

# AGLS Award for the Improvement of General Education: Exemplary Program Processes

National and international education officials, accreditors, and faculty leaders increasingly associate “quality” education with student learning outcomes and continuous quality improvement processes. Moving away from the view of education as a simple act of passing a static body of knowledge from faculty to students, they value education practiced as a commitment to a set of collectively-practiced, ongoing activities: making **institutional choices** about the most important goals for student learning and defining the learning in terms of desired outcomes; developing a shared faculty commitment to **actions** such as high impact, active learning strategies and faculty development designed to increase student achievement; making informed **judgments** about student achievement and the impact of various general education program support processes; and ensuring continuous **improvements** in the educational program. Despite the commitment of academic leaders and accreditors to these processes, too few institutions have documented their success in applying systematic improvement processes to the general education program. As a result, discussions about higher education accountability and improvement conclude that higher education can benefit from models of innovative, effective, and systematic general education program improvements and assessments.

The Association for General and Liberal Studies is the national organization whose mission is singularly committed to quality general education programs and their central role in the liberal education of students. The organization invites institutions to apply for the 2014 AGLS Award for Improving General Education: Exemplary Program Processes. The Award is grounded in the systems analysis questions found in the AGLS publication, *Improving Learning in General Education: An AGLS Guide to Assessment and Program Review*, and it promotes institutional commitment to continuous quality improvement processes, recognizes faculty and institutions that practice these quality behaviors, and provides much needed examples of effective improvement processes. (See links below to review previously recognized exemplary programs.)

The 2014 Award gives institutions recognition options. Applications describing quality general education program work can be submitted for any one of the following learning improvement processes:

- Building Faculty Ownership of the Program (see “Guide” question A4)
- Achieving General Education Goals Using Co-Curricular Programming (A7)
- Providing Evidence of General Education Learning Through Assessment (J2 and I1)

Judges will identify model program processes for each of three options. An Awards presentation will recognize recipients during the 2014 Annual AGLS Conference, September 25-27, in Atlanta, GA. Representatives from recognized institutions will be asked to present their exemplary processes in an identified special session and, if possible, provide a poster presentation for display throughout the conference; they will also have the opportunity to share their process in AGLS e-publications. Recognized institutions will receive a plaque; acknowledgment on the AGLS website; two half-priced registrations for the 2014 conference, which include AGLS membership for 2014-15; and a half-priced institutional membership for the 2014-15 year.

The Association issues a call for applications in early spring, with a deadline for receipt of submissions in mid-June. Application forms and evaluation rubrics for the 2014 cycle are below.

# ASSOCIATION FOR GENERAL AND LIBERAL STUDIES

## 2014 AGLS Awards for Improving General Education: Exemplary Program Processes

### Award Information and Application: Improving Learning through Assessment

National and international education officials, accreditors, and faculty leaders increasingly associate “quality” education with student learning outcomes and continuous quality improvement processes. Moving away from the view of education as a simple act of passing a static body of knowledge from faculty to students, they value education practiced as a commitment to a set of collectively-practiced, ongoing activities: making *institutional choices* about the most important goals for student learning and defining the learning in terms of desired outcomes; developing a shared faculty commitment to *actions* such as high impact, active learning strategies and faculty development designed to increase student achievement; making informed *judgments* about student achievement and the impact of various general education program support processes; and ensuring continuous *improvements* in the educational program. Despite the commitment of academic leaders and accreditors to these processes, too few institutions have documented their success in applying systematic improvement processes to the general education program. As a result, discussions about higher education accountability and improvement conclude that higher education can benefit from models of innovative, effective, and systematic general education program improvements and assessments.

The Association for General and Liberal Studies is the national organization whose mission is singularly committed to quality general education programs and their central role in the liberal education of students. The organization invites institutions to apply for the 2014 AGLS Award for Improving General Education: Exemplary Program Processes. The Award promotes institutional commitment to continuous quality improvement processes, recognizes faculty and institutions that practice these quality behaviors, and provides much needed examples of effective improvement processes. One option for the 2014 Award will recognize institutions committed to systematic, verifiable general education learning achieved through assessment activities. AGLS will recognize up to three institutions employing effective and innovative assessment processes to help achieve general education goals. The Awards presentation will be made during the 2014 Annual AGLS Conference, September 25-27, in Atlanta, GA. Representatives from recognized institutions will be asked to present their learning assessment processes in an identified special session and, if possible, provide a poster presentation for display throughout the conference; they will also have the opportunity to share their process in AGLS e-publications. Recognized institutions will receive a plaque; acknowledgment on the AGLS website; two half-priced registrations for the 2014 conference, which include AGLS membership for 2014-15; and a half-priced institutional membership for the 2014-15 year.

