USING COURSE OUTCOMES TO BUILD COHERENT GENERAL EDUCATION ACROSS INSTITUTIONS

Norm Jones
Director
General Education and Curricular Integration
Utah State University
Norm.jones@usu.edu

The nature of the transfer and articulation problem:

Ignorance and distrust between faculties and institutions.

Overcoming these myths can be difficult

There are two main ways of doing this, best used in concert

a. Administrative agreement
b. Inter-faculty conversations

In both it is important to understand the DEGREE PROFILES

- **NO MAJOR IS A DEGREE. IT IS A PART OF A DEGREE**

ART BY PAUL GASTON

Administrative fixes include a central mandate or memoranda of understanding

1. These are easiest to build around the skills courses. Language courses and maths courses are the obvious ones because their content is seemingly standard, as is their assessment. Why not trust a course that is assessed in the same way as your course?

Administrative fixes include a central mandate or memoranda of understanding

2. They are less easy to build around courses without defined content or assessments. GE breadth courses in Arts, Social Sciences, Life Sciences, Physical Sciences, and Humanities have little common definition. Courses with titles like “critical thinking” are especially difficult, since they have no prescribed content at all. At least “Chinese Civilization” has some assumed common content!

Administrative fixes include a central mandate or memoranda of understanding

3. This is where common learning outcomes become useful. You can articulate by administrative fiat if you are willing to say “all institutions will achieve the essential learning outcomes” according to their mission. If a student has completed GE anywhere, it is presumed that his GE outcomes have been met.

Administrative fixes include a central mandate or memoranda of understanding

This is the system we use in Utah. It works. We also issue a “Certificate of General Education,” sometimes accompanied by an e-portfolio of “signature assignments.” We participate in a multi-state “passport program,” which assures common recognition of the core skills across states.

But what about the distribution areas?

How do we find common values, and common assessments, that allows transfer and articulation of courses that have no obvious equality?

This is where faculty involvement is key.

Proposition

All majors and professors are both consumers and providers of the degree outcomes.

All want students who are well-prepared, and they wish to do a good job as teachers and programs.

ERGO

All teachers and majors should be in conversation about General Education because transfer is about moving upward into majors, on every campus and in the disciplines. They must ask one another:

"What should a student know, understand and be able to do before entering upper division courses?"

It is incumbent on the GE faculty to articulate the outcomes they prepare their students to demonstrate, so the receiving school knows the preparation students bring with them.

In curricula where the course content is unspecified, there must be coherence at the level of what the students are expected to know, understand and be able to do, regardless of who teaches, or what the content is.

USU1320 Integrated Humanities

USU 1320 Integrated Humanities			
Students Shall	To demonstrate Mastery Students can	To demonstrate Competency Students can	Incompetent Students are
Learn about big questions, controversies, and topics concerned with the experience of being human, by confronting primary texts that address these issues, stressing the connection between ideas from other times and places with more contemporary personal and social questions.	Articulate at least some of the big questions and issues and apply ideas learned in the course to contemporary personal and social questions.	Provide an elementary account of at least some of the big questions and issues and recognize and explain application of ideas learned in the course to contemporary personal and social questions.	Unable to provide an elementary account of at least some of the big questions and issues and unable to see the connections between ideas covered in the course and contemporary personal and social questions.
Gain a basic understanding of how the humanistic disciplines work: reading critically, developing interpretations, testing those interpretations against texts or evidence	Demonstrate a critical, humanistic approach to new texts as they are encountered. Is able to see connections between different humanistic disciplines.	Articulate humanistic methodology in general terms	Unable to articulate humanistic methodology
Learn to read analytically - including being able to accurately summarize readings and explain with precision how they establish their theses	Articulate, with accuracy and precision, the main theses and specific content of texts	Summarize the main ideas in a studied text in general terms.	Unable to summarize a given text
Learn to write coherent explanations with critical analyses of source materials	Write developed, articulated arguments with coherent explanations, critical analyses, and appropriate evidence.	Write coherent explanations and critical analyses with clear theses and appropriate evidence.	Unable to write coherent explanations and critical analyses.

USU1360 Integrated Physical Sciences

USU 1360 Integrated Physical Sciences			
Criteria **Students shall**	**Above Average Students are**	**Proficient Students are**	**Below Average Students are**
Understand how the enterprise of science works (i.e., erecting testable hypotheses, refining hypotheses, reproducible results, etc.)	Able to apply the basic structure and methodology of scientific enterprise.	Able to articulate the basic structure and methodology of scientific enterprise.	Unable to articulate the basic structure and methodology of scientific enterprise.
Learn the key laws, concepts and processes that govern physical systems.	Know the key laws and concepts, and is able to apply them to novice problems.	Know the key laws and concepts and can articulate them.	Do not know the key laws and concepts beyond memorization.
Utilize quantitative methods to address a process or principle (i.e., computation, interpreting results (such as in a graph or table), understanding the meaning of accuracy, uncertainty, precision, and error).	Able to make, read, understand and explain a graph, table, or any quantitative series of data, and apply that understanding to a problem.	Able to make, read and understand a graph, table, or any quantitative data.	Not able to make, read or understand a graph, table, or quantitative series of data.
Evaluate the credibility of various sources of information about science-related issues.	Able to assess the credibility of sources of scientific information, and critique source as it applies to a scientific issue.	Able to assess credible sources of scientific information and can articulate why they are credible.	Unable to assess credible sources for scientific information, or unable to determine credibility of sources.
Use written or visual communication to demonstrate knowledge of scientific findings.	Communicate knowledge of a scientific idea or concept clearly, comprehensively, and concisely.	Communicate knowledge of a scientific idea or concept.	Unable to communicate knowledge.
Examine the relationship of the science learned to societal issues (such as sustainability, etc...)	Able to apply science concepts and societal issues to the greater question of the course.	Able to articulate the relationship between science concepts and societal issues.	Unable to recognize the links between social issues, and scientific findings.

Another way of making GE more easily transferable is to build pathways between the GE courses and the major. Let the major do some of the defining of need. Is there more than one way to achieve the GE outcome?

What GE goals are provided by the major?

What GE goals are not met by the major?

History Major PRE-MAJOR Lower-Division Requirements: Students who wish to become History majors must apply for admission after completing the Department's **pre-major** program (at least 30 credits with an overall GPA of 2.5). The pre-major provides a set of "foundation courses" (including broad surveys of Western World, and U.S. history, General Education classes closely tied to the humanities, and USU "competency" courses), all of which prepare students for upper-division work in the major.

“TUNING” THE MAJORS can help with this.

Disciplines ask: WHAT MUST A STUDENT KNOW, UNDERSTAND AND BE ABLE TO DO, AT ENTRY? AT COMPLETION?

Majors' meetings, in which representatives of the major in all institutions meet to discuss their common curriculum in the major, can determine the foundational content for the major.

6.1. USHE Major Committees: To achieve these objectives, the Office of the Commissioner shall organize USHE Majors' Committees in each of the academic disciplines. Major departments at the universities are expected to work closely with the Majors' Committees in order to achieve the greatest possible congruence between pre- major emphases at community colleges and lower-division major requirements at four-year institutions.

[Utah System of Higher Education, Policy R470.6.1]

The Moral

In an ideal world, General Education outcomes are expressed by the faculty and ensured by administrative leaders in an iterative process.