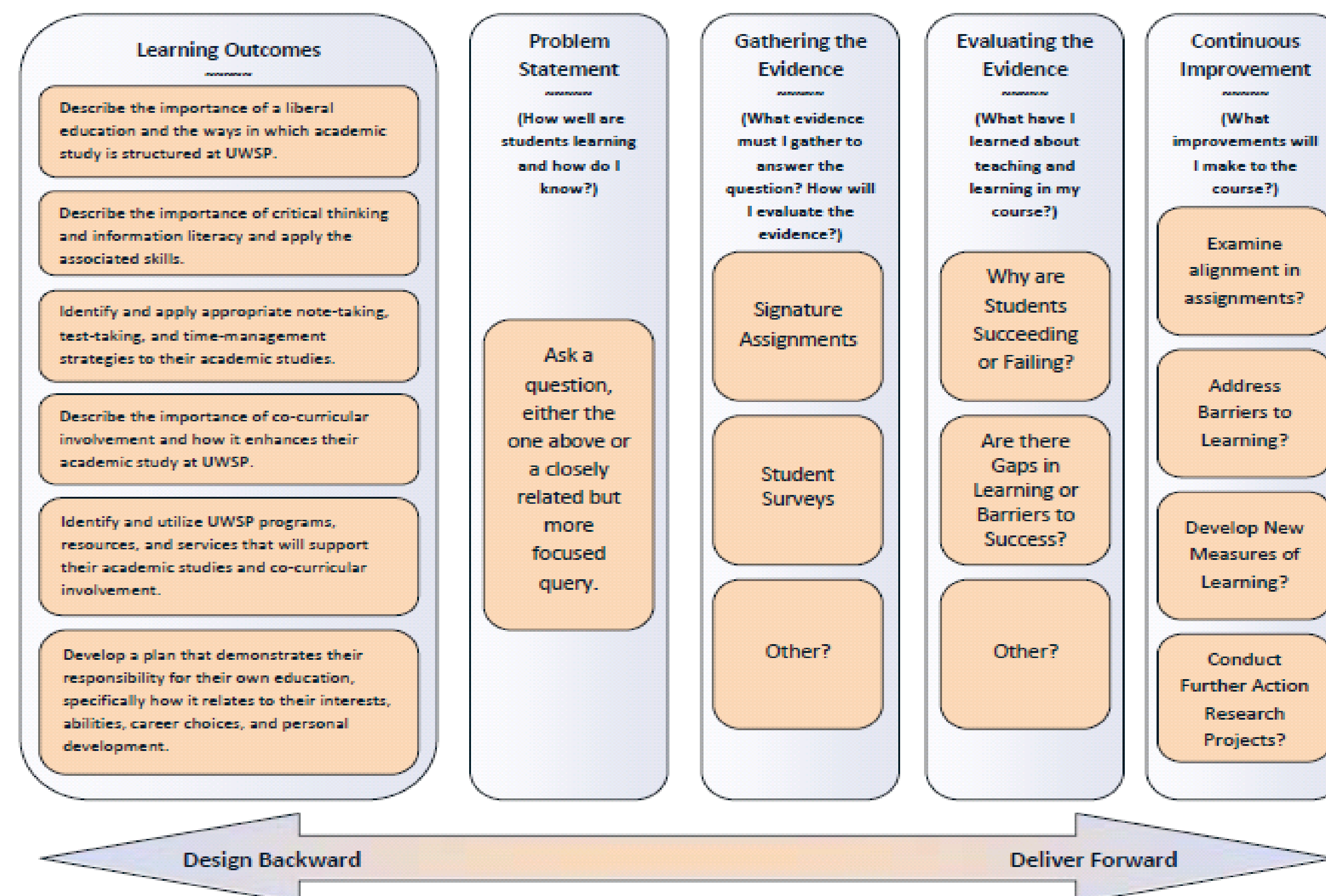# Letting It Flow: Collecting, Analyzing and Disseminating General Education Assessment Data

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ABSTRACT

At UWSP, our Academy Team is spearheading an effort to create an Assessment Plan for a new General Education Program still under development. A principal challenge has been to balance rising calls for accountability against the sometimes conflicting desire to maintain a focus on continuous improvement. The resulting plan—built on the collection of evidence through a *problem-based approach*, the reporting of this evidence by faculty in **course portfolios**, and the evaluation of these portfolios by *faculty learning communities*—achieves this balance. The process is being piloted through our new first-year seminar courses in Spring and Fall 2011.

