Western Washington University Academic Outcomes Assessment Plan

Course-level Assessment

Approval for new or modified courses at Western is a shared responsibility between academic departments, colleges and the Faculty Senate. Western uses the Curriculog software system to process changes to courses. For new courses or significant revisions, the requesting faculty are required to submit a sample syllabus that must meet the minimum requirements established by the Academic Coordinating Commission (ACC) of the WWU Faculty Senate. These include the articulation of course goals/learning objectives that will be used as the basis for grade evaluations; course proposals must demonstrate that they involve an amount of work consistent with the credit hour definition and the WWU credit hour policy.

The office of the Associate VP for Academic Affairs collaborates with the Office of Institutional Effectiveness to regularly scan for trends or issues of concern in course-level grade outcomes, particularly for those gateway courses with higher-than-average rates of students not successfully completing them with passing grades. For these analyses, the grade reports are disaggregated by key demographic categories so as to allow more specific remediation to be planned for courses that may not be serving our historically underrepresented student populations.

Courses meeting the General University Requirements, or GURs, must align their learning outcomes with specific content of requirement and the thematic literacies that underly general education at Western. This is reviewed at the department and college level, and then by the Committee on Undergraduate Education before approval by ACC.

Program Level Assessment

Western's current system for assessing program level outcomes has been in place since 2017 and builds upon the progressive building of capacity in assessment that dates back to the early 2000's. Faculty proposing a new degree through Curriculog are required to establish learning outcomes, which are reviewed at the department, college and ACC levels. Each department is required to establish a plan for assessing degree-level outcomes for each major and a plan and schedule for assessment of those outcomes. For departments with accountability to disciplinary accrediting bodies, those requirements are used to drive their assessment plan and schedule. All other departments are expected to be involved in a cycle of continuous improvement of their academic programs through a schedule of alternating years of assessment of degree-level outcomes, followed by a year focused on implementation of improvement strategies. Annual reporting of these activities is done to the appropriate college dean and to the Assistant Vice President for Academic Affairs, who maintains a central repository for all assessment plans, reports of assessment of student learning, and reports of how departments are "closing-the-loop".

The format for reports on degree-level learning outcomes is Appendix A of this document, and the format for the closing-the-loop reports is Appendix B.

WWU General Education "Assessment and Improvement" Plan

Committee on Undergraduate Education, May 26, 2022

Background Information

General Education at Western Washington University is organized into General University Requirements, or GURs. Most WWU students[1] must complete various GUR requirements in six categories, which generally takes at least 14-15 courses[2]:

- *Communication*
- *Quantitative and Symbolic Reasoning*
- *Natural Sciences*
- *Humanities*
- *Social Sciences*
- *Comparative, Gender and Multicultural Studies*

In addition to the GUR requirements, students must meet the additional general education requirement of completing upper-division courses that cumulatively provide three "writing proficiency (WP)" points.

The structure and content of the GURs are determined through faculty governance at WWU; this work is done by the
Faculty Senate and its committees, specifically the Academic Coordinating Commission (ACC) and the Committee on Undergraduate Education (CUE). CUE is specifically assigned the primary responsibility to review all proposed changes or additions to the list of courses designated as GURs. CUE also plays the lead role in assessment of student learning in WWU's general education curriculum.

Prior to 2019, the learning outcomes for the GURs were described using 11 competencies that focused on skills and practices.[2] In 2016, as part of their report on WWU's general education program, the ACC charged CUE with constructing a clear purpose for the GURs with an accompanying visual representation that could explain how the GURs fit into a liberal arts and sciences education and help faculty teaching

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[1] Students transferring with a two-year degree that qualifies for the "direct transfer agreement" are considered to have already met the GURs.   Additionally, students admitted to Fairhaven College of Interdisciplinary Studies at WWU do not complete the WWU GURs, which is replaced by the Fairhaven College Core Curriculum (https://fairhaven.wwu.edu/fairhaven-college-core-curriculum) [2] https://registrar.wwu.edu/degree-information/gur

