ASSOCIATION FOR GENERAL AND LIBERAL STUDIES
2007 AGLS Awards for Improving General Education:
Effective Program Processes

Award Information and Application

Increasingly in the minds of accreditors and faculty leaders, the idea of "quality" education is associated less with "inputs" and more with the student learning outcomes and the continuous quality improvement processes associated with these outcomes. Accrediting bodies are now encouraging institutions to develop the view that quality education is not a simple matter of a static body of knowledge that faculty pass on to students. Instead, quality education is viewed as commitment to the ongoing activities of making *institutional choices* about appropriate outcomes, developing a shared faculty commitment to *actions* deliberately designed for student achievement of the outcomes, making *judgments* about student success with the outcomes, and ensuring *improvements* to outcomes and their instruction. However, while academic accreditors and faculty leaders are making a commitment to student learning outcomes and assessment, limited effort has been made to apply these concepts to an essential component of a liberal education, the general education program.

As an organization committed to quality general education and a national leader in promoting the centrality of general education in the liberal education of students, the Association for General and Liberal Studies invites individuals and institutions to apply for the 2007 AGLS Awards for Improving General Education: Effective Program Processes. The awards are intended to promote institutional commitment to continuous quality improvement processes, especially as they apply to general education programs, to recognize faculty and institutions that have made the commitment to these quality behaviors, and to provide much needed examples of effective, innovative improvement processes. The 2007 Awards will recognize excellence in two crucial general education program processes: the efforts made by an institution to effectively design and implement a new general education program (C1), or the successful steps taken to make a current general education program work more effectively (A1). Additional information about and explanation of these general education program process can be found in the AGLS *Guide to Assessment and Program Review*. Information on how to obtain the publication can be found on the web at www.agls.org.

Up to six awards (three per category) will be made each year during the AGLS conference, held annually in October. Winners will be asked to present a discussion of their program processes in an identified special session and provide a poster presentation for display throughout the conference. Winners will receive the following: a plaque recognizing their efforts, listing in the AGLS Newsletter, recognition of the process on the AGLS website, and half-priced registration for the up-coming conference, including a year's membership in AGLS.

Award Selection and Criteria

Applications will be reviewed by an Award Committee comprised of AGLS Executive Council members, members of accrediting associations, and recognized leaders in general education. Award categories are based on the Systems Analysis Questions found in the *Improving Learning in General Education: An AGLS Guide to Assessment and Program Review*. Applications will be judged on the extent to which the institution's program improvement efforts can serve as a practical model for other institutions. Judging will consider how innovatively and effectively an institution has addressed one of the following continuous quality improvement processes:

- C1: Commitment to Common Student Learning Objectives. Process used to design a new program, including steps taken to identify and gain institutional commitment to the general education knowledge, values, and skills desired in your graduates.
- A1: Planning and Operational Processes for the General Education Curriculum: Process used to make a current program more effective; the actions taken to produce a curriculum that is more purposeful, coherent, engaging, rigorous, and/or cumulative over the 2 or 4 years of degree programs.

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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* and found in the supporting reference materials listed in the *Guide.* The application should clearly present the creative solutions and leadership methods used to address the issues, concerns, and goals relevant to C1 or A1. Supporting material can be summarized as part of the application and narrative.

Award Timeline

April—Application materials available on AGLS website
June 15th—Final deadline for receipt of award applications
June 20th—Materials distributed to review panel
August 1st—Winners notified
October—Winners' presentations and awards during AGLS Annual Conference

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.*
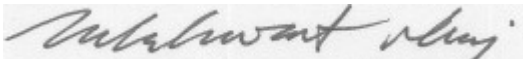
Application Submission

Applications and supporting materials may be submitted as e-mail attachments in Microsoft Word or Adobe Acrobat format, sent to Paul Ranieri at pranieri@bsu.edu. Applications and supporting materials can also be mailed to:

Paul Ranieri
Executive Director, AGLS
Department of English
Ball State University, RB 2109
Muncie, IN 47306

