

General Education Task Force subcommittee
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Report on the General Education Faculty and Alumni Surveys

As part of its charge to consider revision of the core curriculum, the General Education Task Force asked faculty and alumni to share their opinions on the goals of general education at Appalachian. The survey asked faculty and alumni questions about the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that should be gained as part of a general education. In addition, faculty and alumni were asked questions regarding the quality of the educational experience at Appalachian.

Method

Participants

Faculty. Approximately 1,000 course instructors received e-mail invitations to complete the survey. Primary course instructors were identified through the Spring 2006 master course file. Survey responses were received from 256 faculty members. Of those who responded 75% were on the tenure track and 82% were full-time instructors. Their ranks were: 30% professor, 26.5% associate professor, 24.1% assistant professor, 11.1% instructor, and 8.3% lecturer. Table 1 shows the departmental affiliation of respondents. Over 90% of respondents reported that they had taught in the undergraduate curriculum in the past 3 years, but only 50% reported that they had taught a course on the Core Curriculum checklist in the last 3 years.

Alumni. The Office of Alumni Affairs provided a database of all alumni who graduated between 1985 and 2005. Of the 16,876 alumni with a listed e-mail address, a

random sample of 4,000 alumni was selected to participate in the study. Many of these e-mail addresses were returned as undeliverable. Responses were received from 625 alumni, 484 of which completed their general education at Appalachian State University. For the purposes of this report, only students who completed their general education requirements at ASU were included in the analysis.

Procedure

Faculty and alumni were sent an e-mail explaining the purpose of the survey and inviting them to participate. The e-mail contained a web link to the survey. A reminder was sent out about a week after the initial e-mail and the survey remained open for a total of two weeks.

Results

Faculty

Table 2 shows faculty responses to the importance of various goals and outcomes of a general education, while Table 3 shows faculty beliefs about the learning that occurs at Appalachian in each area. Table 4 provides the means for each question and the performance gap, or difference between the importance mean and learning mean for each outcome. The five goals that received the highest mean ratings from faculty for importance were 1) written communication; 2) critical thinking; 3) oral communication; 4) problem-solving skills; and 5) ethical behavior. In contrast, the five goals that received the highest mean ratings for learning were 1) computing skills; 2) understanding of the social sciences; 3) understanding of the humanities; and 4 and 5) specific job-related skills and teamwork (tie).

As shown in Table 4, according to faculty, the largest gaps between importance and learning were in integrative thinking, critical thinking, written communication, problem-solving skills, and oral communication. When asked which five goals or outcomes of a general education were most important, faculty were most likely to select 1) critical thinking; 2) written communication; 3) oral communication; 4) problem-solving; and 5) integrative thinking (Table 5). Finally, Table 6 presents faculty responses to statements regarding the quality of an Appalachian education. Few faculty (20%) agreed that general education courses at Appalachian are engaging.

Alumni

Table 7 presents alumni responses to the importance of various goals and outcomes of a general education, while Table 8 shows alumni beliefs about how their education at Appalachian contributed to their gains in each area. Table 9 provides the means for each question and the performance gap, or difference between the importance mean and gain mean for each outcome. The five goals that received the highest mean ratings from alumni for importance were 1) and 2) written communication and oral communication (tie); 3) critical thinking; 4) ethical behavior; and 5) organization and time management. In comparison, the five goals that received the highest mean ratings for gains were 1) critical thinking; 2) written communication; 3) teamwork; and 4) and 5) information literacy and oral communication (tie).

As shown in Table 9, alumni reported that the largest gaps between importance and learning were in basic financial competency, foreign language competency, computing skills, and organization and time management. When asked which five goals or outcomes of a general education were most important, alumni were most likely to select 1) oral communication; 2) written communication; 3) critical thinking; 4) problem-

solving skills; and 5) organization and time management (Table 10). Finally, Table 11 shows alumni responses to statements regarding the quality of an Appalachian education. More than half of alumni respondents agreed that their general education courses at Appalachian were engaging.

