief assessment data reports from category instructors who taught in the fall.
- May: Collect very brief assessment data reports from category instructors who taught in the spring.
- End of May: Collect very brief assessment data reports from category instructors who taught during May Term.

- By early-September: Aggregate data for the whole category; aggregate data for each department/program; and draft an Annual Assessment Report.

Semester 4

- Early-September: Present a draft of the Category/Flag Assessment Report to the category's instructors, discuss and incorporate instructor's plans for adjusting their own courses as well as any ideas they may have for improvements at the department/program or all-university level, and finalize the Report. It is particularly important that the report addresses how well the goals are being met, points to any areas needing improvement, and, where appropriate, offers ideas for course improvement or curricular reform. The report should also include recommendations for the next time the category is assessed.
- Final Monday in September: Submit final version of the Category/Flag Assessment Report to the Assessment Committee. (See Appendix C for a description of the Category/Flag Assessment Report.)
- October: Share and review feedback from the Assessment Committee with instructors within the category.
- October: Share the Category/Flag Assessment Report, feedback from the Assessment Committee, and data aggregated for each relevant academic unit (e.g., department or program) with the unit's Assessment Liaison. (Note: The data are being shared with Assessment Liaisons, rather than Chairs/Directors, to emphasize the separation of curricular assessment and personnel review.)
- November 15: Submit Category/Flag Assessment Report and Assessment Committee feedback to Curriculum Council.

Overall Review of the General Education Assessment Process Outlined in this Document

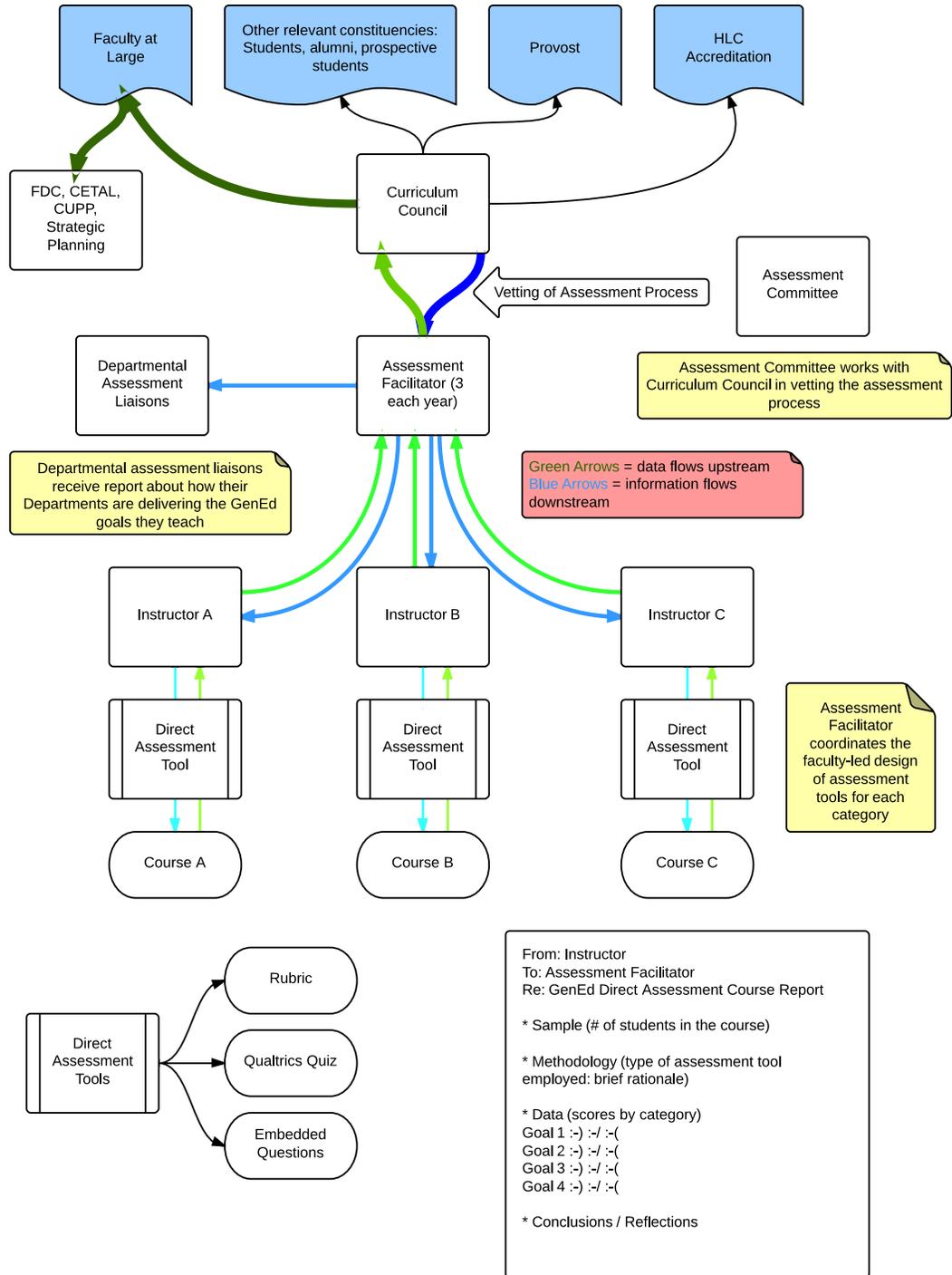
- In November: Meet with the CC Chair, AS Chair, AC Chair, the Associate Dean of Curricular and Faculty Development, and other category/flag Assessment Facilitators to review these procedures for Direct Assessment of General Education and to adjust the process and solve problems accordingly. Every three years, this group will conduct a more-comprehensive review of the process.

