

Humanities General Education report
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Current Status and Overview:

In response to the impending NCA (North Central Accreditation) visit, the Provost's Office and the APCC have asked that campus assess whether the Humanities GER courses are fulfilling their curricular mission. The enabling legislation, UWM Faculty Senate Document 1382, establishes GER policies and procedures. Under number 5, "Area Definitions and Specific Criteria," 1382 states the following:

b. Humanities

1) Definition The academic disciplines which investigate human constructs and values, as opposed to those which investigate natural and physical processes, and those concerned with the development of basic or professional skills.

The humanistic disciplines---such as art history, history, language and literature, philosophy---are concerned with questions, issues, and concepts basic to the formation of character and the establishment of values in a human context; they induce an organic study of letters and knowledge; they provide literary, aesthetic, and intellectual experiences which enrich and enlighten human life.

2) Criteria To satisfy GER distribution requirements for the Humanities, a course must meet criteria (a) and one other:

- (a) Approach its subject using humanistic means of inquiry, such as: the critical use of sources and evaluation of evidence; the exercise of judgment and expression of ideas; the organization, logical analysis, and creative use of substantial bodies of knowledge.
- (b) Increase the student's capacities for making informed and independent evaluation pertaining to the nature of knowledge, language and representation, and concerning the formation of ethical or aesthetic concepts, or the ways in which values are manifested within diverse theoretical or conceptual frameworks.
- (c) Introduce the student to substantial and coherent bodies of historical, cultural, literary or philosophical knowledge, as a means of increasing an understanding of the complexities and varieties of human events.
- (d) Enhance and extend the student's response to literature and/or other arts by introducing the process of thoughtful and systematic analysis, or by fostering an appreciation of distinctive cultures and traditions, or by increasing the student's sensitivity to language and its nuances.

- (e) Foster the application of humanistic perspective to other branches of knowledge or to issues of universal human concern.

These criteria will need to apply to all Humanities GER courses, which are offered in a wide array of disciplines: Africology, Art History, Classics, Communication, Comparative Literature, English, Ethnic Studies, Film Studies, Foreign Languages and Linguistics, French, Freshman Scholars Seminars, German, Hebrew Studies, History, Honors, Italian, Journalism and Mass Communication, Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/ Transgender Studies, Philosophy, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Women’s Studies, Educational Policy and Community Studies, Human Movement Sciences, and Library and Information Science.

Deriving Student Learning Outcomes based on Fac. Doc. 1382:

After reviewing the Humanities Gen Ed information at a number of colleges and universities (see Appendix A), we offer the following goals which we think represent a set of core values that underlie all Humanities GER courses at UWM:

- 1. Students will be able to exhibit their critical thinking abilities in writing that demonstrates command of a variety of modes and genres.**
- 2. Students will be able to demonstrate in speaking and writing the ability to present well-grounded interpretations of complex literary, historical, cultural, and philosophical bodies of knowledge.**
- 3. Students will be able to identify and analyze how significant literary, historical, cultural, and philosophical events have influenced the creation and reception of work in the Humanities.**
- 4. Students will be able to make informed and independent evaluations of work in the Humanities, based on thoughtful, systematic analysis and on sound academic research.**

If we can agree upon these goals (and there may well be others that arise from a renewed conversation among faculty/staff who teach Humanities GER courses), then the next steps are to: a) develop measures by which these goals can be assessed, and b) determine how we can make use of the information gained by this assessment to improve our students’ learning. In creating the following table, we have been mindful of the American Association of Higher Education’s statement on principles of good assessment (Appendix B). We offer this table as part of a sustained conversation about how to make Humanities GER courses effective for students and for our faculty and academic staff in the Humanities:

