

**INTEGRATIVE REQUIREMENT OF THIEL COLLEGE  
PERIODIC REVIEW – 2008-2009**

**1. Goals and Objectives.**

- a. The Goals and Objectives of the Integrative Requirement of Thiel College were assumed to be those identified in the catalogue. These are, in abbreviated form: Intellectual Rigor, Problem Solving, Imaginative Sensitivity, Socio-Cultural Awareness, Historical Perspective, Environmental Responsibility, Individual and Social Maturation, Human Commitment to Life, Physical Development and Religious Awareness and Growth.
- b. For each of the ten Institutional Objectives, specific Learning Objectives and Learning Outcomes were identified. Because students do not always take courses in the IR in a particular sequence, a primary course was identified as one in which the particular objective and outcomes are emphasized, rather than the more traditional way of identifying a course where the elements are first introduced. In a similar vein, the designation of Secondary Courses on our curriculum map corresponds to the more traditional category of Outcomes Reinforced. Assessments have been identified for all outcomes. The Curriculum Map is included as Appendix A.

*Concerns:*

1A. Currently, there are no institutional objectives that are expected to be met by all programs. There is no built-in continuity between Institutional Objectives and Program Objectives.

*Recommendations:*

1A. *That the Institutional Objectives of Intellectual Rigor, Problem Solving, Individual and Social Maturation and Humane Commitment to Life be adopted as objectives of every academic program.*

*Rationale:* In its publication, *Characteristics of Excellence*, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education identifies three types of objectives that are central to undergraduate education, those related to the development of knowledge, of skills, and of values. The publication goes on to say that outcomes at the three levels of course, program, and institution must be interrelated; “continuity, coherence, and integration should be evident.” By including these four objectives in the list of objectives of each academic program, the College demonstrates its commitment to the development of knowledge, skills, and values across its curriculum.

**2. Department Demographics.**

- a. Faculty and staff –
  - i. On average, 21.9 FTE faculty deliver the core curriculum of the College. The total FTE faculty is approximately 76. Consequently, about 29% of faculty load is dedicated to the delivery of the core curriculum. The core curriculum is here taken to include Honors courses; Foreign Language and Math competency courses (College Algebra and Cultural Approaches to Math); Western Humanities; Global Heritage; Scriptures; OWE; HPED theory and activities courses; and the three developmental courses: Introduction to Algebra, Basic English and Basic Math. It does not include courses that can be used for Group IV because it is impossible to determine the percent of load for these courses that would be specifically supporting the IR.
  - ii. The percent of faculty delivering various components of the IR who are full-time varies considerably among courses. The Honors Program is delivered exclusively by full-time faculty. Western Humanities is delivered exclusively by full-time faculty and on average, 94% of the Global Heritage faculty is full-time. Interpreting the Jewish and Christian Scriptures is, for the most part (82%), delivered by full-time faculty. The Math component of the IR saw a steady increase in percent taught by full-time faculty, up to a maximum of 100% in the spring of 2007. Since that time, the percentage has fallen to close to 50%. The two components of the IR that

have the lowest percentages of full-time faculty are Foreign Language with 39% being delivered by full-time faculty and OWE with 32%.

- iii. Basic Math has been taught exclusively by full-time faculty for the past four semesters. Basic English has been taught more frequently by full-time faculty in the past two years than it had been previously, although it is still taught about 50% of the time by adjuncts. Basic Reading is taught by a full-time employee of the Academic Success Center who has adjunct faculty status.
- b. Students –
- i. Total credit hours generated in the spring semesters total 4-10% fewer than those generated in their corresponding fall semesters. When one looks at IR credit hours, the drop from first to second semester ranges between 17-30%. The IR component of total student load is higher for first-year students and presumably decreases as the student moves through the four years. Consequently, it is not surprising that the IR shows a greater total credit hour drop between semesters than is seen for the curriculum as a whole. The drop in freshman enrollment between fall and spring semesters averaged over the nine semester period covered by this report is 19%. The average drop between freshman and sophomore years is 38%. Because the IR tends to be front-loaded, with the bulk of the courses being taken in the first two years, the drop in IR total credits appears to be explainable.

