

Assessment Steering Committee  
Sept. 24, 2008  
Meeting notes

Present: Erica Bastress-Dukehart, Denise Smith, Susan Walzer, Beau Breslin, Ann Henderson, Sue Layden, Michael Ennis-MacMillan, Michael Profita, Claire Solomon, Andrew Pfeifer, Sarah Goodwin

1. Welcome and greeting from VPAA Susan Kress: SK introduced the committee's structure and *raison d'être*. The committee's charge includes a public affirmation that assessment is a major priority of Academic Affairs. There are three components to our charge: 1) Communicate to the community about the nature of and need for assessment as part of our ongoing work; it's a culture change that we have to enact. We need to understand and convey what it is and why it's meaningful. 2) Gather evidence of what students are learning, and make use of it in planning; 3) keep in mind the big picture: the curriculum as the site of dynamic energy and organic change, not just on the micro level but also on the macro. SK also mentioned that we need to keep in mind the developmental nature of student learning, from the first year on through capstone experiences and the transition to post-college life.

2. We reviewed our responsibilities; starting to grasp who will do what:

- General education, overall goals for what our students' transformations should be: our highest priority; we will draft something and bring it to CEPP.
- Hiring a research associate: our most immediate step.
- Coordination and planning: including working with students; planning January and May workshops; we need to talk about the workshops fairly soon. [We didn't talk about coordination with other groups who are doing work on student learning: this should be high on our agenda as well.]
- Departmental assessment: we should review work in progress, keep in mind how these coordinate with our "big picture" projects.
- [Institutional research—we didn't actually discuss this, but it's ongoing, and we will surely be hearing some updates and coordinating our efforts with this research.]
- [We also didn't discuss travel to conferences or how to connect with the "national conversation," so this remains lower on the agenda, but we do have this opportunity and should bear it in mind.]

3. Claire Solomon and Andrew Pfeifer asked about the roles of the students on the committee, noting that much of our work is beyond their purview. We noted that of all of us, students are closest to the curriculum and to what happens in the classroom—and in themselves. Our student members can contribute information about where students are actually learning what. (That information can be anecdotal and/or more systematic, and will surely involve Academic Council.) The work we are doing means a culture change for students as well, as it emphasizes the *transformation*, what it's like and what evidence we have that it's happening. We talked briefly about the nature of the transformation—or transformations and the students' own roles and ownership of the process. Susan Walzer noted that her Student Cultures study underway now is on "What's the most important thing you are learning?"—clearly cogent.

4. Beau asked whether we can also communicate to the college about what we should *not* do as we undertake assessment. [Magic wands welcome.]

5. Our immediate agenda is to launch the hire of the new research associate and then to begin deliberations of overarching learning goals. Ann Henderson distributed a description of the position. She also mentioned that it might make the most sense to consider learning goals writ large—in other words, not to write goals for each requirement but to articulate the goals of the Skidmore education as a whole.



Assessment Steering Committee  
October 8, 2008  
Meeting notes

Present: Erica Bastress-Dukehart, Susan Walzer, Beau Breslin, Ann Henderson, Sue Layden, Michael Ennis-MacMillan, Michael Profita, Claire Solomon, Leanne Casale, Sarah Goodwin

1. We welcomed Leanne Casale, Associate Director of Institutional Research, who is observing the committee in order to learn more about our culture of assessment.
2. Our agenda for today: to “devise a process and a framework for establishing overall learning goals. This will include drafting a document; consulting with CEPP; and determining who else we need to consult with, and when” (Chair’s email to the committee 10-7-08).
3. We agreed that we should notify CEPP that we are working on this framework and hope to send them a document in the course of the semester.
4. We talked at some length about both the *Strategic Plan* and the *Academic Vision* in terms of the extent to which they articulate goals for student learning. We agreed that they do so repeatedly, and are invaluable to our process, but that they also do other things (and are long and, for our specific purposes here, not useful in this form).
5. We agreed that we should try to draft concise learning goals that will be based on these previous documents, as well as the 1997 Core Abilities statement, and also on work being done in a national context (for example, the national study undertaken by Wabash College; the LEAP project at the AACU).<sup>1,2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> From Ann Henderson:

The Plan talks about a Skidmore education as being transformative in that students would be able to:

- engage actively with ideas and think independently, i.e. to critically evaluate knowledge claims
- exhibit creativity when solving problems or thinking about and understanding complex issues
- think flexibly about issues or problems - be intellectually nimble
- apply ideas to practical situations
- take a global perspective on political, social, environmental, and cultural issues
- draw upon the ideas and insights presented by others from different backgrounds in order to create new ideas
- engage in civil civic discourse
- appreciate the perspectives of others, i.e. to develop intellectual humility
- make moral decisions that consider the social good
- lead balanced lives
- understand the dialectic of community and individual
- be sophisticated consumers and creators of content
- be environmentally aware
- be self-directed, life-long learners

<sup>2</sup> The Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education has identified seven goals:

<http://liberalarts.wabash.edu/nationalstudy>

6. We agreed that our first task is to articulate broadly the learning goals of the liberal arts education, rather than to address, for example, specific goals stressed in the Strategic Plan (such as science literacy, for example).
7. We talked about the possibility of bringing a consultant, for example from Wabash College or another college, to help us work through ideas about how to operationalize learning goals in actual assessments (and, ultimately, curriculum and pedagogies).
8. We agreed that we will want to consult with other groups, such as the SPG and CIGU, but that this should come later, after we have worked on the draft.
9. We agreed that for next Wednesday, October 15, we will each
  - Draft and send to the chair our own concise list of learning goals/core abilities; Sarah will synthesize and circulate them for discussion.
  - Look at materials on the Wabash website and, if possible, read about the LEAP project from AACU, and integrate what we find useful into our bullets.
  - Ann will also circulate reports from alumni that we can read and enfold in our thinking.
  - Claire will also work with students from Academic Council to elicit their ideas about their overarching goals for their college education.

At our next meeting, we will aim to emerge with a draft we might share with CEPP.

- 
- Effective reasoning and problem solving
  - Inclination to inquire and lifelong learning
  - Integration of learning
  - Intercultural effectiveness
  - Leadership
  - Moral reasoning
  - Well-being

The operationalization of each goal is a click away on that page:  
[http://liberalarts.wabash.edu/cila/home.cfm?news\\_id=2338](http://liberalarts.wabash.edu/cila/home.cfm?news_id=2338)

**Assessment Steering Committee  
October 22, 2008**

**Meeting Notes, Revised**

Present: Ann Henderson, Erica Bastress-Dukehart, Susan Walzer, Jim Chansky, Michael Ennis-McMillan, Claire Solomon, Andrew Pfeifer, Beau Breslin, Mike Profita, Sue Layden, Leanne Casale, Sarah Goodwin. (Note: Jim Chansky was left off last meeting's list.)