Measures	Outcome	Outcome	Outcome	Outcome	Use of information
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	1	2	3	4	
All students in Humanities GER courses will be given standardized evaluation form in addition to regular course evaluation.	X	X	X	X	Data will be aggregated and reported annually to all faculty and relevant dept chairs, Associate Dean for Humanities, and to the APCC. Action items will be derived for campus and school/college curriculum committees, and for faculty development.
All students in Humanities GER courses will write at least one out-of-class essay that requires research and demands a well-grounded interpretation of a literary, historical, cultural, or philosophical text.	X	X	X	X	Instructors will be asked to keep a file of best/worst student writing. Once a year at annual Hum GER mtg, instructors will meet to assess student writing and discuss how to improve writing and writing assignments in GER Humanities courses..
Survey students who have completed the GER Hum requirement and are enrolled in upper-division Humanities courses.	X	X	X	X	Information will be presented to GER Humanities subcommittee of APCC to determine efficacy of GER Hum courses in encouraging students to enroll in add'l Hum electives.
Once a year, cohort of					Summary of this meeting will be

soph/junior students will participate in a focus group to discuss their experience and perceptions of Hum GER courses.			X	X	distributed to Hum faculty and to the APCC GER Hum subcommittee for review and to establish action items to be discussed at annual mtg.
Once a year sampling of assignments in GER Hum courses.		X			Model assignments will be distributed to Humanities faculty electronically and at annual mtg, and also to the APCC GER Hum subcommittee for review and to establish action items.
Once every two years an alumni survey will include questions that evaluate GER Hum courses.		X		X	Data to go to APCC GER Hum subcommittee and to Hum faculty for consideration at annual mtg.

Examples of Changes Resulting from Assessment Activities:

Humanities department chairs and the L&S Academic Policies and Curriculum Committee have focused renewed attention on the value and efficacy of Hum GER courses.

The campus APCC will be creating a review body that will focus particular attention on GER courses.

Appendix:

Appendix A. Research and Resources

In order to obtain a better idea of what other colleges and universities are doing in relation to establishing outcomes and assessment practices in the area of Humanities General Education, we consulted a number of web sites. We are listing a representative sampling below, and we have put an asterisk before the names of those that we found particularly informative:

University of Colorado-Colorado Springs

web.uccs.edu/tlc/assessment/documents/General_Education_Assessment_Plan.pdf

*Buffalo State University of New York

<http://www.buffalostate.edu/offices/assessment/gened.htm>

University of Missouri-Columbia

<http://provost.missouri.edu/assessment/general-education.html>

Louisiana State University

<http://aaweb.lsu.edu/assessment/gened.htm>

Boise State University

<http://www2.boisestate.edu/iassess/General%20Education%20Assessment%20Plan.htm>

*Northeastern Illinois University

<http://www.neiu.edu/~neassess/gened.htm>

University of Central Arkansas

http://www.uca.edu/divisions/academic/assess/asplans/geplan_draft.htm

*Dixie College

http://www.dixie.edu/effective/ge_inst.htm

U. of Arizona

<http://w3.arizona.edu/%7Euge/gened/outcomes.htm>

<http://w3.arizona.edu/~uge/gened/>

*University of California-Santa Cruz

http://planning.ucsc.edu/irps/stratpln/ge_assmt.htm

University Wisconsin-Madison

<http://wiscinfo.doit.wisc.edu/obpa/Assessment/GeneralEducation.pdf>

<http://www.ls.wisc.edu/gened/FacStaff/background.htm>

The most helpful statement of criteria was that posted at the U. of Arizona, which establishes a two-tiered set of requirements. Their website posts the following statement concerning Humanities:

TIER TWO: HUMANITIES

After taking Tier Two courses in Humanities students will be able to:

- identify and analyze the impact of cultural and historical factors on the creation and reception of artistic and literary works
- relate arguments and ideas from literature and historical documents to the circumstances under which they were written; read primary documents and be able to place them in their historical context; identify disparate ideas from the evidence of these documents
- describe how the development of philosophical and religious thought has influenced human civilization
- use appropriate vocabulary for written and oral descriptions and analyses of literary works

Tier Two courses in the Humanities will:

- explore aspects of human culture such as religion, history, philosophy, literature and languages in an interdisciplinary fashion rather than as discrete phenomena
- allow students to develop critical thinking and interpretive approaches to culture

Appendix B. American Association for Higher Education Principles for Assessing Student Learning Outcomes:

Nine Principles of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning

Developed under the auspices of the American Association for Higher Education (AAHE) Assessment Forum, December 1992

1. **The assessment of student learning begins with educational values.** Assessment is not an end in itself but a vehicle for educational improvement. Its effective practice, then, begins with and enacts a vision of the kinds of learning we most value for students and strive to help them achieve. Educational values should drive not only *what* we choose to assess but also *how* we do so. Where questions about educational mission and values are

skipped over, assessment threatens to be an exercise in measuring what's easy, rather than a process of improving what we really care about.

