

Office of General Education

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Learning Outcomes Assessment Report

URB 20010 (Summer and Fall 2021)

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| Date of report: | January 6, 2022 |
| Course: | URB 20010/ Introduction to Urban Studies  |
| Materials used:  | Writing assignments, presentations, and photographs |
| Date/semester of assessment: | Summer 21 and Fall 21 |
| Assessment Team Members: | Maria Carrizosa |
| Coordination / Oversight: | Ana Vasovic, General Education  |

**Purpose and Justification**

The purpose of this assessment is to identify and qualify strengths and challenges in student accomplishment of General Education learning outcomes in URB 20010, through analysis of student visual and writing assignments, as well as their oral presentations. This class was offered online in the Summer and Fall of 2021. I first taught it in the Fall of 2020, and I was fortunate to design the syllabus after participating in the CUNY Online Teaching Essentials (OTE) course in July 2020. The OTE course helped me be more cognizant of the importance of multimodal learning material and types of assignments; more aware (and hence more accountable) of the quantity, quality, and direction of interactions between the different participants in the class; and more mindful of scaffolding activities to facilitate students’ achievement of the learning objectives and outcomes.

This is a Flexible Core course meeting the three basic learning outcomes:

* Gather, interpret, and assess information from a variety of sources and points of view.
* Evaluate evidence and arguments critically or analytically.
* Produce well-reasoned written or oral arguments using evidence to support conclusions.

As well as these three *Creative Expression* specific outcomes:

* Identify and apply the fundamental concepts and methods of a discipline or interdisciplinary field exploring creative expression.
* Articulate how meaning is created in the arts or communications and how experience is interpreted and conveyed.
* Use appropriate technologies to conduct research and to communicate.

The course offered students the possibility to gain familiarity with a set of key thinkers, discussions, and concepts in the field of urban studies. It also introduced the students to basic research skills, inviting them to apply these seminal concepts in cities around the world, and connect those concepts with their own urban experience. Because urban studies is an inherently interdisciplinary field, the class engaged with a broad range of texts and audiovisual materials across the social sciences, spatial sciences, and the arts. As part of the course, I offered two field visits (with virtual options): to the Tenement Museum and to the Newtown Creek’s New York City Wastewater Treatment Plant.

**Course Overview**

*Class composition*

A total of 70 students have taken my course, 32 in Fall 2020, 18 in Summer 2021, and 20 in Fall 2021. The class is cross listed as a GenEd course (URB 20010) and as an Architecture elective (ARCH 51520). In these three semesters, GenEd enrollment made for 65% of the students, the remaining 35% were from Architecture. I consider this disciplinary mix a great asset for the learning environment of this class, and I have seen the class’ content helping students with different backgrounds benefiting from their new knowledge in their professional paths. For example, I was told of an urban-related fellowship granted to an architecture student from the Fall 2020 class, and an urban-related internship landed by a Psychology student from the Summer 2021 class.

*Structure of assignments*

Student work took the form of writing assignments, oral presentations, and creative digital images (not part of the assessment). On average, throughout the semester each student wrote upwards of 10,000 words, gave oral presentations for more than 60 minutes, in addition to class’ discussion. Each student carried out an individual, term-long scaffolded research on a specific city of their choosing, from a list of world capitals across all continents.

Students wrote three different types of Blackboard posts prior to each session. The first post (250 words) reacting to the assigned texts and audiovisual materials for the session, where they defined the main concept of the week using at least one quote from the assigned material. The second post (200 to 250 words) was an example or reflection of how the topic of the week applied in city they chose to focus individually. The students were encouraged include images (captioned and referenced) to illustrate the topics discussed. The third post (100 words) was a comment to another student’s post, stimulating student engagement and cross-learning. In average, students were writing 600 words per week. The final deliverable was a compilation of the concept’s definitions and examples, editing and formatting their Blackboard posts throughout the semester, in a Glossary of Applied Urban Studies Concepts (optional in the summer session). On average, this document had 3,000 words plus images.

Class-time was largely devoted to student presentations followed by extensive feedback from the professor and often lively group discussions. Each student delivered two presentations: one in pairs, jointly presenting the week’s material and guiding the group discussion (35 minutes), and a second about the city they had chosen as a semester-long case study (25 minutes). Many students selected places they or their families are connected to, making this assignment (“City Talks”) an opportunity to share and learn from the great diversity of CCNY.

The syllabus is included as an annex of this report.

**Assessment Findings**

The assessment below is based on four assignments: two oral presentations, the large set of weekly Blackboard posts, and the final written deliverable (Glossary of Applied Urban Studies Concepts). Data is based on grade point evaluations for all 38 students in the Summer 2021 and Fall 2021 courses.

