

**Assessment of General Education  
Faculty Debriefing  
March 30, 2006**

**Attendees:**

Bud Hirsch - English  
Susan Twombly - Education  
Cheryl Lester – American Studies  
Don Steeples – Provost’s Office  
Deb Teeter – Office of Institutional Research and Planning  
Kathleen McCluskey-Fawcett – Provost’s Office  
Carrie Towns – Office of Institutional Research and Planning

**Susan:** Has a continuing frustration with the “modes of inquiry” question. Says that the questions for Goal 1 are unclear, in general, but particularly the question 1. Thinks that we need to be clearer about what we want to measure in student attainment. Do we want students to be able to set up experiments, or do we want them to be able to effectively evaluate information in a decision-making process? How can the question be asked to target a specific skill?

**Bud:** Students he interviewed had difficulty being specific. They are exhibiting what he calls, “bumper sticker knowledge,” able to identify the issues, but unable to expand on them or make them personal. Had a student who said that her humanities course changed her life, but couldn’t explain what the change was. Had another student who was very socially active, but didn’t vote, and couldn’t support a reason for choosing not to vote.

**Susan:** Found that her students were able to give specific examples. She didn’t have the same experience as Bud.

**Cheryl:** Initially thought that the interview questions needed serious revision and rework, but after using them, found that they actually did a pretty good job of letting her judge student goal attainment. She and her team members compared notes, and found a great deal of reliability, so she thinks that the faculty are probably all looking for the same qualities in the students---depth of experience, critical thinking, and continuity of thinking, etc.

**Susan:** Wonders if there can be any consensus on the intent of question 1. Is concerned that faculty may not actually be in agreement on what kind of response they are asking from students.

**Kathleen:** Thinks that there may be some merit in farming out specific questions to particular experts. Wonders if that would give us more valid measures of the goals.

**Susan:** Was impressed with students’ ability to be reflective about their personal experience, and how college had changed them as a person. She thinks the questions do a good job of eliciting thoughtful responses from students.

**Kathleen:** Agrees that part of what is being sought is for the students to demonstrate a degree of metacognition. Tom Mulinazzi, her team leader, asks a great ice breaker question, “What makes you a different person than you were when you came here to KU?”

**Cheryl:** Found that the Social Welfare students were very skilled in answering questions concerning, race, gender, and social service. Also found the female student in Engineering very interesting. Thought that the question about how they decided to go to KU to be very effective in setting the stage and relaxing the student.

**Susan:** It is important for the teams to have a good warm-up question. One night, her team leader didn't open with an ice breaker question and the interviews did not go as well without them.

**Don:** Found it frustrating and mindboggling that most all of the students identified the internet as the most significant technological advancement of the past century. Didn't seem to even know what a transistor was. Also learned that there is a story floating around that students don't really believe that we have actually gone to the moon. The story goes that it is commonly believed that the moonwalk was a Hollywood creation.

**Susan:** Wonders where students are actually exposed to issues of technology. Says that they take classes in technology in high school, but that there are no specific technology courses in the general education curriculum at KU. The absence of courses makes it difficult to measure student goal attainment on a KU-value-added basis.

**Bud:** Not a big fan of the internet or computers. Thinks that the internet promotes "bumper sticker thinking." Says that his students have a hard time discerning valid sources on the internet.

**Kathleen:** Doesn't know if students know how to decide whether website sources are valid.

**Susan:** J-school students are very good at checking and discerning valid sources. They have been very well taught.

**Bud:** A question that he asked during the interviews highlighted that students were unable to give specific, thoughtful responses—he asked if they had learned anything in college that had to deal with skeptically. Was there anything that just didn't make sense to them, but had been presented to them as fact. How did they examine the validity of the information. The students that he interviewed couldn't answer this question to his satisfaction.

**Susan:** Wonders whether it is a good idea that students are paired with professors they know. Found that the professors tended to ask somewhat leading questions of their students, almost as though to show off the student's proficiency. Found the phenomenon of students and professors actually knowing each other to have been far more prevalent this year.

**Bud:** Had a similar experience with a Journalism professor who kind offered an opinion about a student to the team prior to their interview. Thought the professor was accurate in his judgement of the student, but didn't think it was appropriate for him to have given the team a preconceived notion. Thinks that could be one problematic aspect of pairing students with professors in their discipline.

Wonders if the interviews might be more fruitful without standardized interview questions.

**Kathleen/Deb:** Used to conduct the interviews without standardized questions, but were concerned about the lack of standardization. The questions were added in response to concerns that there was not enough continuity in how the goals were being assessed.

**Cheryl:** Had a recent experience at the Majors Fair where the students asked her questions and wondered whether something like that could be incorporated in the assessment interviewing process. Said that she learned a lot about the students from the questions they were asking. Found that she could rank students on this basis.

**Bud:** Wondered whether people tended to branch out and ask their own questions in the interview, even given that there were standardized questions.

**Don:** Is so surprised that students just think that someone “invented” the internet. Found that students could talk about the cultural aspects and implications of the internet, but not about the technology of it.

**Cheryl:** Likes the idea that these interviews are really “conversations” with students about what we expect 19 and 20 year olds to know about and to be conversant about, as a result of a college education.

**Susan:** Expressed here disappointment in the General Education Review Committee, headed by Kim Wilcox—said that the work of the committee kind of died when Kim left KU. Says that the Committee didn’t give credence to the General Education Assessment process, but couldn’t offer any substantive suggestions for improvement.

**Deb:** Found that fewer of these students were familiar with the Goals of General Education than she had found in years’ past. Thinks the students should be receiving more exposure to the goals in their classes.

**Cheryl:** Thinks that even more than the students, that professors should be aware of the goals and able to incorporate them into their teaching.

Found that this interview process forced her to reflect on her own teaching and said that self-reflection is also a very valuable outcome of this process.

**Susan:** Still thinks that the information gleaned from this process should have a larger impact on decisions at the University than just personal faculty development or as a piece for reaccreditation. Thinks there is more value in it that just those two things.

**Bud:** Offered a word of caution about this process causing the faculty to do too much “naval gazing.” Thinks that the insights gained from this experience can make faculty better teachers, but says that it is a two way street. He characterized learning as a phone call. Unless someone answers the phone, a conversation cannot take place. He would put some of the responsibility for student goal attainment on the students themselves. They also have a responsibility. Both sides are engaged in a creative action.

**Susan:** The real difficulty is that the General Education Goals belong to everyone and to no one. We can only hold students accountable if we are sure they are getting the exposure to the information.