

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.

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Award Information and Application: Co-Curricular General Education Learning

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 program improvements. One option for the 2014 Award will recognize institutions committed to systematic, verifiable general education learning achieved through co-curricular activities. AGLS will recognize up to three institutions that employ effective and innovative co-curricular experiences to help achieve an institution’s 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 co-curricular 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* (see www.agls.org). Evaluation will focus on the innovative and systematic qualities of the institution’s efforts to use co-curricular activities to accomplish the goals of general education (*Guide* question A7) and on how well the institution’s process can serve as a practical model for other institutions. The Committee will consider the evidence offered that the co-curricular activities improve the general education program, help it achieve its goals, and improve student learning outcomes. Previously recognized applications can be found on the AGLS website: <http://www.agls.org/exemplaryprogram.htm>. The application must describe the full “loop” of co-curricular processes: institutional commitment to improving general education learning through co-curricular activities, implementation of clearly defined co-curricular learning processes, the verifiable impact of the processes on

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student learning, and the co-curricular improvements that follow from the data review, showing continuing commitment to the processes.

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 co-curricular general education learning and learning improvement processes. ***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 successful processes and assumes that recognized institutions will share with interested parties additional data or program information.***

Award Timeline

March—Application materials available on AGLS website

June 15th—Materials must be received by AGLS

June 20th—Materials distributed to review panel

August 1st—Recipients notified

September 26th—Recipients' presentations and awards during 2013 AGLS Annual Conference in Indianapolis, IN

Suggested Reference Material

Improving Learning in General Education: An AGLS Guide to Assessment and Learning can be found at: 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. Applications can also be mailed to:

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

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Section #1: Contact Information of Person Submitting Application

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

Section #2: Institutional Endorsement

Chief Executive Officer or Chief Academic Officer

Name	
Title	
Institution	
Phone	
Fax	
Email	
Signature	

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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Section #4: Award Criteria

Criterion 1: Supporting Co-Curricular General Education Experiences

Provide a description of how your institution dedicates itself to co-curricular activities that improve the quality of the general education program and help the institution achieve its general education program goals. How does your institution show its commitment to student learning achieved through co-curricular activities? Address the following issues:

- How your institution aligns its co-curricular efforts with institutional mission and general education program goals
- How the institution communicates to faculty and staff its commitment to improving general education program quality, student engagement, and student learning through the use of co-curricular activities
- Who defines and identifies the expectations for co-curricular general education learning
- How student work or personal experiences shape or are integrated into general education learning
- Who takes responsibility for providing co-curricular experiences, including how faculty support and collaborate with staff on co-curricular activities
- How the institution communicates to students and other stakeholders the value of co-curricular activities

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

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Award Criteria

Criterion 2: Engaging Students in Co-Curricular Learning Experiences

Describe how your institution engages students in co-curricular general education learning activities.

Address the following issues:

- What co-curricular general education learning activities or programs your institution offers to students
- Who defines and structures these learning experiences, including the role faculty, administration, and students play in developing the expectations
- How these student activities or experiences are integrated with general education learning
- Who leads these activities and in what situations and venues, including collaborative activities with faculty inside or outside the classroom
- What resources (financial, human, space, etc.) your institution offers for co-curricular learning activities

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

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Award Criteria

Criterion 3: Evaluating Student Co-Curricular General Education Learning

Describe how your institution assesses student general education learning gained through co-curricular activities. Address the following issues:

- How your institution evaluates its student general education learning goals achieved through co-curricular activities, including the tools used and activities assessed
- What processes are used to gather and analyze the results
- Who evaluates the results
- What the results reveal about the impact of co-curricular activities on general education learning
- How the institution communicates the results of its evaluation processes

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

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Award Criteria

Criterion 4: Improving Co-Curricular Learning Processes

Describe your institution's plans to use its data to mature its co-curricular learning processes. Address the following issues:

