

# **General Education Assessment Guidelines<sup>1</sup>**

## **Lehman College, CUNY**

*Drafted, April 24, 2010*

### **Assessment Overview**

Lehman's culture of learning outcomes assessment is faculty initiated and led, course-embedded, and improvement-focused. As program-level evaluation, the assessment of the General Education program at Lehman is not an evaluation of individual students or faculty members. It focuses on the overall effectiveness of the General Education program.

Lehman's General Education program consists of foundation courses, distribution area courses, and synthesis or capstone courses. The foundation courses provide the basis for developing academic fluencies throughout the student's undergraduate career: these fluencies are developed throughout the entire curriculum. Courses in the seven distribution areas serve to develop a set of applied competencies in specific discipline areas. The two synthesis or capstone courses (LEH300 and LEH301) offer students the opportunity to develop the basic fluencies and applied competencies to general questions using interdisciplinary methods and materials in fields outside their major concentration. The Gen Ed fluencies and competencies are described in other sections of the Gen Ed site.

### **Course Assessment**

The General Education Program identifies particular courses offered by academic departments to be listed in Distribution Areas and in Natural Sciences. Students choose to take one course from each Distribution Area and two courses from Natural Sciences as part of the Gen Ed Program's graduation requirements. The Undergraduate Curriculum Committee certifies the list of courses in these areas.

In order to be listed in a Distribution Area or as a Natural Science, courses offered by academic departments must meet a series of curricular standards set by the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee. Furthermore, the listed courses are designed to meet the learning goals of each area. The lists are reviewed every three years and courses are recertified or not and new courses are certified.

Once every three years the Gen Ed Liaisons Committee gathers information about the Distribution Area courses and assesses the degree to which they satisfy basic criteria established

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<sup>1</sup> Faculty suggestions and recommendations regarding this Guideline are welcome. Contact Rob Whittaker ([Robert.whittaker@lehman.cuny.edu](mailto:Robert.whittaker@lehman.cuny.edu)) or Vinny Prohaska ([Vincent.prohaska@lehman.cuny.edu](mailto:Vincent.prohaska@lehman.cuny.edu)). This procedure and document is modeled on the General Education Assessment Guidelines at George Mason University (<https://assessment.gmu.edu/Genedassessment/methods.cfm>), which were modeled on procedures at William & Mary ([http://www.wm.edu/offices/iae/assessing\\_general\\_education/index.php](http://www.wm.edu/offices/iae/assessing_general_education/index.php))

by the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee and meet the faculty-established goals of each of the areas. The Liaisons also consider suggestions by departments that courses be included in the calendar of Distribution Area courses. The Liaisons, each representing one Distribution Area, prepare a report for each area, on the basis of which the Committee makes its recommendations to the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee. The more recent set of reports, completed in March 2010, are presented elsewhere in this site under “Assessment of Courses.”

### **Assessment of Student Learning: Distribution Areas**

The assessment of student learning is a responsibility shared by the General Education Program and the academic departments. With the exception of LEH300 and LEH301, all courses in the Gen Ed Program are offered by individual departments, who themselves are responsible for the assessment of student learning in their disciplines. Therefore, the assessment of student learning in English Composition (ENG110 and ENG120), in mathematics (including the courses required in Gen Ed: MAT132, MAT171, MAT172, MAT174, MAT175), courses in foreign languages, and courses in the natural sciences is being conducted by the relevant departments.

However, there are shared learning objectives – both the Gen Ed fluencies and the applied competencies in the Distribution Areas – that are the focus of assessment by the General Education Program.

