

COMMON CURRICULUM PROGRAM ASSESSMENT

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

IV. ASSESSMENT PROCESS

IV.A. OVERVIEW

We assess the Common Curriculum by compiling portfolios containing direct and indirect evidence of student learning. The elected members of the General Education Board and the Director of General Education evaluate portfolios at the end of the junior year for each academic class. Direct evidence consists of 1) FYP and SRS assessments and 2) assessments by instructors of student learning in other courses that fulfil the requirements of the Common Curriculum. Indirect evidence consists of 1) a reflective essay written by students prior to 2) an interview with the General Education Board during the senior year.

IV.B. SAMPLING

- The Director of General Education creates a stratified random sample of incoming first-year students such that thirty students in an academic class are evaluated. Typically, samples will be generic, but it will be possible to use alternate-year samples to focus on particular subsets of Union students.
- Steps are taken to tailor the sample so that the burden on faculty is spread as evenly as possible across high-enrolling Common Curriculum courses such as FYP, introductory English courses, or the like. The Gen Ed Board studied the practical burden of the system on individual faculty based on a mock sample using the actual courses taken by students in the class of 2013. Across all the students and courses in that sample, we calculated that 101 instructors would be asked to complete only one IAR, seventeen instructors would be asked to complete two, four to complete three, and only one to complete four.
- Students selected for the assessment sample (AS) and their academic advisers are notified at the start of the academic year. Students in the AS are scheduled to attend an information session with the Director of General Education. Students receive complete written information and verbal explanation of the assessment process and their role in the AS. Advisers (ideally) follow-up with these students during subsequent advising sessions.
- Student Confidentiality and Consent. Students are assigned an AS number in order to protect their identity. Only the Director of General Education, Program Assistant, faculty adviser, and individual faculty members who conduct assessments know the identity of students who are part of the AS. For all other assessment purposes, including assessment reporting, the members of the AS are known only by their AS numbers. It is permissible under federal guidelines to collect data for the sole purpose of improving instructional programs, but we practice appropriate informed consent when working with students in the process.

IV.C. PORTFOLIOS

- The Director of General Education and Program Assistant compile and archive portfolios as part of ordinary program administration.
- Portfolios will contain the following items:
 - 1) Basic information on the student identified by the AS number and the academic class profile.
 - 2) An instructor-completed individual assessment report (IAR) for FYP/FYP-H and SRS/SCH, using a specially designed assessment form for each.
 - 3) An instructor-completed individual assessment report (IAR) for each of the other Common Curriculum requirements consisting of HUL, QMR, SCLB, HUM, SOCS, SET, LCC, using a common assessment form.
 - 4) A student reflective essay (SRE) of between one and two pages single-spaced submitted during fall term of the senior year, in advance of an interview with portfolio evaluators (PE) in winter term of the senior year.

IV.D. PORTFOLIO SUBMISSIONS

- The individual assessment reports (IARs) for FYP/FYP-H, SRS/SCH, and the other Common Curriculum requirements are accessed and submitted through the Common Curriculum webapps.
- The student reflective essay SRE are accessed and submitted through the Common Curriculum webapps.
- After registration closes in a given term, faculty with AS students are notified by the Director of General Education of the presence of such students in their classes for whom an IAR must be submitted.
- The IAR assesses learning outcomes A, B, and C. Instructors complete and submit the IAR via a single integrated webapp. The webapp will make this a one-stop process. Instructors complete the IAR form according to the prompts and instructions on the screen as well as attach and submit copies of the course syllabus, relevant assignments, and student work as needed/indicated. ***IARs must be submitted no later than two weeks from the deadline for final term grades.***
- The SRE assesses learning outcome C. Beginning in 2017-2018, students complete and submit the SRE via a single integrated webapp following the prompts and instructions on the screen. The SRE prompts students to explain connections between courses and experiences in the Common Curriculum and their intellectual development as lifelong learners. ***SREs must be submitted no later than the end of the fall term of the senior year.***

IV.E. EVALUTING and REPORTING on PORTFOLIOS

- The portfolio evaluators (PE) consist of the elected faculty members of the General Education Board and the Director of General Education.
- **Reading Portfolios.** PEs evaluate student portfolios upon completion of the junior year, typically during the summer break. PEs are paid a stipend for evaluating the portfolios and participating in the completion of a summary assessment report. It is expected that the process leading to an assessment report will not require more than one week. PEs read and evaluate entire portfolios irrespective of the individual PEs' particular disciplinary expertise.

