General Education Committee

MEMO

DATE:       June 15, 2006
TO:         Program Review Committee
RE:         General Education Program Review – Annual Report

Continuing and Updated Goals

The January 2006 General Education program review report addressed four goals related to student experience:

- Students will understand the overall purpose of the General Education program.
- The place of the individual courses within the GE will be effectively communicated to students.
- General Education courses (particularly Common Context courses) will be effective in providing background material that will support work in subsequent courses and in dealing with contemporary issues as evidenced by cohort student’s essay responses and reflections on those responses.
- Students’ experience with the General Education program should be satisfactory.

These goals are primarily related to the recent restructuring of the General Education program. (The fall 2004 entering class is the first group of students to operate under the new General Education program.) One of the major reasons for the modification was to make the program more educative and the initial assessment efforts of the General Education Committee, which was constituted in 2002 to oversee the General Education program, were directed toward assessing the efficacy of the changes. As indicated below, the General Education Committee is continuing to monitor progress in this area and to pass on relevant information to other sectors in the college that have General Education responsibility.

In the January 2006 program review report, the General Education Committee identified the need to move beyond appraising student experience to reviewing student performance. Later that spring, the General Education Committee was specifically charged with the task of assessing the college’s performance relative to the six learning standards. In the subsequent four months the committee has gathered data to assess performance for four of the learning standards (indicated by boldface below) and has taken action to begin collecting data in the remaining two areas this fall. Specifically:

1. Christian Orientation: The Religious Studies department will develop and the GE Committee will review and approve an exit assessment instrument to be given to students completing Old Testament. Students will indicate which of the other two
required Religious Studies courses have been taken previously. The first administration of the instrument will be fall 2006.

2. **Critical-Interdisciplinary Thinking**: The GE Committee has reviewed essays written by the GE cohort. In addition, the CLA will be administered to first-year students fall 2006 and seniors in spring 2007.

3. **Diversity**: A review of spring 2004 NSSE data on the number of students engaging in study-abroad programs and in conversations with others unlike themselves has been conducted for this review. Beginning fall 2006, professors teaching courses meeting the *Thinking Globally* GE requirement will develop an essay question and accompanying rubric to be approved by the GE Committee. The essay question will be administered as part of the final exam. Selected essays will be evaluated by instructors of *Thinking Globally* courses.

4. **Active Societal and Intellectual Engagement**: Data from the spring 2004 NSSE has been reviewed to determine the level of student participation in service activities and in study-abroad programs during the course of their education.

5. **Written and Oral Communication**: Data from the spring 2004 NSSE has been reviewed to determine the percentages of students who have given oral presentations during their college career and who have written significant papers during the current year. Self critiques from the fall 2005 cohort assessment were reviewed for accuracy. The CLA will be administered to first-year students fall 2006 and to seniors spring 2007.

6. **Research and Technology**: Commencing spring 2007, a subset of the GE Committee will form a jury to review major honors projects, senior recitals, senior art shows, research projects, and products from capstone courses. The specific focus of the jury will rotate yearly.

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**General Description of Additional Data Collected by the General Education Committee**

In the fall of 2004, a group of 25 entering students was selected to form the initial GE cohort. The cohort students agreed to respond to an assessment instrument each term as part of an ongoing assessment program in probing various aspects of the General Education program. Fall 2004 and spring 2005 data from the cohort (along with a general survey of first-year students) formed the basis of the January report. Since that time, we have collected the following data.

1. **Fall 2005 web assessment of the GE cohort.** (N=15)
   a. Update on GE experience.
   b. A short essay for each relevant course indicating how then-current courses/instructors aided the understanding GE goals and contributed to the goals.
   c. Two critiques of the essay the student wrote in fall 2004.
      i. How well the GE program has lived up to what the student wrote.
      ii. A self critique of the effectiveness of the fall 2004 essay.

2. **Spring 2006 web assessment of the GE cohort.** (N=15)
   a. Update on GE experience
   b. How then-current courses/instructors aided the understanding GE goals and contributed to the goals. One short essay for each class.
   c. Essay: On the Intelligent Design controversy or on the use of torture.
   d. Reflection on how GE courses have equipped the student to write the essay.

3. **Spring 2006 web survey of the 2006 graduating class.** (N=48)
   a. Level of understanding of program (i) goals and (ii) requirements.
b. Experience with GE program.
c. Primary sources of information about GE program.
d. For each GE course rate (1-5) how well the GE area goals have been (i) communicated and (ii) attained.

