**Assessment of General Education Courses**

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UMBC is required both by the Maryland Higher Education Commission and the Middle States Commission on Higher Education to have a plan for the regular assessment of general education courses. The University proposed such a plan in the document [General Education and Assessment: A Streamlined Process](http://www.umbc.edu/provost/General_Education_Assessment-A_Streamlined_Process.pdf) that was approved for implementation in April, 2009. This plan requires that departments regularly assess a sample of GEP courses during each two-year cycle of program assessment reports and that departments assess any remaining courses during the Academic Program Review (APR). The goal is that all GEP courses offered by the department will be assessed at least once every seven-year cycle between APRs.

The goal of all course and program assessment is continuous improvement. Just as in assessment of program outcomes, departments assess GEP courses using direct as well as indirect measures of student learning outcomes. *In the case of GEP courses, however, the learning outcomes assessed are specifically those related to the general education functional competencies that the course addresses.* The department then uses the results of the assessment to determine what students are learning and what they are not related to the functional competencies planned for the course. These results help faculty direct course changes more effectively.

**Functional Competencies**

At the time the department submitted a course for approval as a general education course (GEP), the department designated the specific functional competencies that the course would address chosen from the following (described more fully at [UMBC General Education Competencies](http://www.umbc.edu/undergrad_ed/docs/General_Education_Competencies_0805.pdf)):

* Oral and written communication
* Scientific and quantitative reasoning
* Critical analysis and reasoning
* Technological competence
* Information literacy

*Any functional competency a course is designed to address must be assessed*. Again, the goal is that by analyzing exactly what students are achieving and what they are not achieving in terms of the functional competencies in the course, faculty can design appropriate changes to help the course be more effective. Once changes are implemented, the results will again be assessed.

*Departments may be able to use program assessment data both for their program assessment and for their GEP assessment if their program courses are also designated as GEP courses. The only additional requirement is to relate the assessment results specifically to the students’ achievement of the functional competencies for the course. We do ask that the GEP course assessment be included in a distinct section of the report.*

*Also, in large classes, a random sample or representative cross section of student work (10-20% depending on class size) may be assessed instead of including all student work in the assessment.*

**Direct versus Indirect Measures of Student Learning**

Assessment of any program or course learning outcome or functional competency must always include at least one directmeasure of student learning. Faculty are sometimes confused by this terminology. A *direct* measure is a faculty evaluation of the specific learning students actually *demonstrated* on assignments, exams, papers, etc. *Direct* measures reveal *specifically what* students know or don’t know compared to the proposed student learning outcomes and functional competencies. Examples of direct evidence of student learning include student performance on:

* specific exam questions related to functional competencies, NOT overall grades
* written or oral work scored with defined criteria or a rubric based on learning outcomes or functional competencies
* standardized exams (if related to functional competencies)

A complete list of examples of direct and indirect measures of student learning outcomes may be found in the attached document, *Examples of Evidence of Student Learning*, by Linda Suskie.

Course grades are considered an *indirect* measure of student learning because grades reflect a composite of ALL the types of learning that a faculty member asked students to demonstrate on the assignment or exam. The grade alone doesn’t describe specifically what students knew well and what they didn’t. Direct measures ask faculty to look closer at the assignment or exam to see what kinds of learning students are demonstrating. Then faculty can target specific interventions that should be effective in addressing any perceived deficiencies.

**Sample Plan for Assessing GEP Courses**

Below is an example of a plan that the History Department created to assess their general education courses. In the case of the History Department, all of their GEP courses address either oral and written communication or critical analysis and reasoning so they were able to create a department template. Other departments may need to create separate plans for individual courses or may be able to create template plans for groups of courses that address the same functional competencies and have similar kinds of assignments for students. The goal is to make assessment of GEP courses as automatic, efficient, and effective as possible. Departments should feel free to use a grid such as the one below in reporting their results.

**Department of History Assessment Plan for General Education Courses**

As directed on a prescribed university cycle, the Department of History will assess a general education program (GEP) course in both i*ndirect* and *direct* ways.

1. The *indirect* way will consist of a department designed GEP evaluation completed by students enrolled in the designated course at the end of the fall or spring semester.

The evaluation will survey students’ perceptions of their learning as defined by the general education competencies designated for the course and possible student learning outcomes desired by the individual instructor. The department and instructor will create this survey to be handed out in the designated GEP course.

2. The *direct* way will consist of a targeted evaluation of the specific two criteria under the stated functional competencies to be satisfied by the course.

The instructor will identify two criteria, for instance, “students need to correctly cite sources” and “they need to be able to write a thesis statement” (FC in this case would be “Oral and Written Communication”). The instructor will then use a rubric to score student work (most likely papers or examination) and report the findings in the template below. The instructor will indicate how the students scored, i.e., “I found that 5% of the students could not write a thesis statement” or “10% of the students could not correctly cite historical sources.” The instructor will also indicate a proposed change to the course (e.g., “I will require students to hand in a draft of their thesis statement to practice creating thesis statements.”).

3. The department will have an annual meeting of the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee to review the data.

4. The department will assess one GEP course every other year or as designated by the university.

*Chart for Reporting Assessment Results for UMBC General Education Courses*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Functional Competency #1 | Other Competencies🡪 |
| Course-specific goals linked to FC |  |  |
| How do you assess or measure achievement of those goals? |  |  |
| What did you find? |  |  |
| Changes proposed based on assessment results |  |  |