

University Learning Goals

Eastern Illinois University Council on Academic Affairs

Revised EIU Learning Goals Adopted

On January 16, 2014, the EIU Council on Academic Affairs adopted revised undergraduate University Learning Goals, which become effective during the Fall 2014 semester.

EIU graduates reason and communicate clearly as responsible citizens and leaders in diverse personal, professional, and civic contexts.

Critical Thinking

EIU graduates question, examine, evaluate, and respond to problems by:

- Asking essential questions and engaging diverse perspectives.
- Seeking and gathering data, information, and knowledge from experience, texts, graphics, and media.
- Understanding, interpreting, and critiquing relevant data, information, and knowledge.
- Synthesizing and integrating data, information, and knowledge to infer and create new insights.
- Anticipating, reflecting upon, and evaluating implications of assumptions, arguments, hypotheses, and conclusions.
- Creating and presenting defensible expressions, arguments, positions, hypotheses, and proposals.

Writing and Critical Reading

EIU graduates write critically and evaluate varied sources by:

- Creating documents appropriate for specific audiences, purposes, genres, disciplines, and professions.
- Crafting cogent and defensible applications, analyses, evaluations, and arguments about problems, ideas, and issues.
- Producing documents that are well-organized, focused, and cohesive.
- Using appropriate vocabulary, mechanics, grammar, diction, and sentence structure.
- Understanding, questioning, analyzing, and synthesizing complex textual, numeric, and graphical sources.
- Evaluating evidence, issues, ideas, and problems from multiple perspectives.
- Collecting and employing source materials ethically and understanding their strengths and limitations.

(continued on page 4)



Learning Goals Workshop Series

Introduction

February 20, 10 am-noon
Arcola-Tuscola Room

Writing and Critical Reading

February 25, 2-4 pm
Arcola-Tuscola Room

Speaking and Listening

March 3, 2-4 pm
Arcola-Tuscola Room

Critical Thinking

March 21, 11 am –1 pm
1103 Buzzard Hall

Responsible Citizenship

March 24, 2-4 pm
Arcola-Tuscola Room

Quantitative Reasoning

April 1, 10 am-noon
Arcola-Tuscola Room

Improving Student Achievement through Increased Academic Rigor

Background

In response to multi-year concerns about student learning outcome data relative to the Eastern Illinois University's four undergraduate learning goals, and in concert with the Provost's priorities for improvement, the EIU Council on Academic Affairs in November 2011 began gathering information and data in order to review the integration, instructional practices, and effectiveness of the goals (writing, speaking, critical thinking, and global citizenship). The results of this study may be found at: www.eiu.edu/learninggoals/pdfs/CAA_Learning_Goals_Review_Report_Final.pdf

This study reviewed learning goal assessment data from the Committee for Assessment of Student Learning, relevant research and practitioner literature, practices of peer and non-peer institutions, the results from a university-wide faculty survey, and representative general education and major program syllabi. The study led to the development of a five-year plan designed to improve student achievement in the undergraduate learning goals through a systematic increase in academic rigor. This plan, and the CAA resolution which established it, may be found at: www.eiu.edu/learninggoals/pdfs/CAA_13-83_CAA LearningGoals CommResolution.pdf

Development and Adoption of Revised University Learning Goals

Consistent with best practices in curriculum development at the institutional level, the first step in this five-year plan was to review, revise, and clarify the overarching learning goals for all undergraduate students. The Council on Academic Affairs and key faculty with expertise in the learning goal areas, worked through the summer and fall of 2013 to draft and publicize the revised learning goals, which

CAA formally adopted on January 16, 2014. The revised University Learning Goals will become effective during the Fall 2014 semester.

During the Spring 2014 semester, CAA is conducting a series of workshops to introduce the five revised learning goals to the campus community (see schedule on first page). These workshops will be led by faculty committees who have worked this year to identify curricular, instructional, and assessment resources and practices that will support systematic student achievement in the learning goals in both the general education and major programs across campus.

