Report on the Fall 2020 Trial Assessments of Multiple General Education Areas

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**Introduction**

Cleveland State University has been working on developing an assessment plan for our General Education program since 2017. This follows from recommendations of the Ad-hoc Committee on General Education. The project is our Quality Initiative for our upcoming Reaffirmation of Accreditation with the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) and has been structured through participation in the HLC’s Assessment Academy. 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.

Over the period of our participation in the Assessment Academy, our work has come to focus on engaging the faculty as the key to accomplishing this goal. General Education assessment needs to provide meaningful information to the faculty: it needs to provide faculty members who teach in the General Education program with information they can use to improve their courses and it needs to provide the faculty as a whole with information it can use to guide the future development of the program. For the results of the assessments to be meaningful to the faculty in these ways, they need to be engaged in the assessment process itself.

We have begun by engaging faculty members in the process of developing the assessment plan, so that they are involved in the plan from its foundations. So far, our work with the faculty has taken two main forms:

1) Workshops held in the Summers of 2017, 2018, and 2019 in which groups of faculty members developed goals and objectives for student learning, and rubrics for assessing them, for various General Education areas.

2) Preliminary trial assessments of the Arts & Humanities, Social Sciences, and AALAME areas done using those rubrics in Summer 2019. For a report on these assessments go to <https://www.csuohio.edu/gened/general-education-assessment>

We had planned on doing additional workshops and rubric-based trial assessments in Summer 2020 but had to put those plans on hold because of the Coronavirus pandemic. Given our focus on faculty engagement, it was important for us to be sensitive to the demands that the pandemic has placed on faculty members’ time and energy.

In order to continue to make some progress on this project, in Fall 2020 we decided to go ahead with trial assessments of multiple General Education areas – namely AALAME, African-American Experience, Natural Science, and US Diversity – but to do so by gathering and analyzing test data rather than doing rubric-based assessments of written work. This would require less investment on the part of faculty participants and would also allow us to address an issue that came up during the Summer 19 trial assessments: that some courses in the AALAME and Social Sciences areas that have larger class sizes rely on exams for in-class assessment and so do not produce the kind of written work needed for rubric-based assessments. We need to find a way to work with test data and the 2020 assessments provided an opportunity to experiment with that.

These assessments focused on alignment between the draft goals and objectives for these General Education areas and the courses in those areas (see Appendix A for the goals and objectives). They also some gathered preliminary data on student learning. This report 1) describes the process used for the assessment, 2) presents and analyzes the information gathered about alignment, 3) presents and analyzes the data gathered on student learning, and 4) makes recommendations for future assessments.

**1) Process:**

These assessments began with the assumption that courses with larger class sizes (defined as over 50 students for AALAME and Natural Sciences courses and over 40 for African-American Experience and US Diversity, in order to include more of the later two), were likely to rely on tests rather than written assignments for in-class assessment. This assumption held true for the Natural Science, but not for all courses in the other areas: some still used written work of various types as their primary form of in-class assessment. Future assessments of these areas are going to need to include both rubric-based assessments of written work and the collection and analysis of test data.

Faculty members who taught courses with larger class sizes in these General Education areas in Spring 2020 were sent questionnaires for the assessment: the questionnaire for AALAME is attached in Appendix B as an example. Because of the disruption in teaching and learning caused by the Coronavirus pandemic in Spring 2020, the faculty members were able to choose to answer the questionnaire based on their course from that semester or from another recent semester or not to answer at all. The response rates for faculty in all four areas was low, with only 3-4 faculty members per area responding to the questionnaire.

The questionnaires asked the faculty members to report on the alignment between their courses and the goals and objectives for the General Education area by asking if they had a test item or items that corresponded to each goal and objective. If they answered no, partially, or unsure to that question, they were asked a follow-up question designed to elicit their feedback on the goals and objectives. Faculty members who answered yes had the option of including the test items themselves in their responses.

The questionnaires also asked faculty members to provide student success data on the test items they had for each goal and objective, but again because of the disruption caused by the pandemic providing this data was optional. Several faculty members responded with success data for their courses in general, whether test scores or final grades, but were not able to provide data that corresponded specifically to the goals and objectives. For both AALAME and Natural Sciences, one faculty member provided this kind of specific success data; for US Diversity, two faculty members provided this data; and no faculty members were able to provide this data for African-American Experience.

