

**General Education Assessment Committee (GEAC)
Final Report**

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Mission of General Education at Western Michigan University

General education should develop each student's knowledge, capacity for expression and response, and critical insight to help the student become a capable, well informed, and responsible citizen of a culturally diverse society in a complex world. To this end, the University's general education program aims to improve the student's competence in mathematics and language, both oral and written, and to foster the will and ability to think clearly, critically, reflectively, and with as much precision as the subject allows. While requiring a degree of proficiency of everyone, the University's general education program enables a student to master foundational intellectual skills through a sequence of related courses.

History of Assessment of General Education

In 2003, the General Education Assessment Committee (GEAC) was established by Provost Elise Jorgens with a mandate to develop, implement, and monitor the assessment of general education at Western Michigan University. The provost convened the first meeting of GEAC on January 23, 2003. The committee comprised faculty members from each of the colleges, and was charged with creating a plan for assessing the effectiveness of the University's general education program. At the initial meeting, the committee received the charge to recommend an initial assessment plan for general education to the University Assessment Steering Committee no later than the beginning of May 2003, with the goal of beginning actual assessment in the fall semester of the 2003-2004 academic year. Jorgens also noted that a secondary goal was to begin the process of evaluating the existing general education program, and that assessment information would provide part of the data for the program's evaluation.

At the second meeting of GEAC on February 25, 2003, Provost Jorgens turned over the leadership of the committee to Vice Provost Linda Delene. The committee's first task was to formulate student learning outcomes for each of the eight distribution areas, based on goals established in the General Education Policy document approved by President Haenicke in 1996. Learning outcomes were finalized after soliciting feedback from faculty teaching in each of the areas. (Appendix A: Learning Outcomes)

The committee decided that specific area content would be best assessed locally. A general template was developed that allowed enough flexibility for assessment in each of the eight Distribution Areas. (Appendix B: General Education Assessment Reporting Form)

In the fall semester of 2003, faculty who had taught courses in General Education Distribution Areas I and II each submitted five to ten samples of student work, which were subsequently assessed and the findings documented. Faculty were also asked to determine the percentage of students in each class who achieved the specified learning outcomes for each of the three categories "good," "adequate," and "weak." The process

was repeated for Areas III and IV in the spring semester of 2004, for Areas V and VI in the fall of 2004, and for Areas VII and VIII in the spring semester of 2005.

Assessing the Proficiencies

To assess student learning in the proficiency areas, the committee was asked to choose among several standardized tests. After reviewing the options, GEAC chose to administer the College Basic Academic Subjects Examination (CBase) to freshmen in the fall semester of 2003, and the same exam to seniors in the spring semester of 2004. In order to compare two selected instruments, the committee then administered the California Critical Thinking Skills Test to freshmen in the fall semester of 2004, and to seniors in the spring semester of 2005. For both tests, care was taken to sample a representative student population that was large enough to be statistically significant. (Appendix C: Timeline for GEAC)

Proficiency Areas Results

California Critical Thinking Skills Test: The skills tested by the exam improved for our seniors (18.60) relative to the freshmen (15.01). As a whole the average for the two together (16.76) was very similar to the national average (16.90), with the difference being statistically insignificant.

The California Critical Thinking Skills test proved to be the most limited for comparison purposes as only aggregate data were available for comparison. The national aggregate consisted of 2,677 four-year college students. The sample of Western's students consisted of 577 freshmen and 549 seniors. The aggregate data comprised freshmen and seniors as well as other class years. The exact distribution by class was not available. Because it is not clear if the national distribution is similar to Western's sample, a detailed comparison is not meaningful.

CBase: The sample consisted of 579 freshmen- and 558 senior-completed exams. The exam allowed for a comparison with classes at a group of comparable schools as well as with national results.

The composite score for WMU freshmen was 273, which placed them in the 52 percentile of freshmen nationally and below the comparison group's freshman composite score of 285. Compared to the national sample, scores in English (41%) and Social Sciences (42%) were below the median while Math (59%) and Science (60%) were above. Freshman scores in each of the four areas were below those of the comparable institutions.

Scores for WMU seniors improved in the three areas tested (English, math and science) compared to the freshman class. A composite score was not available because the social science portion was not administered. The score in science was equal to that of

the seniors in the comparison group and in the 69% of seniors nationally. The score in math was higher than the comparison group and in the 73% nationally. The score in English was based on incomplete exams, making an interpretation of the results unclear.

Assessment of Specific Area Content

Below is a table showing the average instructor assessment of student achievement for selected learning outcomes in each of the distribution areas. Note that since scores are averaged and rounded, they do not necessarily add up to 100%.

