

The University of Guam: Institutional values and qualities of the ideal graduate

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Abstract

This paper describes the findings of a qualitative study of the University of Guam's core values, and the qualities and skills UOG expects of an ideal graduate. Analysis of several reports and documents contributed to the findings. These include documents addressing the mission and the learning goals of the university, reports on the General Education Program, and the strategic initiatives and annual reports of the past two years.

Several value themes emerged from a survey of these documents. The values identified in these documents were expressed in the university's commitment to (1) *student success*, (2) *search for and dissemination of global and regional knowledge*, (3) *service and support for local and regional communities*, and (4) *enhanced quality of life* for its learners and the communities served. Other themes appearing in more recent publications of the university highlighted the value placed on *academic excellence*, *preservation of the environment*, and *nurturing of a diverse learning community*.

Based on the General Education philosophy statement, the University of Guam expects its students to be successful and productive members of society; open to different viewpoints; knowledgeable in diverse learning traditions; able to solve problems, and adaptable to changing conditions of the workplace. Future campus-wide discussions are needed to verify these findings, as they are based on a top-down approach and require consensus of the different members of the University community. Establishing these educational values is an important initial step in the assessment of student learning, and the findings of this report and the following campus discussions will provide the necessary foundation for program- and course-level assessments planned for the next five years.

The University of Guam is the only four-year institution of higher education in the Western Pacific, accredited by WASC, and committed to providing top-quality education. Because of this commitment to keep its educational standards that the university has adopted a campus-wide assessment and the new, learner-centered approach to higher education.

The UOG's commitment to assessment is clearly articulated in the UOG Rules, Regulations and Procedures Manual (2000; Article IV, Section B), which states "The University is committed to the assessment of all the academic, administrative and co-curricular services, which it provides for its stakeholders. Assessment denotes the continuous collection of data concerning the effectiveness of services in achieving their stated short-term and long-term goals."

The emphasis on assessment is an integral part of the new learner-centered approach to higher education. Higher education in the United States has recently gone through a paradigm shift, changing its focus from instruction to learning. The traditional teaching paradigm, mostly concerned with the delivery of content is being replaced with a focus on student learning. The need for this change may be traced to two major factors: recent technological developments, and findings of research on human learning. The information explosion and rapid technological developments characterizing the features of modern societies have changed how readily accessible information is, and how rapidly it is being updated. Today, learning facts and content is not sufficient to prepare the learners for successful professional lives. In the words of Carl Rogers (1969) "The most socially useful learning in the modern world is learning of the process of learning; a continuing openness to experience and incorporation into oneself of the process of change." And more specifically Pan (2003) states, "The old pedagogical framework of decontextualized instruction and fixed curriculum is clearly inappropriate. With information having increasingly short shelf life, education must empower learners to learn for themselves, and to continue to do so continuously. Our graduates must be learning-enabled and life-long capable."

The second factor contributing to the need for change in education is based on current thinking and research in education regarding optimal learning experiences. Empirical evidence from human learning and cognitive research supports the learner-centered approach and its practices, and provides evidence for the superiority of this approach in developing students' cognitive abilities. Learner-centered practices have been shown to lead to "better retention, better transfer of knowledge to other situations, better motivation for further learning, and better problem-solving abilities, (and helping students to) construct a better framework from which to generalize their knowledge." (How Teachers Teach: General Principles, 2002 (<http://www.nap.edu/readingroom/books/str/1html>). As the changing realities of the modern world convinced the learning institutions to adopt the learner-centered model in principle, accrediting bodies during accreditation renewals enforce practical application.

The University of Guam is in the process of transforming itself into a learner-centered institution to maintain its accreditation by WASC. A campus-wide five-year assessment

plan including all academic programs, support programs and administrative units has been recently developed (Schwab et al., 2004, University of Guam Assessment Plan) and several professional degree programs (e.g. nursing, business administration, social work, and biology) have already adopted the learner-centered model and have taken steps towards assessment. Once assessment becomes a continuous practice in all academic, administrative and co-curricular services, and it is used to refine curricula and services in order to improve student learning, then the University of Guam will become a learner-centered institution. However, several steps are necessary before this happens.

A necessary starting point for campus-wide assessment is to clarify the institution's mission and educational values. According to the American Academy of Higher Education, (AAHE), one of the principles of good assessment for student learning is that "assessment begins with educational values and these values drive what will be assessed and how assessment will be done." This paper describes qualitative research conducted to identify UOG's institutional values, and the skills and capabilities that all UOG graduates are expected to develop throughout their education.

Method

Materials. The materials reviewed and content analyzed for this project included the following:

- a) University of Guam Strategic Positioning Initiatives developed in 2001 in consultation with the university, authored by the president. The plan is based on the mission of the university and has guided the reorganization of the university and other institutional activities in the following years.
- b) University of Guam, Annual Reports, 2002, 2003. The reports of 2002 and 2003 exhibit the activities and accomplishments related to the initiatives.
- c) University Magazine: Spring, Fall, 2004. Another university publication highlighting regionally relevant research and accomplishments of UOG graduates.
- d) UOG recruitment video (2004);
- e) UOG Undergraduate Catalog (AY 2003-04);
- f) UOG General Education Program – Criteria Manual for GE Categories (unpublished document prepared by Academic Committee on General Education, 2001);
- g) Report of the General Education Review Committee, January 1995.