1. Sarah noted that Claire and Ann are available and willing to attend the Board of Trustees' Academic Affairs committee meeting to talk about assessment. Erica and Beau also volunteered; Sarah will check with Susan on a plan.
2. Sarah distributed hardcopies of the LEAP Executive Summary with learning goals; Mike Profita's "naked list"; and Claire's list from the SGA group.
3. Sarah also distributed the COFHE statement that Skidmore has signed onto, and we discussed how best to summarize our assessment efforts for that audience. We agreed it makes sense to talk about how we have for some years done assessments actively (and idiosyncratically) at the departmental level and departments have enfolded the results in decision-making about curriculum and pedagogy. (We also considered talking about student engagement, the Middle States self-study and the NSSE results and subsequent launch of the FYE, but felt that doesn't foreground our own local assessment work as well.) We noted it's an encouraging sign that other colleges and universities are joining as a voice in promoting locally-based, context-rich integrated assessments that include higher-order, liberal arts learning (in the face of increasing pressure for more standardized testing).<sup>1</sup>
4. Ann updated us on the Assessment Facilitator: we're in the process of drafting the ad and are waiting for the ok on the PQ; office space located. Brief discussion of the PQ and our expectations for qualifications and skills.
5. Beau talked about our need for someone to write an online handbook on how to assess student writing in the majors, as part of the Teagle grant on Writing in the Majors. The Teagle Review Committee is overseeing the grant and talking to departments about ways to enhance writing. We need someone to write the guidebook by late May 2009 and to serve as a resource to departments as they develop discipline-specific assessments of writing. There is a modest stipend, and they are thinking of it as a 2-year position. Beau asked us to mull over possibilities and we'll return to it. (Martha Wiseman was suggested.)
6. We discussed the core learning goals. Erica reported that CEPP is receptive to our goal of submitting a document fairly soon. Some points made in our discussion:

---

<sup>1</sup> *“Assessment through standardized measures does not evaluate what is best and most valuable about American higher education. A liberal arts education requires faculty to take a holistic approach in judging whether students have developed both substantive expertise and the ability to give a clear exposition of original scholarship involving critical reasoning. Based on our experience, we are skeptical about efforts to make this kind of assessment through standardized tests, including those that purport to measure critical reasoning. [...] With student beginning their academic journeys at widely divergent starting points and pursuing a diverse array of curricula, we do not endorse any approach that depends solely on a single standardized measure or even a single set of standardized measures” (4-5).*

- We need to include learning content (“knowledge”—quaint idea) among the goals (cp. LEAP).
- We are looking to our students for a change in their disposition towards learning.
- Occidental College is assessing their students’ total transformation as their primary goal and project, with focus on more specific outcomes. This involves gathering information from alumni multiple years out as well as current students.

We don’t have “pre-test” data for our entering students, at least not in any systematic form. The essay students must write in EN 105 might be considered raw data for a study. The RAP could be put to use this way but it would need to be intentional on our part and would involve designing it with that in mind. Beau mentioned that we have an assessment instrument that we will give to all incoming students next fall. The instrument comes from our consultation with the folks at Macalester. It is different than the RAP.

- We agreed, loosely, that the document could take the form of 1) a short list of primary learning goals, 2) each elaborated very briefly, 3) annotated with the sources, internal and external, for the goals.
- Susan Walzer, Sue Layden and Sarah will form a subcommittee to create this document based on the materials we have from Ann’s table, Claire’s work, and, if it seems cogent, the LEAP work. We agreed that we would try to compress the list of goals to 5 or 6.

*Note: We do meet next week, October 29, same time and place.*

**Assessment Steering Committee**  
**October 29, 2008**

**Meeting Notes**

Present: Denise Smith, Ann Henderson, Erica Bastress-Dukehart, Susan Walzer, Jim Chansky, Michael Ennis-MacMillan, Claire Solomon, Andrew Pfeifer, Beau Breslin, Mike Profita, Sue Layden, Leanne Casale, Sarah Goodwin.

1. Sarah noted that she and Ann, Erica, Beau, and Claire will attend tomorrow's Board of Trustees' Academic Affairs Committee meeting to talk about assessment, and Claire will lead the trustees in a briefer version of the discussion she had with the SGA subcommittee on student learning goals.
2. The committee discussed the draft of goals for student learning received from the subcommittee this week. The changes indicated in the attached document were made by consensus. Two further changes were discussed: changing the title of goal III; and splitting or moving III into one or more other goal. The committee decided to continue this discussion at the next meeting, on November 12. Discussion may also continue on email.
3. The committee agreed that Claire and Andrew should take the current draft of the Goals to the SGA student committee for discussion.

**Assessment Steering Committee**  
**November 12, 2008**

**Meeting Notes**

Present: Denise Smith, Ann Henderson, Susan Walzer, Jim Chansky, Michael Ennis-MacMillan, Beau Breslin, Mike Profita, Sue Layden, Leanne Casale, Sarah Goodwin.

1. Ann updated the group on the state of the search for a part-time Assessment Facilitator. We have a number of viable candidates and the subgroup meets today to establish the long list and the interview process. Ann asked about how the committee would like to be involved. It was agreed that the existing subgroup (Ann and Sarah, with Leanne) should proceed, and when finalists are invited to campus we will invite the committee to meet them, if possible during our meeting time. Susan Kress and Muriel Poston will also be meeting with them.
2. We discussed whether Intercultural and Global Perspectives (#III on the list) should remain a separate “headline” in the learning goals. Some points made and questions raised:
  - Is this goal more about knowledge, or more about values? Or both?
  - If both, should the two bullets be split, with the one about knowledge going to goal I (“Knowledge”) and the one about values going to IV (“Personal and Social Values”)?
  - Goals I, II, IV and V are more “meta”; III feels qualitatively different, more specific.
  - Because of that, III feels to some not right as an independent category.
  - How will these goals be used? By faculty, as a directive of some sort? By this committee as we shape assessment work? How else? Are these uses valid?
  - What is the status of these goals? Are they an assessment document, a planning document, a timeless statement about the Skidmore education? [How might we get better clarity about that?]
  - To some degree, the goals should arise from existing documents; some of us might stress here especially the *Strategic Plan*. Others contest that to some degree because the *SP* is a planning document for this decade rather than an overarching statement about the Skidmore education.
  - The goals will in any case convey something about priorities.
  - We could make a similar case for foregrounding science learning with a separate headline.
  - Some might see the separate headline for III as “tokenizing.”
  - Others feel there is something powerful about having this as one of the college’s main goals.
  - Most are still undecided about whether to retain III as a separate goal.
  - One way to convey our seriousness about the learning in III is to place a bullet under each of the other four headlines that emphasizes the intercultural learning within that framework. Beau volunteered to draft a version of this document that way.
3. Sarah will invite Winston Grady-Willis to our next meeting to consult on this question. We will continue this discussion on email with Beau’s draft.
4. Our next meeting was set for November 26, but we agreed we will cancel that and meet next on December 10.

**Assessment Steering Committee  
January 26, 2009**

**Meeting Notes**

Present: Denise Smith, Ann Henderson, Susan Walzer, Jim Chansky, Michael Ennis-MacMillan, Beau Breslin, Mike Profita, Claire Solomon, Leanne Casale, Sarah Goodwin. Absent: Erica Bastress-Dukehart, Sue Layden, Andrew Pfeifer.

1. Ann Henderson updated us on the arrival of our newly hired Assessment Facilitator, Lisa Christenson, who starts Feb. 23 and is beginning to fill her calendar.
2. Sarah and Michael spoke briefly about the AAC&U meeting that just took place and the tenor of the sessions there. Most importantly, matters of assessment were pervasive and some of the results coming in from some studies were compelling and, sometimes, unsettling.
3. Sarah floated a question about what we might want to do with a spring workshop. Beau suggested a consultant from Hampshire College, and there was some informal agreement that a consultant would be a good idea. To be continued.
4. The rest of the meeting was devoted to the subject of the fourth bullet on our Goals: Transformation. A consensus emerged that it is qualitatively different from the preceding four goals, and we would like to consider ways of acknowledging that. It seems to be a culmination of the other three and at the same time to point forward to our students' lives beyond college more than the others do. We considered, too, whether we really do want our students to be transformed, considering that we select them for particular qualities we already value; after some discussion, we seemed to agree that after four years they are nevertheless—or should be—profoundly changed. Part of the change, it seems, is that they become increasingly agents of their own education: they don't just undergo it, they undertake it.
5. Claire asked whether she may bring the current draft of the goals to the assessment committee of the SGA Senate [Claire: precise title?] for discussion. The group agreed that she may.

