



General Education Assessment Review (GEAR) Group

Meeting: November 4, 2004, Upstate Medical University, Syracuse

Present: Pat Belanoff, Susan Bello, David Carson, Frances Dearing, Mary Jane Feldman, Patricia Francis (co-chair), Robert Golden, Tina Good, Joseph Hildreth, Runi Mukherji, Kimberley Reiser, David Rule, Peter Sinden, Melanie Vainder

Participating by Teleconference: Anne Huot, Robert Axelrod, Milton Johnson

Regrets: Joseph Flynn, Kellie Gervais, Robert Jubenville, Jack Meacham, Patricia Pietropaolo

Guests: Maria Palmara, Assistant Professor, Hudson Valley Community College
Amy Gumaer, Associate Professor, Hudson Valley Community College

I. Welcome from Upstate Medical University

Dr. Paul Grover, Vice Provost at Upstate Medical University, welcomed the GEAR Group and provided some background information on Upstate and its facilities and programs. He also expressed regrets on behalf of Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs Kenneth Barker, who was scheduled to greet the group but was unable to at the last minute. Patricia Francis thanked Dr. Grover for Upstate's hospitality, and also commended the work of his administrative assistant, Margaret Bourke, for her assistance with local arrangements.

II. Welcome and Comments from Executive Vice Provost Anne Huot

Francis then welcomed Dr. Anne Huot, Executive Vice Provost at System Administration, who was joining the group via teleconference. Dr. Huot thanked the GEAR Group members for their work on strengthened campus-based assessment, making reference to the recently-completed draft guidelines, and restated System Administration's willingness to provide strong support to this effort. She also reported on the outcomes of a meeting held the previous day that included University Provost Peter D. Salins, Francis, Joe Hildreth, Kimberley Reiser, and herself, and which focused on the issue of GEAR membership/leadership. According to Dr. Huot, the following agreements were reached:

- Total membership will consist of 26 individuals: 10 nominated by the University Faculty Senate, 10 by the Faculty Council of Community Colleges, two by the Student Assembly, and four by the University Provost;
- Membership terms will last three years, and a "staggered" membership established when this agreement becomes effective so that approximately 1/3 serve for one year, 1/3 for two years, and 1/3 for three years;
- Leadership will be provided by three co-chairs: One from the state-operated sector, one from the community college sector, and one appointed by the University Provost.

In answer to a specific question, Dr. Huot responded that the issue of terms being renewable was still up for discussion, with both Hildreth and Reiser needing to take this issue back to their executive boards. At this point, there seems to be agreement that members should be able to be reappointed to serve for one additional full term. She also said that these conditions will become effective January 1, 2005.

Dr. Huot then excused herself to attend another meeting, again thanking members for their service.

III. Co-Chair's Report – Update on Activities Since 9/29 Meeting

Prior to the Co-Chair's report, there was continuing discussion about GEAR membership and leadership. Francis said that all current members will be given the opportunity to continue to serve, and that she will send out an e-

mail in the near future asking members if they would like to continue their service to GEAR; in this way, members also have an opportunity to step off if they choose. Hildreth and Reiser can then use this information to fill their complement of members. Francis will consult with Hildreth and Reiser in determining the best way of assigning members to initial staggered terms. While it might make sense to do so randomly, Francis is concerned about losing individuals prematurely who have served as review team leaders, especially as we transition into reviewing plans for strengthened campus-based assessment. Whatever decisions are made, Francis will share information with GEAR as it becomes available. As a final point, Francis said that she will wait until all membership is set before she forms new review teams and conducts member training, probably over the winter break.

Francis then provided the following updates on relevant activities that have occurred since the 9/29 meeting:

- 53/57 campuses have approved plans in place, with an additional campus meeting approval status since 9/29; in response to concerns that were raised at the last meeting, Francis informed GEAR that there are consequences for campuses that are not in compliance with the SUNY Assessment Initiative requirements – these include communications from the University Provost, information that is used in presidential evaluations, and possible delays in new program review and approval by System Administration.
- The draft guidelines developed and approved by GEAR and Provost Salins for strengthened campus-based assessment were sent to chief academic officers with copies to presidents on November 1; campuses were asked to share this information with their faculty, and with faculty governance leaders in particular; Francis also sent the guidelines out via the Assessment List Serve, and they are posted on the GEAR Web page. Campuses have until November 30 to send feedback on the guidelines directly to her; at that point she will make appropriate revisions and send them to GEAR for final approval, and the final draft should be sent to campuses by the end of the Fall 2004 semester.
- The draft guidelines were accompanied by a cover letter from Provost Salins that addressed a number of concerns raised by the GEAR Group, including the effect of strengthened campus-based assessment on existing campus-based plans and the status of NSSE/CCSSE, especially as related to the Student Opinion Survey (SOS); she shared this cover letter with GEAR.
- A task force has been formed by Associate Provost John Porter and herself, for the purpose of exploring the administration of the NSSE/CCSSE, and the implications for the SOS; Melanie Vainder and Frances Dearing will represent GEAR on this task force.
- The SUNY Board of Trustees' Academic Standards Committee has a new chairperson, Father John J. Cremins; this committee will continue to be concerned with the assessment of student learning outcomes across SUNY.
- A considerable part of Francis' job responsibilities focuses on campus outreach, and she is making numerous visits to SUNY campuses, serving as a consultant on assessment of general education and academic major programs; she encouraged GEAR members to make this known to their own campuses and others who might be interested in inviting Francis to campus for this purpose.
- She continues to have discussions with companies that construct nationally-normed tests, and two preliminary meetings have been set up to include her, Executive Vice Provost Huot, and company representatives. Francis said that these meetings have been set up at the companies' request, and that they will focus on the requirements of strengthened campus-based assessment with respect to standardized testing. SUNY System Administration will continue its policy of not endorsing or recommending any particular test for this purpose.

