General Education Assessment Report

Foreign Languages

Spring, 2019

The University at Albany, SUNY

Prepared by Steven Doellefeld, Ph.D., MBA
Director of Assessment

With assistance from Bryce Colvin
Graduate Assistant

Office of Institutional Research, Planning & Effectiveness
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 Foreign Languages category, 40 courses met
the General Education requirement, with a total enrollment of 5011. The population of courses that
meet the General Education requirement represents 12 different languages\(^2\). All of these courses
originate from departments in the College of Arts and Sciences.

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 22 sections that were eligible for sampling. Using a random number generator, 12 of
those sections were chosen for the sample. Once section was later eliminated from the sampled pool as
the course was cancelled due to instructor illness. Those eleven classes sampled represented 8 different
languages offered by 3 unique departments, with student N=182 (35% of the Foreign Languages General
Education population of 516). Enrollments in courses selected for the sample ranged from 9 to 30\(^3\).

Of the 11 classes that remained in the sample, all 11 instructors submitted completed forms at the end
of the semester\(^4\). Data collected represents a maximum N=167\(^5\), which is 100% of the sample\(^6\), and
33.33...% of the population.

The instructor participation rate on this administration of the General Education assessment was stronger
than we have experienced in any prior iteration of General Education assessment. We believe this is
attributable in large measure to better communication from IRPE and a concerted effort on the part of the

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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. There were initially 41 courses meeting the General Education requirements that
were offered in the spring of 2019. A cancelled section was subtracted from the initial sample, and its enrollment is not reflected here.
2 Note that the actual number of departments represented is smaller. For example, courses taught under the under the prefixes of AEAC, AEAI,
and AEAS are treated as discrete for the purposes of sampling, but all are offered under the umbrella of the Department of East Asian Studies.
3 Note that typically we do not include courses with less than 10 students in the sample. At the time sampling was conducted, enrollment in this
course was >10, but in two sections the enrollment had dropped to 9 by the time the assessment was conducted.
4 One instructor submitted results for the first learning objective only, and did not supply any data for the second learning objective.
5 Note that for the individual learning objectives, none of the N’s add up to 377. Please refer to the “depending on the discipline” clause of the
learning objectives—not every student is assessed on every learning objective.
6 We have subtracted the enrollment of the medically cancelled course from the sample.
Associate Dean for General Education, who sent several follow-ups and reminders in an effort to improve the response rate.

Course Embedded Assessment

Foreign Languages 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 learning objectives7.

![Summary of 2018-19 Foreign Languages Assessment Results](image)

**Figure 1: Summary of Foreign Languages General Education Results**

The Learning Objectives for the category are as follows:

Students will demonstrate:

1. proficiency in the understanding and use of fundamental elements of a foreign language;  
2. knowledge of distinctive features of the culture(s) associated with the language they are studying.

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7 See Figure 7 on page 6 for an additional, combined, visual representation of this.
Comparison to results of prior Foreign Languages Gen Ed assessments:

In comparison to the 2014 assessment of this General Education category, in 2019 we see a drop of 7 percentage points in the first learning objective, and an increase of 5 percentage points for the second learning objective for the combined “Exceeded” and “Met”. In comparison to the 2010 assessment of this General Education category, we see a drop of 18 percentage points for the first learning objective, and an increase of 16 percentage points for the second learning objective, for the combined “Exceeded” and “Met”.

Figure 2: Foreign Languages Learning Objective 1

Figure 3: Foreign Languages Learning Objective 2
Figure 4: Combined “Exceeded” and “Met” 2019, 2014, 2010 by Learning Objective

Figures 5 and 6 on the following pages compare 2019 data to 2014 and 2010 results in each of the two Learning Objectives.

Figure 5: Learning Objective 1, 2019, 2014, 2010
Comparison between UHS and On-campus student populations

In the Foreign Languages category, the on-campus student population performed slightly better than the UHS population on Learning Objective 1. The UHS population performed dramatically better on Learning Objective 2 – leading their on-campus counterparts by 19 percentage points. While this is not uncommon when looking at the “Exceeded” and “Met” numbers separately, in the case of the second learning objective, the numbers remain skewed even when the “Exceeded” and “Met” numbers are combined – with UHS students outperforming their on-campus counterparts by 19 percentage points.

We also recognize that the UHS courses cover the same material as the on-campus offerings, but 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.

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Figure 6: Learning Objective 2, 2019, 2014, 2010
In the on-campus student sample, 7% “Did not meet” each of the learning objectives. In the UHS sample, there were no students who “Did not meet” the respective learning objectives.

Figure 8: Comparison of Results for UHS and On-campus Populations on Foreign Languages Learning Objective 1
Figure 9: Comparison of Results for UHS and On-campus Populations on Foreign Languages Learning Objective 2

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 overall average 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 professional staff teaching on a part time basis in the general education assessment sample. As shown in Figure 20 below, contingent faculty teach a large majority of the introductory undergraduate courses that meet the General Education requirements in this category. 6 of the 40 courses meeting the Foreign Languages
general education requirement during this assessment period were taught by tenured or tenure track faculty (15%), while 33 (83%) were taught by lecturers. One remaining course (3%) was taught by an individual in titles other than lecturer, but not on the academic tenure track (ie: 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 10: Foreign Languages General Education courses by instructor rank](image)

**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 86 minutes at the beginning of the semester, and 66 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 (respondent 8 did not supply information for either data point, and respondent 9 did not provide this data for the beginning of the semester).

