

# General Education Assessment

## Assessing General Education

### Background

Wichita State University is an urban institution that serves a large number of non-traditional students. We have many minority, international, part-time, first-generation-to-go-to-college, and transfer students. Indeed, only a small minority of our graduates consists of traditional four-or five-year students who take all of their general education courses with us.

These facts of life have had a strong effect on the nature of our general education program and on the means by which we can assess it. At some institutions, the general education program consists of a limited number of courses so that there is a strong element of shared experience for students; that is not possible here. At some institutions, outcomes are measured by a single exam given to all; that also is not possible here.

The essence of our assessment program is that it is a means for providing feedback to ensure that we are achieving our goals to the fullest extent possible. It is based on the premise that our faculty members are professionals who are competent to judge outcomes in the courses they teach.

### Nature of the Program and its Relationship to the Mission of the University

The mission of Wichita State University is to be an essential educational, cultural, and economic driver for Kansas and the greater public good.

In the context of our general education program, we interpret this statement in terms of the skills and breadth of experiences needed for our graduates to succeed. The skills we emphasize are those involved in finding, assessing and analyzing information and formulating ideas so that they can be communicated orally or in writing, as appropriate. The diversity of intellectual exposure demanded by our general education program provides our students with the breadth they need to thrive in a complex world.

### Goals of the Program

- Have acquired knowledge in the arts, humanities, natural and social sciences
- Think critically and independently
- Write and speak effectively
- Employ analytical reasoning and problem-solving techniques

### Structure of the Program

These goals are articulated across the general education curriculum. Students are introduced to these skill areas in four Foundation courses – two in English composition and one each in public

speaking and mathematics. Foundation courses are intended not only to provide practice in research, writing, speaking and the manipulation of abstractions but also to provide students with experience in thinking clearly so that they can argue clearly – in evaluating oral and written and mathematically-based arguments. Students are required to complete this part of their general education program in their first 48 credit hours.

Divisional courses serve as an introduction to the major arenas of intellectual life: the fine arts, humanities, social/behavioral sciences, and mathematics and natural sciences. Students are required to take at least one Divisional course each in the fine arts, humanities, social/behavioral sciences, and mathematics/natural sciences. Students may take Divisional courses concurrently with the Foundation courses, subject to course prerequisites.

Additional courses allow students to follow interests developed in the Divisional courses. Students are required to complete four additional general education courses from at least two of the four divisions (at least 12 credit hours). They are also required to take 9 credit hours of general education coursework numbered 300 or above. Starting with the 2020-21 academic year, first-time-in-college students are required to complete one First-Year Seminar course, which counts as one of the Additional courses, during their freshman year.

Both the Divisional courses and the Additional courses are designed to enhance students' skills in writing and speaking, critical thinking, Departments are encouraged to continue this emphasis in courses beyond the general education program.

### **Learning Outcomes - Student Learning Outcomes for the Divisional Courses Include:**

- Understanding of fundamental concepts used in the discipline
- Awareness of the kinds of problems addressed
- Familiarity with methods used in the discipline

### **Student learning outcomes in courses numbered 300 and above include those listed above, plus:**

- Ability to apply basic concepts to various issues
- Ability to apply some of the basic methods common to the discipline
- Ability to write using the standards of the discipline

### **General education courses that have a diversity attribute have the following goals:**

- Feature material that fosters knowledge of and appreciation for diversity, whether in cultures and categories of identity or in how we conceptualize knowledge
- Expose students to multiple paradigms or world views
- Promote students' understanding of self and others that goes beyond stereotypes
- Help students to recognize and analyze the historical forces have shaped them, the academic disciplines they study, or their society in general

### **The pedagogical approach to a diversity course should:**

- Appeal to the learning styles of a diverse range of students
- Incorporate assignments that teach students how to successfully interact, both professionally and personally, with others and to critically reflect on their positions with respect to others
- Provide opportunities for students to connect their classroom experiences with their lives outside the classroom

**Assessment of the diversity course should:**

- Include multiple forms of assessment (formal evaluations, reflective writing assignments, etc.) given throughout the semester

**The Assessment Process - Foundation Courses and First Year Seminar Courses**

The departments responsible for designing and teaching the Foundation courses are also given the responsibility for assessing the outcomes. The General Education Committee reviews these outcomes periodically, in discussion with the University Assessment Committee.