**Alignment:**

1) AALAME

Based on the responses to the questionnaire, the goals and objectives for AALAME appear to be well aligned with those courses. All three faculty members reported that they had a test item or items that corresponded to Goal 1 and two out of three reported that they had a test item or items that corresponded to Goal 2. The third responded answered Partially to this question and explained that Goal 2 was not emphasized in the course: nevertheless, this faculty member was able to provide a sample test question for Goal 2. Similarly, the other faculty member who provided sample test items included many fewer items for Goal 2 (6) compared to Goal 1 (50, both across multiple exams), but nevertheless included test items aligned to this goal.

2) African-American Experience

Again, based on the responses to the questionnaire, the goals and objectives for African-American Experience appear to be well aligned with these courses. All three faculty members reported that they had a test item or items that corresponded to each goal and objective, with one exception: one answered Partially for Goal 1, Objective B and explained that while they discuss intersectionality (the concept covered by this objective) in class, they do not currently assess students’ understanding of the concept.

3) Natural Science

The table below shows the faculty members’ answers to the alignment questions for each goal and objective. All three had a test item or items that corresponded to Goal 1, Objective A, suggesting that it is well aligned with the courses. However, the faculty members were divided on the rest of the goals and objectives and Goal 2, Objective B, appears to be particularly problematic.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Yes | Partially | No | Unsure |
| Goal 1, Objective A | 3 |  |  |  |
| Goal 1, Objective B | 2 | 1 |  |  |
| Goal 2, Objective A | 2 |  | 1 |  |
| Goal 2, Objective B |  |  | 2 | 1 |
| Goal 3, Objective A | 2 | 1 |  |  |
| Goal 3, Objective B | 1 |  | 2 |  |

The responses of Partially for Goal 1, Objective B, and Goal 3, Objective A, were related to the difficulty of assessing these objectives using multiple-choice examinations. Nevertheless, faculty members were able to supply sample multiple-choice questions for both of these objectives. Goal 1, Objective B requires students to “apply basic concepts in the discipline” and the sample questions described scenarios that required students to do that in order to then select the correct answer. Likewise, Goal 3, Objective A states that students should be able to “interpret figures, graphs and tables” and the sample questions included figures or charts that students had to be able to interpret in order to select the correct answer. This thus seems to be more a matter of test design than of alignment between the goals and objectives and the content of the courses.

The faculty members who responded No and Unsure to the remaining goals and objectives mainly commented that these should be assessed in the laboratory courses that are associated with the lecture courses that they teach. The one exception is a faculty member who answered No on Goal 2, Objective B, and noted that students in the course do not design their own experiments: this raises some question about the alignment of this particular objective.

4) US Diversity

Again, the table below shows the faculty members’ answers to the alignment questions for each goal and objective: all four had a test item or items that corresponded to Goal 1, Objective A, but they were divided on the rest of the goals and objectives.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Yes | Partially | No | Unsure |
| Goal 1, Objective A | 4 |  |  |  |
| Goal 1, Objective B | 2 |  | 2 |  |
| Goal 2, Objective A | 2 | 1 | 1 |  |
| Goal 2, Objective B | 2 | 1 | 1 |  |
| Goal 2, Objective C | 2 | 1 | 1 |  |
| Goal 3 | 2 | 1 | 1 |  |

Two faculty members answered Yes and two No on the alignment questions for Goal 1, Objective B: those answering No gave different reasons for doing so. One stated that “Students identify differing *experiences* based on intersecting group memberships but do not provide examples. The class does not cover the impact of intersectionality on attitudes/point of view.” And the other that “I discuss this topic in class lectures but stress that individuals are free to choose their own identities and values regardless of membership in any group(s).”

For all three objectives for Goal 2, two faculty members answered Yes, one answered Partially, and one No. For Objectives A and B, those who answered Partially and No stated that while they discuss historical challenges and connections between history and the present in class, they do not assess students on their knowledge of the history or on their ability to analyze connections between past and present. For Objective C, one faculty member explained that “students identify characteristics of privilege and examples of it, but do not discuss it,” while the other stated that “I do NOT focus on privilege because it causes resentment and a sense of victimization that is harmful.”

