

# COMMON CURRICULUM PROGRAM ASSESSMENT

[Adopted by the General Education Board on 15 July 2013  
Revised May 2015; March 2016; September 2017]

## II. COMMON CURRICULUM LEARNING OUTCOMES

### II.A. PREMISE

The premise for the common learning outcomes lies in the Union Education framework, the recent study of the Liberal Arts by Professor Mark Roche at the University of Notre Dame, and Union College president Stephen Ainlay's concept of 'think, connect, act.' Roche identified three complementary purposes of a Liberal Arts education: 1) the **practical value** of critical thinking and communication skills that can be applied beyond college or university education; 2) the **intrinsic worth** of the Liberal Arts disciplines and intellectual experiences gained by studying broadly in them; 3) the **idealistic purpose** of the Liberal Arts in that they encourage, even demand, that one ask meaningful questions in the course of becoming someone who lives a reflective life.

### II.B. COMMON CURRICULUM LEARNING OUTCOMES

The following learning outcomes with instructions and explanations have been revised to meet recommendations in the DofA's review of the CC assessment program. Through the Common Curriculum, Union students will develop the breadth of knowledge and flexibility of mind needed to participate in meaningful conversations relevant to particular disciplines, the Academy, local society, or the global community. They will do so by achieving the following learning outcomes across the breadth of Liberal Arts represented in the Common Curriculum requirements. In doing so, they will advance important foundational and differentiating goals in the Union College Strategic Plan (2013).

- A. **Communicate Critical and Analytical Thinking.** *Students will examine, evaluate, and apply problem-solving techniques to evidence, data, objects, artefacts, arguments, and theories according to the diverse analytical traditions of the Liberal Arts; students will communicate clearly and correctly the results of such analysis.* **Explanation:** this learning outcome emphasizes the need to learn and practice critical thinking in the breadth of disciplines and analytical traditions in the Liberal Arts. **Assessment:** instructors assess student learning in this outcome by evaluating a representative sample of assignments. Learning outcome A encompasses the following learning goals in the Strategic Plan and assessment of it should incorporate those goals: **F1-G6:** Union students will graduate with the skills needed to communicate clearly and effectively, work both independently and collaboratively, have developed information, technological, and visual literacy, be prepared to live and work in a culturally-diverse world, and understand ethical considerations and act upon them; **D2-G2,** Union students will receive a broad and deep education that includes exposure to important and distinctive connections within and across the full spectrum of disciplines, including the arts, humanities, social sciences, physical and natural sciences, mathematics, and engineering; **D2-G3,** Union students will learn

through a combination of theory and practice, using both critical thinking and expertise.

- B. Make Connections or Original Contributions.** *Through their writings, theories, problems, designs, objects of art, and other projects students will make connections or original contributions to questions and concerns relevant to a particular discipline, multiple disciplines, the Academy, local society, or the global community.*

**Explanation:** this learning outcome emphasizes the importance of deliberately using students' coursework to engage issues, debates, schools of thought, and the like relevant to particular disciplines as well as the Academy, local society, or the global community. **Assessment:** instructors assess student learning in this outcome by evaluating a representative sample of assignments. Learning outcome B encompasses the following learning goals in the Strategic Plan and assessment of it should incorporate those goals: **F1-G3**, Union students will develop an attitude of inquiry: they will ask questions that matter, and develop the capacity to engage complex challenges with skill, creativity, and confidence; **D2-G1**, Union students will engage in disciplinary, interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches, and will have opportunities to learn at the intersection of fields of study; **D2-G4**, Union students will develop a diverse set of skills that can be applied across a spectrum of disciplines and future careers; also relevant components of goal **D2-G2**.

- C. Reflect on Their Learning.** *Students will demonstrate the ability to link their experiences in the Common Curriculum with their intellectual development as lifelong learners, including possible career and life paths.* **Explanation:** this learning outcome may be viewed as asking the students to draw together the practical, intrinsic, and idealistic value of the Liberal Arts as they relate to being a life-long learner and reflecting on a meaningful life. **Assessment:** the Gen Ed Board assesses learning outcome C indirectly through a student reflective essay and student interview; instructors provide direct assessment of this learning outcome **if** it is observed in their classes. Learning outcome C encompasses the following learning goals in the Strategic Plan and assessment of it should incorporate those goals: **F1-G2**, Union students will discover lifelong intellectual interests and strive to excel in them; **F2-G4**, Union students will develop a sense of themselves as a "whole person," with the skills necessary for the pursuit of life-long learning, global citizenship and effective work with others, through co-curricular programs that complement the academic mission; also relevant components of goal **D2-G4**.