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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.
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 – Foreign Languages

Students will demonstrate:

1. proficiency in the understanding and use of fundamental elements of a foreign language;
2. knowledge of distinctive features of the culture(s) associated with the language they are studying.
# Appendix B: End of Semester Reflections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent #</th>
<th>Learning Objective #</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>After quizzes were graded, anonymous excerpts taken from each quiz were written at the blackboard by the instructor. Subsequently students brainstormed in groups to find and correct errors. The instructor circled in red all mistakes on each 1st draft, giving clear indications on the nature of the grammatical errors and spelling mistakes. Students re-wrote the compositions trying to correct their mistakes. Only the 2nd drafts were graded. The instructor wrote at the blackboard the main oral mistakes made by students. Students and instructor elaborated on the incorrect structures at the end of the conversation. Short questionnaires in Italian were administered after the videos.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Administering short and basic written and oral questionnaires in Italian on the main points of the readings in order to test both retention of information and critical thinking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>I gave my students homework assignments every day and gave them feedback as soon as possible. I also gave quizzes as often as possible, so that my students could attain small goal each week.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Throughout the semester, I went over the course objectives/its gen edu requirement implications with the class on several occasions. On account of that, I was able to raise the awareness of my students regarding FL learning objectives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Throughout the semester, I went over the course objectives/its gen edu requirement implications with the class on several occasions. On account of that, I was able to raise the awareness of my students regarding FL learning objectives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>LO # 1 was assessed using two assignments with the purpose of assessing proficiency in written and oral Spanish skills. Students showed an appropriate use of the target language (content, structure &amp; vocabulary) in both assessment tools with a few mistakes in grammar that did not impede comprehension. For Composition in class # 2, students were able to write coherent essays after a class discussion about the documentary. The group project had an oral component that students prepared in advance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Students had the opportunity to talk about a cultural topic of their choice and make comparisons with their own country. All students were well-prepared and were able to communicate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
specific cultural features of the country of interest. Students listening showed understanding of the oral presentation by answering general questions. Although some students expressed discomfort of speaking Spanish in front of the class, I believe this is an appropriate tool to assess their understanding of cultural knowledge using their speaking skills.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>The most fundamental difference between my students’ native (usually) English and Russian is the far greater degree of inflection in Russian. This makes the Russian case system a good candidate for “fundamental elements” of Russian. I have a simple section in the final for Redacted that judges severely and objectively the student's mastery of noun declension.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>The system of Russian kinship terms is distinctly complex even for native speakers, with a degree of specificity exceeding that of other European languages. In Redacted we teach the basics of that system of terms. The more exotic terms that distinguish the husband’s and the wife’s in-laws, for example, are more rarely used and are taught at higher elements levels. Other cultural elements of Russian speech behavior, e.g., modesty in response to compliments, are presented and &quot;gamed&quot; in oral exercises and assessments, but these are harder to quantify.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>The two strategies that were most helpful to student success, were:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>a. giving frequent quizzes, which allowed me to limit the amount of material tested per quiz. Students knew that there would be a quiz almost every week, so they studied daily, rather than trying to 'cram' for larger quizzes at the last minute. I may return to my previous format of fewer but longer quizzes with more material per quiz and less frequent testing, because students who did miss classes are often unprepared for more frequent quizzes. For responsible students, who come to class on time and are prepared, having frequent, shorter quizzes is ideal. For students who miss classes, come late and unprepared, the longer/less frequent format is more useful for their success in terms of grade. I am not convinced, however, that it is better for their overall learning of the material.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Strategies that helped: allowing students to speak in the target language as much as possible in class while correcting their pronunciation and sentence formation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Changes: I would like to use the language lab, however it is too small to accommodate classes larger than 21. I will look into assigning lab time to the students to use outside of class. We

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
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<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Quizzes make students to be ready by reading and studying before classes.

The evaluations help them to do a self-assessment about their learning process. They can see their progression, mistakes and what to work on.

The oral presentations help them to build the confidence and the ability to use the language as in a real setting.
## 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>60</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>I think that the form is very useful to put things into perspective, and I thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to participate in the General Education Assessment process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>120</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>45</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>The form does not work properly. I tried filling out the boxes with comments, some were locked and I could not fill them in, others I could not see what I was writing, so I tried writing elsewhere and copying it in the boxes, and then I could not finish what I was writing. Extremely frustrating form to fill out. Not well conceived.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>No response</td>
<td>No response</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>No response</td>
<td>60</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>Looking back, I might have chosen different assessment tools. For some reason, several students chose not to complete one or more of the mandatory Blackboard culture/grammar quizzes, thus receiving a 0. While this didn’t affect their overall grade significantly (if it was just one quiz), it did affect their Culture Learning Objective assessment categorization—dropping those students from what would have been “Exceeded” or “Met” (based on their other grades on the quizzes) to an “Approaching” or “Did not meet.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>120</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>