**TABLE 1. CREDIT HOURS GENERATED Total, IR, and Percent of Total Represented by IR**

SEMESTER	F04	S05	F05	S06	F06	S07	F07	S08	F08
TOTAL CH	17670	15854	18111	17143	18147	16338	16359	15752	15743
IR CH	6672	5546	6980	5770	6740	4745	5930	4564	5470
IR(% TOT)	0.38	0.35	0.39	0.34	0.37	0.29	0.36	0.29	0.35

- ii. The IR represents between 29% and 39% of the credit hours generated in any given semester. Approximately one-third of the student's total credit load is expected to be devoted to the IR. First-year students represent the largest cohort and IR requirements account for about half of the first-year student's course load. Consequently, it is expected that the IR would represent more than a third of the total credit hours. Total IR credit hours are underestimated because of the inability to quantify the IR credit hours represented by Group IV.
- iii. Total credit hours generated by Basic courses in each of the full academic years included in this report, 2004-5, 2005-6, 2006-7, and 2007-8, are 5.3, 14.1, 13.7, and 5.9 times higher than those generated by the Honors program. Two important factors to be considered are the total number of Honors-eligible students recruited in any given year and the percent of eligible students opting into the Honors Program. As indicated in Table 2, the percentage of the first-year class that was eligible for the Honors Program decreased from 2004 to 2006 and increased from 2006 to 2008. The effort to decrease the percentage of students least prepared for Thiel and to increase the percentage of well-prepared students over the past two recruitment seasons appears to have borne fruit. The trend in percentage of eligible students opting into the Honors Program is also positive, with an unusually high percentage opting into the program in 2007.

<b>TABLE 2. HONORS PROGRAM – FIRST YEAR ENROLLMENT</b>					
<b>FALL SEMESTER</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2004</b>
<b>FRESHMEN ELIGIBLE FOR HONORS (% OF CLASS)</b>	53 (16.7)	38 (10.6)	29 (7.9)	38 (8.9)	46 (12.5)
<b>FRESHMEN REGISTERED FOR HONS OWE I (% OF CLASS)</b>	30 (9.5%)	30 (8.3%)	13 (3.6%)	16 (3.8%)	15 (4.1%)
<b>PERCENT OF ELIGIBLE FRESHMEN TAKING HONS OWE I</b>	56.60%	78.95%	44.83%	42.11%	32.61%
<b>FRESHMAN COHORT</b>	317	360	365	426	369

- iv. Average class size for the curriculum as a whole varied little between the fall of 2004 and the spring of 2008, ranging between 19-21 students per class. The past two semesters show a dip to 18 and 16 respectively. Averages for non-IR courses range from 14-18, while those for the IR (excluding Basic and Honors courses) range from 22 to 27. It is clear that the larger class sizes of the IR allow for smaller classes on average in the non-IR courses. The average class size for the Honors Program ranges from 9-16, while that for Basic courses ranges from 14-23.

**TABLE 3. AVERAGE CLASS SIZE FOR VARIOUS CURRICULAR ELEMENTS**

	F04	S05	F05	S06	F06	S07	F07	S08	F08
All courses	19	19	21	19	20	19	19	18	16
Non-IR courses	17	17	18	18	17	17	16	16	14
Basic Courses	21	23	24	17	24	19	22	14	18
IR Courses	23	23	25	23	27	23	26	23	23
Honors Courses	12	15	13	10	13	9	16	14	16

*Concerns:*

- 2A. OWE, a first-year, core requirement is being taught primarily by adjunct faculty.
- 2B. Foreign Languages are being taught primarily by adjunct faculty.
- 2C. Between 5 and 15 times more credit hours are being generated by Basic courses than by Honors courses. Currently, only about one-half of the students eligible for the Honors Program enroll in it, and less than 20% of all incoming students are even eligible. Of the 15 students who were enrolled in HONS OWE I in 2004, only five graduated in the Honors Program in 2008 (33.3%). Of the 16 students enrolled HONS OWE I in 2005, ten graduated in the Honors Program in 2009 (62.5%). Although this is a vast improvement over the year before, it is a small number of students.

