The Starting Point for the Assessment of Student Learning: Examining Undergraduate GE Requirements

The faculty of Wake Forest College provide a liberal education in arts, science and letters. Our curricular requirements are designed to provide students with a broad perspective that includes an appreciation of different cultures and of different ways of understanding the world, an understanding of the fine arts, facility with quantitative analyses, ability to communicate both orally and in written form, and an understanding of the role of science in modern society. We believe that such broad training prepares students to become active and informed citizens, citizens who are able to make contributions that exemplify the Wake Forest motto, Pro Humanitate.

Our curriculum is generally divided into two parts, the core or lower division courses are taken largely within the first two years, and the major or upper division courses are taken in one or more specific disciplines primarily during the junior and senior years. The core or divisional requirements are as follows:

1. English 111 (writing seminar)
2. FYS 100 (first-year seminar)
3. Health and Exercise Science 100 and 101
4. One 200-level foreign language course
5. Courses in each of the divisional areas, as follows:
   - 2 courses in Humanities (History; Philosophy; Religion)
   - 1 course in Literatures (Literatures Written in English (English Department) or in English Translation (Classics, East Asian Languages and Cultures, German, Humanities, and Russian))
   - 1 course in the Fine Arts (Art, Music, Theatre and Dance)
   - 2 courses total in the Social Sciences (Anthropology, Communication, Economics, Education, Political Science, Psychology, Sociology)
   - 2 courses total in the Math and Natural Sciences (Biology, Chemistry, Computer Science, Mathematics, Physics)

Here we document the educational goals and learning outcomes expected for students who complete these general education requirements.

WRITING SEMINAR, ENG 111

Educational Goal, Writing Seminar. Recognizing that writing is fundamental to learning at every stage and in every facet of a liberal arts education, that the recursion and reflection inherent in the writing process enhances students’ abilities to think deeply and critically, the College’s educational goal is simply to unite, strengthen, and develop the writing and critical thinking skills of all our students, from first year students to graduating seniors. The course, ENG 111, forms the foundation for the accomplishment of this goal.

Student Learning Outcomes, Writing Seminar
1. To read texts closely and critically.
2. To write for a variety of audiences and various rhetorical situations (although our scholarly emphases are on interpretation, analysis, argumentation, and research).
3. To consider how genre, purpose, and audience shape reading and writing processes.
4. To construct a thesis or establish a project and to structure texts coherently.
5. To develop ideas in unified, coherent paragraphs.
6. To evaluate evidence (electronic and traditional) and construct cogent arguments.
7. To research and integrate sources (original texts) and to document properly.
8. To learn the conventions of grammar and usage and to be able to control such surface features as syntax, grammar, punctuation, and spelling.
9. To use electronic environments for drafting, revising, editing, or sharing texts.
10. To critique their texts and the texts of others.

**Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes, Writing Seminar.** We assess student writing primarily through the evaluation of student essays, although we also may use quizzes, examinations, writing samples, and presentations. We also schedule three individual conferences with our students each semester to evaluate their progress and understanding. In the writing seminar, we value frequent writing and we sequence our writing assignments in terms of increasing complexity. Because we understand the necessity of revision, we return papers in a timely manner throughout the semester.

Each ENG 111 syllabus should clearly describe or reflect those goals. Readings and writing assignments should be designed to allow students to work toward proficiency, which is measured by improvement. The syllabi are fairly detailed; faculty members lay out goals clearly and demonstrate how assignments are designed to meet learning objectives. All new writing seminars must be approved by the English Department Core Committee. New course proposals are approved at the departmental level. We plan to continue to work on assessment during the 2011-2012 year.

**FIRST YEAR SEMINAR, FYS 111**

**Educational Goal, First Year Seminar.** The educational goal of a first year seminar is to introduce each student to college-level reading, writing, oral communication, and critical thinking during their first year at Wake Forest.

**Student Learning Outcomes, First Year Seminar.** Student who complete the First Year Seminar (FYS) Program will experience and learn to participate in the following:

1. Intense intellectual interchange, both written and oral, in a seminar setting.
2. Participation in critical thinking and analysis of arguments.
3. Discussion and debate on issues.
4. Examination of opposing viewpoints.
5. Written and oral assignments that force students to make explicit their ideas and thoughts.
Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes, First Year Seminar. Currently, learning outcomes are assessed individually in each class, through appropriate measures stated in the course syllabi. Courses and syllabi are approved by the First Year Seminar Faculty Committee, which is responsible for seeing that each course fulfills these learning outcomes.

HEALTH AND EXERCISE SCIENCE, HES 100 and 101

Educational Goal, Health and Exercise Science. The College’s educational goals for the basic required courses, HES 100 (Lifestyle and Health) and 101 (Exercise and Health), are to provide Wake Forest students with a basic understanding of the effect of lifestyle behaviors on health outcomes and how to apply principles of healthy exercise behavior to their everyday lives.

