

Assessment of General Education at Binghamton University
Procedures
Revised March 25, 2014

Following are the revised procedures for the assessment of General Education at Binghamton University:

1. Three General Education categories are assessed each year. Twelve course portfolios are collected in each of those categories – six in the fall semester and six in the spring semester.
2. The University Undergraduate Curriculum Committee reviews the portfolios and writes reports for three categories per year.
3. A sampling of faculty and instructors teaching General Education courses is contacted and given assistance to create a “course portfolio.” The portfolio is submitted to the UUCC at the end of the semester. It contains:
 - a. A course syllabus;
 - b. A brief description of how the course fulfills the content requirements and meets the learning objectives of the General Education category (the same information submitted to the UUCC to earn the General Education designation) and the overall goals of critical thinking and information management.
 - c. A brief narrative of strengths and weaknesses in student learning with regard to the learning goals in the selected General Education category
 - d. An Outcomes Assessment Report (template provided) that includes the following:
 - i. Learning outcome statements
 - ii. Methods/measures used to assess each outcome
 - iii. Assessment results (percentage of students finishing the course who fall into these categories: exceed, fulfill, approach, or fail to meet each learning outcome)
 - iv. Action plan (if applicable, changes the instructor will make in the course for continuous improvement)
4. It is understood that there is no necessary correlation between grades in a course and the relative ranking of examples provided for assessment, since course grades in many courses depend on more criteria than those involved in the General Education component of the course.
5. The use of course portfolios in the assessment of General Education remains the basis for General Education assessment at Binghamton University, although additional information may be provided to the UUCC for review as it prepares to write the reports. As a faculty-based process, it ensures that faculty input and feedback are central to the assessment process. Therefore, the following selection procedures (as developed by the Provost’s Office) will be followed in order to continue ensuring that faculty are included in the assessment process and to ensure that the course portfolios used in General Education assessment are representative of courses that students complete in each General Education category:
 - a. For the purposes of identifying courses to be assessed, each section of a course having multiple sections taught by different instructors of record is considered as a separate course. A particular course number taught by a different instructor of record counts as a separate course.
 - b. Courses to be assessed in a given category are chosen randomly from the pool of courses being offered in that category, with the limitations that no more than four courses per department are chosen in a particular semester and an instructor is not chosen more often than once in three years.
 - c. A course fulfilling more than one Gen Ed category (for example, P and C) can be assessed in only one category during a given semester.

- d. Waivers of participation may be available in limited cases:
 - i. Graduate students may request a waiver in the semester they are defending their dissertation.
 - ii. Faculty members may request a waiver in the semester of their tenure review.
 - iii. New faculty may request a waiver in their first semester on campus, with the understanding that they will then be eligible to participate in their second semester.
 - e. In the case of refusals to cooperate, the University Undergraduate Curriculum Committee may consider removal of the General Education designation in the future for that course taught by that instructor.
6. Working from criteria for learning outcomes approved by the Faculty Senate, the UUCC evaluates course portfolios in relation to achievement of the goals for student learning. The UUCC suggests revision of the General Education learning outcomes to make them more meaningful and measurable if needed. The UUCC might also consider additional information it finds pertinent to the successful assessment of each General Education category, and does the following:
- a. Reviews the findings and recommendations of the last report to understand past issues, to evaluate progress made since the last reporting period, and to help guide the committee in making recommendations in its current report;
 - b. Evaluates the course portfolios and other assessment information (e.g., rubric evaluation results, survey data, focus groups, etc.) and assesses the extent to which the courses are addressing the student learning outcomes for the General Education category to which they have been assigned, as well as overall strengths and weaknesses in student learning with regard to such learning outcomes, with particular attention to the overall goal of enhancing critical thinking and information management.
 - c. Makes recommendations that address strengths and weaknesses identified in (b).
7. The UUCC evaluates success, considers students' needs and faculty suggestions, weighs changes over time, and explores areas for improvement. Issues involving individual faculty or student experiences are treated as confidential within the process of evaluating course portfolios. Data should be aggregated, and individual students or faculty members should not be identifiable in any reports. The UUCC may also review aggregate data on grades for all courses in the category, as well as anonymous data from web surveys of faculty and students or other relevant data from campus-wide surveys and focus groups of students. Course portfolios are maintained in an archive for limited access and data analysis. All final reports are anonymous, identifying neither students nor instructors.
8. The UUCC discusses its reports with the Provost, the faculty participating in portfolio review and all the faculty teaching in the Gen Ed category as needed. Elements of the report result from a systematic review of the course portfolios and other assessments made available to the UUCC. At a minimum, each report contains the following:
- a. A brief summary regarding how the recommendations and issues discussed in the prior report have been addressed
 - b. A discussion of strengths and weaknesses about the extent to which courses in each General Education category are addressing the learning outcomes in each category.
 - c. A discussion of strengths and weaknesses with regard to student learning as they relate to each student learning outcome in the General Education category of concern.
 - d. Recommendations that the UUCC wants to make as a result of its review of the course portfolios and other assessment information provided to it.
 - e. Additional comments, as the UUCC deems warranted.

