Report on the Summer 2019 Trial Assessments of General Education Arts & Humanities, Social Science, and AALAME Areas

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**Introduction**

Cleveland State is currently in the final phase of a project for the Higher Learning Commission’s Assessment Academy that is focused on assessment in our General Education program. While there have been attempts at assessment in General Education at CSU in the past, this project represents an effort to create an ongoing and effective assessment plan for the program.

To be effective this plan needs to work, first and foremost, for the faculty who teach in the General Education program: it needs to be responsive to what they do in their Gen Ed courses and it needs to provide them with information they can use to improve those courses. Beyond that, the plan needs to work for the faculty as a whole in providing information that can guide the future development of the overall General Education program.

Work on the HLC project began with assessments of the Information Literacy Skill Area and of Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) courses, both done in 2016-17. There were some drawbacks to these assessments: both relied on samples from a very limited number and range of courses, in neither case were faculty members involved in the actual assessment, and the results were not shared with the faculty who teach in these areas.

The experience with these assessments led to the decision to develop custom rubrics to be used in assessing all of CSU’s General Education areas, rather than using existing rubrics such as the AAC&U’s VALUE rubrics (as was used for the 2016-17 Information Literacy assessment). There are two main advantages to developing and using our own rubrics: first, these rubrics should more closely reflect what is taught in Gen Ed courses at Cleveland State and so should provide useable information to the faculty teaching those courses. Secondly, work on the rubrics provides an opportunity to engage faculty members in the assessment process from early on in its development and so should help ensure that the process will be meaningful to them.

Development of the rubrics began in Summer 2017, when a group of department chairs met under the leadership of then Director of General Education, Barbara Margolius. They developed goals and objectives for student learning, and rubrics for assessing them, for the Arts & Humanities, Natural Sciences, and Social Sciences areas. In Summer 2018, a group of faculty members who teach courses in the subset of Arts & Humanities and Social Sciences courses that meet the AALAME requirement (a course on Africa, Asia, Latin America, or the Middle East), and who teach courses in the Social Diversity areas (US Diversity and African-American Experience) met under the leadership of the current Director of General Education (myself) to develop goals, objectives, and rubrics for these three areas. And in Summer 2019, faculty who teach WAC courses and courses for the Writing Skill area met under my leadership to do this work for those two areas.

The draft rubrics developed in these summer projects have been shared with additional faculty members for feedback and revision. In Spring 2018, the draft rubrics for the Arts & Humanities, Natural Sciences, and Social Sciences were shared with faculty and revised. In Fall 2018, the draft rubrics for AALAME, US Diversity, and African-American Experience courses were likewise shared with faculty and revised. That process has now begun for the WAC and Writing Skills draft rubrics.

In Summer 2019, a first attempt was made to use the revised draft rubrics for the Arts & Humanities, Social Sciences, and AALAME areas to assess samples of student work. The primary goal of these assessments was to test the usability of the rubrics: the assessments were expected to lead to further revisions of the rubrics based on faculty members’ experiences with their use. A secondary goal was to provide some preliminary information about student learning in these three General Education areas. This report 1) describes the process used for these assessments, 2) presents and analyzes quantitative data from the assessment, 3) summarizes the readers’ qualitative evaluation of student work, and 4) makes recommendations for future assessments and for continuing revisions to the rubrics.

**1) Process**

Collection of student work samples was done during Spring semester of 2019. The goal was to collect samples from at least two different courses, taught by different departments, for each of the three areas, so that the rubrics would be tested against a range of samples.

The collection process targeted courses were being taught in multiple sections with different instructors. The intent was to collect student work from one section and to recruit the instructor of another section to serve as a reader during the assessment. This would ensure that the faculty members involved in the assessment both had subject area expertise relevant to the student work samples they were assessing and were able to be objective in their assessments. It proved to be difficult to recruit matching sets of samples and readers, however, and so most readers were instructors who taught a similar course, in the same department, as the course from which the work samples were taken.

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One issue that arose during the collection of samples is that, while the AALAME and Social Sciences rubrics seem to have been developed with papers in mind as the student work samples, many of these courses are taught in large lectures and so rely primarily on tests for grading. As a result, it was difficult to get appropriate samples from these courses. To respond to this issue, one faculty member who teaches a course that is both an AALAME and a Social Science course was invited to join in the assessment, but to spend his time thinking about how the AALAME rubric might be adapted for use with test data.

