

# Student Learning Assessment at Wright State University



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UNIVERSITY

## Assessing Learning in General Education

### Wright State University General Education Learning Goals

The General Education Program is required of all students and serves as a foundation upon which all baccalaureate programs are built. A bachelor's degree awarded by a university implies more than career preparation or specialized technical competency. A university education should be broadly based in order to promote intellectual growth, cultivate critical examination and informed understanding, encourage breadth and flexibility of perspective, and provide students an opportunity to develop skills and knowledge that will form the basis for their life-long learning. Accordingly, the General Education program at Wright State University is a planned and coherent program that is designed to help students:

#### Goals of General Education

- sharpen critical thinking, problem solving, and communication skills;
- learn about the aesthetic, ethical, moral, social, and cultural dimensions of human experience needed for participation in the human community;
- increase knowledge and understanding of the past, of the world in which we live, and of how both past and present have an impact on the future.

To realize these overarching goals, the General Education program is divided into six sub areas, each with its own learning outcomes:

#### GE Area

#### Learning Outcomes

#### I. Communication and Mathematical Skills

*English Composition*  
*Mathematics*

- a. use writing processes to explore, think, and learn, and to write appropriately for various tasks and audiences
- b. develop logical and fair arguments, and observe appropriate writing conventions
- c. show ability to identify main ideas and evaluate, analyze and synthesize

- d. use, formulate and interpret mathematical models
  - e. summarize and justify analyses of mathematical models or problems using appropriate words, symbols, tables and/or graphs
- II. Cultural-Social Foundations**  
*History*  
*Non-Western World*
- a. describe and analyze historical-social elements of western culture
  - b. describe and analyze historical-social elements of nonwestern culture
  - c. describe and analyze the global interdependence of groups and of individuals
- III. Human Behavior**  
*Economics*  
*Political Science*  
*Psychology*  
*Sociology*
- a. use multiple approaches/perspectives to systematically analyze complex individual and institutional behavior culturally, subculturally, and/or crossculturally
  - b. recognize appropriate ethical uses of social scientific knowledge
- IV. Human Expression**  
*Great Books*  
*e and Performing Arts*
- a. recognize and critically discuss significant creative, philosophical and religious works
  - b. understand the complex blend of personal vision, social-cultural background, ethical values and aesthetic judgment in such works
  - c. discuss the diverse means of communication in such works
- V. Natural Science**  
*Biology*  
*Chemistry*  
*Geology*  
*Physics*
- b. understand the importance of model building for understanding the natural world
  - c. understand the theoretical, practical, creative and cultural dimensions of scientific inquiry
  - d. discuss some of the fundamental theories underlying modern science
  - e. understand the dynamic interaction between society and the scientific enterprise
  - f. recognize appropriate ethical uses of knowledge in the natural sciences

## VI. College Component

- a. communicate with individuals who are in the student's major, in allied fields, and non-specialists
  - b. understand important relationships and interdependencies between the student's major and other academic disciplines, world events or life endeavors
- Or
- c. additionally meet the objectives of Area I, II, III, IV, or V.

### GE Goals Described

The General Education (GE) program takes its current form in direct response to assessment findings. Ongoing GE assessment in the 1990s confirmed earlier findings that many classes were too large, that student success was impeded by rigid course requirements, that the assessment of student learning outcomes was problematic, and that students needed more individualized instruction in writing. These findings led to a 1998 plan to reform general education around areas of intellectual competency, with skills and abilities defined in learning outcomes for each of six areas of GE. The new program provides more choices in most areas, making it possible to offer smaller sections and more writing-intensive sections as well. Once the plan was approved, departments and colleges revised and rewrote the syllabuses for all GE courses to make them consistent with the stated student learning outcomes for each area and with the overall goals of the GE program. When the new program was implemented in 2003, the University General Education Committee was charged with developing a new assessment plan that would address each of the six areas of the program. That plan has been implemented, and assessment findings are continuing to (re)shape Wright State's GE program.

### Learning Outcomes Profiled

The General Education Assessment Plan (consisting of overall and area plans) is available on Wright State University's Assessment home page:

<http://www.wright.edu/assessment/bpra/outcomes/gened.html>.

The assessments of General Education that are tied to the above plans are also available online:

<http://www.wright.edu/assessment/bpra/outcomes/genedrpt.html>.



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## Assessing Learning in the Major

### Example of Assessment in the Major: English

For courses in the major, the following example from English is but one of many such assessment plans across the university. For other majors, see <http://www.wright.edu/assessment/bpra/outcomes/plans.html>.