As a consequence of today's discussion, we agreed to several things:

- We will look at the document again and consider whether there are ways that formatting, or minor changes could signal the qualitative difference in the 4<sup>th</sup> bullet.
- Sarah will work on Jim's draft of a preamble and will try incorporating language about transformation from the *Strategic Plan* to frame the 4 bullets.
- We will all look at every word of the document and see what words we need to consider and discuss more fully. Some candidates are in green below.

\*\*\*\*\*

**I. Knowledge**

- Acquire knowledge of human cultures and the **physical and natural world** through study in the arts, histories, humanities, languages, mathematics, natural sciences, and social sciences [**what about business?**]
- Understand social and cultural diversity in national and global contexts

- **Perform synthesis** and demonstrate advanced learning and accomplishment in both **general and specialized** studies

## **II. Intellectual Development**

- Think critically, creatively and independently
- Gather, analyze and integrate varied forms of information; understand evidence
- Communicate effectively, in writing and other modes; understand argument
- Develop engagement in and responsibility for learning
- Interact effectively and collaboratively with individuals and across social identities

## **III. Personal and Social Values**

- Examine one's own values and their use as ethical criteria in thought and action
- Interrogate one's own values in relation to those of others, across social and cultural differences
- Apply learning to find solutions for personal, social and scientific problems

## **IV. Transformation**

- Integrate knowledge, habits of mind and creative thought from multiple disciplines in new contexts
- Embrace intellectual humility, especially as it relates to differences among ideas, peoples, and cultures
- Demonstrate a disposition to learn, an enduring commitment to **a life of learning**.

**Assessment Steering Committee**  
**February 2, 2009**

**Meeting Notes**

Present: Ann Henderson, Sue Layden, Susan Walzer, Jim Chansky, Michael Ennis-MacMillan, Mike Profita, Claire Solomon, Leanne Casale, Sarah Goodwin. Absent: Denise Smith, Erica Bastress-Dukehart, Beau Breslin, Andrew Pfeifer.

We had an energetic and very productive meeting!

1. We discussed the draft of a preamble distributed by Sarah. Some key points made:
  - The purpose of the preamble is to introduce the document for all constituencies, to provide a basic context for it that is clear and requires no specialized knowledge.
  - It should be short, perhaps a paragraph.
  - It should incorporate some of the language from the *Strategic Plan*.
  - Ideally it will convey or allude to what is particularly characteristic of Skidmore in our learning goals: the emphases on hand & mind and on creative thought.
  - It will include the language about transformation from the *Strategic Plan* so that the 4<sup>th</sup> bullet feels fully integral to the document.

Sarah will come back with a new draft.

2. We went over the Learning Goals document very carefully and agreed on a number of changes. The changes aimed to make the wording as clear and lean as possible, and to strengthen the thread regarding applying knowledge. Some particular points:
  - We spent some time on the first knowledge bullet and the sources of the items in it (“study in the arts, histories, humanities, languages, mathematics, natural sciences, and social sciences”). We agreed that the primary conceptual source for these goals in existing documents is our distribution requirements (which we might well want to revisit, at some point).
  - Histories and mathematics are not in our distribution requirements, and although we believe we probably do want our graduates to have a sense of history, we don’t currently require it of all students.
  - Some foundational knowledge in mathematics (QR1) is however required of all of them. QR2, we felt, is addressed more in **II. Intellectual Development**.
  - We also don’t mandate any particular learning experience that ensures our graduates have practiced applying knowledge to real-world (or quasi-real-world—what is real?) situations. The *Strategic Plan* talks a good deal about civic engagement, learning to become a citizen, and application of knowledge. Because of the community’s endorsement of the *SP*, and because of our traditional identity of valuing “mind and hand,” we felt comfortable introducing a bit more emphasis on applying knowledge into the goals (see revisions).
3. We agreed that we will discuss the Academic Council’s Assessment Subcommittee’s concerns at our next meeting.

4. Sarah expressed some concern about attendance at our meetings. We agreed that we need to look for a replacement for Andrew. (Suggestions welcome!) If you know now about conflicts ahead, please do inform Sarah. The committee's work and credibility depend on our full collective participation. Many thanks too for the work you do between meetings, reading and vetting drafts. We have a good deal more ahead of us this semester.

Next meeting:

1. Students' subcommittee response to the goals
2. Assessment this semester and in May

**Assessment Steering Committee  
February 9, 2009**

**Meeting Notes**

Present: Ann Henderson, Sue Layden, Susan Walzer, Jim Chansky, Michael Ennis-MacMillan, Mike Profita, Claire Solomon, Leanne Casale, Denise Smith, Erica Bastress-Dukehart, and new member Julia Dauer, student. Absent: Beau Breslin.

Agenda review changes, claire's notes, doing assessment

1. Sarah welcomed Julia to the committee; introductions were made. Sarah also congratulated Denise Smith on the upcoming Moseley lecture and noted that it will make a strong case for the importance of evidence.
2. We discussed the revised learning goals and made one correction: we had intended to retain "physical world," not "natural world," so that change must be made.
3. We discussed the revised preamble in some detail and agreed on a number of changes; Sarah will circulate a new draft. In sum, the changes aim 1) to abbreviate the preamble so that the whole document fits on one page; 2) to delete the long quotations from the *Strategic Plan* and use similar but leaner language about transformation; and 3) to introduce somehow the Skidmore angle of hand and mind, practical application. We agreed that we will consider this revision on email, and if any of us has concerns or reservations about it we will discuss it at next week's meeting.
4. We agreed to create an appendix with some rationale and detail about sources for the different goals. Sarah will make one pass and we may farm out chunks of it, depending on how much detail we want.
5. Turning to Joanna Cohen's notes on the student discussion, Academic Council's subcommittee on assessment, we heard from Claire about the student group's sense of confusion about the intended audience for and purpose of the goals. We agreed that it would be good for one or more of us to go to the AC group's meeting to clarify our sense of these things and, equally important, in a receptive mode to hear more about the students' concerns and ideas. [Perhaps also to note that in response to their sense that they "want to see Skidmore in these goals," we are adjusting the preamble to capture a little more of what is distinctive here, as well as to point out where "Skidmore" does appear in these goals.]
6. We agreed that we are very receptive to the students' creating a set of more practical, skills-related goals that we can consider further.
7. Sarah announced that she had met with Michael Casey to talk about partnering on gathering information from alumni about their learning at Skidmore. We agreed that he can come in to a meeting soon, depending on when we are ready to sign off on our goals document and send it to CEPP.