- **Student Reflective Essays and Interviews.** SREs are added to student portfolios upon receipt at the end of the fall term of the senior year. PEs evaluate each SRE. Students will be interviewed during the winter term of the senior year beginning in 2017-2018. PEs will make a conscious effort to explore responses in the SREs and make direct connections to Learning Outcomes A, B, and C. PEs will develop a set of standard questions to this end as the assessment process is phased in.
- **Summary Evaluation and Analysis.** The responsibility of PEs is not to duplicate or double-check the work of faculty in the IARs or evaluate individual faculty or courses. The primary responsibility of PEs is to take a 'big picture' view of student learning in the Common Curriculum with a view to affirming current practice or making recommendations for program-scale improvements. These might range from revisions to content requirements or review of learning outcomes A, B, or C and the assessment process itself to significant changes in particular requirements, elimination of others, or addition of new ones.
- **Assessment Report.** Much of the evaluation process takes place in discussion between PEs after 1) reading portfolios and 2) completing student interviews. It is expected that the Assessment Report will include some tabulation of proficiencies in learning outcomes in the AS (see example below), but the report is primarily a narrative of the PEs analysis, evaluation, and recommendations. It is the responsibility of the Director of General Education to draw together the comments and discussion in drafting an assessment report. PEs are free to submit written comments or responses as part of compiling the assessment report.
- **Closing the Loop.** The annual Common Curriculum assessment report is posted to the *Teaching the Common Curriculum* Nexus site (open to all faculty) and submitted to the Director of Assessment. As Mary J Allen writes, 'If the assessment demonstrates that students are mastering the outcome at appropriate levels, you and your colleagues can celebrate. If some aspects of the results are disappointing, change is called for.' (Allen, *Assessing General Education Programs*, 19) In other words, assessment should not be premised on seeking out problems that require changes. If it isn't broke, we won't feel compelled to fix it. The primary goals of this assessment are to promote 1) curricular innovation in the Common Curriculum and 2) pedagogical and faculty development. We argue that the assessment report and information about particular requirements as experienced by real students provides an opportunity for faculty to reflect on the program or their own teaching within it. The act of completing an IAR can have the same effect at the level of individual instructors. In other words, we expect that participation by faculty and students in the IAR and SREs will prompt self-reflection and innovation. We use FYP, SRS, and COT workshops, among other venues, as opportunities to encourage that process.
- **Alumni Follow-up.** Beginning in 2015-2016, the Gen Ed Board will develop a small set of questions for the four- and nine-year surveys of alumni conducted by the college to evaluate the long-term, lasting impact of courses in the Common Curriculum.

IV.F. PHASE-IN

- When fully phased in, the PEs will evaluate the sample from each graduating class at the end of its junior year and conduct interviews with students in the AS in the senior year.

However, with the three-year lead-time required, that would have meant not conducting the first Common Curriculum assessment until Summer 2016. Besides being an undesirable and impractical delay, this posed problems for the mid-term accreditation report for Middle States. This phase-in provides sufficient information until a graduating class can be evaluated in its entirety on the ordinary schedule.

- PEs evaluate the class of 2017 portfolios each year as they are assembled until the junior year. The ordinary schedule will be followed beginning with the classes of 2018 and 2019. The schedule is as follows:

CLASS	Summer 2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
2017	READ	READ	READ	Interview		
2018		XXX	XXX	READ	Interview	
2019			XXX	XXX	READ	Interview