General Education Assessment
Arts
Spring 2013

The University at Albany, SUNY

Assessment Report

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Institutional Research, Planning & Effectiveness

August, 2013
General Education Assessment  
Spring 2013  

Categories Assessed: Arts, Humanities  

Background  

In Spring 2013 the University at Albany assessed the degree to which students were achieving student learning objectives in Arts and Humanities. As with previous assessments the sample was chosen to be generally representative of the categories rather than fully random. The Arts sample consisted of 19 classes from 5 different departments, with student N=1,057 (42% of the Arts population). Enrollments in these courses ranged from 19 to 166. All of the courses sampled were within the College of Arts and Sciences.  

Of the 19 classes sampled, 16 instructors submitted correctly completed forms\(^1\) at the end of the semester. The other 3 instructors submitted forms that were either incomplete or filled out in a manner that precluded their use. Data collected represents N=967\(^2\), which is 91.5% of the sample, and 42% of the population. This is both a larger N and represents a larger percentage of the population of students taking courses meeting this General Education requirement than the assessment of the Arts General Education requirement completed in the spring of 2009.  

The instructor participation rate on this administration of the General Education assessment was better in both categories than it has historically been. We believe this is attributable to 2 factors: 1) Better communication from IRPE, including earlier notification of selection for the sample, and a pre-notification of all instructors in the two categories by the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education and the Associate Dean for General Education; and 2) regular and repeated communication from the Dean’s Office in the College of Arts and Sciences to instructors who were selected to be part of the sample. Instructors 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. Appendix B illustrates these activities and reflections.  

Course Embedded Assessment  

Seventeen of nineteen instructors sampled responded, though three provided data that was either incomplete or was not useable. Total enrollment in courses meeting this General Education category was 2,298 students. The sample consisted of 1,057 students, and the number of students assessed was 967 (91.5% of sample, 42% of the population).  

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\(^1\) Due to serious illness (and subsequent passing) of one respondent, end of semester forms were completed by the department chair.  

\(^2\) It is important to note that both the Arts and Humanities General Education categories differ from the other categories as students in courses meeting these General Education categories are not required to complete all of General Education Learning Objectives. In some cases, students may meet no more than 1 or 2 of the requirements, thus in no case do the data supplied actually add up to the N of 864, as there are some students who were not counted towards a particular General Education Learning Objective.
Arts and Humanities assessment results indicate that the majority of students “Exceeded” or “Met” expectations. As shown in the composite graph below, as well as graphs for each of the individual learning objectives on the following pages. Large majorities of students were reported to have either met or exceeded each of the four learning objectives, ranging from a low of 76% for objective 3 to a high of 91% for objective 2.

![Graph showing Arts General Education results for Spring 2013.](image)

**Figure 1: Summary of Arts General Education results.**

The Learning Objectives for the category are as follows:

Arts courses enable students to demonstrate:

1. an understanding of the history and/or practice of one form of artistic expression;
2. an understanding of the function and meaning of form;
3. that they have the vocabulary they need to continue to learn about how art is made and interpreted;
4. depending on the nature of the course, recognition of the difference and overlap between creative and critical thinking;
5. depending on the nature of the course, an understanding of how art works are embedded within different cultures at different times and places.
1) Arts courses enable students to demonstrate an understanding of the history and/or practice of one form of artistic expression.

- Exceeded: 49%
- Met: 39%
- Approached: 5%
- Did Not Meet: 7%

2) Arts courses enable students to demonstrate an understanding of the function and meaning of form.

- Exceeded: 51%
- Met: 40%
- Approached: 4%
- Did Not Meet: 5%

Figure 2: Arts Learning Objective 1

Figure 3: Arts Learning Objective 2
3) Arts courses enable students to demonstrate that they have the vocabulary they need to continue to learn about how art is made and interpreted.

![Pie chart showing the percentages of students who exceeded, met, approached, or did not meet the objective.]

Figure 4: Arts Learning Objective 3

4) Arts courses enable students to demonstrate depending on the nature of the course, recognition of the difference and overlap between creative and critical thinking.