Comparison of faculty and alumni responses

Table 12 compares the responses of alumni and faculty on the importance of each possible outcome of general education. There was a great deal of consistency between the groups in the ordering of importance. The top three responses for both groups included written communication, critical thinking, and oral communication. Ethical behavior was also included in both groups' top five responses. However, alumni gave higher responses than faculty on goals such as organization and time management, computing skills, teamwork, and experiential learning. Faculty gave higher responses than alumni on goals such as an understanding of issues facing the world and awareness of the world's diversity.

Table 1

Departmental Affiliation of Faculty Respondents

Department	Frequency	Percent
AS-English	20	7.8
AS-Biology	14	5.5
AS-Mathematical Sciences	12	4.7
AS-Psychology	12	4.7
RCOE-Leadership and Educational Studies	12	4.7
AS-Interdisciplinary Studies	11	4.3
FAA-Communication	11	4.3
RCOE-Curriculum and Instruction	11	4.3
AS-Political Science & Criminal Justice	9	3.5
AS-History	8	3.1
FAA-Health, Leisure, and Exercise Science	8	3.1
FAA-Technology	8	3.1
FAA-Theatre and Dance	8	3.1
HSM-Music	8	3.1
AS-Chemistry	7	2.7
AS-Philosophy and Religion	7	2.7
AS-Sociology and Social Work	7	2.7
FAA-Art	7	2.7
FAA-Family and Consumer Sciences	7	2.7
WCOB-Management	7	2.7
AS-Anthropology	6	2.3
RCOE-Language, Reading, and Exceptionalities	6	2.3
AS-Foreign Languages and Literatures	5	2.0
AS-Geography and Planning	5	2.0
AS-Geology	5	2.0
RCOE-Human Development and Psychological Counseling	5	2.0
WCOB-Accounting	5	2.0
WCOB-Economics	5	2.0
AS-Physics and Astronomy	4	1.6
WCOB-Marketing	4	1.6
AS-Computer Science	3	1.2
WCOB-Finance, Banking, and Insurance	3	1.2
AS-Special Studies	2	.8
FAA-Military Science and Leadership	2	.8
WCOB-Computer Information Systems	2	.8

Table 2

Faculty: How important are the following goals or outcomes of a general education?

	Not important at all	2	3	4	Very important
Specific Job-Related Skills	9.9%	28.5%	26.1%	17.8%	17.8%
Written Communication	.4%	0%	2.7%	7.1%	89.8%
Oral Communication	.8%	.4%	3.5%	16.9%	78.4%
Critical Thinking	.4%	.4%	2.7%	9.4%	87.1%
Research Skills	1.2%	1.6%	9.1%	31.1%	57.1%
Organization and Time Management	1.6%	4.3%	15.3%	30.2%	48.6%
Problem Solving Skills	.4%	.4%	3.9%	22.0%	73.3%
Ability to Interpret Numerical Data	.8%	3.9%	17.3%	33.7%	44.3%
Awareness & Appreciation of World's Diversity	.8%	4.7%	14.5%	28.2%	51.8%
Respect for Diverse Opinions	1.6%	3.5%	15.0%	28.3%	51.6%
Ethical Behavior	.8%	2.0%	11.4%	16.9%	69.0%
Computing Skills	.8%	5.1%	16.6%	37.2%	40.3%
Teamwork	1.2%	5.1%	16.5%	39.0%	38.2%
Information Literacy	.4%	.8%	8.3%	29.6%	60.9%
Basic Financial Competency	8.6%	14.1%	27.1%	29.8%	20.4%
Foreign Language Competency	6.3%	15.0%	27.6%	33.5%	17.7%
International Experience	4.7%	15.0%	29.1%	33.1%	18.1%
Understanding of Social Sciences	.8%	5.9%	16.9%	39.8%	36.6%
Understanding of Natural Sciences	2.0%	6.7%	18.9%	39.4%	33.1%
Understanding of Humanities	.8%	6.9%	19.0%	34.3%	39.1%
An Understanding of the Issues Facing the World	1.2%	3.5%	10.2%	29.1%	55.9%
Intercultural Skills	1.2%	4.7%	13.0%	36.0%	45.1%
Civic Engagement	4.8%	10.8%	19.9%	37.1%	27.5%
Integrative Thinking	1.2%	.8%	10.3%	24.5%	63.2%
Experiential Learning	3.2%	8.7%	18.2%	33.6%	36.4%
Health and Wellness	5.1%	8.7%	26.1%	34.0%	26.1%

Table 3

Faculty: To what extent do you believe that education at Appalachian contributes to student learning in the following areas?

