Report on the Spring 2021 Pilot Assessments

of the General Education Arts & Humanities

and Social Science Areas

Marian Bleeke, Director of General Education

Michael Baumgartner, Assessment Champion for the Arts & Humanities

Colleen McMahon, Assessment Champion for the Social Sciences

**Introduction**

Cleveland State University has been working on developing an assessment plan for our General Education program since 2017. The project was structured through participation in Higher Learning Commission’s Assessment Academy and was the Quality Initiative for our successful Reaffirmation of Accreditation with HLC in 2021. While there have been occasional efforts at assessment in our General Education program since it was implemented in 2008, our goal for this project is to create a plan for ongoing and meaningful assessment of the program. Through our participation in the Assessment Academy, our work came to focus on engaging faculty as the key to accomplishing this goal.

A central aspect of this work was the creation of the position of Assessment Champion. A Champion is a faculty member who teaches in a General Education area and who is tasked to work with other faculty members who teach in that area to develop and implement assessment measures that are appropriate for the area. The Champions have course releases to provide them with the time needed for these responsibilities and they receive professional development support through collaboration with the Director of General Education and the Director of Student Learning Assessment.

The first two Assessment Champions, Michael Baumgartner (Associate Professor of Musicology, School of Music) for the Arts & Humanities and Colleen McMahon (Associate Professor, Department of Psychology) for the Social Sciences, started work in fall 2019. They began by educating themselves about our General Education program, current trends in General Education, and assessment as a process. In spring 2020, they met with department chairs, shared the rubrics that have been developed for Arts & Humanities and Social Sciences areas with them, and discussed the possibilities and potential challenges for assessment in their areas.

As small-scale trial assessments in the Arts & Humanities and Social Sciences General Education areas had been done in summer 2019, the Champions planned to do scaled-up pilot assessments in summer 2020. However, this had to be put on hold because of the Coronavirus pandemic. They did these pilot assessments in Spring 2021. The primary goal for these assessments was to learn more about the assessment process and its implementation on a large scale. The assessments also produced some preliminary data about student learning in these two areas.

In this report, the Assessment Champions separately describe their work and its results. Then the Director of General Education compares the results of these assessments with those from the summer 2019 trial assessments. Finally, the report presents recommendations for the larger scale assessments in the Arts & Humanities and Social Sciences areas that are to be done in 2022 and for longer term work on these two areas.

**Arts & Humanities**

Faculty Participation

We recruited 12 instructors to assess student success in 14 courses. We received assessments for 9 courses and 7 instructors have confirmed their participation. 1 instructor confirmed that he did not complete his assessment and 4 instructors did not respond to our follow-up e-mail regarding their completion of the assessment.

Instructor Feedback

After an e-mail invitation to all recruited instructors, 4 (out of 12) instructors completed an individual half-an-hour follow-up interview via Zoom. All agreed that the rubric worked for their assessments. The assessment process went well for all without any unforeseen difficulties. 3 instructors mentioned that the assessment was time consuming and would thus welcome an honorarium for any future assessments.

Instructors also provided feedback as comments with the data they submitted:

Rater 1**:** I entered “not applicable” for students who were enrolled but did not complete the assignment assessed.

Rater 6**:** Ten students did not submit the assignment. This assignment had a single focus: comparative sections on exams and discussion questions addressed issues of how concepts and forms differ across categories, however… [cut off here]

Rater 8: Goal 1, Objective B is absolutely something I strive for students to be able to do in my class. But in a lower-level class, it’s rare for a written assignment to be comparative in nature. This kind of synthesis is more common in class discussion (or, potentially, an exam, though in the asynchronous environment I did not do exams).

Quantitative Data

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 0 No Evidence | 1 Below Expectations | 2 Meets Expectations | 3 Exceeds Expectations | N/A |
| **Goal 1. Students will gain a broad understanding of concepts, ideas, values, artistic forms, and/or narratives, from varying cultures and traditions** |
| *Objective A*. Students will be able to describe and/or explain concepts, ideas, values, artistic forms, and/or narratives. | 6.6%(14/212) | 14.6%(31/212) | 45.3%(96/212) | 31.1%(66/212) | 2.4%(5/212) |
| *Objective B*. Students will be able to demonstrate how concepts, ideas, values, artistic forms, and/or narratives differ across categories, e.g., space, time, gender, class, ideologies, etc. | 2.85%(6/212) | 16%(34/212) | 36.3%(77/212) | 17%(36/212) | 27.85%\*(59/212) |
| **Goal 2. Students will understand how disciplines in the Arts and Humanities approach the analysis and interpretation of concepts, ideas, values, artistic forms, and/or narratives.** |
| *Objective* Students will be able to make use of the basic concepts, methods, and/or terms that are appropriate to the discipline | 8.05%(17/211) | 18%(38/211) | 45.5%(96/211) | 26.05%(55/211) | 2.4%(5/211) |

\* This number is unusually high due to10 students who did not submit the assignment used to assess this outcome in one particular class.