Likewise, for Goal 3, one faculty member answered Partially, and one No. The first explained “Exams are multiple choice, so students do not use the vocabulary for discussing the material on exams. Instead, they identify key vocabulary and identify examples on exams.” The other simply stated that they do not address this objective.

These results suggest that there may be a lack of alignment between the courses and the emphasis placed on historical knowledge and analysis in the objectives for Goal 2. The faculty members’ explanations also suggest some revisions to the language of certain objectives that could bring them into closer alignment with the courses.

**Student Learning:**

1) AALAME

One faculty member provided student success data, specifically percentages of students who selected correct answers on multiple-choice test questions. For Goal 1, there were 50 questions, given over multiple exams. On individual questions, between 44% and 100% of the students selected the correct answer. The average over all 50 question was 85%. For Goal 2, there were 6 questions, again given over multiple exams. On individual questions, between 79% and 96% of students selected the correct answer, and the average over all six was 84%.

This data is based on one course and so is far from definitive: however, it becomes more suggestive when combined and compared to the results of the rubric-based assessment of AALAME courses done in Summer 2019: see the chart below. This assessment was likewise based on papers from a single course, but a different course from a different department.

Taken together, the two assessments suggest that students generally are achieving Goal 1 (which after the Summer 2019 assessment was simplified to have only 1 objective). However, the two are split on the results of what is now Goal 2 and was formerly Goal 3 (the previous Goal 2 was dropped after the Summer 19 assessment). The 2020 data shows students succeeding at essentially the same rate on both goals, where the 2019 assessment showed a majority of papers rated as below expectations for Goal 2/3. In Summer 2019 it was unclear if this was showing a deficit in student learning or a lack of alignment between the goal and the papers used for the assessment: the data from 2020 suggests the later was the case. As mentioned above in discussing alignment, this goal does seem to be aligned with the courses, but appears to be less emphasized in them, and so may not have been reflected in that specific assignment.

2) Natural Science

One faculty member provided student success data, specifically percentages of students who selected correct answers on multiple-choice test questions. The faculty member provided a sample question with success data for both objectives for Goal 1, for Goal 2 Objective A, and for Goal 3 Objective A. The other goals and objectives did not align with the exams given in this course.

Again, since this data is based on one course, it is far from definitive. It suggests that students are generally achieving both objectives associated with Goal 1 and Goal 3, Objective A. However, it also suggests that students are markedly less successful in achieving Objective A for Goal 2. This is an objective that one faculty member stated would be better assessed through the associated laboratory course than through exams in the lecture course. It would be interesting to compare an assessment of this objective based on a lab course with this result based on an exam.

3) US Diversity

Two respondents provided student success data for some of the goals and outcomes. Both provided data for Goal 1 Objective A and Goal 3, and one or the other provided data for Goal 1 Objective B, Goal 2 Objective A, and Goal 2 Objective C. They did not provide data on goals and objectives that did not align with their exams.

Again, this data consisted of percentages of students who selected correct answers on multiple-choice test questions. The table below presents more detail on the data provided.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Goal and Objective | Course | Number of test items | Lowest percentage correct | Highest percentage correct | Average correct |
| Goal 1, Objective A, | Course 1 | 4 | 89.5% | 100% | 93.5% |
| Course 2 | 13 | 42.5% | 95.1% | 82% |
| Goal 1, Objective B | | 3 | 39% | 94% | 62% |
| Goal 2, Objective A | | 1 | 84.5% | 84.5% | 84.5% |
| Goal 2, Objective C | | 6 | 50% | 90% | 73.8% |
| Goal 3 | Course 1 | 2 | 79% | 92% | 85.5% |
| Course 2 | 16 | 35% | 94% | 73% |

Again as this data is based on only 2 courses, it is suggestive rather than definitive. It suggests that students are generally achieving these goals and objectives, although to differing degrees: the strongest performance was on Goal 1, Objective A, and weakest on Goal 1, Objective B. Interestingly, the difference in student performance appears to track closely with faculty responses to the alignment questions, with Goal 1, Objective A, being the most and Goal 1, Objective B, the least aligned.