[2] "Analyze and communicate ideas effectively in oral, written, and visual forms"; "Analyze and interpret information from varied sources, including print and visual media"; "Use quantitative and scientific reasoning to frame and solve problems"; "Identify and analyze complex problems"; "Apply tools of technology, with an understanding of their uses and limitations"; "Explore, imagine and create"; "Recognize the rights, responsibilities, and privileges of participating in, and contributing as a citizen in, a diverse society"; "Understand and evaluate assumptions, values, and beliefs in context of diverse local, national and global communities."; "Work collaboratively and manage projects to effective completion"; "Reflect on one's own work and on the ethical dimensions of academic pursuits"; "Understand and assess the impacts of interactions among the individual, society, and the environment [4]
https://www.wwu.edu/gened/documents/GUR_Literacies%20faculty%20version.pdf

the GURs explain their importance to students. In addition, ACC recommended a reduction in the eleven competencies.

In response, CUE developed a new framework for describing the desired outcomes for student learning in the GURs that reduces the 11 competencies to 6 literacies, organized into areas of knowledge and core practices and provided a visual representation of how these literacies fit into a liberal arts education.[4] This revision was adopted by ACC in January 2020, with Faculty Senate approval the following month.

The new GUR literacies are as follows:

> •   **Core areas of knowledge** ○ *Social, cultural and historical knowledge literacies* ○ *Civic, ethical and environmental knowledge literacies* ○ *Quantitative, scientific and technological knowledge literacies*
> •   **Core practices** ○ *Communicative and interpretive practice literacies* ○ *Creative and problem-solving practice literacies* ○ *Critical and reflective practice literacies*
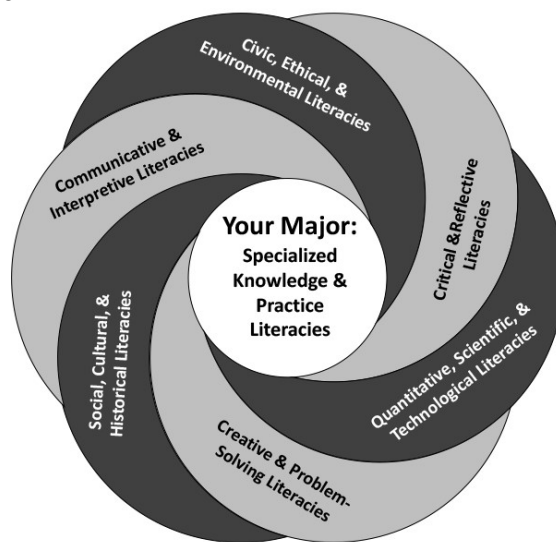
The revised literacies clusters are more thematic and interdisciplinary. As they are more general in nature, this presents a new set of challenges in terms of assessing the effectiveness of WWU's general education program and planning strategies for improvement.

Previous General Education Assessment Strategies and Results

While the full history of assessment of general education at WWU is beyond the scope of this report, a few points related to recent assessment work will be highlighted.

- The Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA)[3] was administered several times for incoming first-year students and graduating seniors, most recently in 2013 and 2016. This provided a method for direct assessment of student learning in three of the previously used 11 competencies.
- The Western Educational Longitudinal Study (WELS)[4] is WWU's primary survey tool for studying the student experience; it involves gathering data at a half-dozen points in time, from the confirmation of admission to graduation and beyond to the feedback of alumni. This data was a very valuable source of indirect assessment for all of the 11 previous competencies.
- The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)[5] has been administered regularly (every three years) and has provided valuable student self-assessment that related to 9 of the 11 previously used competencies.

The previous GUR competencies were evaluated comprehensively in 2016. This analysis identified several areas that could have warranted further investigation.[6] However, CUE members in 2022 are not aware of any formal structure incorporating the results of the 2016 general education assessment into improving WWU's gen-ed program, though some results may have influenced the stalled proposal to improve WWU's writing program.

