General Education Assessment
2018-19

Categories Assessed: Foreign Languages, Natural Sciences, US History

Background

During the spring semester of the 2018-19 academic year, the University at Albany assessed the degree to which students were achieving student learning objectives in General Education courses in Foreign Languages, Natural Sciences, US History. As has been the case with other recent General Education assessment activities, the sample was chosen to be generally representative of the categories rather than completely random, and instructors who had completed assessments in other General Education categories within the past 5 years were exempted. In the US History category, 53 course sections met the General Education requirement, with a total enrollment of 1146\(^1\). 50 of these sections originate from departments in the College of Arts and Sciences, 3 of these sections originate within Rockefeller College.

After assuring that no instructor would be sampled more than once, and eliminating courses with enrollment that was potentially below the Registrar’s enrollment cancellation number, there was a remaining pool of 21 sections that were eligible for sampling. Using a random number generator, 11 of those sections were chosen for the sample. One section was later eliminated from the sampled pool.\(^2\) Those eleven sections sampled represented offerings from 3 unique departments, with student enrollment at the time of sampling N=447, and enrollment at the start of the semester N=604\(^3\). Start-of-semester enrollments in courses selected for the sample ranged from 23 to 132.

Of the 10 classes that remained in the sample, all 10 instructors submitted at least some materials, and

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\(^1\) Sampling is conducted prior to the start of the semester, and figures represented for both the sample N and individual course enrollments reflect enrollment at the time of sampling—and thus is not necessarily reflective of the number of students who were actually assessed as part of the administration of this General Education assessment.

\(^2\) The instructor of one section that had originally been included in the sample (respondent \#9) was replaced by another instructor, who was already part of the sample. In accordance with our practice that no instructor be sampled for more than one section, we dropped this section from the sample.

\(^3\) In an unusual anomaly, the N at the time of sampling was 447. While some growth (or shrinkage) of the N due to enrollment changes after sampling is not unusual, in this particular instance, a single section picked up an additional 50 students, and another section picked up an additional 48. Eight of the sampled sections gained enrollment after sampling, one section remained the sample, one section dropped by 4 students.
9 submitted completed forms at the end of the semester\textsuperscript{4}. Data collected represents a maximum 
N=505\textsuperscript{5}, which is 84\% of the sample\textsuperscript{6}, and 44\% of the population\textsuperscript{7}.

The instructor participation rate on this administration of the General Education assessment was stronger 
than prior iterations of the US History General Education assessment – in 2010 the response rate was 33\%, 
in 2014 it was 88\%. We believe these improvements are attributable in large measure to better 
communication from IRPE and a concerted effort on the part of the Associate Dean for General Education, 
who sent several follow-ups and reminders in an effort to improve both the rate and quality of responses.

**Learning Objectives and Course Embedded Assessment**

The Learning Objectives U.S. History courses enable students to demonstrate:

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;
2. knowledge of representative institutions in American society and how they have shaped and 
   been shaped by different groups;
3. an understanding of the relationship(s) between America and other parts of the world;
4. an understanding of various tools and approaches used in interpreting U.S. history.

US History 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\textsuperscript{8}.

\textsuperscript{4} One instructor submitted results for the first 3 learning objectives and not the fourth. Another submitted results for the first 2 learning 
objectives, but not the third or fourth. One instructor submitted beginning of semester materials, but did not submit end of semester results.

\textsuperscript{5} Note that for the individual learning objectives, none of the N’s add up to 604- the maximum n reflected in the results is associated with the 
first learning objective, and totals 505.

\textsuperscript{6} The N represented here is based on actual enrollments in the course at the start of the semester.

\textsuperscript{7} This figure could be slightly misleading, as the numerator reflects actual enrollment, and the denominator reflects enrollment at the time of 
initial sampling. Enrollment in courses that were not selected for the sample were not recalculated ex-post-facto to reflect changes in 
enrollment.

