General Education Assessment
Arts and Humanities
Spring 2009

The University at Albany, SUNY

Assessment Report

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Institutional Research, Planning & Effectiveness

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Background
In Spring 2009 the University at Albany assessed the degree to which students were achieving student learning outcomes in Arts and Humanities. As with previous assessments the sample was chosen to be generally representative of the categories rather than random. The Arts sample consisted of 12 classes from 6 different departments with enrollments ranging from 11 to 126. Seven faculty completed Form 1 and 8 completed Form 2. The actual return of results exceeded the 20% mandate by 2% (22%). The Humanities sample consisted of 14 classes from 11 different departments with enrollments ranging from 10 to 150. Out of the 14 classes sampled, 11 faculty completed Form 1 and 10 completed Form 2. The actual return of results exceeded the 20% mandate by 9% (29.1%).

Arts Results

Course Embedded Assessment

Assessment results indicate that the majority of students “Met” or “Exceeded” expectations for all four learning objectives. Of note, is the fact that for Objective 3 (“Students will be able to recognize the difference and overlap between creative and critical thinking”) 19.9% of students only “Approached,” a result less satisfactory than that for other objectives.

Table 1
Arts – Reported as percentages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Objective</th>
<th>Exceeding A/A</th>
<th>Meeting B+/B/B-</th>
<th>Approaching C+/C/C-</th>
<th>Not Meeting D+/D/D</th>
<th>Not Meeting E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Students will have an understanding of the history and/or practice of one form of artistic expression.</td>
<td>25.1</td>
<td>63.7</td>
<td>5.85</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Students will have the vocabulary needed to continue to learn about how art is made and interpreted.</td>
<td>36.9</td>
<td>54.8</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Students will be able to recognize the difference and overlap between creative and critical thinking.</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>57.9</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Students will have an understanding of how art works are embedded within different cultures at different times and places.</td>
<td>38.4</td>
<td>54.4</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. Depending upon the nature of the course, students will develop an understanding of how art works are embedded within different cultures at different times, and places.

Student Perceptions of General Education Program Course Survey Results

In this category 344 students completed the perceptions surveys. This represents about two thirds of the sample from 8 out of the 12 classes.

The results were largely unremarkable. The vast majority of students indicated that the course either “Considerably”\(^1\) or “Greatly” fulfilled the requirements of the General Education program and the category. Once again, it is difficult to interpret the responses to the Yes/No questions pertaining to why the student took the course. Whereas 63.6% of respondents indicated that they took the course to fulfill a General Education requirement, it is not clear if that ties into the response that only 52.6% were interested in the subject matter.

**Humanities Results**

**Course Embedded Assessment**

Assessment results from this category indicate that the majority of students “Exceeded” or “Met” expectations. In fact, in 5 out of the 6 learning objectives, well over one third of the students in the classes sampled, “Exceeded.”

**Table 2**

**Humanities – reported as percentages**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Objective</th>
<th>Exceeding A/A</th>
<th>Meeting B+/B-/C+/C/-</th>
<th>Approaching D+/D/D</th>
<th>Not Meeting E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Students will have an understanding of the cultures of the people who created the objects studied.</td>
<td>36.2</td>
<td>49.8</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Students will have an understanding of the relevance of the objects studied to the present time and to the world outside the university.</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>43.5</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Students will have the ability to use the terms and understand the methods of the discipline.</td>
<td>55.6</td>
<td>30.1</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Students will have the ability to determine the strengths and weaknesses of ideas and positions.</td>
<td>28.8</td>
<td>56.3</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^1\) The scale of possible answers on the survey ranged from “Very little,” “Somewhat,” and “Considerably” to “Greatly.” Those who chose “Not applicable.” Were not factored into the percentage calculations.
5. Students will have an understanding of the nature of the objects studied and assumptions that underlie them.  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>38.3</th>
<th>51.4</th>
<th>6.3</th>
<th>3.8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

6. Students will have an understanding of the cultures of the people who created the objects studied.  

| Item | 31.9 | 57.6 | 7.3 | 2.9 |

Student Perceptions of General Education Program Course Survey Results

In this category 272 students completed the perceptions surveys. This represents about one third of the students in the sample. The results were largely unremarkable, with the vast majority of students indicating that the course either “Considerably” or “Greatly” fulfilled the requirements of the General Education program and the category. Whereas 69.4% indicated that they took it to fulfill a General Education requirement, 73.5% also indicated that they were interested in the subject matter.

Pilot Forms

The assessment process included the use of new forms developed by the Interim Director of Program Review and Assessment in consultation with the General Education Assessment Committee. Major differences were a) the inclusion of suggestions for ways to make the current learning objectives more specific, b) a request for faculty to reflect on how the results might influence their teaching strategies in the future, c) a request for information about the amount of time they devoted to completing the assessment forms, and d) a request for feedback about the forms and the process.