IV. Reports by Three Sub-Groups on Options for Externally-Referenced Measures

GEAR heard presentations by the chairpersons/members of the three sub-groups charged to research and make recommendations regarding the three options for externally-referenced measures included in the guidelines for strengthened campus-based assessment. In general, the presentations followed the format of the charge developed for the sub-groups at the 9/29 meeting:

- A. Description of research, as appropriate.
- B. Identification of all issues that will need to be considered by GEAR and campuses if they choose to utilize that approach.
- C. Summary of all actions that would have to be taken in order to implement the approach (by both System Administration and campuses), including recommendations for a time line.
- D. Description of advantages and disadvantages of the approach.
- E. As appropriate, summary of how GEAR would evaluate a campus's proposal to use the approach,

using a format similar to our current guidelines, especially Criterion #3 (i.e., “The GEAR Group is likely to agree this criterion is met if”).

- F. Summary of suggestions as to how System Administration and GEAR might support campuses that elect to use the approach.

Nationally-Normed Measures Work Group. Vainder’s group on nationally-normed measures made the first presentation, providing a detailed analysis for a variety of standardized tests measuring critical thinking, mathematics, and writing: These tests included the ACT CAAP, the ETS Academic Profile, the California Critical Thinking Skills Test, the Quant Q, the Critical Reasoning Ability Test, the GRE, and Accuplacer (including WritePlacer). In addition, the NSSE, CCSSE and SOS were covered thoroughly. Overall, major concerns about this approach are focused on the fact that few existing tests will map exactly to the stated learning outcomes for SUNY’s general education programs. An additional concern is that of student motivation, unless the administration of the test can be built into a particular course’s requirements and therefore be administered in a course-embedded manner. Campuses must also be concerned about the norming samples used for each test.

Locally-Developed Instrument (Concurrent Validity) Work Group. David Rule presented the major findings for this group, noting that there will be an “extra step” involved for campuses choosing this option in that they will have to build in time for actually conducting the validity study. In general, there was agreement that this option may provide the most challenges to campuses, because this approach has all the disadvantages of the nationally-normed measures approach (e.g., student motivation, incomplete mapping of test to outcomes) in addition to its own unique disadvantages (e.g., the extra time it will take to implement this approach). For campuses that have already developed a test they are comfortable with, however, this remains a viable option.

Locally-Developed Instrument (Discipline-Based Panel) Work Group. Tina Good reported on this group’s work. There was general agreement that this approach will require the most lead time, given the fact that discipline panels will need to be formed, and scoring rubrics and standards developed for presentation to campuses. During discussion, a number of revisions were made to the group’s original proposal – these included having 8-member panels (4 representing community colleges, 4 representing the state-operated campuses), making panel members’ terms comparable to those of GEAR Group members, agreeing that panel members would not be paid (i.e., since membership would constitute university service), and stipulating that panels should not include GEAR members so as to ensure independence between these two bodies. There was also agreement that, although GEAR should consult as much as needed with the panels, final decisions about campus plans would be left to GEAR since that is GEAR’s charge.

A number of additional issues arose for this option. First, while the work group had recommended the possibility of “expedited review” by panels, GEAR members agreed that no review could possibly occur until the scoring rubrics/standards are in place. As a related matter, according to Good and others, some campuses are under the impression that, simply by virtue of having scoring rubrics and standards in place as part of their campus-based general education assessment, they will automatically receive approval from GEAR should they choose to use their own rubrics/standards and not adopt those developed by the panels. Francis agreed that this concern needs to be clarified directly, and could be addressed in Provost Salins’ cover letter for the final guidelines, on the GEAR Web site, and in an *Assessment Update* sent out via the Assessment List Serve.