\textsuperscript{8} See Figure 6 on page 4 for an additional, combined, visual representation of this.
Figure 1: Summary of US History General Education Results

Figure 2: US History Learning Objective 1

1) Students will demonstrate knowledge of a basic narrative of American history (political, economic, social, and/or cultural), including an awareness of unity and diversity in American society.
2) Students will demonstrate knowledge of representative institutions in American society and how they have shaped and been shaped by different groups.

Due to rounding, values may not equal 100%

Exceeded: 41%
Met: 28%
Approached: 19%
Did not meet: 12%

Figure 3: US History Learning Objective 2

3) Students will demonstrate an understanding of the relationship(s) between America and other parts of the world.

Due to rounding, values may not equal 100%

Exceeded: 56%
Met: 22%
Approached: 19%
Did not meet: 3%

Figure 4: US History Learning Objective 3
Comparison to results of prior History Gen Ed assessments:

When looking at combined “Exceeded” and “Met” data for 2019 results, when compared to 2014 results there is:

- a decrease of 1 percentage point on the first learning objective
- a decrease of 6 percentage points on the second learning objective
- an increase of 1 percentage point on the third learning objective
- an increase of 13 percentage points on the fourth learning objective

When looking at combined “Exceeded” and “Met” data for 2019 results, when compared to 2010 results there is:

- an increase of 7 percentage points on the first learning objective
- a decrease of 2 percentage points on the second learning objective
- an increase of 8 percentage points on the third learning objective
- an increase of 11 percentage points on the fourth learning objective
Figure 6: Combined “Exceeded” and “Met” 2019, 2014, 2010 by Learning Objective

Figures 7-10 on the following pages compare 2019 data to 2014 and 2010 results in each of the four Learning Objectives.
Figure 7: Learning Objective 1, 2019, 2014, 2010

Figure 8: Learning Objective 2, 2019, 2014, 2010
Learning Objective 3 Through Three Assessment Cycles
Students will demonstrate an understanding of the relationship(s) between America and other parts of the world.

![Graph showing exeeded, met, approached, and did not meet categories for 2019, 2014, and 2010 with percentages for each year.]

**Figure 9: Learning Objective 3, 2019, 2014, 2010**

Learning Objective 4 Through Three Assessment Cycles
Students will demonstrate an understanding of various tools and approaches used in interpreting U.S. history.

![Graph showing exeeded, met, approached, and did not meet categories for 2019, 2014, and 2010 with percentages for each year.]

**Figure 10: Learning Objective 4, 2019, 2014, 2010**
Comparison between UHS and On-campus Student Populations

In the US History category, comparisons of performance between the UHS and on-campus populations remain skewed, but are somewhat less skewed than we have often seen when comparing General Education results of these populations. Although the UHS students led the UAlbany students in all categories when “Exceeded” and “Met” numbers are combined, the margins were generally smaller—between 2 and 20 percentage points.

![Figure 11: Comparison of Combined “Exceeded” and “Met” Results, by Learning Objective](image)

Amongst UHS students, between 2% and 3% of students “Did Not Meet” the respective learning objectives. In comparison, the number of on-campus students who “Did Not Meet” is between 9%- 19% for each of the learning objectives.
Figure 12: Comparison of Results for UHS and On-campus Populations on US History Learning Objective 1

Figure 13: Comparison of Results for UHS and On-campus Populations on US History Learning Objective 2
Figure 14: Comparison of Results for UHS and On-campus Populations on US History Learning Objective 3

Figure 15: Comparison of Results for UHS and On-campus Populations on US History Learning Objective 4

It is important to note that the majority of students who enroll in University in the High School courses tend to be highly motivated and high performing. In fact, only juniors and seniors with an overall average of B or better are allowed to enroll in UHS classes. One could reasonably expect students who
have a high GPA to perform well in these classes. Additionally, on-campus students taking courses meeting this General Education requirement may be doing so only to fulfill the General Education requirement, and that is a potential explanation of differences in performance that appear to exist across these populations.

We also recognize that the UHS courses cover the same material as the on-campus offerings, but typically do so in a year-long format rather than the standard semester format. Additionally, the typical UHS course meets every day, not a few times a week. Both of these could be contributing factors to explain the high performance of UHS students relative to their on-campus counterparts.