- What new goals (if any) for co-curricular learning have been identified as a result of the evaluation process
- What data-driven co-curricular improvement projects your institution selected in order to improve learning or assessment of the learning
- Who collaborated to identify and plan the improvements
- What level of institutional support exists for the improvement projects
- What plans exist to follow up on targeted improvement projects to check for continuing or improved ownership
- What results have been collected following improvement efforts (if they have been collected during a second or later cycle of review)
- What lessons were learned from the improvement process

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

Evaluation Rubric
2014 AGLS Awards for Improving General Education: Exemplary Program Processes
Co-Curricular General Education Learning

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 with an improvement cycle; these are programs that develop and provide co-curricular activities, check the impact, and consider improvements.*

Criterion #1: Supporting Co-Curricular General Education Experiences

Excellent Model (5): Overall, a useful description of how an institution and its leadership can demonstrate that it places a high value on co-curricular learning and using co-curricular outcomes to achieve program goals. The application clearly describes the institution's successful efforts to communicate to faculty and staff how it values using co-curricular learning to increase student engagement and achieving its mission and gen. ed. goals. A practical example of broad collaboration and of a systematic approach for determining the expectations for co-curricular learning; app. offers meaningful and practical suggestions on how key individuals and documents formulate and present student expectations, including consideration of how to integrate student work and personal experiences into the learning goals. The app. details practical, easy-to-envison, insightful suggestions on how faculty and staff can collaborate to complete co-curricular learning activities. The institution sends a strong, clear message to students and other stakeholders that co-curricular activities are essential for the student engagement and learning.

Acceptable Model (3): Overall, the app. presents a mission/goals-related context for valuing co-curricular learning with some insights for others, but the narrative gives limited discussion of the breadth of the commitment or the quality of the communication of the commitment. There might be questions about institutional support simply because the co-curricular effort is new and in early stages of development or because the app. fails to fully describe the support. App. identifies who makes decisions regarding co-curricular expectations, including how student work and personal experience are integrated with gen. ed. learning, but these processes might not be collaborative faculty and staff efforts or the app. leaves questions about the effectiveness of the plans for the collaboration needed to successfully complete the student activities. The institution communicates how it values co-curricular experiences to students and stakeholders, but the message might be stronger or more effective.

Developing Model (1): Overall, the application describes a limited institutional commitment to co-curricular learning and limited insight into co-curricular programs. The program is dependent on a few co-curricular "heroes," or it fails to clearly show faculty and staff an institutional commitment to co-curricular learning processes. The processes for determining expectations for students might not reflect full consideration of students' needs or personal experiences, or expectations for faculty/staff collaboration to complete activities are either poorly described or lack a systematic structure, and thus may not reflect a sustainable process. The message to students and stakeholders regarding the importance of co-curricular learning is either not described or the message is potentially ineffective.

Criterion #2: Engaging Students in Co-Curricular Learning Experiences

Excellent Model (5): Overall, the application offers fresh insights into a process for using co-curricular learning to accomplish general education program goals. App. clearly describes a creative, effective, systematic process for co-curricular programming that can be used by other institutions. Collaborative,

ground-up processes, including faculty, staff, and students, are used to define expectations and how co-curricular activities are integrated with general education. App. details a creative and “easy-to-duplicate” model of implementing and managing. The app. provides good evidence that sufficient human and financial resources exist to sustain the program in order to achieve its goals for developing general education learning.

Acceptable Model (3): Overall, the app. addresses all the questions and offers some insights into putting in place a co-curricular program, but questions exist about how effective some processes are or how applicable they will be for others, maybe because the program is relatively new. App. describes how staff, faculty, and/or students, determine expectations and integrate the expectations into the general education program, but it may be unclear how much collaboration exists or how well the processes align with general education program goals, or how successful the process will be in achieving its goals for engaging students and improving general education learning. The institution offers some human, financial, and/or space resources to sustain its ownership efforts, but it might be unclear as to whether the resources are sufficient to broadly implement the program or sustain well enough to produce the desired results.

