

SUNY New Paltz General Education Assessment Plan (Capstone Plan)

(To begin Fall 2019)—proposed by the General Education Board and Accepted by Faculty Senate May 1, 2019

Introduction

Assessment of student learning in general education (GE) courses is required in order for us to determine whether our students have mastered the content and skills of a liberal education as defined by our faculty. Although some GE assessments are mandated by the SUNY Board of Trustees, the primary reason why we do it is because it provides criterion-referenced data that inform our curriculum and instructional decisions. Assessments should be structured so that we obtain information about student learning that will be useful to us in assuring learning, learning from the outcomes, and innovating improvements.

What is General Education assessment?

Assessment, in this context, is a continuing activity of looking at different measures of student learning in order to inform decisions about teaching and learning at the university, college, program, and classroom levels. GE assessment provides information at the level of the GE program, with information at that level also informing decisions instructors may make for their own classrooms.

GE assessment focuses on the 30 student learning outcomes (SLOs) for our GE program specified by the SUNY Board of Trustees, and reflect an education that has a basic breadth of knowledge and key skills for communicating and working with information of different types.

The work of GE assessment is to better understand if students are meeting particular standards that are key goals or SLOs of a GE program. The information from our assessment activities can then be used to adjust programs or classes as needed to support more students in reaching those GE SLOs. This assessment is not a direct comparison of what students knew before a particular class and after it or even before their education and after it, but rather serve as a way to see that as many students as possible are reaching key benchmark levels.

Why is assessment important?

General education assessment is important because of the usable information it gives us for our classes, our curricula, and our stakeholders. Colleagues, from within disciplines and campus, can come together to discuss GE assessment findings and create strategies to help students learn. Instructors can systematically examine patterns of student learning across courses in different content areas and use the information to improve educational practices. Assessment enables instructors to provide feedback to students regarding their strengths and weaknesses that can guide their studies. It can reveal to instructors topics and skills that require further instruction. At the program level, GE assessment can guide the modification of curriculum to appropriately address areas of strength and weakness.

While the foregoing is of primary importance, we also are cognizant of the fact that assessment information is required by external audiences. The campus as a whole must be attentive to the requirements of our regional accrediting body, Middle States Commission on Higher Education (<http://www.msache.org/pubs.html>). Colleges and universities and their departments and programs must demonstrate they are assessing student learning and are using the information to improve teaching and learning. Further, as a public institution, taxpayers, legislators, and others expect us to be accountable.

What GE areas does SUNY New Paltz assess?

SUNY New Paltz performs GE assessment in the 10 content areas of The Arts (ART), Basic Communication (BC), Foreign Language (FLNG), Humanities (HUM), Mathematics (MATH), Natural Sciences (NSCI), Social Sciences (SSCI), American History (USST), Western Civilization (WEST), and World Civilizations (WRLD). We also assess two competencies: Critical Thinking (CT) and Information Management (IM). Specific learning outcomes for each area and further details follow below.

When does SUNY New Paltz perform GE assessment?

Direct assessment of students' work in GE courses takes place each year. Student work is collected during the relevant fall or spring semester and reviewed by faculty near the end of that semester.

Each content area and competency listed above is on a three-year cycle for formal assessment. While faculty are continually observing student work, sharing information about student success, and making adjustments, specific information will be collected for approximately 4 areas each fall. For example, in fall 2019, formal GE assessment of The Arts, Mathematics, Western Civilization, and Information Management are scheduled to take place. A different set of GE areas would be assessed the following fall, and a different set the next, and The Arts, Mathematics, Western Civilization, and Information Management IM would cycle back for formal assessment in fall 2022.

What forms does this assessment take?

Some assessments are indirect, such as the use of survey data. Some draw from other assessments happening on campus, such as program assessments for accreditation agencies in particular areas (e.g., Education, Business, Art). Some assessments use direct measures (e.g., examination of student work relevant to the learning outcomes). The assessment of the 10 content areas takes place with the organizational support of the GE Board, while the two competencies, CT and IM, are assessed within major programs as part of their programmatic assessment activities.

How will results be reported?