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|  | **Gen Ed Learning Outcome** | **Brief description of findings**(ex, students being able or not to demonstrate skills; % of students receiving a satisfactory score, % of students excelling…)  | **Select one**Exceeds ExpectationsAbove AverageAverageBelow average Below passing |
| Oral and writing communication skills | Provide credible, relevant evidence in support of argumentsUse appropriate language that conveys meaning and is grammatically correctDeliver a clear, well-structured presentation of a complex subject, supporting points of view with reasons and examples [[1]](#footnote-1) | This assessment is based on the Blackboard participations. 18.4% of the students exceeded the expectations for this assignment (3.7 or A+), 65.8% were above the average, 5.3% were on the average (2.96 or B+), 28.9% were below average, and 2.6% were below passing. (C+ grade). 7.9% had a perfect score.This assessment is based on the final Glossary deliverable. 22.9% of the students exceeded the expectations for this assignment (3.7 or A+), 51.4% were above the average, 8.6% were on the average (3.1 or A-), 40% were below average, and 2.9%, that is, one person was below passing. (C+ grade). This assessment is based on the average of the two oral presentations. 13.2% of the students exceeded the expectations for these assignments (a perfect 4 score), 55.32% were above the average, 7.9% were on the average (3.1 or A-), 36.8% were below average, and 0% were below passing, in fact the lowest grade was 2.85, or B+. 7.9% had a perfect score. | Above AverageAbove AverageExceeds expectations |
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| Critical Thinking skills | Clearly state issue/problem delivering relevant information Analyze and/or synthesize evidence derived from appropriate sources Formulate and argue a clear position on an issue, taking into account different points of view | This assessment is based on the average of the two oral presentations. 13.2% of the students exceeded the expectations for these assignments (a perfect 4 score), 55.32% were above the average, 7.9% were on the average (3.1 or A-), 36.8% were below average, and 0% were below passing, in fact the lowest grade was 2.85, or B+. 7.9% had a perfect score.This assessment is based on the Blackboard participations. 18.4% of the students exceeded the expectations for this assignment (3.7 or A+), 65.8% were above the average, 5.3% were on the average (2.96 or B+), 28.9% were below average, and 2.6% were below passing. (C+ grade). 7.9% had a perfect score. This assessment is based on participation in class’ discussions. 42.1% of the students exceeded the expectations for this assignment (with a perfect score), 50% were above the average (3.3 or A), and 5.3% were below passing. (C+ grade).  | Exceeds expectationsAverageExceeds expectations |
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| Information Literacy skills | Understand info needs/ search efficiently through either guided research (with assigned texts) or students search for sources Evaluate info sources through understanding and reviewing information sources, consider if amount of information is sufficient to address the issue Acknowledge sources and cite accurately. No plagiarism | This assessment is based on the Blackboard participations. 18.4% of the students exceeded the expectations for this assignment (3.7 or A+), 65.8% were above the average, 5.3% were on the average (2.96 or B+), 28.9% were below average, and 2.6% were below passing. (C+ grade). 7.9% had a perfect score.This assessment is based on the final Glossary deliverable. 22.9% of the students exceeded the expectations for this assignment (3.7 or A+), 51.4% were above the average, 8.6% were on the average (3.1 or A-), 40% were below average, and 2.9%, that is, one person was below passing. (C+ grade). Intentional plagiarism was not an issue in this course. Many students acknowledge sources and there is common usage of direct quotes. However, far too few students know how to cite properly. Referencing of images is very unusual and generally incomplete. This assessment is based on the final Glossary were at least 28.9% of the assignments had serious referencing style issues, and only 13.2% of them did so correctly. | Above AverageAverageBelow average  |
| Creative Expression Outcomes | Identify and apply the fundamental concepts and methods of a discipline or interdisciplinary field exploring creative expression.Articulate how meaning is created in the arts or communications and how experience is interpreted and conveyed. Use appropriate technologies to conduct research and to communicate. | This assessment is based on the final Glossary deliverable. 22.9% of the students exceeded the expectations for this assignment (3.7 or A+), 51.4% were above the average, 8.6% were on the average (3.1 or A-), 40% were below average, and 2.9%, that is, one person was below passing. (C+ grade). This assessment is based on the final grade for the course. 27.3% of the students exceeded the expectations for the course (a perfect 4 score), 42.1% were above the average, 5.3% were on the average (3.5 or A), 50% were below average, and 0% were below passing, in fact the lowest grade was 2.85, or B+. 7.9% had a perfect score.This assessment is based on the average of the two oral presentations. 13.2% of the students exceeded the expectations for these assignments (a perfect 4 score), 55.32% were above the average, 7.9% were on the average (3.1 or A-), 36.8% were below average, and 0% were below passing (the lowest grade was 2.15 or B-). 21.1% had an exceptional performance, even above a perfect score (possible as there were grade booster opportunities. | AverageExceeds expectationsAbove Average |