Developing Model (1): Overall, the app. fails to clearly describe its processes for co-curricular learning, or the process description offer limited insight into how to accomplish the goal of implementing a co-curricular program, or the program does not connect with and enhance general education. Collaboration is limited or too little information is given to clearly see how the program can be effectively implemented, or the co-curricular program is not tied to the general education program and goals. The institution offers limited resources to support the co-curricular activities and might be expecting too much for its limited investment.

Criterion #3: Evaluating Student Co-Curricular General Education Learning

Excellent Model (5): Overall, the evaluation methods and tools are simple but effective, and they can and should be considered by others. The processes used to collect and evaluate evidence on the impact of co-curricular learning activities are clear, replicable, and effective for identifying the importance and value of adding co-curricular programming in order to enhance general education learning. Individuals taking responsibility for the collection and evaluation process and the methods used are clear and appear to be effective for gathering the information that can be used to establish the effectiveness of co-curricular activities and for identify improvements that might be needed. The evaluation results give strong evidence of the effectiveness of the co-curricular programming, and show positive gains in student learning. The results are shared with all key stakeholders, including those who will use them to strengthen the program and make improvement decisions.

Acceptable Model (3): Overall, the app. describes co-curricular activities that are producing some evidence of improved general education learning. The processes used to collect and evaluate the impact of co-curricular activities are identified, but more detail is needed to clarify the process, or the tools and methods seems overly complicated for the results produced, or the results might raise questions about goals achievement. Responsible individuals and all other participants are described. The evaluation results give evidence of the benefits of co-curricular activities and potential for improvement, although some evidence of the impact of the activities on student general education learning is limited or questionable. The evidence is shared with key stakeholders, but the plan for collaborative discussion and use of the results is limited.

Developing Model (1): The processes used to collect and evaluate the impact of co-curricular activities are unclear, or they leave questions about their effectiveness in terms of producing meaningful and useful data about the impact of the co-curricular activities, or they do not clearly connect to the goals of the general education program. The details about the actual collection, sharing, and evaluation processes,

including who takes responsibility for the process, suggest the process is unsystematic or underdeveloped. The results suggest limited impact on general education learning, or they do not lend themselves to specific improvement plans, or the results, while positive, reflect a questionable or small sample of activities. Results are shared but not broadly or there appears to be no focus on using them to identify improvements to the co-curricular program.

Criterion #4: Improving Co-Curricular Learning Processes

Excellent Model (5): Overall, the app. details improvements that will help other institutions more quickly and effectively establish co-curricular programs and show other institutions what is meant by a full-loop of assessment. The app. describes plans for goals and/or improvement projects that sensibly follow from the results collected. The improvement plans fit with the current plan and should strengthen the co-curricular program or general education learning. The plans should be effective because of the broad support in developing the new plans, including institutional support. Plans for checking improvements are clear and measureable, and plans for who will check what and when improvements will be checked are in place or they are in use and producing results. An excellent summary of lessons learned that will help and encourage others to start similar programs.

Acceptable Model (3): Overall, the app. shows an institution moving towards a process of using data to improve its co-curricular general education program. The app. describes the plans for improving goals or activities, though some improvements might not clearly follow from the data collected or the plans might not lead to gains in student engagement or student learning that the institution is hoping to achieve. The plans for making improvements might have good potential, but might reflect limited collaboration or limited institutional support. While the app describes an improvement process that has merit, it has not reached a stage where improvements are being checked, or the plans might not address some ownership needs. However, plans for checking future improvements are in place; there might be some questions about specific details, like who will collect or when. The summary of lessons learned is complete with some important considerations for others.

Developing Model (1): The app. describes improvement goals or projects, but the plans are 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 either fails to describe the closing of the loop, or closes the loop, but leaves too many unanswered questions throughout the full process.