**Essential Skills Instruction in General Education**

DACC Division Meeting  
9/10/2019

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Topics

- Purpose of General Education (role in Student Success)
- Instructional goals: integration, transparency, transferability
- Resources for GE faculty

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**What is the primary purpose of general education?**

- To assure a breadth of content learning (liberal arts ideal)
- To make it challenging to graduate on time?
- Development of transferable skills
- Priority of the new state model

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**Skills-Centered GE**

Six content areas

I. Communications  
II. Mathematics  
III. Science  
IV. Social & Behav. Sci.  
V. Humanities  
VI. Creative & Fine Arts

Five Essential Skills

- Communication
- Critical Thinking
- Information & Digital Literacy
- Personal & Social Responsibility
- Quantitative Reasoning

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**Opportunity!**

General Education Reform:

- Emphasis on broad, transferable "essential skills”
- Institutional flexibility

NMSU LEADS 2025

- Enhance student success...
- Promote social mobility...
- Close the achievement gap...

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**General education and student success**

- GE courses comprise one-half of a 60-credit associates degree...
- GE courses are a key component of most students’ initial academic experiences at NMSU
- Students should know the purpose and value of our GE program!
- Goal today: provide a framework for communicating GE’s purpose

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**Measures of student success and social mobility**

- Retention and degree completion
- Career attainment
- (small) Achievement gaps
- Social Mobility Index
- Etc.

Characteristics of a successful student/graduate?

- Cognitive
- Intrapersonal
- Interpersonal

**GE Essential Skills**

Benefits of learning in multiple/varied contexts

- Groups A and B practiced as shown
- When tested later on a bucket 3 ft away, group B did best by far

"... varied practice ... improves your ability to transfer learning from one situation and apply it successfully to another."

Instructional goals

- Integration not decoration. Disciplinary context is vital
- Transparency. Students must know our learning objectives
- Transferability. Teach for “deep” (transferable) learning

Example narrative excerpts: Critical Thinking in BIOL 111G

- Problem sets are ... based on real-life situations (e.g. an authentic and scientifically-relevant problem) that can be grounded in a course-specific scientific topic.
- Information is routinely provided to students in the form of data (raw or presented in charts and graphs). This provides students opportunities to practice their data graphing, interpretation and evaluation skills.
- Students identify the key problems or questions. Students then draw a conclusion based what they have evaluated and make evidence-based recommendations.

Example narrative excerpts: Critical Thinking in BIOL 111G

- For example, in the sample assessment... students are challenged to think about quantitative models of population growth in Whooping Cranes.
- They then use reasoning skills to devise their own conservation strategy.
- After modeling population growth with their conservation plan, they critically evaluate the results and exercise reasoning skills to discuss which parameters are effective in increasing population sizes in both the short and the long term.
**Recommendations for GE faculty**

- Review GE Certification documents
- Communicate the purpose of GE to your students (in the syllabus, assignments, etc.)
- Analyze existing course materials for essential skills connections
- Modify/develop assignments as needed for transparency with respect to essentials skills

**How we teach matters!**

From NMSU LEADS 2025, our goal is to be a “Recognized leader in serving diverse students and eliminating achievement gaps”

- Currently, achievement gaps for our students mimic those that are ubiquitous in higher education nationwide
- Student success depends on a variety of cognitive and non-cognitive factors, i.e., on the transferable competencies discussed above
- Closing those gaps likely will require us to reconsider how we teach

**Students preferred study strategies...**

- give the illusion of mastery
- don’t really help them learn

**Do faculty prefer teaching strategies that...**

- give the illusion of students’ mastery?
- don’t really help students learn?

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**Hierarchy of Learner Needs**

- Student success depends heavily on non-cognitive factors.
- Quality course design and instruction reduces achievement gaps

**Resources for GE Instructors**

**http://gened.nmsu.edu/Resources:**

- Introduction to teaching GE Essential Skills, a 75-minute workshop, will be offered this fall. Dates TBD or by request.
- Certification documents are available for review. These include narratives on teaching of essential skills and sample assignments.
- (planned) A library of assignments for teaching and assessing essential skills is being created
Integrating Essential Skills
Instruction into General Education

David Smith
Assessment

Monday, October 14 OR
Thursday, October 17
10:30-11:45 am
Milton Hall Room 50