

General Education Assessment—Summary Report CY 2014

The Assessment Advisory Committee (AAC) developed a four-part rubric (appendix 1) in order to take the measure of all CY 2014 assessment reports submitted in early 2015. In aggregate, the totals indicate that departments and programs tended to be strongest in the first section, reporting numerical data, and weakest in the fourth section, insights that will be helpful both for the department/program in question and for others conducting general education assessment. As is to be expected, there was a wider range of scores in section two: major findings and section three: action to be taken. Given that findings and actions are related, it makes sense that a lower score on section two would lead a corresponding lower score on section three, and vice-versa. That said, there were many fine reports; a sample can be found in appendix 2.

The work of the AAC brought to light general points of emphasis that need to be kept in mind as departments/programs continue taking the measure of student learning in general education categories. These points include

Reporting: consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, Emerson tells us, only if it is a foolish consistency. Using the form provided by the Associate Provost's office will make for a consistency sensible both for the AAC and for the individual department/program. Regarding the former, using the same form will make it easier for the AAC to find and makes sense of what is most meaningful in the assessment report. Regarding the latter, using the same form from year to year will make it easier for you to focus your labors on findings and actions to be taken.

Sample size: artifacts need to be collected and assessed from **minimum of 20% of the total number of students** taking a general education course delivered by a department/program. In classes with ten or fewer students, artifacts from all students must be included in the assessment. In classes with 11-50 students, artifacts from at least ten students must be assessed. In classes with more than 50 students, the sample must be at least 20% of the class.

Insights: perhaps due to the fact that discrete categories are being assessed and reports are coming from particular departments/programs, we saw very little sharing of insights that might be of help to others conducting general education assessment. We want to encourage academic departments to think both within and beyond your department/program as you reflect on what the assessment has revealed and to make note of those thoughts in the insights section of the report. We can all benefit from good ideas and best practices.

In addition to the general points listed above, several ideas and practices came up a number of times in reports. We list a few of them below and encourage departments/programs to discuss them as they reflect on and refine their teaching and assessment practices in order to help improve student learning.

Coordination: several departments/programs noted either the notion or the benefit of coordination between sections of the same general education course. This could take the form of shared points of emphasis linked to the learning outcome(s), shared assignments, shared test questions and/or writing prompts, and the like.

Assessment rubric: a common rubric developed and then deployed by a department/program in order to assess student learning was brought up. While SUNY faculty working groups developed common rubrics in writing and critical thinking back in the day, there exists no common rubric from SUNY in other general education categories/areas. What would it mean to develop such a rubric?

Best practices:

Strong reports made clear in the Major Findings section both strengths and weaknesses in student work as it explicitly spoke to the learning outcome(s) being assessed. The strong reports also made clear to the reader the connections between the data provided and the Major Findings section; this enables the reader to see that the findings are supported by the data.

The actions to be taken section of strong reports indicated a degree of thoughtfulness concerning what could and/or will be done to improve the student learning given what the current assessment reveals.

Strong reports also thought beyond the particular section or course and offered insights regarding assessment that could be of value either for assessment throughout the department/program, to other department/programs conducting assessment of student learning in the particular general education category, or both.

Please refer to appendix 2 for a sample report.

Two Final Thoughts

The AAC learned much from the exercise of reading and taking the measure of the CY 2014 reports. To highlight one insight that we will take forward into future CY assessment, we now realize that the Major Findings section of the Assessment Report form needs to be revised to include the opportunity for reporting departments/programs to either refer to the method of analysis indicated in their assessment plan for the category or to articulate the method of analysis used if it differs from what had been indicated.

Given the necessarily close connection between assessment plans and reports, finally, this assessment round made apparent the value of including samples of the types of questions to be asked on exams and the types of prompts to be used for written assignments for those taking the measure of student learning via qualitative and quantitative means respectively. We see two values in this for departments/programs. Both full-time and adjunct faculty teaching courses for which there are multiple sections can use the questions/prompts as guides as they construct particular assessment instruments for their section(s). Representative types of questions and/or assignments can serve as a resource for future assessments.

