 Office of General Education A-218C

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Spring 23 Assessment of student learning in General Education Courses horizontal line

**Purpose**

The goal of this project was to:

(1) examine alignment of course assignments with Pathways learning outcomes

(2) assess student learning in relation to Pathways learning outcomes

(3) design ways to improve course delivery and/or assignments to strengthen student learning

(4) strengthen instructors’ understanding of General Education expectations

**Methodology**

Instructors teaching Pathways courses (all Flexible core categories, Life and Physical Sciences and Speech) in Spring 23 were invited to participate. Twenty-nine instructors teaching eighteen different courses participated. Using a template form, Instructors provided the following information about their respective courses:

* Specific activities/assignments through which students demonstrate their learning related to Pathways outcomes
* Summary of student performance, including strengths and challenges, for each outcome
* Portion of students achieving each outcome and samples of student work
* Specific example(s) of “closing the loop” activities (if any) based on findings.
* Feedback on the activity and its impact on teaching

The instructors performed work on their own time and received support through in-person and zoom guidance sessions, written guidelines, and additional communication as needed.

Forms were submitted to the Director of General Education, who reviewed them all and compiled the summary presented bellow (parts 1, 2, and 3). Post-activity, the instructors were asked to respond to an anonymous online survey, 14 responded; results are presented in part 4.

# Assessment Findings Summary

1. It appears that the majority, if not all, **courses include assignments/activities aligned with Pathways outcomes.** A couple of submissions did not include specific enough information on assignments to show how they relate to the outcomes. Detailed information available in:

Appendix A – Pathways Outcomes relevant to this study

Appendix B – Courses engaged in this study

Appendix C – Types of assignments through which students demonstrated their learning

1. For the most part, **students successfully demonstrated their** **knowledge or skills** **pertaining to Pathways outcomes**.

**Flexible Core courses:** Overall, students meet the benchmarks for writing, critical thinking, and information literacy skills. See Appendix D for Benchmarks.

**Writing skills:**

Level I courses (13 courses participating in this study)

Almost all students were able to successfully compose personal narratives and summary-and- response essays. While most students did satisfactory work with critical analysis essays, some struggled with structuring their essays appropriately.

All students demonstrated an understanding of context, audience, and purpose. Most students were able to present a clear thesis statement as a main idea or an argument, but many struggled with providing sufficient credible, relevant evidence in support of their theses. Some assignments were geared toward Level II expectations (thesis as an argument), with instructors noting students’ apprehension to take a side of an argument or having a difficulty elaborating their views.

Some student writing contained grammatical errors (mostly as ELL) which detracted from the overall effectiveness.

Overall, scaffolded assignments resulted in high quality writing as faculty were able to provide feedback along the way allowing students to structure their essays well and use sufficient and appropriate evidence in support of their theses.

Level II (3 courses)

All students demonstrated awareness of context, audience, and purpose. In two of the sections almost all students were able to clearly state/defend a thesis statement with consistent use of credible, relevant sources to support ideas. In one section, only 60% students did so. Students were able to use straightforward language that conveys meaning, but many seemed unaware of formatting and technical conventions (italics, capitalization, etc.)

**Critical Thinking Skills**

Level I

Students exceled at being able to clearly state an issue/problem. Many struggled with analyzing sources and their arguments (rather, they accept the authority of published sources) and with synthesizing evidence derived from multiple sources, though there was a wide range among students in this respect. Their conclusions were fine and safe. Students did well on quizzes/exams that incorporated critical thinking.

Level II

Students exceled in clearly stating issue/problem and delivering relevant information. Most successfully used evidence to support their argument, and some synthesized evidence from various texts taking into account alternative perspectives. Most students understood the role assumptions play in analyzing literature and were able to take positions on the issue at hand. Drawing conclusions from secondary sources was a more difficult task for them, affecting their ability to draw truly logical conclusions.

**Information Literacy Skills**

Level I

Students demonstrated strong skills in guided research as well as in gathering outside sources. Some students had difficulties identifying relevant or scholarly sources. Their ability to acknowledge and properly cite sources varied, and some struggled with understanding the timeliness of a source.

Level II

Students were able to gather a variety of sources and demonstrated an understanding of scholarly sources. Students’ ability to cite sources properly varied and some didn’t include a bibliography (as a misunderstanding in instructions).

**Creative Expression:** Most students demonstrated an ability to identify and apply the fundamental concepts of a discipline related to creative expression (art, music, or architecture) although they came in with almost no previous knowledge. Similarly, students came in with an uneven background knowledge on human societies, but most were able to acquire it sufficiently and demonstrate an understanding of the significance of works of art in the societies that created them. By the end of the semester, most students were able to articulate an assessment of an artwork’s meaning; they were able to describe how it intersects with the cultural, historical, and political experiences of its makers and users, though they often avoided assigning value to it. In Music, many students assigned meaning at an elemental level often simplifying it to one idea, however, scaffolding assignments produced good results. Students demonstrated an understanding of the skills involved in a creative process. They were able to use appropriate technologies to conduct research, but identifying scholarly sources and properly citing sources was a challenge for some.