The opportunity for faculty to write their reflections on Form 2 was instructive. There were a variety of responses: some were satisfied with results obtained, others frustrated. Most responded directly to the results with specific ideas for changes for when they would teach the course again. These comments, which are included in the appendices, yielded several themes that were identified by Christine Reimers, Special Asst. to the Provost for Faculty and Program Development.

- Students are not doing the readings
- Different kinds of assignments (observation projects, critiques, analysis papers, creative papers) are needed for assessment
- The quality of student writing is low
- How to design in-class exercises, interactions for student intellectual engagement
- How to foster critical thinking, (with special emphasis on synthesis)
- How to develop more effective grading systems (timing, kinds of assessments)

These themes will be useful for Reimers and Bill Roberson, Director of ITLAL, in addressing teaching needs and coordinating faculty development efforts.

2 Same scale used as for Arts.
Inclusion of part-time faculty

Whereas in the past part-time faculty were dropped from assessment samples, in Spring 2009 a more conscious effort was made to include part-time faculty in the sample since they are heavily represented in these categories. In the Arts, non tenure-track faculty teach 73% of the classes. In the Humanities 62% of the classes are taught by non-tenure track faculty. Special efforts were made to provide information pertaining to the inclusion of part-time faculty. For instance, the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education and the Interim Director of Program Review and Assessment visited a College of Arts and Sciences Chairs meeting to explain the justification for the inclusion of part-time faculty. Several Chairs expressed two major concerns at the meeting and in subsequent emails. The first is that when part-time faculty are employed short term, there is no justification to include them in the sample from the viewpoint of faculty development and second, that the inclusion of part-time faculty represented an additional responsibility for which they were not paid.

Appropriateness of courses for General Education assessment

A difficulty arose this semester regarding the inclusion of a music performance ensemble in the Arts sample. The professor teaching the course thought that the course would be impossible to assess given the objectives of the category. The Chair of the department was also of the opinion that 18 of the courses offered in that department raised similar concerns and should be removed from the Arts category. Although on the surface it seems appropriate to include music courses in the General Education Arts category, according to the faculty member and the Chair, the objectives, as they are currently written, do not apply to performance ensemble courses.

Time required to complete assessment

The pilot forms requested that faculty record the length of time it took them to prepare data for and complete the two assessment forms (see Appendix). The average for the required preparation of the data and the completion of both forms was 3.85 hours. On average (with the exception of one outlier) Form 1 required about an hour to complete. The preparation and input of results for Form 2 was about 2 ½ hours, almost evenly divided. There were a couple of difficulties pertaining to computer use (one faculty member lost material after cutting and pasting, another’s computer crashed...) so it is unclear if these difficulties were included as part of the reported time. The one outlier who reported a significant investment of time in preparing the forms did not attend the information session, and another who had some difficulty stated that he would have benefitted from having done so. The Perceptions Survey portion of the assessment requires no time on the part of the faculty, particularly if they allow a student to administer the forms at the same time as the SIRFs (which most do). However, if a faculty member attends a one-hour workshop, which is recommended, the time for completing the General Education Assessment approaches 5 hours.
Observations on the Assessment Process

1. There has been positive feedback about the pilot forms.
   Recommendation: That the forms in their present format be used again in 2009-2010 in order to make comparisons and get additional feedback from faculty.
   Recommendation: That efforts continue to simplify/shorten the forms to make them more “user-friendly” and responsive to faculty needs while ensuring the collection of valid data.
   Recommendation: That the administration explore other options that might reduce faculty time in completing the assessment requirements, including a SNAP survey format option.

2. The inclusion of part-time faculty has raised concerns about workload expectations and whether there can be any benefit to part-time faculty that parallels the pedagogical development opportunities of full-time faculty.
   Recommendation: That the policy of including part-time faculty be reviewed by the General Education Assessment Committee with the intent of a) finding ways to include this constituency without increasing their workload, and b) providing for pedagogical development opportunities or other appropriate benefits for long term part-time faculty.

3. The learning that takes place in Music performance ensembles is not assessable using the Arts objectives as they are currently written. If these courses are to remain General Education Arts courses, there should be a means to assess them.
   Recommendation: That a review of the learning objectives as they apply to performance ensemble courses be undertaken by the General Education Assessment Committee, with a view to finding a way to modify or expand upon them so that performance ensembles may be included.
   Recommendation: That the process for de-registering a General Education course be clarified and made available to the faculty, Chairs, and governance (CAA, GEC, GEAC).
The appendices that accompany this report have been redacted to protect the identities of respondents and the integrity of the General Education Assessment process.