![Pie chart showing the percentages of students who exceeded, met, approached, or did not meet the objective.]

Figure 5: Arts Learning Objective 4
Comparison to 2006 & 2009 results:

In comparison to the 2009 assessment of this category, we see marked improvements in the number of students who exceeded expectations in all 5 categories. However, when “Exceeded” and “Met” are combined, we see drops in all categories from 2009 to 2013. We offer no speculation to explain this drop, other than to point out that the General Education Assessment forms have been revised since the 2009 assessment, and are now easier to understand and complete. The 2013 results, as with the 2009 and 2013 results, show that upwards of 75 percent of students in the assessment exceeded or met the learning objectives.
Figure 7: “Exceeded” and “Met” 2013, 2009, 2006, by Learning Objective

In comparing 2013 data to 2009 and 2006 data in each of the five Learning Objectives individually (figures 8-12 on the following pages), there no discernible patterns among the learning outcomes.

Figure 8: Learning Objective 1, 2013, 2009, 2006

Figure 9: Learning Objective 2, 2013, 2009, 2006
3) Arts courses enable students to demonstrate that they have the vocabulary they need to continue to learn about how art is made and interpreted.

Figure 10: Learning Objective 3, 2013, 2009, 2006

4) Arts courses enable students to demonstrate depending on the nature of the course, recognition of the difference and overlap between creative and critical thinking.

Figure 11: Learning Objective 4, 2013, 2009, 2006
Inclusion of graduate students and contingent faculty

Since the Spring of 2009, we have made a concerted effort to include courses taught by graduate student instructors, contingent faculty (typically under the title of “Lecturer”), and professional staff teaching on a part time basis in the general education assessment sample. As shown in Figures 12-14, below, graduate student instructors and contingent faculty in particular teach a disproportionate percentage of the introductory undergraduate courses that meet the General Education requirements in this category. In fact, only 41% (25 of 61) of the courses meeting the Arts general education requirement in Spring, 2013 were taught by tenured or tenure track faculty. While this result is not unexpected, it does serve to demonstrate why any valid assessment in this category would need to require non-tenure-related faculty.
Time required to complete assessment

The general education assessment forms that faculty are requested to complete record the length of time it took them to prepare data for and complete the beginning and end of semester assessment forms (see Figure 15 and Appendix C). The average for the required preparation of the data and the completion of both the beginning and end of semester section of the form was 77 minutes, after removing two of eleven faculty who provided the time estimate who were outliers. If we include the outliers, then on average, the 11 instructors who completed the beginning of semester form and included a response to this question indicated that it took 2 hours and 3 minutes to complete. When two extreme outliers were removed from the average, the time to complete the form drops to 1 hour and 17 minutes.
Recommendations:

1) The 2009 General Education Arts assessment report noted that:

“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).”

It appears that this concern has not been addressed, and it remains that there are credit bearing performance ensembles, bands, and chorales that are clearly unable to meet the General Education requirements as written (in the semester that this assessment was completed, no fewer than 9 such courses were offered, with a total enrollment of 325 – most for only 1 credit). Furthermore, the Director of Academic Assessment received specific feedback from the Chair of the Music Department to the effect that performance ensembles are not designed to meet some of the learning objectives, and wondering whether they should not be part of the general education system. Finally, this raises the question of whether one-credit courses more generally should be allowed to satisfy
general education requirements. We again recommend that General Education committee of the UAC review the General Education designation for these courses.

