College-Wide General Education Learning Outcomes Assessment
Cultural Understanding
Spring 2018
Preliminary results

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Method

The Assessment Council issued an email call for participants in December 2017 (see Appendix A). After the initial email, individual faculty were contacted in an effort to achieve full representation of the five areas of the General Education Core (Communication, Humanities and Fine Arts, Mathematics, Physical and Life Sciences, and Social and Behavioral Sciences). The goal was to include both full- and part-time faculty, as well as face-to-face and online sections. Participants were asked to submit four samples of student work from one class section. Correspondence, including collection of the samples, was handled by one member of the Assessment Council. Personal identifying information and course information were redacted from samples; unique IDs were assigned based on the core areas.

Scoring took place at the April 2018 Assessment Council meeting; 15 members were present. Members were asked to read a sample and determine whether it demonstrated the three components of Cultural Understanding (see Appendix B). Samples were read at least twice; samples that received a differing score on any component went to a third reader. Members were also asked to write brief reflections (see Appendix C) about scoring the samples, which led into a discussion.

Results

Participants

Samples from four of the five General Education Core areas were represented: Communication, Humanities and Fine Arts, Physical and Life Sciences, and Social and Behavioral Sciences. Mathematics was not represented. Full-time faculty were represented at 67% (n=4) and part-time faculty at 33% (n=2). One online section was included in the sample. Four samples were included from each section (n=24).

Table 1

Courses Represented in Scoring Set

Area	Full-time faculty	Part-time faculty
Communication	COM 101	ENG 101
Humanities and Fine Arts	PHILO 101	PHILO 202
Mathematics	--	--
Physical and Life Sciences	BIOL 105	--
Social and Behavioral Sciences	PSYCH 101 (online)	--

Scores

The sample was split generally equally—47% (n=34) of components were scored as meeting the outcome; 53% (n=38) were not. Third reads were required for 14 components (19%).

Core areas. In Area A, Communication, 38% of samples (n=9) demonstrated Cultural Understanding. In Area B, Humanities and Fine Arts, 50% (n=12); Area D, Physical and Life Sciences, 75% (n=9); Social and Behavioral Sciences, 33% (n=4).

Table 2

Scores by General Education Core Area

Area	Score	
	YES	NO
Communication	9	15
Humanities and Fine Arts	12	12
Physical and Life Sciences	9	3
Social and Behavioral Sciences	4	8

Components. A slight majority of samples (54%) demonstrated a global perspective, Component 1. Fewer samples (29%) demonstrated the ability to navigate and thrive within diverse communities and workplaces, Component 2. Samples most successfully (63%) demonstrated an appreciation for the values of diversity, equity, and sustainability, Component 3.

Table 3

Scores Distributed by Cultural Understanding Component

	Score	
Component	**YES**	**NO**
Demonstrate a global perspective	13	11
Demonstrate the ability to navigate and thrive within diverse workplaces and communities	7	17
Demonstrate an appreciation for the values of diversity, equity, and sustainability.	15	9

Discussion

Interpreting results

Physical and Life Sciences had the highest number of samples demonstrate Cultural Understanding (75%), which somewhat surprised readers. The course sampled was Environmental Biology, and assignments clearly focused on sustainability. These assignments were worksheets, which readers explained offered the least helpful information in terms of *how well* students understood Cultural Understanding. This result raised questions for readers regarding whether diversity, equity, and sustainability should be combined into one outcome/component.

The fewest number of samples (29%) demonstrated the ability to navigate and thrive within diverse communities and workplaces. Readers questioned whether one assignment can

demonstrate this ability, and suggested that might be more apparent from an indirect source, such as an employer survey. It could also be more evident in a lab or other simulated activity.

Benefits

Members of the Assessment Council generally agreed this was a good first experience. They found it relatively easy to score the samples, even those outside of their disciplines—they saw the yes/no scoring guide to be useful, and felt prepared to answer the question. They also expressed appreciation for the post-scoring discussion. They believed the process would be useful to a bigger group of faculty, so more people on campus can see what student work looks like.