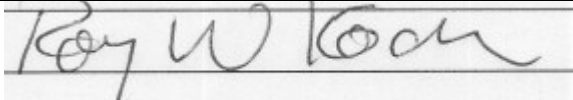# ASSOCIATION FOR GENERAL AND LIBERAL STUDIES
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Section #1: Contact Information of Person Submitting Application

Name	**Sukhwant Jhaj**
Title	**Interim Director, University Studies**
Institution	**Portland State University**
Department/Program	**University Studies**
Street Address	**PO Box 751**
City, State, Zip	**Portland, OR 97217**
Phone	**503-725-8996**
Fax	**503-725-5977**
Email	**jhaj@pdx.edu**
Signature	

Section #2: Institutional Endorsement

Chief Executive Officer or Chief Academic Officer

Name	**Roy Koch**
Title	**Provost**
Institution	**Portland State University**
Phone	**503-725-5257**
Fax	**503-725-5262**
Email	**kochr@pdx.edu**
Signature	

Section #3: Application Summary

Include a summary of the award application, identifying the award category (C1 or A1). 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.

Award category: A1

Portland State University (PSU) has been recognized by the Corporation for National Service, the Pew Charitable Trust, the Atlantic Foundation, the Kellogg Foundation, and *U.S. News and World Report* for implementing an exemplary capstone program. In this award application we will share PSU's model of capstone courses, describe the

goals of this program, our process for creating a quality program, and provide detailed information on how PSU assesses the senior capstone courses and how the data is used to improve the quality of future courses and the program.

Section #4: Award Criteria

Criterion 1: Identification of the Problem

Provide a description of how your institution identified its need to design a new general education program and commit to common general education outcomes (C1), or its need to make a current program more effective by ensuring a more purposeful, coherent, engaging, rigorous, and/or cumulative general education curriculum (A1). Address the following issues:

- The need at your institution, including context for the issue at your institution
- The process used to identify the need, for instance, a review of assessment practices by a campus committee or a visit by an accrediting agency
- The process used to understand the need
- The process used to communicate the need and related issues to faculty and decision making bodies

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

The Portland State capstone was developed in 1994 as a result of an entire redesign of the general education program. In the early 1990s, the administration at PSU asked a working group of faculty to examine the university's general education curriculum from a scholarly perspective. The working group was charged with exploring current learning theory, student affairs literature, and best practices in teaching and learning, and it examined national trends, data, and scholarship on teaching and learning as it sought to revise PSU's general education model. As a result of that research, the faculty senate at PSU approved the adoption of a four-year general education program called University Studies. The new program was based on a constructivist philosophy of education, an approach that encourages high student-to-student interaction, low faculty-to-student ratios to promote increased faculty and student interaction, active learning pedagogies, inquiry-based coursework, and learning with relevance (real-world learning).

Service learning was promoted throughout the curriculum and mandated in a required senior-level capstone because, as pedagogy, it showed promise of addressing the four goals of the University Studies program: communication, critical thinking, ethical/social responsibility, and the diversity of the human experience. To improve students' communication skills, courses address oral communication, visual communication, quantitative literacy, and current communication technologies. Courses tackle the critical thinking goal by requiring students to evaluate differing theories and numerical information and to analyze personal and societal assumptions. Ethical/social responsibility is framed in terms of understanding the impact of life choices on self, society, and environment, as well as exploring the ethical dimensions within these arenas. Finally, the diversity goal aims to enhance students' awareness and appreciation of diversity at the local, regional, national, and global levels. One of the foundational beliefs of University Studies is that education should be relevant to students. Capstone courses require students to apply their learning in these four general education goal areas while addressing real issues in the greater community.

All three thousand senior-level PSU students are required to take one of the 230 capstone courses offered annually. We face a classic problem in quality management; how to maintain and encourage variety while maintaining quality. Our challenge is to offer the program at this scale and accommodate growth so that in each capstone course, students address the four University Studies goals while connecting their academic course content to a real issue in the

community through the completion of a comprehensive, group-based final product.
Capstone Committee (a faculty committee), program administrators and teaching faculty have collectively worked to develop multiple approaches assess capstones.

