Chapter 12
General Education

The institution's curricula are designed so that students acquire and demonstrate college-level proficiency in general education and essential skills, including oral and written communication, scientific and quantitative reasoning, critical analysis and reasoning, technological competency, and information literacy. *MSCHE*

General Education in the Curricula

The *Code of Maryland* (COMAR), Title 13B, Subtitle 06 (February 1998) requires community colleges to include general education courses in five areas: (1) English composition; (2) humanities; (3) mathematics; (4) science; and (5) social science. An optional area called Emerging Issues is available for colleges that wish to add other general education requirements. The COMAR further specifies a minimum of 20 credits to a maximum of 36 credits spread across the five required areas with no more than an additional eight credits from Emerging Issues. The total number of required general education credits is determined by the type of degree, associate of arts (A.A), associate of science (A.S.), associate of arts in teaching (A.A.T.), and associate of applied science (A.A.S.) (*2004-2005 College Catalog*, p. 161).

The college has consistently required more than the minimum 20 general education credits in all of its degree programs. The college requires one course in cultural diversity and one in computer literacy in the Emerging Issues area in addition to the courses required in the other five areas. The Task Force's review of every associate degree program offered by the college confirms that the college's general education requirements exceed both COMAR's and Middle States' requirements.

Inclusion of General Education Outcomes in Courses

Prince George's Community College has had a long-standing General Education Committee that includes representatives from all academic divisions. The committee's

charge is to review and update the list of courses approved for inclusion in general education core areas. The committee also reviews the core requirements themselves and recommends revisions to those requirements if they seem warranted. Recently, the committee was asked to provide leadership in the realignment of course outcomes to better reflect general education goals. In fall 2004, the vice president for Instruction directed the General Education Committee to develop and initiate a systematic review of general education courses to determine how well they incorporate general education outcomes. The General Education Committee first had to reconcile two sets of expected learning outcomes. One set is in the *College Catalog*, p. 29, the other set was on the Academic Outcomes Assessment Committee (AOAC) Web site. Table 12.1 compares them.

Table 12.1 Comparison of Two Sets of Expected Learning Outcomes

#	Core Educational Outcomes	Core Learning Outcomes
1	Communicate effectively in oral and written English	Communicate effectively orally and in writing in standard English
2	Read with comprehension	Comprehend and interpret reading materials
3	Understand and interpret numerical data	Apply appropriate methods of mathematics to solve problems
4	Understand the scientific method	Understand and apply the methods, principles, and concepts of the natural and social sciences and the humanities
5	Reason abstractly and think critically	Use computer technology for communications and information retrieval
6	Understand the nature and value of the fine and performing arts	Understand the nature and value of the fine and performing arts
7	Recognize and appreciate cultural diversity	Recognize and appreciate cultural diversity

For the most part, both sets of expected outcomes are similar, but not identical. The outcomes in #5, however, are radically different. The "Use of technology for communications and information retrieval" needed to be updated to reflect current learning

needs. The General Education Committee reconciled the two versions into a third shown in Table 12.2. This version is currently on the AOAC Web site, will be printed in the *2005-2006 College Catalog,* used by the General Education Committee to evaluate general education courses, and incorporated, as necessary, in general education courses. Clearly, "reason abstractly and think critically" and "apply ethical standards and judgment values to decision-making" have become a major focus for instruction and student learning.

Table 12.2 Reconciled Core Education Outcomes

Communicate effectively in standard oral and written English
Comprehend, analyze, and interpret written materials
Reason abstractly and think critically
Use appropriate methods of quantitative reasoning to understand, interpret, and manipulate numerical data.
Understand and apply the scientific method
Demonstrate informational literacy and apply technological competencies to access, evaluate and communicate information
Apply ethical standards and value judgments to decision-making.

Evidence of Core Education Outcomes in General Education Courses

Using the AOAC version of Learning Outcomes,[1] the Task Force examined the master syllabi of 14 general education courses, one or more of which is taken by every student, to see if the core learning outcomes are included in the course objectives. Admittedly, this kind of analysis has significant limitations. Just because core educational outcomes are not listed on a syllabus does not mean that these outcomes are ignored or excluded from instruction. Arguably, every course requires oral and written communication, reading with comprehension, and abstract reasoning. The results are in Table 12.3.