Selection of Assessment Facilitators

By November 15 of each year the Chair of Curriculum Council, with the assistance of the Associate Dean, will ask the Registrar to generate lists of faculty who have taught in the to-be-assessed categories over the past three years. By December 1, each group of faculty will receive a memo indicating that the category is up for assessment in the following year along with descriptions of the assessment process and the job of Assessment Facilitator. Faculty in the category will be invited to nominate tenure-line colleagues for the role of Assessment Facilitator.

Tenure-line faculty may also nominate themselves. The Chair of Curriculum Council or Associate Dean will confirm the willingness of those nominated and ask each of them to provide a paragraph describing their interest and qualifications. Faculty who have taught in the category over the past three years will have access to the paragraphs as they vote for Assessment Facilitator by electronic ballot. Voting should occur by January 15. Once elected, the Assessment Facilitator will convene all instructors who have taught in the category over the last three years to develop/review assessment tools and the assessment cycle will commence.

Appendix A: Information Flow Chart



Appendix B: Five-Year Rotation Calendar

← YEAR	Gen Ed Category to be Assessed	<i>Creation of Direct Assessment Tools</i>	<i>Data collection</i>	<i>Data collection</i>	<i>Closing loop</i>
1	SI, LA, FR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> AFs selected by Jan. 15th Direct measuring tools created AF brief report to AC due April 2 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> FT brief course report to AF due Jan 15 for Fall data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> FT brief course report to AF due May 5 for Spring and June 5 for May 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> AF report to AC due final Monday in September. AF report and AC feedback to CC due November 15
2	GW, W, G, U	Spring 2014	Fall 2014	Spring/May 2015	Fall 2015
3	AV, LT, PE	Spring 2015	Fall 2015	Spring/May 2016	Fall 2016
4	LSI, LSL, PSI, LSI	Spring 2016	Fall 2016	Spring/May 2017	Fall 2017
5	CHC, AR, IT	Spring 2017	Fall 2017	Spring/May 2018	Fall 2018
1	SI, LA, FR	Spring 2018	Fall 2018	Spring/May 2019	Fall 2019
1	SI, LA, FR	Spring 2019	Fall 2019	Spring/May 2020	Fall 2020

AF Assessment Facilitator

FT Faculty Teaching in the Category/Flag

Appendix C: Category/Flag Assessment Report

CATEGORY/FLAG ASSESSMENT REPORT

—approximately 5-6 pages; due on the final Monday in September, the academic year after data collection

The Category/Flag Assessment Report serves many purposes. First and foremost, it is a record of the assessment activities undertaken by faculty teaching in the category/flag in the previous academic year: what the category/flag has assessed, and why, and what your category/flag is doing in response to its findings: what strengths were revealed by or changes were suggested, and then made, based on assessment data? Additionally, the Report serves the crucial function of documenting ongoing assessment activities for internal use and for external review agencies.

Categories/Flags are asked to address six topics (1-6, listed below) in their Assessment Reports. Below each topic is a description of what a response might entail, and explicit identification of the criteria the Committee uses to guide its own responses to the Reports.

Throughout the report there should be a strong interlocking narrative among the parts. In other words, each piece should connect conceptually with every other piece—for example, measures with goals, and feedback mechanisms with learning outcomes.

1. Attach the relevant Action Plan. If applicable, explain any significant changes made to this plan during implementation.

Category/Flag Assessment Reports address assessment activities that were outlined in an earlier Action Plan. Share that Action Plan with the Committee. As assessment needs to be flexible and responsive, it is understood that a Plan may have to be revised. Please explain any significant changes you made to the relevant Action Plan while you were implementing it.