	Not at all	2	3	4	Very much
Specific Job-Related Skills	5.2%	21.1%	39.0%	23.5%	11.2%
Written Communication	2.4%	20.6%	50.4%	20.6%	6.0%
Oral Communication	2.4%	27.4%	44.0%	21.0%	5.2%
Critical Thinking	3.2%	27.4%	44.4%	19.4%	5.6%
Research Skills	6.7%	28.2%	40.9%	20.6%	3.6%
Organization and Time Management	6.8%	27.9%	43.0%	19.5%	2.8%
Problem Solving Skills	4.8%	25.4%	46.4%	19.0%	4.4%
Ability to Interpret Numerical Data	8.4%	29.7%	39.8%	18.9%	3.2%
Awareness & Appreciation of World's Diversity	4.4%	29.9%	35.5%	21.9%	8.4%
Respect for Diverse Opinions	6.0%	28.0%	35.6%	23.2%	7.2%
Ethical Behavior	8.8%	28.0%	42.8%	15.2%	5.2%
Computing Skills	2.0%	11.6%	41.0%	33.3%	12.0%
Teamwork	2.4%	18.9%	45.4%	28.5%	4.8%
Information Literacy	4.0%	24.0%	44.0%	24.0%	4.0%
Basic Financial Competency	20.6%	32.1%	39.5%	6.6%	1.2%
Foreign Language Competency	23.2%	32.9%	35.0%	6.5%	2.4%
International Experience	8.4%	28.5%	32.1%	25.7%	5.2%
Understanding of Social Sciences	2.0%	16.7%	41.1%	30.5%	9.8%
Understanding of Natural Sciences	4.9%	20.2%	39.7%	28.7%	6.5%
Understanding of Humanities	3.3%	15.9%	41.9%	29.7%	9.3%
An Understanding of the Issues Facing the World	7.2%	30.9%	44.2%	14.5%	3.2%
Intercultural Skills	13.8%	33.3%	38.6%	11.4%	2.8%
Civic Engagement	10.2%	32.4%	40.2%	13.9%	3.3%
Integrative Thinking	11.7%	33.9%	39.9%	12.5%	2.0%
Experiential Learning	6.9%	22.2%	46.8%	19.4%	4.8%
Health and Wellness	8.9%	27.6%	38.6%	20.3%	4.5%

Table 4
Faculty: Means and Performance Gap

Goal/Outcome	Importance Mean	Learning Mean	Performance Gap
Specific Job-Related Skills	3.05	3.14	-0.09
Written Communication	4.86	3.07	1.79
Oral Communication	4.72	2.99	1.73
Critical Thinking	4.82	2.97	1.85
Research Skills	4.41	2.86	1.55
Organization and Time Management	4.20	2.84	1.36
Problem Solving Skills	4.67	2.93	1.74
Ability to Interpret Numerical Data	4.17	2.79	1.38
Awareness & Appreciation of World's Diversity	4.25	3.00	1.25
Respect for Diverse Opinions	4.25	2.98	1.27
Ethical Behavior	4.51	2.80	1.71
Computing Skills	4.11	3.42	0.69
Teamwork	4.08	3.14	0.94
Information Literacy	4.50	3.00	1.50
Basic Financial Competency	3.39	2.36	1.03
Foreign Language Competency	3.41	2.32	1.09
International Experience	3.45	2.91	0.54
Understanding of Social Sciences	4.06	3.29	0.77
Understanding of Natural Sciences	3.95	3.12	0.83
Understanding of Humanities	4.04	3.26	0.78
An Understanding of the Issues Facing the World	4.35	2.76	1.59
Intercultural Skills	4.19	2.56	1.63
Civic Engagement	3.72	2.68	1.04
Integrative Thinking	4.48	2.59	1.89
Experiential Learning	3.91	2.93	0.98
Health and Wellness	3.67	2.84	0.83

Note: 1 = not important at all/not at all; 5 = very important/very much

Table 5

Faculty: Which five goals or outcomes of a general education are most important?