In the end, student work samples were collected from:

* Arts & Humanities: 5 different courses over 3 departments
* Social Sciences: 2 different courses over 2 departments
* AALAME: 1 course.

Student work was collected in a variety of ways. Some instructors made photocopies and gave them to me. Others sent me electronic files with student work. And others gave me access to their course Blackboard sites so that I could download the work for myself. This was manageable due to the relatively small number of samples collected: it would be impractical for a larger scale assessment.

Prior to the assessment, all identifying information was removed from the student work samples including student names and numbers, course numbers and titles, and instructor names. These were replaced by codes for each course (A&H1, A&H2, and so on). Likewise, each faculty member serving as a reader was assigned an identification code (A&HR1, A&HR2, and so on).

The assessment day began with an introduction and overview of the General Education assessment project. Then the faculty members serving as readers spent time reading and assessing the papers individually. Next each reader completed a questionnaire about their experience using the rubric for their area. And then the readers in each of the three areas spent time discussing their experiences using the rubrics and making suggestions for their revision. After lunch, the readers returned to assessing papers, completed the questionnaire again – now also answering questions about the quality of the student work – and again discussed their experiences.

After the assessment day, the raw data – completed rubric forms and questionnaires – for the Arts & Humanities and Social Sciences were given to the newly appointed Assessment Champions for these two areas to tally and compile. I did that work for AALAME. Data from the rubrics is presented and analyzed below. Feedback from the questionnaires appears in the section on Student Learning and the Recommendations.

**2) Quantitative Data and Analysis**

A. Arts and Humanities

Quantitative data for the Arts & Humanities shows that students are generally meeting expectations for the goals and objectives in the area. Student performance is stronger for the two objectives associated with Goal 1 than for the objective for Goal 2, with more students exceeding expectations on those two objectives. There is room for improvement on all of the goals and objectives for this area, however, as all three show a number of student work samples that are below expectations.

More work samples were rated below expectations for Goal 1 Objective A and Goal 2 than for Goal 1, Objective B: however, that result is complicated by the higher showing for no evidence for Objective B. This likely points to a lack of alignment between this objective and the assignments that generated the samples. This lack of alignment that was noted by the readers in the questionnaire. Readers were encouraged to use NA rather than no evidence for a lack of alignment, but they may not have done so when they did not have the original assignment and so could not confirm that it did not include the objective in question.

B. Social Sciences

Quantitative data shows students meeting expectations for Objectives B and C for Goal 1. Student performance is lower for Goal 2, with more work samples rated as below expectations than as meeting expectations and with a higher number of samples showing no evidence than for the other objectives.

The results for Goal 1, Objective A, are difficult to interpret. They show slightly more students exceeding than meeting expectations, but also show more students as below expectations rather than meeting or exceeding them. In fact, the results show almost equal numbers at all three of these levels for this objective. This finding may point to a problem with the rubric.

C. AALAME

The AALAME assessment was based on 17 papers from 1 section of 1 course in the area: thus the results are far from definitive. The results show students meeting the objectives for Goal 1, but not for Goal 2 or Goal 3. This may point to a lack of alignment between the assignment that generated the papers and the rubric: a lack of alignment was noted by the readers for Goal 2 in particular. The results for the two objectives for Goal 1 are identical, which reinforces the readers’ feedback that there was no difference in practice between these two objectives.

**3) Student Learning**

To elicit qualitative feedback on student learning, the readers were asked first to generalize about the strengths and weaknesses they saw in the student work samples and then to select and describe one especially strong and one especially weak paper. They did this individually in their questionnaires and this was followed by a whole group discussion of student learning.

As a whole, the readers saw the students as struggling to make the transition from lower to higher-level processes, as is appropriate for students in 100 and 200-level General Education courses. In the Arts & Humanities, for example, students could generally summarize or describe a text or image and could use appropriate vocabulary to do so. However, they were less able to move on from there to analysis, interpretation, or argumentation. Likewise, in the Social Sciences, students were able to define, explain, and even apply concepts. However, they were less familiar with forms and methods of research. This corresponds to the quantitative data for the Social Sciences which likewise shows lower performance on Goal 2: students will understand the forms of research and analysis used in the Social Sciences. Readers also commented on students’ writing skills as making the difference between stronger and weaker papers.