Area	Good	Adequate	Weak
I Fine Arts	57%	29%	15%
II Humanities	42%	41%	17%
III US Cultures and Issues	51%	33%	17%
IV Other Cultures and Civilizations	44%	35%	23%
V Social and Behavioral Sciences	49%	36%	16%
VI Natural Science with Laboratory	48%	32%	21%
VII Natural Science and Technology: Applications and Implications	61%	26%	13%
VIII Health and Well-Being	82%	17%	1%
Overall Average	55%	32%	16%

Area I: Fine Arts

In the fall 2003 semester, assessment data for four student learning outcomes in Area I were collected from eleven instructors in two colleges. In general, essays provided more accessible evidence of student learning than did embedded test questions or short assignments such as reading responses. Percentages of students whose work was judged to be “good,” “adequate,” or “weak” varied widely from section to section and depending upon which of the four learning objectives was being assessed.

Area II: Humanities

General Education assessment data were collected in the fall 2003 semester from 22 instructors for 24 sections representing 19 different courses, all within the College of Arts and Sciences. Eleven samples of student work assessed student learning outcomes 1, 2, and 4, while 17 samples assessed outcome 3. Samples of student work included essays, book reviews, reading response papers, poetry reviews, final exam short-answer questions, and final exam essay questions. Once again, percentages of students whose work was assessed to be “good,” “adequate,” and “weak” varied widely.

Area III: U.S. Cultures and Issues

Faculty in seven departments within the College of Arts and Sciences submitted student learning outcome assessment data from 16 courses. Eleven submissions represented coursework from the spring 2004 semester, two from the summer I 2004 semester, and three submissions assessed courses completed in the fall 2004 semester. Student work included multiple-choice questions, out-of-class essays, essay and short-answer exam questions, and composite judgments of course performance. Percentages of student achievement in the “good” category varied from a high of 90% with no student responses designated as “weak,” to a low of 15% in the good category with 60% considered to be weak. If the percentages reported for each class are averaged, 51% of students exhibited a good mastery of the three Area III learning outcomes, 33% were adequate, and 16% were weak.

Area IV: Other Cultures and Civilizations

Faculty in four departments in the College of Arts and Sciences assessed the four student learning outcomes in Area IV from a total of eight courses. Six assessments took place in the spring 2004 semester, while two faculty members assessed their students during the fall 2004 semester. Examples of student work included essays, multiple-choice exam questions, book reviews, written homework assignments, student interviews, and class discussion. If the percentages reported for each class are averaged, 41% of students exhibited a good mastery of learning outcomes, 37% were adequate, and 22% were weak.

Area V: Social and Behavioral Sciences

Of the 18 different schools, departments, and programs that offer courses in Area V, 11 of them collected data from 26 courses in the fall semester of 2004. Methods for collecting the data on student mastery of the three student learning outcomes expected in Area V classes included embedded essay questions on exams, multiple-choice exam questions, oral presentations, out-of-class essays, and article analyses. If the results for the ratings of “good” and “adequate” are combined (to show a baseline level of

competence), in 22 of the 26 courses the results showed that more than 80% of the student learning outcomes assessed revealed results that portrayed student mastery.

Area VI: Natural Sciences with Laboratory

Of the 17 courses available for Area VI, 14 instructors collected assessment data during the fall 2004 and spring 2005 terms. Students in all courses included in the assessment were evaluated on their mastery of student learning outcome 2 and students in seven courses were assessed on student learning outcome 1. Exams and/or quizzes were used in five courses; experiment reports or motion analysis papers were used in two courses; and some type of problem-solving exercise was used in the courses. In five courses at least 50% of students earned a “good” rating; in six courses 30-50% achieved an “adequate” rating; and in all courses fewer than 40% of the students were deemed to be “weak.” Overall, student learning outcome 1 was achieved by at least 75% of students enrolled in these classes. An examination of the percentages by category for student learning outcome 2 shows that four courses had 75% or more students achieving a “good” rating; while 35% or fewer of students in all courses were deemed to be “weak” for this outcome. Overall, student learning outcome 2 was achieved by nearly 85% of students enrolled in these courses.

Area VII: Natural Science and Technology

Of the 23 courses available for Area VII, eight instructors collected assessment data for eight sections representing seven courses during the spring 2005 semester. Students in all courses included in the assessment were evaluated on student learning outcomes 2 and 3, and students in all but one course were assessed on student learning outcome 1. Exam and/or quiz questions comprised the primary data collection instrument, but written work, evaluation exercises, class exercises, and group projects were also employed. In five courses at least 50% of students earned a “good” rating for learning outcome 1; in two courses at least 50% achieved an “adequate” rating, and in one course 69% of the students were deemed to be “weak.” Overall, student learning outcome 1 was achieved by the majority of students in these courses. An examination of the percentages by category for student learning outcome 2 shows that at least 55% of students in six courses earned a “good” rating while less than 22% of students in all eight courses were deemed to be “weak” for this outcome. Overall, student learning outcome 2 was achieved by nearly 80% of students enrolled in these courses. Results of student learning outcome 3 follow a pattern similar to that for outcome 2. Most courses reported a large portion of students earning a “good” or “adequate” rating. Students in the “weak” category comprised fewer than 20% of the total, with the exception of one course that reported 40% “weak” students. Overall, student learning outcome 3 was achieved by at least 60% of students enrolled in these courses.