*Recommendations:*

- 2A. *That the College increase the proportion of full-time faculty delivering OWE.*

*Rationale:* A large body of literature supports the belief that full-time faculty members should be teaching first-year courses. It is during the first year that students bond with the institution, and a key element in student bonding is making strong connections with faculty. Full-time faculty members are more available to the students because of their increased teaching load and increased presence on campus, compared with adjunct faculty.

- 2B. *That the College increase the proportion of full-time faculty teaching Foreign Language.*

*Rationale:* It is very difficult to build a program that is staffed almost exclusively by adjuncts. It is also difficult to maintain a strong program that is solely a service program. Reinstating the second full-time position that was lost three years ago might allow for some creative envisioning of the Foreign Language Department and its role at Thiel. Thiel's study abroad program has languished; increasing the Foreign Language profile at Thiel might have the side benefit of vitalizing the study abroad program.

- 2C. *That the College focus more attention on developing, promoting and supporting the Honors Program.*

*Rationale:* A strong, high-profile Honors Program has the potential to attract and retain good students.

**3. Program and Student Assessment.**

Outcomes assessment has not been done before at the institutional level. Periodic reviews of the core/IR have occurred, and occasional revisions have been made, but the focus has been on what is included in the IR, not on what is achieved. Consequently, the academic year 2008-2009 was devoted to generating

an assessment plan, as well as to reviewing various aspects of the delivery of the IR. It is proposed that the first round of comprehensive learning outcomes assessment be instituted during the 2009-2010 academic year, with responsibility for oversight of the assessment being assigned to the Coordinator of the IR. Recommendation 3A describes a structure for ongoing assessment of the IR.

A Curriculum Map (Appendix A) and Specific Learning Outcomes Matrix (Appendix B) are attached. The General Learning Outcomes of the IR (found in both Appendix A and Appendix B) were derived directly from The Objectives of Thiel College as listed in the Academic Catalogue. The Specific Learning Outcomes of individual IR courses (found in Appendix B) were matched with the appropriate General Learning Outcome of the IR. In almost every case, Specific Learning Outcomes for more than one required course were identified for each General Learning Outcome. Consequently, the institution is in a position to assess each learning outcome using different instruments, in different courses, and involving different assessors. It is expected that this will address concerns about variability in expectations and standards without reducing the assessment of the IR to a purely quantitative exercise.

Because each of the General Learning Outcomes is being addressed by course-specific learning objectives of more than one course, it can be concluded that, taken as a whole, the IR as currently constructed does address all of the objectives of the College. What will be conducted next year (and in subsequent years) is an assessment of institutional effectiveness in achieving the College objectives.

Assessment instruments are in place for each component of the IR. Some additional assessment strategies are under consideration or are being recommended to the faculty as a whole. In order to establish some uniformity in assessing skills – oral and written communication, computational and foreign language skills – two recommendations are being made. Recommendation 3B describes standards for assessing oral and written communication skills for the faculty to consider adopting. Recommendation 3C suggests the use of standardized tests in assessing basic competencies. Two additional recommendations are being made. Recommendation 3D suggests that the faculty consider institutionalizing e-portfolio as a developmental as well as evaluative tool. Recommendation 3E calls on the faculty to consider adopting an institutional expectation that all programs include a capstone experience as part of their requirements.

Group IV of the IR has not been included in the current analysis. Because of the variety of options available to the student in meeting this portion of the IR, it was impossible to identify specific learning outcomes of these courses that could be matched with the general learning outcomes of the IR. In some cases, a general nesting of a group of courses within a particular objective might have been possible – the requirement of a course in fine or performing arts is likely to contribute to the development of imaginative sensitivity, for example. However, such a general analysis is of questionable worth. The goal of Group IV, as stated in the Academic Catalogue, is “to challenge students to choose areas of exploration into human knowledge and experience that promote diverse ways of thinking and inquiring.” By requiring students to satisfactorily complete 3-4CH in each of the four major cognate areas, the College insures the achievement of the goal. Specific learning outcomes of individual courses are likely to reinforce many of the general learning objectives of the IR.

