



Higher Learning Commission
A commission of the North Central Association

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May 5, 2011

Dr. Douglas A. Kristensen
Chancellor
University of Nebraska at Kearney
905 W. 25th St.
Kearney, NE 68849-1201

Dear Chancellor Kristensen:

The progress report you submitted to our office has now been reviewed. A staff analysis of the report is enclosed.

On behalf of the Commission, I accept the report on general studies assessment. No further reports are required. The institution's next comprehensive evaluation is scheduled for 2013 - 2014.

I am also enclosing a copy of the institution's Statement of Affiliation Status, which reflects the actions I have taken on behalf of the Commission. If you have any questions about this analysis or any other evaluation matters, please let me know. I can be reached via email at rappleson@hlcommission.org or by voice at (800) 621-7440 x 122.

Sincerely,

Robert R. Appleson

Robert R. Appleson,
Vice President for Accreditation Relations

Enclosures



STAFF ANALYSIS OF INSTITUTIONAL REPORT

DATE: May 4, 2011

STAFF: Robert R. Appleson

REVIEWED BY: Katherine C. Delaney

INSTITUTION: University of Nebraska at Kearney, Kearney, NE

EXECUTIVE OFFICER: Douglas A. Kristensen, Chancellor

PREVIOUS COMMISSION ACTION RE: REPORT: A progress report due on 4/30/11 focused on general studies assessment.

ITEMS ADDRESSED IN REPORT: The office of the Commission received University of Nebraska at Kearney's report on the above topic on 4/28/11.

STAFF ANALYSIS: The University of Nebraska at Kearney hosted a mandated focused visit in April 2008. The visit was focused on assessment and on the institution's request to change its stipulations of affiliation status to include online delivery of existing and future undergraduate and graduate degree programs. The team recommended approval of the University's change request. With respect to assessment, the team commented:

The University of Nebraska Kearney has demonstrated a significant commitment toward assessment over the past four years. While program level assessment is moving forward, assessment of General Studies still appears to be struggling due to the lack of a shared understanding of the General Studies program-level student learning outcomes.

As it currently stands, there does not appear to be a clear, shared definition nor understanding of the learning outcomes for the General Studies program. Each department that is teaching courses in General Studies is assessing their interpretation of the outcomes in their own way, using their own instruments. As such, it is impossible to determine whether UNK students are achieving at an acceptable level when the level shifts from course to course, program to program. Many assessment "rubrics" are simply numerical scales, without descriptions of performance characteristics at each level.

As a new General Studies program was still in its early formative stages, the team, recommended this progress report on the new program's structure, student learning outcomes, assessment plan and the implementation status for each of the outcomes.

Structure of the Renewed General Studies Curriculum

Between 2008 and 2010, the University developed and implemented a new General Studies curriculum. The curriculum is structured sequentially:

- It begins with a freshman seminar (or "Portal" course) that focuses on 1) strengthening critical thinking skills, and 2) helping orient new students to the enhanced standards of higher education.
- Concurrent with the Portal course, beginning students also take *Foundational Core* courses in written communication, oral communication, mathematics, and democracy. These initial

courses are intended to give students the necessary communication and quantitative skills, and a fundamental understanding of the principles of democracy, in order to prepare them for further general education courses.

- After the Foundational Core courses, students select courses from six *Distribution* categories: Aesthetics, Humanities, Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, Analytical & Quantitative Thought, and Wellness.
- The final piece of the curriculum is the junior level *Capstone* course, which is an interdisciplinary experience that requires each student to create and submit an original Capstone project. The project requires that students demonstrate that they have met the program level outcomes for General Studies.

General Studies Learning Outcomes

Creation of common learning outcomes with shared definitions occurred in fall 2009 and was implemented in all General Studies courses beginning in 2010. These learning outcomes were developed and refined over a three year period with the involvement of many faculty from across campus. Each of the learning outcomes is formulated such that they involve only one skill or ability and one level of accomplishment. The complete set of general studies learning outcomes was attached to the progress report. Learning outcomes are articulated for program, for the general studies portal, for the foundational core, the distribution categories and for the capstone courses.

Common Assessment Methods and Instruments

A rolling implementation of common assessment measures throughout the General Studies program began in fall 2010 with the Portal Courses and will be in place in all General Studies courses by spring 2012. The common assessments will be implemented in each area to insure assessment data are reported in all areas by fall 2013.

