General Education Assessment
Basic Communication and Critical Thinking
Spring 2008

The University at Albany, SUNY

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Institutional Research, Planning & Effectiveness

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General Education Assessment  
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Executive Summary

In Spring 2008, as part of the University at Albany’s ongoing assessment of the General Education program, classes in the Writing Intensive category were sampled to measure the level of student achievement in Basic Communication and Critical Thinking learning outcomes as demonstrated in Writing Intensive courses. In lower division Writing Intensive courses students were assessed on two Basic Communication skills, their ability to 1) Produce coherent texts within common college-level written forms and to 2) Demonstrate the ability to revise and improve such texts. At the upper division level students were assessed on two Critical Thinking competencies, their ability to 1) Identify, analyze, and evaluate arguments as they occur in their own and other’s work and to 2) Develop well-reasoned arguments. As stated in its Strengthened Campus Based Assessment Plan the university chose to use SUNY-wide disciplinary rubrics to measure these skills. The artifacts were collected from sampled classes, and assessed by ten graduate student readers trained in sessions led by Dr. Robert Yagelski from the Educational Theory and Practice department and Dr. Billie Bennett of the Institute for Teaching, Learning and Academic Leadership. The graduate student readers were compensated through funds provided by System Administration in support of the SUNY initiative for Strengthened Campus Based Assessment. The actual sample size for the lower division was 215 papers, representative of 12.3% of the students enrolled in lower division writing intensive courses. The actual sample size of the upper division was 407 papers, representative of 18% of the students enrolled in upper division writing intensive courses.

Major findings

Lower division:
- the majority of students “Met” (60.7%) or “Exceeded” (15.6%) expectations in their ability to produced coherent college-level forms, while just under one quarter “Approached” (21.8%) or “Did Not Meet” (1.7%)
- over one half of students “Met” (48.1%) or “Exceeded” (7.5%) expectations with respect to revising texts, while a sizable percentage “Approached” (32.5%) or “Did Not Meet” (11.2%) expectations with regard to revising texts

Upper division:
- almost three quarters “Met” (49.6%) or “Exceeded” (20.6%) expectations in their ability to identify, analyze and evaluate arguments, while just over a quarter either “Approached” (21.6%) or “Did Not Meet” (8.1%) expectations
- almost two thirds either “Met” (48.3%) or “Exceeded” (16.1%) expectations in developing well-reasoned arguments, while almost one third “Approached” (29%) and 6.4% “Did Not Meet” expectations.
Inter-rater reliability:

The second reading of 20% of the artifacts from both lower and upper division artifacts confirmed that the vast majority of students at both the upper and lower division “Met” or “Exceeded” expectations for each of the objectives at both the lower and upper divisions. It may be worth noting that the second readers scored no artifacts as “Exceeding” expectations for the first objective in the lower division, and far fewer artifacts as “Exceeding” expectations at the upper division level.

Student Perception Surveys:

Each semester the University at Albany administers its own survey to gather students perceptions of their General Education classes. In Spring 2008 the vast majority of students at the lower and upper division indicated that the general education courses were fulfilling their stated objectives. At both levels almost two thirds of students responded “greatly” and about one quarter responded “considerably” to questions about the extent to which their course fulfilled the general education objectives.

General Education Assessment Results

Spring 2008

I. Introduction

As part of the University at Albany’s ongoing assessment of the General Education program, Basic Communication and Critical Thinking were assessed in lower and upper division Writing Intensive classes. Prior to the beginning of the semester faculty listed as teaching Writing Intensive courses in the spring were informed about the potential for being selected as part of the sample and sent information about the learning objectives. Once the semester began a sample was chosen that was the most representative of this particular category. It included classes both large and small, those taught by full-time as well as part-time faculty, and those that were 1 credit add-ons to non writing intensive courses. The first reading consisted of 407 upper division student papers, and 231 lower division student papers. Although the sample was representative, it was not balanced across disciplines. For instance, there was a large representation in the lower division from Biology, because Chemistry and Physics do not offer any Writing Intensive courses. The total number of student works assessed

A specific objective of this assessment was to include a measure of inter-rater reliability to ensure that the actual assessments of student work were valid and reliable. As part of its support of Strengthened Campus Based Assessment, SUNY System Administration provided sufficient funds to hire ten readers to assess the artifacts against the SUNY rubrics for the learning objectives (see Appendix A and B) and to do an additional inter-rater reliability read of 20% of the sample. The readers were all from the University at Albany, primarily doctoral students from the fields of English and Education. In order to provide consistency, the readers attended training and norming sessions led by Dr. Robert
II. Lower Division Results

The collected sample fell somewhat short of the required 20% due to a lack of participation. The required sample size based on enrollment as of February 22 was 348 artifacts, but only 215 were collected. This is 133 short of the 20% and represents 12.3% rather than 20%. Several faculty members with large classes chose not to participate.