Award Criteria

Criterion 2: Identification of Goals and Procedure Used to Address Needs
Describe how your institution identified and approved the goals and procedure used to address the need identified in Criterion 1 above. Address the following issues:

- The persons involved in the process of identifying the goals and procedure used to address the need identified in Criterion 1
- The research used to identify the desired goals and procedure that would most effectively address the need identified in Criterion 1
- The process used to select the desired goals and identify the appropriate procedure
- The process used to win institutional commitment to the desired goals and appropriate procedure

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

Using Multiple Approaches to Assess Capstones
The Capstone committee, program administrators, Assessment Associate and Faculty Development Associate are responsible for developing assessment and faculty development plan and the procedures and protocols for conducting assessment and supporting the faculty.

The Student Capstone Survey was significantly revised in the 2002-2003 academic year. The number of items was expanded in order to get a better indication of students' previous experiences with community-based learning and to identify whether learning outcomes could be correlated with actual Capstone experiences. In other words, we wanted to learn if student outcomes on the end-of-course survey could be attributed merely to the students' themselves, or if, in fact, Capstone courses have a significant affect on student development. In sum, do Capstone courses make a difference?

The capstone program uses three formal assessment strategies to provide feedback on the quality of capstone courses. First, mid-term qualitative assessments are completed each term in 20 percent of capstones to gather formative data for capstone faculty and the capstone office. Second, students complete an end-of-term quantitative course evaluation that measures how well their course addressed the University Studies goals, the congruence between community service and course content, and the quality of the instruction. Finally, a qualitative section of the end-of-term evaluation asks students to state their most important learning and their ideas for improving the course.

Mid-quarter feedback. Each year at mid-quarter, Portland State conducts qualitative feedback sessions in all capstone courses. In each of these assessments, a trained facilitator (who is also a capstone instructor) observes the flow of teaching in a course for about fifteen minutes. Then the faculty member leaves the class and the facilitator seeks anonymous student feedback. The students are organized into small groups, and each group provides a written response to the assessment questions. The facilitator instructs the students to report only those comments upon which there is group consensus, which not only provides for anonymity in small capstone courses, but also provides faculty with feedback affecting most or all the class. The questions that students respond to are (1) What about this course is helping you to learn the course material and engage in your community work? (2) What could be changed to improve the course? (3) What specific suggestions do you have to bring about those changes?
After the assessment session, the facilitator summarizes the students' feedback and contacts the faculty member. The faculty member and the facilitator have a follow-up conversation to review the data, clarify any feedback statements that are unclear, get ideas for concrete changes the faculty member may choose to make to the course, and discuss

how the assessment results will be discussed with the students. The transcribed assessment data is also shared with the capstone program director and the faculty development coordinator to determine any themes that are relevant across the capstones in order to facilitate programmatic improvement.

Analysis of mid-quarter feedback. In order to use this data for programmatic improvement, an analysis of the data is conducted to see what themes are present across capstone courses. Three separate readers analyze these data using Creswell's qualitative approach to data analysis (1994). This process requires the researchers to read through all of the session transcriptions carefully to get a sense of the whole and to note initial ideas about the data. The researchers then review the data one course at a time and answer the question, "What is the underlying meaning of this transcription?" Next, the researchers make a list of the core underlying topics and cluster similar ones into topical themes (identifying, coding, and categorizing the primary patterns in the data). The researchers then test these themes by looking at the data to see if it could be organized according to these themes (a process of content analysis in which topics are defined and labeled). After organizing the data, the researchers categorize the data and look for relationships between the themes in order to make final decisions about the themes and their coding.
Each reader conducts an individual thematic analysis according to the same set of data analysis instructions. The researchers compare and contrast their thematic findings and confirm the results.

Analysis of qualitative comments from end-of-term course evaluations. The end-of-term course evaluation asks students to answer two questions: (1) What stands out as your most important learning in this capstone? (2) What would you change about this course? The capstone course evaluation typically yields over 1,500 student comments, which are transcribed and given back to the faculty for the purpose of course improvement. The data are also shared with the capstone program director and a faculty development coordinator so that 1:1 faculty support is given to any faculty member with a struggling capstone course. In addition to this individual analysis, a random sample of 250 student responses to each of the questions are selected for analysis. These comments are analyzed by two independent readers who consider the data separately, create themes suggested by the data, and categorize the comments by the identified themes.