Assessment Council members and administration agreed having a broad range of individuals read student samples is valuable. They would like to continue scoring samples in a similar fashion (rather than having individual instructors to score work in isolation).

Limitations

There are a number of limitations in this initial General Education assessment project, most of which emerged in the reflections and discussion by the Assessment Council.

Scoring. Readers were limited to answering whether the sample demonstrated each component of the Cultural Understanding outcome by a simply yes or no; they were not asked to determine at what level the sample demonstrated the outcome. Some responses indicated that, if the reader *were* asked to identify "how much" cultural understanding the samples demonstrated, their answer would have been "not much"; others explained that when they were uncertain whether the sample achieved the outcome, they answered "yes."

The yes/no scoring guide was designed intentionally for two main reasons: It would allow for a quick scoring session (the Assessment Council had one 90-minute meeting in which

to score samples), and it would encourage conversation about how readers arrived at their scores. That conversation will be shared with the CWGELO committee, who can use the information to refine the outcomes and components and determine the professional development that would best support teaching and learning.

Additionally, there was no initial discussion or "norming" to precede the scoring session. As a result, readers had no shared idea of what Cultural Understanding would look like in student work. Again, this was intentional, so the experience would inform how the CWGELO committee wants to see the outcome enacted across the curriculum.

Assignments. Multiple readers indicated they preferred reading longer student samples. Since the outcome is multi-faceted, consensus was students had more opportunities to demonstrate their achievement of the outcome in a short essay format. Discussion board posts and worksheets were generally considered to be less helpful, as were longer (3+ pages) essays.

Volunteers. Faculty were told the samples they submitted did not necessarily need to align with the selected College-Wide General Education Outcome (CWGELO) of Cultural Understanding; since this was an initial assessment process, the AC wanted to see how the CWGELO was enacted across the curriculum to establish a baseline. Despite this assurance, some faculty were hesitant to participate. One person, for instance, explained Cultural Understanding was an aspect of the class, but emerged in class discussions, not in assignments or exams. Others did not think the project was relevant to their discipline and declined to participate. Finally, since adjunct faculty are in precarious positions, they may be less likely to participate. More outreach might improve faculty participation across the board.

Implications for CWGELO

The scoring experience made it clear that this group has questions about what Cultural Understanding looks like; it seemed to generally refer to the ability to reflect on aspects of culture outside a student's own perspective, in terms of demographics like national origin, race/ethnicity, socio-economic status, and gender identity. It would be helpful to come to a shared understanding of the outcome and its various components. Relatedly, several people wondered whether the outcome brings together too many distinct ideas. For instance, readers were uncertain what a "global" perspective was (Component 1), and focused on three interpretations: A worldwide understanding, an ability to critique non-Western or non-American perspectives, and an ability to consider the world (or even cultures) outside of oneself.

Readers also raised concern about how the CWGELO operate across the curriculum: Are they designed to be examined deeply in a limited number of courses, or to be approached broadly in as many courses as possible? That is, what is the relationship of the outcomes to the General Education Core and to the entire course catalogue?

Considerations for CWGELO Assessment

To arrive at a better understanding of how the outcome is enacted across campus, it might be helpful to use a stratified random sample in the next scoring session. That is, samples areas of the General Education Core would be overrepresented where the outcome is expected to emerge.

Some readers expressed concerns about academic writing conventions, particularly integration of source material with student ideas and grammar, usage, and mechanics. The Assessment Council should determine how to address these concerns in future scoring sessions.

Discussion and reflection focused on assignment design. Multiple readers expressed the importance of explicitly designing assignments/exams to allow students the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge of the CWGELO. They raised questions of fairness and validity—

is it right to evaluate students on an outcome (even in a low- or no-stakes situation) if they have not been asked to fulfill that outcome?

