

University General Education Curriculum Committee Assessment Project

Frequently Asked Questions

Why are we assessing the General Education Program?

It is important to point out that the University is assessing the General Education Program not only because it is a SACS expectation, but because it is also an expectation we have for ourselves as a university. Assessment of student learning outcomes is a national expectation in higher education and the expectations are calls for increased accountability. As such, assessment of student learning is something that is, and will continue to be, important to us. The plan implemented by the General Education Curriculum Committee was only a first step. It was developed with the idea that it could be expanded and improved in the years to come.

If we teach General Education courses do we have to take part in this assessment project?

This process is a very important responsibility for the university, its units, and departments; therefore, it is not optional and it is essential for all to be involved. It is a very clear requirement of SACS that we assess learning outcomes in our General Education Program, and the necessity to maintain and improve upon our current system cannot be underscored. Failure to properly assess General Education courses places our accreditation as a University in jeopardy. The impact of such a failure cannot be underestimated.

Who is responsible for the assessment process?

This process is and will remain the responsibility of the faculty. While a number of administrators have been involved in developing this plan to make sure it is consistent with the expectations of SACS and others who work in assessment, the plan was ultimately developed by a group of faculty on the General Education Curriculum Committee and they will have the responsibility for implementing the plan, reviewing the results of the assessment, and developing plans for improvement. While the plan will evolve over time, the prominent role of the faculty in this process will not change.

Will our department be assessed every semester?

No, the assessment process will cover different departments each semester on a rotating basis, determined by the Assessment Subcommittee of the General Education Curriculum Committee.

Is this going to measure/evaluate my work in the classroom?

The purpose of the process is not to assess individual faculty members, students, or courses. The goal is to assess student learning in the General Education Program as a whole. Consequently, we have worked to guarantee student and instructor anonymity in the process.

How will you ensure anonymity?

The General Education Assessment Coordinator or a representative from each academic department, compensated by the Provost's office, will be responsible for collecting documents for assessment and coordinating the removal of any identifying markers.

Why kinds of course documents will you be using for the assessment?

We will be using graded work from current General Education courses. Our hope is that this approach will help guarantee student motivation to perform at their highest levels in their General Education courses. In addition, using this kind of assessment framework eliminates the need to use a standardized test for assessment, which could require the altering of the curriculum of General Education courses.

What General Education competencies will you be assessing and why?

The General Education Curriculum Committee decided on a system of assessment that would use holistic readings of sample papers and exams from General Education courses. The initial phase of assessment focused on the three broad learning outcomes listed in the first paragraph of the General Education Program description: "The General Education Program at the University of Louisville fosters active learning by asking students to think critically, to communicate effectively, and to understand and appreciate cultural diversity."

Focusing on these three outcomes provided a more achievable goal for the initial assessment as opposed to trying to assess seven different content areas, each with multiple outcomes, in one year. The three general outcomes also allowed us to make clear to SACS that we were assessing outcomes that are listed prominently in the program description.

As an ongoing initiative, the General Education Curriculum Committee, in consultation with other faculty members, has designed rubrics to measure effective communication, cultural diversity, and critical thinking. The critical thinking rubrics are subdivided into three areas: social sciences, natural sciences, and mathematics. The rubrics were designed by drawing on the outcomes listed for those areas in the General Education Program Description.

Can we see the rubrics?

Yes, the rubrics and scoring criteria are always available for review at <http://louisville.edu/provost/GER/rubrics>. In addition, the rubrics and scoring criteria will be provided to departments before they are assessed.

Who will collect the information and documents for assessment in my department?

The General Education Assessment Coordinator, Joy Karega, (jakare01@louisville.edu, 852-7865), will handle the collection of information and documents for assessment of departments with a limited number of General Education courses. Departments with higher numbers of General Education courses will be asked to identify a person from within the department to coordinate the collection of assessment information and documents. A graduate student, staff member or part-time lecturer (with oversight from the department chair and/or undergraduate program director) will be fine for this job, which ends when all required materials have been forwarded to the assessment office at the end of the semester and uploaded into the livetext assessment system. The departmental coordinator will be compensated by the Provost's Office for their service to the assessment project. The name of each departmental coordinator should be sent to Joy Karega, General Education Assessment Project Coordinator, 852-7865 or jakare01@louisville.edu.

How will the process work?

In an effort to make this process more environmentally friendly, in the Fall semester of 2010, a new process for the collection and assessment of documents was implemented. The College of Education and Human Development (CEHD) has been successfully using livetext for outcomes assessment for a number of years, and the livetext company has worked with the GECC to develop a tool that fits the current general education assessment model. The use of this software allows the submission and assessment of all assignments and student samples electronically, saving time and other valuable resources.

Departments will be notified of their selection for assessment by the GECC at least one academic semester in advance. Livetext demonstrations for department chairs can be scheduled at this time as a way of familiarizing each department with the assessment process. After the final withdrawal date in the semester a department is being assessed, faculty/ instructors teaching general education courses will receive a marked course roster indicating which students have been randomly selected to have materials collected for assessment. The marked rosters will also ask for faculty/instructors to identify the competencies addressed by the assignment and (in the case of examinations) the specific parts of the assignment that address those competencies.

Faculty/instructors may submit for assessment any assignment given after receipt of the marked roster. As soon as the assignment is submitted by the selected students,

faculty/instructors should provide either the General Education Assessment Coordinator or the departmental coordinator with the following materials:

- The original marked course roster indicating which competencies the assignment addresses.
- An electronic copy of the assignment sheet distributed to students.
- An electronic *ungraded, unmarked* copy of the selected students' responses to the assignment. All identifying information (*student name, faculty/instructor name, course number*) should be redacted from assignments and student papers before they are submitted to the department coordinator.

Exception: Instructors submitting scantron exams for assessment must submit

- a copy of the exam indicating which questions measure which competencies
- the student performance report (generated by scantron after all exams have been scored). No individual student scantron forms will be submitted.

The General Education Assessment Coordinator and/or the departmental coordinator will confirm receipt of these materials and assist with the uploading of these materials to the livetext system, where the anonymity of students and faculty/instructors will be maintained, and the documents will be prepared for the scheduled assessment reading.

Who will select the readers?

The deans of all colleges with students in the General Education program will be asked to recommend readers to the GECC.

What kind of time commitment are readers expected to make?

The readers will be expected to participate in a half-day training session and a full-day of assessment reading.

How will the readers be compensated?

Readers will receive \$150 for the half-day of training and \$350 for the full-day of reading.

How will the readers be trained?

Training will be conducted by members of the GECC along with other faculty of the University who have experience with assessment.

What will happen with the data?

Once the readings are complete, the data will be forwarded to the GECC, which will use it to evaluate whether changes should be recommended for the General Education Program. A report about the assessment process will be forwarded to SACS as part of the accreditation process.

Can I see how my students did?

No, if anonymity is to be maintained it will not be possible for instructors to determine how their students scored.

Where can I direct other questions?

Questions can be directed to Joy Karega, General Education Assessment Coordinator, 852-7865 or jakare01@louisville.edu.