

COMMON CURRICULUM PROGRAM ASSESSMENT

[Adopted by the General Education Board on 15 July 2013; Revised October 2016]

III. COMMON CURRICULUM CONTENT REQUIREMENTS

III.A. EXPLANATION

Previous assessment processes, such as they were, essentially assessed whether, say, a literature course was really teaching literature through micro-level assessment using five or six different learning outcomes. The same was true for all of the requirements in the Common Curriculum, creating a situation in which hundreds and hundreds of students had to be assessed across fifty or sixty individual learning outcomes in many dozens of courses. Collectively, faculty faced a situation where they would have been asked to produce thousands of individual assessments across the vast majority of courses producing a mountain of indigestible data for its own sake. That approach fails the expectations of Middle States regarding usability and cost-effectiveness.

We rejected such an approach in favour of assessing common outcomes built around the essential purposes of the program expressed through the breadth of analytical traditions in the Liberal Arts. Courses have been and will continue to be approved for inclusion in the Common Curriculum during the ordinary course proposal process. The instructor must satisfactorily explain both 1) how Common Learning Outcomes will be embedded in the course and 2) how the course meets some or all of the Category Content Requirements. Assessment will address the program-wide Common Learning Outcomes, not category content requirements that must be met up-front for course approval.

III.B. CATEGORY CONTENT REQUIREMENTS

The following content requirements must be met before a course will be approved for Common Curriculum credit. They are adapted from draft learning outcomes developed between 2006 and 2011 (that can be found in the Program Archive portion of the Common Curriculum website).

FIRST-YEAR PRECEPTORIAL (FYP) / HONORS PRECEPTORIAL (FYP-H) Content Requirements

FYP and FYP-H will provide instruction and guidance through which students achieve the learning outcomes specified under sections IIB and IIC above. Content developed by individual instructors will reflect the mission statement for FYP/FYP-H, which reads: Through reading, writing and discussing important ideas from diverse perspectives, students develop an appreciation for the values embodied in the liberal arts. These include the habits and skills of critical inquiry, a tolerance for diverse points of view, an awareness of ambiguity, and a deep curiosity about the social, ethical, cultural, political and natural world in which we live. All of this takes place in an environment that cultivates skills in analytical reading, clear and vigorous writing, and convincing argumentation. More specific guidelines on content are:

- a) Faculty will organize the course and select content around general themes. Themes are both broad and flexible: Dialogue and Diversity, The Outsider, Freedom and Oppression, etc. The current themes are Nature and Culture and Ways of Knowing.
- b) Faculty should emphasize gender, cultural diversity, and inter-disciplinarity in the course content. Sections should not be considered as 'departmental seminars' focusing on one discipline.

- c) Writing is to be a significant element in FYP. Students are expected to complete frequent writing assignments that receive written faculty response. The nature of the assignments may vary depending on the instructor. They could take the form, for example, of expository essays, creative writings, response journals, micro-themes, etc. At least two of these assignments should be substantial in nature, involving revisions and individual meetings between the faculty member and the student. Some instructors ask their students to buy a handbook or style guide.
- d) The development of critical thinking and critical reading skills is to be a significant element of FYP.
- e) Speaking, whether through participation in discussion, debates, formal presentations, or the use of student discussion leaders, should also be an important part of the course.

SOPHOMORE RESEARCH SEMINAR (SRS) / SCHOLARS RESEARCH SEMINAR (SCH)

SRS and SCH will provide instruction and guidance through which students achieve the learning outcomes specified under sections IIB and IID above. Content developed by individual instructors will reflect the mission goals for the course, stated as:

- a) Contribute (with the other parts of the Common Curriculum) to exposing students to the breadth of human knowledge.
- b) Give all students one early experience in thinking like a researcher before or alongside their major program of study. Thinking like a researcher in SRS/SCH means taking the raw materials of any subject or topic, analyzing them critically and creatively, and developing a reasoned argument or theory grounded in evidence.
- c) Conduct research in a field that may not be the students' own using unfamiliar methods.
- d) Find the best way to present original research in a coherent, persuasive, and pleasing form, typically in the form of a research paper of 15-18 pages.

LITERATURE (HUL) Content Requirements

A Literature course will provide instruction and guidance through which students:

- a) Read and interpret primary written works of Literature throughout the course; defined as short- and long-form written works of prose and/or verse including short stories, novels, plays, poetry, and mythologies.
- b) Learn and practice the literary analysis and criticism of works of Literature (as defined above), including questions of structural choice, formal choice, literary and rhetorical devices, historical and cultural allusions and commentary, the history and evolution of genres, the relationship of an author's biography to a work, the relationship of language to power, the history and evolution of language.
- c) Courses in Music, Film, or Media Studies must demonstrate that works of Literature (as defined above) constitute the clear majority of content in the course and are subjected to literary analysis and criticism identified in b) above.

QUANTITATIVE AND MATHEMATICAL REASONING (QMR) Content Requirements

A Quantitative and Mathematical Reasoning course will provide instruction and guidance through which students:

- a) Comprehend problems and express solutions using the language of mathematics, quantitative reasoning, and problem solving that requires rigorous logical demonstrations with multiple steps.
- b) Make use of symbolic and abstract representations and adapt non-trivial algorithms.

NATURAL SCIENCES WITH LAB (SCLB) Content Requirements

A Natural Sciences with Lab course will provide instruction and guidance through which students:

- a) Understand how science and the scientific method work.
- b) Comprehend the difference between a hypothesis and a theory, how data are interpreted, and how hypotheses are formed.

ARTS AND HUMANITIES (HUM) Content Requirements

Arts and Humanities courses will provide instruction and guidance through which students:

- a) Understand literary or philosophical texts and traditions and works and styles of art.
- b) Comprehend meaningful contexts, credible interpretations, and the pursuit of questions arising from the act of interpretation for such works.

SOCIAL SCIENCES (SOCS) Content Requirements

A Social Science course will provide instruction and guidance through which students:

- a) Analyze the human experience (the behavior of and interactions among individuals, groups, institutions, societies, or the natural environment) past and present.
- b) Develop an understanding of theories, concepts, methods, and ethical practices characteristic of particular disciplines in the social sciences.

SCIENCE, ENGINEERING, AND TECHNOLOGY Content Requirements

A Science, Engineering, and Technology course will provide instruction and guidance through which students:

- a) Develop an understanding of how foundational principles and methodologies in science, engineering, or technology are used to analyze and manipulate the natural and physical world.
- b) Evaluate evidence, results, and claims related to the impact of science, engineering, or technology on broader human or societal issues.

LANGUAGES AND CULTURES (LCC) Content Requirements

Languages and Cultures courses, advanced foreign-language training, or dedicated coursework and experiential learning abroad will provide instruction and guidance through which students:

- a) Learn and demonstrate methodologically- and disciplinary-grounded approaches to the study and analysis of cultural diversity and complexity
- b) Acquire a conscious and respectful recognition of cultural diversity and complexity within an understanding of our shared humanity.
- c) Be enabled and empowered as citizens of a global community to act across cultural boundaries justly, disinterestedly, and on the basis of human equality.