2) Graduate student/contingent faculty - With great thanks to the deans and department chairs we were able to secure the participation of graduate student instructors, contingent and part time faculty in assessments of student learning in General Education courses. IRPE must continue to work with the deans and chairs to make clear to graduate student instructors, contingent and part time faculty, that General Education Assessment is included as part of their contractual responsibilities, and if selected for the sample, they are expected to participate without additional remuneration.
Appendix A: Student Learning Objectives – Arts

Arts courses enable students to demonstrate:

6. an understanding of the history and/or practice of one form of artistic expression;
7. an understanding of the function and meaning of form;
8. that they have the vocabulary they need to continue to learn about how art is made and interpreted;
9. depending on the nature of the course, recognition of the difference and overlap between creative and critical thinking;
10. depending on the nature of the course, an understanding of how art works are embedded within different cultures at different times and places.
## Appendix B: End of Semester Reflections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent #</th>
<th>Learning Objective #</th>
<th>Comments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>The grades on the papers helped boost the number of A’s for this objective. Had I measured this just using the tests the number of students exceeding expectations would have been 20. The tests require the challenge of memorizing a lot of information, while the paper allows a more personal discovery of art history.</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>The research papers are generally excellent. The students are helped in that I review with them how to breakdown an analysis of an artwork. We do this from day 1 in class, and continue as we look at works all semester. Where they lose points is with their ability to research beyond online sources, or to cite sources with care. I may need to do more regarding library use and how to research databases for scholarly material.</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Vocabulary is pretty straightforward, and the students know which terms they are required to know going into the test. This is always the test section that students are most successful with.</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>1</em></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Many of these higher level thinking questions have to do with recognizing qualities typical of an artistic movement, or within an individual artist’s personal approach. The students who are looking and taking careful notes in class, and those who have developed a good eye succeed at these questions. Those students who see the course as just a lot of facts, don’t develop that critical eye. I’m not sure how I can get them to look more. Perhaps by employing some method of class discussion which is near impossible in a full lecture center. More written assignments would do it, but I’m stretched to the limit grading 300 papers each semester. Part of the problem is the student’s own attendance, which I’ve tried to encourage by taking surprise attendance 6 times during the semester. It’s good to see here that most students are “getting” it.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>I think I’m on the right track with the tests. Although, I don’t like seeing this many failures, I wouldn’t want to make the tests less challenging.</td>
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| 3            | 1                    | 1. Keys to success include emphasizing key points in my lecture by writing key words on the blackboard at the start of and during each class, and engaging the students in class discussions on particular topics.  
2. I would increase the number of in-class discussions. |
| 5            | 1                    | 1. Strategies that helped achieve the learning objectives: Structured curriculum that builds each level of skill achievement from week to week. Also, many critiques during each class including on homework and class drawings. Students receive a lot of feedback and are called on to orally communicate their understanding of the principles. What can be improved: include more contour line drawing earlier in the semester before measurement techniques are introduced. |
| 5            | 2                    | Strategies that helped students achieve this learning objective: |
analysis of artwork from historical past and seeing the ways in which the form of Degas, for example, differs radically from Picasso. This leads to discussions of the specifics of how form generates ideas and expressions, but also how it is a product of its time.

5 3 Strategies that helped students achieve this learning objective: keeping a consistent approach to drawing methodology beginning with how to stand at an easel, hold a drawing tool, view the subject, measure for accuracy, etc. The student is able to improve over time through practice and thus, continued practice yields further Components of idea development.

5 4 Strategies that helped students achieve this learning objective: Introducing many images of a variety of artists to the students leads to an understanding that the conditions for producing drawings is complicated, involving personal/aesthetic, social and historical elements which can be identified and discussed. That would make this better: Access to actual drawings. A field trip to a museum with a good drawing collection would aid seeing what drawings are – not just how they appear in reproductions.

6 1 Hands on drawing sessions each class. 3hrs per class.

6 2 At the beginning of each class I give the students a demonstration of the topics we are discussing. If a visual demonstration is not enough I hand out packets with example drawings for the students to work from.

6 3 Art vocabulary is what we use during critique sessions. The midterm and final are times that vocabulary is expressed and used by students the most. This grade will be reflective to the students who scored well with understanding form.

6 4 This is an idea that is stressed every time a student starts to draw or is at home working on a project. Composition for the drawing is one of the steps in critical and creative thinking that is stressed and talked about in every class.

7 1 Assigned students to research one artist that they then presented to the whole class. These artists were then used as examples for the introduction of a project.

