GENERAL EDUCATION PROGRAM ASSESSMENT REPORT, AY 21-22

Background: This year marked our fifth assessment cycle. We were gratified to be able to meet in person again, rather than via Zoom as we were forced to do last year. A record number of 53 readers volunteered this year, a significant number of whom were not instructional faculty. They brought a fresh perspective to our assessment processes.

Current Practice: We continue to assess our program of General Education by reading portfolios of assignments and student artifacts that represent what a College of Southern Idaho student might experience in completion of 36 credits of the general education core. Every instructor who teaches a general education course is asked to participate. Assignments and artifacts are collected over the course of a year, and then collated into the representative portfolios in the fall. Readers meet during Assessment Week in November to discuss assigned portfolios. We meet in smaller reading "teams" to discuss two portfolios, and then as a larger group in a sort of "report out." Results of the process are shared in a yearly report like this one.

Most of the changes implemented last year, including use a revised rubric, consideration of the assignment as well as the student artifact, and reading two portfolios instead of four, we maintained this reading cycle. We discontinued our practice of responding to each faculty who submitted artifacts and assignments because faculty were non-responsive to our requests of them for more information.

An important change to this year's process was meeting with CTE faculty, for the first time, to gather their input on portfolios that represent what a student in a CTE program might experience in completion of either 9 or 15 credits of General Education, in either an ITC or AAS degree. This was an extremely valuable process, outlined in a separate report, the results of which we hope will inspire conversations amongst gen ed faculty about how we might revise our assignments, assessments, and courses to better meet the needs of Career Technical students.

Results: Verbal and written feedback was gathered to ascertain the following.

Evidence of faculty response to meet our Gen Ed goals:

- Readers noted increased engagement or "buy in" from students when faculty-created assignments encouraged students to make thoughtful connections between course content and their personal lives.
  - One reader highlighted a practice from a faculty member who submitted an assignment and artifact that the faculty member recognized that many of his students were in CTE programs and thus tailored assignments to help students evaluate their own expectations of the course and to find their own value in what they gained from the course. Subsequent assignments were then adjusted in response to student feedback.
- Readers saw evidence of assignments that gave students autonomy and that provided opportunities for creative, application-based responses.
- We observed more assignments and artifacts that moved into more advanced levels on the rubric, and that asked students for deeper reflections.

Evidence of student achievement of our Gen Ed goals:

- Artifacts showed evidence that students understand the value of general education coursework.

- Artifacts showed that students can apply concepts to personal and real-world issues.
- Artifacts show evidence that students can communicate; they are able to reflect upon, think critically through, and share their own experiences.
- Artifacts showed that students can use data and other outside source information to support conclusions and provide evidence for arguments.

Opportunities for faculty to improve how we meet our Gen Ed goals:

- Build reflection and connection into entire general education courses, and not just ask for it in the one assignment that will be submitted to the assessment process.
- Avoid submission of "short answer" assignments that don't give student the opportunity to fully explain, discuss and evaluate subject matter.
- Multiple readers observed that assignments address the "how," but not always the "why."
- While many artifacts showed that students connected coursework to their own lives, personal experience "can only go so far," as one reader commented. We can create assignments that ask students to apply concepts to future workplace, local community, or humanitarian/global issues.
- Multiple readers observed that assignments produced written artifacts. Those readers encouraged creation of assignments that allowed demonstration of achievement of outcomes in modalities other than writing. Relatedly, some readers asked why many assignments asked for "longer" written responses when in industry clear and succinct is more valued than length.
- Many readers submitted comments about the language we use when discussing our general education program and its goals. Some felt this language could be confusing to students and those "outside" the program. Others suggested that we should be using this language more broadly and consistently in all of courses to improve understanding of not only what this terminology means but also the intentionality of our general education program.

Opportunities for students to improve achievement of our Gen Ed goals:

- Be more actively involved and fully engaged in coursework. Readers speculated that less-than-competent student work was in part due to students not asking questions they needed assistance or did not understand directions.
- While some readers noted proficient use of outside sources in student artifacts, others noted a deficiency in this area, particularly in the use of academic sources.

Opportunities to improve our assessment process:

- Many of our readers were participating for the first time, and some were not faculty. They expressed a desire for more training before the reading occurred. There was a suggestion that in addition to meeting as a large group prior to reading that the smaller teams also meet together to review the process and to discuss the goal of their conversation after reading. There was also a suggestion to provide teams with questions or prompts to keep the discussion productive and on track.
- Readers valued faculty comments that explained the purpose or context of the assignment and suggested these be required rather than optional.
- Multiple readers suggested involving students in the assessment process.

- Involve dual credit faculty.
- Involve more on-campus faculty and/or rotate readers.

Next steps:

Student engagement and how it relates to the value of general education received a lot of attention in this year's assessment process. Readers noted both engagement and lack of it in the artifacts submitted. We need to learn from each other, and from experts in our TLC, what pedagogical practices lead to high levels of student engagement and adjust our instruction accordingly.

Participation from readers outside academic instruction was highly impactful to this year's process. General education faculty would do well to remember that the very large majority of our students will be using and applying concepts from our courses outside of academics and instead in industry. There are opportunities for us to adjust our assignments and expectations for student demonstration of outcomes accordingly.

Our assessment process this year revealed that many in our campus community don't have a shared sense of what we mean by our *program* of general education. We need to improve understanding of this program, including its goals and value, for all who are impacted by it: students, faculty, staff and community stakeholders.

Involving more readers in this process continues to be a goal. We addressed this in part this year by meeting separately with CTE faculty, as previously mentioned. However, many general education faculty have never participated in assessment of the program of which the courses they teach are a part. We need to proactively address this lack of participation, perhaps by requiring a certain number of participants from each way of knowing, by rotating readers, or by providing some incentive to read. Readers again commented on how valuable the assessment process is, and on how much they appreciate the chance this process gives them to engage in rich discussions with their colleagues, but this value cannot be fully understood unless one has participated in the portfolio reading.