Goals/Outcomes	N	Percent of Total Responses	Percent of Respondents
Specific Job-Related Skills	21	1.7%	8.2%
Written Communication	190	15.0%	74.2%
Oral Communication	130	10.3%	50.8%
Critical Thinking	195	15.4%	76.2%
Research Skills	50	4.0%	19.5%
Organization and Time Management	23	1.8%	9.0%
Problem Solving Skills	122	9.6%	47.7%
Ability to Interpret Numerical Data	26	2.1%	10.2%
Awareness & Appreciation of World's Diversity	43	3.4%	16.8%
Respect for Diverse Opinions	39	3.1%	15.2%
Ethical Behavior	72	5.7%	28.1%
Computing Skills	15	1.2%	5.9%
Teamwork	24	1.9%	9.4%
Information Literacy	34	2.7%	13.3%
Basic Financial Competency	5	.4%	2.0%
Foreign Language Competency	19	1.5%	7.4%
International Experience	10	.8%	3.9%
Understanding of Social Sciences	22	1.7%	8.6%
Understanding of Natural Sciences	26	2.1%	10.2%
Understanding of Humanities	25	2.0%	9.8%
An Understanding of the Issues Facing the World	60	4.7%	23.4%
Intercultural Skills	11	.9%	4.3%
Civic Engagement	16	1.3%	6.3%
Integrative Thinking	69	5.5%	27.0%
Experiential Learning	5	.4%	2.0%
Health and Wellness	13	1.0%	5.1%
Total	1265	100.0%	494.1%

Table 6
 Faculty: Quality of an Appalachian Education

	Strongly disagree	2	3	4	Strongly agree
Students who graduate from Appalachian are adequately prepared to adapt to an ever-changing job market	4.4%	11.9%	52.8%	29.0%	2.0%
Students receive a high quality education at Appalachian	2.8%	8.0%	30.0%	51.2%	8.0%
The general education courses at Appalachian are engaging	6.4%	30.7%	43.0%	19.1%	.8%

Table 7

Alumni: How important are the following goals or outcomes of a general education?

	Not important at all	2	3	4	Very important
Specific Job-Related Skills	1.2%	7.8%	21%	32.9%	37%
Written Communication	.2%	.2%	3.7%	19.9%	76.1%
Oral Communication	.3%	0%	3.3%	20%	76.4%
Critical Thinking	.2%	0%	2.4%	25.8%	71.6%
Research Skills	.3%	1.6%	13.7%	42.3%	42.1%
Organization and Time Management	.2%	.9%	6.1%	29.7%	63.1%
Problem Solving Skills	.3%	.5%	5.6%	37.4%	56.2%
Ability to Interpret Numerical Data	.5%	5.2%	23.5%	40.3%	30.4%
Awareness & Appreciation of World's Diversity	2.1%	8.9%	24.8%	33%	31.3%
Respect for Diverse Opinions	.7%	6.3%	21.6%	34%	37.5%
Ethical Behavior	.9%	.9%	7.1%	25.2%	66.8%
Computing Skills	.2%	1.0%	7.7%	31%	60.2%
Teamwork	.2%	.3%	9.8%	33.6%	56.1%
Information Literacy	.3%	1.0%	9.1%	42.6%	46.9%
Basic Financial Competency	.9%	4%	17.2%	36.7%	41.2%
Foreign Language Competency	8.9%	23.2%	40.7%	18.3%	8.9%
International Experience	9.2%	27%	34.8%	18.3%	10.6%
Understanding of Social Sciences	2.4%	12.4%	35.3%	34%	15.9%
Understanding of Natural Sciences	7%	17.7%	38.8%	25.9%	10.6%
Understanding of Humanities	5.6%	18.6%	36.1%	27.5%	12.1%
An Understanding of the Issues Facing the World	1.6%	3.7%	21.3%	42.1%	31.3%
Intercultural Skills	.7%	4.7%	18.8%	37.5%	38.3%
Civic Engagement	3%	12.7%	37.3%	33%	14%
Integrative Thinking	.3%	2.1%	14.4%	42.1%	41%
Experiential Learning	.2%	2.4%	10.6%	35.2%	51.6%
Health and Wellness	.9%	6.3%	23.8%	40.5%	28.5%

Table 8

Alumni: To what extent did your education at Appalachian contribute to your gains in the following areas?