When individual faculty or faculty review groups report assessment results, they will complete a Qualtrics Survey that can be linked to my.newpaltz.edu for easy access (or through a similar, updated form or software). Reporting in content areas will be done based on a 2-level rubric with Meets and Does Not Meet as the options relative to each learning outcome. Competencies will be reported based on a 4-level rubric including Exceeds, Meets, Approaches, and Does not meet as the levels.

How will results be used?

The purpose of assessment is improvement of student learning, so faculty are ~~need~~ to discuss their results with other faculty and ~~to~~ reflect on how they might more effectively help students meet the SLOs. Faculty have always made course and program changes to improve student learning; assessment just makes the process more transparent and systematic. Assessment data are ~~is~~ aggregated. They are not used to evaluate individual instructors or course sections.

Assessment results will be reported out to faculty teaching GE courses in the areas being assessed, to department chairs, associate deans, and the GE Board. Faculty in each area will review the results, have discussions within departments and/or GE content areas about the results, and then implement changes to the curriculum as appropriate.

What is the initial schedule for when categories will be assessed?

2019-20: HUM, NSCI, SSCI, WEST, plus Information Management within majors

2020-21: USST, WRDL, BC-O

2021-22: ART, FLNG, BC-W, MATH, plus Critical Thinking within majors (with CT piloted in 2018-19)

Categories will be assessed again every three years unless assessment practices or results determine that a change is necessary.

How and when will the GE assessment plan be reviewed?

The GE assessment plan will undergo informal review by the GE Board each year when new GE assessment results are released. Those results and input about the process can inform the GE Board's discussions about potential changes to make, including changes in the assessment process, rubrics, closing the loop activities, and other areas. Minor changes in implementation or materials may be put in place by the GE Board. Substantive changes to the plan would require review by the Faculty Senate. The GE Board should undertake a more thorough review of the GE assessment plan after each full, three-year cycle of assessment.

How will faculty know if their students or courses are up for assessment?

The GE Board and/or the appropriate representative from Academic Affairs (currently the Associate Provost for Strategic Planning and Assessment) will communicate with faculty the semester prior to an assessment that students in their capstone course(s) are up for assessment. The communication will include instructions for the assessment and due dates for turning in materials.

Assessments

We will use multiple types of assessment to gain information about the overall GE program. Types include indirect assessments, program assessment materials, major-based direct assessments of competencies, and university-wide direct assessments of GE content areas.

Indirect Assessments:

Data from students' responses to relevant NSSE questions may be used as that information is available. Relevant National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) items include

- Worked on paper or project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources (critical thinking)
- Using computers in educational work (information management)
- Writing clearly and effectively (basic communication)
- Speaking clearly and effectively (basic communication)
- Thinking critically and analytically (critical thinking)
- Analyzing quantitative problems (quantitative skills)
- Using computing and information technology (information management)

DFW reports may be used to add information about timely student completion and class success in content areas.

Data from any Information Literacy survey administered through the library and may use other localized surveys as they become available.

A selection of instructors teaching GE courses in areas up for assessment will be asked to complete a short survey about course activities and student learning related to the SUNY BoT learning outcomes.

Program Assessments:

Information on assessed learning outcomes from program assessments may be used as that information is available and relevant.

Possible program assessments to use include, but are not limited to, those from Art, Business, Education, and Engineering.

Competencies Direct Assessments:

We will directly assess student work in the two SUNY Board of Trustees competencies. Areas will typically be assessed on a three-year cycle within each major.

Critical Thinking will be assessed by programs/departments/schools at the advanced level of the three levels (introductory, intermediate, advanced) in the stepped curriculum plans as reflected in curricular maps.

The required learning outcomes are as follows:

CRITICAL THINKING (REASONING) Students will:

- identify, analyze, and evaluate arguments as they occur in their own or others' work; and
- develop well-reasoned arguments.

Assessment data from each major on relevant classes/students (selected with the aid of Institutional Research as needed) will go to the relevant Associate Dean and on to the GE Board and the Associate Provost for Strategic Planning and Assessment. Analysis of the assessment data will return to programs/departments/schools for reflection, review, and program and class revisions as needed.

