

# **ASSESSMENT OF GENERAL EDUCATION OUTCOMES 1999-2000**

During the week of July 17, 2000, a group of four CSU faculty members under the direction of Professor James Schuerger carried out an evaluation of a sample of student productions from courses in three of seven general education areas in the curriculum. This evaluation is one component of the Outcomes Assessment Plan for General Education Requirements. It assessed student outcomes in the areas of Western Culture and Civilization, Nonwestern Culture and Civilization, and Human Diversity and African-American Experience. The evaluation process followed recommendations and a methodology developed by a faculty committee under the direction of Dr. Schuerger during the summer of 1999.

Samples of student products were obtained by requesting, from faculty members teaching courses designated as partially fulfilling requirements in these three curricular areas, three samples of student work produced in response to course assignments. The instructors were asked to submit the assignments submitted by the first three students whose last names began with a particular letter of the alphabet, but to exclude from the sample work of students who were not in good standing in the course at the time of the submission. The samples were read and holistically scored by Professors Valerie George, Beverly \_\_\_\_\_, David Larson, and Donald Ramos. Professor Jeffrey Ford coordinated the readings and tabulated the results.

## **Procedure:**

1. **Review of Criteria and Identification of Anchor Papers.** Before evaluating the samples in each of the categories, the readers reviewed the set of evaluation criteria developed during the exercise conducted during the summer of 1999 (Attachment A). All of the readers then read a sample of six to nine papers pre-selected by the coordinator to represent the range of levels of competence, and scored each using the following three-point scale: 1-Below Expectations; 2-Meets Expectations; 3-Exceeds Expectations.
2. **Identifying Anchor Papers.** After reading the submissions, the readers discussed essays in the sample which had received different scores in order to identify differences in evaluation criteria and arrive at greater uniformity in the application of criteria. The group then agreed on an "anchor" or sample paper to represent each of the three possible scores. Finally, the committee formulated descriptions of the characteristics of a submission at each of these levels (Attachment B). This final step was fully completed for only the first curricular area, "Western Culture and Civilization."
3. **Evaluation.** After the completion of this preparatory exercise, each of the student submissions in the sample for that curricular area were read and scored independently by two members of the committee. In cases in which the resulting scores were a 1 and a 2, the submission was read and evaluated by a third member

of the committee. As a result, the following four evaluative levels are distinguished in the results reported below.

**Exceeds expectations:** Two readers assigned a score of 3.

**Meets expectations +:** One reader assigned a score of 2, the other of 3.

**Meets expectations:** Two readers assigned a score of 2.

**Below expectations:** Two readers assigned a score of 1.

**Outcomes:**

I – Western Culture and Civilization:

Exceeds Expectations	3	6.7%	
Meets Expectations +	13	28.9%	
Meets Expectations	13	28.9%	57.8%
Below Expectations	16	35.6%	
Total in sample	45		

II – Nonwestern Culture and Civilization

Exceeds Expectations	2	8.3%	
Meets Expectations +	5	20.8%	
Meets Expectations	10	41.7%	62.5%
Below Expectations	7	29.2%	
Total in Sample	24		

III – Human Diversity and African-American Experience

Exceeds Expectations	5	15.6%	
Meets Expectations +	5	15.6%	
Meets Expectations	13	40.6%	56.3%
Below Expectations	9	28.1%	
Total in Sample	32		

**Notes and Recommendations**

The 1999 faculty committee noted a number of defects in the design of the assessment plan that should, once again, be kept in mind in interpreting these results.

The goals associated with the curricular requirements are assumed to be achieved through more than one course in a curricular area, whereas the assessment is based on work in a particular course which may or may not have been produced at a point near the student's completion of the requirement.

The 1999 recommendations for obtaining samples more suitable for evaluation resulted in a more uniform and usable set of student products. In particular, this group of submissions did not include single sentence or single paragraph answers to examination questions. Nevertheless there continues to be too much variation in the kind of work being evaluated. The items in the sample ranged from examination essay answers of approximately 500 words to term papers of ten pages or more. In some cases the submissions were responses to questions testing the students' command of factual information, and, consequently, not suited to evaluating the ability to present and develop a point of view as stipulated in the criteria. Furthermore, in some cases, the readers knew the prompt or question that the submission responded to. In others, the assignment was not included. This meant that, in addition to evaluating the product according to the criteria, readers found themselves attempting to judge whether a defect was a reflection of the student's ability or the nature of the assignment.

