

January 15, 2007

TO: Members of the Academic Affairs Committee
FROM: Kim Mooney, Special Assistant to the President for Assessment
RE: The Assessment of General Education at St. Lawrence

In order to fulfill our charge from President Sullivan to “create the institutional assessment plan that must accompany our next Middle States accreditation self-study” the Assessment Committee’s early work focused on shaping the actual self-study design and supporting the work of academic department and programs as they formally articulated learning goals for their majors and minors. This fall, once it completed its reviews of departments and programs’ learning goals, the Assessment Committee turned its attention to another component of the St. Lawrence curriculum: general education.

Using the AAC&U definition of general education as the central shared educational experiences for all students regardless of their majors or minors, we determined that in addition to the FYP, the St. Lawrence distribution and diversity requirements also met this criterion. We then proceeded to take the first step in any academic assessment project: the articulation of learning goals. The published rationales and definitions for the five distribution categories in arts/expression, humanities, social sciences, mathematics or foreign language, and natural science/science studies and for the diversity requirement, guided the Assessment Committee’s translation of this language into discreet learning goals.

Because the preliminary Middle States report will be prepared this summer, the Assessment Committee submits for your review this first draft of learning goals (attached) as derived from the distribution and diversity requirement rationales. We welcome your feedback on these goals and on possible next steps in the assessment of general education. Specifically, we hope that the Assessment Committee and Academic Affairs Committee might mutually consider the following questions:

- How well do the attached learning goals represent the expected learning outcomes for our distribution and diversity courses?
- How effectively do our distribution system and the diversity requirement perform in meeting our eight curricular aims and objectives?
- To what degree do the goals of the courses that fulfill these requirements align with the broader distribution/diversity goals?
- Do we adequately link the distribution and diversity rationale (and goals) to course approvals?
- What are some ways and where we might work with colleagues to answer these questions?

On behalf of the Assessment Committee, I request a meeting early in the spring semester to discuss the attached goals and attendant questions. Thank you.

cc: President Sullivan
Mike Sheard, Chair of Faculty Council

**Distribution and Diversity Requirements:
From Rationale to Learning Goals
(Fall 2006 Draft)**

1) Learning Goals for the Arts/Expression Requirement

In courses satisfying the Arts/Expression requirement, students will:

1. expand their aesthetic sensibilities and capacities through regular expressive and/or performative practice
2. learn to use creative expression, whether through musical, visual, written or spoken language, in order to express concepts and ideas imaginatively
3. experience the rigorous demands of the artist's craft
4. learn to reflect upon their creative processes

2) Learning Goals for the Humanities Requirement

Through the distribution courses in the humanities (literature, film, history, religious studies, art history, theatre), students will learn to respond to texts (defined inclusively as written, oral, performative, visual or cultural forms) as cultural artifacts.

In courses satisfying the Humanities requirements, students will:

1. appreciate the importance of tradition and history as ways of knowing and making meaning
2. be able to interpret texts with reference to larger social and historical contexts, and be able to explain how the specific features of a text point to an interpretation of its meaning
3. be able to discuss how there might be multiple interpretations/explanations for a specific text and how the interpretations of texts can change over time
4. be able to express criteria for aesthetic evaluation within a particular artistic tradition (for courses within literature and the arts) OR be able to make a critical assessment of the evidence and reasoning used to make philosophical, political, or historical arguments

3) Learning Goals for the Social Science Requirement

In courses satisfying the Social Science requirement, students will:

1. begin to acquire a basic understanding of the nature of social scientific inquiry, including:
 - a. the nature of social scientific theories and evidence
 - b. the relationship between social scientific theory and evidence
 - c. the processes by which social scientists compare theory and evidence and how those can lead to the reformulation of theories
2. gain insight into how social scientific inquiry allows us to see patterns in human social experience that are not easily discovered in other forms of inquiry
3. develop an understanding of, and appreciation for, the diversity of human economic, political, social, and/or cultural institutions and their effects on human social interaction

4) Learning Goals for the Mathematics/Foreign Language Requirement

In courses satisfying the Mathematics requirement, students will:

1. apply quantitative reasoning and analytical thought effectively as a means of problem-solving
2. demonstrate an understanding of how mathematics makes contact with problems encountered in everyday experience, using examples and application

In courses satisfying the Foreign Language requirement, students will:

1. demonstrate an increased capacity to read, write, speak and listen well in a second language
2. gain knowledge of another culture through the study of a foreign language
3. demonstrate a habit of analytical thinking in their encounters with the fundamental grammatical structures which are universal in all languages

5) **Learning Goals for the Natural Science/Science Studies Requirement**

In courses satisfying the Natural Science requirement, students will:

1. appreciate the variety and richness of natural phenomena and be able to relate these phenomena to their everyday experience
2. be able to use both qualitative and quantitative methods to explain processes underlying natural phenomena
3. know the general methodology for conducting scientific observation and experimentation
4. know how to evaluate critically scientific evidence

In courses satisfying the Science Studies requirement, students will:

1. be able to apply critically scientific knowledge to analysis of social issues
2. develop an appreciation for the ways in which their ethical and political views depend upon their evaluation of science's place in the ways we understand the world
3. develop an understanding of how ethical and political concerns and institutions might affect the questions science asks, the ways it attempts to answer them, and the ways such answers are evaluated

6) **Learning Goals for the Diversity Requirement**

In courses satisfying the Diversity requirement, students will:

1. Understand the construction of social relations based on the notions of difference and sameness as they relate to such factors as nationality, ethnicity, gender, class, sexual orientation, and religious and/or cultural preferences
2. Develop a habitual respectfulness towards the practices and beliefs of diverse peoples while at the same time acquiring the ability to think critically about those practices and beliefs
3. Exhibit an intellectual curiosity about the world that extends beyond the boundaries of their own countries of origin*

*Note: Is this true if students choose two US diversity options?