

CCATF GenEd Conversations
20 February 2024

Topic: Student Learning Outcomes
Location: Zoom
Max participants at any one time: 17
Total people attending: 18

Notes:

JMU currently has a outcomes-based model. This kind of program is often contrasted with distribution models, which don't often focus on SLOs. What do you think about an outcomes-based model, not only in GenEd but also for higher ed in general?

Evidence-based practices are important. Outcomes-based programs help us demonstrate teaching effectiveness and student learning. Evidence from our work contributes to the ongoing vibrancy of a program.

As long as learning outcomes are defined at very high level then I think they're okay. GenEd should be about seeing how different knowledge areas help you see the world differently, not about what specific books you've read, or what specific pieces of knowledge you have.

In the GEC we're currently try to keep SLOs at a high level. It is tricky to write outcomes that are meaningful and still capture high-level learning across disciplines.

The Adult Degree Program is also interested in high-level outcomes, and particularly those that can also be linked to prior learning, and which are not linked specifically to any specific courses.

What percent of faculty teaching in the GenEd program know/understand GenEd SLOs and have them present on syllabi?

Listed learning outcomes on syllabi is fairly low, and varies by subject area.

Who tells the faculty about GenEd SLOs?

Are course objectives different from GenEd SLOs?

Specific courses can have different course objectives.

There is a learning outcomes culture on campus. This helps us design good courses. How are GenEd SLOs and course-based SLOs linked?

Not sure we have an answer to that. This seems similar to the question related to ADP. Transfer credit evaluation is also relevant. Transfer credit evaluation is often a complicated picture. I'm glad we don't have a rigid template to evaluate.

In the GEC we're currently looking into a wellness option for students who are not an 18-year-old living on campus. Can a new class be created to meet the objectives?

Do we have too many learning outcomes? Are they at the appropriate level for someone who wants higher-level outcomes?

How are we supposed to be using SLOs? It might be easier to ask about the level of outcomes before asking about the number of outcomes. Having different disciplines in the same area makes it even more difficult.

Seems like our high number of learning outcomes is an artefact of the "cluster history," where different disciplines are represented in the clusters.

Do we have an agreement on why we have GenEd? This should drive the overall design and help us communicate the value to students and other constituents.

Students can often find majors through GenEd. And they often gain skills, writing, communication, etc. in those courses.

Our students are not "rounded" enough. They really need GenEd. They need sociology, philosophy, writing, etc. in business. Students can come out of JMU with no common sense. Not prepared to live a life. GenEd can help.

Maybe we need a spiral curriculum. Writing: Develop the skills and keep coming back to it. Self-management: Develop skills and keep coming back to it.

GenEd programs seem to always be fighting against moves to add more technical-focused courses.

Iterative communication about the purpose of GenEd with students is also probably important.

GenEd SLOs, while they have been reviewed and revised over time, still reflect a cluster model. The challenge is: How do you have a SLO model and have few meaningful outcomes?

Maybe we should have 3-5 meaningful outcomes for the program. More compact. Easier to communicate.

AAC&U has four broad objectives.

How can we ensure we're meeting objectives? Should instructors show how they're meeting the objectives? Can we ask faculty for curricular mapping?

Can we ask this of adjunct faculty?

Can we create "sample" curricular mapping for faculty, both newer and older?

In the GEC, we're discussing having an "onboarding" site for GenEd instructors. It would have learning objectives and would include resources for faculty.

If we have a few meaningful outcomes, then we could link those outcomes to many upper-level courses in majors. Courses at the upper level can often link to GenEd-related outcomes in the sense that they carry further the work begun in GenEd. Writing or critical thinking, for example.

Transfer challenge: we should be careful to have outcomes that are transfer-friendly.

Do we have the right learning objectives? I don't see anything related to technology. Not the natural world but the built world. If no other reason than to help make us better users or consumers of technology.

In the GEC, we're beginning to look at "modern literacies" learning outcomes.

What are the big SLOs in addition to technology?

Critical thinking, logical thinking, complexity, x-cultural understanding, communication, cognitive flexibility.

A GEC working group is looking at the current GenEd learning outcomes to try to distill them. Perhaps this is a good way to start identifying the small set of outcomes.

Be clear about what we mean by "learning outcome."

We have not yet written about the responsibilities of students. They should be responsible for their own learning and applying their learning. Is this target a good learning outcome?

This is a developmental process. And we've lived a long time with the model of teachers filling heads.

We need senior and grad data to see the longer time outcomes of curricula.

What can we do to excite students re: learning? That's a vision I'd love to have. GenEd is what expands your mind and makes life worth living.

END OF NOTES