**4) Recommendations**

A. Process

* Before large-scale assessments are attempted, CSU needs to develop a system for collecting, storing, distributing, and tracking the student work samples.
* Some way of addressing inter-rater reliability needs to be developed: the Assessment Champion for Arts & Humanities noted that the five readers in this area seemed to be rating student work differently, with some giving consistently higher and others consistently lower scores.
* A preliminary discussion of the rubric would be helpful as discussion later on in the process helped with readers’ confidence in applying the rubric.
* It is important to collect the original assignment along with the student work samples in order provide additional guidance to the readers, in particular to allow them to distinguish between 0 and NA.

B. Rubrics in General

* Alignment between the assignments that generate the student work samples and the rubrics needs to be improved. Interestingly, the readers who noted a lack of alignment generally recommended that assignments be changed, not the rubrics.
* The Social Science and AALAME rubrics (and likely the Natural Science rubric and possibly some of the skill area rubrics) need to be written so that they can be used equally with written work and with test data.
* The scale for levels of achievement may need to be expanded, as some papers fell in-between the levels: the gap between 0 or No Evidence and 1 or Below Expectations seemed especially large.

C. Arts and Humanities

* Possibly eliminate Goal 1. Objective A: it appears to ask for a simple summary and so may be too low-level for a college course.
* Or revisit the list in Goal 1. Objective A, concepts and ideas seems very different from artistic forms.
* Possibly eliminate Goal 1 Objective B as it did not correspond well to the work samples (alternatively the assignments in these courses may need to be revised to incorporate this objective).
* Clarify what is meant by “concepts” since it appears in the lists for both Goals.
* Either revise the Objective for Goal 2 or add a second Objective: the goal is about analysis and interpretation, whereas the current objective focuses on the use on concepts, methods, and terms.
* Revise the quantitative language in the levels of achievement: bring the level down and make the language more concrete. 1 = at least one, 2 = more than half, 3 = majority or nearly all
* Include some quantitative language about evidence in the levels of achievement for the Objective under Goal 2: how much evidence is needed for each level?

D. Social Sciences

* For Goal 1, Objectives A and B, replace “identifies” with “explains,” “defines” or “describes,” or add “explains” to “identifies.”
* Write a second Objective for Goal 2, separating research from analysis, or forms/types of research from analysis/application of research.
* Include quantitative language in all levels of achievement for all Objectives. Make that language consistent between Objectives.

E. AALAME

* The AALAME rubric should go through a second trial assessment, with work samples from additional courses, before it is finalized and adopted.
* Combine Objectives A and B under Goal 1 as there is no practical difference between them.
* Add qualitative language to levels of achievement for Objective(s) under Goal 1.
* Possibly eliminate Goal 2 as it did not correspond well to the work samples (alternatively the assignments in these courses may need to be revised to incorporate this goal).
* Possibly bring down expected levels of achievement as no papers reached Exceeds Expectations on any of the Goals/Objectives.

Arts and Humanities Draft Rubric

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 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. | Provides no descriptions or explanations.  | Provides some descriptions and/or explanations. Descriptions and/or explanations may be incomplete and/or partially incorrect. | Provides a majority of descriptions and/or explanations. Descriptions and/or explanations are generally complete and correct. | Provides all required descriptions and/or explanations. Descriptions and/or explanations accurate and thorough. |  |
| *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. | Does not identify an example of concepts, ideas, etc. differing across categories. | Identifies at least one example of concepts, ideas, etc. differing across categories. | Identifies AND explains one or more examples of concepts, ideas, etc. differing across categories. | Provides a sophisticated analysis of multiple differences in concepts, ideas, etc. across categories. |  |
| **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 | Does not make use of appropriate concepts, methods, or terms. | Makes use of some appropriate concepts, methods, and/or terms, but may use them incorrectly. | Makes correct use of appropriate concepts, methods, and/or terms. | Makes sophisticated use of multiple appropriate concepts, methods, and/or terms. |  |