**Recommendations:**

1) Future General Education assessments should include both rubric-based assessments of written work and the collection and analysis of test data. Faculty members should be able to choose which form of assessment is best suited to their courses.

2) Additional trial assessment should be done of African-American Experience and US Diversity courses using rubrics and written work.

3) A larger scale assessment of AALAME courses should be done in the near future. It might be possible to do this as part of the scaled-up assessments of the Arts and Humanities and Social Sciences areas that are to be done in 2021.

4) Future assessments in the Natural Sciences should be based on both lecture and laboratory courses as is appropriate for specific goals and objectives. In an initial assessment of laboratory courses, special attention should be paid to Goal 2, Objective B, to see if it is in alignment with these courses.

5) The US Diversity goals and objectives should be revised to bring them into closer alignment with the courses. Suggestions include:

* Reducing the emphasis placed on historical understanding and analysis by eliminating Goal 2, Objective A and/or B.
* Either eliminating Goal 1, Objective B, or revising the language to read: Students will be able to identify the ways in which intersecting group memberships shape experience, self-identity, and/or point of view. The rubric language would also need to be revised to reflect this change.
* Revising the language for Goal 2, Objective C to read: Students will be able identify characteristics of privilege relevant to the course content. The rubric language would also need to be revised to reflect this change.
* Revising the language for the objective for Goal 3 to read: Students will be able to identify, define, and/or use discipline-appropriate concepts and vocabulary relevant to the course material. The rubric language would also need to be revised to reflect this change.

Given that the goals and objectives for African-American Experiences courses are very similar to those for US Diversity, similar revisions may need to be made to them.

**Appendix A: Goals and Objectives**

AALAME

Goal 1. Students will develop an understanding and appreciation of the cultures of societies from Africa, Asia, Latin America, and/or the Middle East.

*Objective:* Students will be able to identify and explain the distinctive aspects of the culture(s) of the society or societies under study.

Goal 2. 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 identify and explain examples of interconnection and/or interdependence between multiple cultures and/or societies.

African-American Experience

Goal 1. Students will develop an understanding of the historical experiences and contributions of African-Americans.

*Objective A.* Students will be able to identify and describe examples of African-American experiences and/or contributions.

*Objective B.* Students will be able to identify and explain how the intersectionality of race, class, gender, and sexuality shapes individual identities and/or points of view.

Goal 2. Students will develop an awareness of how historical factors have produced distinct challenges for African-Americans.

*Objective A.* Students will be able to identify and explain the historical challenges faced by African-Americans.

*Objective B.* Students will be able to analyze connections between the historical past and contemporary experience of African-Americans.

*Objective C.* Students will be able to discuss the dynamics of race and privilege relevant to the course content.

Goal 3. Students will learn discipline-appropriate discourse for discussing African-American experiences

*Objective.* Students will make use of discipline-appropriate concepts and vocabulary for discussing the course material

Natural Science

Goal 1. Students will understand concepts in the scientific discipline and be able to apply them in relevant situations.

*Objective A.* Students will be able to identify and explain the basic concepts in the discipline.

*Objective B.*  Students will be able to apply basic concepts in the discipline.

Goal 2. Students will understand the role of experimentation in the natural sciences.

*Objective A.*  Students will be able to identify the key components of experimental design

*Objective B.*  Students will be able to apply key components of experimental design to test a concept

Goal 3. Students will be able to analyze and evaluate the limitations of collected data.

*Objective A.* Students will be ableto interpret figures, graphs and tables

*Objective B.*  Students will be ableto assess the scope and limitations of collected data.

US Diversity

Goal 1. Students will develop an understanding of the diverse experiences of social/cultural groups

*Objective A.* Students will be able to identify an example(s) of the different experiences of social/cultural groups.

*Objective B.* Students will be able to provide examples of the ways in which intersecting group memberships shape self-identity or point of view.

Goal 2. Students will develop an awareness of how historical factors have produced distinct challenges and privileges for varied social/cultural groups.

*Objective A.* Students will be able to identify the historical challenges faced by the social/cultural group(s) studied in the course.

*Objective B.* Students will be able to analyze connections between the historical past and contemporary experience of the social/cultural group(s) studied in the course.

