General Education Assessment  
Spring 2010  


Background  

In Spring 2010 the University at Albany assessed the degree to which students were achieving student learning outcomes in U.S. Diversity, Foreign Language, U.S. History. As with previous assessments the sample was chosen to be generally representative of the categories rather than random. The U.S. Diversity sample consisted of 11 classes from 9 different departments with enrollments ranging from 10 to 103. Four faculty completed Form 1 and four completed Form 2. The Foreign Language sample consisted of 11 classes from 10 different programs/departments with enrollments ranging from 10 to 30. Eight faculty completed Form 1 and five completed Form 2. The U.S. History sample consisted of eight classes from three different departments with enrollments ranging from 6 to 250. Six faculty completed Form 1 and three completed Form 2.
**U.S. Diversity**

**Course Embedded Assessment**

Because of the low response rate for this category, we have assessments for only four classes totaling 178 students, or 34% of the sample of 524. In addition, three of the four instructors who completed Form 2 reported identical student breakdowns for all four learning objectives; thus, all of the variance seen in Table 1, below, is due to the apparently more careful assessment conducted in one of the four classes. As shown below, large majorities of students were reported to have either met or exceeded each of the four learning objectives, ranging from a low of 86% for objective two to a high of 91% for objective 4. In addition, impressive numbers of students – consistently more than one third, were rated as having exceeded the expectations for the learning objective for all four objectives.

**Table 1. U.S. Diversity – Reported as percentages**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Objective</th>
<th>Exceeding A/A</th>
<th>Meeting B+/B/B- C+/C/C-</th>
<th>Approaching D+/D/D</th>
<th>Not Meeting E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. knowledge and understanding of the diversity and pluralism of U.S. society with respect to race, ethnicity, and gender, as well as class, sexual orientation, and/or religion.</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. knowledge and understanding of the social and cultural influences that shape the perspectives of various social groups as well as students' own points of view.</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. knowledge and understanding of the contributions of various social groups to U.S. society.</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. knowledge and understanding of the sources and manifestations of controversy or conflict arising from U.S. diversity and pluralism.</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Student Perceptions of General Education Program Course Survey Results**

In this category 268 students completed the perceptions surveys, in eight of the eleven classes in the sample. This represents just over half of the sample of 524. Complete responses for the student perception surveys for all three categories included in this report are presented in Appendix B.

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. The survey also includes a set of questions related to the reasons the student took the course. In this case the top response was the 76% of respondents who took the class because they were interested in the subject matter, followed by 67% who took the course because it fulfilled a general education requirement. Another 45% took the course because of the reputation of the instructor and 27% took it because it fulfilled a major or minor requirement. The role of friends was not large – only 31% took the course because it was recommended by a friend, while only 22% took it because a friend was taking it.

**Recommendations:**

None

\(^1\) The scale of possible answers on the survey ranged from “Very little,” “Somewhat,” and “Considerably” to “Greatly,” as well as “Not applicable.”
Foreign Language

Course Embedded Assessment

The five classes for which Form 2 was completed represent 102 students out of 221 in the sample, or 46%. Large majorities of the assessed students either met or exceeded expectations for each of the two learning objectives for this category – 88% for objective 1 and 97% for objective 2. As with the U.S. Diversity category, impressive numbers of students – again, more than one third, were rated as having exceeded the expectations for the learning objective for all four objectives.

Table 2. Foreign Language – reported as percentages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Objective</th>
<th>Exceeding A/A</th>
<th>Meeting B+/B/B-/C+/C/C-</th>
<th>Approaching D+/D/D</th>
<th>Not Meeting E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. proficiency in the understanding and use of fundamental elements of a foreign language.</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. knowledge of distinctive features of the culture(s) associated with the language they are studying.</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Student Perceptions of General Education Program Course Survey Results

In this category 133 students completed the perceptions surveys, in nine of the eleven classes in the sample. This represents 60 percent of the sample of 221. Again, complete responses for the student perception survey are presented in Appendix B.

Again, the results were largely unremarkable. The vast majority of students indicated that the course either “Considerably”\(^2\) or “Greatly” fulfilled the requirements of the General Education program and the category. On the reasons the students took the course, the top response was the 85% of respondents who took the class because they were interested in the subject matter, followed by 70% who took the course because it fulfilled a general education requirement. Another 35% took the course because of the reputation of the instructor, while only 23% took it to satisfy a major/minor requirement. Again, the role of friends was not large – only 13% took the course because it was recommended by a friend, while only 20% took it because a friend was taking it.

Recommendations:

None

\(^2\) Same scale used as for U.S. Diversity.
U.S. History

Course Embedded Assessment

Because of the low response rate for this category, we have assessments for only three of the nine classes in the sample, representing 175 students out of 732 in the sample, or just 24%. Majorities either met or exceeded expectations for all four learning objectives, although not by such decisive margins as for the other two general education categories reported here. Percentages reported as having met or exceeded expectations ranged from a low of 70% for objective 4 to a high of 72% for objective 1 – so numbers were very similar across the objectives (this is partly because one of the three instructors entered the same numbers for all three categories, and it was a large class). Similarly, percentages not meeting expectations were within a narrow range between 12% and 14% and those approaching expectations ranged between 14% and 18%.

Table 3. U.S. History – Reported as percentages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Objective</th>
<th>Exceeding A/A</th>
<th>Meeting B+/B/B- C+/C/C-</th>
<th>Approaching D+/D/D</th>
<th>Not Meeting E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. knowledge of a basic narrative of American history (political, economic, social, and/or cultural), including an awareness of unity and diversity in American society.</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. knowledge of representative institutions in American society and how they have shaped and been shaped by different groups.</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. an understanding of the relationship(s) between America and other parts of the world.</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. an understanding of various tools and approaches used in interpreting U.S. history.</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Student Perceptions of General Education Program Course Survey Results

In this category 286 students completed the perceptions surveys, in six of the eight classes in the sample. This represents 39% of the sample of 732. Again, complete responses for the student perception survey are presented in Appendix B.

As with the other two categories included in this report, the vast majority of students indicated that the course either “Considerably” or “Greatly” fulfilled the requirements of the General Education program and the category. However, with a range of 57%-81%, the numbers fell well below those of the other two categories. In particular, the questions on the four learning objectives showed that between 6% (objective 2) and 15% (objective 3) felt that they had gained “very little.” For the combined “very little” and “somewhat” responses, percentages ranged from 20% for objective 2 to a high of 43% for objective 3. In contrast, the largest percentage of combined “very little” and “somewhat” responses for U.S. Diversity was 12% for objective 4 and the largest for Foreign Language was 10% for objective 2. This would seem to indicate that, at least from the student’s perspective, the link between the curriculum and the learning objectives is a good deal less strong for the U.S. History courses than it is in courses for the other two learning objectives discussed in this report.

---

3 Same scale used as for U.S. Diversity.
On the reasons the students took the course, the top response was the 84% of respondents who took the course because it fulfilled a general education requirement, followed distantly by the 54% who took the class because they were interested in the subject matter. Only 22% took the course because of the reputation of the instructor, while only 24% took it to satisfy a major/minor requirement. Again, the role of friends was not large – only 10% took the course because it was recommended by a friend, while only 17% took it because a friend was taking it.

Recommendations

None
The appendices that accompany this report have been redacted to protect the identities of respondents and the integrity of the General Education Assessment process.