The information from the senior survey is intended to serve as a baseline against which to compare the results from the graduating class of 2008, the first class to graduate under the new General Education program.

This data along with data from previous reports can be viewed on the web at http://www.westmont.edu/_academics/pages/provost/Curriculum/GE/Program%20Review%20Data/

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<th>Student Experience</th>
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<td><strong>Goal:</strong> Students will increase in their understanding and appreciation of the goals of the General Education program.</td>
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**Criterion for Success:** In the course of responding to other prompts, 25% of cohort students in their second year will articulate a specific experience which demonstrates that they understand and/or appreciate the value of the General Education courses they have taken.

**Data:** The cohort responses to the following prompts were reviewed:

- For each new course above, please comment on
  - a. the ways the course through its syllabus or instruction has (not) helped you understand the goals of the GE
  - b. the ways in which the course has (not) contributed to these goals.

Last fall, you wrote an essay or persuasive speech as if you were a Westmont College student leader giving a talk to your high school explaining Westmont's General Education program. Your essay was attached to the email which directed you to this survey. Please critique your essay in the following ways:

1. The extent to which the General Education program, as you have experienced it, has lived up to the rhetoric of your essay. Be specific
2. Based on your growth as a writer, critique the effectiveness of your essay as a piece of writing

How have your GE courses contributed to your capacity to write the previous essay?

**Interpretation:** Student responses from fall 2005 and spring 2006 cohort assessments were reviewed looking for concrete examples of student experience. Approximately half of the cohort gave specific examples which demonstrated either understanding or appreciation of the purposes of the General Education program. (“Approximately” is used here since, while the number of identified examples exceeded 50% of the participating students, some of the responses may have been multiple instances arising from the same student.)

Sample experiences are listed below.

After having taken Public Speaking in Spring '05 it is humorous to look back at this speech and see how I now know how to do it more effectively. I am excited about that!

I appreciate little things in life like sunsets so much more because I know the “science” of what our amazing God created!
The ideas I discuss in one class often flow fluidly into the next, and although the subject matter may be entirely different, there is always some element of each class that can be transferred from one subject to another. It was necessary, both in New Testament and in World Art, for me to attempt to step somewhat outside of my own cultural context in order to see and better understand other cultures. Discussions about classifying art also flowed nicely into discussions about classifying plant and animal life in Biology.

… when I was studying at a local coffee shop and reading a text book for Doctrine. An older man was sitting at the table next to mine and began commenting on the book; he was not fond of Christianity by any means. I was able to hold my own in this conversation and listen to his points with respect, but then counter them with points of my own. Obviously neither one of us was going to convert the other to his or her side, but the conversation was civil and beneficial. I also felt confident that I was actually learning and processing Doctrine class and not just memorizing a bunch of information.

The emic perspective constitutes an anthropological concept of seeing through the eyes of the group being studied. This was a really new concept for me, but I realized it is so important for effective communication as a politician, in the medical community, or in sharing the gospel. In this sense a GE course, otherwise unnecessary, will help make me better in my chosen field of study.

**Using the Results:** The criterion for success was clearly exceeded in this area. It is worth noting that, in the surrounding material, many of respondents indicated that careful articulation of the General Education goals in the class syllabus along with re-articulation throughout the semester was important to the process of understanding and appreciating the way a course fit into the General Education program. The cohort’s narrative reflections on their General Education courses along with a memo about how important communication of goals is to students have been passed on to the relevant departments.

**Next Steps:** At some point, it will be important to do a similar study on students who are not part of the cohort. Due to repeated assessment, cohort students are particularly sensitive to the General Education program and its role in a Westmont education.

**Critical-Interdisciplinary Thinking – Learning Standard 2**

**Goal:** Students are versatile thinkers, able to use appropriately the tools provided by different disciplinary methodologies and to understand that each discipline implies a particular epistemological orientation. Critical interdisciplinary thinking requires students to combine a variety of discipline-specific reasoning abilities in attempts to solve problems or answer questions. It also requires them to have the ability to frame appropriate questions; to think abstractly; to test definitions of key terms and categories of analysis, and to examine one’s own assumptions. (*Learning Standards*)

**Criterion for Success:** Fewer than 20% of the spring cohort essays are judged to demonstrate “Undeveloped Skills” in this area.

