General Education Assessment Report:

Social Sciences

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The University at Albany, SUNY

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Institutional Research, Planning & Effectiveness

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Introduction

In 2011-12 the University at Albany assessed the degree to which students were achieving student learning outcomes in the Natural Sciences and Social Sciences General Education categories. As with previous assessments the sample was chosen to be generally representative of the categories rather than random.

The Social Sciences sample consisted of 24 instructors and 30 courses\(^1\), representing 13 departments and 4 colleges/schools. Enrollments in these courses varied from 4 to 197.

Although the sample captured 45% of students enrolled in Social Sciences General Education classes, only six instructors sent back completed assessment forms. The low response rate illustrates results for 19% of the sample population, and only 9% of students enrolled in Social Sciences General Education classes.

Although fewer than expected instructors participated in the social sciences general education category assessment Appendix D illustrates how the instructors who did participate mapped their courses to specific learning objectives, reflected on assessment results, and discussed how their findings would influence their course design and pedagogy for these courses in future semesters. This is exactly what we hoped the assessment process would produce.

\(^{1}\) Note that there were 24 discrete courses/instructors sampled. Six of the courses were cross listed in two departments.
Social Sciences

Course Embedded Assessment

Six of twenty four instructors sampled responded. The sample consisted of 2,406 students, and the number of students assessed is 460 (19%). The percent of students assessed is slightly lower than in Fall 2008 (21.8%), but the sample was significantly larger than the 2008 sample (which consisted of 1,724 students), which was the last time an assessment of the Social Sciences General Education category was conducted.

Assessment results from this category indicate that the majority of students are “Exceeding” or “Meeting” expectations. 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 78.5% for objective 5 to a high of 90.7% for objective 3.

In comparison to the 2008 assessment of this category, in three of the categories (2, 3, and 5) there are improvements in the percentage of students exceeding or meeting the objectives, including a dramatic 25.1 percentage point increase in category # 3 (from 65.6% in 2008 to 90.7% in 2012).

In two categories (1 and 4) there were very slight decreases in the percentage of students who exceeded or met the objectives (83.2% and 84.1% respectively in 2008, 80.3% and 79.7% respectively in 2012).

<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. an understanding that human conduct and behavior more generally are subject to scientific inquiry.</td>
<td>31.3</td>
<td>49.0</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>9.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. an understanding of the difference between rigorous and systematic thinking and uncritical thinking about social phenomena.</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>49.5</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. an understanding of the kinds of questions social scientists ask and the ways they go about answering these questions.</td>
<td>46.5</td>
<td>44.2</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. knowledge of the major concepts, models and issues of at least one discipline in the social sciences.</td>
<td>29.0</td>
<td>50.7</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. an understanding of the methods social scientists use to explore social phenomena, such as observation, hypothesis development, measurement and data collection, experimentation, evaluation of evidence, employment of mathematical analysis, employment of interpretive analysis.</td>
<td>39.5</td>
<td>39.0</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Due to rounding, categories may not total 100.
Recommendations:

Readers are reminded and cautioned that given the modest sample size and the low response rate, it is difficult to draw conclusions about the performance of students in courses meeting the Social Science general education requirement.

Recommendation 1: IRPE, in collaboration with the Associate Dean for General Education and the Deans of the Schools and Colleges, needs to work to improve the response rate from the faculty chosen to participate in the sample.

Recommendation 2: The General Education Assessment Committee should investigate why faculty participation rates are so low, to aid in developing successful solutions.

Recommendation 3: That the administration and the General Education Assessment Committee continue to work on streamlining the process to achieve valid results without overburdening faculty.
The appendices that accompany this report have been redacted to protect the identities of respondents and the integrity of the General Education Assessment process.