7 2 Creating an atmosphere that encouraged open, engaged, dialogue between students allowed for a more relevant conversation on what was and wasn’t working in student presentations. Leading the critiques with specific questions relevant to the projects might have helped to raise the level of discussion. These questions could be generated by me, or I could assign different groups to be responsible for them.

7 3 A list of art definitions and terms are given at the beginning of each project that relate specifically to the project, and become a library of terms for the student. The students are asked to use this language during classroom discussions and critiques. Although all of this information was provided for students on blackboard, a master list could be compiled and offered to the students at the end of the course.

7 4 Students were asked to perform problem solving in combination with aesthetic qualities. This encouraged students to consider the cultural references elicited by the available materials. A specific assignment could be added to explore the source of these cultural references.

8 1 Reading literature from a wide range of time periods, paying close
attention to the similarities and differences between them concerning the major elements of fiction covered at the introductory level, such as voice, characterization, and imagery, etc.

| 8  | 2  | If the week’s writing assignment focused on practicing techniques for creating imagery, I assigned the students the subsequent chapter on imagery so that we could learn about and discuss the types of techniques defined, and then we read samples of fiction and poetry that used the various types of techniques so that we could see them in action. Only after doing this did we practice the form under discussion. A writing assignment was often accompanied by a writing workshop, in which we looked at a few student examples and provided comments, critique, and feedback. After they received class and teacher evaluation, they could rewrite the assignment as long as they came to me to talk about what they did well and where they might revise. |
| 8  | 3  | I’m a believer in small classes with lively class discussions, because it engages students and allows them to become active, rather than passive, learners. The problem is that there are always those students who are too shy to speak though it is soon clear, through an assessment of their written work, that they are paying attention and learning the material and have wonderful insights. Sometimes I will call on students to draw them into the discussion, or put them into small groups. |
| 8  | 5  | When they read a story which they initially feel they cannot “relate” too (which is something I’ve noticed is important to many college students), it helps to look for similarities between the students’ lives and the “unrelatable” characters, and then to hypothesize the reasons for the supposed differences between the students and the characters. |
| 9  | 1  | Out-of-class writing assignments were very useful in practicing the writing strategies discussed in class. Class participation helped students process the elements and strategies they needed to employ in the writing assignments. The combination of oral discussion and written assignments gave them a means to go through the process of writing—from studying a model text to planning their own pieces to executing their own piece, as informed by the ideas raised in class. Peer review was harder to practice. The students struggled to be critical of each other’s works and tended to favor general statements of praise rather than a more critical engagement with the issues of their drafts. I may incorporate reviews of peer reviews if I get to teach this class again in order to facilitate a clearer understanding of what constitutes helpful, practical critique. |
| 9  | 2  | A recurring idea that helped focus the semester was form is content/substance is style. Anchoring ourselves to this concept throughout our discussion of the different texts helped the students develop attentiveness to their choices, both stylistic and thematic, in their writing. It was useful to return constantly to a key concept and discuss how each required text grappled with it. |
| 9  | 3  | Peer review was a tougher tool to make use of in the semester. Some students were reluctant to be critical of their peers’ work and others did not take the work of their peers as seriously as the published texts. It might be useful next time around to incorporate reviews of the peer reviews—a class discussion or two of sample peer reviews drawn from the class to illustrate what makes reviews clear and helpful. |
I may include next time around a sample text or two that works as an explicit hybrid of critical and creative writing, i.e., a book of poetry that meditates on current events (Claudia Rankine’s Don’t Let Me Be Lonely comes to mind). Doing so would further drive home the point that the critical and creative are not separate realms.

Class participation was particularly useful to illustrate textual reception and reader response. The basic realization that each student brings in a response defined by her particular subject positions comes through quite clearly in discussion.

This part of the course went pretty well, but maybe I could make them work a little harder by assigning two concert reports instead of one to see how they do.

This part of the course was great—students often presented on music of their own particular heritage and everyone (including the professor!) learned a great deal.