Based on feedback from CUE members, this plan envisions moving away from the CLA as the primary tool for *direct* assessment of GUR learning outcomes. The CLA is administered at both the beginning and the end of students' time at WWU and thus it is difficult to attribute any changes in performance to the GUR program specifically. Furthermore, the
CLA is not able to offer feedback on all of the literacies that the GUR program aspires to improve. It was also noted by CUE members that most WWU faculty are unfamiliar with the test and have had no involvement with its past implementation, and thus may have been less motivated to accept the results as a motivator for continuing the development and improvement of their GUR pedagogies. CUE members believe that WWU faculty will be much more invested in applying assessment efforts that are more directly tied to existing assignments in their courses. The CLA is also quite expensive to implement and it has proven difficult to motivate a significant number of seniors to complete the exam, despite offering modest financial incentives, leading to problems with the statistical significance of the results.

Proposed New Assessment and Improvement Strategy

For these reasons, this plan proposes a schedule of every-other-year direct GUR assessment activities that will be developed in consultation between CUE faculty and academic departments/faculty delivering the GUR courses in question. In years between assessment efforts, CUE would focus on using the results to improve the GUR program.

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[3] http://cae.org/cla+/

[4] https://oie.wwu.edu/wels/

[5] https://nsse.indiana.edu/nsse/about-nsse/index.html

[6] While on both critical and quantitative reasoning questions, WWU seniors scored just above the CLA median on the CLA exam, our seniors scored lower on the CLA exam than their SAT scores would have predicted on analyzing complex problems. Additionally, the CLA showed just 59 to 69% of seniors able to write at a level considered adequate for college graduates.

For discussion purposes, a potential idea for how this might work is presented below. Actual GUR literacies and focal points for investigation would be determined by CUE close to the time of evaluation. Selection of literacies and focal points that address key strategic priorities of the university at that time are encouraged, as are discussions with administrators regarding availability of funding of faculty development in that area during the following "improvement" year, though each GUR literacy would need to be evaluated before repeating previously investigated literacies.[7] The complete cycle for direct assessment would occur over 12 years.

Example Schedule of WWU GUR Assessment Activities For Upcoming Years

THE ACTUAL SCHEDULE OF LITERACIES/FOCAL POINTS WILL BE DETERMINED LATER, THOUGH CUE IS INTERESTED IN EXAMINING "COMMUNICATIVE AND INTERPRETIVE" (WITH A FOCUS ON WRITING) AS THE FIRST ASSESSMENT

Academic Year	GUR Literacies Investigated	Focal Point of GUR Assessment
2022-2023	Communicative and Interpretive	Effectiveness of WWU FY Writing for first-gen students
2024-2025	Quantitative, scientific and technological	Effectiveness of WWU FY Math for students with weaker math preparation
2026-2027	Creative and problem solving	Use previously developed rubric (Identify and Analyze Complex Problems) to evaluate student learning process in 100 and 200 level GUR courses

It is beyond the scope of this plan to define the specific assessment strategies that would be used in each year, especially as different literacies and focal points would lend themselves to different types of assessment, but it is envisioned that it would be a mixture of

- Collecting student work from courses of some GUR faculty for evaluation by a CUE appointed faculty task force
- Use of existing well-accepted survey/assessment instruments that are relevant for the area of evaluation
- Continued use of Western Educational Longitudinal Study and National Survey of Student Engagement

The highest-effort portion of this assessment process would be the direct assessment of class artifacts. After determining the GUR literacy and focal point to be assessed, CUE would work with faculty experts in that area to determine a single rubric for all class artifacts to evaluate how well learning objectives had been achieved. CUE would work with faculty teaching in that area to obtain a selection of student

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[7] This example schedule has a number of direct connections to the strategic priorities of WWU. Student learning in FY writing and math plays a critical role in their overall academic achievement and it appears that the pandemic has significantly impacted learning in these areas, thus these areas could be the first two assessment projects. For example, DFW rates in English 101 for first-generation students more than doubled in 2020-2021 compared to the prior five years and remained high in fall 2021.

work over (likely) fall and winter quarter that could demonstrate the extent to which targeted learning outcomes had been achieved. It is not necessary or expected that all instructors teaching in the area being assessed would participate, but CUE would seek to get participation from a varied group of instructors (e.g., multiple departments or colleges, to the extent that is applicable to the literacy/focal point being assessed).

