

NSU General Education and Beyond

Northeastern State University (NSU) is Oklahoma's fourth-largest public four-year institution and one of six regional institutions governed by the Regional University System of Oklahoma board. The University serves a learning hub in northeastern Oklahoma formed by three campuses – the main campus in Tahlequah and branch campuses located at Muskogee and Broken Arrow– which together serve nearly 10,000 students annually. In 2008, a strategic planning task force was selected representing students, faculty, and professional staff to review, revise and adopt the mission, vision and core values for Northeastern State University. The following statements were adopted and student learning outcomes will be aligned with the mission, the vision, and the core values of the University:

NSU Focused Mission Statement: We empower individuals to become socially responsible global citizens by creating and sustaining a culture of learning and discovery.

Vision Statement: We will be the educational partner of choice in eastern Oklahoma, embracing the challenges and opportunities of a global society.

Core Values Statements

Integrity: We model ethical and intellectual development by advancing honesty, human dignity, and accountability.

Collaboration: We build partnerships to create learning opportunities and promote educational and economic success.

Creativity: We advance knowledge by exploring new possibilities through critical inquiry and intellectual freedom.

Leadership: We have a compelling commitment to serve, inspiring and preparing others to do the same.

Excellence: We pursue continuous improvement individually and as a community

NSU strongly believes that the assessment process serves as the basis for program and curricular review as well as improvement of instruction and student learning outcomes. The development of an assessment plan for NSU originally began during the 1988-89 academic year. During 1992, NSU refined and added to the original assessment plan. Graduate level assessment was added in 1993. The 2008-2009 report remains consistent with the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education (OSRHE) mission in both practice and spirit. NSU takes the assessment effort seriously and truly attempts to include those persons who will be impacted by program and curricular review in order to enhance both specific and general student learning outcomes in accordance with the mission, vision and values of the University.

The strengths of the NSU assessment process include:

1. An Assessment & Institutional Research office that is competently staffed.
2. Program reviews are submitted to the Regent's in a timely manner and reflect unit successes. The Regents template is of assistance in completing the process.
3. Assessment for placement is working very well. Students who enter NSU without the requisite ACT sub score are enrolled in the proper zero level instruction. Remedial instruction at NSU works well as demonstrated by years of pre/post assessment data.

4. General Education has been assessed for the past 18 years using Riverside's College Base Inventory. A new General Education system was instituted in fall, 2010 and represents the primary basis of this project and beginning in spring 2010 NSU began using ETS's proficiency Profile in place of the College Base instrument.
5. Recently, several surveys have been conducted by a consulting firm that assisted the university with its branding campaign and resulted on several changes as well.
6. Satisfaction has been measured by several standard instruments such as the Senior Survey, the NSSE and the Alumni Survey. Campus and instructional changes have been made as a result of these data.
7. NSU completes the annual Regents' Assessment Report that focuses on undergraduate and graduate majors.

The weaknesses and barriers of the NSU assessment process include:

1. The selection of instruments for assessment in the major has been the choice of the individual department. Some assessment tools are self developed and others are purchased from national vendors. This has led to a lack of reliability.
2. There has been no effort from the Regents to compare campuses.
3. Program Reviews are most often completed by the department chair. Because these positions change frequently, there may be a lack of training for new chairs.
4. There is no single place to retrieve the data needed to complete parts of the reviews.
5. Regular full-time faculty with terminal degrees tend not to embrace remedial instruction.
6. Student participation is poor in General Education assessment. With the new General Education Capstone course, this assessment will be embedded.
7. Program assessment is often looked at as an exercise to please accreditors and is not used well for improvement of student learning. The partial lack of faculty buy-in is being addressed and will be a prime component of this application.
8. The satisfaction inventories usually attract the very satisfied and the very unsatisfied making the distribution bimodal and the data are not normally distributed.
9. The most pressing evaluation need includes the development of consistent, efficient assessment practices that inform instructional and program improvement and is centered on measuring learning outcomes and growth among our students. Further, a clear need exists to bring assessment efforts together in order to reduce redundancy. Additionally, NSU is striving to enhance the campus culture regarding assessment of student learning outcomes. Finally, we need to build a campus-wide commitment to the new General Education curriculum which was implemented in fall, 2010.

Goals for the Academy Project: There are two major projects associated with NSU and the HLC Academy. The first is to thoroughly assess the new General Education curriculum and compare the results to the previous curriculum. This first goal will consume the first and second years of the Academy. The second goal, to be addressed in years three and four of the Academy is to determine the construct validity of NSU's mission, core values and overall learning outcomes of the University.