### Award Selection and Criteria

Applications will be reviewed by an Awards Committee comprised of AGLS Executive Council members, members of accrediting associations, and recognized leaders in general education. The application narrative questions are based on the Systems Analysis questions found in the AGLS publication, *Improving Learning in General Education: An AGLS Guide to Assessment and Program Review*. Evaluation will focus on the systematic qualities of the institution’s learning assessment and improvement efforts (*Guide* questions J2 and I1) and on how well the process can serve as a practical model for other institutions. It will consider how innovatively and effectively an institution has assessed **one** general education area of learning. *Special consideration will be given to applications describing learning areas or methods not previously recognized by the Award, especially assessments of learning achieved through engaging pedagogies, such as creative uses of technology, active learning strategies, or methods for successfully engaging students of varying abilities.* Previous winning applications can be found on the AGLS website: [www.agls.org](http://www.agls.org). The application must describe the full “loop” of assessment processes: defining learning, checking student success, analyzing data, implementing needed improvements, and ideally, completing follow-up assessment to identify the impact of the improvement efforts.

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### Application Format

To be considered for the award, an applicant on behalf of an institution should complete:

- Section #1: Contact information for individual submitting the application
- Section #2: Institutional endorsement by either the chief executive or academic officer
- Section #3: Application summary (150 words or less)
- Section #4: Responses to four award criteria, limited to two pages per criterion

### Examples of Evidence for Award Criteria

Evidence of merit requires answering the questions under each of the criterion listed in the application below. Evidence should focus on specific activities and processes that employ the continuous quality improvement principles discussed in the AGLS publication *Improving Learning in General Education: An AGLS Guide to Assessment and Program Review*. The application should clearly present the creative solutions and leadership methods used to address the issues, concerns, and goals relevant to improving student general education learning through assessment. ***Supporting material can be summarized as part of the application and narrative, but limit your explanations to two pages per criterion. Please do not use links to data and analysis reports; narrative summary of your key results and processes, within the application, is preferable to links that eventually become inoperable. AGLS offers model narratives as examples of success and assumes that recognized institutions will share with interested institutions additional data or information about recognized processes.***

### Award Timeline

March—Application materials available on AGLS website

June 15<sup>th</sup>—Materials must be received by AGLS

June 20<sup>th</sup>—Materials distributed to review panel

August 1<sup>st</sup>—Recipients notified

September 26<sup>th</sup>—Recipients' presentations and awards during 2014 AGLS Annual Conference in Atlanta, GA

### Suggested Reference Material

*Improving Learning in General Education: An AGLS Guide to Assessment and Learning* can be found at:

[www.agls.org](http://www.agls.org). Supporting literature (from regional and specialized accreditors and from AAC&U) is listed in the *Guide*.

### Application Submission

Applications may be submitted as e-mail attachments in Microsoft Word or Adobe Acrobat format, sent to Joyce Lucke at [execdir@agls.org](mailto:execdir@agls.org). Applications can also be mailed to:

Joyce Lucke, Executive Director  
Association for General and Liberal Studies  
445 Fifth Street, Suite A  
Columbus, IN 47201

**ASSOCIATION FOR GENERAL AND LIBERAL STUDIES**  
**2014 AGLS Awards for Improving General Education:**  
**Exemplary Program Processes**

**Section #1: Contact Information of Person Submitting Application**

<b>Name</b>	
<b>Title</b>	
<b>Institution</b>	
<b>Department/Program</b>	
<b>Street Address</b>	
<b>City, State, Zip</b>	
<b>Phone</b>	
<b>Fax</b>	
<b>Email</b>	
<b>Signature</b>	

**Section #2: Institutional Endorsement**

**Chief Executive Officer or Chief Academic Officer**

<b>Name</b>	
<b>Title</b>	
<b>Institution</b>	
<b>Phone</b>	
<b>Fax</b>	
<b>Email</b>	
<b>Signature</b>	

**Section #3: Application Summary**

Include a summary of the award application. Please begin the narrative with a brief description of your institution and the time frame for the process. Briefly explain your process and why you think it equates with quality. *The summary should not exceed 150 words.* The text box may be increased in size as necessary.

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# ASSOCIATION FOR GENERAL AND LIBERAL STUDIES

## 2014 AGLS Awards for Improving General Education: Exemplary Program Processes

### Section #4: Award Criteria

#### Criterion 1: Supporting and Defining Learning

Provide a description of how your institution supports and operationally defines learning for one learning goal or area of learning. What are your learning outcomes for this goal, and what is the evidence your institution collects to show that graduates have acquired the desired general education knowledge, skills, or values? Address the following issues:

- How the goal of this learning area aligns with your mission
- What process your institution used to operationally define this goal's learning outcome(s)
- Who participated in the development of this definition and what level of support exists for the goal and outcomes
- How your institution communicates this definition to faculty, students, and other interested parties
- What collaborative efforts members of your institution are making to achieve these learning outcome(s), including efforts to ensure shared understanding and alignment among the faculty, and across multiple programs, courses, and sections.