The Lower Division reading presented challenges for assessment given that 62 artifacts did not include a first draft and so the second objective could not be measured in those cases. Also, a number of papers included more than one draft. In that case the readers took each draft into account when assessing the second objective.

Overall: The majority of artifacts met or exceeded expectations for the first objective. In the second objective, however, a substantially higher number of papers approached, rather than met expectations. As noted above, the number of papers that could be measured was substantially less, but still sufficient to observe a shift.

Objective 1 (first reading)
“Students will demonstrate their abilities to produce coherent texts within common college level forms.”

Not meeting – 1.7%
Approaching – 21.8%
Meeting – 60.7%
Exceeding – 15.6%

Objective 2 (first reading)
“Students will demonstrate their ability to revise and improve such texts.”

Not meeting – 11.2%
Approaching – 32.5%
Meeting – 48.1%
Exceeding – 7.5%

By Category: When the results were broken down by category it was noted that the majority of artifacts met or exceeded expectations for both the first and second objectives. It should be noted, however, that all the artifacts derived from one biology class. In the Arts/Humanities category the majority of artifacts met or exceeded expectations for Objective 1 but the results for Objective 2 were closer to those shown in the overall results. That is, more artifacts approached, and a majority did not meet and/or
exceed for this objective. The social sciences category was represented by only one artifact from one class. In the first year classes the majority of artifacts met or exceeded expectations for Objective 1 but the results for Objective 2 were closer to those shown in the overall results.

Objective 1 (first reading)  
“Students will demonstrate their abilities to produce coherent texts within common college level forms.”

Objective 2 (first reading)  
“Students will demonstrate the ability to revise and improve such texts.”

Sciences (61 artifacts, one class)  
Not meeting – 0%  
Approaching – 20%  
Meeting – 66%  
Exceeding – 14.7%

(37 artifacts, 1 class)  
Not meeting – 16%  
Approaching – 16%  
Meeting – 62%  
Exceeding – 5.4%

Arts/Humanities (93 artifacts, 7 classes)  
Not meeting – 1.1%  
Approaching – 22.5%  
Meeting – 60%  
Exceeding – 18.8%

(68 artifacts, 7 classes)  
Not meeting – 12.7%  
Approaching – 39.7%  
Meeting – 41.1%  
Exceeding – 7.3%

Social Sciences (1 artifact, 1 course)  
Not meeting – 0%  
Approaching – 0%  
Meeting – 100%  
Exceeding – 0%

(1 artifact, 1 course)  
Not meeting – 0%  
Approaching – 100%  
Meeting – 0%  
Exceeding – 0%

First year (69 artifacts, 3 courses)  
Not meeting – 4.4%  
Approaching – 23%  
Meeting – 61.1%  
Exceeding – 13%

(54 artifacts, 3 courses)  
Not meeting – 11.2%  
Approaching – 32.5%  
Meeting – 48.1%  
Exceeding – 7.5%

Large classes – small classes
Instructors were asked to submit artifacts for each student in their sampled classes. However, the number of artifacts received and the enrollment did not exactly match. There were students who did not turn in papers, who turned them in too late, etc. In most cases the number of artifacts does represent closely the number of students in the class.

Objective 1
The scores were broken down by “enrollments as artifacts submitted” the following results derived. Classes with 10 or fewer students made up one quarter of the sampled classes (3/12). The number of artifacts from those small classes (13) made up only 5.8% of the total number of artifacts collected and measured for Objective 1. When compared
to large classes, small classes appear to have more artifacts not meeting and fewer exceeding. Several causes for this difference are possible, but none are evident simply from the numbers.