Award Criteria

Criterion 3: Actions Taken
Describe the actions taken by your institution to achieve the goals and implement the procedure designed to address needs. Address the following issues:

- The individuals involved in the process
- The action steps identified
- The process used to gain faculty and administrative support and participation
- The process used to check progress

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

Improving the Quality of the Program through Faculty Development.
Course evaluation data is broadly shared with capstone faculty through the capstone e-mail listserve, through meetings with capstone faculty, and at capstone faculty retreats. Program assessment documents the common strengths and challenges in capstone courses and encourages dialogue and the exchange of ideas among faculty. The data demonstrate the importance of working with newer faculty on developing, organizing, and integrating the community

partnership experience and course structure. Creating a clear and well-organized course is a common challenge throughout the university, of course, but for capstone faculty this needs to be addressed within the context of community service learning, since the nature of the community partnership necessarily influences the structure and organization of the course. Faculty development efforts target both instructors with extensive teaching experience but less experience structuring community collaborations and those with extensive community knowledge but less experience in designing a course.

By using multiple strategies—the continuous generation of course assessment data through mid-term qualitative assessments and end-of-term course evaluations, the reporting out of this data in an ongoing basis in a variety of faculty development settings, and the developing and sharing of best practices in both group and one-on-one settings—the program intentionally and systematically addresses the concerns expressed by students and furthers the quality of teaching and learning in capstones.

Award Criteria

Criterion 4: Evidence of Improvement and Continuing Commitment to the Processes
Provide evidence of the success of your improvement strategy and your institution's continuing commitment to the goals and processes used. Address the following issues:

- A description of the results of your activities

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- An explanation of how the results address the needs
- An explanation of how the institution is improved by the results
- Evidence or justification of your improvement claims
- Evidence of on-going commitment to the improvements

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

Capstone Assessment has revealed that students had a better understanding of social problems facing the community and the nation; that they had increased their knowledge of people of different races and cultures; improved interpersonal skills and expanded capacity to work cooperatively. These findings and others indicating growth in leadership and public speaking skills signified large gains compared to the Pre-Capstone Experience ratings, suggesting that this course makes a difference in student development. Post-Capstone assessment of 16 additional factors revealed greater commitment among students reporting to civic responsibility and an increased interest in promoting social justice and equity, as well as a heightened tendency to view themselves as an "active citizen."

Assessment related to Capstone course design indicated that indicated that a great majority of respondents engaged in class discussion in their Capstone course (85%), while slightly fewer said they engaged in collaborative assignments (78%), and participated in group decision making (77%). Longitudinal data on Capstones for 1999-2003, which was gleaned from a redesigned instrument, showed that students remain, as in the three previous years (1999-2002), of the opinion that participation in the Capstone "helped to connect them to real life situations." As in earlier years, a strong majority of students also continues to believe they have a responsibility to meet the needs of the community partner. Also, they think the community work they did in their capstone benefited the community and indicated they would continue to volunteer in the community following their capstone course. It is also true, according to the data, that students need enhanced assistance in grasping the connection between course readings and lectures and the hands-on work itself.

End-of-term Capstone evaluations revealed that compared with 04-05 in 05-06 more instructors required class attendance, collaborative projects and group decision making. Instructors also decreased the time they spent on lecturing. These changes are consistent with the active learning pedagogies encouraged in University Studies. Students also reported an increase in the number of readings on civic responsibility, discussions on political issues and discussions on social issues, which reveal improvement on two of the four university studies goals. Qualitative analyses of mid-term small group assessments as well as student comments on the end-of-term survey were also conducted. These analyses align with the findings from the quantitative portion of the end-of-term evaluation. Students reported that effective instructors, engaging discussions, and effective readings were helping them learn and reported that they learned about the importance of community involvement, gained new understanding of another population, increased communication skills and were able to apply theory to practice. When asked about areas for improvement, students suggested that community partnerships could be made more clear and that the courses could be structured so that the work is more easily completed. The Capstone program uses these suggestions to focus faculty development and training.