

UT MARTIN ASSESSMENT NEWSLETTER

MARCH 2022

Our most important job is to help our students succeed!

Skyhawk Retention Summit

You should have received an email from Dr. Acree Cavalier regarding our Skyhawk Retention Summit. The Summit will be held on May 25, and we are expecting participants from other Tennessee institutions as well as participants from our surrounding region. This is an opportunity to share our stories about retention and to learn from our colleagues at other institutions. For more information about the Summit, please visit the website <https://www.utm.edu/retentionsummit/>. To register, scroll to the bottom of that page and click "Registration." Registration is free for UT Martin faculty and staff, and the deadline for registering is May 10. We hope you'll consider attending!

General Education Course Reviews

The Faculty Senate Committee on Instruction has spent the past month reviewing annual general education course assessment reports and conducting the five-year review of courses in the Fine Arts category of general education. This led to a robust discussion of the assessment process in general, similarities and differences in assessment methods and expectations, and some suggestions for helping our new faculty participate in the assessment process. The members of the committee recognized that departments and courses are different, that methods of assessment are different based on the nature and expectations of the course, and that suggestions that apply to one course or department may not be applicable to another course or department. The suggestions provided during the meeting were typically aimed at a particular

course but could be applicable to a variety of courses and even programs. We thought the suggestions were so good that we wanted to share them with everyone:

- If you have a course in the general education core curriculum that your department has decided to discontinue teaching, please process the paperwork to remove the course from the catalog and from general education. It does our students a disservice to list a course as an option in the general education core curriculum that we have no intention of offering.
- If you are teaching a course in the general education core curriculum, please make sure that the correct general education student learning outcomes associated with your course are listed on your syllabus. In the past we have seen syllabi that do not list these outcomes or that list outdated outcomes.
- If you have new faculty in your department who are teaching courses in the general education core curriculum, please take some time to make sure that they have the appropriate student learning outcomes on their syllabus, that they understand their obligations for conducting the appropriate assessments within that course, and their obligation for reporting the resulting data. In the past few years, we've had several instances of new faculty who were not told of these obligations.

- If your department has adopted benchmarks based on students acquiring a particular percentage on an assessment (e.g., some percentage of students will score at least X% on a particular assignment), the Committee on Instruction recommends that the percentage score on the assignment be at least 60% to reflect the typical percentage used for a passing grade. If the percentage score must be lower, the Committee recommends that the benchmark be accompanied by a detailed explanation as to why the department chose the lower score for the benchmark.

Two examples will clarify what such an explanation might be. First, let's suppose that our students in a particular course routinely average a 35% score on an assignment being used for assessment. Setting the benchmark at 60% would require the department to almost double the students' average scores. It would be appropriate for the department to set incremental benchmarks as they experimented with pedagogical tweaks aimed at increasing student learning. Including a brief explanation to that effect would help the reviewer understand why an initial benchmark is set low.

Second, let's suppose that a department chose a nationally normed exam as their primary assessment for a particular learning outcome. Setting the benchmark based on a 60% score, when then national average on that exam is 50%, could mean that your expectations for your students are not aligned with national expectations. A brief note explaining the national expectations and how your expectations are aligned to

them would be helpful when reviewing your report.

- The Committee on Instruction noted that one of the main purposes of assessment is to discover areas for improvement. When a department has consistently high results, there is little or no opportunity for improving. The Committee recommends that departments with consistently high results in an area examine the assessment instrument and determine whether the instrument can be refined to provide finer gradations of the levels of student achievement. This would allow the department to more closely examine student learning and identify areas of concern that might not be apparent with a broader examination.

Our thanks to the members of the Committee on Instruction for their engaging conversation and thoughtful feedback on both our annual assessments and our five-year reviews!

Program Reviews are Underway

We have several program reviews occurring over the next few weeks:

- Visual and Theatre Arts (March 30-April 1)
- General Agriculture (April 12-14)
- Natural Resource Management—B.S. (April 20-22)
- Natural Resource Management—M.S. (April 26-28)
- Geosciences (April 27-29)
- Political Science (to be determined)

Thank you to the faculty in these programs for completing their five-year review reports, and thank you to all of the faculty who have volunteered to serve on the review committees!