	Not at all	2	3	4	Very much
Specific Job-Related Skills	2.8%	13.4%	29.3%	30.7%	23.9%
Written Communication	1.0%	3.3%	19.1%	40%	36.5%
Oral Communication	1.1%	6.7%	21.4%	37%	34%
Critical Thinking	.3%	3.8%	17.6%	42.1%	36.1%
Research Skills	1.6%	5.8%	21.8%	40.1%	30.7%
Organization and Time Management	3.8%	8.9%	29%	31.6%	26.7%
Problem Solving Skills	1.2%	4.0%	23.6%	47%	24.1%
Ability to Interpret Numerical Data	3.5%	13.1%	30.1%	34.7%	18.6%
Awareness & Appreciation of World's Diversity	4.4%	16.6%	34.4%	26.9%	17.8%
Respect for Diverse Opinions	2.8%	14.1%	31.1%	31.2%	20.8%
Ethical Behavior	3.0%	7.9%	25.2%	34.8%	29.2%
Computing Skills	4.7%	13.3%	25.6%	29.4%	27.0%
Teamwork	1.4%	5.6%	15.5%	41.4%	36.1%
Information Literacy	.7%	3.5%	23.5%	43.9%	28.4%
Basic Financial Competency	15.9%	22.7%	27.9%	22.0%	11.5%
Foreign Language Competency	44.8%	24.2%	20.0%	7.5%	3.5%
International Experience	44.8%	21.2%	17.3%	7.9%	8.9%
Understanding of Social Sciences	2.4%	13.1%	35.1%	32.3%	17.0%
Understanding of Natural Sciences	8.0%	19.7%	39.3%	21.1%	11.9%
Understanding of Humanities	4.8%	13.7%	34.2%	28.7%	18.6%
An Understanding of the Issues Facing the World	4.7%	16.1%	37.4%	29.7%	12.1%
Intercultural Skills	6.9%	14.3%	30.2%	28.0%	20.6%
Civic Engagement	10.9%	24.4%	35.7%	19.7%	9.3%
Integrative Thinking	1.4%	4.8%	27.8%	42.3%	23.8%
Experiential Learning	2.8%	8.1%	24.7%	35.7%	28.7%
Health and Wellness	6.6%	14.2%	35.8%	28.7%	14.7%

Table 9
Alumni: Means and Gap

Goal/Outcome	Importance Mean	Gain Mean	Performance Gap
Specific Job-Related Skills	3.97	3.59	0.38
Written Communication	4.72	4.08	0.64
Oral Communication	4.72	3.96	0.76
Critical Thinking	4.69	4.10	0.59
Research Skills	4.24	3.93	0.31
Organization and Time Management	4.55	3.68	0.87
Problem Solving Skills	4.49	3.89	0.60
Ability to Interpret Numerical Data	3.95	3.52	0.43
Awareness & Appreciation of World's Diversity	3.82	3.37	0.45
Respect for Diverse Opinions	4.01	3.53	0.48
Ethical Behavior	4.58	3.79	0.79
Computing Skills	4.50	3.61	0.89
Teamwork	4.45	4.05	0.40
Information Literacy	4.35	3.96	0.39
Basic Financial Competency	4.13	2.91	1.22
Foreign Language Competency	2.95	2.01	0.94
International Experience	2.94	2.15	0.79
Understanding of Social Sciences	3.49	3.48	0.01
Understanding of Natural Sciences	3.15	3.09	0.06
Understanding of Humanities	3.22	3.43	-0.21
An Understanding of the Issues Facing the World	3.98	3.28	0.70
Intercultural Skills	4.08	3.41	0.67
Civic Engagement	3.42	2.92	0.50
Integrative Thinking	4.21	3.82	0.39
Experiential Learning	4.36	3.80	0.56
Health and Wellness	3.90	3.31	0.59

Note: 1 = not important at all/not at all; 5 = very important/very much

Table 10

Alumni: Which five goals or outcomes of a general education are most important?