I think this is about right—naturally I would love to see everyone do well but they had three chances to improve upon these aspects of the course over the term and I think it is a fair assessment of the work they did. Some students just won’t do any work outside of class (or even come to class regularly!) and they won’t reach “exceeded”.

Both class discussion and question/answer sessions were effective strategies.

Question/answer sessions during rehearsals was an effective strategy.

Both class discussion and question/answer sessions were effective strategies.

The strategy of having students practice improvising solos during rehearsals was effective.

By the end of the term, students are generally able to write convincing essays synthesizing the unit materials. Many take the opportunity to re-write their Items on multiple choice first essay to achieve this.

By semester’s end, most students are able to discuss genre in terms of change over time, with consideration of both musical materials and cultural developments.

Short answers demand precise understanding of individual works. These results show that this continues to be a challenge with new material for some students.

Close readings of dramatic texts, experience of live performance and learning analytical tools were the most effective strategies. Also learning tools to critically assess one’s own encounters and experiences with the art form.

Again, reading and analyzing texts and viewing performances helps students most effectively to acquire critical and analytical tools, and to understand and apply basic concepts of function and form. Next time I would try to do more of these activities.

Almost all activities in class are designed to achieve this learning objective: lectures and class discussions; homework assignments, response papers to live performance, analyses of texts, etc.

There are many assignments and activities that illuminate the creative process in the theatre; each of the three topic units over the semester focus on a different aspect of the creative and collaborative process in dramatic arts: unit 1: playwriting; unit 2: play production practices; unit 3: divers uses of theatrical spaces.
and their role in interpreting plays. Other assignments or other components of the same activities help student learn to critically access their experience as theatergoers and play readers. and play and readers. This combination seems to work satisfactorily.

| 15 | 5 | The assignments and activities in this class emphasize the theatre as a global phenomenon, while at the same time they stress the importance of historical and cultural context of the theatrical event and experience. This approach to the overall material is necessary to the understanding of the nature of dramatic arts, while it is also very helpful to students to achieve this particular learning objective. |
| 18 | 1 | Students who failed to read did poorly on quizzes. Also students who were absent a lot failed quizzes. Those who “did not meet” were often absent and didn’t read. No changes needed |
| 18 | 5 | All students attended and responded to the performance LOVE AND DESIRE. Their response papers led to an in depth conversation about theatre, the performance, and women in society. |
### Appendix C: Time to Completion and Comments