**Data:** In the spring semester of 2006, the cohort was asked to write an essay in response to the following prompt:

Please write a short essay on the current debate about Intelligent Design or on the issue of the imprisonment and treatment of terror suspects.
Interpretation: Six reviewers read each of the 14 cohort essays (one student chose not to write the essay) and rated each essay according to eight criteria using the attached rubric. Since there were occasional disagreements on the ratings, the summary table uses medians to eliminate outlier effects.

Since the essays students were asked to write were short and there were no extrinsic rewards for exceptional essays or consequences for poor essays, the ratings in “response framing” and “key definitions and categories” were expected to be somewhat low. This seems to have been less of an issue than expected.

Since students wrote these essays in their fourth semester at Westmont, most are expected to be in the “Developing” stage.

Median Score

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max | 8  | 8  | 7  | 8  | 7  | 7  | 7  | 7  |
min | 3  | 3  | 3  | 3  | 4  | 3  | 3  | 2  |
median | 5  | 4  | 5  | 5  | 4  | 5  | 5  |

RF: Response Framing    KD: Key Definitions    A: Assumptions
GT: General Thinking    C: Conclusion    D: Use of Data
PP: Portrayal of Positions    DU: Disciplinary Use

Using the Results: The criterion for success was achieved with only 14% of the writing sample being judged “Undeveloped” for the critical-interdisciplinary skills displayed in the essay.

A cross-check indicates that the five students who were rated as having “Developed” skills had completed at least two writing-intensive courses as well as the Philosophical Reflections requirement. Additionally,
the students (2) in the cohort who had completed three writing-intensive courses wrote essays that were rated as “Developed.” On the other hand, half of the students who had completed only one writing course wrote essays that were judged as “Undeveloped.” We conclude from this data that

1. Students seem to be progressing at a reasonable rate and it seems reasonable to expect that at least 80% will demonstrate fully developed skills by the end of four years at Westmont.
2. Writing-intensive courses seem to play a significant role in this development.
3. The role of the Philosophical Reflections requirement is ambiguous in this data as all but two of the students (whose essays were rated “Developing”) had already completed the requirement.

This information will be passed on to department chairs at an Academic Senate meeting in the fall. No addition action seems to be needed at this time.

Next Steps: We will continue to monitor students’ progress in this area. In addition to the cohort assessment essays, the Collegiate Learning Assessment exam will be administered to the incoming students fall 2006 and to seniors spring 2007. The performance task portion of the CLA will be used to assess critical-interdisciplinary thinking. The criterion for success is that the CLA scores in this area are at or above those of schools with a similar academic profile.

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### Diversity – Learning Standard 3

**Goal:**

Students have the understanding and skills to engage people unlike themselves—both individuals and groups—in ways that affirm others as persons created in God’s image. Students are able to approach others respectfully—avoiding the natural tendency to deal with differences by vilifying, romanticizing, or victimizing. ([Learning Standards](#))

**Initial Criteria for Success:** At this point, we are simply looking to see that the desired interactions and opportunities are in place. Of graduating seniors

1. at least 50% will have participated in an study-abroad program,
2. at least 80% will have had a serious conversation with students of a different race or ethnicity, and
3. at least 80% will have had a serious conversation with students who are very different in terms of their religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values.

**Data:** Senior responses to questions 1.u, 1.v, and 7.f on the spring 2004 NSSE were used to determine the number of graduating seniors who had participated in respectively a study-abroad program, a serious conversation with a student from a different race or ethnicity, and a serious conversation with a student who held significantly different views.

**Interpretation:** 55.4% of seniors completing the NSSE indicated that they had participated in a study abroad program. An additional 4.5% indicated that they were intending to participate in such a program before graduating. Presumably, they took part in one of the study-abroad mayterm offerings that year bringing the total to 59.9%

The percentages of responses to the questions asking whether the student has had a) a serious conversation with students of a different race or ethnicity and b) a serious conversation with students who are very different in terms of their religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values are displayed in the table below.

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<td>Never</td>
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Using the Results: The stated criteria for success have been met in each case. However, the spirit of the goal is only met by the number of students participating in a study-abroad program. While 85% to 90% of students have engaged in serious conversations with students unlike themselves, in more than 50% of the cases this did not take place or occurred infrequently. The effects we desire in students’ lives are unlikely to come to fruition unless there is additional interaction.

Since the 2004 NSSE, several changes have been made to the curriculum.
1. A component has been added to the General Education program which requires students to either engage in a cross-cultural experience or participate in a program that would qualify under serving society; enacting justice.
2. A racial justice series has been added to the curriculum. This seminar will be offered each term.

