

GER Assessment

What We Plan To Do With the Results

NC State has instituted a course-based procedure for assessing GERs. According to this procedure, faculty teaching GER courses will create student learning outcomes specific to their courses, outcomes that enable students to meet the appropriate general GER category objectives. Faculty will then designate specific means of evaluating those outcomes and then, based on the results of their evaluation, write an evaluation report describing the extent to which students were able to meet the outcomes and, where necessary, outline pedagogical strategies for enhancing student performance in those outcomes. This procedure is designed to provide data that will improve general education at NC State. This course-based procedure for assessing GER is a formative assessment process. A summative assessment of the GER Assessment process will need to be conducted at some point to assess the overarching values of the general education program. Before conducting this type of assessment, a formative assessment of the program should be conducted so that faculty can improve their courses as GER courses.

The most important improvement that will come from the data is that faculty teaching GER courses will be better able to teach their courses effectively as GER courses. This is a significant advance over the present system, in which professors have no opportunity to evaluate their courses as GER courses. Generating GER student learning outcomes and measuring student performance related to those outcomes will give professors a standard by which they can evaluate their GER courses, a standard that is appropriate both to the general GER objective and to their particular courses. The results of that assessment, which will provide the basis for their assessment reports, will allow professors to shape their courses to better enable students to achieve the GER category objectives.

Academic departments can also use the assessment results as a way to improve their overall GER course offerings. Faculty assessment reports will be collected by undergraduate coordinators and reviewed periodically by undergraduate committees. These committees will be charged with summarizing the reports, noting strengths and weaknesses in their GER offerings and what if any action the department has taken to enhance the effectiveness of its GER courses. These reports will be sent to the deans' offices in each college and then to the Council on Undergraduate Education (CUE).

As the university committee designated to oversee the GERs, the CUE is ultimately responsible for the success of general education at NC State. The CUE has many ways in which it can enact that responsibility. It has created GER objectives that will guide each GER course in meeting its requirements as a GER course, it will review the student learning outcomes and means of assessing

those outcomes for each proposed GER course, it will review departmental assessment reports on a periodic basis, and it will review all courses up for renewal of GER status, with the right to request GER assessment reports for those courses. Thus, the results of course-based GER assessment will provide the CUE with valuable data for overseeing general education.

This overall assessment plan may also have an important impact on departments that undergo external review, such as professional accreditation. Oftentimes, reviewers want information about students' experience outside their major, particularly general education courses. Departments will now be able to point to the GER objectives that all GER courses should meet as well as to the assessment procedures in place that seeks to assure that students taking those courses meet the objectives. As further evidence, they can show reviewers student learning outcomes for courses their students typically take and assessment reports from those courses.

Course-based GER assessment represents a major step forward for general education at NC State. The results of this assessment can be used to make significant and continuous improvement of the courses that comprise the GERs. We recognize, however, that we cannot rely on course-based assessment alone. The next step, once this assessment is on track, is to assess the broader goals of general education. These goals will first need to be identified (they may include such attributes as an understanding and appreciation of diversity and critical thinking) and defined and then an appropriate means of assessment designated. Perhaps this assessment will include identifying and following a cohort of students and periodically evaluating that cohort based on prescribed parameters. Of course, such assessment does not have the advantage of directly affecting individual classes, as course-based assessment has, but we feel that it is important to assess these broader goals, a process that could to a freshly conceived general education requirement at NC State.