The IR for the Honors Program has been included in this review only as it relates to the Objectives of the College and not to any specific objectives of an honors program. Honors sections of Interpreting the Jewish and Christian Scriptures, OWE I and II, and Western Humanities I and II have the same Specific Learning Objectives as the non-Honors sections of the same courses with regard to the College Objectives (although they may have additional outcomes specific to the Honors Program). In attempting to assess the Honors Program IR, it was noted that there may no longer be educational goals unique to that program. The goals of the program, according to the catalogue, are “to provide an

integrative education designed to enhance critical thinking, to enable students to make connections among disciplines, and to promote a world view grounded in the exploration of ideas, ideologies, and values.” When the Honors Program was first established, the College had a distributive core. At that time, the above description distinguished the Honors core from that of the larger College. However, when the College adopted the Integrative Requirement, that particular distinctiveness of the Honors Program’s educational goals was eliminated. Until a few years ago, the Honors Program was also distinctive in its requirement of two years of a foreign language. That was also changed and is now the same as the requirement for the rest of the College. Currently, the curriculum of the Honors Program is distinctive in the substitution of its four-semester sequence of Honors Interdisciplinary courses for Group IV of the general College IR. It is also distinctive in that there is no physical education requirement. Because the Honors Program does not currently require that students take any physical education or allied health courses, the program as constructed fails to meet the College Objective of promoting physical development in its students. A recommendation to address this deficiency is included as Recommendation 3F. A recommendation to address the assessment of the Honors Program as a whole is included as Recommendation 3G.

*Concerns:*

3A. There is currently no structure and no process for ongoing coordinated oversight and assessment of the core curriculum of the College. Individual components of the IR are either housed in particular departments or exist as stand-alone entities with individual coordinators housed within the general academic program overseen by the Academic Dean. With the loose organizational structure and high autonomy of the components comes the potential for lack of accountability.

3 B There are no uniform criteria for assessing compositions or speeches. The College has a Writing Intensive Course requirement with no set of standards by which to measure effective written communication.

3 C With the discontinuation of the English Competency test, there is no institutional assessment of this competency, nor is there any institutional assessment of other competencies – Math or Foreign Language.

3 D The Honors Program does not require Health and Physical Education courses. Therefore, this objective is not being met by the current Honors Program curriculum.

3E The Honors Program has nothing comparable to Group IV of the College’s core, so the program does not require that students engage in deeper exploration of specific disciplines within the four broad areas of the academy.

3F The Honors Program has not revised its goals, objectives or outcomes since its inception in 1981. With the changes in the core curriculum of the college and the modifications of the Honors Program core over the years, much of the distinctiveness of the original Honors Program has been lost. A thorough assessment of the effectiveness of the Program is not possible in the absence of clear goals, objectives, and outcomes.

*Recommendation:*

*3A. That the College adopt an organizational structure for the IR that will facilitate ongoing assessment and improvement of the core curriculum of the College.*

*Recommended structure:*

The IR would be evaluated at two levels:

1. Individual courses. The faculty members involved in the delivery of an individual component of the IR (Western Humanities, Global Heritage, OWE, Interpreting the Jewish and Christian Scriptures) serve as assessment committees for their respective components. These committees will have the responsibility of developing and refining instruments that assess the individual learning outcomes of the course(s) they deliver. The committees will also have the responsibility of reviewing their course(s) annually to determine the extent to which the

individual learning outcomes are being achieved and to determine the appropriateness and effectiveness of the assessment instruments. It is expected that some group evaluation of actual work products will be included in the analysis.

2. IR Committee. The coordinators of the individual components of the IR (Western Humanities and Global Heritage), chairs of departments housing IR components (English, Religion, Math/CSci and Foreign Language), and the Director of the Honors Program serve with the Coordinator of Teaching and Learning as the IR oversight committee under the direction of the Coordinator of the IR . It will be the responsibility of the IR Committee to assess the effectiveness of the IR as a whole, identifying weaknesses and, in conjunction with the Academic Dean, recommending changes to the Curriculum Study Committee.

*3B That the faculty consider adoption of uniform standards for assessing oral and written expression pieces. Suggested standards are included as Appendix C.*

*Rationale:* An absence of uniform standards makes it difficult to measure institutional effectiveness. It is not sufficient to have a standard for the number of words to be generated in Writing-Intensive Courses; it is also necessary to have a set of standards by which written pieces are judged. If all programs are to incorporate intellectual rigor in their list of objectives (recommendation 1A), then it is important that a set of standards be adopted for the institution. The standards do not have to be incorporated into the grading rubrics of courses (although they could be used for this purpose as well); they are to be used as criteria by which the ability of Thiel students to generate college-level oral and written pieces of work is measured.