An initial workshop, designed to set the context and establish the rationale for the revision and implementation of the revised learning goals, was conducted on February 20 by Rebecca Throneburg and Stephen Lucas, co-chairs of the CAA Committee on General Education and University Learning Goals. This newsletter briefly summarizes the content of that workshop and focuses on the rationale and impetus for revising the learning goals and developing a systematic approach to supporting student achievement in the curricular, instructional, and assessment practices in both general education and major programs across campus. Handouts and video from this session will be available on the CAA Learning Goals website (www.eiu.edu/learninggoals).

Pressures on Higher Education

Institutions of higher education, like Eastern Illinois University, find themselves in a rapidly changing context today. Some of the pressures EIU, like other regional universities, faces include:

- Parents and families who are increasingly “outcomes” oriented, i.e., concerned with employment

prospects. The recent economic downturn and the rising cost of higher education have caused families to take a hard look at the value of a four-year degree.

- Graduate schools and future employers expect university graduates to possess high levels of critical thinking and communication skills in order to be successful. Graduates are expected to exhibit strong competence in these skill areas regardless of the major program which they have completed.
- The likelihood of eventual, externally-imposed accountability measures. At both the federal and state levels, legislators and administration officials are beginning to propose developing and implementing measures of student outcomes, including employment rates and those related to learning outcomes, and then publishing these results to better inform families about the performance of colleges and universities. Some states are also considering tying funding of institutions to these measures.
- States are also expecting ever-higher achievement by all students. With the current implementation of the Common Core State Standards in K-12 schools, states are beginning to encourage college and universities to reexamine their curricula to ensure that the expectations of undergraduates truly build “on top” of the newly-raised graduation expectations of high schools. At the same time, states are expecting colleges and universities to reduce the amount of non-credit bearing, remedial coursework taken by students.

Rationale for the Five-Year Plan

The rationale for the five-year plan developed by CAA is grounded in EIU's mission statement, the university's recently completed strategic plan, the accreditation expectations of the Higher Learning Commission, and CAA's shared governance role in improving the university's curriculum and student learning outcomes.

EIU's Mission Statement

EIU's mission statement declares that it is "a public comprehensive university that offers superior, accessible undergraduate and graduate education. Students learn the methods and results of free and rigorous inquiry in the arts, humanities, sciences, and professions, guided by a faculty known for its excellence in teaching, research, creative activity, and service. The University community is committed to diversity and inclusion and fosters opportunities for student-faculty scholarship and applied learning experiences within a student-centered campus culture. Throughout their education, students refine their abilities to reason and to communicate clearly so as to become responsible citizens and leaders." (www.eiu.edu/about/mission.php, emphasis added)

University's Strategic Plan

The recently-conducted university strategic planning process identified "academic excellence" as one of the six major areas of focus for improvement at EIU. Included within this focus area was the need to increase students' critical thinking skills and overall academic rigor. (www.eiu.edu/strategicsummary/)

Higher Learning Commission Accreditation Expectations

EIU is currently conducting a campus-wide self-study in preparation for its NCA accreditation visit during the Fall 2014 semester. Among the ac-

creditation criteria that EIU must meet are:

- The general education program should impart broad knowledge and intellectual concepts to students and develop skills and attitudes that the institution believes every college-educated person should possess;
- Every degree program offered should engage students in collecting, analyzing, and communicating information; mastering modes of inquiry or creative work, and develop skills adaptable to changing environments;
- Education offered by the institution should recognize the human and cultural diversity of the world.
- The institution should maintain and exercise authority over the prerequisites for courses, the rigor of courses, and expectations for student learning;
- The institution should demonstrate a commitment to educational improvement through ongoing assessment of student learning;
- The faculty should participate substantially in the assurance of consistency in the level and quality of instruction and in the expectations of student performance; also that the instructors communicate course requirements through syllabi.