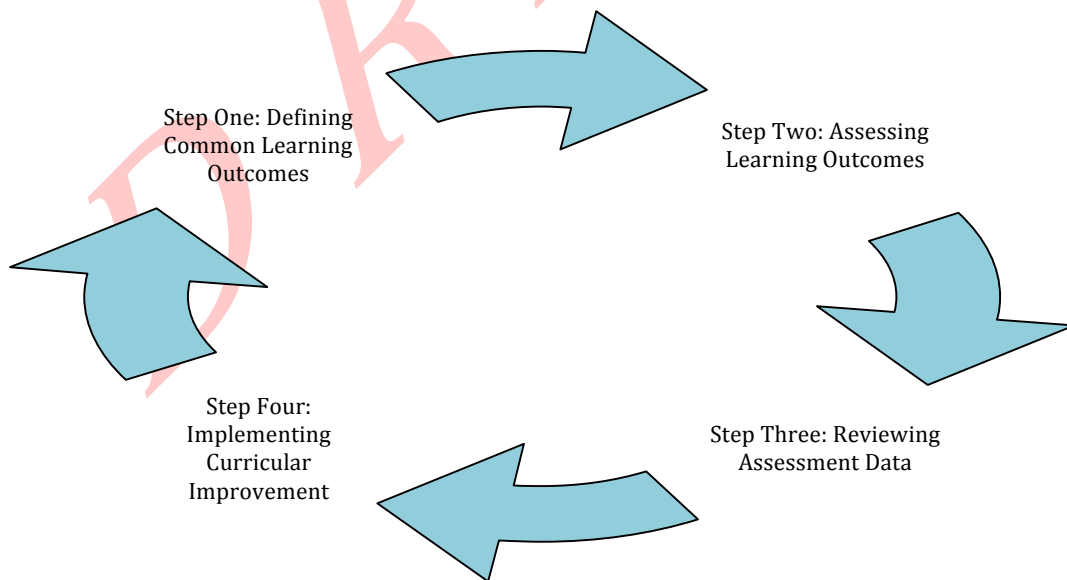
The students learning objectives which have been defined for each of the Distribution Areas are systematically assessed in a process that was developed and refined for the first time in the spring 2010. This assessment follows upon an intensive period of study and collaboration among the faculty teaching in these areas, during which time (beginning in spring 2004) the instructors gathered regularly to discuss and define the goals and overall learning objectives of each distribution area. Developed in a series of workshops (the minutes can be found in reports on this site) this work also described the integration of the Distribution Area objectives into specific courses, explored how to communicate these objectives to students and faculty, and finally began to address how to assess the learning outcomes in the distribution areas. The methods under discussion for the assessing of student learning in the Distribution Areas are described below.

Student learning objectives represented by the core fluencies will be assessed at the final stages of the General Education curriculum, in the capstone LEH300-LEH301 courses. The students in these courses will be surveyed and tested regularly to assess their abilities in each of the fluencies. The first of these tests – in quantitative reasoning – will be administered at the end of the spring 2010 semester.

The assessment of learning objectives in the Distribution Areas follows four major steps (see Figure One):

1. Define Learning Outcomes: the faculty teaching in each general education Distribution Area has defined common learning outcomes across all courses regardless of the discipline. (These outcomes are described elsewhere in this site.) The assessment focuses on two questions: to what extent faculty address these learning outcomes in their courses and how well students achieve these outcomes.
2. Assessing Learning Outcomes and Collecting Data: all assessment is embedded in the course. Faculty members or course coordinators provide evidence of course content and pedagogy, and collect and submit samples of student work, in a process detailed below.
3. Analyzing and Reviewing Assessment Data: faculty teams develop review criteria and standards and conduct the review. The results are shared with the General Education Liaisons Committee and the faculty who participate in the assessment. The aggregated results are made available to the Lehman Undergraduate Curriculum Committee, which reports to the Academic Senate. No individual faculty results are made public.
4. Implementing Curricular Improvement: The ultimate goal for General Education assessment is to use data to identify the strengths and weakness of the program and plan for curricular improvement. For example, faculty may discover ways to modify existing course content, tests or assignments to better align the outcomes of the tests/assignments with the common learning outcomes for the category.

Figure One: Learning Outcomes Assessment Cycle



### **Assessment Method: Electronic Course Portfolios**

Lehman's assessment approach is adapted from a successful Course Portfolio System developed by George Mason University and by the College of William and Mary and recently used as part of a SACS reaccreditation process. Course portfolios serve three purposes:

1. General Education Assessment: Taken together across courses and categories, the portfolios provide a clear picture of the overall effectiveness of the General Education program at Lehman.
2. Learning Outcomes Assessment: The portfolios provide direct evidence of student achievement in general education learning outcomes through samples of student work.
3. Course Review: The portfolios provide the most updated information about what is being taught in the course, what kind of learning experiences are offered to students, and what assessment strategies faculty use.