**Social Sciences**

Faculty Participation

In February 2021, Assessment Champions contacted Department Chairs and General Education course instructors via email to announce the Spring 2021 Pilot Rubric Study. In the initial announcement, we requested participants to submit student learning data from Fall 2020. For the Social Sciences pilot, 8 department chairs and 34 faculty were contacted; for the Social Sciences ALAAME pilot, 4 department chairs and 11 faculty were contacted. On February 16, 2021, we held a Zoom assessment workshop for chairs and instructors to explain the project, review the Arts & Humanities and Social Sciences Rubrics, introduce the multiple methods to submit rubric data, and answer questions. Additional Social Sciences email contact was conducted with 3 department chairs and 8 faculty. Individual Zoom meetings for potential participants were conducted with 4 instructors. Recruitment efforts resulted in total of 13 participants: 1 ALAAME; 12 Social Sciences, 2 of whom were adjunct instructors.

Instructor Feedback

Six participants indicated a willingness to answer questions about the assessment process. Most used tests/test items for their ratings and indicated that it took them 1-2 hours to complete the rubric ratings. For the two who used assignments and/or combination measures they estimated that it took close to 4 hours to complete the rubrics. The latter group indicated that they would be unlikely to participate again without additional compensation.

Instructors also provided feedback as comments with the data they submitted. One instructor indicated that the assessment was a “useful learning experience”. Two instructors expressed displeasure that the pilot project occurred during “a pandemic”. Those two instructors also expressed dissatisfaction with the rubric, indicating that it did not “define important concepts” and did not “measure student learning”.

Quantitative Data and Analysis

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 0 No Evidence | 1 Below Expectations | 2 Meets Expectations | 3 Exceeds Expectations | N/A\* |
| **Goal 1. Students will understand and be able to apply fundamental knowledge, concepts, and theories related to the study of human behavior in the field or subfield.** |
| *Objective A* Students will be able to identify or describe fundamental knowledge, concepts, and theories related to the study of human behavior in the field or subfield. | 0%N=0 | 2.5%N=11 | 29%N=132 | 21%N=92 | 47.5%N=212 |
| *Objective B* Students will be able to define or explain how or whether given concepts or theories apply to specific examples of human behavior. AND/OR | 0%N=0 | 1%N=4 | 53%N=237 | 46%N=206 | 0%N=0 |
| *Objective C* Students will be able to apply or use concepts or theories to predict or explain specific examples of human behavior | 15%N=67 | 11%N=49 | 3%N=13 | 3%N=13 | 68%N=305 |
| **Goal 2. Students will understand the forms of research and analysis used in the Social Sciences.** |
| *Objective A* Students will demonstrate knowledge of the forms of research used within the field or subfield.  | 13%N=58 | 13%N=58 | 8%N=36 | 3%N=13 | 63%N=282 |
| *Objective B* Students will demonstrate knowledge of the forms of analysis used within the field or subfield.  | 16%N=72 | 17%N=76 | 24%N=107 | 17%N=76 | 26%N=116 |

The thirteen participants included: tenure-track faculty (N=7); lecturers (N=4); and adjunct, or part-time, instructors (N=2). Evidence used to complete the rubric included: tests, exams, or quizzes or selected items from these measures (N=6); assignments (N=4); and a combination of assignments and/or test items (N=1). Two participants did not indicate what they used to rate student learning. Eight participants submitted ratings on Qualtrics; three submitted via emailed Excel documents, and two submitted results via emailed WORD documents.

Social Science student learning rubric ratings are provided in the table above. Instructors rated that their students met or exceeded learning outcomes for Goal 1, Objective 1B, “*students will be able to define or explain how given concepts or theories apply to specific examples of human behavior*”. The results for the other rubric objectives were less consistent. For Goal 2, Objective B, “students will demonstrate knowledge of the forms of analysis used within the field or subfield”, student learning outcomes were evenly rated across the score ranges (no evidence to exceeds expectations). For Goal 1, Objectives A and C and Goal 2, Objective A, most participants rated the Goals and Objectives as “not applicable” for their course.

When the results are disaggregated by student learning evidence, only participants who used assignments and/or combination student performance measures for their ratings indicated that the three Goals and Objectives were “not applicable”. Those participants who relied on tests and/or selected test items rated all Goals and Objectives as applicable to their courses. Test/test item raters did rate student learning as lower for both objectives under Goal 2, a pattern similar to all raters.

**Comparative Data**

Arts & Humanities

The bar charts above place the results of the spring 2021 pilot assessments in comparison to those of the summer 2019 preliminary trial assessments. The 2021 results confirm the impression from 2019 that students are generally meeting expectations for the goals and objectives in this area. In fact, the 2021 results show stronger student performance, with the proportion of students exceeding expectations larger than the proportion not meeting expectations on all goals and objectives, a reverse from the 2019 pattern.

The obvious difference between the two sets of results is the strong showing of NA (not applicable) for Goal 1 Objective B in the spring 2021 results. This is much higher than the NA result for the other goals and objectives (even after removing the record for the 10 students who did not submit the assignment used to assess this objective).