Agenda for next week, potentially:

1. Revised consolidated Learning Goals document
2. Appendix?
3. Doing assessment I: Michael Casey
4. Doing assessment II: thinking about an overarching plan



**Assessment Steering Committee**  
**February 16, 2009**

**Meeting Notes**

Present: Ann Henderson, Sue Layden, Susan Walzer, Jim Chansky, Michael Ennis-MacMillan, Mike Profita, Claire Solomon, Denise Smith, Erica Bastress-Dukehart, Beau Breslin, Julia Dauer, Sarah Goodwin

We spent most of the meeting talking about the preamble and the learning goals in anticipation of sending them to CEPP. We also talked briefly about plans for May, which might include travel, workshops and/or a consultant. Taken in order:

1. We agreed to some changes in the draft preamble. The new text reads (changes highlighted in yellow—please let me know pronto if I have not gotten these right!):

The Goals for Student Learning **at Skidmore College** outlined here represent our aspirations as a liberal arts college and the values we place at the core of our work. They emerge from our shared sense of a Skidmore education as a transformative experience: we aim for our graduates to possess both knowledge and capacities that enable them to embrace change and apply their learning in new contexts. Our **Goals** articulate, in language that is as clear and lean as possible, what this understanding of the liberal arts education means for our students' learning at Skidmore. They lay the groundwork for our continued inquiry into the evidence of that learning.

2. We talked at some length about the third bullet under *II. Intellectual Development*. The bullet currently reads: "Communicate effectively, in writing and other modes; understand argument." The question came to us from DoF staff whether we want to privilege writing as a mode of communication, or whether we want to enumerate the "other modes," and if so, how. Some points made:
  - We could enumerate the four major modes of communication: written, oral, quantitative, and visual (and a fourth came up: artistic or expressive; but is this really a separate mode on a par with the others, or a potential dimension of the others?).
  - If we enumerate beyond writing, we need to be prepared to ask where in our curriculum, and whether, our students are learning that mode of communication.
  - An enumeration may imply a hierarchy; we would need to sort that out.
  - Some of us do believe we should privilege writing; others, writing and quantitative reasoning.
  - QR is addressed in the previous bullet ("Gather, analyze, integrate, and apply varied forms of information; understand and use evidence"), but without the emphasis on effective communication. Do we expect our students not only to understand and use quantitative evidence, but also to communicate effectively with it? Or is "use" tantamount to "communicate with"? What about "use effectively"?

We agreed that we need to talk about the communications bullet at greater length and will take it up at the next meeting. A proposed change is on the table:

- “Communicate effectively, in **written, oral, quantitative, and other modes**; understand argument.”
3. We talked briefly about ways to do assessment work in May. The AAC&U General Education institute in late May could provide an opportunity for a five-member team from Skidmore to frame the next-generation assessment plan based on our new Learning Goals. Information about that institute is cut and pasted below. We determined that the faculty on the committee, with the exception of the chair, are already committed and would not be able to go to the institute; alternatives include:
    - Plan a workshop on campus at a time when ASC members are available
    - Send a team to the institute consisting of Sarah, one further member of ASC to be determined, a member of CIGU, a member of CEPP, an at-large faculty member, and/or Lisa Christenson or Leanne Casale.

Sarah will look into these possibilities, and suggested that next academic year we should be alert earlier to the possibilities for AAC&U events that might help us develop broader faculty participation and commitment.

4. Michael mentioned, and there was general agreement, that the college needs to do more to recognize and applaud assessment work.

#### Summary of the AACU Gen Ed Institute:

The 2009 Institute on General Education will be held May 29-June 3, 2009, in Minneapolis, Minnesota on the campus of the University of Minnesota - Twin Cities. [...] The Institute [...] is comprised of interactive presentations by experienced faculty who have been engaged in general education reform and with emerging trends in higher education and student learning. Campus teams will have ample opportunity to meet one-on-one with these faculty consultants, work collaboratively within their teams, and to share ideas with the other campus teams.

The rich curriculum in general education reform includes a variety of sessions on **framing campus projects in local and national contexts, improving assessment of general education student learning**, best practices, and emerging trends in higher education. Campus teams also learn **strategies for placing their general education reform within the framework of AAC&U's Greater Expectations and Liberal Education and America's Promise [LEAP] initiatives**.

For more information: [http://www.aacu.org/meetings/institute\\_gened/index.cfm](http://www.aacu.org/meetings/institute_gened/index.cfm)

#### Agenda for next time:

1. Continue (complete?) discussion of II. Bullet 3 on effective communication
2. Look at the rationale and appendix draft, and process for handoff to CEPP
3. Plans for May
4. Update from Sarah on departmental assessments
5. Possible consultations with campus constituencies this spring?—Michael Casey; others? Eg Science Planning Group, Gove Effinger re QR, CIGU?

**Assessment Steering Committee**  
**February 23, 2009**

**Meeting Notes**

Present: Lisa Christenson, Ann Henderson, Sue Layden, Susan Walzer, Jim Chansky, Michael Ennis-MacMillan, Mike Profita, Denise Smith, Erica Bastress-Dukehart, Beau Breslin, Sarah Goodwin; absent (ill): Claire Solomon, Julia Dauer

1. We introduced Lisa to the group and ourselves to her. A most welcome arrival!
2. Erica, on behalf of CEPP, raised two questions:
  - Has our committee taken the Academic Council subcommittee students' concerns and additional learning goals into consideration as we have revised our document?
    - Sarah reported on a productive meeting on Feb. 10 with those students. The students looked at our goals alongside the LEAP Liberal Arts outcomes list, and Sarah explained both the scope of our goals and some of the ways they reflect Skidmore culture in particular. The students seemed comfortable with the idea that we will return to discussion of a more focused list of skills and abilities goals after we have submitted the liberal-arts learning goals to CEPP. Susan Walzer also noted that we had increased some emphasis on practical learning in our goals in response to the students' questions earlier this month.
  - CEPP also questioned the final bullet on our document: "Demonstrate an enduring disposition to learn." They suggested "Commit to a life of learning." We agreed that we will take this up as soon as we reach a decision about II. Bullet 3.
3. Sarah suggested that we start dedicating half our time each meeting to considerations of May workshops so that we can get that planning underway.
4. We spent most of the remaining time discussing the wording of II. Bullet 3, which in the current draft reads: "Communicate effectively, in writing and other modes; understand argument." Discussion focused on whether we should enumerate the other modes (eg quantitative, oral, visual, esthetic), whether the sense of hierarchy in such a list is desirable or appropriate, and what we actually intend by such a list. Some points made:
  - If we do list the modes of communication, at least one of us felt that quantitative reasoning must be among them
  - Listing the modes might appear to be aiming at the "lowest bar," the foundation requirements.
  - We're not clear whether these bullets are reflecting our requirements in some way, or our higher aspirations for the *end* results of the Skidmore education.
  - If the latter, almost all of us agreed that it is more compelling not to list the modes of communication; omitting the list, we can convey the sense that we expect our graduates to communicate effectively in multiple modes, often blended together or leading from one to the other, and that there is a certain power in "graduating" from the list to a more holistic understanding of communication by the end of the college years.
  - One of us felt that it makes sense to privilege written communication as an essential part of a liberal arts education, and thus argued for a list of the modes, leading off with writing.

Ultimately, we decided to delete the second clause, resulting in: “Communicate effectively; understand argument.”

5. We talked briefly about workshops in May. Sarah suggested we aim to hold two workshops:
  - 1) one with members from CEPP and ASC to map out a new five-year Academic Affairs assessment plan that emerges from our work on the learning goals and is integrated with any planning for curricular change coming from CEPP; this will include identifying both projects and methods, and may include one or more outside consultants; it will also provide significant stipends to participating faculty.
  - 2) another to undertake an actual assessment project related to the goals; this may or may not include ASC members.