Course portfolios will NOT be used to evaluate faculty teaching, review individual faculty, or assess individual students. In response to recommendations from MSCHE in its 2010 review of Lehman's assessment procedures, the general education Distribution Areas will be assessed in two semesters: **fall 2010** (Areas 1, 2, 6, ,7) and **spring 2011** (Areas 3, 4, 5 and Natural Sciences). After 2011, the Areas and Natural Sciences will be assessed on a **four-year cycle reviewing two Areas each year.**

### **Who will Submit a Course Portfolio?**

When a general education Area is under review, **all faculty (regardless of appointment status, full-time or adjunct)** who teach an approved course or a section of the course during fall and spring semesters may be required to submit a course portfolio. For courses with numerous sections, no more than two will be selected. For faculty who teach the same course in both fall and spring semesters, only one course portfolio is required. Faculty who teach multiple sections of a course in a given semester submit a portfolio for one section. Some faculty members (adjunct faculty and graduate teaching fellows) are eligible for a modest honorarium for completing a portfolio.

### **Who will Review Course Portfolios?**

Faculty Review Teams are identified by the General Education Liaisons Committee to conduct portfolio reviews for each general education category. Reviewers receive a modest stipend in recognition of their work. The reviewers are faculty who either teach/coordinate general education courses or serve on the General Education Liaisons Committee. All review teams have faculty members from different disciplines, including both an expert and a non-expert in the field(s) under review. They use a common, category-specific rubric to rate whether a course adequately meets the general education learning goals through the resources/information provided in the course portfolio. **Portfolio review rubrics for each category are posted on the General Education website.**

## Major Components of a Course Portfolio

An electronic course portfolio has the following components:

- Course/Section Syllabus
- Faculty Reflection
- Course Assignments/Projects
- Samples of Student Work
- Student Survey Results
- Review Team Ratings

### 1. Course/Section Syllabus

Faculty are encouraged to include in their syllabi the selected learning outcomes from the general education category in addition to course specific learning outcomes.

### 2. Faculty Reflection

A 1-2 page narrative, focusing on the following questions:

- a. Which general education Distribution Area learning outcomes were addressed in the course? How were they addressed?
- b. How did the instructor assess these learning outcomes?
- c. How well did the students achieve these general education learning outcomes, i.e., approximately what percentage of students were judged to be highly competent, competent, or less than competent according to the faculty member's own criteria? (This is NOT a description of the overall grades, but rather an opportunity to share observations on student achievement of specific learning outcomes.)
- d. *Optional:* if the faculty member teaches the course again, are any changes being contemplated?

### 3. Course Assignments/Projects

Faculty submit **a maximum of 3 assignments/projects they have created and used in class to address or assess** selected Distribution Area learning outcomes for the category. The assignments/projects may take different forms, e.g., individual/group papers, lab reports, websites developed by students, presentations, performances, videos, essay/short answer exams, multiple-choice exams, etc. Along with these, faculty are also required to submit:

- a. Instructions provided to students, if not included with the assignment
- b. Grading guides, checklists or rubrics (if applicable) (NOT answer keys for the exams)
- c. A short description mapping these assignments to the corresponding learning outcome(s) for the category

### 4. Samples of Student Work

From among the assignments/projects above, faculty select **ONE** assignment and provide student work samples:

- Faculty provide the actual work of 3-6 randomly selected students from the course/section. The Liaison Committee does the random sampling and provides faculty

with a list early in the semester. If more than one randomly selected student drops out during the semester, a replacement sample will be provided.