**World Cultures and Global Issues:** Students showcased an aptitude for identifying and interpreting themes and symbols in texts enhancing their comprehension of different cultures and global issues. They could draw connections between the texts and real-world contexts. Students did a good job analyzing culture, globalization, diversity and were able to describe events or processes from more than one point of view. They exhibited willingness to challenge status-quo, taken-for-granted assumptions and ideas of the western world, though many had deeply-ingrained ideas about “human nature”. Students successfully presented the historical development of a non-U.S. society, but some struggled with analyzing the societies instead of just summarizing published views. In individual assignments, students were able to analyze the significance of movements that shaped the world’s societies, but many struggled to make connections between different assignments. In some cases, students were able to connect the movements to their personal lives. Finally, students displayed strong awareness of the role that forms of social differentiation (race, class, etc.) play in world cultures and societies and they related to it personally.

**Individual and Society:** Students demonstrated knowledge of main concepts within a discipline and were able to present an individual agency or experience in relationship to larger social forces while taking into account positionality. They excelled in assessing ethical concerns in research. Student did great in relating individual action or collective behavior to changing trends or ideologies.

**Life and Physical Sciences:** Students were able to gain and apply knowledge of basic concepts in Earth Science related to global warming. Most understood how to apply scientific method to gather and analyze data. BY the end of the semester, all students were able to utilize excel to gather and analyze data; those who struggled received help from group members and few needed basic excel help. Most students are able to present findings in written lab reports and understand how to apply research ethics.

**Speech** – in progress

**Note: Instructors across different courses raised concerns about AI and asked for guidance.**

1. **Instructors specified multiple ways which they will use to strengthen student learning** based on what they learned from the activity.

These include:

**Improving assignments** by:

-redesigning assignment sheets to:

-clarify the expectations (guidelines) for writing, critical thinking and research (based on Gen Ed benchmarks)

-better address learning outcomes

-Providing grading rubrics and a critical thinking reflective rubric to students

-Changing timing of assignments

-Scaffolding or splitting assignments

-Giving opportunities to revise work

- Introducing new assignments, such as a library assignment, argumentative writing, guided research assignment focusing on evaluating credibility of sources, exercises on evaluating evidence

- Engaging students to design questions for discussion instead of just answering questions

**Changing/Improving pedagogy by**:

- Giving in-class instruction on how to structure an essay, conduct library research, cite sources, present orally, etc.

- Implementing peer reviews

- Introducing new in-class activities, such as evaluation of sources activities, more group work, more quizzes, more visuals, more resources on different perspectives

- Expanding online discussion with an oral in-class component

- Integrating close reading activities in class time

- Introducing new reading materials, group hands-on projects, reflection activities

-Adding resources to course site including video content with instructions for a specific activity

Some instructors asked for TA assistance in order to better serve students in large classes.

1. Fourteen faculty (48%) participated in the **survey.** **The survey data indicates that the activity helped instructors become more familiar with Pathways outcomes**: most were “somewhat familiar” before and all instructors reported being “very” or “extremely familiar” with the outcomes after the activity. Almost all instructors reported that they gave some consideration to Pathways outcomes when designing course assignments before the activity but plan to make modifications going forward to strengthen alignment and student learning. Instructors also reported finding the activity helpful for other courses they teach, and some suggested modifications of the form the format to improve its functionality. See Appendix E for additional information.

Lessons for future assessment: Instructors will be required to attend a meeting before and a meeting after the activity to: ensure they understand what information is being asked for and to benefit from sharing what they learned with each other.

Appendix A Pathways Learning Outcomes

Flexible Core

**World Cultures and Global Issues**

*A course in this area must meet these three learning outcomes. A student will:*

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

*AND at least three of the additional learning outcomes. A student will:*

1. Identify and apply the fundamental concepts and methods of a discipline or interdisciplinary field exploring world cultures or global issues, including, but not limited to, anthropology, communications, cultural studies, economics, ethnic studies, foreign languages (building upon previous language acquisition), geography, history, political science, sociology, and world literature.
2. Analyze culture, globalization, or global cultural diversity, and describe an event or process from more than one point of view.
3. Analyze the historical development of one or more non-U.S. societies.
4. Analyze the significance of one or more major movements that have shaped the world's societies.
5. Analyze and discuss the role that race, ethnicity, class, gender, language, sexual orientation, belief, or other forms of social differentiation play in world cultures or societies.