*3C. That standardized tests be incorporated into the institutional assessment process.*

*Rationale:* Skill development is one of the general objectives of the institution. Standardized tests can be used to assess skill development in foreign language, mathematics, and English. Pre- and post-tests can be used to assess progress within a course, program, or within the curriculum as a whole, and the post-test can be used to assess competency in these areas. This would be but one instrument to be used within the entire set of assessment strategies.

*3D That the institution incorporate the use of e-portfolios as institutional assessment tools.*

*Rationale:* Because institutional assessment is concerned with student learning outcomes rather than with specific course elements, an e-portfolio approach would allow for individualized demonstration of learning achievement. However, Thiel has not yet developed a comprehensive system of e-portfolio use and, consequently, it may be wise to delay action on this recommendation until e-portfolios have been further developed and possibly institutionalized at Thiel.

*3E That the institution consider requiring a capstone experience for all students.*

*Rationale:* Capstone experiences can take many forms – a senior seminar, an independent research project, an internship – or it can be a combination of elements. Capstone experiences are valuable tools in helping students to integrate various elements of their undergraduate experience and, as such, the capstone experience has become a primary means by which programs assess their effectiveness. Currently, capstone experiences exist within the Honors Program and within a number of majors. The Kemper Seminar on the Value of a Liberal Arts Education also serves as a capstone experience.

*3F That the Honors Program generate a mechanism by which the objective of physical development can be met by its students.*

*Rationale:* Because Physical Development is not a general objective of most programs, unless this objective is met by the core curriculum, the institution cannot guarantee that the objective is being addressed for all students.

*3G That the Curriculum Study Committee call for a review of the Honors Program with the purpose of establishing and articulating goals, objectives, and outcomes that will be reflected in the individual curricular components of the program.*

*Rationale:* A lot of attention and resources have been directed toward support of Thiel's least prepared students. The number and variety of services designed to enhance the learning experience of these students have increased over the past two decades. The Honors Program has not benefitted from the same sort of focused attention. Although the number of students in the Honors Program has increased generally, only about half of the students eligible for the Honors Program actually enroll in it. There is also attrition from the Honors Program of between 40-50%. A complete review of the Honors Program might allow the College to reshape and reinvigorate the program so that it becomes an important vehicle for attracting and retaining well-prepared and well-motivated students.

*3G That the institution consider requiring a service-learning experience for all students.*

*Rationale:* A service-learning experience calls upon a student to apply knowledge and skills to the benefit of others. The Mission of Thiel College concludes with the belief that all of its graduates should be prepared for lives of service. One small step in that preparation might be the requirement that all students experience the intrinsic value of using their talents to help others. In so doing, students learn more about themselves, about others, and about the disciplines that they are applying. General learning outcomes of the institution are likely to be addressed in such an activity. Problem-solving, individual and social maturation, a human commitment to life, intellectual rigor, and effective communication are likely to be enhanced by a service-learning experience.

#### 4. **Changes Considered and/or Implemented.**

As part of, or in parallel with, this review of the IR, a number of activities have occurred that might be considered changes. Perhaps the most ambitious project was undertaken by Professor Grover in attempting to specify elements of mathematical competency and to make sure that each of the Math courses that might be taken to fulfill the math competency requirement is structured so that each element (Specific Learning Outcome) might be met. The Specific Learning Outcomes and assessments of the Math component of the IR as well as those for each of the courses of the IR are attached as Appendix D.

Dr. Hall has attempted to establish some consistency of expectations among OWE instructors and has recommended that the English Department assume more collective oversight of OWE (including HONS sections) and Basic English. With six full-time and seven adjunct faculty delivering these courses during the 2008-2009 academic year, the challenge of establishing uniformity of expectation without limiting the approaches to teaching that characterize this diverse group is daunting. The Coordinator of the English Language Competency Requirement (Dr. Dorfeld) in collaboration with Dr. Hall conducted a mid-semester evaluation of the OWE course. That evaluation and Dr. Hall's direct classroom observation of each of the OWE instructors have raised concerns about delivery, course content and outcomes, and inability of students to produce clear, cogent, and properly formatted papers and speeches requiring sustained and substantive research (beyond 3-4 pages or 4-8 minutes). The English Department will be asked to consider these issues during the coming academic year.