Utilizing a Problem-Based Approach through Course Portfolios

Learning Outcomes

- Describe the importance of a liberal education and the ways in which academic study is structured at UWSP.
- Describe the importance of critical thinking and information literacy and apply the associated skills.
- Identify and apply appropriate note-taking, test-taking, and time-management strategies to their academic studies.
- Describe the importance of co-curricular involvement and how it enhances their academic study at UWSP.
- Identify and utilize UWSP programs, resources, and services that will support their academic studies and co-curricular involvement.
- Develop a plan that demonstrates their responsibility for their own education, specifically how it relates to their interests, abilities, career choices, and personal development.

Problem Statement
(How well are students learning and how do I know?)

Ask a question, either the one above or a closely related but more focused query.

Gathering the Evidence
(What evidence must I gather to answer the question? How will I evaluate the evidence?)

- Signature Assignments
- Student Surveys
- Other?

Evaluating the Evidence
(What have I learned about teaching and learning in my course?)

- Why are Students Succeeding or Failing?
- Are there Gaps in Learning or Barriers to Success?
- Other?

Continuous Improvement
(What improvements will I make to the course?)

- Examine alignment in assignments?
- Address Barriers to Learning?
- Develop New Measures of Learning?
- Conduct Further Action Research Projects?

Design Backward → Deliver Forward

Elements of a Course Portfolio

Course Information:

1. A **syllabus**, including intended learning outcomes aligned with those of the General Education program.
2. A brief **narrative** describing how the relevant General Education learning outcomes will be met by students through course experiences, assignments, and/or activities.

Assessment Information:

3. A discipline-appropriate **evaluation** of student attainment of at least one learning outcome, including a brief explanation of how student learning was assessed. The evaluation should be problem-based, addressing the question "*How well are students learning and how do I know?*" or a closely related but more focused query.
4. Three **examples** related to the evaluation above showing student work that exceeds acceptable performance, meets acceptable performance, and falls below acceptable performance.
5. Results of **feedback mechanisms** used in the course (e.g., surveys, classroom assessment techniques, such as one-minute papers, Plus/Delta, guided instructional feedback technique, etc.) that explore student perceptions of course assignments and their alignment with the GE learning outcomes.
6. A **brief statement** explaining how assessment results will be used to improve learning in the course in the future.

The General Education Assessment Process

FACULTY

Teach GE courses;
Prepare course portfolios;
Receive feedback from FLCs;
Continuously improve their courses

FACULTY LEARNING COMMUNITY (FLC)

Reviews course portfolios;
Provides feedback to individual instructors;
Evaluates learning;
Prepares report on student learning and recommendations for the GEC

GENERAL EDUCATION COMMITTEE (GEC)

Reviews FLC reports;
Examines institutional-level data;
Considers and develops recommendations;
Reports to the campus;
Coordinates with CAESE for faculty and curriculum development.
Works with Faculty Senate on changes to GEP learning outcomes, course criteria, assessment procedures, etc.

GEP Learning Outcomes

Students will:

- Demonstrate critical thinking, quantitative, and communication skills necessary to succeed in a rapidly changing global society.

- Demonstrate broad knowledge of the physical, social, and cultural worlds as well as the methods by which this knowledge is produced.

- Recognize that responsible global citizenship involves personal accountability, social equity, and environmental sustainability.

- Apply their knowledge and skills, working in interdisciplinary ways to solve problems.