**Table 1: Objective 1 (first reading)**
*Classes with 10 or fewer students enrolled*

“Students will demonstrate their abilities to produce coherent texts within common college level forms.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not meeting</th>
<th>Approaching</th>
<th>Meeting</th>
<th>Exceeding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of students</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Percentage of whole</strong></td>
<td>7.6%</td>
<td>30.7%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

13/224 = 5.8%

**Table 2: Objective 1 (first reading)**
*Classes with more than 10 students enrolled*

“Students will demonstrate their abilities to produce coherent texts within common college level forms.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not meeting</th>
<th>Approaching</th>
<th>Meeting</th>
<th>Exceeding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of students</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Percentage of whole</strong></td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>57.5%</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

211/224 = 94.1%

**Objective 2**
The scores were broken down by “enrollments as artifacts submitted” the following results derived. There were 4/12 classes with 10 or fewer artifacts measured for Objective 2. The number of artifacts measured for Objective 2 represented 13.7% of the total. Again there was a difference comparing larger and smaller classes. The smaller classes showed a significant number of artifacts that did not meet expectations and none that exceeded expectations.

**Table 3: Objective 2 (first reading)**
*Classes with 10 or fewer students enrolled*

“Students will demonstrate the ability to revise and improve such texts.”
Table 4: Objective 2 (first reading)
Classes with more than 10 students enrolled

“Students will demonstrate the ability to revise and improve such texts.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of students</th>
<th>Not meeting</th>
<th>Approaching</th>
<th>Meeting</th>
<th>Exceeding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of whole</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>27.2%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

22/160 = 13.75%

Inter-rater Reliability
The inter-rater reading results were somewhat different from the results above. Forty-four papers were read a second time for Objective 1 and 30 papers for Objective 2. The difference stems from the fact that a number of papers did not have a draft and so Objective 2 could not be measured. There were very few major disagreements (diff >2) in the readings. For example there were no examples of papers which received a 0 or 3 on the first read and the opposite on the second. There was only 1 example of a 0-2/2-0 split. The importance of the splits was discussed and it was determined that they were not equal. The crucial difference seemed to be the 1-2/2-1 split, which indicated the division between an artifact approaching or meeting expectations. Although this is an arbitrary division to a certain extent, it was used as a benchmark when calculating the importance of the splits.

For Objective 1 (“Students will demonstrate their abilities to produce coherent texts within common college level forms”) the 1-2/2-1 split was 36%. For Objective 2 (“Students will demonstrate the ability to revise and improve such texts”) the 1-2/2-1 split was 20%. Overall, disagreements were few.

When separated out by reader to see if any reader(s) were in disagreements more often, Reader #6 appeared 3 times out of the 8 total differences of 2, but also appeared that many times in the difference of 0. When separated by subject areas BIO showed up more often, but it was also sampled more often since it represented a quarter of the artifacts. No other significant trends were observed.
The results for papers that were read twice and where there was complete agreement (17) showed that no papers could be said to have exceeded expectations. For Objective 1, one paper did not meet expectations, two papers approached, and the remainder met. For the second objective, out of the 13 agreements, one did not meet, five approached, 6 met and one exceeded. The following are the percentages representing those numbers, although they are very small.

**Objective 1**
“Students will demonstrate their abilities to produce coherent texts within common college level forms.”

- Not meeting - 5.8%
- Approaching –11.7%
- Meeting – 82%
- Exceeding – 0%

**Objective 2**
“Students will demonstrate the ability to revise and improve such texts.”

- Not meeting - 7.6%
- Approaching – 38%
- Meeting – 46.1%
- Exceeding – 7.6%

Lower Division artifacts that “did not allow the student to demonstrate competency per the SUNY learning objectives”

- None

*Student Perceptions of General Education Program Course Surveys*

*Lower Division*
Out of the 23 classes sampled, 20 returned surveys (see Appendix C). Out of those, four were returned not completed because they were provided after the labs were done for the semester.
It was suggested by the GEAC in Spring 2008 that if the two columns designated as “very little” and “somewhat” totaled 30% or more there was cause for concern. In this semester the highest combination was 14.8%. In fact the lowest number in the “greatly” column was 53.2%, indicating that students thought the courses were fulfilling their general education expectations.