All areas will use the required learning outcomes, but they may develop their own rubrics for those outcomes that match their fields of study.

Information Management will be assessed by programs/departments/schools at the advanced level of the three levels (introductory, intermediate, advanced) in the stepped curriculum plans as reflected in curricular maps.

The required learning outcomes are as follows:

INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

Students will:

- perform the basic operations of personal computer use;
- understand and use basic research techniques; and
- locate, evaluate and synthesize information from a variety of sources.

Assessment data from each major on relevant classes/students (selected with the aid of Institutional Research as needed) will go to the relevant Associate Dean and on to the GE Board and the Associate Provost for Strategic Planning and Assessment. Analysis of the assessment will return to programs/departments/schools for reflection, review, and program and class revisions as needed.

All areas will use the required learning outcomes, but they may develop rubrics for those outcomes that match their fields of study.

Content Area Reflective Direct Assessments:

We will directly assess student work in the ten SUNY Board of Trustees GE content areas through reflective questions. These content areas will typically be assessed on a three-year cycle. This assessment uses a common rubric for all areas, with some models and directions regarding what responses do and do not meet the learning outcome standards.

Process:

1. The semester before the assessment, the GE Board will convene a group of faculty who teach in the areas up for GE assessment. This group will develop reflective prompts for students to answer in capstone courses (1 hour or less per prompt). The prompts should address all the learning outcomes for the relevant content area. The faculty groups will also develop model answers or guidelines for reviewing student answers to the prompts.
2. Shortly before the semester the assessment takes place, instructors of capstone courses will be informed that their students will complete a GE assessment activity. Sections resulting in approximately 25% of students taking capstone courses will be selected for assessment in each content area scheduled for that year. This will typically result in all capstone courses being selected, but they will be selected for only one content area each. By the beginning of the semester, the prompt for the relevant content area and any model answers will be provided to capstone course instructors.
3. Instructors will explain the purpose of the assessment (as a reflection on student's educational experiences) and provide the listed amount of class time (no more than 1 hour) for students to answer the prompt. They will collect student answers and provide those to the GE Board during the first weeks of the semester. Instructors will also have the option to administer the assessment outside of class by a date to be designated each semester.
4. During the second five weeks of the semester (typically), a group of faculty assessors will review student answers in each content area. Typically, GE Board members and instructors who teach in the relevant content areas will make up the groups. Each person would focus on one of the three or four content areas up for assessment. Faculty assessors will use the Standard Content Area Rubric (see below) to score student answers. Faculty assessors will enter numerical results and answer discursive questions regarding student work for each learning outcome.
5. Instructors in GE courses for the areas up for assessment that year will answer a brief survey at the end of the term regarding student learning for the appropriate content area.
6. Results will be aggregated, analyzed, and reported back to all faculty, programs, departments, and schools connected to the content area by the end of the semester that the student answers were collected.
7. Faculty will review the assessment results during the semester following the assessment and make adjustments as needed.

Assignment Collection:

Capstone course instructors will be provided with prompts for their classes. After administering the reflective question early in the semester, instructors will collect all student responses. They will then turn in the student work to a GE Board representative either in hard copy or electronically as the situation requires and current campus technology allows.

Faculty Survey Questions

Faculty teaching courses in GE categories up for assessment will complete a short survey at the end of the semester. The purpose of this survey is to gather information about teaching practices and faculty understanding of student learning in GE courses. This information relies on faculty expertise and can be put together with the reflective direct assessment results from the capstone courses.

- How do you help students understand your course within the broader context of the General Education (GE) Program?
- What work do your students complete that aligns with the GE student learning outcomes for the content area assigned to your course? (link to learning outcomes here).
- Based on performance in the assignments noted above, fill in the following boxes to estimate how many students in your course met/did not meet the GE student learning outcomes.

Learning outcome	# of students in course section	# of students Meet (Conveys at least basic understanding of the learning outcome material; makes implicit connections between the Goals, Assumptions, & Objectives of the GE Category and the assigned task.)	# of students Do Not Meet (Provides minimal or confused understanding of the learning outcome material; makes virtually no connections between Goals, Assumptions, & Objectives of the GE Category; and makes unclear or unwarranted connections to the assigned task.)
Students will...learning outcome 1			
Students will...learning outcome 2			

SUNY Required Learning Outcomes

Art (ART)

Students will demonstrate

- understanding of at least one principal form of artistic expression and the creative process inherent therein.