Discussion of possible consultants ensued. Sue and Beau will send Sarah information on consultants they know of (Gavin? Hampshire?); Sarah will look into them; committee members will send Sarah information on May availability (with the understanding that Ann and Michael are overcommitted in May). We also talked about the possibility of having one consultant also meet with a group of chairs to help them move along with their departments.

6. Several members asked Sarah to put on our agenda the request from FEC to talk about committee membership and the possibility of reductions in numbers.

Agenda for the next meeting:

1. # II bullet 3: “Communicate effectively; understand argument.” Do we want to reconsider “understand argument” now in this sentence? **Please circulate draft ideas ahead of our next meeting.**
2. #IV final bullet: “Demonstrate an enduring disposition to learn”: CEPP’s proposed revision (“Commit to a life of learning”).
3. May workshops
4. FEC request for information about committee size: could we be smaller?

**Assessment Steering Committee**  
**March 2, 2009**

**Meeting Notes**

Present: Lisa Christenson, Ann Henderson, Sue Layden, Susan Walzer, Michael Ennis-MacMillan, Mike Profita, Erica Bastress-Dukehart, Beau Breslin, Claire Solomon, Julia Dauer, Sarah Goodwin; absent: Jim Chansky, Denise Smith

1. **FEC request for information about committee size:** we discussed this matter and agreed, somewhat tentatively, to reply to FEC as follows: Either the Dean of Studies or the Director of the First-Year Experience could step off the committee, because they are in regular communication with each other; and we could do with one fewer faculty (we currently have two at-large faculty, the CEPP representative, and the chair), with the understanding that the ASC would consult with other faculty constituencies as needed. In addition, the student representatives will talk about whether it would suffice to have one student member, and there was some feeling that either Career Services or Student Academic Services is needed, but not both. (That might require further discussion.) Sarah will convey this admittedly “soft” information to FEC. Since we are a new committee, it seems possible that we will have a firmer sense of this once we have completed a full year’s cycle. [Note: we may also want to talk about next year’s committee and the overall status and charge of the ASC as we wrap up this year’s work.]
  
2. **May workshops:** We segued into this discussion in the context of what we expect to achieve this year and what is expected of committee members. Sarah outlined again the idea of having two workshops: one for some ASC and CEPP members to work out a new 5-year plan, including potential methods, projects and a timetable, aligned roughly with the Learning goals; and a second one to actually undertake an assessment project that aligns with our current goals. We talked about whether the Learning Goals document must be approved by CEPP and/or the faculty before it can be used as a guide for such a plan. We seemed to agree that it does, in the sense of using the goals as a template, but that we could nevertheless work out a plan based on certain recurrent goals around which there has been a historical consensus [such as critical thinking, effective writing, intercultural understanding, and scientific reasoning], and that this would dovetail with the Learning Goals if and when the faculty endorses them. The assessment plan could be modified in the light of the goals if major changes occur. Ann also suggested that we might offer support for, and try to pull together, some of the assessment projects that are already under discussion, for example in CIGU, in the Civic Engagement task force, in the group assessing the S3M grant, in study abroad, and in sophomore retention, as the “second workshop” or cluster of workshops. The ASC agreed this would be a good idea,, and also noted that it could be valuable to hear from some of these people as we continue to learn and think about how assessment is done at the college.

Sarah agreed to contact the point persons involved in those projects, and also to issue a general call for assessment projects, to begin to shape the May undertakings. Sarah will also contact the two consultants under consideration to find out availability and dates.

Sarah also noted that it would be a good idea to give the ASC an update on departmental assessments, as that information comes in; and to begin to strategize about building stronger faculty support for and awareness about assessment work.

3. **# II bullet 3: “Communicate effectively; understand argument.”** We agreed to delete “understand argument” from this bullet.
4. **#IV final bullet: “Demonstrate an enduring disposition to learn”:** CEPP’s proposed revision (“Commit to a life of learning”): We discussed this at some length and agreed to new wording: “Develop an enduring disposition to learn.”
5. **Signing off on the Learning Goals:** We agreed that they are now ready to be sent to CEPP.

Agenda for next time (following spring break: March 16):

1. Continue the planning for May; updates on responses to queries.
2. If possible, hear from Claire and Julia about the students’ skills/specific learning goals project.
3. Consider strategies for cultivating faculty support for and recognition of effective assessment work

And, in the future: consideration of departmental assessments; whom should we invite to ASC?

**Assessment Steering Committee**  
**March 16, 2009**

**Meeting Notes**

Present: Lisa Christenson, Ann Henderson, Sue Layden, Susan Walzer, Michael Ennis-MacMillan, Mike Profita, Erica Bastress-Dukehart, Beau Breslin, Denise Smith, Julia Dauer, Sarah Goodwin; absent: Jim Chansky, Claire Solomon

**Note:** There will be no meeting on March 23.

1. **Handouts.** Sarah circulated some descriptions of “good assessment” synthesized by Linda Suskie of Middle States (distributed at an AACU workshop in January).
2. **Consultants for May.** Lisa reported on her successful contacts with Gavin Henning, Barbara Walvoord, and Carol and Steve from Hampshire College. Henning is available May 7-8 and 13-14. Barbara Walvoord is available May 11-12. The Hampshire team has much of May available. We talked at some length about what we might ask the consultants to do. There was a loose consensus, slightly uncomfortable, around a three-pronged approach:
  - Invite Gavin Henning to conduct a workshop on assessing general learning goals around intercultural understanding, with the hope of developing a plan and creating links among some ongoing work.
  - Invite either Walvoord or the Hampshire team to come to campus and split time between 1) a workshop with chairs (understood to be an optional workshop with the intention of helping chairs—something Lisa and Sarah need to emphasize in meetings with chairs this spring) and 2) a workshop on assessing general learning goals, with the idea of creating a longer-range plan.

Sarah will solicit responses from this group on dates and tentative interest in taking part; Lisa will circulate the materials she has on the consultants, and we will try to reach a decision about whom to engage, and when, via email.

3. **AACU Engaging Departments Institute July 8-12, and work with chairs in general.** Sarah solicited responses to the idea of inviting science chairs or their representatives to this institute to encourage the development of more integrated departmental assessments that reflect more fully the SPGs goals for their students’ learning, as well as the Learning Goals we are bringing to the faculty. Sarah agreed to circulate the SPG document to the ASC. The committee was positive about the idea, but perhaps skeptical about the willingness of chairs to go to such an institute in July. The committee also encouraged Sarah and Lisa to ask chairs, as we meet with them, how we can support them in their assessment work; and also to ask Susan and/or Muriel for time at the end-of-semester retreat to work with chairs on assessment matters, to enfold this work within the time frame of an existing meeting.

- 4. Tentative agenda for this semester.** After much discussion we agreed that we will invite David Karp, Winston Grady-Willis and Cori Filson to our March 30 meeting and ask each for documents ahead of time and a 5-minute report, followed by discussion of interconnections and potential future directions. We also agreed to leave Michael Casey as is on April 6. There was some concern about leaving workshop planning until late in the semester [and we need to allow time in there too to discuss the students' document, once we receive it], so we opted not to set the schedule further for now.
  
- 5. Planning for this Friday's meeting.** On Friday, CEPP has invited faculty and staff [confirmed; Dan Nathan's email was sent to the faculty-list and the admin-prof-list) to an informational meeting on our Learning Goals document and the Center for Teaching Study Group. Erica clarified that CEPP is not endorsing the goals, just providing the occasion for early public discussion and feedback. Lisa will send Dan (and the ASC?) a file with the Goals plus the Appendix, so that can be the basis of the discussion.