9. Each year, the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment does the following:
 - a. Administers surveys with questions related to General Education learning outcomes (e.g., the Graduating Senior Survey, Undergraduate Alumni Survey, National Survey of Student Engagement, etc.);
 - b. In the area of critical thinking/information management, evaluates samples of students work using a rubric, each on a three-year cycle. The results of the rubric assessment are made available to the EPPC and UUCC.
 - c. Consults with UUCC to determine what other data it might need for completion of assessment reports.
10. The assessment process is facilitated and overseen by the Assistant Provost for Institutional Research and Assessment. Each year, the Assistant Provost does the following, working with the Provost's Office as needed:
 - a. Consults with the UUCC to ensure that it has the information it needs to complete its report;
 - b. Presents the past year's reports to the UUCC, either in report form or in person;
 - c. Reports on the progress regarding recommendations made in past reports.
 - d. Ensures that reporting requirements regarding the completion of General Education assessment (reports to Middle States and other regulatory bodies requesting information) are completed annually. In cases of such reports, the Assistant Provost will inform the UUCC Chair that such reports are being made and the substance of such reports.
 - e. Works with the Chairs of the EPPC, UUCC, and other relevant Faculty Senate Committees, as well as the Provost, to consider recommendations made by the reports.
 - f. Reminds faculty from Provost's and Deans' levels that the faculty created the assessment system, that they are obligated to participate, and that assessment offers significant rewards in ideas for course improvement to those who take time to participate.
11. The Provost's Office rewards participation by crediting it as a service activity (i.e., adding an entry in the Annual Faculty Report), or by other appropriate means, such as recognition or letter of thanks from the Provost.
12. Copies of the UUCC's reports are provided to faculty and instructors teaching in the General Education category, so that they may make improvements in the teaching of General Education courses.
13. The Provost's Office works with the Center for Learning and Teaching (CLT) to set up a meeting once a year with all instructors who offer courses in the three Gen Ed categories being assessed that year for general discussion of teaching in that category, successful strategies, and revisions to courses based on the assessment outcomes.

Rationale for proposed changes:

Currently, General Education courses are assessed by means of course portfolios. Portfolios are collected from four courses in each General Education category in the fall and spring semesters. These portfolios are reviewed on a three-year cycle by faculty Assessment Category Teams (ACTs), who then write reports.

We are proposing the following changes to the assessment of General Education for two reasons:

1. We need to use the reports to improve General Education and, with regard to Middle States, to show that we are doing so.

2. We find faculty increasingly reluctant to participate in the ACTs and in the assessment process. Of the instructors who agree to participate, approximately 20 percent do not turn in a course portfolio.

Collecting fewer course portfolios each semester will lighten the burden on departments and instructors. The Faculty Senate has been unable to fully staff the Assessment Category Teams. The University Undergraduate Curriculum Committee is the Faculty Senate committee charged with the oversight of General Education and has membership from all of the schools which offer General Education courses. In addition, members of the UUCC have expressed concern that courses awarded Gen Ed designations may not be doing what they said they would do. This would allow the UUCC to review and assess the courses that have been approved as meeting General Education designations. Many departments have been requesting waivers for all graduate students and adjuncts. Since relatively few General Education courses in certain categories are taught by senior faculty, this eliminates most of the pool of Gen Ed courses from the assessment process.