Appendix 1

CY 2014 General Education Assessment Report Rubric

Question 1 - Learning Outcomes with Information and Results

Did they report numerical data?

- 0 No entries
- 1 Learning outcomes have most of the numeric values for n and percent of students, percent exceeding, meeting, and approaching.
- 2 Every outcome has numeric values for n and percent of students, percent exceeding, meeting, and approaching.
- 3 Every learning outcome has (a) numeric values for n and percent of students, and (b) percent exceeding, meeting, approaching, and not meeting. The sample size is appropriate.

Question 2 - Major Findings

Did they provide an analysis of the data?

- 0 No entry; or no entry that speaks to the learning outcomes.
- 1 The report identifies only strengths or weaknesses but not both.
- 2 The report identifies strengths and weaknesses in student learning with respect to learning outcomes. Fails to specify method of analysis.
- 3 Some indication of method of analysis is described. The report identifies strengths and weaknesses in student learning with respect to learning outcomes.
- 4 Method of analysis is fully described with sufficient detail. Findings are supported by the data. The report identifies strengths and weaknesses in student learning with respect to learning outcomes.

Question 3 - Action

Did they specify actions to be taken to address shortcomings identified in the analysis?

- 0 No entry
- 1 Suggests an action that indicates some awareness of and reflection on shortcomings.
- 2 Partially identifies appropriate action to address shortcomings, but does not clearly identify specific steps.
- 3 Clearly identified specific steps to be taken. Action is an appropriate means to address the identified shortcomings. [Or no shortcomings identified and the data and analysis support this.]

Question 4 – Insights

Did I learn anything helpful about assessment?

- 1 [Bonus] Report provides something useful

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Campus: SUNY Oswego

{specify name of branch campus, if relevant}

Calendar Year: 2014Course: ENG 486, World Cinema

Knowledge and Skills Areas / Competencies	Learning Outcome	Information			Results ¹				
		Date of Assessment Semester/Year:	Students Assessed ²	% ³	% Exceeding Standards	% Meeting Standards	% Approaching Standards	% Not Meeting Standards	
World Awareness – Humanities	Knowledge of either a broad outline of world history, or the distinctive features of the history, institutions, economy, society, culture, etc. of one non-Western civilization Knowledge of the conventions and methods of at least one of the humanities in addition to those encompassed by other knowledge areas required by the General Education program	Spring 2014	10	25%	2	3	4	1	
		Spring 2014	10	25%	3	5	1	1	

¹ Each student should be counted only once and the four percentages should total 100%. If assessments have taken place across different courses/course sections, data should be aggregated for the purpose of this report

² Enter the actual date(s) the assessment took place.

³ Number should represent percentage of the total students enrolled in courses approved as addressing this learning outcome area.

Major findings of assessment: 1. The results suggest that students excel in the dimensions of the course that build upon their already substantial experience with the humanities, especially literary and film study. Students were able to deploy fairly sophisticated formal methods and vocabulary and turn them in the service of making sense of complicated films often quite foreign to their usual viewing habits. 2. Not surprisingly, the students were less accomplished at attending to the cultural and historical specificities of these same films. Those who did excel were precisely the ones who read most widely and carefully in the written material on the syllabus. 3. The students who scored lowest in the assessment were also the least accomplished writers.

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Action to be taken in addressing these assessment findings: In order to bolster the students' ability to attend to the historical, political, economic, cultural specificities of the films viewed in the course, it would seem wise to: 1. Incentivize more thoroughly the careful reading of the textual material in the course; 2. Curtail some of the open discussion of the films in favor of more 'mini lectures' about this material. However, because the assessment instrument consisted of student essays, it may well be that the students know more than what appears in those essays. Also, the worst results came from the worst writers, so that a short-answer exam might have demonstrated a wider range of knowledge. Indeed, the results suggest a correlation between writing competency and mastery of the conventions and methods of the humanities, precisely where the students did indeed, as a group, excel. So another course here would be to first change the assessment instrument and then compare results.

What has been learned that could be helpful to others as they conduct assessment of General Education: Nothing new, as far as I can tell, except to confirm that assessment has very much to do with the instrument deployed.