

General Education Assessment

Illinois State University

Procedures Manual

I. Value of Assessing General Education

The ability to accurately describe the learning which occurs on a college campus challenges many institutions of higher education. While still complex, measuring students' abilities and skills related to discipline knowledge is often aided by the discrete and recognizable nature of the skills taught in the disciplines. Determining someone's ability to apply a mathematical theory or make use of effective writing techniques, may be more easily accomplished than assessing the values encompassed by a General Education program. Yet, the goals of General Education are some of the most essential aspects of a college education.

The Institutional Portfolio Process for General Education Assessment has been designed to help illustrate students' acquisition and demonstration of those vital skills addressed in the General Education Program at ISU. Information collected from the Institutional Portfolio will provide ISU faculty with specific data to address areas of strength and weakness of the current General Education curriculum. Lastly, the Institutional Portfolio meets assessment requirements for the General Education program as set forth by the Illinois Board of Higher Education and the North Central Accreditation Agency.

II. The Goals of the General Education Program at Illinois State University and the Shared Learning Outcomes

As previously stated, ISU's Goals of General Education embody some of the most important purposes of American higher education. Appropriately, the General Education program and its goals are the responsibility of the ISU faculty, represented by the Council for General Education. Utilizing the twelve goals of the General Education program, four shared learning outcomes were determined in an attempt to capture the more than 40 distinct skills or abilities outlined for students as a part of the goals of the General Education curriculum. The development of the four shared learning outcomes allowed for a manageable and effective, yet non-intrusive, system for assessment to be developed. The four shared learning outcomes represent students' capacity to critically think and solve problems, to comprehend and contribute to diverse and global perspectives, to be a steward of life-long learning, to advance public opportunity, and communicate their abilities and thoughts in all areas. Additionally, these four shared learning outcomes are certainly credible outcomes that capture the intentions and purpose of General Education in the college curriculum.

Illinois State University Vision & Values <i>(Educating Illinois)</i>	General Education Program Values <i>(Gen. Ed Webpage)</i>	General Education Goals <i>(As reviewed by Council for Gen Ed)</i>	Shared Learning Outcomes in General Education
Active Pursuit of Learning & Scholarship Innovation	Critical Thinking	2, 4, 5, 11	Critical Inquiry and Problem Solving
	Interdisciplinary approaches	1, 3, 4, 8, 9, 12	Life-Long Learning
Public Opportunity	Maximizing use of university resources	7, 12	Public Opportunity
Diversity	Global Perspectives	6, 10	Diverse and Global Perspectives

Shared Learning Outcome #1

Critical Inquiry and Problem Solving

Students will develop and communicate a range of interests and curiosities, engaging those interests and curiosities through critical thinking, reasoning, and problem solving.

General Education Goals

2. Provide for the systematic development of critical thinking, quantitative reasoning, and communication skills. As a result, students will be able to:
 - a. Critically evaluate a wide variety of ideas and express that analysis in both writing and speaking.
 - b. Use quantitative reasoning appropriate to the particular problems they address.
4. Provide for student involvement in learning that is active and continuous. As a result, students will be able to:
 - a. Articulate their position on a variety of issues, understanding the context of others' viewpoints.
5. Develop the ability to make informed, well reasoned moral and ethical judgments. As a result, students will be able to:
 - a. Recognize moral issues and apply relevant principles and arguments to their resolution.
11. Develop an understanding of the earth's environment, including the natural forces and specific human activities that impinge upon it. As a result, students will be able to:
 - a. Evaluate the real and potential consequences of natural, ideological, and social forces that affect life.
 - b. Demonstrate an understanding of the interactive links between the development and use of technology and the biosphere.

Shared Learning Outcome #2

Public Opportunity

Students will identify the resources and articulate the subsequent value of civic and community engagement.

General Education Goals

7. Develop the ability to function as a responsible participant in the social, economic, technological, and political dimensions of life within local, national, and global communities. As a result students will be able to:
 - a. Describe different ways in which the social, economic, technological, and political dimensions of life are known and conducted.
 - b. Analyze the meaning and purpose of individual and social life, focusing on such concepts or institutions as family, religion, business, and the state.
 - c. Formulate a critically informed position on participation in civic life.
12. Foster an understanding of the social and collaborative nature of knowledge and learning. As a result, students will be able to:
 - a. Account for the influence of context upon the creation and use of knowledge.

Shared Learning Outcome #3

Diverse and Global Perspectives

Students will be exposed to diverse and global perspectives by developing and communicating an appreciation for the impact made in personal and professional lives.

General Education Goals

6. Develop a critical appreciation of a wide range of aesthetic experiences. As a result, students will be able to:
 - a. Formulate interpretations of diverse forms of creative expression.
 - b. Understand the role of the individual as creator in diverse depth of human creativity.