2. **Assessment is most effective when it reflects an understanding of learning as multidimensional, integrated, and revealed in performance over time.** Learning is a complex process. It entails not only what students know but what they can do with what they know; it involves not only knowledge and abilities but values, attitudes, and habits of mind that affect both academic success and performance beyond the classroom. Assessment should reflect these understandings by employing a diverse array of methods, including those that call for actual performance, using them over time so as to reveal change, growth, and increasing degrees of integration. Such an approach aims for a more complete and accurate picture of learning, and therefore firmer bases for improving our students' educational experience.
3. **Assessment works best when the programs it seeks to improve have clear, explicitly stated purposes.** Assessment is a goal-oriented process. It entails comparing educational performance with educational purposes and expectations -- those derived from the institution's mission, from faculty intentions in program and course design, and from knowledge of students' own goals. Where program purposes lack specificity or agreement, assessment as a process pushes a campus toward clarity about where to aim and what standards to apply; assessment also prompts attention to where and how program goals will be taught and learned. Clear, shared, implementable goals are the cornerstone for assessment that is focused and useful.
4. **Assessment requires attention to outcomes but also and equally to the experiences that lead to those outcomes.** Information about outcomes is of high importance; where students "end up" matters greatly. But to improve outcomes, we need to know about student experience along the way -- about the curricula, teaching, and kind of student effort that lead to particular outcomes. Assessment can help us understand which students learn best under what conditions; with such knowledge comes

the capacity to improve the whole of their learning.

5. **Assessment works best when it is ongoing, not episodic.** Assessment is a process whose power is cumulative. Though isolated, "one-shot" assessment can be better than none, improvement is best fostered when assessment entails a linked series of activities undertaken over time. This may mean tracking the process of individual students, or of cohorts of students; it may mean collecting the same examples of student performance or using the same instrument semester after semester. The point is to monitor progress toward intended goals in a spirit of continuous improvement. Along the way, the assessment process itself should be evaluated and refined in light of emerging insights.
6. **Assessment fosters wider improvement when representatives from across the educational community are involved.** Student learning is a campus-wide responsibility, and assessment is a way of enacting that responsibility. Thus, while assessment efforts may start small, the aim over time is to involve people from across the educational community. Faculty play an especially important role, but assessment's questions can't be fully addressed without participation by student-affairs educators, librarians, administrators, and students. Assessment may also involve individuals from beyond the campus (alumni/ae, trustees, employers) whose experience can enrich the sense of appropriate aims and standards for learning. Thus understood, assessment is not a task for small groups of experts, but a collaborative activity; its aim is wider, better-informed attention to student learning by all parties with a stake in its improvement.
7. **Assessment makes a difference when it begins with issues of use and illuminates questions that people really care about.** Assessment recognizes the value of information in the process of improvement. But to be useful, information must be connected to issues or questions that people really care about. This implies assessment approaches that produce evidence that relevant parties will find credible, suggestive, and applicable to decisions that need to be made. It

means thinking in advance about how the information will be used, and by whom. The point of assessment is not to gather data and return "result"; it is a process that starts with the questions of decision-makers, that involves them in gathering and interpreting of data, and that informs and helps guide continuous improvement.

8. **Assessment is most likely to lead to improvement when it is part of a larger set of conditions that promote change.** Assessment alone changes little. Its greatest contribution comes on campuses where the quality of teaching and learning is visibly valued and worked at. On such campuses, the push to improve educational performance is a visible and primary goal of leadership; improving the quality of undergraduate education is central to the institution's planning, budgeting, and personnel decisions. On such campuses, information about learning outcomes is seen as an integral part of decision making, and avidly sought.
9. **Through assessment, educators meet responsibility to students and to the public.** There is a compelling public stake in education. As educators, we have a responsibility to the publics that support or depend on us to provide information about the ways in which our students meet goals and expectations. But that responsibility goes beyond the reporting of such information; our deeper obligation -- to ourselves, our students, and society -- is to improve. Those to whom educators are accountable have a corresponding obligation to support such attempts at improvement.