General Education Project: This effort, the primary focus of this Academy, consists of the enhancement of existing tools and the development or acquisition of new or existing evaluation instruments in order to effectively assess student learning outcomes and the stated seven

categories of knowledge of the new General Education program curriculum. These categories are:

1. **Written & Oral Communication** - Students should be able to express themselves effectively, both in writing and in person.
2. **Social & Behavioral Sciences** - Students should understand the content and processes used by historians, social scientists, and behavioral scientists to explain human behavior and social systems.
3. **Global Perspectives** - Students should develop an awareness of their own cultural identities, recognize their ethnocentrism, and learn to analyze cultural differences in a respectful, non-judgmental manner from various disciplinary perspectives.
4. **Life Skills** - Students should have life skills that form the basis of a well-rounded citizen.
5. **Humanities** - Students should understand methods of intellectual and creative inquiry that have been used to communicate perspectives on the human condition.
6. **Natural Sciences** - Students should understand the study of the natural world, both biological (living) and physical (non-living) systems, and possess the critical thinking skills required to evaluate scientific hypotheses and to apply scientific knowledge.
7. **Quantitative Analysis** - Students should understand the study of numbers, shapes, and patterns as well as possess the logical reasoning and other skills needed for analyzing, interpreting, and communicating quantitative data.

Beginning List of Major Activities/Tasks for Completing the Project: The primary need for participation in the HLC Assessment Academy is to enhance, monitor and modify (as needed) the assessment measures for student learning outcomes for the new General Education classes and curriculum as well as to add a measure of personal growth and development to the overall evaluation. A second component of this primary need is to compare and contrast the results of the prior General Education program requirements (control group) with the new requirement outcomes (experimental group). NSU is in the unique situation of transitioning and evaluating student learning outcomes between the two sets of General Education requirements during the Assessment Academy. The research design for the comparison study is a traditional non-paired comparison of both quantitative and qualitative data which will include measures of the goals set forth in the new General Education requirements. Additionally, and of significant interest, is the inclusion of measures of personal growth and development following completion of the General Education requirements.

The first component of the General Education project is to compare old and new curricula. It will have one independent variable: General education curriculum (two levels—old and new). Data will be utilized from existing data from the 8-year period of data collection ending in 2007 with the possibility of collecting some additional data from current students completing the old curriculum. The comparison between the old and new curricula will utilize the college base instrument and will be administered to students under the new general education curriculum upon completion this would possibly start spring 2012. There will also be new data from end of capstone course in new curriculum. There will be seven dependent variables: four subscales on College Base test (English, Math, Science, and Social Studies) and three subscales from homegrown items (Speech, Health & Physical Education, and Humanities). Statistical analyses will involve one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) with appropriate post hoc measures.

The second component of the General Education project will have one independent variable: exposure to general education curriculum (two levels – pre- and post curriculum. The initial data will come from the beginning of the university strategies course. The post-test will occur at the end of the final course, the Capstone. In this component of the project, there will be multiple dependent variables (exact number yet to be determined) including: achievement tests of general education areas (Proficiency Profile), student perceptions of competence in seven goals of general Education, student satisfaction with the general Education curriculum, and other opinion/perception variables from students to also include measures of student engagement (NSSE) and personal development. Statistical analyses will again include one-way repeated measures multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) with appropriate post hoc measures.