- For each student work provided, faculty specify the level of achievement: highly competent, competent, or less than competent. If no “highly competent” work was randomly selected, faculty can provide an *additional* sample showing high competence.
- Faculty are also encouraged to provide additional comments about the assignment or the student work sample that may help with the review process.
- **Written work** (i.e., papers, lab reports, essay/short answer exams, etc.) is highly encouraged. Both electronic and hard copies are acceptable (paper copies will be scanned).
- For student products accessible via the Internet: faculty members only need to provide URLs and specify the competence level for each.
- For student presentations or performance: faculty can provide PowerPoint files, videos or audio samples. Technical assistance with editing and uploading media is available upon request.
- If multiple-choice tests are the only method used in class, faculty should identify which questions address the general education learning outcomes and provide a grade distribution of the test based on the entire class (not only the randomly selected students).

#### 5. Student Survey

At the end of the semester, all students enrolled in the general education Distribution Area under review are surveyed by the Liaisons Committee. The survey includes questions about course experiences directly related to the Distribution Area learning outcomes. The survey results provide indirect measurement of student learning in the course and are reviewed by the General Education Liaisons Committee. Faculty members are encouraged to remind students of the importance of participation in this survey.

#### 6. Portfolio Review Ratings

A faculty team, appointed by the General Education Liaisons Committee, reviews each course portfolio using a common review rubric. At the end, the review team assigns a single rating for each course/section. The rating reflects the extent to which the course provides the learning experiences that result in specified student learning outcomes. It should be reemphasized that this review is NOT an assessment of the course as a whole or the instructor, but only the course’s demonstrated alignment with the general education Distribution Area in which it resides. Portfolio review results are sent to the General Education Liaisons Committee, individual faculty, and the appropriate department chairs.

#### What Happens after the Portfolio Review?

The reviewers’ ratings are used in the following ways:

- by the General Education Liaison Committee to verify that a majority of the goals and learning outcomes related to Gen Ed are being met.
- by the Lehman College Assessment Council.

- by department chairs to improve the effectiveness of Gen Ed courses.
- by the General Education Liaison Committee, the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee and the Associate Provost for Undergraduate Studies to develop recommendations for the Gen Ed program as a whole.

The ratings will NOT be used, by faculty, chairs, deans, or the provost's office, as elements in reappointment, promotion, and tenure dossiers. They relate specifically to the alignment of a course (and, in the aggregate, a set of courses) with the corresponding Gen Ed outcomes and goals. In some cases, a faculty member may receive one or two recommendations from his or her chair toward improving alignment with Gen Ed; in a very few cases, and only after consultation with the relevant department, it is possible that the General Education Liaisons committee may remove a course from the calendar of Distribution Area courses. Departments may also initiate the withdrawal of a course from the inventory. It must be emphasized that such actions are not intended as evaluation of or commentary on the value and effectiveness of a particular course or instructor *per se*, but only on the issue of alignment with the goals of General Education. Many outstanding courses meet a number of learning outcomes that relate to a specific discipline but may not be judged suitable for inclusion in the calendar of Distribution Area courses.

### **Technology Support for Electronic Course Portfolios**

All course portfolios are stored in Blackboard, protected by password. Faculty members have access to their own portfolio only; the Review Team members, General Education Committee members, and staff from the Office of Institutional Assessment have access to all portfolios. An outstanding portfolio may be made available to the university community given the faculty member's approval.

A "course" (with a generic name such as "Gen Ed – Area 1," "Gen Ed – Area 3," etc.) is automatically assigned to the faculty members who are required to submit a portfolio; they will be, in Blackboard terminology, "students" in that course. They are instructed to upload syllabi, reflection, course assignments/projects, and student work samples under designated "assignments" of that "course." Logistical instructions for constructing a portfolio and uploading documents is available on the General Education website. In each semester, the Office of Undergraduate Studies and Online Education provides training for creating electronic course portfolios.

### **Assessment of Student Learning: Gen Ed Fluencies in LEH300-LEH301**

The basic fluencies of Lehman's General Education program are developed throughout the student's study, from the earliest Foundation Courses to the synthesis or capstone Gen Ed courses (LEH300 and LEH301) as well as in coursework taken to satisfy the requirements of the major and minor concentrations. There are five fluencies emphasized by the Gen Ed Program: communication and language; Informational and technological; quantitative; scientific; and critical and analytical. These are basic skills or abilities, shared by many undergraduate programs in the university and across the country, and are described in terms of specific learning objectives in "The Core Fluencies" elsewhere in this site.