This year, the director of the Writing Center was invited to attend the monthly meetings of the English Department and was asked to report on the number of OWE and Basic English students who visited the Writing Center for assistance. A recommendation to incorporate the Writing Center into the English Department is presented as Recommendation 4A.

In Global Heritage, efforts are being made to formalize the Think Globally, Act Locally project by supporting a Micro-Credit loan project in Managua, Nicaragua. One member of the Global Heritage team has worked with this project in Managua during the past three summers and this summer a second member of the teaching team will participate. This active participation by Global Heritage faculty members has provided the opportunity for students to support a global project and to receive direct

feedback from the beneficiaries of the project. Global Heritage faculty members are working to develop service-learning opportunities for students. Update of the Global Heritage text will occur soon.

Members of the Religion Department have been discussing the merits of adding the Qur'an to the texts covered in REL 120. The current structure (3CH) might not accommodate such an addition, so it might be necessary to increase the credit hours to 4 if the Qur'an were to be included in the course. Given the current global impact of the Islamic religion and its followers, introducing Thiel students to Islamic scriptures and their interpretations is worth considering. No recommendation is being put forth at this time. The Religion Department may attempt to introduce the Qu'ran in a limited way within the current structure initially.

*Recommendation:*

*4A. That the Writing Center be organizationally situated within the English Department.*

*Rationale:* This organizational structure exists at most colleges and universities. If the English Department bears the major responsibility for insuring that our students are competent writers, having the Writing Center under the direction of the English Department would facilitate achievement of shared goals. In addition, many of the students who staff the Writing Center are members of Sigma Tau Delta, the English Honorary Society, who work closely with the English Department.

**5. Staffing.**

There are two different staffing challenges associated with the delivery of the IR. The first revolves around the number of full-time faculty available to teach specific components. There exists a need for additional full-time staffing in English and Foreign Language. Recommendations for these specific staff increases were made in Section 2 of this report. The second challenge is in balancing commitments to the IR with departmental teaching commitments. The Honors Program has periodically experienced difficulty in attracting faculty members to teach its interdisciplinary courses. Global Heritage is currently struggling to provide expertise in the biological sciences during the fall semesters when biological sciences are emphasized. Last fall, this coming fall, and possibly in the following fall semester, sabbatical leaves limit participation in Global Heritage by biology faculty. The problem is compounded by the fact that twice as many students tend to take Global Heritage I (fall semester) than Global Heritage II (spring semester). No specific recommendation is being made to address these challenges.

**6. Academic Support Assessment.**

**a. Facilities.**

Bly Lecture Hall, S200, and the library classroom have been equipped in recent years so that they adequately support Global Heritage, Western Humanities, and OWE respectively. The library and G101 classroom would serve the needs of OWE better, however, if a printer were available in the classrooms. All IR courses have incorporated technology, and so courses like REL120 have become increasingly dependent upon the availability of smart technology. There is a need for more classrooms equipped with interactive smart technology. Although the basic facilities needs are currently being met, there is a need to continue to explore the possibility of establishing an interdisciplinary learning center where the sciences might more effectively interface with the rest of the academic community. This would likely benefit Global Heritage as well as the other areas of the IR.

**b. Services**

Library holdings are adequate to meet the needs of the IR. The staff works closely with the OWE faculty, including conducting classes in the use of library resources. The CLA has worked with IR instructors on the Early Alert process. Students who are in jeopardy in any of the IR courses are identified and CLA staff members work to determine appropriate intervention strategies. ASC



provides a variety of support services – Supplemental Instruction, tutoring, and review sessions in some disciplines. The measure of the effectiveness of these services should be included in the separate ASC review which was to have been completed during the current academic year.