QUESTIONS ASKED BY THE ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE

- Is the relevant Action Plan attached?
- Are any significant changes to the Action Plan—such as additional or revised measure(s)—explained?

2. Describe assessment measures that were used during the year.

Describe assessment measures that were used during the year, including the specific student learning goals measured, the classes and number of students, or sample sizes involved.

QUESTIONS ASKED BY THE ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE

- Are the goals and measures clearly defined?
- What direct measures were implemented?

3. Summarize the data/results from your measures.

Provide a summary of data/results from measures used by your category/flag. Summaries may include quantitative and/or qualitative data. Please do not send reports submitted by individual teaching faculty within the category/flag. Your category/flag can keep files of these as it sees fit. Once these instruments have been evaluated and the necessary summary has been made, your category/flag may keep or destroy them, as is deemed appropriate, bearing in mind the need to maintain confidentiality.

QUESTIONS ASKED BY THE ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE

- Have data been summarized?
- Do the measures in fact assess what the category/flag intended them to measure, and do the measures do so consistently? That is, are the measures well-targeted and dependable?

4. Describe the process by which you evaluated your data.

Categories/flags are urged to reflect on the findings from the measures, and on the methods and standards used to reach conclusions; so, once the data are gathered, how did the faculty teaching in your category/flag go about sharing and analyzing the data? What methods, subjective or objective, did your category/flag use to assess your findings? A common subjective method is conversation among a category/flag's faculty. You might report details about that conversation, such as the following: Was it a retreat or a meeting set aside for this purpose? Who was involved? All of the category/flag's faculty? Anybody in addition to the faculty? When did it take place? Commonly, objective measures involve statistical analyses of tests administered – some description of the method should be provided. Who performed this analysis? Using what tools?

QUESTION ASKED BY THE ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE

- Is the evaluation process clearly defined?

5. Describe what you learned as a result of the evaluation process.

A feedback mechanism is some systematic way for a category/flag as a whole to reflect and act on the results of the assessment measures of student learning. Examples typically include retreats or other meetings in which assessment is addressed in a structured discussion. Developing this report also can be considered a feedback mechanism, and it needs to be shared with category/flag faculty so that it can include their plans for adjusting their own courses as well as any ideas they may have for improvements at the department/program or all-university level.

What was the substance of your category/flag's evaluation process? What did your category/flag learn as a result of engaging in the process? It is important to demonstrate that your category/flag has examined thoroughly the data gathered and has thoughtfully analyzed how the data compare to the category/flag's curricular goals. The evaluation should not just state conclusions, but should describe the results of the various study measures as well as the implications of the results—do students meet your category/flag's learning goals?

A category/flag may find gaps or other inadequacies in its assessment methods. It is appropriate to note those conclusions here and make recommendations for future assessment practices. In

this way, the Report will serve as a useful record of how your category/flag's assessment efforts are evolving.

QUESTION ASKED BY THE ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE

- Do the faculty teaching in the category/flag clearly describe what they learned?

6. What does your category/flag plan to do with the information it has evaluated?

Closing the feedback loop is essential. Please describe exactly what it is your category/flag has done/recommended to factor what it learned back into the curriculum. Did the results of your category/flag's analysis confirm the achievement of its goals? Or did the results suggest there are ways your category/flag can improve reaching those goals?

In particular, report any necessary changes, and what changes (large or small) have been implemented or suggested as a result of the data. If these changes require action beyond simple adjustments that individual faculty can make to their own courses, have ideas for CC and/or academic units been clearly stated? If additional expertise, resources, faculty development initiatives etc. appear to be necessary, has the need for these been articulated? If no changes are planned, briefly describe how the data suggest that this as an appropriate course of action.

QUESTION ASKED BY THE ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE

- Has the academic unit considered future actions based on assessment results and/or described any actions resulting from assessment?

7. Provide a summary of your Category/Flag Assessment Report.

In approximately 200-300 words, summarize your Category/Flag Assessment Report: state the learning goal(s) measured; state the type(s) of measure(s) used; summarize the data; describe the evaluation of the data; describe what was learned from the evaluation process; and describe what your category/flag has done or suggests doing with the information and insights gathered from the year's assessment activities.

Sharing the results of assessment with appropriate constituencies, including students, is a vital part of closing the assessment feedback loop. Posted on an Assessment Committee website, this summary may serve as a key component of a category/flag's public reporting of assessment activities and outcomes. While the summary must accurately summarize the Category/Flag Assessment Report, it also provides categories/flags some flexibility in terms of how the Report is presented to relevant constituencies.

QUESTION ASKED BY THE ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE

- Has the category/flag provided an accurate summary?