However, the summer 2019 results likewise showed a higher number of students scoring 0 or no evidence for this objective than for the others. The report on the 2019 assessments comments on this finding by stating that faculty members who participated in this assessment may have used 0 here where NA would have been more accurate. The faculty who participated in the 2019 assessment were not the instructors of the courses that produced the student work samples and they did not have access to the assignments that produced the work, so they would not have known whether an assignment incorporated this objective.

The report on the 2019 trial assessments suggested the possibility of removing Goal 1 Objective B. However, on further reflection, we are committed to this objective. Students who complete an Arts & Humanities General Education course should “be able to demonstrate how concepts, ideas, values, artistic forms, and/or narratives differ across categories, e.g., space, time, gender, class, ideologies, etc.” The findings for this objective on the two assessments suggests that work needs to be done to bring Arts & Humanities courses into alignment it.

Social Sciences

The bar charts above place the results of the spring 2021 pilot assessments in comparison to those of the summer 2019 preliminary trial assessments. In terms of student learning, both assessments show strong performance on Goal 1, Objective B. However, the two assessments show very different results for the remaining goals and objectives. This includes strong showings on non-applicable for multiple goals and objectives in the 2021 assessment, which makes it difficult to draw any conclusions about student learning for these goals and objectives.

Goal 1 Objective A had highly mixed results on the 2019 assessment and as a result the objective and its rubric language were revised prior to the 2021 assessment. On that assessment this objective had a strong showing of non-applicable. This is surprising given that goal is related to students’ understanding of the course content: it states that “Students will be able to identify or describe fundamental knowledge, concepts, and theories related to the study of human behavior in the field or subfield.” In her analysis, Dr. McMahon notes that the strong showings of non-applicable came primarily from faculty members who used assignments rather than tests for the assessment. This is an interesting finding given that the 2019 report expressed some concern about using test data for assessment, given that the rubrics seemed to have been written with assignments in mind. Tests may be more appropriate for assessing Goal 1 Objective A in that understanding of the course content may be better demonstrated through testing.

The 2021 assessment also shows a strong result for non-applicable on Goal 1 Objective C. However, it is important to note that the rubric for the Social Sciences includes an “and/or” statement linking Objectives B and C for this goal and, as noted above, the assessment showed strong student performance on Objective B. It may be that Objective C is not well aligned with the courses in this area and should be removed from the rubric.

Finally, the 2019 assessment showed lower student performance on Goal 2. The report on that assessment suggested splitting this goal into two objectives and that was done for the 2021 assessment. That assessment shows a high result for non-applicable for Objective A and mixed results for Objective B. After discussion, we remain committed to this goal. Students who complete a General Education course in the Social Sciences should “understand the forms of research and analysis used in the Social Sciences,” just as students who complete a course in the Arts & Humanities should “understand how disciplines in the Arts and Humanities approach the analysis and interpretation of concepts, ideas, values, artistic forms, and/or narratives” and students who complete a course in the Natural Sciences should “understand the role of experimentation in the Natural Sciences” (from the Natural Sciences draft rubric). In other words, students who complete a General Education course in any one of these areas should understand how knowledge is made in that area. We will continue to work to refine the language of this goal and its objective(s) and to bring Social Science courses into alignment with it.

**Recommendations**

For the 2022 Assessments

1) Process

We received additional feedback on the assessment process through email correspondence with chairs and in a meeting with the Interim Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences. The following recommendations come from that feedback:

* The assessments should be announced and faculty participants recruited prior to the beginning of the semester in which the assessments are to be performed. This is to allow faculty to include the time needed to do the assessments in their planning for the semester.
* Since many General Education courses are taught by part-time faculty members, they need to be involved in the assessments. Part-time faculty should be compensated for the time it takes them to do this work.

Additionally for the Social Science:

* Faculty should be encouraged to use tests or test items for assessment as this is less time consuming than using assignments and yields results that are in better alignment with the rubric.

2) Rubric Revisions

In general:

* Add a column to the rubrics to record numbers of students who did not submit the assignment on which a particular objective is assessed. This is so that faculty will not use the NA column for that purpose.
* Have NA reported once per course or per assignment, rather than having it reported per student. This is so that our assessment of the alignment between courses and the rubrics is not skewed by the large class sizes.

For the Social Sciences:

* Possibly remove Objective C for Goal 1
* Continue to revise Goal 2

Longer Term Recommendations

While we expect to learn more about student learning and about the assessment process through the larger scale assessment to be done in 2022, the results of the 2019 and 2021 assessments suggest work needs to be done on the alignment between Arts & Humanities Goal 1 Objective B and Social Sciences Goal 2 and the courses in these areas.

To this point, our emphasis has been on bringing the goals, objectives, and rubric language into alignment with courses as they are currently taught. In the future, that emphasis should change to bringing the courses into alignment with the goals, objectives, and rubrics. This alignment work should be done through faculty development workshops and through the review and recertification of courses by the University Curriculum Committee. As part of that review and recertification process, faculty should explain how they will achieve the goals and objectives for the relevant General Education area in their courses and should identify what artifacts (tests, assignments) they will use for assessing these goals and objectives.