CUE expects that the actual evaluation of the class artifacts would be primarily or exclusively done by CUE members likely during spring quarter, either during a small number of the standard Thursday afternoon CUE meetings or at a time of members' choosing where a few Thursday meetings would be cancelled with the expectation that members spend an equivalent amount of time evaluating class artifacts. The number of class artifacts examined would be limited to make this evaluation process viable without increasing the overall time commitment of CUE membership. Before evaluation, CUE would also seek out assistance from area experts in training CUE members on what to look for during the evaluation process; having a "norming" session where area experts publicly evaluated sample class artifacts and explained their thought process would be particularly valuable to arrange.

While there have been occasional "one-time" allocations of money every few years in the past to administer the CLA, WWU does not have any dedicated funding for GUR assessment and this proposed strategy is designed with this in mind, as well as a desire to not add to the overall time commitment of CUE membership. Should funding become reliably available for GUR assessment, then CUE would likely recommend some changes to this proposed strategy.

Results of all direct and indirect assessment measures would then be combined in an overall assessment of how well WWU's GUR program is performing for the selected literacy and focal points. It should be clear that this evaluation is *NOT* of specific faculty who have volunteered to participate in this assessment, but of the *GUR program's* performance.

The "improvement" work done in the alternating years without assessment would be done by working with the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education and the Center for Instructional Innovation and Assessment to inform all faculty teaching in the evaluated area (not just those who participated in the assessment) about the results and to support faculty in continuing to improve the effectiveness of their courses with a focus on addressing issues raised in the assessment process. The specifics of how this would be performed would vary with the literacy/focal point being assessed and the assessment results. Availability of funding for faculty development would also likely play a role here. Selecting GUR literacies and focal points for evaluation that are of strategic importance to the university at the time of assessment may help with obtaining this funding.

CUE might occasionally consider larger systemic changes based on what is learned in the assessment process, though given the effort necessary to implement these changes, this is expected to be rare. An example of this from the recent past is the proposal to overhaul university writing that was developed by CUE in 2018, in part as a response to assessment of the engagement of WWU students in longer writing projects.

Bi-Annual Assessment Report Form and Rubric

Academic Year Due: 2023-2024

Please submit to your College Dean with your Departmental Annual Report by the End of the academic year and to jackherring@wwu.edu at that time

Note: Please save the report in MS Word and submit it in that format. This makes it easier for us to make accessible for the web.

Department:

Student Learning Outcomes Assessed This Year *(Please use this table to report assessment of two SLOs for each degree program)*:

Assessment Measures	SLOs Assessed	Degree	Results
Example: large ensemble concerts occurring at the end of each quarter	*(from the master assessment plan)*		*Example: Faculty evaluated large ensemble performances with our rubric; results indicate 45% of graduates are at standard for SLO 5 and 68% are at standard for SLO 6. In response, the department revised music theory curricula to include a stronger emphasis on . . . .*

Bi-annual Assessment Report Rubric (*2023-24*)

Keep these criteria in mind as you complete your report.

	Best Practice	At Standard	Developing	Unacceptable

Level of Faculty Participation	Broad faculty participation	Select faculty participation with departmental discussion.	Select faculty participation.	Minimal faculty participation.
Frequency and Meaningfulness of Assessment	1. All degree or program SLOs assessed twice in a 7-year cycle. 2. Assessments meaningfully connected to improvement efforts.	1. All degree or program SLOs assessed at least once in a 7-year cycle. 2. Assessments meaningfully connected to improvement efforts.	Some SLOs not assessed, but selected SLO assessments meaningfully connected to improvement efforts.	Some SLOs not assessed, and elected SLO assessments not meaningfully connected to improvement efforts.
Measures*	1. SLO assessment includes meaningful & quantifiable** direct measures. 2. Indirect measures meaningfully supplement direct measures.	SLO assessment includes 1 quantifiable** and meaningful direct measure for each outcome.	SLO assessment includes direct measures but they are not sufficiently meaningful or quantifiable.	No direct measures of student learning.
Reporting Results	Reported results detail meaningful conclusions sufficient to support data-informed and measurable improvements.	Reported results permit actionable improvements but in a manner that is inferential rather than measurable.	Reported results are not sufficiently specific or meaningful to permit data-informed improvements.	No results reported.