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**Creative Expression**

*A course in this area must meet these three learning outcomes. A student will:*

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

*AND at least three of the additional learning outcomes. A student will:*

1. Identify and apply the fundamental concepts and methods of a discipline or interdisciplinary field exploring creative expression, including, but not limited to, arts, communications, creative writing, media arts, music, and theater.
2. Analyze how arts from diverse cultures of the past serve as a foundation for those of the present, and describe the significance of works of art in the societies that created them.
3. Articulate how meaning is created in the arts or communications and how experience is interpreted and conveyed.
4. Demonstrate knowledge of the skills involved in the creative process.
5. Use appropriate technologies to conduct research and to communicate.

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**Individual and Society**

*A course in this area must meet these three learning outcomes. A student will:*

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

*AND at least three of the additional learning outcomes. A student will:*

1. Identify and apply the fundamental concepts and methods of a discipline or interdisciplinary field exploring the relationship between the individual and society, including, but not limited to, anthropology, communications, cultural studies, history, journalism, philosophy, political science, psychology, public affairs, religion, and sociology.
2. Examine how an individual's place in society affects experiences, values, or choices.
3. Articulate and assess ethical views and their underlying premises.
4. Articulate ethical uses of data and other information resources to respond to problems and questions.
5. Identify and engage with local, national, or global trends or ideologies, and analyze their impact on individual or collective decision-making.

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**College Option – Speech**

Students will develop their abilities to

1. Communicate effectively and confidently
2. Organize thoughts and ideas into a workable outline
3. Prepare a speech, developing the outline into a text designed for public speaking
4. Manage stage fright
5. Be active listeners and participants in classmates’ performances
6. Become an effective note taker
7. Provide constructive feedback
8. Use visual and multi-media aids during a speech with ease
9. Work in groups

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**Fixed Core - Life and Physical Sciences**

*A course in this area must meet all the learning outcomes in the right column. A student will:*

1. Identify and apply the fundamental concepts and methods of a life or physical science.
2. Apply the scientific method to explore natural phenomena, including hypothesis development, observation, experimentation, measurement, data analysis, and data presentation.
3. Use the tools of a scientific discipline to carry out collaborative laboratory investigations.
4. Gather, analyze, and interpret data and present it in an effective written laboratory or fieldwork report.
5. Identify and apply research ethics and unbiased assessment in gathering and reporting scientific data.

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Appendix B COURSES

**Flexible Core CLAS College Option**

*Creative Expression (CE)* SPCH 11100 Foundations of Public Speaking

AES 20000 Introduction to Building Architecture

ART 10000 Introduction to Visual Arts of the World **Fixed Core**

MUS 10000 Popular Music *Life and Physics Sciences*

MUS 10100 Introduction to Music EAS 10400 Perspectives on Global Warming

MUS 10200 Introduction to World Music

MUS 14500/ BLST 31177 Introduction to Jazz

*World Cultures and Global Issues (WCGI) - Literature*

FREN 28300 The Lit. of Contemporary France

URB 31000 The City in History

*World Cultures and Global Issues (WCGI) - History & Culture*

ANTH 10100 General Anthropology

ASIA 20200 Contemporary Asia

BLST 10200 African Heritage: Caribbean-Brazilian Experience

WCIV 10100 World Civilizations I: Prehistory to 1500 AD

INTL 20100 International. Studies: A Global Perspective

*Individual and Society (IS)*

ANTH 20100 Cross Cultural Perspectives

SOC 10500 Individual, Group and Society: An Intro. to Sociology

WS 10000 Women’s/Gender Roles in Contemporary Society

Appendix C ASSIGNMENTS

All instructors provided information on assignments/activities related to relevant learning outcomes. However, a small number of submissions either lacked sufficient specificity demonstrating the connection or described how the course meets the outcomes instead of how students demonstrate their learning.

Assignments for LOs 1 (research), 2 (critical thinking), and 3 (writing), which are common to all Flex Core courses included:

critiques, compare and contrast essays, critical analysis essays, research essays, oral presentations, reading responses, exam questions, in-class group exercises, collaborative scripts, discussion board posts, summary and response essays (argumentative in nature), argumentative essays, research essays, reflections on course readings (argumentative in nature), fieldwork notes and weekly logs, research projects (both written and oral presentation), weekly response exercises, group presentations, memos discussing and analyzing readings, reading critiques, video lecture summary and responses.