Area VIII: Health and Well-Being

In the spring 2005 semester, assessment data were collected from seven instructors for 15 sections (approximately 1,500 students) of the four classes that satisfy the Area VIII requirement. Only two instructors submitted samples of student work, none of which was categorized as “good,” “adequate,” or “weak.” Two instructors provided sample test questions from which their data were drawn and three instructors included a summary list of the 19 questions comprising their data source. Each instructor provided proportions of his or her students who fell into the “good” and “adequate” categories, but only two instructors also included a “weak” category. Each Area VIII instructor used multiple-choice and true/false test questions on the final exam to assess student learning of the two identified student learning outcomes. Instructors categorized student learning of outcome 1 as “good” for 66% to 89.4% of the sample and as “adequate” for 10.6% to 30% of the sample. Student learning of outcome 2 was categorized as “good” for 66% to 98% of the sample and as “adequate” for 10.3% to 30% of the sample. Overall, Area VIII student achievement reveals that 85% of students exhibited a good mastery of the two learning outcomes, 17% were adequate, and 4% were weak.

Appendix A

Report on Student Learning Outcomes, Areas of General Education

Approved by General Education Assessment Committee May 12, 2003

The general education area student learning outcomes are designed to determine, through assessment, whether undergraduate students learn these outcomes at least partly as a consequence of the University's general education program. Obviously, there is no single assessment method that can be used for all learning outcomes simultaneously – and the faculty teaching in each area of the general education program will have to consider how best to do assessment in each area of the general education program.

After an experimental two-year assessment of general education at Western Michigan University during the 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 academic years, we will again collaboratively consider how to refine the student learning outcomes, with some use of the assessment results for the prior two years. Assessment results from this experimental period should provide valuable insights about student learning, and perhaps, provide some ideas about how to restructure and change the University's general education program in cooperation with the Faculty Senate's Committee on General Education (COGE). Any such restructuring of the general education program will require the initiation and support of both the Provost and the Faculty Senate for a formal review of general education at the University.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES FOR GENERAL EDUCATION AREAS

AREA I – FINE ARTS

- Explain the role of the arts in reflecting and influencing the human condition.
- Describe the historical context of various art forms.
- Interpret, evaluate, and describe aesthetic experiences and creative activities.
- Demonstrate knowledge of formal and thematic characteristics of different media and genres.

AREA II - HUMANITIES

- Explain the intellectual traditions that have helped shape present cultures.
- Describe the historical context of various literary, philosophic, historic, or religious works.
- Evaluate qualities and characteristics of works of literature, philosophy, history, or religion.
- Explain the role of at least one of the humanities in reflecting and influencing the human condition.

AREA III - U.S. CULTURES & ISSUES

- Explain the characteristics and historical background of diverse racial, religious, political, and social groups in the U.S.
- Identify issues such as age, class, disabilities, gender, race, or discrimination that have an impact on the cultural life of the United States, and analyze the roles those issues play in U.S. culture.
- Identify some of the historical dynamics (social, economic, political) that have shaped a current social condition (for example, economic and social segregation in U.S. cities or economic inequality) and explain how that dynamic has contributed to that condition.

AREA IV – OTHER CULTURES AND CIVILIZATIONS

- Explain the adaptive nature of culture.
- Explain the influence and contributions of at least one other culture and/or civilization.
- Describe the history, literature, arts, religion, ideas, and institutions of at least one culture other than one's own.
- Compare, contrast, and evaluate two or more different cultures, including one's own.

AREA V – SOCIAL AND BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES

- Describe how geographic, political, and historical processes influence the social and behavioral science issues.
- Examine critically the applications of the social and behavioral sciences for policy and public service.
- Analyze data and draw appropriate conclusions.

AREA VI – NATURAL SCIENCE WITH LABORATORY

- Apply the scientific method of discovery to the study of natural phenomena by critically evaluating and analyzing data and reaching the appropriate conclusions.
- Use scientific concepts and vocabulary to explain and make predictions about natural phenomena in a physical, life, or behavioral science.

AREA VII – NATURAL SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY: Applications and Implications

- Describe the history of technological innovation and its impact, both positive and negative, on society.
- Explain the interconnection between the natural sciences and advancements in technology as they impact:
 - health, social and economic welfare;
 - the storage, transfer, and processing of information;
 - the environment.
- Demonstrate the ability to evaluate and participate in making societal decisions regarding science and technology.

