A. General Education Curriculum at USC Upstate

The General Education curriculum at USC Upstate is focused around five Competencies with nine Student Learning Outcomes.

Competency 1: The USC Upstate graduate should demonstrate an ability to communicate in English, both orally and in writing.
  1.1 Students are able to create and deliver coherent, grammatically correct oral presentations.
  1.2 Students are able to create coherent, grammatically correct written responses to prompts and questions.

Competency 2: The USC Upstate graduate should demonstrate an understanding of and an ability to apply scientific investigation and quantitative and logical reasoning.
  2.1 Students demonstrate an ability to apply scientific reasoning by drawing appropriate conclusions from scientific data.
  2.2 Students demonstrate an ability to apply quantitative and logical reasoning by producing solutions to or analyses of appropriate problems.

Competency 3: The USC Upstate graduate should be able to integrate and critically evaluate information.
  3.1 Students are able to evaluate strengths and weaknesses of varying points of view.
  3.2 Students demonstrate the ability to distinguish between pertinent and irrelevant information.

Competency 4: The USC Upstate graduate should understand and demonstrate an awareness of distinctive features of language and cultures.
  4.1 Students demonstrate knowledge of linguistic and cultural diversity and contributions of such diversity to society.

Competency 5: The USC Upstate graduate should demonstrate responsible and appropriate use of information technologies.
  5.1 Students are able to gather and correctly process information through appropriate use of technological tools.
  5.2 Students demonstrate the ability to use information technologies to communicate information to others.

Each of the 95 General Education Courses at USC Upstate is aligned with at least two Student Learning Outcomes from two different competencies listed above. “Aligned with” means that faculty agree to support student learning aimed at engaging them in a particular competency. The 95 General Education courses offered at USC Upstate are housed in nine different units on campus; each unit within the College of Arts and Science contributes to the General Education curriculum as do three courses taught by the George Dean Johnson Jr. College of Business and Economics.
B. Assessment Processes

i. Assessment Timeline
The diagram below illustrates the assessment timeline.

![USC Upstate General Education Competency Assessment Process Diagram]

ii. Testing Rotation Cycle
Assessments of student abilities relating to the general education competencies will be administered on a rotation that allows each competency to be assessed each year. For example, two competencies might be assessed in the Fall semester and the remaining three would then be assessed in the Spring. Senior Seminar/capstone courses will be the main assessment venue, and assessments will be assigned to each course each semester by the office of Institutional Research, Assessment, and Planning in consultation with the appropriate CATs and the General Education Committee. The chart below illustrates the testing rotation cycle.
### C. Assessment Data Summary

#### Competency 1: Communication

*SLO 1.1 – Internal Rubric Developed to Assess Oral Communication*

The results from the oral communication rubric indicated that students performed well on both mechanics/grammar and organization of their oral presentations. Obviously, though, national comparisons are not available for this internal assessment, and this was the first implementation, so additional semesters of data will be beneficial. The oral communication rubric will be administered in SSPH 201 courses in future semesters to provide more data regarding students’ oral communication skills.

*SLO 1.2 – CAAP Writing Essay Test*

The average of USC Upstate students’ scores on the CAAP Essay was no different from the national average, which is encouraging. Students’ mean scores have remained fairly consistent over the multiple administrations of this assessment. Analysis of the Fall 2008 data which included SEGL 101 students, SSPH 201 students, and Senior Seminar students showed a statistically significant difference (p<.05) between scores of students in senior seminars and both SSPH 201 and SEGL 101, indicating that improvement in writing skills is taking place across the students’ educational experiences at USC Upstate.
Competency 2: Quantitative Reasoning and Scientific Inquiry
SLO 2.1 and 2.2 – CAAP Science Test & Proficiency Profile (MAPP)--Mathematics Skill Area
Members of CAT 2 were generally pleased with students’ performance on both the CAAP Science and the MAPP Mathematics Skill Area assessments. In both cases, the University’s mean scores approximated the national averages.

Competency 3: Critical Thinking
SLO 3.1 and 3.2 – Proficiency Profile (MAPP)--Reading/Critical Thinking Skill Area
While the data show that Upstate students’ critical thinking skills are on par with the national average, we would like to see a greater proportion of our students scoring in the proficient range for Critical Thinking, Level 3 of the MAPP test.

Competency 4: Globalization/Diversity
SLO 4.1 – Intercultural Development Inventory
The data were positive overall; the majority of students do not view one culture as better than another. About 20% of students have a strong appreciation for diversity and understand its importance; whereas 30% were functioning at the low end of the continuum. The middle 50% meet some but not all aspects of this competency. These students recognize cultural similarities and base their interactions on similarities, however they do not yet understand the importance of acknowledging and understanding the differences in people. The CAT agrees that it is probably most advantageous to develop improvement measures that address the bottom 32%, who are in the process of recognizing differences in cultures and moving beyond an “us and them” mentality.

Competency 5: Information Technology Literacy
SLO 5.1 and 5.2 – Total Testing
Gen Ed CAT 5 reviewed the data from the spring 2010 Total Testing administration and agreed that, overall, the assessment provided meaningful results. Students did well on much of the assessment, although they did somewhat better on Digital Literacy items (74.6% correct) than on MS Excel, MS Word, and Internet Explorer tasks (64.3% correct, 65.3% correct, and 67.2% correct, respectively.) Students’ overall score was 65.5% correct; the CAT would like to see the overall score increase to 70% in the future. After reviewing and testing several other applications designed to assess information technology literacy (My IT Lab by Pearson, SimNet by McGraw Hill, and SAM by Cengage), the committee decided to implement SAM by Cengage in the next administration.