III. Upper Division Results

The collected sample fell somewhat short of the required 20%. The number of artifacts returned was 407, which represents 18% of the enrollment. A number of faculty chose not to participate.

Overall: The majority of artifacts met or exceeded expectations for the first objective. For the second objective about one third approached, and almost half met expectations.

Objective 1 (first reading)
“Students will identify, analyze, and evaluate arguments as they occur in their own and others’ work.”

Not meeting – 8.1%
Approaching – 21.6%
Meeting – 49.6%
Exceeding – 20.6%

Objective 2 (first reading)
“Students will develop well-reasoned arguments.”

Not meeting – 6.4%
Approaching – 29%
Meeting – 48.3%
Exceeding – 16.1%

By Category: When the results were broken down by category for Objective 1 a few observations could be made. In the Sciences there was almost an even split among those artifacts that approached, met or exceeding expectations. In the Arts/Humanities area almost a quarter did not meet expectations. This was due to the unusually high number of artifacts from Journalism in this category. In the Social Sciences the majority met expectations and in the Professional group the majority met or exceeded. When the results were broken down for Objective 2 the results were fairly comparable. Again, there were an unusually high number of artifacts that did not meet expectations from the 25 Journalism artifacts. This was because, according to the Reader, the assignment did not allow for students to demonstrate their competency in Objective 2. However, they were still given a score in those cases.
Objective 1 (first reading)
“Students will identify, analyze, and evaluate arguments as they occur in their own and others’ work.”

Objective 2 (first reading)
“Students will develop well-reasoned arguments.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sciences (18 artifacts, 4 classes)</th>
<th>(19 artifacts, 4 classes)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not meeting – 5.5%</td>
<td>Not meeting – 5.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approaching – 33.3%</td>
<td>Approaching – 31.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting – 33.3%</td>
<td>Meeting – 42.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exceeding – 27.7%</td>
<td>Exceeding – 21%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arts/Humanities (119 artifacts, 8 classes)</th>
<th>(119 artifacts, 8 classes)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not meeting – 22%</td>
<td>Not meeting – 17.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approaching – 16%</td>
<td>Approaching – 26.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting – 41%</td>
<td>Meeting – 41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exceeding – 20.3%</td>
<td>Exceeding – 14.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Sciences (67 artifacts, 3 classes)</th>
<th>(67 artifacts, 3 classes)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not meeting – 0%</td>
<td>Not meeting – 0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approaching – 22.3%</td>
<td>Approaching – 26.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting – 59.7%</td>
<td>Meeting – 59.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exceeding – 17.9%</td>
<td>Exceeding – 13.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional (190 artifacts, 9 classes)</th>
<th>(186 artifacts, 9 classes)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not meeting – 2.6%</td>
<td>Not meeting – 1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting – 52.6%</td>
<td>Meeting – 49.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exceeding – 21%</td>
<td>Exceeding – 17.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Large classes – small classes
Instructors were asked to submit artifacts for each student in their sampled classes. However, the number of artifacts received and the enrollment does not exactly match. There were students who did not turn in papers, who turned them in too late, etc. In most cases the number of artifacts does represent closely the number of students in the class.

Objective 1
The scores were broken down by “enrollments as artifacts submitted” the following results derived. Classes with 10 or fewer students made up 37.5% of the classes (9/24). The number of artifacts from those small classes made up 11.4% of the total number of artifacts collected. In classes with 10 or fewer students 70% of the artifacts met or exceeded expectations for Objective 1. In classes with more than 10 students the figure was 69.8%. In classes with 10 or fewer students there was a slightly lower percentage of students that did not meet (2.2%) compared to those with enrollments greater than 10 (3.4%). In classes with 10 or fewer students there were more students who approached (26.6%) than in classes with more than 10 students (20.9%).

Page 10
Table 5: Objective 1 (first reading)
Classes with 10 or fewer students enrolled.