*Please limit your response to two pages.* The following text box may be increased in size as necessary.

# ASSOCIATION FOR GENERAL AND LIBERAL STUDIES

## 2014 AGLS Awards for Improving General Education: Exemplary Program Processes

### Award Criteria

#### **Criterion 2: Completing the Assessment Process**

Describe how your institution assesses the learning identified in Criterion 1 above. Address the following issues:

- What assessment methods and tools your institution has developed and uses, including details about the measures of learning, levels of student learning, types of assignments/activities, and the program[s] assessed
- Who participates in the development of the assessment tools
- What institutional support exists for the development of the assessment tools
- How the assessments are completed and who participates in the process (a **brief** process description)

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# ASSOCIATION FOR GENERAL AND LIBERAL STUDIES

## 2014 AGLS Awards for Improving General Education: Exemplary Program Processes

### Award Criteria

#### **Criterion 3: Analyzing Assessment Results**

Describe how your institution analyzes assessment results to identify, select, and implement improvements. Address the following issues:

- Who analyzes the data and what level of collaboration exists
- What processes are used to analyze the results
- What the results reveal about student learning, and which learning results are viewed as most significant
- How internal or external benchmarking is used (or might be used) to validate the learning or lack of it
- What the results reveal about your assessment tools and methods
- How extensively the results are communicated to faculty, students, and administration

*Please limit your response to two pages.* The following text box may be increased in size as necessary.

# ASSOCIATION FOR GENERAL AND LIBERAL STUDIES

## 2014 AGLS Awards for Improving General Education: Exemplary Program Processes

### Award Criteria

#### **Criterion 4: Making Improvements**

Describe your institution's efforts to identify needed learning and methods improvement projects following the analysis of assessment data. Address the following issues:

- What learning improvement projects your institution has selected, including high-impact, active learning strategies, and/or faculty development activities
- What assessment method improvements your institutions has selected (if needed)
- What outcome statement improvements/adjustments have been made (if needed)
- Who has collaborated on targeted learning or methods projects and at what level of activity
- What level of institutional support exists for the improvement projects, such as funding, personnel, and faculty development
- What plans exist to follow up on targeted improvement projects to check for improvement
- What results have been collected following the improvement efforts (if they have been collected)
- What lessons have been learned from the improvement process

*Please limit your response to two pages.* The following text box may be increased in size as necessary.



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**Exemplary Program Processes**

## **Evaluation Rubric**

### **2014 AGLS Awards for Improving General Education: Exemplary Program Processes Improving Learning through Assessment**

**Introduction:** As indicated in the application, the AGLS Awards for Improving General Education are intended to recognize institutions committed to the principles and practices described in the AGLS *Guide*. The general evaluation descriptions below reflect the assumption that the Awards are intended to serve as models of how to achieve innovative reform, enhanced learning, strong leadership, and institutional commitment to on-going, evidence-based improvement. *Preference will be given to programs that are fully developed and implemented, revealing the complete assessment cycle.*

#### **Criterion #1: Supporting and Defining Learning**

**Excellent Model (5):** Application clearly describes why the goal of the learning area or domain addressed in the application is important to stakeholders and aligns with the institution's mission. It clearly details the processes essential to engaging all key players in a dialogue to operationally define the goal in terms of learning outcome(s). App. provides specific, practical, innovative methods used to communicate the outcome(s) definition and the importance of the outcome(s) to students, faculty, administrators, and other stakeholders. App. offers an insightful method for developing collaborative commitment to the outcome(s) and agreement on pedagogy among multiple faculty, possibly across multiple departments.

**Acceptable Model (3):** Application presents a mission-related context for the learning area or domain described, and describes a process involving all key players in developing an operational definition. The processes described offer some insight into effective development of an operational definition of the outcome(s), but might lack either effective processes for identifying the significance of the goal and outcome(s), or might suggest limited support for or lack of clear evidence of effective communication of the operational definition and its significance to all relevant/essential parties. Collaboration exists, but the application gives limited description about the level of collaboration or is not clear about how that collaboration was achieved.

**Developing Model (1):** Application fails to connect the goal and outcomes of the learning area or domain to the institutional mission or it suggests a poor effort to communicate that importance. Outcome(s) identified, but the explanation of the processes used to operationally define outcome(s) lacks detail or the creativity essential for a good model. The expression of the outcome(s)' importance is poor, or the methods used to communicate the outcome(s)' importance to others seems ineffective. Collaboration on the outcome appears limited or the process used to gain collaboration appears weak.