10. Develop an acquaintance with the civilizations of the world, the many ethnic traditions that create American culture, and the emerging common civilization of the contemporary world community. As a result, students will be able to:
 - a. Identify and critically reflect upon the major institutions, movements, ideas, and values which characterize the past and present of culture in the United States.
 - b. Identify and critically reflect upon the major institutions, movements, ideas, and values which characterize the past and present of culture in Western cultures.
 - c. Identify and critically reflect upon the major institutions, movements, ideas, and values which characterize the past and present of world cultures.
 - d. Investigate cross-cultural issues, including human nature, human rights, gender, race and religion globally.

Shared Learning Outcome #4

Life-Long Learning

Students will utilize the skills indicative of an effective life-long learner actively pursuing knowledge and applying new information and skills in interdisciplinary approaches.

General Education Goals

1. Focus on the acquisition and application of a common core of knowledge, drawn from the humanities, sciences, and social sciences. As a result, students will be able to:
 - a. Assess the relative value of literacy and artistic works for themselves and for contemporary society.
 - b. Recognize the significant events, ideas, individuals, artifacts, and institutions that have shaped our knowledge of the world.
 - c. Describe principle scientific and mathematical concepts used to understand both the natural world and the technologies that modify it.
 - d. Illustrate the relevance of science and technology to problems connected with the quality of life for individuals and communities.

3. Integrate general education with the major through the identification, exploration, and development of common dimensions. As a result, students will be able to:
 - a. Develop skills that can be incorporated within their majors.

4. Provide for student involvement in learning that is active and continuous. As a result, students will be able to:
 - a. Articulate their position on a variety of issues, understanding the context of others' viewpoints.

8. Provide opportunities to explore connections among ideas from the perspectives of different disciplines. As a result, students will be able to:

- a. Discuss how and why different fields may legitimately develop various formulations of a single issue.
 - b. Explore the ramifications of knowledge across disciplinary fields.
9. Provide learning experiences on issues and themes that transcend the boundaries of traditional disciplines. As a result, students will be able to:
- a. Contribute to collaborative efforts involving two or more disciplines.
12. Foster an understanding of the social and collaborative nature of knowledge and learning. As a result, students will be able to:
- a. Account for the influence of context upon the creation and use of knowledge.

III. Institutional Portfolio Process for General Education Assessment

What is an Institutional Portfolio for General Education?

At Illinois State University, an Institutional Artifact Portfolio [IAP] will be a collection and subsequent review of student work (a.k.a. artifacts) produced for each of four shared learning outcomes based upon the 12 goals of General Education. A compilation and analysis of the artifacts will occur (as detailed throughout this document) and an annual report will be generated based upon a pre-determined assessment cycle. The unit of analysis will be the *institution*, not the class, faculty member, or student.

How does an Institutional Portfolio work?

The collection and compilation of artifacts will be organized and managed by the University Assessment Office; per the Provost's charge. Each semester faculty teaching courses in the targeted core [*Inner, Middle, or Outer*] and shared outcome [*Public Opportunity, Diverse and Global Perspectives, Critical Thinking and Inquiry and Lifelong Learning*] under review will be invited to submit student artifacts that address the assessment items as outlined by a rubric which has been designed for each of the four shared learning outcomes. This process will occur during the fall and spring semesters, and will exclude the summer term. This is a voluntary system with no penalty for not participating and faculty retain the autonomy to select the assignment(s) for review. However, the process requires that faculty submit artifacts from all students in their course.

Once participants are identified a scheduled submission date is determined by the faculty. On that date, a staff member from the UAO will pick up the artifacts from the faculty member, copy them, and return the artifacts to the faculty member within one business day. This process will occur prior to faculty grading so as to avoid influencing reviewers' opinions of artifact quality. The UAO will then code the copies, remove any identifying student information, and prepare the artifacts for review. Since the General Education program is the collective responsibility of the ISU Faculty, the review of the artifacts will be carried out by teams of multi-disciplinary ISU faculty using the four developed rubrics. The results will be generated by a consensus process; as an "average score" is not relevant to the rubrics which have been designed for the review process.

The results of each semester's review will be further analyzed by the UAO and background institutional data will be introduced into the analysis. Results of the annual institutional portfolio assessment will be reported by the University Assessment Office directly to the Council for General Education. The CGE will then evaluate the assessment results to make informed decisions about the General Education program.

The benefits of the Institutional Portfolio model for assessing General Education is that it is minimally intrusive to students and faculty. No additional tests are required. In fact, students see no changes in their courses or demands whatsoever. Additionally, all that is required of faculty is

for them to review the rubric(s) and consider what assignment(s) in their syllabus meets the criteria which they would be willing to have reviewed by the faculty team.