**Summary**

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| *Briefly summarize overall findings by identifying* ***strengths*** *in students’ accomplishment of learning outcomes/specific benchmarks.* Writing/Critical Thinking/Information Literacy: * This class emphasized oral communication. Students demonstrated remarkable skills at articulating themselves verbally in ways that often exceeded their capacity to do so in writing.
* The students appreciated the detailed individual feedback by the instructor on their presentations. The depth of this feedback underscored the importance of listening skills as integral to the critical thinking process. Listening to presentations and comments of classmates helped as much as the feedback, to improve the presentations throughout the semester.
* Written comments to other students’ writing were also a very important aspect of this class. It helped them engage intellectually with other. Most comments revolved on the strengths of a colleagues’ idea, which rendered a positive environment for learning.
* Having a mix of topics to learn collectively from, and individual case studies that shared in presentations, helped the students learn by comparison. Commenting each other’s presentations was important so they could reflect on the nature and quality of the arguments and rhetorical devices.
* The individual case studies on world cities, exposed all students to doing actual research on their own. Some found many sources, others too few, some had to use second languages to extend their scope. This proved interesting to do, as also to learn from. It also prevented the threat of plagiarism.

Creative Expression specific outcomes: * By the end of the semester, when the students had the chance of reviewing the large number of new concepts they had learned, they came to the realization that in urban studies familiarity with key terms, discussions and authors is key, but more importantly, the way these are interconnected.
* Students learned the analytical and communicative power of visuals and gained confidence using images for their argumentative value. The use of video excerpts as part of presentations was a notable and efficient resource.
* Students excelled at identifying social, cultural, and economic trends and patterns across world cities.
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| *Briefly summarize overall findings by identifying* ***challenges*** *in students’ accomplishment of learning outcomes/specific benchmarks.* Writing/Critical Thinking/Information Literacy: * A number of students have grammar and writing skills deficiencies that, because of the size and pace of the course, could not receive one on one support. This is especially the case of ESL students.
* Although students excel at forming an opinion based on personal experience, and struggle little at grasping the argument of the scholarly pieces read, they have a harder time taking a step back and analyzing which parts of an author’s argument they agree or disagree with.
* As stated earlier, more attention to proper citing and referencing protocols is needed to prevent inadvertent plagiarism.

Creative Expression specific outcomes: * When prompting students to do an unplanned psycho-geographic derive through the city and share back a souvenir from their walk, almost all students rely on mobile phone photographs as a form of visual expression. While this is not necessarily a challenge need overcoming, it speaks of the reduce range of creative expression tools that this generation feels familiar with. Almost none drawing, no painting, sculptures, very few poetic approaches, no videos nor sounds. Multimodality in creative expression should be encouraged.
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| *How useful are the text and other resources assigned to this course?* This is an ZTC/OER designated course. In addition, the syllabus was designed to ensure availability of audiovisual sources (podcasts, films, videos, websites, infographics) *en par* with texts for every single session. Having this diversity proved key. At the request of one student, I added a reference textbook (*Key Concepts in Urban Studies Handbook*), that could be a good addition or complement. Also notable were the two field visits / guest lecturers offered. Both were extremely useful and will recommend their continued inclusion.  |
| **Conclusions** / “Closing-the-loop” plans to improve student learning/success |
| *Based on your assessment of student learning, how well aligned are the activities and assignments in URB 20010 with the general education learning outcomes?*I found the assignments useful and well aligned to the learning objectives. However, I found the need to include an additional learning outcome that refers specifically to oral communication skills, which I phrased as follows: “Deliver a clear, well-structured presentation of a complex subject, supporting points of view with reasons and examples”. I found no specific benchmark or rubric to tackle oral presentations in CCNY’s Handbook. Also crucial to foster communication skills, are listening skills to which there could be more awareness in terms of relevant learning objectives.   |
| *Based on your assessment of student learning, do you plan to implement or recommend at instructional level changes to improve student learning? Specify topics and pedagogical changes, if applicable.*To help boost student performance, I would recommend adding a Teaching Assistant to this class with the sole task of providing weekly feedback on the Backboard posts. This would guarantee students are able to detect their mistakes and improve upon them throughout the semester. This would also help with the inadvertent plagiarism issue noted earlier. |
| *Provide suggestions, if any, to be done on a departmental or institutional level to support student learning/success in this course.* No further suggestions aside from the TA. |

1. I added this learning objective as there was none in CCNY’s Handbook specific for oral presentation skills. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)