Basic Communication (COMP)

Students will

- produce coherent texts within common college-level written forms;
- demonstrate the ability to revise and improve such texts;
- research a topic, develop an argument, and organize supporting details;
- develop proficiency in oral discourse; and
- evaluate an oral presentation according to established criteria.

Foreign Language (FLNG)

Students will demonstrate

- basic proficiency in the understanding and use of a foreign language; and
- knowledge of the distinctive features of culture(s) associated with the language they are studying.

Humanities (HUM)

Students will demonstrate

- knowledge of the conventions and methods of at least one of the humanities in addition to those encompassed by other knowledge areas required by the General Education program.

Mathematics (MATH)

Students will demonstrate the ability to

- interpret and draw inferences from mathematical models such as formulas, graphs, tables and schematics;
- represent mathematical information symbolically, visually, numerically and verbally;
- employ quantitative methods such as, arithmetic, algebra, geometry, or statistics to solve problems;
- estimate and check mathematical results for reasonableness; and
- recognize the limits of mathematical and statistical methods.

Natural Sciences (NSCI)

Students will demonstrate

- understanding of the methods scientists use to explore natural phenomena, including observation, hypothesis development, measurement and data collection, experimentation, evaluation of evidence, and employment of mathematical analysis; and
- application of scientific data, concepts, and models in one of the natural (or physical) sciences.

Social Sciences (SSCI)

Students will demonstrate

- understanding of the methods social scientists use to explore social phenomena, including observation, hypothesis development, measurement and data collection, experimentation, evaluation of evidence, and employment of mathematical and interpretive analysis; and
- knowledge of major concepts, models and issues of at least one discipline in the social sciences.

American History (USST)

Students will demonstrate

- knowledge of a basic narrative of American history: political, economic, social, and cultural, including knowledge of unity and diversity in American society;
- knowledge of common institutions in American society and how they have affected different groups; and
- understanding of America's evolving relationship with the rest of the world.

Western Civilization (WEST)

Students will

- demonstrate knowledge of the development of the distinctive features of the history, institutions, economy, society, culture, etc., of Western civilization; and
- relate the development of Western civilization to that of other regions of the world.

World Civilizations (WRLD)

Students will demonstrate

- knowledge of either a broad outline of world history, or
- the distinctive features of the history, institutions, economy, society, culture, etc., of one non- Western civilization.

Rubrics

CT rubric: developed/chosen by major program

IM rubric: developed/chosen by major program

GE Content areas: Standard Content Area Rubric

Category	Meets	Does not meet
GE Student Learning Outcome	Conveys at least basic understanding of the learning outcome material; makes implicit connections between the Goals, Assumptions, & Objectives of the GE Category and the assigned task.	Provides minimal or confused understanding of the learning outcome material; makes virtually no connections between Goals, Assumptions, & Objectives of the GE Category; and makes unclear or unwarranted connections to the assigned task.

(The above rubric is borrowed and revised from the 2018 SUNY Cortland GE assessment rubric.)

Additional guidance in determining what types of responses meet or do not meet learning outcomes will be provided by the faculty groups creating the individual prompts. The guidance is tied to those specific prompts.

Sample Reflective Direct Assessment Questions

Questions will be created the semester before the assessment by faculty teaching in the matching content areas. Groups working in future years of assessment can revise initial prompts as needed. Each prompt should also ask students to identify if they complete the majority of their GE coursework at SUNY New Paltz or at another institution. Below are a few sample questions. These are not designated for use.

ART

Think of an artistic work that you remember vividly and can describe and analyze in some detail. Pay particular attention to the materials and medium of the work. Is it a painting, sculpture, architecture? Spend some time brainstorming so you can remember details and find the language to describe it, then write an essay on it that does the following:

1. Identify and describe the individual work and explain the categories it might fall into. What form of artistic expression is it? What are key features of this form of artistic expression. How does the work you chose exemplify those features?
2. Describe the creative process used to create a work of art like this one. Feel free to refer to the process of specific artists or your own artistic process if applicable. What considerations, steps, and elements are included for work in this form?
3. How has your understanding of this (and other) artistic work, form, and process shaped the way you think about creativity? What connections have you found between artistic expression and your major?