Source: Seybert, J. (2005). *The institutional portfolio: A performance-based model for assessment of General Education*. Presentation given October 25, 2005 at the Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis Assessment Institute.

IV. Steps in the Institutional Portfolio Process for General Education Assessment

A. Invitation to submit artifacts

During the first week of the Fall and Spring semesters faculty teaching general education courses in the targeted Core and Shared Learning Outcome will receive a letter from the Provost inviting them to participate in the semester's General Education Assessment and a corresponding memo from the Director of University Assessment. Included in the letter will be the primary traits representing the Shared Learning Outcome for which the assessment is targeted and for which the faculty member can identify an assignment or collection of assignments [no more than three] that meet the criteria. Specific instructions will be provided regarding how the faculty should proceed if they elect to participate. The faculty member has 10 business days to respond to the invitation; a follow-up e-mail reminder will be sent 5 business days following the initial invitation.

B. Faculty elect to participate and submit required information

After reviewing the primary traits for the Shared Learning Outcome faculty may elect to participate in the assessment process by identifying one (1) assignment [discovery activity, paper, speech, exam, etc.] or a collection of **no more** than three (3) complimentary assignments [whether individual assignments or excerpts from a required student portfolio] that address the majority of the criteria outlined. Faculty will be instructed to complete an on-line **Intent to Participate** form accessed from the University Assessment Office – Gen Ed Assessment web page which includes the following information:

- Course Name and Number
- Section Number
- Number of Students Enrolled in the Course – based upon any census data they have available at the time
- Faculty Name
- Faculty E-mail
- Faculty Telephone
- Name of Assignment(s)
- Scheduled Due Date(s)
- Brief description of the expected assignment artifact [i.e., paper, video DVD, sculpture, etc.]
- Preferred date, time and location of artifact pick-up
- Faculty will also be instructed to attach a copy of the proposed assignment

[Link to Intent to Participate form](#)

C. Artifact preparation by faculty/students

For the purpose of tracking artifacts a standardized cover sheet must accompany each assignment identified. Faculty can instruct students where to access this cover sheet from the UAO – Gen Ed Assessment website. Faculty will also be provided an e-mail reminder regarding their participation in the Gen Ed Assessment process which will have a link to the coversheet

which faculty may also send to their students. The coversheet must accompany all artifacts including visual items such as DVDs, photographs, sculptures, etc. The coversheet will request the following information:

- Course Abbreviation and Number
- Course Section Number
- Name of Faculty member
- Student UID – No Names Please
- Assignment Number - [1 of 1, 2 of 2, 2 of 3, or 3 of 3 – this will be a check box] This is especially important for those artifacts which have been determined to meet the rubric requirements as part of a series of assignments. **Faculty will need to instruct students how to respond to this question.**

[Link to Student Cover Sheet](#)

D. Artifact pick-up and Return

Based upon the preferred date/time indicated by the faculty member on the original **Intent to Participate** form, a date, time, and location will be confirmed with the faculty member 2-weeks prior to pick-up. The faculty member will also receive an e-mail reminder of the scheduled pick-up date/time/location 2-days prior to its occurrence. Faculty may request a change in artifact pick-up at anytime via the UAO General Education Assessment – Change Artifact Pick-up page. A final date/time/location will always be confirmed with an e-mail message.

A member of the University Assessment Office staff will collect all artifacts on the confirmed date/time/location. The artifacts will be directly returned to the UAO office where they will be duplicated and returned within one (1) business day. All artifacts will be returned to the Department/School Office in a secured box which is labeled for the faculty member. To insure receipt of the returned artifacts a two-part signed receipt form will be used.

E. Artifact Review

The Gen Ed Assessment review teams will be populated by tenure track and 50% or greater appointment non-tenure track faculty and administrative professionals with teaching responsibilities. The review teams will be comprised of 2-3 persons who will review each artifact based upon the rubric for the Shared Learning Outcome. The team must reach a consensus; as an “average” score is not possible based upon the rubric’s design.

F. Data compiled

The data derived from the review teams will be compiled in conjunction with institutional background data to provide the most accurate results regarding student performance among the Shared Learning Outcomes.

G. Data reported to Council for General Education

Results of the annual Institutional Artifact Portfolio assessment will be reported by the University Assessment Office directly to the Council for General Education. The results will be reported by academic year and provided to the CGE on or before September 30th. The CGE will then evaluate the assessment results to make informed decisions about the General Education program. A summary of CGE’s response to the annual results will be published in the Spring issue of the University Assessment Office’s newsletter *Progressive Measures*.