General Education Assessment Summary Report

May, 2009
Spring 2006 through Fall 2008
Undergraduate College

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I. Undergraduate College Courses Offered in the Assessment Period:

FND-0100	Foundations of Scientific and Quantitative Reasoning
FND-0110	Foundations of Western Culture
FND-0120	Foundations of World Citizenship
FND-0130	Foundations of Religious Belief
BIO-0102	Life Science I
CHE-0100	General Chemistry
HIS-0233	History of Women in the United States, 19th Century
HIS-0271	Beyond Salsa: Latinas and Latinos in United States History
HIS-0273	Ethnicity in American History
PSY-0100	Basic Concepts of Psychology
PSY-0328	Psychopathology of Childhood
PSY-0361	Educational Psychology
PHI-0275	Biomedical Ethics
MAT-0104	Developmental Mathematics (Modu Math)
MAT-0115	College Algebra
MAT-0120	Calculus I

II. Factors that may have affected assessment:

- Curricular changes in majors, including a switch from a 4-credit to a 3-credit system.
- A shrinking faculty.
- Problems with assessment plans in the majors that included classes taken to fulfill General Education requirements meant that assessment data was not always available.

III. Assessment Results: Undergraduate College.

The Foundations courses in the Undergraduate College General Education curriculum were envisioned to be multidisciplinary, team-taught courses that would provide students with a content knowledge of the liberal arts over their first four semesters at Rosemont College. The original intent was that these courses would be a "common experience" shared by all students (with the exception of transfers). Eventually, that intention was diluted somewhat by the adoption of equivalent courses and the ability to "opt out" of the Foundations courses.

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The Foundations courses were also designed to meet four goals:

Goal 1: To improve students' ability to communicate orally and in writing.
Goal 2: To acquaint students with information technology and the use of bibliographic sources.
Goal 3: To develop the ability to think critically.
Goal 4: To understand American values and cultural diversity.

The data in the following chart, taken from indirect assessment methods (i.e. student course evaluations) in the spring 2006 and fall 2008, indicate that these students increasingly felt that the courses were meeting these four goals. (1 to 5 scale, 5 being highest).

	All Foundation Courses Spring 2006	All Foundation Courses Fall 2008
Goal 1	3.18	3.81
Goal 2	3.00	3.65
Goal 3	3.43	4.04
Goal 4	3.53	3.87

At the same time, however, student perceptions of the value of these classes were lower than other courses that were used to fulfill General Education requirements but linked to one specific discipline. General Education distribution courses, (in psychology, history, philosophy, math, and science) ranked an average of 4.18 on overall value to students while the Foundation courses averaged 3.84.

	Ethics	**Science**	**History**	**Psychology**	**Math**
Expectations	3.83	3.91	3.94	4.91	3.90
Challenged	4.35	3.89	4.34	4.72	4.09
Learning Increased	4.30	3.98	4.24	4.86	3.92
Overall Value	4.10	3.83	4.08	4.83	3.83

	Average Discipline Specific Course	**Average Foundations Course**	**Difference**
Expectations	4.10	3.82	-0.28
Challenged	4.28	4.26	-0.02
Learning Increased	4.26	3.93	-0.33
Overall Value	4.13	3.84	-0.29

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In theory, the Foundations courses broke new ground as an experimental curriculum. The courses embodied many of the new ways of thinking about GE and in teaching General Education courses. Also, many of the professors found the new approach invigorating, as it broke down the old walls between disciplines and forced faculty to work together toward common goals.

In practice, however, they did not work that well. A shrinking faculty made staffing them difficult, often forcing departments to recruit adjunct instructors, or requiring a single faculty member to teach from the perspective of two different disciplines. Scheduling multiple sections of a given Foundations course became difficult and also led to frustrated students at their inability to get into a course. Further, students were confused about the "interdisciplinary" nature of the courses, and they did not readily absorb or appreciate the interconnectedness of the disciplines presenting the courses. Some faculty also complained that the Foundations courses were too burdensome and did not provide enough time to cover the material sufficiently. These factors all contributed to a general sense that, while the courses were not intrinsically flawed, they never lived up to their potential.

IV. Agenda for using the assessment data: Given the assessment results, the Undergraduate College decided not to continue the Foundation courses and instead work toward creating a completely new General Education program. All General Education courses would now be listed under individual disciplines, and any decision to team-teach would be made voluntarily by the faculty rather than being dictated by the program.

Another lesson learned from the assessment data is illustrated by the following chart, which shows clearly the first course in calculus (which mainly enrolled science majors) ranked much higher in all categories compared to algebra (which was a mix of science majors and non-majors). This trend pointed clearly to the need for classes in biology, chemistry, and mathematics that address the needs of non-science majors.

	Calculus I	**College Algebra**	**Difference**
Expectations	5.00	3.14	-1.86
Challenged	4.80	3.72	-1.08
Learning Increased	4.80	3.39	-1.41
Overall Value	4.80	3.17	-1.63

Finally, the previous assessment experience itself has led to a new approach to understanding how well the GE works or doesn't work. The new GE curriculum will be regularly assessed by the Assessment Committee, which includes representation of Undergraduate College faculty and discipline chairs. In addition, the Undergraduate College is considering including questions on course evaluations for GE classes that could be used to gather data from students regarding course goals and outcomes. In the future, evaluations will probe whether students actually did attain the expected levels of

scholarship and technical ability, and not rely solely on indirect measures of student self-reporting.

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