## **Observations of Capturing, Displaying, and Downloading General Education SLOs for ANT 2000, General Anthropology**

Kenneth E. Sassaman October 11, 2016

## Background

In 2016 General Anthropology (ANT 2000) became one of six statewide General Education options for Social and Behavioral Sciences. Until this year, ANT 2000 was required of Anthropology majors at the University of Florida. It no longer is, but it remains a popular General Education (S) course. The department routinely enrolls about 300-400 students in two or three section every semester. I taught the course regularly for nine years (2000-2008), and returned to it this year with a new, online version and a simultaneous in-class section. The inclass section (6354) has 133 enrollees; the online sections (18F3, 18F7) total 216 enrollees, 33 of which are UFO students. Another in-class section taught by a Ph.D. student has another ~130 students. Summed up, ANT 2000 is delivered to about 480 students this term and is expected to maintain or grow this number in years to come. I consider ANT 2000 to be *the* General Education course that everyone should take.

I worked this past summer with a former Ph.D. student of mine, Zack Gilmore (now at Rollins College) and the course development staff of CLAS to design and construct the online version of ANT 2000. After the course was developed, I met with Dr. Tim Brophy to review the protocols for implementing General Education Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs), as well as course-specific SLOs. I worked in Canvas to achieve these goals for all assessments of ANT 2000. The online course consists of 12 modules, each of which has a quiz and discussion board. Students also have 10 individual assignments involve research and writing, and three objective exams, based on the quiz test banks. Added up, there are 37 assessments for which General Education SLOs apply. All of the quizzes (12) and exams (3) involve *Content* SLOs; the discussion boards (12) and assignments (10) involve *Critical Thinking* and *Communication* SLOs. Six course-specific SLOs (*Anthropological Perspectives, Biological Variation, Cultural Variation, Biocultural Variation, Processes of Change, and Modern Relevance*) are distributed across discussion boards and assignments as applicable. I should note that although ANT 2000 has many assessments involving short writing projects, this is not a Gordon Rule course.

On Monday, October 10, 2016 I met with a General Education Subcommittee chaired by Dr. Eva Czarnecka-Verner to review the structure of ANT 2000 as it pertains to the collection and display of General Education SLOs. I agreed to supply this short report on the challenges of doing so in the Canvas platform in which this course is delivered. The online and in-class versions of ANT 2000 are parallel, the only substantive difference being that lectures for the online version are taped.

## SLO Data Collection, Display, and Download

ANT 2000 was designed in Canvas to collect data on General Education and course-specific SLOs through the rubric utility for grading assessments. In the observations that follow, the

discussion boards and assignments each involve *Critical Thinking* and *Communication* SLOs, as well as course-specific SLOs. *Content* SLOs are restricted to quizzes and exams, which are 100% objective and require no writing.

In constructing the *Critical Thinking* and *Communication* SLOs I chose the default binary rubric of "Mastery" and "Non-Mastery." A tripartite scheme of "exceeds," "meets," or "does not meet" the criteria of Mastery is apparently available for General Education SLOs, but I used only the binary option. All of the course-specific SLOs are assessed with the tripartite rubric. In my opinion, binary and tripartite rubrics are virtually the same if what constitutes Mastery in the latter is the "meets" value. I also chose to not count the score of General Education and course-specific SLOs toward a student's grade. Grades on assignments and discussion boards come from assessment-specific criteria in the rubrics, which vary from simple to complex.

Numerical outcomes for SLOs are coded in the rubric through SpeedGrader and those values are captured in Canvas and displayed in the "Learning Mastery" of the "Grades" utility. For the binary General Education SLOs, possible values are either 1 (Mastery) or 0 (Non-Mastery); for the tripartite course-specific SLOs, possible values are 5 (exceeds), 3 (meets), or 0 (does not meet).

Now, a problem arises due to the option I chose in designing this class to record only the highest value attained for SLOs across all assessments. Thus, a student may fail to meet Mastery of, say, *Communcation* for all but one of the assessments but have a value equivalent to Mastery in the Grade Book. The raw data on individual assessments are embedded in the records of individual students, but the Grade Book displays only the highest score achieved, which is almost always 1 for the binary and 3 for the tripartite.

What is needed is a means to collate all values for SLOs by student and generate an average for all assessments. This may have been an option that I overlooked in constructing the course, but if so, it is not obvious. Again, they data are there, they just do not appear in a format that is viewable and downloadable, as far as I know.

On a related topic, it would be beneficial to have capacity for SLOs to be calculated from the point values of criteria specific to the assessments. This appears to be the case with *Content* SLOs associated with objective exams, where values of at least 60% qualify for Mastery of *Content* (although even in these cases the values are not automatically coded in the rubric and require the grader to click the appropriate box based on quiz or exam point value). There is no such articulation between assessment-specific values and those of *Critical Thinking* and *Communication* SLOs. A course designer ought to be able to assign value thresholds for assessment-specific criteria that then trigger the appropriate values for General Education and course-specific SLOs.

I will set aside for now any discussion of thresholds for Mastery and simply reiterate that a structure that captures all point values for SLOs and averages them (either straight up or as decaying averages) would enable real time monitoring of student outcomes throughout the semester and the collation of final outcomes at the end of the semester. Ideally, it would be great

to have these data exported to whatever General Education authority seeks them without adding more burden on the instructor to supply these data.

## Miscellany

A couple of other observations for what they are worth. First, my personal threshold for what constitutes Mastery of Critical Thinking is much higher than what is currently coded for ANT 2000. I would estimate that no more than 25% of 349 students are able to understand what a problem entails as far as data gathering and evaluation, inference of pattern, synthesis, and explanation of cause, effect, synergies, and collateral factors. They do not seem to have the skills to differentiate between legitimate knowledge claims and unsupported assertions, and they suffer from society-wide biases about class, health, race, gender, and American exceptionalism. ANT 2000 is a good place to help students develop better criterial thinking skills. I spend considerable time and effort writing lengthy emails to all students explaining why they did not "master" the critical thinking of a particular assessment. Their communication skills are OK on average although weak critical thinking skill fosters muddled writing, even as the syntax and grammar are fine.

The second observation has to do with the effectiveness of the online learning experience. As noted above, I am teaching both an online and in-class version of ANT 2000 this semester. The only difference between the two is that the online version has taped lectures that the students view each week, while the in-class version has me lecturing ~2.5 hours a week using the exact same PowerPoint presentations. All individual assignments, discussion boards, quizzes, and exams are exactly the same. Over the first half of this semester, the in-class students earned, on average, 10% more points per assessment than did their online counterparts. As much as I try to make the online experience just as good as the in-class version, the outcomes are evidently divergent. I am not optimistic that online versions of classes, no matter how good they may be, will be as effective as in-class versions, all else being equal.