CAA's Role and Plan

The Council on Academic Affairs, as a shared governance body elected by the university faculty, has the responsibility and authority for making recommendations to the President relative to academic regulations and general education requirements for all undergraduate degrees, and is also concerned with the maintenance of desirable standards in the university's curriculum (Article 7 of CAA By-laws).

As a result of the findings in the Learning Goals study CAA conducted in 2012 and 2013, CAA has developed a five-year plan "focused on improving student learning outcomes at the university through systemic increase in rigor and improvement of curricular, instructional, and assessment practices in both the general education and major programs." The plan includes:

- **Reinvigorating the University's Learning Goals:** Revising and adopting the goals to provide a clearer, more detailed set of expectations for all undergraduate students.
- **Aligning the General Education Curriculum:** Revising the curriculum of foundational courses to ensure introductory competence in the learning goals during the freshman year; developing common, consistent expectations for course rigor and student achievement of learning goals within segments of the general education program; partnering with CASL to develop a plan for assessment within general education courses.
- **Extending the Learning Goals into the Majors:** Developing a framework for more systematic extension of the learning goals into upper division courses and program assessment practices within major programs.

As of February 2014, CAA has adopted the revised University Learning Goals and is conducting a series of workshops to introduce the revised goals—along with implications for curriculum, instruction, and assessment—to the campus community. CAA is now beginning to study possible approaches for systematically infusing the revised goals into the university's general education courses and the curricula of major programs. CAA and CASL, processes for more systematic assessment of student achievement in the learning goals within both the general education and the major programs.

CAA Adopts Revised Learning Goals (continued from page 1)

Speaking and Listening

EIU graduates prepare, deliver, and critically evaluate presentations and other formal speaking activities by:

- Collecting, comprehending, analyzing, synthesizing and ethically incorporating source material.
- Adapting formal and impromptu presentations, debates, and discussions to their audience and purpose.
- Developing and organizing ideas and supporting them with appropriate details and evidence.
- Using effective language skills adapted for oral delivery, including appropriate vocabulary, grammar, and sentence structure.
- Using effective vocal delivery skills, including volume, pitch, rate of speech, articulation, pronunciation, and fluency.
- Employing effective physical delivery skills, including eye contact, gestures, and movement.
- Using active and critical listening skills to understand and evaluate oral communication.

Quantitative Reasoning

EIU graduates produce, analyze, interpret, and evaluate quantitative material by:

- Performing basic calculations and measurements.
- Applying quantitative methods and using the resulting evidence to solve problems.
- Reading, interpreting, and constructing tables, graphs, charts, and other representations of quantitative material.
- Critically evaluating quantitative methodologies and data.
- Constructing cogent arguments utilizing quantitative material.
- Using appropriate technology to collect, analyze, and produce quantitative materials.

Responsible Citizenship

EIU graduates make informed decisions based on knowledge of the physical and natural world and human history and culture by:

- Engaging with diverse ideas, individuals, groups, and cultures.
- Applying ethical reasoning and standards in personal, professional, disciplinary, and civic contexts.
- Participating formally and informally in civic life to better the public good.
- Applying knowledge and skills to new and changing contexts within and beyond the classroom.

For More Information



EIU Council on Academic Affairs:

<http://castle.eiu.edu/eiucaa/>

CAA Learning Goals Website:

<http://www.eiu.edu/learninggoals/>

CAA Learning Goals Report:

www.eiu.edu/learninggoals/pdfs/CAA_Learning_Goals_Review_Report_Final.pdf

EIU Committee for the Assessment of Student Learning (CASL):

<http://www.eiu.edu/~assess/caslhome.php>

EIU Office of the Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs:

<http://castle.eiu.edu/acaffair/>

EIU Strategic Plan:

<http://www.eiu.edu/strategicsummary/>

EIU NCA Self-Study (Accreditation):

<http://www.eiu.edu/nca2014/>