### **IIC. ADDITIONAL FYP/FYP-H LEARNING OUTCOMES for Outcome A**

First-Year Preceptorial (FYP) and Honors Preceptorial (FYP-H) have more specific learning outcomes under Learning Outcome A, as follows:

**A1. DISCUSS IDEAS:** critically and respectfully engages in dialogue with others about ideas in texts as well as those expressed in class.

**A2. READ TEXTS CRITICALLY:** shows an understanding of/ability to evaluate complex and sophisticated ideas from multiple and diverse perspectives.

**A3. DEVELOP EFFECTIVE ARGUMENTS:**

**A3a.** Supports a focused thesis, including analysis of evidence to support conclusions.

**A3b.** Organizes information logically and clearly in essays that guide readers through the text

**A3c.** Expresses ideas clearly and appropriately, with few, if any, grammar, usage, and spelling errors

**A3d.** Integrates evidence into one's own argument (e.g., uses quotations appropriately, correct citation, etc.).

**A4. INCORPORATE REVISION** into the writing process as a means of improving critical thinking and the expression of ideas.

## **IID. ADDITIONAL SRS/SCH-150 LEARNING OUTCOMES for Outcome A**

The Sophomore Research Seminar (SRS) and Scholars Research Seminar (SCH-150) have more specific learning outcomes under Learning Outcome A, as follows:

**A1. DEVELOP A RESEARCH TOPIC:** Formulate a clear, focused research question or thesis appropriate to the topic of inquiry.

**A2. FIND EVIDENCE:** Identify and locate evidence appropriate for examining a research question or thesis.

**A3. EVALUATE EVIDENCE:** Critically and ethically analyze evidence obtained for examination of a research question or thesis.

**A4. DEVELOP AN EVIDENCE-BASED ARGUMENT:** Develop and organize a logical argument grounded in the analysis of evidence that supports or refutes a research question or thesis.

**A5. PRESENT RESEARCH FINDINGS:** Present a logical analytical argument supported by evidence in an appropriate written form without errors of grammar, usage, and spelling.

**A6. PRACTICE PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS OF CITATION:** Incorporate and cite evidence in a manner that meets the professional standards of the discipline most appropriate for the topic of inquiry.

## **III. ASSESSMENT EVALUATION RUBRIC**

Faculty assess all CC learning outcomes according to this standard rubric or proficiencies.

- **Exceptional:** Demonstrates complete learning of the outcome with original and creative contributions; learning exceeds the highest standards for the level and difficulty of the course.
- **Mastery:** Demonstrates complete learning of the outcome without mistakes or flaws; learning meets the highest standards for the level and difficulty of the course.
- **Proficient:** Demonstrates complete or nearly complete learning of the outcome without mistakes or flaws; learning meets the acceptable standard for the level and difficulty of the course.
- **Developmental:** Demonstrates incomplete learning of the outcome and features some minor mistakes and flaws; learning meets the acceptable standard for the level and difficulty of the course.
- **Insufficient:** Demonstrates little or no learning of the outcomes and features frequent, sometimes major mistakes and flaws; learning is below the acceptable standard for the level and difficulty of the course.

## **IIF. LEARNING OUTCOMES and THE STRATEGIC PLAN**

The content and distribution requirements (i.e. overall structure) of the Common Curriculum advances students' breadth of knowledge per goal F1-G5 in the Strategic Plan, that Union students will graduate with deep and broad knowledge; deep knowledge is advanced by majors and minors. There are three goals in the Union College Strategic Plan that general education can, should, and sometimes does contribute to, but which are not well integrated into the program as it exists or its learning outcomes. They are: **D2-G1**, Union students will engage in disciplinary, interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches, and will have opportunities to learn at the intersection of fields of study; **D1-G3**, Union students will develop and enhance their understanding of their own and others' race, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, and other dimensions of our diverse community and cultures; **F2-G4**, Union students will develop a sense of themselves as a "whole person," with the skills necessary for the pursuit of life-long learning, global citizenship and effective work with others, through co-curricular programs that complement the academic mission. The Common Curriculum predates both strategic plans by some years. The program from its inception struggled to build into its true interdisciplinarity per D2-G1 and the deliberateness of students engaging in interdisciplinary or multi-disciplinary work in the CC can be highly variable. This is a challenge that any future general education program should address and resolve; otherwise, the academic requirements of the college should be evaluated and revised to ensure all students meet this goal, for example, by requiring an interdisciplinary minor for any student who does not major in a program with strong interdisciplinary content. Finally, the weak, uncertain focus on goals D1-G3 and F2-G4 is the most significant disconnect between general education and the college's strategic priorities. Particularly because of the emphasis they place on understanding cultural complexity and empowered global citizenship, both of such critical importance for our students and our mission as an institution contributing to a sustainable and just future, these goals must have a prominent and essential place in any future general education program at the college.