Assignments for Flex Core category specific outcomes included:

**Creative Expression:** exhibition project object analyses, library research assignment, neighborhood ethnography, developing musical backing track, group exercise on mapping networks and causal chains of cultural colonialism in samba music, small group discussions and presentations addressing specific questions, quizzes, analysis of a blues piece, concert report

**World Cultures and Global Issues**: reading commentaries, comparing cities to understand historical development, developing neighborhood timelines including urban and social issues, research essays, discussion boards, quizzes, analyzing documentaries to demonstrate an if sociocultural issues, from multiple perspectives, Create your own society projects, book analyses, small group work/presentations, written exercises, essays

**Individual and Society**: group presentations on national or global trends/ideologies, reading critiques, free writes, reading reflections, analysis of quotes from readings selected by students, critical thinking essays on social movements or on ethical concerns, ethnography critiques, evaluations of claims from readings,

**Life and Physical Sciences**: quizzes, lab reports, group work with excel to gather and analyze data

**Speech** – in progress

Appendix D

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| **BENCHMARKS** | **Level I** typical assignments: summary and response, description, narration | **Level II** typical assignments: reports, summary and response, researched critical analysis including argument |
| **Context of and Purpose for Writing** | Demonstrates awareness of context, audience, purpose, and to the assigned tasks(s) - begins to show awareness of audience's perceptions and assumptions Target 70% | Demonstrates awareness of context, audience, purpose, and to the assigned tasks(s)  Target 75% |
| **Thesis/Main idea** | Thesis is clearly stated **/** expressed as a main idea Target 70% | Thesis is clearly stated/defended with argument  Target 75% |
| **Structure and Organization** | -Has a coherent introduction though it might lack some focus to set up the thesis  -Progression of thought within paragraphs is clear and logical but not necessarily from paragraph to paragraph  -Has a coherent conclusion though it might need greater focus Target 70% | Same as level I Target 75% &  -Has a focused introduction that effectively sets up the thesis  -Progression of thought both within and between paragraphs is clear and logical  -Has a clear and focused conclusion Target 20% |

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Evidence and Development** | -Uses appropriate and relevant content to develop and explore ideas through most of the work  -Demonstrates an attempt to use credible and/or relevant sources to support ideas that are appropriate for the discipline and genre of the writing Target 70% | Same as level I & Target 75%  -Uses appropriate, relevant, and compelling content to explore ideas within the context of the discipline and shape the whole work.  -Demonstrates consistent use of credible, relevant sources to support ideas that are situated within the discipline and genre of the writing. Target 20% |
| **Control of Syntax and Mechanics** | Uses language that generally conveys meaning to readers with clarity, although writing may include some errors Target 70% | Same as level I Target 75% &  Uses straightforward language that conveys meaning to readers and has few errors Target 20% |
| **Critical Thinking** |  |  |
| **Explanation of issues** | Issue/ problem to be considered critically is stated (description might leave some terms undefined, ambiguities unexplored, and/ or backgrounds unknown Target 60% | Same as Level I Target 70% &  Issue/ problem to be considered critically is stated clearly delivering all relevant information Target 20% |
| **Evidence /Analysis and Synthesis (*Selecting and using info to investigate a point of view or conclusion)*** | -Information is taken from source(s) with some interpretation/ evaluation, though not necessarily enough to develop a coherent analysis or synthesis Target 60% | Same as Level I Target 70% &  Information is taken from source(s) with at least some interpretation/ evaluation Target 20% |
| **Conclusions and related outcomes (implications and consequences)** | Conclusion is logically tied to information (although information might not be chosen to fit the desired conclusion); some related outcomes (consequences and implications) are identified clearly Target 60% | Same as Level I Target 70% &  Conclusion is logically tied to a range of information, including opposing viewpoints; related outcomes are identified clearly Target 20% Target 20% |
| *Optional, depends on class* **Context and Assumptions**  **Student’s position** | N/A | -Analyze own and others' assumptions and several relevant contexts when presenting a position.  -Formulate and argue a clear position on an issue taking into account different points of view |
| **Information Literacy** |  |  |
| **Demonstrates a clear understanding of information needs and is able to search efficiently (within assigned texts and/or by source search)** | -Understands the research question but may not be fully confident in identifying search term(s)  -Has knowledge of an information source  -Might need assistance in interpreting the information collected Target 60% | -Understands the research question  -Has knowledge of an information source  -Might need assistance in interpreting the information collected  Target 70% |
| **Effectively evaluates information sources** | -Demonstrate an understanding of scholarly sources  -Uses scholarly databases Target 60% | Understands and reviews information sources, considers whether the amount of information is sufficient to address the issue. Target 70% |
| **Articulates credibility of sources** (authority, affiliation of author, timeliness, bias) | If appropriate to the discipline, mentions one aspect of credibility Target 60% | If appropriate to the discipline, articulates 2 or more aspects of credibility of sources Target 70% |
| **Uses information ethically** | -Uses appropriate citation style; might need improvement in formatting the bibliographies and footnotes Target 60%  -Does not plagiarize Target 100% | Uses appropriate citation style; might need improvement in formatting the bibliographies and footnotes Target 70%  -Does not plagiarize Target 100% |

Appendix E Survey Results