The General Education Liaisons Committee has the responsibility of conducting direct assessment of student learning in general and of the Gen Ed Fluencies in particular. The Committee has embarked upon a process of systematic assessment of the mastery of the core fluencies by students in the capstone courses LEH300 and LEH301. These two courses are the final, culminating courses in the program and are taken by all Lehman students – whether transfer or not - at some time before graduation. The assessment will provide a snapshot of student learning in one of the five fluencies, whether the section in which they are currently enrolled emphasizes or specifically supports this fluency or not. The cumulative effect of the entire General Education curriculum includes all the fluencies and applied competencies identified as its goals.

The five fluencies will be the subject of a series of surveys to assess the abilities of students in these skills. The surveys will be administered each semester on a rotating basis, beginning in the spring of 2010.

The results of the survey will be reviewed by the instructors teaching the LEH300 and LEH301 sections and by the Gen Ed Liaisons. The results will be reported by the Liaisons Committee to the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee.

The first survey will assess students' attitudes towards and abilities in quantitative reasoning. The same survey administered in the spring will be administered to the entering freshmen in the fall, as part of the Freshman Seminar (LEH100), which is taken by all first time freshmen as part of the Freshman Year Initiative. The next survey, on critical reasoning, will be administered at the end of the fall 2011 semester. The results will be reported in the same manner.

By comparing the results of the surveys on regular two-and-a-half-year cycles will allow the Liaisons Committee to assess the trends in student mastery of the basic Gen Ed fluencies and to adjust the emphases or structures of the program should this be indicated in order to achieve the goals of General Education.

### **Assessment of Student Learning: Gen Ed Fluencies and the CPE**

The General Education Liaisons Committee is considering the use of the CUNY Proficiency Examination as a summative assessment of student learning within Lehman's Gen Ed curriculum.

According to the CUNY web site:

"The CPE tests a student's competency in areas that the CUNY faculty considers important for later success, including:

**Reading and interpreting** textbooks and material of general interest;

**Organizing and presenting** your ideas about what you have read and connecting those ideas to other information or concepts;

**Writing clearly and effectively** for an audience; and

**Interpreting and evaluating** material presented in charts and graphs."

These competencies correspond to basic fluencies that are the goals of Lehman's General Education curriculum. Thus, this externally produced and graded exam that was contracted by



CUNY's Central Administration, can be used as an assessment of how well Lehman College students are learning these competencies through Lehman's general education curriculum.

It should be noted that the CPE was designed as a summative assessment instrument. That is, its goal is to demonstrate whether a student's general education experience (at whatever college the student achieved it) has prepared the student for upper-division college work. It is not a formative instrument; it was not designed to indicate specific areas in which general education curricula need to be improved. Thus, we should not consider our general education curriculum a success unless our pass rates are close to 100%.

Because the goal is to assess the Lehman general education curriculum, only students who completed their General Education at Lehman should be included in the analysis. Thus, data from the following groups of students must be eliminated from the analysis:

1. Students who failed the exam because they did not take it. If a student does not take the exam, we cannot draw any conclusion as to how he/she would have performed.
2. Students taking the exam more than once – unless they did not take the exam at their first appointment date. After students fail the exam, they are encouraged to participate in supplemental workshops and tutoring. Thus, only the first time students take the exam is an accurate indicator of their general education learning.
3. Transfer students – any student with more than 12 transfer credits. It might actually be useful to place results from these students into a separate group and compare their scores to the Lehman-only group. Hopefully we can then demonstrate that Lehman students do at least as well as students who received their general education elsewhere.

In addition to examining the overall pass rates on the exam, we also should separate the scores for the two parts of the exam. Although broad, these individual scores can be useful in indicating in a general sense where in the general education curriculum improvements might be needed.

~rwhittaker, vprohaska 4/24/10