Attention then turned to the timing of actions that need to take place in order for this option to be available to campuses. Francis specifically made reference to the Faculty Council of Community Colleges (FCCC) resolution passed in April 2004 endorsing strengthened campus-based assessment but stating that: 1) the standards and rubrics developed by the discipline-based panels would “be submitted to the SUNY campus faculty” for approval; and, 2) the existing campus-based assessment of critical thinking be allowed to proceed without forming a discipline panel “until a collection of standards and rubrics has emerged from the campuses,” at which time the panel will be formed to review these standards and rubrics.

Francis said that, while she understands the need to adhere to these conditions, she was concerned about their implications for implementing strengthened campus-based assessment in a timely fashion, and she asked Reiser if the FCCC had thought specifically about how “faculty approval” for the rubrics/standards might be gained. Reiser responded that one way this could happen would be at the April 2005 FCCC plenary, but GEAR members expressed concern over the delay that will result, especially for campuses that have indicated they might like to implement strengthened campus-based assessment during the 2005-06 academic year. Francis added that it really makes no sense to distribute final guidelines for strengthened campus-based assessment if campuses are then unable to examine discipline panels’ rubrics/standards until at least April. Moreover, it would not be wise to

provide information on the nationally-normed measures and concurrent validity options without providing comparable information on the discipline panel option since that might suggest to campuses that it will be easier and faster for campuses to use standardized tests in implementing strengthened campus-based assessment. Francis, Reiser, and Hildreth agreed to meet in the near future in Albany to try to resolve this problem in a creative way. Reiser also said she would discuss the issue with her executive board.

With specific reference to the formation of the critical thinking panel, Francis asked Reiser if it would be acceptable to send out via the Assessment List Serve a call to campuses to submit to System Administration their scoring rubrics and standards for critical thinking. She would do this in the near future, and at the same time Reiser and Hildreth could be making their recommendations for membership on the critical thinking discipline panel. By the time the panels are formed, Francis should have the critical thinking rubrics and standards for the panel's inspection. Reiser agreed that this strategy was consistent with the wording of the FCCC resolution; she and Hildreth also agreed to solicit from their constituents critical thinking scoring rubrics and standards.

Final decisions about this matter included Hildreth and Reiser's agreement to have the discipline panels formed approximately by mid-December. Once the panels are formed, they will be invited to System Administration to meet with the GEAR co-chairs and perhaps 1-2 members of the discipline panel work group to discuss the work they need to do. The three panels will meet separately with GEAR members.

V. Final Endorsement of Guidelines and Development of Planning Time Line for Implementing Strengthened Campus-Based Assessment

During discussion it was agreed that Francis, after receiving feedback from campuses on the draft guidelines for strengthened campus-based assessment, would make revisions as appropriate and send them to GEAR for final approval. Since the guidelines have been reviewed and approved by the University Faculty Senate, the FCCC, and System Administration, it is unlikely that substantive changes will be suggested or made. When sending the final guidelines to GEAR, Francis will provide a rationale for any revisions that are made.

In terms of establishing a time line, members agreed that this task was really not possible without some sense of how SUNY faculty will have input into the scoring rubrics and standards for the three learning outcome areas, as called for in the FCCC resolution described earlier. Francis said that once she, Reiser and Hildreth have resolved this issue, she will develop a draft time line for consideration by GEAR.

VI. Other Business

Francis then asked the group for advice for how to proceed at this point. For example, the three sub-groups provided much valuable information for campuses in implementing the three externally-referenced approaches, but this information needs to be condensed in some fashion to be most useful, and then widely distributed. In addition, suggestions for change were made to each of the sub-group reports, so final copies need to reflect these changes. After discussion, Francis agreed to revise and organize the materials in a way that will be reader friendly, and she will then send them to GEAR for comment. If possible, these materials should be sent to campuses along with the final guidelines from Provost Salins, and they should also be posted on the Web page as well as in other locations that campuses might access.

Discussion then turned to the best strategy for helping campuses get started in implementing strengthened campus-based assessment once the final guidelines are out. One approach would be to hold an "information session" very early in the Spring 2005 semester that would focus on the new guidelines, outlining the three different strategies for conducting this assessment, including their advantages and disadvantages. The session could be a two-day event, and campuses would be invited to send representatives to either the entire event, or only to those sessions of interest to them. Francis will take this idea back to System Administration for feedback, and to determine if it is indeed feasible.

Finally, there was general agreement that there is no need for the entire GEAR group to meet again in the near future. Francis thanked everyone for their efforts, and commended in particular the work of the three sub-groups in pulling together all the requested information in such a timely and comprehensive manner. As was the case for the last meeting, Francis will distribute minutes of the meeting electronically to GEAR for review and approval. After the minutes have been approved, they will be made widely available to campuses, sent to campus Chief Academic Officers and subscribers to the Assessment List Serve and posted on GEAR's Web page.