

## Implementation of Internal Assessment of the General Education Content, Critical Thinking and Communications SLOs

It is recommended that courses which already use appropriate assessments related to the Gen Ed SLOs continue to make use of them, pending approval of the Gen Ed Committee. The purpose of this document is to provide assistance to instructors who are developing new courses or who teach existing courses that lack assessments of one or more Gen Ed SLOs (for content, critical thinking, and communication)

The content SLO relates to knowledge of the concepts, principles, terminology and methodologies used within a discipline. This may easily be assessed by developing a project intended to address content, by assigning a paper or presentation topic or by administering an exam.

Some suggestions for the assessment of content in General Education course are provided below. These are presented not as recommendations, but ways to help instructors see that varied approaches may be used to assess content/knowledge in a discipline.

1. Selected response or short answer exams: These can be extremely efficient ways of assessing discrete elements of knowledge in a short period of time, especially beneficial in large lecture courses. Although it can provide a good assessment tool for knowledge and patterns of reasoning, it may be limited in terms of assessing critical thinking and communications SLOs.
2. Extended written response and essay topic: A writing assignment may be designed to address course content. A written assignment can be a good solution to assess students' understanding of relationships among elements of knowledge, and reasoning proficiency. Written assignments addressing a complex problem or topic can also tap into both the critical thinking and communication SLOs as well as be an indicator of content knowledge. It is important for instructor to have clear grading criteria, and word limit (500 words), or whatever limit is practical given the class size and topic complexity).
3. In some courses a performance or presentation assignment may be the best tool to assess content acquisition. A short presentation, demonstration, or project may be designed to best watch students solve problems, "to think out-loud", and infer reasoning, knowledge and skill proficiency related to the content of the course. A well-designed topical performance or presentation assignment can allow students to demonstrate content knowledge, communication and perhaps critical thinking as they are probed to ask related questions related to the course content or topic explored. (See communication suggestions below for more ideas about implementing a presentation assignment that addresses both course content and communication General Education SLOs).

### CRITICAL THINKING PORTION HERE?

The critical thinking SLO relates to: ...

The communication SLO relates to students' abilities to develop and express ideas in oral or written form. In many classes, this may be most easily assessed using a graded writing assignment or a

presentation. In small classes, it is appropriate and practical to use a writing assignment that takes the form of a report, research paper, essay, short story, or critical review. A presentation in a small class might include a persuasive speech, research presentation, brief lecture, or a critical review.

Larger classes present logistical issues, especially for assessing presentations. The value of class time for lectures may, in many cases, make individual student presentations impractical, no matter how brief these might be. Where teachers lack grading assistance, written assignments may also prove challenging. While acknowledging these difficulties, it is important that instructors find innovative and engaging ways to assess communication in their large-section Gen Ed classes.

Some suggestions for the assessment of communication are provided below. These are presented not as recommendations, but ways to help instructors see that innovative solutions can make assessment practical even in large classes.

1. Mediated filmed presentations: As suggested earlier, incorporating presentations in large section classes is often considered impractical because it would require too much class time. One professor on campus avoids this issue by having students mediate their presentations. Students are tasked with filming themselves using widely available recording devices such as phones or inexpensive cameras. Powerful but easy-to-use video editing software available on both Windows and Mac operating systems is then used by students to edit the videos. The final products are posted on YouTube and shared with instructors and classmates. This approach avoids the need to use class time, since the presentations can be viewed at any time. To manage the demands of watching video presentations, they are limited to no more than three minutes. Grading and feedback is supplemented with peer assessments, guided by a communication rubric, that score the presentations and provide feedback.
2. Mediated recorded presentations: A number of presentation tools are available for instructors who wish to assign online presentations in which students do not film themselves but use tools similar to PowerPoint. One example is Prezentit: <http://prezentit.com/>. Students can create presentations and store them online, for no cost.
3. In-class group presentation: Oral presentations in large classes are also more practical when done by groups. The need to ensure an opportunity for individual assessment can be satisfied by requiring that each student in a group have some defined speaking role.

Presentation assignments are generally more effective when an instructor is clear about the communication goals, expectations for quality and polish, the nature of the intended target audience, and the need for students to rehearse. These practices are even more important in large sections. In addition, providing students with clear written instructions on the use of editing or presentation software is helpful for mediated presentations.

### Writing assignments

Assessing the communications SLO with a writing assignment is common practice in smaller Gen Ed sections, but may seem impractical in large classes. Assessment is more manageable when writing assignments are specific (is the assignment meant to inform, persuade, analyze, critique, etc.) brief (500

word limit, or whatever limit is practical given the class size and topic complexity), and focused (intended audience, exact topic). It may be appropriate to use some peer evaluations of written assignments as a way to manage assessment.

#### Incentives for Assessment

The most common incentive for student participation in an assessment is that the assessment be scored and linked to a final grade. However this is not the only incentive that an instructor can provide. Large numbers of students may participate in an assessment when it is offered for extra credit or as a way to improve a grade. Instructors should consider the incentive system that works best given their class demands.