Despite such limitation, the Task Force notes that three of the course master syllabi do not mention any major core educational outcomes. Some outcomes such as "reading with

[1] The Task Force completed its work before the reconciled Core Education Outcomes were available.

comprehension" and "reasoning" are implied in the syllabus; otherwise, the syllabi objectives are content specific. Undeniably, all courses cannot be expected to include every core learning outcome. However, given that oral and written communication, abstract reasoning, and critical thinking are integral to the general education at Prince George's Community College and are emphasized in the Academic Profile assessment, all courses, especially those accepted general education courses, should clearly identify the core learning outcomes they address.

Table 12.3 Core Educational Outcomes Identified in 14 General Education Courses

Course	Oral & written communication	Reading with comprehension	Abstract reasoning	Interpreting numerical data	Knowledge of scientific method	Appreciating cultural diversity	Appreciating fine arts	Computer technology	Totals
AFA 101						X			1
BIO 101					X				1
BIO 103					X				1
ECN 103									0
EGL 101	X	X	Implied			X	X	X	6
EGL 102	X	X	Implied			X	X	X	6
HST 131									0
HST 137						X			1
HST 143									0
MAT 112			Implied	X					2
MUS 101							X		1
SOC 101									0
SPH 101	X								1
SPH 109	X								1

Incorporation of Values, Ethics, and Diverse Perspectives

To test for the presence of values, ethics, and diverse perspectives within general education course outcomes, a cross-section of departments submitted 19 general education master syllabi. For each syllabus, the Task Force divided the number of times an outcome clearly referenced values, ethics, or diversity by the total number of outcomes and multiplied

by 100 to create the percentage. Table 12.4 shows the variation in the incorporation of values, ethics, and diversity in the 19 syllabi. Three courses made no reference, and three courses incorporated all three. The relative importance of the three concepts in each syllabus is indicated by the percent they represent of the outcomes listed. The higher the percent, the greater the importance.

Based on the small sample of general education syllabi, all degree-seeking students are exposed to values, ethics, and diversity in general education courses. The degree of exposure and emphasis varies by the courses students take.

Table 12.4 Frequency of Values, Ethics, and Diverse Perspectives Mentioned in the Syllabi of 19 General Education Courses

Course Identifier	Total # of Course Outcomes	Values Outcomes	Ethics Outcomes	Diverse Perspectives Outcomes	Outcome % Related to General Education
ANT 103	10	6	1	3	100%
CHM 101	9		2		22%
CIS 101	13				0%
ECE 170	12		1	8	75%
ECN 103	15			1	7%
EGL 101	14	3	3		43%
EGL 102	12	2			33%
EGL 207	6	2	1		50%
HST 141	10	4	2		60%
HST 245	9	2	2	1	56%
MAT 112	11				0%
NTR 101	5	1	2		60%
PHL 101	4	2	1	1	100%
POS 101	12	2	1		25%
SOC 101	10	4	1	1	60%
SPH 101	21	3	3	2	38%
SPH 123	9	6		6	133%
SPN 201	5			2	40%
THE 101	7				0%
				Average Frequency of Mention	47%

Currently, the general education program requires a cultural diversity course for all associate degrees. However, in spring 2004, the General Education Committee recommended eliminating the cultural diversity requirement since the college has addressed multicultural issues through programs such as Book Bridge Project, A.L.A.N.A., the International Center, and through program offerings such as African-American Studies and Women's Studies. In the last ten years, issues addressing cultural diversity have been incorporated into many courses. Eliminating the cultural diversity requirement allows the programs to reduce the number of credits required for graduation and, in some cases, replace that requirement with a course focused on critical thinking.

Inclusion of General Education in Published Documents

The college catalog devotes several pages to a description of general education requirements and the courses that may be used to satisfy them (*2004-2005 College Catalog*, pp. 27, 29, and 70-71). However, neither the *Student Handbook* nor the class schedule mentions them.

The *2004-2005 College Catalog* is the first Prince George's Community College catalog that codes individual course descriptions to indicate what, if any, general education requirement the course meets. Schedules of classes currently do not indicate whether a course meets a general education requirement. The college mission statement includes a reference to general education, but, for the most part, the strategic initiatives and campuswide goals do not. The commitment can only be inferred. No recruitment brochures refer to the presence of general education in the college's programs nor do any curriculum descriptions make mention of general education outcomes as something the academic departments wish to see developed in their students.