#### 7. **Financial Impact Supplement.**

Separate budgets exist only for Western Humanities, Global Heritage, and the Honors Program. Costs of other elements of the IR are included in the budgets of their respective departments. The Honors Program budget will be analyzed in the separate review of that program. Budgets for other components of the IR are adequate and continue to support field trips to art museums (Western Humanities and Global Heritage) and to the Cleveland Zoo (Global Heritage). These are considered key components of the interdisciplinary courses.

A grant of \$135,000 from FIPSE, NEH, and NSF was used to develop Global Heritage. The Global Institute of Thiel College grew out of the Global Heritage initiative. The Global Institute has organized an Earth Week lecture series and a workshop for elementary school children every year for the past ten years. In recent years, these activities have been supported by EITC money. This year the Earth Week events were included as part of the Community Building Initiative of the College. Global Heritage and its surrounding activities have also helped to provide a variety of professional development experiences for the faculty. Dr. Barton and Dr. Cuff had the opportunity to study in Ghana for a month as a direct result of the Global Heritage course. It is likely that participation in Global Heritage and writing the accompanying textbook had a role in several Fulbright awards to Global Heritage faculty members. These included both full-year and summer institutes.

### **Concluding Observations and Recommendations.**

**General Recommendation.** The goal of the IR is to provide a common learning experience for all students that leads to specific learning outcomes. The assumption is that IR courses are foundational, serving to introduce the student to skills, knowledge, and values that they will further develop during their remaining undergraduate experience and throughout their lives. If students are to build on the IR foundation while still at Thiel, it is necessary that they complete the IR requirements prior to their senior year. The senior year ought to be a time of capstone experiences and of preparation for the transition from undergraduate to post-graduate life. In order to optimize the impact of the IR on the lives of Thiel students it is recommended:

*8A That the IR be completed by all Thiel students prior to their senior year.*

Too many students are waiting to take IR courses until their senior year because they have, or think they have, a weakness in the area to be covered by those courses. Rather than using the IR as it is intended to be used—as a mechanism for establishing a knowledge and skill base upon which to build an education—some students view the IR solely as a set of obstacles to be overcome. Because of a lack of understanding of the inherent value of a core curriculum, some students are denying themselves those opportunities that might have significant positive impacts on their performance at Thiel. The College has a responsibility to design the curriculum in such a way that students will derive optimal benefit from it. Requiring students to complete the IR during their first three years at Thiel would help to accomplish that task.

There are circumstances under which this recommendation would not be met. Those who transfer with significant credits from another school may have to fulfill some specific Thiel requirements during their senior year. Some programs, such as Education, because of scheduling challenges, may have to postpone fulfillment of an IR requirement until the senior year. Such examples should serve as exceptions to the rule rather than as an argument against the rule.

**General Observation.** It is safe to say that the idea of outcomes assessment has not been met with unbridled enthusiasm by the faculty as a whole. There are legitimate reasons to approach assessment with some caution. Liberal arts colleges are unique institutions, and much of what they do is intangible. An assessment that attempts to reduce everything to numbers or that denies the transformational nature of what occurs in such institutions simply because it cannot be easily measured would be very damaging to a liberal arts college. On the other hand, it is equally irresponsible to hide behind lofty goals or to use the history of success of such institutions as excuses for not examining carefully what they are doing and what they are accomplishing. It is our hope that this document will serve as an example of how assessment can be constructed so that accountability is insured while intangibles are preserved and honored.

The group of individuals who worked on this first major effort at outcomes assessment of the IR is fairly representative of the spectrum of backgrounds in and attitudes toward assessment found in the whole faculty. What was critical to our effort this year was the willingness of everyone to put any negative attitudes aside and to engage in a positive collaboration to achieve our goal. Those who approached the task with more trepidation were simply given more time to learn with and from those who were more comfortable with shaping the process. In the final analysis, the group is comfortable with the process and with the product of our deliberations. Ultimately, we have all come to understand the importance of this assessment task. The goal of assessment is to measure the extent to which we deliver on our promise to the student and to determine ways of improving on our delivery. This is certainly a worthy goal. It is our hope that this document will serve as a guide for programs and departments who share some of the uncertainty with which our group initially approached its assignment. It is our hope that all of the faculty will come to appreciate the importance of assessment and the opportunity it provides for refocusing our efforts and for re-envisioning what is possible at Thiel College.

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