Student Learning Outcomes, Health and Exercise Science.

1. Describe the multiple dimensions of health, wellness and fitness.
2. Identify the effect of lifestyle behaviors on health outcomes throughout life.
3. Describe common barriers to adopting healthy lifestyle behaviors.

Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes, Health and Exercise Science. Currently, learning outcomes are assessed in each class, through appropriate measures stated in the course syllabi.

FOREIGN LANGUAGE, ONE 200-LEVEL COURSE

Educational Goal, Foreign Language.

Student Learning Outcomes, Foreign Language.

Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes, Foreign Language. Currently, learning outcomes are assessed individually in each class, through appropriate measures stated in the course syllabi.

DIVISION I, HUMANITIES, TWO COURSES

Educational Goal, Humanities.

Student Learning Outcomes, Humanities. Students who complete the Division I requirements will be able to:

1. Construct, evaluate, and present arguments in both written and oral form.
2. Demonstrate a general comprehension of the major fields of inquiry in the respective disciplines.
3. Develop and evaluate interpretations of historical, philosophical and/or religious texts.
4. Engage critically with the texts and topics in the respective disciplines.
5. Understand key discipline-specific methodology and approaches.
6. Appreciate a diversity of perspectives.
**Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes, Humanities.** Currently, learning outcomes are assessed individually in each class through appropriate measures stated in the course syllabi for courses approved to satisfy this divisional.

**DIVISION II, LITERATURES, ONE COURSE**

**Educational Goal, Literatures.**

**Student Learning Outcomes, Literatures.** Upon completion of the Literature requirement, students are expected to demonstrate their ability to:

1. Interpret and analyze literary texts and images through reading, writing, and discussion.
2. Examine the fundamentals of literary analysis, such as the importance of genres, literary language, conventions, historic traditions, and cultural contexts.
3. Pose questions about and respond to issues involving aesthetics, values, and cultural heritage.
4. Explore complex political, cultural, or ethical issues through literature.

**Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes, Literatures.** Currently, learning outcomes are assessed individually in each class through appropriate measures stated in the course syllabi for courses approved to satisfy this divisional.

**DIVISION III, FINE ARTS, ONE COURSE**

**Educational Goal, Fine Arts.**

**Student Learning Outcomes, Fine Arts.** Following completion of the requirements in Fine Arts, students will:

1. Be able to demonstrate an awareness and understanding of art forms situated within a cultural and historical context.

*and/or*

1. Have engaged in the process of artistic creation in order to explore humanistic concerns.

**Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes, Fine Arts.** Currently, learning outcomes are assessed individually in each class through appropriate measures stated in the course syllabi for courses approved to satisfy this divisional.

**DIVISION IV, SOCIAL SCIENCES, TWO COURSES**

**Educational Goal, Social Sciences.**

**Student Learning Outcomes, Social Sciences.** Upon completion of the divisional requirement in Division IV, students are expected to demonstrate:

1. The ability to critically evaluate issues, questions, claims, and hypotheses in the social and behavioral sciences.
2. Basic understanding of the research methods and analytical approaches commonly used in the social and behavioral sciences.

3. Knowledge of the core questions and concepts, the major theoretical approaches, and/or the most significant empirical findings in at least two areas within the social and behavioral sciences.

4. The ability to apply social and behavioral science principles to individual, local, and global issues and problems in an ethical manner.

5. Effective communication of the abilities, knowledge and understanding listed above.

**Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes, Social Sciences.** Currently, learning outcomes are assessed individually in each class through appropriate measures stated in the course syllabi for courses approved to satisfy this divisional.

**DIVISION V, MATH AND NATURAL SCIENCES, TWO COURSES**

**Educational Goal, Math and Natural Sciences.**

**Student Learning Outcomes, Math and Natural Sciences.** Students liberally educated at Wake Forest in the natural sciences and mathematics are expected to demonstrate their ability to:

1. Use quantitative tools, such as formulas, equations, graphs, or computer models to represent the natural world.

2. Communicate the results of scientific or mathematical investigations in writing.

3. Apply inductive and deductive reasoning to discover and understand scientific and mathematical principles.

4. Evaluate the validity of different sources of scientific and mathematical information.

5. Understand key concepts from at least two disciplines within the natural sciences, computer science, or mathematics.

6. Apply hands-on skills using the specialized methods and tools of scientific, computational and mathematical inquiry.

**Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes, Math and Natural Sciences.** Currently, learning outcomes are assessed individually in each class through appropriate measures stated in the course syllabi for courses approved to satisfy this divisional.