Sarah will introduce the Goals, describe the process by which we reached them, and lean very heavily on the members of the ASC for answers to questions.

**Assessment Steering Committee**  
**March 30, 2009**

**Meeting Notes**

Present: Lisa Christenson, Ann Henderson, Sue Layden, Susan Walzer, Michael Ennis-MacMillan, Mike Profita, Erica Bastress-Dukehart, Beau Breslin, Claire Solomon, Julia Dauer, Jim Chansky, Denise Smith, Leanne Casales, Sarah Goodwin

1. Lisa announced that we have two dates in May reserved for consultants and workshops: Barbara Waalvoord (May 11) and Gavin Henning (May 13) [Lisa: please confirm that I have these dates right]. Announcements will go out shortly.
2. Sarah welcomed David Karp, Kristie Ford, and Winston Grady-Willis. Each gave us a brief review of documents that had been distributed to the committee about assessment projects that are underway (Ford and Karp), or assessments that would complement the work of CIGU (Grady-Willis). Some discussion of interconnections followed. One question was about the degree to which goals related to civic engagement and intercultural understanding may become prescriptive (“You should be better” vs. “You should think about your values”). Winston noted that the LG draft doesn’t mention race, class, sexuality or other identities and remains general in its use of “culture.”
3. Erica reported that in this morning’s CEPP meeting some reservations about the Learning Goals document had emerged, and the committee talked about them in the context as well of the recent open meeting on the Learning Goals. The concerns seem to be as follows:
  - Student support for the goals, on Academic Council, was described as “lukewarm”; the document does not include some of the kinds of “concrete” learning that the students consider important as well.
  - CEPP is concerned about who the audience for the document is, and sees it not as a vision document but a “bridge” between actual assessment work and a larger vision; it should not be disseminated more broadly.
  - There seems to be some concern about whether our committee is willing to make changes in the document.

A related point came up again that was raised in the open meeting:

- It is not clear who is responsible for “delivering” the learning outlined in the document, whether just the faculty, or other areas of the college as well, especially Student Affairs. If the responsibility is broader, there may be other kinds of goals to include as well, covering other ways that our students learn and mature over four years. [This point was a major point made at the open meeting and didn’t come out of the CEEP meeting, it seems, but did surface today.]

And, in addition:

- In my meeting with the VPAA staff Susan Kress expressed concern that the document doesn’t sufficiently foreground what is particular to Skidmore’s

character and history in the goals (e.g. the emphasis on creative thinking, on bringing theory to practice, and on interdisciplinarity); this point re-emerged today as well.

Some discussion followed, rather fragmentary and rushed. As the meeting adjourned, we agreed rapidly that these concerns are substantive enough that it seems premature to bring the document to the faculty for discussion at the meeting this Friday, April 3.

**Appendix: From the minutes of the VPAA Staff meeting on March 17**

(SK=Susan Kress; MP=Muriel Poston; JW=John Weber; JSi=Justin Sipher; JSe=Jeff Segrave):

Sarah Goodwin provided an update on the work of the Assessment Steering Committee (ASC) and discussed the draft of the learning goals prepared by the ASC. Her very brief summary of what she took to be the most crucial questions:

1. (SK) Does this document sufficiently define our unique identity? Might we introduce language into the preamble, for example, noting what is particular to Skidmore in these goals? [SG: creativity, practical application, integration of disciplines, intercultural understanding]
2. (MP) Might we bring out more fully the notion of civic engagement and the common good?
3. (JW) Is there enough emphasis on effective teamwork as an essential part of intellectual development and values?
4. (JSi) Is there room to emphasize the need to be able to learn in new contexts and through new vehicles, such as online?

It seems that most other observations were essentially supportive: JSe saying that Athletics and other areas of Student Affairs are helping us meet many of these learning goals for our students; the general sense that it is fine not to enumerate which forms of “communication” we ask of our students; JW’s sense that the Tang could make use of these in reflections on student learning there; Ruth’s sense of the need to have a document like this to communicate the value of what we do; your overall encouragement, and in particular your support for keeping the goals and the assessments lean, clear, manageable, and useful.

There also seemed to be some agreement with the idea of supporting faculty work on assessment more integrally throughout the college, though we need more discussion to see what that would look like in practice.

**Assessment Steering Committee**  
**April 6, 2009**

**Meeting Notes**

Present: Lisa Christenson, Ann Henderson, Sue Layden, Susan Walzer, Michael Ennis-MacMillan, Mike Profita, Erica Bastress-Dukehart, Beau Breslin, Claire Solomon, Julia Dauer, Jim Chansky, Leanne Casales, Sarah Goodwin; Denise Smith, heroically, by conference call.

1. The first half our meeting took place 9:15-10:00 in the company of CEPP. [Present were Lisa, Sue, Michael, Mike, Erica, Beau, Claire, Jim, and Sarah; Ann and Leanne arrived late from another meeting] Sarah summarized briefly the reasons for the joint meeting and what the ASC understood from Erica to have been CEPP's concerns. Dan Nathan then led off a discussion in which we first heard from the CEPP members about their reservations concerning the Learning Goals. They developed some of the points that Erica had reported: they were not enthusiastic about the goals as a stand-alone document and felt that it has a role as an assessment tool, but is not inspiring and should not be used as an inspirational document. There were also concerns about whether the role of Student Affairs is adequately addressed in the document in its current form. Some felt that the audience should be limited to faculty or "in-house." The suggestion was made repeatedly that more text is needed: something more to frame the document, to convey in it what is unique to Skidmore, and to expand upon it enough for different readers to get more of a sense of what the headers and bullets mean in practice. Finally, it was also noted that the LG document does not adequately represent some students' wishes for some more concrete and practical kinds of learning that might help them in life after college.

In replies, ASC members noted some of the following: we are open to making some changes in the document; it will not be possible to limit the audience of the Learning Goals, and as a draft it is already public and there is some interest in it, especially but not only as an assessment document; we do want to keep it succinct and accessible, but could imagine inserting some more wording in the brief preamble, as well as drafting a framing text aimed in this case at the faculty who will be discussing and voting on it; other frames might be written for other contexts; we welcome further discussion of the goals; we do think they have integrity and are even, for some, inspiring, though it is not intended as a philosophy but as a distillation.

Some on CEPP indicated their understanding that the goals are necessary to progress to the next steps of gathering the evidence of the degree to which students are learning these things. ASC members indicated in turn that we do not want to bring the LG to the faculty for a vote until and unless CEPP endorses them. Sarah also expressed a willingness to try to draft a framing document [time being the principal obstacle!]. Rochelle noted that "absent the context, some could be led in ways you don't intend," and asked for a chance to speak with the ASC about Student Affairs' role; we invited her in to our next meeting.

2. After the CEPP meeting ended, the ASC continued the discussion of the LG. We agreed that the conversation with CEPP had been productive; that we do want and seek their endorsement; that we might have a look at some new language about what is unique about Skidmore in the goals, and entertain other suggestions for revision; that a framing text for the faculty might explain the history and purpose of the goals as well as offer some anecdotal or exemplary details (and that a separate framing text for students and potential applicants should be quite different and “invite them in”); that many areas of the college help to “deliver” this student learning, most especially Student Affairs and also Special Programs, and will be involved in assessment efforts; that we do need to remember our primary charge to summarize the goals for liberal arts education at Skidmore (which may well seem bland, because they are goals we share with countless other colleges but are no less lofty for it); and that it will be helpful to hear next week from Rochelle and perhaps also David Karp about how they think we might amend or frame the LG to make this clear, while still keeping our primary focus on academic learning.

