

GER SUMMARY OF PILOT GROUP'S ASSESSMENT REPORTS

Assessing GER courses enables faculty to teach GER courses more effectively as GER Courses. Participants in the pilot study were given strategies for interpreting GER category objectives for their courses, creating learning outcomes designed to help students meet the objectives, and identifying means of evaluating those outcomes. When applied to their GER courses, for the pilot faculty, the assessment provided data that allowed them to better evaluate their students' learning and, where appropriate, to generate changes in their courses to enhance learning. Eleven faculty engaged in the pilot study. The following information is summarized from the pilot study assessment reports

How is this GER assessment method improving the teaching of GER courses?

The GER assessment process was helpful to the pilot faculty by enabling them to see their courses from the perspective of student learning and thus to reshape and reconceive their courses to improve learning. Faculty expressed a greater appreciation for the opportunity for "change and creativity." Many expressed their surprise that they were already complying with GER objectives; however, through minor adjustments, they found that they could deliver instruction that could provide for greater clarity and understanding of the objectives. The following is a collection of observations about improved teaching.

- "Overall, this has been an extremely helpful process. Using the GER objectives provided much more clarity and direction during the development of assignments. I have often struggled with how to construct previous homework assignments. However, I will continue to utilize previous structure, changing only the articles and ads that are evaluated."
- "I realized my expectations for my students (all first-semester freshmen) were higher than they are likely to achieve. Indeed, junior and senior history majors have difficulty evaluating historical sources. One option, then, would be to change the outcome so that it expresses a more realistic expectation. My experience in this course, has led to other changes for future classes. I found that my students made greater progress in their writing than in their speaking. Thus, I plan to reduce the number of writing assignments and to substitute instead more classroom discussion. I also found that students on this level require more instruction in basic college skills. I will focus on basic research and learning-skills, such as using electronic research tools and note-taking."

- “Students learned how to analyze works of art without knowing that that was what they were doing, so when I then asked them to do an analysis they did not know that they knew how to do that. To correct this problem, I plan to frame sessions in which we do analysis with some explicit talk about the process of analysis and evaluation. I plan to offer some definitions on the first day, and insist that we stick with them rather than let these definitions gradually emerge from discussion. I wove comments on the historical background of works of art into the discussion, but because I offered them simply as one more component of discussion, which they dominated, many students missed the fact that this historical background is important. Next time, I plan to have students make reports on historical background before students first see or read the work of art, and frame these reports with comments on the kind of importance historical background may have. The prompt for the presentations and papers needs to be reworded to make it clearer that the concepts of inquiry, risks, creativity, and ethics must arise from the works themselves, and not from students’ other experiences, which the works of art are then used to illustrate.”
- “Students will be given a copy of the performance rubric at the beginning of the semester. This will enhance their understanding of the fitness and physical skill demands of the game. The class rubric will be “streamlined” to better illustrate different skill requirements without being cumbersome. Class discussion of rules will include a section pertaining to etiquette and safety and how those two areas can be similar yet separate entities.”

How well are students learning the stated GER objectives from these pilot courses?

Generally speaking, students in the pilot courses met the objectives to the satisfaction of the teachers. In the instances where students did not, faculty had specific information about what needed to be refined in teaching the course. Some faculty also discovered that the question most often asked by students, “what is expected of me,” was largely diminished once students received their course syllabi with objectives, grading scale, and outcomes indicated on of them. The following is a collection of observations about how well students learned from the courses:

- “Average scores on homework assignments were higher than previous assignments. Rubrics were used which evaluated the accuracy, clarity, depth, relevance, logic, and significance of their answers.
- “Increased confidence and fluency among most students as the semester progressed. Quiet students participated more frequently in class discussions.”
- “During the course of the semester, students showed steady growth in their ability to report accurately the comments made in class analyzing the historical, cultural

and aesthetic dimensions of the works we studied. By the end of the semester, everyone was able to report, reflect on, and criticize salient ideas reliably.”

What improvements have been made to the GER pilot courses as a result of this assessment?

Faculty plan to refine assignments, and the selection of assigned articles and readings, in order to improve student learning. Approaches to teaching and exercises have been identified and modified. Though some faculty stated that only minor adjustments were made, others made more substantial changes. The following is a selection shown course changes related to GER assessment:

- “GER objectives provided much more clarity and direction during the development of new assignments. Only minor structural changes such as articles and ads.”
- “Teaching freshmen has led to the following observation: reduce the number of writing assignments, substituting more classroom discussion. Focus more on basic research and learning-skills, such as using electronic research tools and note-taking.”
- “I plan to offer some definitions on the first day, and insist that we stick with them rather than let these definitions gradually emerge from discussion.”
- “Students will be given a copy of the performance rubric at the beginning of the semester. This will enhance their understanding of the fitness and physical skill demands of the game.”