Given the lack of a focus on general education in the college's publications, the Task Force turned to other documents where the importance of general education might be indicated. The Task Force looked for specific mention of duties related to general education assessment or outcome development in the job descriptions of academic deans and searched the operating budget expenditure lines to find money earmarked for general education initiatives. Finally, the Task Force studied the charge to the college's General Education Committee for indications of the relationship the committee should have to the assessment of general education proficiencies in courses and programs.

The analysis of college publications revealed that the job descriptions of academic deans and chairs include reference to assessment but do not specify general education assessment. The budget is more general and does not include separate lines for general education or other programmatic areas. The deans have a partial responsibility for general education since general education courses reside in the divisions. How the deans interpret that responsibility is not defined.

Assessment

The college began a serious and deliberate commitment to the assessment of general education outcomes in 1999 when the vice president for Instruction appointed a faculty-led group called the Institutional Team for Core Learning Outcomes (ITCLO). This group selected 13 heavily enrolled general education courses and worked closely with the department chairs and teaching faculty to identify general education course outcomes and develop course-embedded assignments to assess how well students learned them. In 2002, ITCLO became the Academic Outcome Assessment Committee (AOAC), and department chairs and faculty assumed responsibility for course assessment plans subject to AOAC

approval. A cycle of planning course assessment, implementing the assessment plan, analyzing the results of the assessment, and making changes as indicated has been continuous since 2002.

In fall 2002, the college piloted the short form (36 items) of the Academic Profile assessment with 42 graduating student volunteers. The results of the pilot produced more complete information about the college's general education program than the course-embedded assignment assessment method. As a result, the Academic Profile, developed by the College Board's Educational Testing Service (ETS), was instituted as a step in the graduation process for all graduation applicants.

ETS scores the tests and reports the results in the skill areas of critical thinking, reading, writing, and mathematics and the context-based areas of humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. The mean scores are compared to aggregate means from a comparison group of similar (according to ETS) colleges across the country so that this college can assess the level of attainment of its own students compared to this much larger population.

"The Academic Profile: Executive Summary, 2003," and "The Academic Profile: Executive Summary, 2004," (Exhibit 76) prepared by OPIR indicate that the college's students' mean and median scores fell well within one standard deviation from the reference group. Even so, the scores were below those of the reference group in all areas for both years. However, some differences between the college's graduating students and the reference group make the interpretation of the scores more difficult than might otherwise be the case. For example, Prince George's Community College students were more likely to work more than 30 hours per week compared to the students in the reference group. Students at Prince George's Community College also earned notably lower college GPAs prior to graduation

than students in the reference group. Given these differences, OPIR cautions against inferring too much from the comparisons made in test scores. Nevertheless, ETS' Academic Profile standards and the performance of the reference group are benchmarks for the college to work toward.

The college also uses the Academic Profile results as a year-to-year self-comparison as it works to improve the education that it delivers. With two years of data, 2003 and 2004, the test results have stayed relatively constant.

Using Assessment for Curricular Improvement

Using the results of the various assessment methods, the college has made many adjustments to improve student learning:

- Requiring the outcomes in master syllabi and faculty syllabi to be written in assessable terms.
- Making changes in courses to improve student learning.
- Providing faculty professional development emphasizing pedagogy to reinforce critical thinking.
- Having the Curriculum Committee, General Education Committee and the AOAC develop and implement a plan to ensure that courses and programs submitted to the Curriculum Committee meet general education and AOAC standards. The committees will submit their plan to the vice president for Instruction in April 2005.

Recommendations

1. Include a statement about the college's commitment to general education outcomes in all major college publications (e.g., recruiting brochures, the student handbook, program descriptions).

2. Develop a philosophy of general education, and incorporate it into the next strategic plan..
3. Define, in writing, the general education responsibilities of academic deans and department chairs.
4. Analyze general education content in required degree courses and include these outcomes in published documents and course syllabi.
5. Reinforce the development of general education competencies in all programs of study.
6. Study the advisability of developing a general education course that focuses on ethics, values, and critical thinking.
7. Indicate in the course schedule if a course satisfies a general education requirement.
8. Use the norms established by ETS as benchmarks for improvements in curriculum design, teaching methodology, and course outcomes.
9. Perform course-by-course outcome evaluations and revise courses, as necessary, to include critical learning skills.