Basic COM-Oral

1. Watch the TED talk X as a class (10-15 minutes).
2. Write a critique of the argument, organization, delivery, and visual aspects of the presentation using the rubric provided as a guide (10 minutes).
3. Provide a description and set of characteristics for what an effective oral presentation is like. Describe the most effective oral presentation you have given in college and use that presentation experience to provide examples for your argument about what makes for high quality oral presentations (20 minutes).

(or simply do part 3 above in a way that includes both reflection on one's own presentation and on what makes for a good presentation)

Basic COM-Written:

Choose a particular document or set of documents you have written during college that make some sort of claim and required some form of research (library, lab, dataset, text, interview, other). In a well-organized, coherent essay, using your college experiences as the main material, make an argument about what elements are most important for good writing and why. In your essay, include a reflection on 1. Your process for developing a topic, gathering information, writing, and revising that assignment and 2. Your approach to research more fully, including how you utilize sources, how you determine the reliability of information, and how you organize that material.

Please include any brainstorming, notes, and early drafts of this current essay with the material you turn in.

HUM:

Sample prompt for Humanities--Capstone Assessment Plan

Think of an artistic, literary, philosophic, or other work in the humanities that you remember vividly, can describe and analyze in some detail, and find compelling. For example, a specific work of art, short story, novel, play, philosophical text, or essay. Spend some time brainstorming so you can remember details and find the language to describe it, then write an essay on it that does the following:

1. Describe the work in a way that conveys its meaning to someone who has never seen or read it. Be sure to provide some historical or cultural context for the work. Who wrote it? When and where? What categories apply to this work? For example, does it belong to a specific genre within the history of art, literature, or philosophy? Is it a part of certain type of movement? How does it exemplify this category, genre, or movement?
2. Explain the work by describing and connecting specific and concrete artistic, literary, or philosophical details to its main idea. What is the work about? What perspectives does it offer? Does it address an enduring problem, concern, issue, question, or idea about what it means to be human? How does it help us to think about humanity? What about this work merits our consideration?

MATH:

Provide a statistics-focused set of 10 or 15 multiple choice questions (2 or 3 per learning outcome). Provide another set of 10-15 algebra-focused multiple choice questions. Students have the option to answer one set or the other based on the math work they have done. (Other areas may add question options as needed—like Symbolic Logic, but many should be covered by these two.) Finish with a short paragraph about how their knowledge of math has changed or has been used in their college studies as a whole. Can draw on plans from previous assessment cycles for sample questions or re-usable questions.

NSCI:

Reflect upon any of the following:

- 1) An experience you had as a college student that involved using principles and/or methods of science.
- 2) A recent scientific discovery that you are familiar with.
- 3) An issue that you routinely follow in the news that you believe has scientific aspects.
- 4) A favorite activity that you do in your everyday life that has scientific aspects.
- 5) A favorite reading, movie, play, artwork, musical piece etc. that you believe requires some knowledge from the natural sciences to fully appreciate, critique, or understand.

With your chosen reflection in mind (pick from 1-5 above), in as much detail as you can, answer the following questions:

- 1) Describe and explain the natural science principles, concepts, models, or data that you find valuable in understanding, appreciating, or taking part in the item you chose.
- 2) Describe your understanding of the natural science methods involved in the item you chose. Consider any or all of the following: methods of observation, hypothesis development, measurement, data collection, experimentation, mathematical analysis, evaluation of evidence).

WEST:

(A similar model of using related current events could be used for other categories, including the sciences)

Sit the student down with a world map and a Sunday New York Times. Ask them to find an article that reflects on "the development of the distinctive features of the history, institutions, economy, society, culture, etc., of Western civilization;" and how "the development of Western

civilization is related to that of other regions of the world." Using material learned in their courses, explain how this contemporary newspaper article reflects on that Western civilization's history and locate where it is in the map.