Goals/Outcomes	N	Percent of Total Responses	Percent of Respondents
Specific Job-Related Skills	166	5.8%	28.8%
Written Communication	391	13.6%	67.9%
Oral Communication	418	14.6%	72.6%
Critical Thinking	310	10.8%	53.8%
Research Skills	65	2.3%	11.3%
Organization and Time Management	239	8.3%	41.5%
Problem Solving Skills	291	10.1%	50.5%
Ability to Interpret Numerical Data	16	.6%	2.8%
Awareness & Appreciation of World's Diversity	42	1.4%	7.3%
Respect for Diverse Opinions	61	2.1%	10.6%
Ethical Behavior	152	5.3%	26.4%
Computing Skills	150	5.2%	26.0%
Teamwork	184	6.4%	31.9%
Information Literacy	37	1.3%	6.4%
Basic Financial Competency	64	2.2%	11.1%
Foreign Language Competency	9	.3%	1.6%
International Experience	7	.2%	1.2%
Understanding of Social Sciences	13	.5%	2.3%
Understanding of Natural Sciences	9	.3%	1.6%
Understanding of Humanities	14	.5%	2.4%
An Understanding of the Issues Facing the World	48	1.7%	8.3%
Intercultural Skills	12	.4%	2.1%
Civic Engagement	8	.3%	1.4%
Integrative Thinking	79	2.8%	13.7%
Experiential Learning	65	2.3%	11.3%
Health and Wellness	18	.6%	3.1%
TOTAL	2868	100%	497.8%

Table 11
 Alumni: Quality of an Appalachian Education

	Strongly disagree	2	3	4	Strongly agree
My Appalachian education has adequately prepared me to adapt to an ever-changing job market.	1.9%	4.2%	22.7%	46.2%	25.0%
I received a high quality education at Appalachian	1.2%	1.4%	7.6%	39.1%	50.7%
My general education courses at Appalachian were engaging	2.6%	10.6%	27.8%	40.5%	18.6%

Table 12

Comparison of Faculty and Alumni Responses – How important are the following goals...

Question	Faculty			Alumni		
	Mean	Rank	% Important / Very Important	Mean	Rank	% Important / Very Important
Written Communication	4.86	1	96.9	4.72	1	96.0
Critical Thinking	4.82	2	96.5	4.69	3	97.4
Oral Communication	4.72	3	95.3	4.72	2	96.4
Problem Solving Skills	4.67	4	95.3	4.49	7	93.6
Ethical Behavior	4.51	5	85.9	4.58	4	92.0
Information Literacy	4.50	6	90.5	4.35	10	89.5
Integrative Thinking	4.48	7	87.7	4.21	12	83.1
Research Skills	4.41	8	88.2	4.24	11	84.3
An Understanding of the Issues Facing the World	4.35	9	85.0	3.98	16	73.4
Awareness and Appreciation of World's Diversity	4.25	10	80.0	3.82	20	64.2
Respect for Diverse Opinions	4.25	11	79.9	4.01	15	71.4
Organization and Time Management	4.20	12	78.8	4.55	5	92.9
Intercultural Skills	4.19	13	81.1	4.08	14	75.7
Ability to Interpret Numerical Data	4.17	14	78.0	3.95	18	70.8
Computing Skills	4.11	15	77.5	4.50	6	91.1
Teamwork	4.08	16	77.2	4.45	8	89.7
Understanding of Social Sciences	4.06	17	76.4	3.49	21	49.9
Understanding of Humanities	4.04	18	73.4	3.22	23	39.6
Understanding of Natural Sciences	3.95	19	72.5	3.15	24	36.5
Experiential Learning	3.91	20	70.0	4.36	9	86.8
Civic Engagement	3.72	21	64.6	3.42	22	46.9
Health and Wellness	3.67	22	60.1	3.90	19	69.0
International Experience	3.45	23	51.2	2.94	26	28.9
Foreign Language Competency	3.41	24	51.2	2.95	25	27.2
Basic Financial Competency	3.39	25	50.2	4.13	13	77.9
Specific Job-Related Skills	3.05	26	35.6	3.97	17	69.9