

AAC&U LEAP project teaching circle 2014-2015

Institute on General Education and Assessment Action Plan

Transparency and Problem Based Learning Team

University of Houston-Downtown

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Abstract

This document highlights the summary of our teams work with the AAC&U's Transparency and Problem Based Learning Project. We also provide a summary of our experiences from the AAC&U'S 2015 Institute on General Education and Assessment. Lastly, we highlight how our work from the Transparency and Problem Based Learning Project and GEA Institute can be implemented at UHD through faculty level CTLE Transparency Training Sessions, UHD Core Assessment Plan Committee and UHD Departmental Level Implementation.

Institute on General Education and Assessment Action Plan

The University of Houston Downtown, under General Education reform, are transitioning into measuring student learning using the six core objectives as defined by the state of Texas. There are three issues: (a) Confusion among faculty and students over the goals of this reform; (b) Resistance among the faculty to the reform due to lack of understanding or misinterpretation of the goals; and (c) A lack of training in faculty in implementing these practices or measuring their outcomes. This plan of action highlights the summary of our teams work with the AAC&U's Transparency and Problem Based Learning Project, provides a summary of our experiences from the AAC&U'S 2015 Institute on General Education and Assessment and addresses how our work from the Transparency and Problem Based Learning Project and GEA Institute can be implemented at UHD through faculty level CTLE Transparency Training Sessions, UHD Core Assessment Plan Committee and UHD Departmental Level Implementation.

As a team we would like to use transparency techniques as a tool to disseminate the General Education principles to UHD faculty at the Center for Teaching Learning Excellence training levels at all six core skills. As a team we understand the universities commitment to implementing the General Education Reform and more importantly we understand the value of General Education for our students. As faculty members, we have a unique vantage point and understanding of our students struggles and characteristics and we have a moral imperative to give them the best education possible. We are embracing the opportunity to be pioneers with assisting the University through this implementation plan.

During the 2014-2015 school year our University participated in AAC&U's Advancing Underserved Student Success Through Faculty Intentionality in Problem-Centered Learning

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program. The goal of this project was to provide insights into the role of problem-centered course designs for promoting learning, particularly integrative learning across general education courses, for underserved students. Our team worked in an inter-institutional learning community to develop practices for increasing transparency and clarity of assignment goals and learning expectations for our students in five different UHD courses. Not only was the projects main goal to increase student-teach course work transparency but to also further existing knowledge about the relationship between high-impact practices and underserved student success. Two days prior to meeting at the IGEA conference, our team, along with six other institutions met to share our success and failures with this project while gauging how the data gathered over the last year can help universities better improve course transparency for student learning success. The initial results of the project are very promising and confirm data from UNLV's ongoing Transparency project. After two rigorous days sharing information about our transparency project we joined 40 other colleges and universities at The Institute on General Education and Assessment held in Edmund, Oklahoma. The Institute provided our team with the opportunity to explore intentional, well-defined, and meaningfully assessment models of general education; while providing workshops engaged with opportunities for deeper analysis and application of ideas for campus-based reform efforts. During the Institute we identified strategies and practices for successful implementation of curricular/co-curricular change. We learned how to implement meaningful assessment strategies that target course learning outcomes, put in place by the Texas core and engaged in meaningful improvements in teaching and learning practices. Lastly, but most importantly, we created a plan for action that has enabled us to take thoughtful, strategic steps toward accomplishing our transparency course goals for general education reform and assessment of student learning.

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Our Transparency and Problem Based Learning Teaching Circle Team, during the 2015-2016 school year will conduct training sessions with university faculty on how to a) design problem-based course assignments; b) how to use the Problem-Based Rubrics in course assignment assessment and c) how to create transparent course assignments, transparent course syllabi and transparent course interaction. Based on promising preliminary statistics gathered over this last year we have learned that under-served students feel more engaged in course work when professors are intentional and transparent in the manner in which they design course assignments, deliver course materials and assess students work.

In addition to working with the CTLE, we plan to work with the Core Assessment Plan Committee. The CAP Committee is currently assisting faculty in developing their Signature Assignments that will be used to assess and measure progress in the Core. Our Team believes our training from AAC&U in transparency & Intentional GE practices, will give us the opportunity to provide the capacity building tools needed for the CAP Committees work in implementing the core assessment plan. More specifically, CAP will: (a) Align signature assignments with rubrics; (b) learn how to calibrate the rubric; (c) use transparency and intentionality in assignment & syllabus design; and (d) collect data as a measure of student learning gains.

Additionally, we envision implementing transparency at the departmental level as well. As a pilot approach, efforts would begin with the Natural Sciences Department and if successful, can be extrapolated to other departments at our institution. Within NS efforts would be focused on increasing transparency of e-portfolio design and usage both for faculty and students. This would be accomplished primarily through online training to be delivered as Blackboard course. Another area that could benefit from implementation of transparency is the existing work with

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barrier courses and course re-design. Faculty will receive training either one-on-one or via small workshops to make assignments and overall course delivery more transparent. These changes can then impact retention and pass rates of traditionally defined barrier courses.

This summarizes our plan of action to instill Transparency and Intentionality at the Institutional level directly to faculty via workshops sponsored by the CTLE, via working with committees like CAP, and at the departmental level as well. We truly believe that our work can impact student success at UHD. Thank you for your time and consideration

Our communication strategy for our institution will consist of at least two phases. In phase I, the plan described above will be presented to Dr. Gregory Dement (Director of the Center for Teaching and Learning); Dr. Chris Birchak (Dean of University College and Chairwoman of the UHD QEP Committee); and Dr. Lea Campbell (Director of Institutional Assessment). After that initial presentation and gaining the support of the above mentioned individuals, phase II will include presentations to our Dean's and Department chairs and a possible presentation (either directly or through the Deans) to the Provost and President of UHD. Based on their recommendations and level of support we will then proceed with plan implementation.