Social Sciences Draft Rubric

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 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 fundamental knowledge, concepts, and theories related to the study of human behavior in the field or subfield. | Does not accurately identify any of thefundamental knowledge, concepts, and theories in the field or subfield. | Accurately identifies a few of the fundamental knowledge, concepts, and theories in the field or subfield. | Accurately identifies most of the fundamental knowledge, concepts, and theories in the field or subfield. | Accurately identifies the fundamental knowledge, concepts, and theories in the field or subfield. |  |
| *Objective B* Students will be able to identify how or whether given concepts or theories apply to specific examples of human behavior. AND/OR | Does not identify a concept or theory. | Identifies a concept or theory, but it does not relate to the given specific example of human behavior. | Identifies one or more concepts that relate to a given specific example of human behavior. | Comprehensively identifies the concepts/theories relevant to a given specific example of human behavior. |  |
| *Objective C* Students will be able to apply concepts or theories to predict or explain specific examples of human behavior | Does not use a concept or theory to predict or explain an example of human behavior. | Uses a concept or theory to predict or explain an example of human behavior, but that prediction or explanation is inaccurate or incorrect. | Uses a concept or theory to accurately and correctly predict or explain an example of human behavior. | Uses a concept or theory to comprehensively predict or explain an example of human behavior. |  |
| **Goal 2. Students will understand the forms of research and analysis used in the Social Sciences.** |
| *Objective* Students will demonstrate knowledge of the forms of research and/or analysis used within the field or subfield.  | Does not demonstrate knowledge of the forms of research and/or analysis used within the field or subfield. | Demonstrates a limited knowledge of the forms of research and/or analysis used within the field or subfield. Details demonstrating comprehension are simplistic and may be partially incorrect. | Demonstrates a basic knowledge of the forms of research and/or analysis used within the field or subfield. Details demonstrating comprehension are correct. | Demonstrates a thorough knowledge of the forms of research and/or analysis used within the field or subfield. Details demonstrating comprehension are complete and correct. |  |

AALAME Draft Rubric

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | O No Evidence | 1 Below Expectations | 2 Meets Expectations | 3 Exceeds Expectations | N/A\* |
| **Goal 1. Students will develop an understanding and appreciation of the distinctive worldviews and/or cultural practices of societies from Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East.** |  |
| *Objective A.* Students will be able to identify and explain the distinctive aspects of the worldview(s) of the society or societies under study. AND/OR | Does not identify or explain any distinctive features of the worldview(s) of the society or societies under study. | Identifies and explains only 1-2 distinctive features, OR identifies but does not explain multiple distinctive features, of the worldview(s) of the society or societies under study. | Identifies and explains multiple distinctive features of the worldview(s) of the society or societies under study.  | Identifies and explains multiple distinctive features of the worldview(s) of the society or societies under study AND address the implications of the difference(s) in worldview between multiple societies. |  |
| *Objective B.* Students will be able to identify and explain the distinctive aspects of the culture(s) of the society or societies under study. | Does not identify or explain any distinctive features of the culture(s) of the society or societies under study. | Identifies and explains only 1-2 distinctive features, OR identifies but does not explain multiple distinctive features, of the culture(s) of the society or societies under study. | Identifies and explains multiple distinctive features of the culture(s) of the society or societies under study. | Analyses the distinctive features of the culture(s) of the society or societies under study AND uses them to draw conclusions about that society/those societies. |  |
| **Goal 2. Students will develop an understanding and appreciation of human commonalities that cross over multiple cultures and/or societies.** |  |
| *Objective.* Students will be able to illustrate the commonalities of people across multiple cultures and/or societies. | Does not illustrate the commonalities of people across multiple cultures and/or societies. | Provides at least one example of the commonalities of people across multiple cultures and/or societies. Example lacks detail or is incomplete. | Provides multiple examples of the commonalities of people across multiple cultures and/or societies. Includes some detail about each example. | Provides multiple examples of the commonalities of people across multiple cultures and/or societies. Examples are detailed and thorough. |  |
| **Goal 3. Students will develop an understanding and appreciation of the ways in which different cultures and/or societies are interconnected and/or interdependent.** |  |
| *Objective*. Students will be able to illustrate interconnection and/or interdependence between multiple cultures and/or societies. | Does not illustrate interconnection and/or interdependence between cultures and/or societies. | Provides at least one example of interconnection and/or interdependence between cultures and/or societies. Example lacks detail or is incomplete. | Provides multiple examples of interconnection and/or interdependence between cultures and/or societies. Includes some detail about each example. | Provides multiple detailed examples of interconnection and/or interdependence AND explains the significance of the interconnection and/or interdependence between the cultures and/or societies.  |  |