D. Action Plans for Improvement
Action Plans have been created for the SLOs supported by each General Education course, and will be implemented in January 2011. The complete list of Action Plans is available on the P drive (P:\Assessment\Gen Ed Committee Folder\2010-11 Gen Ed\Action Plans Fall 2010). Below is a summary of some of those plans.

Competency 1: Communication
- Students will be required to rewrite papers with multiple errors in grammar, mechanics or organization.
- Students will be asked to defend a position rather than simply stating a viewpoint.

Competency 2: Quantitative Reasoning and Scientific Inquiry
- Students will be required to construct, evaluate, and interpret graphs.
- Students will be asked to design a true experiment to test an hypothesis.
- Students will be required to choose the appropriate statistical test for use with various types of data, to conduct these tests and interpret the results in terms of the relevant variables.
- Students have previously shown weakness in some areas of graphical interpretation. Historically we have not given graded homework assignments on this topic during the semester, but instead only asked questions in this area on the final exam. For the 2011 year we will start giving graded homework assignments in this area prior to the final exam, and then ask a related (non-identical) question to determine whether the graded homework assignment was effective in helping the students master the logic associated with type of problem.
Competency 3: Critical Thinking
- Students will perform Internet searches regarding course topics. They should find factual and research-based information and opinion-based information and provide a synopsis of the different information found in each.
- Students will write a justification for an opinion regarding a topic that requires them to assimilate information learned.
- Students will identify fallacies—arguments that tend to persuade but are in fact unreasonable.
- Ask students to identify systematic errors or uncertainties in their experimental data.

Competency 4: Globalization and Cultural Diversity
- Students will compare European, American Indian, and African influences in American History in each unit, stressing the effect of history on these groups.
- Students will be rewarded for attending events relating to different cultures.
- Students will discuss current events from a multi-cultural point of view.

Competency 5: Information Technology Literacy
- Students will submit data in an MS Excel workbook with data represented in multiple ways (bar graph, pie chart, scatter plot).
- Students will design a PowerPoint presentation offering a high level view showing the results of a study.
- Students will complete a project using statistical packages such as SPSS, SAS, or Systat, and communicate the results in appropriate graphical and tabular form.

E. Problems Identified
While these standardized tests are advantageous in that they allow comparisons to be made with a national sample, they are not ideal measures for the first three competencies. The outcome data provided by the testing companies regarding Communication, Quantitative Reasoning and Scientific Inquiry, and Critical Thinking is too general to inform our plans to improve students’ performance in these areas. For example, we know that our students perform at the national average for each competency but we are unable to determine sub-areas of strengths and weaknesses for the first three competencies. Specific comments from each CAT follow below.

Competency 1: Communication
Unfortunately, the CAAP Essay score reports are not ideal because they only provide overall scores for the essays with no indication of areas of weakness. Therefore, the CAT is limited to improvement suggestions geared toward many areas of written communication. The CAT will investigate other assessments to replace or support the CAAP Essay as a measure of writing aptitude.

Competency 2: Quantitative Reasoning and Scientific Inquiry
The CAT found the data received from the CAAP test to be less than ideal in determining specific areas of focus for future improvement. Although improvement in any area of the assessment of scientific reasoning would benefit students, the CAT is investigating additional methods of obtaining data regarding areas that would benefit from more focused improvement methods.

Competency 3: Critical Thinking
The lack of specificity in the MAPP and CAAP results was of great concern to this Assessment Team. The test is designed to address several important subcomponents of critical thinking, however the results are not broken down by subcomponent. The company provides one overall score for each student, leaving us unable to discern our students’ strengths and weaknesses in critical thinking. There is another version of the MAPP that provides more detailed feedback, however that test takes more time to administer than we currently have available for testing. The Assessment Team will explore this longer version and other assessment options in the Spring.
Competency 4: Globalization and Cultural Diversity
An internal writing prompt was created and administered in Spring 2010. Because of various aspects of the responses, the results are not ideal. The writing prompts will be re-examined by this team in the Spring semester.

Competency 5: Information Technology Literacy
The assessment measure provides meaningful data; the Competency Assessment Team has decided to continue with a similar assessment measure for the future.

Miscellaneous
The Action Plans received from each unit varied considerably in terms of specificity and language. The committee would like the Action Plans to be more uniform and will work on a form that will facilitate more standardized Action Plans.

The timeline may need to be revised to reflect how quickly the testing companies are able to return the data.

F. Summary
The USC Upstate General Education Curriculum has undergone one complete assessment cycle. We have adopted six standardized tests, five of which allow comparison between USC Upstate students and students across the country. In all cases, USC Upstate students are performing at the national average. We have developed two internal assessment measures, one to assess oral communication and one to assess the globalization and diversity competency. The oral communication measure seems to be an effective measure, but the globalization measure needs some revision. All nine of the units housing General Education courses have submitted Action Plans – exercises or activities that will give students an opportunity to develop skills in a particular competency – for the spring semester. The impact of these changes will be assessed in three to five years when the freshmen and sophomores enrolled in the general education classes for the spring semester will enroll in their senior seminar courses.