AREA VIII - HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

- Identify major health issues affecting students and other people and describe ways of reducing preventable disease, disability, and death.
- Describe the principles of a healthy lifestyle and ways of assessing health risks.

Appendix B

Western Michigan University
General Education Area Outcomes Assessment Reporting Form
Institutional Effectiveness – Room 3090 Seibert Admin Bldg

It is requested that WMU faculty who teach general education courses help with the assessment of the general education program by completing this form. The purpose of the form is to gather the faculty’s judgment about student achievement of general education learning outcomes. This form and related, supporting information should be sent directly by the faculty member to the Office of Institutional Effectiveness. This information **cannot** be used for any personnel or instructional decisions about the faculty member, nor can it be used as an evaluation or rating of one’s teaching. Upon receipt by the Office of Institutional Effectiveness, the faculty member’s name will be removed from the report and any accompanying or supporting materials. Faculty names will be entered only on a composite list to document faculty who did assist with this ongoing and cumulative assessment of general education.

Name of Instructor of Record (please print): _____

Faculty Appointment Type (circle one): Tenured Faculty Tenure-Track Faculty Term Faculty
 Part-Time Faculty/Adjunct Teaching/Graduate Assistant

Department Name: _____ **Course Prefix and Course Number:** _____

Course Title: _____

Gen Ed Distribution Area (circle only one): Area I Area II Area III Area IV Area V Area VI Area VII Area VIII

Appropriate Semester (circle one): Fall, Spring, Summer I, Summer II **Academic Year:** _____

Below please write out the specific student learning outcomes that were assessed in this class. All General Education student learning outcomes for each distribution area are at: www.wmich.edu/poapa/GEA/GenEdLearningFINAL.pdf

	Percentage of Students in Category:		
	Good	Adequate	Weak
(1)			
(2)			
(3)			

Indicate above the extent to which students in this course, as judged by you, achieved the learning outcomes specified for the distribution area for your general education course. **Your judgment of student achievement in the three categories should take place if at all possible during the last three weeks of a semester period, or during the last week of a summer session.** We ask you to judge the **percentage** of students in class that achieved the specified learning outcomes for each of the three categories.

Please note how you collected information on student learning outcomes (e.g., through an embedded question in a test, from samples of written coursework, or as the result of your composite judgment about student progress during the course). Please attach 5 to 10 samples of student work that represent the three different levels of achievement for general education student learning outcomes. **If you provide samples of student work, please black out names before providing the samples.**

You may also include your additional comments about student achievement of general education learning outcomes that would be helpful to the General Education Assessment Committee. All information will be treated with respect, confidentiality, and anonymity. Your comments may be continued on the back of this page or on a second page. Please contact Dr. Eileen Evans, Vice Provost for Institutional Effectiveness at 7-2314 or email at: eileen.evans@wmich.edu with any questions or concerns. **Thank you for your help – we can only improve with your participation!**

Appendix C

GENERAL EDUCATION ASSESSMENT

Western Michigan University

Exploratory Phase - 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 Years

The General Education Assessment Committee has established the following calendar to carefully examine alternative means for general education assessment at Western Michigan University. The Committee and other groups are using the next two academic years (2003-2004 and 2004-2005) to explore alternative means for the assessment of student learning outcomes in terms of the proficiencies and areas within the University's complex general education program. The calendar for this exploratory period of general education assessment is as follows:

Administration Date	Area Reviewed	Instrument Used	Date of Results	Review Parties for the Assessment Evidence
Early Fall 2003	Proficiencies for freshmen	<i>CBase</i> from the University of Missouri	December 2003	General Education Assessment Committee, COGE, UASC, Faculty Senate, Faculty/Chairs, Deans and Provost
Spring Semester 2004	Proficiencies for Seniors	<i>CBase</i> from the University of Missouri	May 2004	Same as above
Fall 2003	Areas I, II	Specific Outcomes	December 2003	Same as above plus specific area faculty
Spring 2004	Areas III, IV	Specific Outcomes	May 2004	Same as above
Early Fall 2004	Proficiencies for freshmen	<i>California Critical Skills Test</i>	December 2004	General Education Assessment Committee, COGE, UASC, Faculty Senate, Faculty/Chairs, Deans and Provost
Spring Semester 2005	Proficiencies for seniors	<i>California Critical Skills Test</i>	May 2005	Same as above
Fall 2004	Areas V, VI	Specific Outcomes	December 2004	Same as above plus specific area faculty
Spring 2005	Areas VII, VIII	Specific Outcomes	May 2005	Same as above
Campus Discussion - General Education Program and its Assessment – Fall 2005				