#### Name of Major

ENGLISH

All students taking a B. A. in English should be

- informed readers, able to formulate readings of texts based on their knowledge of literary historical contexts and of basic critical strategies
- able to develop a thesis and sustain a coherent written argument about literature using secondary sources

Students in the Literature Concentration should also be

- familiar with works in the Anglo-American literary tradition and other literatures written in English
- familiar with and able to use the terms of literary analysis

Students in the Creative Writing Concentration should also be

- familiar with the discipline of creative writing and the value of criticism in the creative process
- able to write in their chosen creative forms

#### Learning Goals

Students in the Professional Writing Concentration should also be

- familiar with the fields of professional writing and with the primary writing conventions and skills needed in several fields
- able to create and edit appropriate professional and/or technical documents

Students in the TESOL Concentration should also be

- familiar with the nature of language, the structure of English, and the fundamentals of language teaching
- able to develop a classroom pedagogy informed by their understanding of language

Students in the Integrated Language Arts Concentration should also be

- familiar with the fundamentals of teaching language arts at

- the high school and middle school levels
- able to develop an approach to language arts teaching informed by their understanding of literature and language

Achievement of the above learning outcomes are measured in the following ways:

**Review of culminating papers:** each year, five culminating papers, together with the corresponding assignment, are randomly selected from each of two sections of 400-level literature classes (one in fall, one in winter) and from ONE of the following courses or sets of courses:

- ENG 400-level literature class in spring (Literature)
- ENG 492 and 493 (Creative Writing)
- ENG 405 (Professional Writing)
- ENG 484 (TESOL)
- ENG 486 (Integrated Language Arts)

The papers from the 400-level literature classes are assessed for the general outcomes expected of all students. The papers from the courses listed in bullets are evaluated to determine the degree to which they meet the specific learning outcomes of each concentration. All program outcomes will be assessed in this way.

### Measuring Learning Goals

**Exit survey:** each graduating senior is given a survey and a postage-paid envelope. These are collected, sorted, and stored until needed for assessment. Students on the survey are asked to identify their concentration. They are asked to comment on aspects of the program. Over time, the survey may be refined. As of now, it serves as an indirect tool for assessing the first outcome for each concentration, the outcome relating to knowledge.

**Focus groups:** each spring, the department sponsors a focus group of students in one of the concentrations. The focus group is led by a faculty member not primarily responsible for teaching courses in the concentration being evaluated. Questions in the focus group focus on the outcomes for the concentration being evaluated, primarily on students' perception of the second outcome, the outcome relating to performance and writing.

The department faculty holds a retreat each spring or fall quarter for the purpose of evaluating the assessment data gathered during the current calendar year.

### Learning Outcomes for

### Department of English: Assessment of Undergraduate Program

The excellent undergraduate paper will meet the standards described in **all** of these categories:

**CONTENT**

The central idea will be clearly defined and developed with originality and careful thought, supported substantially and concretely. When a paper from a literature class is being assessed for general program assessment purposes, it should present an effective and persuasive reading of a text or texts based on knowledge of literary historical contexts and of basic critical strategies.

Work being assessed for the concentration in literature should show the students' genuine familiarity with works in the Anglo-American literary tradition and/or other literatures written in English; the student should also be very familiar with and skillful in the use of the terms of literary analysis.

Work being assessed for the concentration in creative writing should show the students' genuine familiarity with the discipline of creative writing and with the value of criticism in the creative process, as well as the ability to write in their specific chosen creative forms.

Work being assessed for the concentration in professional writing should show the students' genuine familiarity with the genres of professional writing and with the primary writing conventions and skills needed in several fields, as well as the ability to create and edit appropriate professional and/or technical documents.

Work being assessed for the concentration in TESOL should show the students' genuine familiarity with the nature of language, the structure of English, and the fundamentals of language teaching, as well as the ability to develop a classroom

pedagogy informed by their understanding of language.

Work being assessed for the concentration in Integrated Language Arts should show the students' genuine familiarity with the fundamentals of teaching language arts at the high school and middle school levels, as well as the ability to develop an approach to language arts teaching informed by their understanding of literature and language.

### **MECHANICS**

The paper will progress by clearly ordered and necessary stages; paragraphs will be unified and developed with unusual effectiveness; transitions between and within paragraphs will be clear and effective; paragraphs and sentences will be coherent and emphatic. Diction will be appropriate, clear, carefully chosen, and idiomatic. Except for very infrequent minor errors, grammar and punctuation will help to clarify meaning by following accepted conventions; Misspellings will be very infrequent.