*Objective C.* Students will be able to discuss the dynamics of privilege relevant to the course content.

Goal 3. Students will learn discipline-appropriate discourse for discussing cultural diversity.

*Objective.* Students will make use of discipline-appropriate concepts and vocabulary for discussing the course material.

**Appendix B: AALAME Questionnaire**

Cleveland State University

General Education Trial Assessments

Test Data Feedback Form: AALAME

Thank you for participating in the trial assessment of the AALAME area in CSU’s General Education program. This questionnaire asks for your feedback on the alignment between the draft goals and objectives for AALAME courses and the tests (quizzes and/or exams) you give in your course. This feedback will help us as we revise the goals and objectives for this area and refine our assessment plans. The questionnaire also asks you to share data on student success in meeting these goals and objectives: however, sharing that data is optional.

You are being asked to complete this questionnaire because you taught an AALAME course with an enrollment of 50+ students during the Spring 2020 semester. We do realize that semester’s teaching and learning were disrupted by the Coronavirus pandemic and the resulting shift to remote teaching. If you feel unable to provide useful feedback based on your Spring 2020 course, you can choose not to participate in the trial assessment or to participate based on an offering the same course during another recent semester (Fall 19, Summer 19, or Spring 19). Likewise, if you feel the student success data from your Spring 2020 course is not representative, you can choose not to provide that data or to provide data from another recent semester.

The point of this work is to *assess student learning* (not instructor teaching) in the General Education program in order to be able to make programmatic improvements. Be assured that this information will NOT be used to evaluate your course, program, or department, or you as an instructor. For this reason, your course number and title, the name of your college and department, and your name, will NOT appear in any reports written based on this information and will NOT be shared without your consent. To see a report based on the Summer 19 trial assessments go to <https://www.csuohio.edu/gened/general-education-assessment>

**Course Information**

Course prefix, number, and title:

Semester: circle one

Spring 20 Fall 19 Summer 19 Spring 19

**Goal 1. Students will develop an understanding and appreciation of the cultures of societies from Africa, Asia, Latin America, and/or the Middle East.**

*Objective:* Students will be able to identify and explain the distinctive aspects of the culture(s) of the society or societies under study.

Part A. Alignment

1) Do you have a question or questions on a test or tests for this course that addresses this goal and objective?

Circle one: Yes Partially No Unsure

2) If yes, please copy the question or questions in here (optional)

3) If you answered Partially, what part of the goal and objective do you assess through a test question or questions? And what do you not assess in this way and why not? Do you assess it in another way? Or is it something that you do not address in this course?

Please copy the question or questions in here(optional).

4) If you answered no, why not? Is it something you assess in class in another way? Or is it something that you do not address in this course? Or is there another reason?

5) If you answered Unsure, what is making you uncertain? Do you find the wording of the goal and objective to be unclear? Do you have ideas about how they could be clarified? Or is there another reason for your uncertainty?

Part B. Student Success (optional)

If you answered Yes or Partially, please provide any data you have on student success in answering the question or questions that address this goal and objective: for example, what percentage of the students answered the question or each of the questions correctly?

**Goal 2. 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 identify and explain examples of interconnection and/or interdependence between multiple cultures and/or societies.

Part A. Alignment

1) Do you have a question or questions on a test or tests for this course that addresses this goal and objective?

Circle one: Yes Partially No Unsure

2) If yes, please copy the question or questions in here (optional)

3) If you answered Partially, what part of the goal and objective do you assess through a test question or questions? And what do you not assess in this way and why not? Do you assess it in another way, for example, though a written assignment? Or is it something that you do not address in this course?

Please copy the question or questions in here (optional).

4) If you answered no, why not? Is it something you assess in class in another way, for example, though a written assignment? Or is it something that you do not address in this course? Or is there another reason?

5) If you answered Unsure, what is making you uncertain? Do you find the wording of the goal and objective to be unclear? Do you have ideas about how they could be clarified? Or is there another reason for your uncertainty?

Part B. Student Success (optional)

If you answered Yes or Partially for either or both goals and objectives, please provide any data you have on student success in answering the question or questions that address this goal and objective: for example, what percentage of the students answered the question or each of the questions correctly?