3. We then turned to the students’ document, “Concrete Student Learning Goals.” Claire explained that these were much the same goals they had culled last fall, but that in consultation with Susan Kress they had clustered them by the areas of the college that are most responsible for them (FYE, Career Services, Cross-Curricular). The academic goals, we agreed, are covered directly or indirectly by the LG document and thus are ostensibly part of the curriculum, though we might well want to name more of them explicitly as we indicate how we might elaborate on the succinct bullets. We then talked about where the remaining goals are or might be offered. Mike Profita noted that Career Services has sometimes offered no-credit classes on some of the real-world skills listed on the document, but students have not responded well. We noted that the Scribner Seminars’ 4<sup>th</sup> credit hour had been intended to teach some of the skills—such as time management—to entering students. It seems unlikely that the college Curriculum Committee would approve a 1-credit course with no academic content. Still, we agreed that some of the goals on the list do have enough academic content—Economics, Business, persuasive writing, public speaking—that it might be possible to put together such a 1-credit, one-semester course for seniors in the spring, and that it is well worth looking into.

**Assessment Steering Committee**  
**April 13**

**Meeting Notes**

Present: Lisa Christenson, Ann Henderson, Sue Layden, Michael Ennis-MacMillan, Mike Profita, Erica Bastress-Dukehart, Beau Breslin, Denise Smith, Claire Solomon, Julia Dauer, Leanne Casales, Sarah Goodwin; absent: Jim Chansky, Susan Walzer. **Visitors:** 1. Rochelle Calhoun and David Karp; 2. Michael Casey

1. Erica reported from CEPP: their meeting followed up on our conversation from last week. Their concerns remain the question of audience for the document; how to frame it better and contextualize it; what the assessment tools will be; and whether and how the document represents Skidmore in particular, our strengths and our identity. The question was also raised as to whether there is a deadline for the document. CEPP is not ready to endorse it. Claire affirmed this report.
2. We welcomed Rochelle and David Karp and invited Rochelle to continue the report from CEPP and offer her own comments. Rochelle mentioned that Michael Ennis-MacMillan's comments at our joint meeting had stayed with her: he had said he was concerned to know whether Student Affairs sees its work represented in the LG document. Rochelle said that it does, that Student Affairs can unquestionably see itself in a document that is about support of the students' academic experience. She was struck by an institutional matter: Skidmore's historical resonance as a college with an emphasis on applied and practical learning is absent from this document. Students talk often about the importance for their learning of experiences outside the classroom; that doesn't stand out here.

David then spoke, and noted that he agreed with Rochelle's comments. He added that for him the matter of institutional uniqueness is not so important, but rather the need to reinforce the small liberal arts college as distinct from the larger universities. He also said that he would not like to have a separate set of learning goals for Student Affairs and Academic Affairs, and wondered whether we might enlarge the scope of the LG document. It can be hard to draw the line between intellectual development and personal development. He would prefer an integrated document; Rochelle agreed. Rochelle also noted that giving serious attention to our institutional identity would lead us to an integrated document. David noted that he would endorse and support the items in the CAS learning goals document that he had circulated to us.

Discussion was necessarily brief. Denise noted that our Learning Goals are aiming to stay at a very high level, "way up there" in abstraction, so that no one area is named but everyone can find themselves there and work out the details of their own engagement. We would not want to see a separation of Academic Affairs and Student Affairs, she suggested, and our LGs are in close alignment with the CAS list. Erica noted, in response to David's earlier comments, that the CAS document addresses both larger and smaller institutions and doesn't make any distinctions on that basis. Michael Ennis-MacMillan noted that the CAS document is organized and conceptualized sequentially very similarly to ours.

We agreed to continue the discussion among ourselves next week.

3. Michael Casey described his hopes for a collaboration between the ASC and Advancement around surveying alumni. His area has both interest in and capacity for surveying alums. Alumni often complain that they only hear from us when we want something from them, and in truth

there is value in reinforcing that they remain lifelong members of the community—value for us and for them. There is also potential value in the information we can gather from them. Is there truth in the proposition that a liberal arts education yields “a life more richly led”? Michael’s “grandest of dreams” is an ongoing longitudinal study that would be a rich storehouse of data for our successors.

We have the means to conduct such a study, and could launch this year a big re-engagement from our broad base. There are lots of good reasons to do this now, in this economic climate: at this moment we are having to address questions about our basic mission, or core values. For the fall, we are planning a mid-term assessment of the Strategic Plan, with “town meetings” planned for the fall; we are inviting alumni and others as well. We will address basic questions about the value proposition: Is Skidmore worth it? *Scope* is planning a big fall issue with this question in mind as well. Questions addressed include What do we cost? How do we make it affordable and provide access to all?

If we do launch a major, ongoing study, we could “brand” it, so that alums would know to expect it every year and know that it is our way not just to stay in touch but also to gather information that is valuable to us. We are looking for more ways to make alumni drivers rather than just passengers. And for us, we stand to learn how we are doing on various metrics, for example, on responsible citizenship or healthy lifestyle. His area could train student callers to do survey work. Among other things, information like this could give us a useful response to such flawed ways of measuring “quality” as the *US News & World Report* rankings, which rely so heavily on “input” (SATs, etc) rather than “output” (what students actually have learned).

Responses to Michael: Denise said she is very enthusiastic and believes these are exactly the kinds of relationships and information we should be cultivating. She asked Ann about previous surveys, and Ann noted that IR collaborated with Alumni Affairs and Career Planning on the 2004 survey. She noted that the hardest thing for Alumni Affairs was to let go of information that was oriented toward fundraising—to forego asking about salary or the name of the workplace; she noted that those are questions that reduce participation. (Michael suggested that we can resolve that, and that the survey should come out of the institution as a whole, not out of Advancement.) Ann also noted that the kinds of qualitative data that we would get can be very hard to summarize and this raises questions about validity. How representative are any given individualized responses? Michael Ennis-McMillan noted that even a relatively small alumni survey done by Environmental Studies was a lot of work to process. We also need to communicate results back to alums. Who would do this work, and when?

Sarah noted that it would be good for someone from his area to come to at least part of the May 11 workshop as we consider the scope, sequence and methods for college-wide assessments. As we adjourned, the committee thanked Michael for coming in and agreed that we are quite interested and will take up the subject again.

Agenda for next time:

1. Follow up on Rochelle and David; CEPP’s concerns
2. Follow up on Michael’s ideas; where to go from here

**Assessment Steering Committee**  
**April 20, 2009**

**Meeting Notes**

Present: Jim Chansky, Susan Walzer, Lisa Christenson, Ann Henderson, Sue Layden, Michael Ennis-McMillan, Mike Profita, Erica Bastress-Dukehart, Beau Breslin, Denise Smith, Claire Solomon, Julia Dauer, Leanne Casales, Sarah Goodwin; absent: Claire Solomon.