**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 professionals teaching on a part-time basis in the general education assessment sample. As shown in Figure 16 below, contingent faculty teach a majority of the introductory undergraduate courses that meet the General Education requirements in this category. 24 of the 53 courses meeting the US History general education requirement during this assessment period were taught by tenured or tenure track faculty (45%), while 28 (53%) were taught by lecturers. One remaining course (2%) was taught by an individual in titles other than lecturer, but not on the academic tenure track (i.e., Visiting Assistant Professor, teaching assistant, or professional faculty lines). While this result is not entirely surprising, it does demonstrate why any valid assessment in this category would need to include non-tenure-related instructors. We will also point out that while we often receive requests to exempt graduate students from participating in these assessments, most of the individuals teaching in the “lecturer” title are graduate students, and therefore we are unable to accommodate those requests. With rare exception (and none in this cycle) we have allowed a tenured faculty member who had not been selected to participate, to voluntarily replace a graduate student who had been selected.
Figure 16: US History General Education courses by instructor rank\(^9,10\)

**Time required to complete assessment:**

The general education assessment forms that instructors complete as part of this assessment process asks them to record the length of time it took them to compile the data and complete the beginning and end of semester assessment forms (Please refer to Appendix C for the further detail). The average for the required preparation time of the data and the completion of the forms was 99 minutes at the beginning of the semester, and 153 minutes at the end of the semester. As is often the case, some respondents did not provide responses to this question on the end of semester form, and thus we are missing data for those individuals (respondents 1 & 4 did not supply information for either data point, and respondent 2 did not provide this data for the beginning of the semester).

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\(^9\) Note that “responded” indicates that the instructor submitted either the beginning of semester forms, the end of semester forms, or both. It is not an indication of the completeness or “correctness” of their submission.

\(^10\) Note that while the chart is accurate in indicating that 9 sections listed at individual at the rank of “Professor” as instructor of record, in practice, 8 of these sections were directly taught or supervised by one individual.
Figure 17: Time Required to Complete Assessment Forms

Recommendations:

The Office of Assessment is very pleased with both the response rate and quality of the assessment materials submitted in this cycle. We offer a self-recommendation to continue to work closely with the Associate Dean for General Education, as the extra efforts have paid dividends in improving response rate and submission quality. We commend and thank the faculty who participated in this assessment for their hard work in striving to meet the goals of the General Education learning objectives.
Appendix A: Student Learning Objectives – US History

U.S. History courses enable students to demonstrate:

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;
2. knowledge of representative institutions in American society and how they have shaped and been shaped by different groups;
3. an understanding of the relationship(s) between America and other parts of the world;
4. an understanding of various tools and approaches used in interpreting U.S. history.
### Appendix B: End of Semester Reflections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent #</th>
<th>Learning Objective #</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Weekly on-line quizzes on assigned readings helped students considerably. I would try not to cover so much material in my lectures and reduce the # of my Power Point slides. Though some students appreciated the depth and breadth of my PowerPoints, others found them intimidating. I would also be more selective in my TA's. Though one of my TA's was excellent, the other was definitely NOT. I would reduce the number of assigned essays (I made a mid-course correction and reduced the required papers to TWO). I will reduce the number of documentary films assigned for out-of-class viewing and substitute short primary source reading assignments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Results above reflect these results as well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Norton's InQuizitive quizzes allowed students to take and re-take the quizzes till they achieved mastery of the material, hence the high &quot;Exceeded&quot; #s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Essay assignments focused on working with primary sources and answering historical questions utilizing primary sources. Some students enjoyed and got much from these assignments; others were clearly intimidated - even after they were provided with guidance on locating relevant primary source collections available online. Next year I will provide additional guidance to students and provide them with examples of good essays.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>We had class discussion about how to construct a narrative/story about American history, specifically poverty in America. I gave them the questions in advance to give them time to think through. Surprising numbers of students only approached the objective. This was their first crack at this type of assignment and because many are taking the course for a gen ed they are not ready to answer this type of deep historical narrative question. Maybe next year I need to hand out a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>I think students met this objective better because they were more comfortable with the course and with what I was looking for in how</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>They had experience in searching primary sources and we had discussed the role of US foreign policy and international affairs in the health care section of the course (which preceded this section) so they had a good basis for understanding how global issues might affect domestic policymaking. I do not plan on changing anything.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>They did ok on this assignment overall. Good discussion of the transcripts in class helped, as did my pre-clearance of their newspaper article. In other words, they needed guidance. Changes? Maybe do this assignment earlier in the semester? It's the last one they did and they were tired.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Students did VERY well on the quizzes and did better than usual on the exams. I made the Powerpoints more emphatic on the &quot;big picture&quot; items and I think that helped. I will continue emphasizing overall importance and broad changes over time rather than details. I will leave those to the quizzes. The documentary responses were very rewarding to read: students really focused on big significant changes through these responses. I was delighted with the degree of empathy and respect for American diversity that they showed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>This is where 100-level students struggle the most. They have difficulty understanding how the three branches of government should work, despite having learned this repeatedly through their years of education. The Supreme Court is particularly problematic in their understanding. This area needs to be emphasized more in future classes (but that runs the risk of sounding like a Poli Sci or civics class).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Emphasis on American wars in the twentieth century helped students to see a more nuanced view than what they learned in high school- that wars are never black and white, good versus bad - that there are always shades. They also learned that the U.S. has wavered between isolationism and interventionism throughout its history. They gained a new understanding of the Cold War and its origins - many of them grasped the complexity of that bifurcation in the world that resulted from the end of World War II and the consequences that arose from that bipolar geopolitical era--- consequences not just for the U.S. and the Soviet Union, but for many other areas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Students did very well in this area because of a book assignment. That book shows them not only how our interpretation of the Jim Crow era in the South has changed over time, but why that interpretation has changed- because of the discovery and release of new documents. Here the students did exceedingly well and I will use this book again whenever I teach this course. It is called Redacted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Students did well in meeting or exceeding learning objective #1. For the de facto segregation question, instruction took place both power point slides (my own that are given to the students), and a sketch the board showing how a rust belt city became more segregated from 1950 to 1970 as residential pockets of African Americans became both larger and more concentrated geographically. We then went over a number of reasons why this took place. The evolution of voting rights covers less foreign ground in that most students come to POS 101 with some knowledge of all women achieving the right to vote in 1920, and that most African Americans did not have true voting rights until the Civil Rights Movement. It is important to recognize the rights are not guaranteed and that it often required constitutional amendments to achieve greater equality. Most students achieved a strong understanding of both the evolution of voting rights, and the various factors creating societal segregation. I am satisfied with the outcome of this learning objective.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Both of the questions assessing learning objective two did not find effective learning outcomes for this objective. While part of this can be explained by poor student attendance toward the end of the course (both questions were on the final exam), but the presidential nomination material was also quite dense. I would either substitute other historical material in its place, or create a more simplified narrative on par for this introductory gened course. The government agencies material can be taught more effectively by giving students power point slides in advance and asking them to prepare for class by coming up with ways that society can influence government agencies, and how different types of agencies have varied effects on society. The four types of agencies and various ways citizens can hold them accountable may be information overload for a single class meeting without more preparation outside of class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Students in American universities suffer as Americans do in general with knowing little about how our system of government relates to others in the world. Students with high levels of academic orientation appear to more easily grasp this material than their peers. Instead of teaching material related to this learning objective through traditional power point lecture-instruction followed by exam questions, it might be better to assign short papers requiring students to find nation states with different government forms and examples of US foreign policy approaches. We can then review some of the better papers in class.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 7   | 4   | I was quite pleased that a large number of students performed well on learning objective four. Knowing the difference between primary and secondary sources is important in being able to analyze the value of information provided by others. In the classroom I used a handout with a number of different sources (full of citations) listed and we went around the room and discussed the sources. It appeared
that a number of students had prior knowledge of the difference between primary and secondary sources, so the familiarity of these concepts may have also contributed to good learning outcomes.