Future Work

In Spring 2018, the Vice President of Academic Affairs requested each master course outline and corresponding individual syllabi include at least one CWGELO. From the information collected, the Assessment Council and Office of Institutional Research will be able to collaborate and identify a regular collection schedule. There are 93 courses in the General Education Core; the AC and IR will be able to determine when to examine which courses (with particular attention to high-enrolling courses).

The Assessment Council has been discussing the possibility of trans-disciplinary assessment projects, and will need to determine whether faculty can participate in a General Education project in lieu of a traditional course-based student learning outcomes assessment project.

To address concerns about assignment design, the CWGELO committee and Assessment Council can collaborate on shared assignments, perhaps on a pilot basis. For instance, some institutions use performance tasks that are relevant to multiple disciplines; Joan Hawthorne, University of North Dakota, recently discussed this approach at the 2018 HLC Conference. In her example,[1] students receive information about three job offers—including the job, salary, and benefits; cost of living and quality of life indices; and typical home and commuting options. Students have to analyze multiple forms of data and write a rationale. Performance tasks require students to apply their knowledge to authentic scenarios aligned with course and institutional student learning outcomes.

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[1] https://www.assignmentlibrary.org/assignments/559c3986afed17c65f000003

Appendix A

Recruitment email

From: Jessica Nastal-Dema
Sent: Tuesday, December 5, 2017 11:21 AM
To: #Faculty <#Faculty@prairiestate.edu>; #Adjunct <#Adjunct@prairiestate.edu>
Cc: Carolyn Ciesla <cciesla@prairiestate.edu>
Subject: Do you teach cultural understanding?

Dear colleagues,
This semester, the Assessment Council embarks on a project to build on the College-Wide General Education Outcomes committee's previous work analyzing students' educational experiences at PSC. We will review student work, analyze and communicate the results, and design professional development opportunities to support our teaching and our students' learning. If you'd like to know more about the process, I am happy to chat about it.

I'm writing today with a question and request: **Do students in your classes have an opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge of cultural understanding*?** Please email back to let me know, even if the answer is no. And, if they do, in which class?

Your answers will help us refine a curriculum map of where and how the General Education Outcomes are enacted on campus. If you're willing to share samples of your student work, please let me know that, too! All samples will be anonymized, and your participation will never be used to evaluate your teaching.

It is my hope that we can foster more conversations about our teaching through this process. I look forward to working with you on the project!

Cheers,
Jessica, on behalf of the Assessment Council

Defined as: Students will demonstrate a global perspective, the ability to navigate and thrive within diverse communities and workplaces, and appreciation for the values of diversity, equity, and sustainability.

Appendix B

Scoring guide

PSC Assessment Council – 2017-18
General Education Outcomes Assessment

Student #:_____   Reader:_____

This semester, we are reviewing samples of student work to understand how they encounter the
Cultural Understanding learning outcome across the curriculum.

Cultural Understanding
Students will demonstrate a global perspective, the ability to thrive within diverse
communities and workplaces, and an appreciation for the values of diversity, equity, and
sustainability.

Please read the sample. Then, circle "yes" or "no" for each of the following questions.

Does the sample demonstrate a global perspective?	**YES**	**NO**
Does the sample demonstrate the ability to navigate and thrive within diverse communities and workplaces?	**YES**	**NO**
Does the sample demonstrate an appreciation for the values of diversity, equity, and sustainability?	**YES**	**NO**

Appendix C

Reader reflection

PSC Assessment Council – 2017-18
General Education Outcomes Assessment

What stood out to you in the samples?

What features led to your decision of "yes" or "no" on the various components of the Cultural Understanding outcome? How did you determine when a sample demonstrated aspects of cultural understanding?

What would you like to see in student work that demonstrates Cultural Understanding?

What questions do you have about the Cultural Understanding outcome?

What kinds of samples seemed to work particularly well for this type of scoring?

What kinds of samples did not seem to work well for this type of scoring?

What kinds of samples would be helpful to include in future scoring sessions?

What other observations, comments, questions, or suggestions do you have?