#### **Criterion #2: Completing the Assessment Process**

**Excellent Model (5):** Application clearly describes the assessment method and how it is accomplished, identifying such things as whether the measures are direct or indirect, whether the assessments are embedded or stand-alone activities, what programs and levels of learning are assessed, and when the assessments are completed. The application gives a helpful model for getting a significant number of decision makers involved in the development of the assessment process and gaining support for the assessment tools. Clear evidence exists of institutional support that aided the development of the tools. The methods appear to be manageable and give useful data.

**Acceptable Model (3):** Application describes how the assessment methods and tools were developed and how the process is completed, but may leave questions about the effectiveness or usefulness of some of the methods, tools, or data. Questions might exist about the development, implementation, levels of participation in, or institutional support for the tools and processes; however, many people participated or shared in the development. The process used to develop the assessment methods and the process for winning broad support for the methods is given and can offer some insight to others, though its full effectiveness is unclear. The methods appear able to produce data but might be hard for others to replicate.

**Developing Model (1):** Application fails to clearly describe the assessment methods or how the assessment is done, or it leaves questions about the usefulness of the assessment or the data. While key players are involved in developing the processes, the explanations lack the detail needed for the model to be helpful, or it is unlikely to inspire others to find creative assessment solutions. The level of support for the methods and tools is unclear. Questions exist about the level of institutional support.

### **Criterion #3: Analyzing Assessment Results**

**Excellent Model (5):** The process used to evaluate assessment data is clearly detailed and can serve as a helpful model for others. The application makes clear all those who were involved in the discussion of the data and implications, and shows how broad consensus was gained concerning the meaning and implications of the results. Specific data are presented in the application, including various levels of success and the implications for learning. The conclusions about student learning and implications for improvements clearly follow from the data presented. Assessment findings for level of proficiency or knowledge are benchmarked, either internally (i.e. in relation to other programs on campus) or externally (i.e., in relation to similar outcomes and results at peer institutions) to contextualize findings and justify the improvement plans. The discussion also includes evaluation of the tools and methods, relating to the data produced, considering their strengths and weaknesses in light of the data produced. The application reveals a clear, well-developed, broad communication of the data, its analysis, and analysis of the methods and tools.

**Acceptable Model (3):** The process used to collect and evaluate assessment data is described. As described some steps might be unclear or have limited applicability for others. Application describes the efforts to engage all the stakeholders but might not clarify the levels of involvement or the process used to share the data and gain support for the interpretation of the data. The data presented is limited or is narrated, but the perceived implications do not clearly follow from the data given, or the app. fails to clarify the ranges of student success and their implications. The app. fails to discuss the implications of the results for the tools and methods, or overlooks their possible limitations. Results are communicated, but it is not clear how broadly or how well.

**Developing Model (1):** The process used to collect data and evaluate results is either poorly described or suggests a limited model. It might not make clear the level of broad-based support or might not clarify how the data is analyzed. No specific data is presented or the data presented is too limited to explain the analysis and conclusions drawn from it. No apparent or little discussion of the tools and methods is given in the application. Communication of the results with faculty, students, or administration is limited.

### **Criterion #4: Making Improvements**

**Excellent Model (5):** Application presents a useful model of how to select data-driven improvement projects, especially focusing on high impact, active learning strategies, that include faculty development activities aimed to prepare faculty for the improved learning strategies. The application makes clear who collaborated on the projects and reveals high levels of activity and strong institutional support for the improvements. Planned improvements in assessment methods or outcomes are considered, described, and fully explained, as needed. The improvement plans detail implementation and coordination procedures and when success will be identified in follow-up assessments; follow-up results might be described. The application summarizes lessons learned in ways that can benefit other institutions. The application represents an example of a full assessment loop.

**Acceptable Model (3):** Clearly the institution is moving forward to identify data-driven improvement learning and faculty development projects. The projects might have limited scope or might not employ high-impact, active learning strategies. The collaboration on the projects includes some members of a department(s), but does not appear to have broad support, and might have limited institutional support. The application identifies the need for improved assessment methods or changes in outcomes, but does not make clear what changes will be made or why the changes are needed. A check on the results is planned, but the quality of the check is unclear or how it will be accomplished is undeveloped. Lessons

learned make sense, as far as they go. Overall, the model completes the loop, but leaves questions about how well it can benefit others.

**Developing Model (1):** Application describes improvement projects, but of questionable merit. How the projects will be accomplished is not well-detailed, or the level of support, of any kind, is unclear.

Questions about methods and/or outcomes should have been asked, but weren't. The plans for follow-up checks on the improvements are unclear. Lessons learned are of limited value to others. Overall, the application closes the loop, but leaves too many unanswered questions throughout the full process.