Note: Michael Ennis-McMillan's name has been misspelled in recent Meeting Notes. Apologies!--SG

1. Erica reported from CEPP: they did not discuss assessment-related matters this morning.
2. Sarah reported on the discussion of the Learning Goals with the Council of 100 on Saturday. Their discussion reinforced much of the response that we have been hearing from CEPP and others. They were quite enthusiastic about the goals overall [one of them said, "This is what you get graded on in life!]. One main point was that they felt this learning is happening all over the college and not just in the curriculum. They also talked, without consensus, about whether the goals capture what is particular about Skidmore. [Susan Kress posed this question.] The discussion was followed by a captivating student panel on what they are learning, in which they demonstrated learning in just about all of the bullet points.
3. Beau reported on an assessment meeting he attended this weekend at Hamilton. In short, he reported that the other colleges present are doing very interesting and creative assessment work ("way ahead of us"); their work on learning goals is already behind them, he noted.
4. Sarah raised briefly the question of follow-up to Michael Casey's visit last week. Ann voiced again her concerns about gathering too much qualitative data that would be difficult to put into useful form and would remain anecdotal. Sarah noted that Advancement will be holding the Town Meetings in any case, and the question is whether we want to propose some specific questions for them to be posing to alums in meetings and surveys. We agreed that we have some interest in doing so, but didn't refine it further than that today; Sarah floated the idea of basing a few questions on the LG. We will respond that we remain interested. [As suggested earlier, part of the May workshop could be dedicated to refining this, working with Advancement.]
5. We talked about the students' concerns about practical learning, and whether it is implicit in the LG document, and if so, where. We returned to the idea of a one-credit class (ID 399: "Out of the Bubble"). Sarah agreed to raise the subject with Susan Kress to see about potential interest in and funding for an initiative to get one started. Might there be grant funding? If it were an online course, potentially with a handful of face time, it might be possible to create one for all interested seniors that would not require a big investment of faculty time. It was noted that Paul Calhoun is offering a 1-credit course for seniors in MB (on "A Brand Called Me"), and Mike showed us a book given to the Class of 2005 by the Alumni Association, *Life After School. Explained.*, that addresses many of the students' goals.
6. We talked about how to respond to Rochelle Calhoun's and David Karp's concerns. Two stand out: Should the LG reflect more emphatically Skidmore's traditional strengths in bridging theory with practice and strategic emphasis now on civic responsibility? And should we aim to create a more "integrated document" that would incorporate more of the goals from the CAS list that DK circulated? Consensus seemed to emerge:

- We need to take these concerns seriously.
- Most of the CAS goals are represented in our LG.
- We are willing to change the title to “Goals for Student Learning and Development.”
- We want to consider adding bullets [or potentially even a headline?] that will embrace the competencies from the CAS document that don’t appear in ours.

Beau agreed to draft one or more possible bullets along these lines for us to consider.

Just after the meeting ended, Lisa also volunteered to synthesize the CAS goals with our LG to show where they overlap, and where they don’t.

7. For next time:

- Consider Beau’s draft.
- Return to the title of the LG: now firmly “Goals for Student Learning and Development”?
- Are there ways that the sense of civic responsibility could come out more in the LG?  
(Anyone want to play with this for next time?)
- Next steps for the Goals?
- Plan for the workshops

**Assessment Steering Committee**  
**April 27, 2009**

**Meeting Notes**

Present: Jim Chansky, Susan Walzer, Lisa Christenson, Ann Henderson, Sue Layden, Michael Ennis-McMillan, Mike Profita, Erica Bastress-Dukehart, Beau Breslin, Denise Smith, Claire Solomon, Sarah Goodwin; absent: Julia Dauer.

1. Erica reported from CEPP: a) they discussed the Learning Goals again and agreed that they hope to see a final draft from us in time for their meeting next Monday. b) Dan Nathan, Kyle Nichols, Bob Turner and Erica expressed interest in taking part in the May 11 workshop on general education.
2. We talked briefly about the workshops. Some points made:
  - Jim Chansky is available for both; Sue Layden will take part on the 13<sup>th</sup>. [Denise Smith is not sure yet whether she will be available, but hopes to be.]
  - The stipend for \$500 to faculty covers the workshop, some time for preparation (short readings), and potentially a short follow-up meeting. The goal is to plan for assessing on the college level. Further assessment work by faculty beyond the workshop may be further compensated. [Sarah is in discussion with Susan Kress about compensation for staff, but it looks unlikely.]
  - Lisa is tracking potential attendees.
  - To clarify: Walvoord will work for part of the day with chairs and directors, and part of the day with the core group. We do not yet have a schedule worked out; that depends in part on who will be taking part. [It seems possible that we could have Walvoord start off with the gen ed group, get us started with some pointed questions and tasks, meet with chairs, and return to the gen ed group after that.]
  - Henning will work with the Goal II group Wednesday after the faculty meeting. There were no responses to Sarah's invitations to other areas of the college to make use of him that morning. Lisa will communicate with him about whether it makes more sense for him to travel that morning to start at noon with us.
3. We discussed Beau's proposed changes to the goals in response to the students' wishes for more practical learning and in response to the CAS document and Rochelle Calhoun's and David Karp's visit. After lively discussion, we approved some changes:
  - We added a bullet under headline **II. Personal and Social Values**: "Develop practical competencies for managing a personal and professional life."
  - We added a bullet under headline **IV. Transformation**: "Foster habits of mind and body that enable a person to live deliberately."
  - We also made changes to bullet #4: we changed "Apply learning to find solutions for personal, social, and scientific problems" to "Apply learning to find solutions for social, civic, and scientific problems"
4. There was a hesitant consensus about these changes. We agreed to vet them on email with the goals of settling the ASC's final draft by Wednesday and forward it to CEPP. We were out of time but wished to discuss the proposed new short preamble text as well; we agreed to vet both today's amendments and the preamble on email by Wednesday. Proposed new text:

## **Assessment Steering Committee Draft**

### **Goals for Student Learning and Development**

The goals that follow reflect certain emphases that are deeply engrained in Skidmore's history and culture: on creativity, on civic responsibility, and on interdisciplinary thinking. From Skidmore's earliest days, our students have learned to link theory with practical learning in real-world situations. Although the college has changed dramatically over time, we still aim to graduate students who can think deeply and creatively, communicate well, and act effectively. Increasingly, in recent years, we have expanded our sense of civic responsibility to include intercultural understanding and global citizenship. We take pride in having been in the forefront of the renewed emphases many colleges are placing now on values we have held for decades.

Our goals emerge in particular from our collective sense of a Skidmore education as a transformative experience: we want our graduates to possess both knowledge and capacities that enable them to embrace change and apply their learning lifelong in new contexts. We believe that this learning takes place throughout our students' experience, both inside the classroom and out, on campus and off. Our goals articulate, then, in language that is as clear and lean as possible, our understanding of students' learning and development at Skidmore. They lay the groundwork for our continued inquiry into the evidence of the nature and extent of that learning.

#### **I. Knowledge**

- Acquire knowledge of human cultures and the physical world through study in the arts, humanities, languages, mathematics, natural sciences, and social sciences
- Understand social and cultural diversity in national and global contexts
- Demonstrate advanced learning and synthesis in both general and specialized studies

#### **II. Intellectual Skills**

- Think critically, creatively and independently
- Gather, analyze, integrate, and apply varied forms of information; understand and use evidence
- Communicate effectively
- Engage in and take responsibility for learning
- Interact effectively and collaboratively with individuals and across social identities

#### **III. Personal and Social Values**

- Examine one's own values and their use as ethical criteria in thought and action
- Interrogate one's own values in relation to those of others, across social and cultural differences
- Develop practical competencies for managing a personal and professional life
- Apply learning to find solutions for social, civic and scientific problems

#### **IV. Transformation**

- Integrate and apply knowledge and creative thought from multiple disciplines in new contexts
- Embrace intellectual humility
- Foster habits of mind and body that enable a person to live deliberately.
- Develop an enduring disposition to learn.