Procedure. Values themes that appear consistently in the University's mission statement, strategic initiatives, activities and accomplishments mentioned in the yearly reports, and the (sample) messages of administration (President and the Vice President of academic affairs) delivered to the university community, and General Education Program documents were used to identify the core values of the institution.

The skills and capabilities expected of UOG graduates are described in the General Education Program documents and they are summarized in this paper with reference to the different clusters of courses aimed at developing these skills.

Results and Discussion

Core values: Table 1 summarizes institutional values that are common to the documents included in this analysis, namely, UOG's Mission Statement, UOG's strategic initiatives, General Education philosophy statement, undergraduate catalog (2003-04), annual reports of 2003 and 2004, and spring and fall issues of the University Magazine (2004). The core values identified in these documents include:

- Student success
- Global and regional knowledge
- Service to local and regional communities
- Enhanced quality of life for learners and the communities served

Student success: The University shows its commitment to student success not only by its Mission Statement but also by relocating its resources to continuously improve the quality of education, and the efficiency and the effectiveness of the institution. The General Education Program, which is the foundation program required of all students, prepares students for lifetime achievement by helping them become lifelong learners capable of reeducating themselves and transferring skills from one career to another.

Global and regional knowledge: As an educational institution, the University is committed to the search for and dissemination of knowledge and wisdom. Being the only four-year institution of higher education in the Western Pacific, located at the crosscurrents of the East and the West, the university places equal value to understanding both global and local knowledge. Learners are exposed to and benefit from diverse learning traditions.

Service to local and regional communities: The University is a land grant institution in and places great importance to identifying the needs of local and regional communities and to deliver services to fulfill those needs. Through education, and regionally significant research and service in a wide range of areas from agriculture, business, and government to mental health, the university is a hub of resources for the Western Pacific.

Enhanced quality of life: Through education, research and service, the University of Guam is committed to enhance the quality of life of its learners and the communities served.

There are other value themes, some of which are embedded in the University's publications of the past two years (2002-2003), and others reflected in the messages delivered by administrators (Table 2). These themes include:

- institutional excellence
- preserving the environment
- nurturing a diverse learning community.

Institutional excellence: The value placed on institutional excellence is articulated in the messages of the university administrators who mention their commitment to academic

excellence and show increasing number of world-renowned research centers and Federally funded research programs at the University as evidence of this commitment.

Preserving the environment: This is a value theme that is reflected in the recent University publications highlighting programs such as the erosion project and habitat studies.

Nurturing a diverse learning community: The diverse learning community of the University, and efforts to nurture learners from diverse backgrounds, are trademarks of the University. If supported at the college and program levels, this value theme may be placed among the core values of the institution.

Tables 3-6 show a detailed analysis of the documents contributing to the summary lists of values described above. They are presented to provide more specific information that contributed to the final tables.

Table 7 is a matrix that can be used in future assessment work looking for the degree of alignment between institutional goals and values and those at the college and program levels. Some of the programs with clear learning objectives described in the undergraduate catalog are mentioned in the table. The college mission statements are used to compare college-level values with institutional core values. Further work is necessary to complete this table/template.

Skills and qualities of the ideal UOG graduate: The University of Guam's General Education Program documents were analyzed to identify the skills and qualities expected of UOG graduates. One of the earliest documents listing the learning goals of UOG's Baccalaureate degree is the 1995 General Education Committee report. These learning goals are listed in Table 8. The General Education philosophy statement, institutionalized in 2001, further articulated the learning goals and the philosophical foundation of the program. Table 9 is a listing of these goals and the corresponding qualities to be developed by the learner once the goals are achieved. Based on the General Education philosophy statement, the University of Guam expects its graduates to be successful and productive members of the society, open to different viewpoints, knowledgeable in diverse learning traditions, able to solve problems and adaptable to changing conditions of the work place.

The General Education Program consists of nine categories, each of which contains clusters of courses that are around a theme, e.g., essential skills, global studies, and search for meaning. The General Education Criteria Manual (2001), based on the 1995 report articulated the learning objectives for each category and provided further guidelines for the program. The skills and capabilities to be developed and nurtured in different parts of the program include the following:

- to be able to speak, read, write and listen effectively
- to be able to observe, clarify, organize, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate individually and in a group

- to be able to interpret and use mathematical concepts, ideas and other quantitative information in order to solve problems
- to be able to describe the aesthetic significance of an object, work or experience
- to be able to interpret current events and issues
- to be able to make informed judgments about the past
- to be able to organize, analyze and communicate information by means of computers and be able to retrieve and process information utilizing various media
- to be able to observe and interpret natural and social phenomena in accordance with appropriate methodology
- to be able to identify and analyze values
- to be able to use basic concepts of health and wellness

The categories of the General Education Program aimed at developing and nurturing these skills are shown in Table 10. Most of these skills are addressed in several categories. Many degree programs also include a similar set of skills in their professional requirements. Additional studies are needed to identify the skills specific to various degree programs, and the degree to which students acquire these skills upon graduation. Continuous assessment leading to revisions of curricula to better accomplish intended learning goals would result in improved student learning and success.

This report is one of the first studies in a five-year comprehensive assessment plan. This plan will help in aligning the learning goals and objectives of the institution with its instruction, research, outreach and support units, creating a learning environment that will improve student learning and help the institution reach its goals.

References

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