These problems were more serious in the samples from courses in the areas of "Nonwestern Culture and Civilization" and "Human Diversity and African American Experience." There seemed to be considerable difference in faculty members' interpretations of the objectives of these requirements. The members of the committee did not have a clear and uniform understanding of the third criterion under "Nonwestern Culture and Civilization": "Ability to understand primary materials in the context of the culture that produced them." Since the third area included African-American courses and Human Diversity courses, and since the objectives of these two requirements are different, it was necessary to make a decision about which criteria to apply in evaluating submissions under this heading.

As a result of these difficulties, the members of the committee found it difficult to decide what criteria should distinguish the evaluation of papers in the second and third areas from those in Western Culture and Civilization or to develop characterizations of papers that fall within the three categories of evaluation for these two areas. Attempts to formulate criteria and characterizations based on the rationales for the curricular requirements seemed to create expectations inappropriate to the majority of the submissions.

Prior to the beginning of the evaluation exercise, a number of products were removed from the sample because they seemed unsuitable for the purpose. In the course of the reading, the committee rejected two submissions from the Western, two from the nonwestern and four from the Human Diversity/AA areas because it was not possible to agree on how they might be evaluated.

It seemed clear to the members of the committee that, if this strategy is to produce meaningful results, it will be necessary to obtain a greater degree of uniformity in the work to be evaluated. The committee recommended, as a minimum, that essays for evaluation should be over 500 words in length, that faculty members teaching courses identified with these curricular areas be informed of the criteria and characteristics that will be used in the evaluation at the time their submissions are requested, and that, prior to the next evaluation, the criteria and characteristics for evaluation of work in the Nonwestern and Diversity/AA areas, be reconsidered and more fully developed. This will probably entail reconsidering the goals of these curricular requirements and should probably involve the participation of faculty teaching courses in these areas.

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ATTACHMENT A

EVALUATION CRITERIA

WESTERN CULTURE AND CIVILIZATION

1. Thoughtful consideration of an important aspect of western culture.
2. Ability to formulate, develop, and support a point of view with respect to the topic.
3. Appropriate use of information resources.

NONWESTERN CULTURE AND CIVILIZATION

1. Thoughtful consideration of an aspect of nonwestern culture/civilization.
2. Ability to support a point of view with respect to the topic.
3. Ability to understand primary materials in the context of the culture that produced them.
4. Appropriate use of information resources.

HUMAN DIVERSITY AND AFRICAN-AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

1. Understanding of some aspect of the experiences and/or contributions of one of the relevant groups.
2. Ability to support a point of view with respect to the topic.
3. Understanding of the role of prejudice and discrimination (or racism) in the interactions between different groups in the United States.
4. When appropriate, knowledge of aspects of either African-American history and culture or African-American urban experience.

ATTACHMENT B

WESTERN CULTURE AND CIVILIZATION

Evaluation Categories

**Exceeds Expectations:**

The author selects a phenomenon or group of related phenomena that lend themselves to analysis and definition. He/she adopts a clear and appropriate analytical procedure and carries out the analysis coherently and effectively. The author presents a clear thesis concerning the selected topic, and develops and supports that thesis coherently, consistently, and effectively. The author demonstrates the ability to move from the analysis of the particular topic or phenomena to more general cultural implications. The author displays a sophisticated mastery of academic language and style.

**Meets Expectations:**

The author selects a phenomenon or group of related phenomena for analysis/discussion, and this selected topic serves as the focus of the discussion throughout most of the essay. The author presents a clear thesis or point of view concerning the selected topic, and develops and supports that thesis with reasonable coherence and effectiveness. The author displays a reasonable mastery of academic language and style.

**Below Expectations:**

The paper exhibits one or more of the following defects: The author fails to clearly identify a topic or to organize the essay around a single coherent topic. The author fails to present a clear thesis or point of view in the essay. The author fails to develop coherent relationships among the facts and opinions that the essay presents. The author displays an inability to recognize the difference between valid and invalid inferences. The author displays serious misunderstandings about the subject matter of the course. The paper displays serious grammatical and mechanical errors and/or an inability to employ any but the most basic syntactic structures.