I was also satisfied with students’ understanding of how the Supreme Court justices interpret the Constitution from a historical or contemporary standpoint. In future POS 101 classes I might offer more examples of court decisions where justices had different interpretations of the Constitution.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>8</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>First time I'm teaching this course. Most changes would involve selecting different readings, not so much in assessments so far (to 4/7/19)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>As on previous sheet, all assignments have involved Jewish immigrants/inhabitants of US. Essay was given to every student to prepare; only some chose to answer it on their exam.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 10  | 1   | Please note that because the assessment tools are multiple choice questions on exams, I am unable to offer nuance between "exceeded" and "met."

80% of test takers answered question #15 correctly. 28 students answered correctly ("exceeded") and 7 students answered incorrectly ("did not meet"). In large part, it seems, students answered incorrectly because they thought that the urban renewal period was much earlier. (1) I used vivid descriptions and maps to convey the significance of this material. (2) In order to help students who answered incorrectly, in the future I plan to emphasize the time period of urban renewal.

91.43% of test takers answered question #19 correctly. 32 students answered correctly (exceeded) and 3 answered incorrectly (did not meet). Two out of the three students who answered incorrectly seem to have been confused by the time period and the socio-economic differences in populations. (1) On a PowerPoint presentation, I shared some of my archival research, many of which were photographs, to illustrate the racial discrimination that pervaded NYC public housing in its early years. This was very effective in eliciting a discussion among students. (2) I think that overall students understood and critically assessed this narrative of urban history.

| 10  | 2   | Please note that because the assessment tools are multiple choice questions on exams, I am unable to offer nuance between "exceeded" and "met." |
80% of test takers answered question #16 correctly. 28 students answered correctly and 7 students answered the question incorrectly. It seems students were unable to identify when redlining started. (1) I used redlining maps and newspaper articles to convey the effects of redlining and its ongoing impact on communities of color in cities. (2) I am satisfied with how students received and analyzed the material. To help students who answered incorrectly, I would stress the importance of time periods during lecture and exam review.

80% of test takers answered question #17 correctly. 28 students answered correctly and 7 answered incorrectly. Students who answered incorrectly were not thinking of the criteria set for DACA students. (1) I used pro-immigrant online brochures and related course material to contemporary news (2) In the future I will have to stress the differences in pro-immigrant DACA supporters in both lectures and test materials.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>10</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To avoid counting students twice I am adding the information requested in the previous column below. Please note that because the assessment tools are multiple choice questions on exams, I am unable to offer nuance between &quot;exceeded&quot; and &quot;met.&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

57.14 % of test takers answered question #24 of the midterm correctly. 20 students answered correctly (exceeded) and 15 students answered the question incorrectly (did not meet). 13 of the 15 students who answered incorrectly appear to have made their choice based on a common but historically incorrect understanding that spatial segregation results out of individual choice. (1) I used course readings, maps, and videos to illustrate this history. (2) In the future, I plan to leave aside more time for students to discuss this common misconception.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>10</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It is difficult to assess how many students met this objective. However, a majority of students were in class that day and two-thirds participated in the conversation about the hip hop videos. The others who did not participate may have nonetheless taken notes and quietly absorbed the lesson.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(1) I enjoy using music videos in this class because it helps students understand that everyday objects and media can also help us understand history. Our analysis of Redacted as a historical document led us to discuss several urban policies, policing trends, black and Latinx stereotypes, and the effects of the financial crisis on the Bronx in the 1970s-80s. (2) Currently, I do not have any changes planned.
## Appendix C: Time to Completion and Comments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent #</th>
<th>Beginning of Semester (in minutes)</th>
<th>End of Semester (in minutes)</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>No response</td>
<td>No response</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>No response</td>
<td>I found some of the terms to be relatively vague. Perhaps providing brief examples might be helpful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>120</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>No response</td>
<td>No response</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>45</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>It might be easier if we were able to give the numbers that met, exceeded, and failed to meet the goals for each of the assessment tools rather than all lumped together. Then we could tally for the overall results. I had to do that on my own; having it on the form would have made that easier for me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>360</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>No response</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>150</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>