In each General Studies course, beginning fall 2010 with the Portal courses, students have been required to submit one assignment –designated as a General Studies assessment– as part of their grade in the course. Faculty members have six different assessment assignments they can choose from to use for their course. The six possible assessment questions all address the common learning outcomes and provide consistent assessment of those outcomes. Evaluation of the assessment assignments is completed using a common rubric that is intended to capture the learning outcomes for the course category.

Standardized Rubrics

UNK chose to adapt and use the rubrics of the Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U) VALUE project. The first of the VALUE project related rubrics to be adapted were the rubric for the Portal courses. This rubric was used from the initial implementation of the new General Studies program in fall 2010. The rubric is designed to capture the learning outcomes of the Portal category.

When the students in a General Studies course are given the common assessment assignment used to evaluate these outcomes, their performance is then evaluated using the standardized rubrics. Faculty using the rubrics for scoring are trained on the use of the rubric to insure a common understanding of the descriptions of performance for each of the items in the rubric and to allow for greater inter-rater reliability.

Implementation of the standardized rubrics in the General Studies program began in fall 2010 with the Portal courses and will be in place in all General Studies courses by spring 2012.

Faculty Development

Faculty who taught a Portal course in 2010-2011 first attended three orientations – an overview of General Studies assessment, an introduction to e-portfolios, and a training session on using the Portfolio rubric and evaluating student work using TaskStream. A website was established that serves as a one-stop location for information for both students and faculty about acquiring and using TaskStream. As an incentive to learning and using the online e-portfolio system, faculty are receiving a onetime \$500 stipend if 90% or greater of students enrolled in their General Studies course submit their assessment assignment on TaskStream; if the instructor evaluates all of the submissions using TaskStream; and if the instructor attends all necessary orientations.

Logistics of Assessment in the New Program

The decision was made in spring 2010 to adopt an e-portfolio system for the archiving of student assessment assignments and for the ease of online grading and compiling of results. The application adopted for General Studies at UNK is TaskStream, which was already being used by UNK's College of Education as their e-portfolio system for majors.

Beginning in fall 2010, all students entering under the new General Studies program and taking their Portal course were required to purchase a license for TaskStream and then to upload their written General Studies assessment assignment to the application. This procedure provides an efficient way to handle all the assessment assignments and gives faculty an easy way to grade the assignments using the required rubric, which is available to them in TaskStream. Faculty received training on the use of TaskStream at the same time they took part in the training on the use of rubrics.

Data from the common assessment assignments will be used at the department, college and institutional level to gauge quality of the General Studies program and to identify ways to improve student learning. The General Studies Council and director are charged with ensuring that the data are collected and analyzed, and then used formatively to improve the program and the quality of student learning.

Staff comment: The University of Nebraska at Kearney is commended both for an excellent progress report and for the excellent progress it has made in the development and implementation of the new general studies program. The general studies program and the assessment analyses that result from it will be valuable for the institution's self-study as it prepares for its comprehensive visit in 2013-2014.

STAFF ACTION: Accept the report on general studies assessment. No further reports are required. The institution's next comprehensive evaluation is scheduled for 2013 - 2014.

STATEMENT OF AFFILIATION STATUS

UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA AT KEARNEY
905 W. 25th St.
Kearney, NE 68849-1201

Affiliation Status: Candidate: Not Applicable
Accreditation: (1916- .)

PEAQ PARTICIPANT

Nature of Organization

Legal Status: Public
Degrees Awarded: B, M, S

Conditions of Affiliation:

Stipulations on Affiliation Status: None.

Approval of New Additional Locations: Prior Commission approval required.

Approval of Distance and Correspondence Courses and Programs: New Commission policy on institutional change became effective July 1, 2010. Some aspects of the change processes affecting distance delivered courses and programs are still being finalized. This entry will be updated in early 2011 to reflect current policy. In the meantime, see the Commission's Web site for information on seeking approval of distance education courses and programs.

Reports Required: None.

Other Visits Scheduled: None.

Summary of Commission Review

Year of Last Comprehensive Evaluation: 2003 - 2004
Year for Next Comprehensive Evaluation: 2013 - 2014
Date of Last Action: 09/04/2008

Name Change:

Nebraska State Teachers College, Kearney to Kearney State College (1964) to University of Nebraska at Kearney (7/1/91)