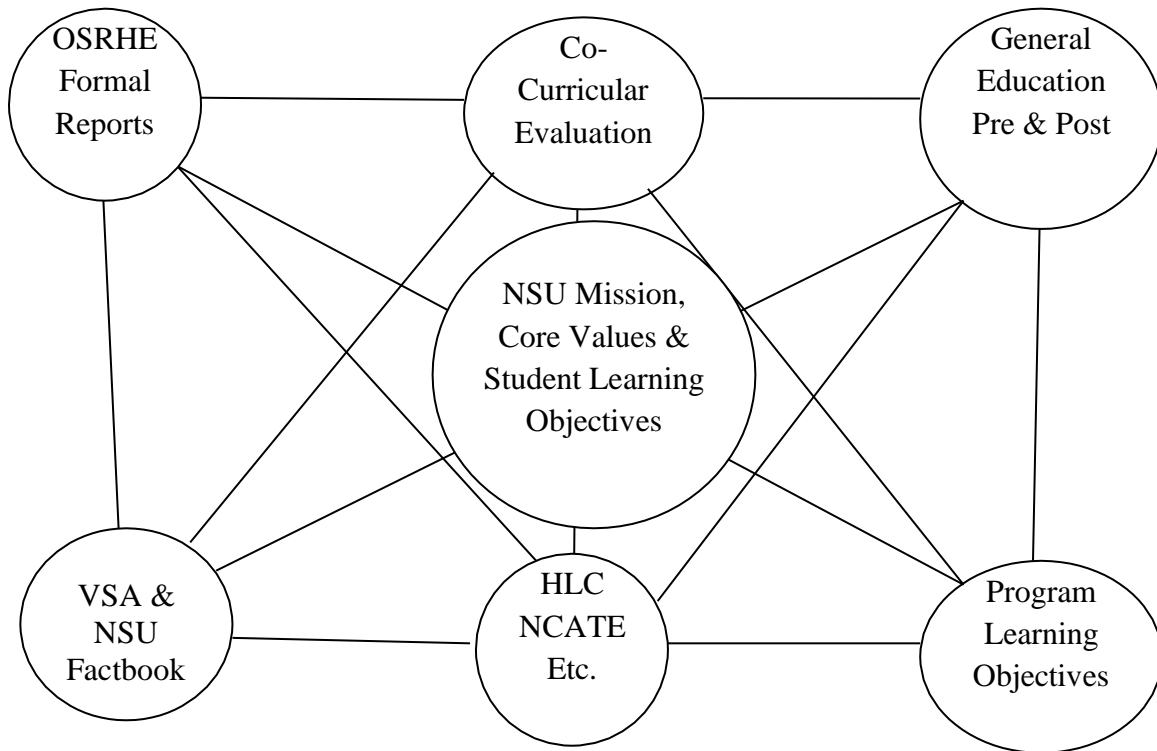
The final component of the project will involve one independent variable: exposure to value-added workshops, presentations, and other information pertaining to student learning processes utilizing a pre- post-test design on the new curriculum. While the data points have yet to be fully determined, there will be multiple dependent variables (exact number yet to be determined) including: perceptions and understanding of student learning and assessment, engagement in student learning processes, and other measures. The statistical analyses will again be one-way repeated measures multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) with appropriate post hoc tests.

List of Tentative Ongoing Products, Processes, Impact on Student Learning Desired from the Project: 1. HLC Academy Team; 2. Student Learning Committee; 3. Re-tasking of NSU's Center for Teaching & Learning; 4. Regents' assessment reports & program reviews. Impact is hoped to be increased efficiency and reduced redundancy of student learning outcomes, program objectives and adherence to NSU's vision, leading to more meaningful and successful proximal and distal outcomes related to NSU's core values. This will lead to ensuring the fulfillment of NSU's mission to empower individuals to become socially responsible global citizens by creating and sustaining a culture of learning and discovery.

Intended Outcomes of the Project: It is expected that the primary project will yield critical information regarding the efficacy of NSU's new General Education requirements, not only regarding the attainment of the goals detailed earlier for what is expected of a graduate of NSU, but also with the inclusion of the distinctive measure of personal growth and development. Second, we expect extensive faculty commitment to using assessment to improve practice and programming. Third, we expect a significant, measurable enhancement of student learning as measured by selected outcome-based assessment.

Second Project: The second project to be undertaken under the auspices of the Academy is much more general and quite difficult. It involves the use of discriminant analyses to assess an approximation of the construct validity of NSU's mission, core values and student learning outcomes outlined in our strategic planning process. Through assessing the consistencies among the theoretical, empirical and observable data points one can build a case that the construct validity of NSU's mission and core values as well as general student learning outcomes are succeeding. This will take the third and fourth years of the Academy as well as beyond. Below is a representation of the discriminant analyses to be constructed around NSU's mission and core

values. It will include virtually all quantitative and qualitative, curricular and co-curricular assessments and evaluations as part of the construct validation.



Key People and Groups Leading the Project: Key people involved in the Academy projects include the Academy Team, NSU’s Faculty Council, the Center for Teaching and Learning, President’s Cabinet, and other relevant stakeholders. The Assessment Academy Team will lead the project and consists of members representing Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, Assessment & Institutional Research, the Red Balloon project and others.

NSU is committed to not only completing these two projects (with the assistance of Academy mentors and scholars) but also to continue in the advancement of evaluation of student learning outcomes into the distant future.