It is our hope and expectation that these changes will issue in NSSE results that address the spirit as well as the letter of the criteria for success.

Next Steps: We need to evaluate the quality of the interactions and the intellectual maturity that supports them. Beginning fall 2006, professors teaching courses that meet the Thinking Globally GE requirement will develop an essay question and accompanying rubric which will be approved by the GE Committee. The essay question will be administered as part of the final exam. Selected essays will be evaluated by instructors of Thinking Globally courses.

### Active Societal and Intellectual Engagement – Learning Standard 4

**Goal:**
It is our hope that students are equipped to benefit from a Westmont education over the course of a lifetime. As a result of their educational program, they will have the skills, attitudes and commitments that enable them to be effective in both their personal and vocational lives throughout all the stages of their lives. (*Learning Standards*)

**Criterion for Success:** At least 80% of graduates will have participated in a service activity or internship in the course of their education at Westmont.

**Data:** Senior responses to questions 7.a and 7.b on the 2004 NSSE were reviewed to determine the respective percentages of graduating seniors who had participated in an internship and in a service activity.

**Interpretation:** According to 2004 NSEE responses, 81% of graduating seniors participated either in an internship or a service activity. 45% participated in both types of activities with remaining 36% evenly split between internships and service activities. 25% of students who had participated only in one type of program indicted their intention (presumably over the summer) to participate in the other by the time they finished Westmont. This would bring the percentage of students who participated in both an internship and a service activity to 54%.

**Using the Results:** The criterion for success was achieved. Westmont continues to have a significant number of students involved in internships and service activities. Over the last few
years, noteworthy steps have been taken to insure that internships have academic integrity and include reflective components. With the recent modification to the General Education program, steps are being taken to include more academic reflection on service activities. Indeed, this type of reflection is one of the explicit criteria used by the General Education Committee when evaluating Serving Society; Enacting Justice proposals.

Next Steps: As reflected in its program review report, the internship office is already reviewing its program to assess the level of reflection students are doing during internships. The General Education Committee will take steps to assess the quality of the connection between the academic program and the service learning components in future years.

### Written and Oral Communication – Learning Standard 5

**Goal:**

Students are capable of mature, critically insightful self-assessment and peer assessment of both writing and speaking. *(Learning Standards)*

**Criterion for Success:** At least 50% of second-year cohort students will receive scores of 4 or higher when rated a five-point scale on how well they self-assess previous work. The students were assessed in their third semester at Westmont. As such, their abilities represent works in progress.

**Data:** Cohort students were asked to critique an essay written as part of the first-semester cohort assessment. Eleven students wrote the original essay and a critique. The fall 2004 prompt was

Write a brief (2-3 paragraph) essay or persuasive speech as if you were a Westmont College student leader giving a talk to your high school explaining Westmont's General Education program.

The prompt in fall 2005 was

Last fall, you wrote an essay or persuasive speech as if you were a Westmont College student leader giving a talk to your high school explaining Westmont's General Education program. Your essay was attached to the email which directed you to this survey. Based on your growth as a writer, critique the effectiveness of your essay as a piece of writing.

**Interpretation:** The original essays were evaluated on a 9-point scale in each of the following areas:

- Grammar
- Punctuation
- Sentence structure
- Focus/organization
- Sense of audience
- Use of examples
- Accuracy
- Persuasiveness
- Overall effectiveness
After rating all of the original essays, the students’ essays were reread along with their critiques. Using a 5-point scale the critiques were evaluated on a) how well they assessed the overall quality of the essay and b) how well they identified its particular weaknesses.

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Scores reflect the accuracy of the student’s assessment and not the quality of the work itself.

**Using the Results:** The criterion for success was achieved. 81% of the critiques accurately identified the areas of relative weakness in the original essay. 64% accurately reflected its overall quality. There is good reason to believe that we are on track for at least 90% of students to achieve ratings of at least 4 in both areas by the time they graduate.

The data seems to indicate that students are better able to perceive the relative strengths and weaknesses than the absolute quality of their work. We recommend that this fall, the Academic Senate discuss ways such as providing students with samples of exemplary work to help them calibrate their assessments.

**Next Steps:** A similar pair of essay-critique tasks will be included in the fall 2006 and fall 2007 cohort assessments to determine the level achieved by students as they graduate. The CLA will be administered to first-year students fall 2006 and to seniors spring 2007. The benchmark is that the CLA scores in this area are at or above those of schools with a similar academic profile.