“Students will identify, analyze, and evaluate arguments as they occur in their own and others’ work.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of students</th>
<th>Not meeting</th>
<th>Approaching</th>
<th>Meeting</th>
<th>Exceeding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of whole</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>26.6%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

45/394 = 11.4%

Table 6: Objective 1 (first reading)
Classes with more than 10 students enrolled

“Students will identify, analyze, and evaluate arguments as they occur in their own and others’ work.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of students</th>
<th>Not meeting</th>
<th>Approaching</th>
<th>Meeting</th>
<th>Exceeding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of whole</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>20.9%</td>
<td>50.1%</td>
<td>19.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

349/394 = 88.5%

Objective 2
The scores were broken down by enrollments (as of Feb 22) and the following results derived. The percentage of students meeting or exceeding expectations was only slightly lower for classes with more than 10 students enrolled (64%) compared to classes with 10 or fewer students enrolled (67.4%). Overall figures were slightly higher for the larger classes in the” Not meeting,” “Approached” and “Meeting” categories, and slightly lower in exceeded (15.8%) compared to the smaller classes (18.6%).

Table 7: Objective 2 (first reading)
Classes with 10 or fewer students enrolled

“Students will develop well-reasoned arguments.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of students</th>
<th>Not meeting</th>
<th>Approaching</th>
<th>Meeting</th>
<th>Exceeding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 8: Objective 2 (first reading)
Classes with more than 10 students enrolled

“Students will develop well-reasoned arguments.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of whole</th>
<th>4.6%</th>
<th>27.9%</th>
<th>48.8%</th>
<th>18.6%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

43/389 = 11%

Inter-rater Reliability
The inter-rater reading results were somewhat different from the results for the first reading. Seventy six papers were read a second time for Objective 1 and Objective 2.

There were very few major disagreements (diff >2) in the readings. There were two examples of a 0-3 split for Objective 1 and 1 example for Objective 2. The importance of the splits was discussed and it was determined that they were not equal. The crucial difference seemed to be the 1-2/2-1 split, which indicated the division between an artifact approaching or meeting expectations. Although this is an arbitrary division to a certain extent, it was used as a benchmark when calculating the importance of the splits.

For Objective 1 the 1-2/2-1 split was 22%. For Objective 2 the 1-2/2-1 split was 25%. Overall, the disagreements were in the minority. When separated out by reader to see if any reader(s) were in disagreements more often, readers 3 and 6 were the only ones in a 03/30 split. Reader number 3 showed up in that split once for the first objective and once for the second. When separated by subject areas , JRL showed up in the 0-3/3-0 splits for both objectives. The other one was RDG. JRL also showed the highest number of splits in the 0-2/2-0 category - 5 times for Objective 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Difference</th>
<th>Objective 1</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>= 76</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Difference</th>
<th>Objective 2</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>= 76</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>32</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The results for papers that were read twice and where there was complete agreement showed an overwhelming majority meeting or exceeding expectations. In fact, no artifacts were shown to not meet for either objective.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective 1)</th>
<th>Objective 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Students will identify, analyze, and evaluate arguments as they occur in their own and others’ work.”</td>
<td>“Students will develop well-reasoned arguments.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not meeting - 0%</td>
<td>Not meeting - 0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approaching – 12%</td>
<td>Approaching – 21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting – 76 %</td>
<td>Meeting – 68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exceeding – 8%</td>
<td>Exceeding – 6.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Upper Division artifacts that “did not allow the student to demonstrate competency per the SUNY learning objectives”

- Objective 1 – 16 artifacts
- Objective 2 - 43 artifacts

**Student Perceptions of General Education Program Course Surveys**

**Upper Division**

Out of the 55 classes sampled, 38 classes returned surveys (see Appendix D). It was suggested by the GEAC in Spring 2008 that if the two columns designated as “very little” and “somewhat” totaled 30% or more there was cause for concern. In this semester the highest combination was 9.7%. In fact the lower number in the “greatly” column was 62.7%, indicating that student though the courses were fulfilling their general education expectations.

**Upper and Lower Division Surveys Combined**

When the results were combined for those questions that pertained to all General Education courses it was noted that over 60% of respondents answered “greatly” to each question. Answers of “very little” or “somewhat” were in the single digits. While over 86% of students in the Lower Division courses seemed to have taken the course they did because it fulfilled a General Education requirement, in the Upper Division, that figure dropped to 55.7%. In the Upper Division 80.7% indicated that they were interested in the subject matter and that the reputation of the instructor 55.5% was a factor in their decision to take the course, compared to 36.8% in the Lower Division.
The appendices that accompany this report have been redacted to protect the identities of respondents and the integrity of the General Education Assessment process.