During the appropriate part of the assessment cycle, the relevant departments report summary statistics to the General Education Committee to aid in the assessment of the overall program. These include: number of students who have taken the courses, course grade distributions, exit/final exam grade distributions, and whatever other measures they have accumulated.

The Elliott School of Communication reports the results of their pre-test/post-test of students' self-reported attitudes regarding speech competency and both the instrument used and the cumulative scores for the persuasive policy speech required of all students in Communication 111.

The English Department reports numbers of students in the composition courses, diagnostic exam scores administered the first week of classes, the grade distributions in the courses and on the exit exams.

The Mathematics Department reports the percent of students receiving a passing grade in the mathematics courses MATH 111 and MATH 131.

The University Libraries has created a series of online library tutorials for the First Year Seminar classes which introduce students to library services, resources, and best practices for research and citation. The tutorials are part of the support offered by the library for First Year Seminars. Faculty can choose to assign library tutorials for their classes. Responses from students who complete the tutorials are used as one component of ongoing assessment in relation to the library skills learning outcome for First Year Seminars: "identify appropriate library and other resources to facilitate research and accurately provide citations."

## **Divisional & Additional Courses**

Assessment of the rest of the general education program (including further assessment of the Foundation courses) is accomplished through 1) program monitoring, 2) tracking outcomes, and 3) other institutional feedback.

### **General Education Program monitoring**

In order to determine the extent to which the various courses are contributing as they should to the general education program, the curriculum approval process (CIM) includes reviewing general education course information regarding:

1. The ways in which the course addresses all of the goals of the program
2. How the goals are reflected in course assignments
3. The percentage of the course grade that is derived from assignments directly related to general education goals.

Instructors are asked to provide this information in course syllabi.

One of the goals of the program (to gain a basic understanding of the natural sciences, social and behavioral sciences, humanities and fine arts) is addressed in the structure of the program, which requires students to take Divisional and Additional courses in the various broad fields of inquiry. In addition, the General Education Committee uses a General Education Course Proposal Form and the course syllabi to determine the appropriateness of a course for the program and the extent to which the course addresses this goal. Since such courses will vary in the extent to which they can address all four outcomes, the course review process conducted by the general education committee includes a matrix in which the general education goals and corresponding course outcomes are identified.

### **Tracking Outcomes**

The outcomes of the program are determined in three ways.

1. Course grade distributions are a measure of the outcomes of the Foundation courses. This is appropriate because each department teaching a Foundation class has a rubric (that is shared with students) for evaluating outcomes. The departments teaching the courses provide grade distributions, including withdrawals, and an analysis of problems encountered in ensuring that students are achieving the appropriate learning outcomes.
2. The General Education committee consults with the University Assessment Committee to review other assessment findings and metrics related to student learning outcomes relevant to general education.
3. Individual departments provide data to the general education committee as part of the regular program assessment cycle. Instructors who teach General Education courses provide appropriate assessment of student learning outcomes, including (but not limited to) pretest-posttest models. Every undergraduate program is reviewed on a four-year cycle, and this review includes an assessment of general education courses.

## **Institutional Feedback**

In order to monitor and improve the program, we have designed a set of feedback processes that allow all parts of the university that affect general education to learn from one another. Faculty members who teach general education courses are asked to report outcomes once every four years. At the time when their input is requested, they are also be asked for comments on the strengths and weaknesses of the program.

The general education committee meets yearly with academic advisors to obtain feedback from them regarding the program and to provide them with whatever feedback the committee obtains from faculty. Similarly, the general education committee includes a representative from the library as a member of the committee, and the library member consults with other library faculty to provide feedback on library research skills. The committee has access to the annual reports from exceptions committees to monitor waiver of general education requirements.

## **Schedule**

The general education committee completes an assessment report that is submitted to the Faculty Senate in the spring semester. The report with any recommendations for change is presented to the senate for consideration prior to taking any recommendations to the general faculty. Any changes approved by the general faculty will be instituted in the next academic year.

In the fall semester, the relevant departments gather the outcomes data. In the spring semester, a report with any recommendations for change is presented to the Faculty Senate for consideration prior to taking any recommendations to the general faculty later in the semester. Any changes approved by the general faculty will be instituted in the following version of the undergraduate catalog.

Assessment of the general education program is accomplished in a variety of ways, with a diversity of measures. Each year, the General Education Assessment Report is published for tracking and trend purposes.

## [General Education Outcomes](#)