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<tr>
<th>Respondent #</th>
<th>Time to Complete Form 1 (in minutes)</th>
<th>Time to Complete Form 2 (in minutes)</th>
<th>Comments</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>This exercised my atrophied math skills, but the assessment process was, on the whole, easy and painless. And the statistics I worked out gave me some things to think about. Thanks for organizing the form clearly.</td>
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<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>540</td>
<td>First, in the process of filling out this form, I began to consider why I have been hearing discussions about these Gen Ed assessments not yielding much by way of useful or meaningful results. Admittedly, I avoided the completion of these forms this term, but not because I have an issue with assessing the success of general education in general or my own course in particular. However, I do find the forms themselves cumbersome, inelegant, and unappealing, complete with columns that are not human-friendly, especially as they expand. Also, reducing learning about art to quantitative analysis feels somewhat antithetical to me, no matter which side of my brain I am using. Seriously, I would recommend at least a brief consideration of the notion that the more thorough someone attempts to be in the process of completing this assessment, the less useful the form becomes and the more work is created for the faculty member. Therefore, I suspect that some people who feel forced into doing this may be considering how to minimize their workload and frustration-levels by providing the least amount of information, which then becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy about insufficient data for analysis. For me, the major assessment difficulty rests with what feels like a somewhat artificial deconstructing of these learning objectives, and pretending for the purposes of assessment that they are discrete areas. I am saying this, of course, even while admitting that I was a member of the initial Arts Gen Ed Task Force responsible for developing these learning objectives. However, I still cannot in good faith ask irrelevantly “binary” questions of students, simply to satisfy an assessment requirement; so, I end up somewhat arbitrarily picking certain questions to demonstrate their success for each objective. However, beyond embracing a new vocabulary, a major point of this sort of course is to get students to SYNTHESIZE rather than compartmentalize new information,</td>
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knowledge, and ideas. Of course, I am well aware of the individual building blocks as I present them to a class, but I spend a good deal of time trying to get them to see how it all relates in complex and interesting ways. A student’s ability to regurgitate specifics is only useful at the lowest learning level; and while they cannot succeed without the necessary vocabulary, an ability to define terms does not readily translate into a guarantee that they will be able to use the terms in any meaningful process of assimilating new knowledge. In this class, some test and exam questions are factual, requiring students to have memorized terms and concepts, and/or be able to identify the same. At the most elementary level of understanding this will show mastery of the basic vocabulary of the field, which is essential to their increased enjoyment and perception of the performing arts throughout their lives. Other test and final exam questions, as well as some BLACKBOARD assignments, ask students to choose and interpret visual images. Successful answers show a solid understanding of the terms and ideas discussed throughout the course. As the term progresses, test questions ask for and expect an increasing ability to think both critically and creatively while interpreting images. The observational design journal gives students the opportunity to consider what they have learned in class and apply it to the creative aspects of this semester-long assignment, in order to become producers of a sort of design compendium of their own. The most successful students assemble their entries using the elements of design and incorporating the principles of composition into this semester-long project. Then they demonstrate their expanding knowledge and awareness by choosing interesting and varied entries about which they write with increasing depth and awareness. The least successful students fail to take the long-term nature of this assignment seriously, attempting to create fifty entries over one or two weeks, or even nights. Their entries invariably fail to show growth in their ability to analyze, and there is a distinct lack of variety in examples or types of responses. Poor journals generally show a clear lack of understanding or both the basic vocabulary or the ideas behind their words. I do not include specific details of the assignments in my syllabus because it is already seven pages long, and because I want to be able to explain each assignment as they acquire the necessary knowledge to appreciate the nature of the assignment and the requirements for success. I do, however, give students a general outline in the syllabus and an elaborate overview in the first class so that they have a reasonable understanding of how much work the class will entail, in addition to what they can reasonably expect to learn during the term if they put forth some effort. Then, for each web-based assignment, detailed instructions are posted on Blackboard along with information on the purpose of the assignment and the grading criteria. As far as what worked and what was less effective, after teaching this class for more than a decade I have noted a gradual but clear decline in the average student’s ability to use words (not course-specific vocabulary, just general terms) to describe ANYTHING (again, I am not talking deep analysis, I mean simple descriptions). At the same
time, the proliferation of visual stimuli in their daily lives makes it more difficult for them to observe anything carefully, which means I need to spend more time simply getting them to see, really see, what is around them. With fewer students having any depth of general knowledge beyond the most recent popular culture event, I have discovered the need to draw more heavily from those events in order to lead them more directly into making associations that will help them to perform critical analyses of events outside their daily existence. This was more obvious to me this term, in part because I did not teach this course last year, and the year before I taught an honors version to students who were both more motivated and better prepared to be in college. The one last comment I will make is not directly related to assessment, though I think the assessment component further fuels student perspectives on “meaningless, academic hoops” that just need to be gotten through. I think our campus focus on GENERAL EDUCATION courses somehow encourages our students to think of these courses as something to survive instead of as an integral part of their undergraduate education. The rampant attitudes about courses beyond their majors being “just gen eds” or “too much work for a gen ed” or their perceived need to take easy gen eds so they don’t mess up my GPA – regardless of the topic – creates a classroom atmosphere that is seldom conducive to learning. I do realize that we are dealing with the generation of students raised on “teaching to the test” and that no single aspect of university education is responsible for the current ingrained attitudes; but, I think that if we hope to turn more of our average students into willing and eager learners we will need to create an atmosphere that truly encourages and rewards serious learning above testing and assessment success. Of course, this is why I need to work in the arts and not the social sciences. A PDF of the syllabus is attached separately, along with a separate PDF of sample questions/tools.