*Measures should target the senior class level and include measures for both the degree and program level.

**Quantifiable measures report the percentage of students found to be at or above standard for the SLO being evaluated.

"CLOSING THE LOOP": IMPROVEMENT BRAINSTORMING SHEET

Type of Change	Example/Your Draft Improvements
Curricular	Change prerequisites or GE requirements; Add required courses; Replace existing courses with new ones; Change course sequence; Add internships, labs and other hands-on learning opportunities. **Your Improvements:**

Faculty Support	Increase number of TAs or peer mentors; Add specialized support to faculty (Library, Academic Technology, etc.); Increase support to promote dialogues and community among faculty. **Your Improvements:**
Faculty Development	Provide targeted professional development opportunities. **Your Improvements:**
Pedagogy	Change course assignments; Add more active-learning components to course design; Change textbooks; Increase opportunities for formative feedback and peer-assisted learning. **Your Improvements:**
Student Support	Increase tutors; Add more online resources; Improve advising to make sure students take the right courses; Provide resources to encourage community building among students and between students and faculty; Bring graduates back to discuss work opportunities related to the major. **Your Improvements:**
Resources	Change the course management system; Improve or expand lab spaces; Provide resources to support student independent research. **Your Improvements:**
Assessment Plan	Refine SLO statements; Change methods and/or measures; Change where (e.g. courses) the data are collected; Collect additional data; Improve data reporting and dissemination mechanisms. **Your Improvements**:

"CLOSING THE LOOP": PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT DOCUMENTATION
ACADEMIC YEAR: 2022-2023
Please submit to your College Dean with your Annual Report by the End of the 2022-2023 academic year and also to jackherring@wwu.edu at that time

COLLEGE: **DEPARTMENT OR PROGRAM:**

CHAIR OR DIRECTOR: **ASSESSMENT COORDINATOR:**

One of this year's assessment tasks is to document program improvements informed by SLO assessment and other forms of evidence. Use this form to document your improvements and the evidence and discussion that informed them.

Type of Change	Degree	SLOs Targeted	Description of Program Improvement	Rationale and Level of Faculty Involvement	Evidence that will demonstrate if this change improves student learning.

Type of Change	Degree	SLOs Targeted	Description of Program Improvement	Rationale and Level of Faculty Involvement	Evidence that will demonstrate if this change improves student learning.

Closing-the-loop Reporting for WWU Departments and Academic Programs: Sources and Strategies

2022-2023 Academic Year

Closing-the-loop reports should be submitted to your Dean for their review along with departmental annual reports and should be sent to the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education at the same time (jackherring@wwu.edu).

The goal of the CTL process is to document the implementation of improvements informed by the assessment of student learning outcomes, and by all other indirect and direct sources of information about the effectiveness of your curriculum.

Here are instructions.

Step 1: Review the SLO assessment results you reported most recently. These are available on the WWU Sharepoint website here: https://wwu2.sharepoint.com/sites/Accreditation/ASLO/Assesment%20Library/Forms/AllItems.aspx. You can also get to this site easily by doing a Google search for "WWU assessment". The first result will then lead you to a link to "2018-2023 Assessment Reports". Once you are in this database, you can filter by college, department, program, or assessment cycle year (we are currently in year 6 of the accreditation cycle).

Step 2. Review any feedback you may have received from professional advisory boards or employers, as well as the indirect assessment data concerning your students and graduates made available by Western's office of Institutional Research. This data includes the following:

A. Trend data on time to degree, degree majors awarded, and majors enrolled is available within the Department Details section of Factbook: https://oie.wwu.edu/department-details/

B. Information on graduate outcomes: https://oie.wwu.edu/employment-security-wage-data/

In light of the above data and ongoing, qualitative information, such as information shared at department meetings, please document program improvements that you made or are making since your last CTL report on the CTL template. The template includes examples for each kind of improvement possible. Please be specific as to which degrees in your department or program that each improvement applies to.

As these will be the last CTL reports submitted before the next accreditation site visit, we encourage departments to think broadly and as comprehensively as possible about your program improvement efforts and to document those in this reporting process.