

Muhlenberg College General Education Assessment Plan

Approved by the Faculty on November 7, 2014

Purpose of General Education Assessment

Assessment of the General Education curriculum at Muhlenberg serves several complementary functions that support student engagement, faculty development, and the mission of the institution. The purpose of general education assessment is:

- 1) To insure that our graduates have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions consistent with the goals of the academic program
- 2) To provide evidence for on-going examination of the general education program
- 3) To support faculty engagement in the scholarship of teaching and learning

Guiding Principles of General Education Assessment

Valid and reliable assessment of student learning at Muhlenberg will be guided by the following principles:

- 1) Assessment will include both direct and indirect evidence of student learning
- 2) Assessment activities need to be practical, useful, and not burden or detract faculty from their responsibilities as teachers and scholars. Wherever possible, assessment should use existing course assignments (embedded assessments) and not add additional work for students or faculty.
- 3) Assessment evaluates broad academic goals and curricular elements, not individual courses, faculty, or students.
- 4) Student work used for assessment purposes will remain anonymous and only aggregate results will be shared in any reports.
- 5) General Education Assessment at Muhlenberg will be consistent with the 9 Principles of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning as outlined below:

9 Principles of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning

1. The assessment of student learning begins with educational values.

Assessment is not an end in itself but a vehicle for educational improvement. Its effective practice, then, begins with and enacts a vision of the kinds of learning we most value for students and strive to help them achieve. Educational values should drive not only *what* we choose to assess but also *how* we do so. Where questions about educational mission and values are skipped over, assessment threatens to be an exercise in measuring what's easy, rather than a process of

improving what we really care about.

2. Assessment is most effective when it reflects an understanding of learning as multidimensional, integrated, and revealed in performance over time.

Learning is a complex process. It entails not only what students know but what they can do with what they know; it involves not only knowledge and abilities but values, attitudes, and habits of mind that affect both academic success and performance beyond the classroom. Assessment should reflect these understandings by employing a diverse array of methods, including those that call for actual performance, using them over time so as to reveal change, growth, and increasing degrees of integration. Such an approach aims for a more complete and accurate picture of learning, and therefore firmer bases for improving our students' educational experience.

3. Assessment works best when the programs it seeks to improve have clear, explicitly stated purposes.

Assessment is a goal-oriented process. It entails comparing educational performance with educational purposes and expectations -- those derived from the institution's mission, from faculty intentions in program and course design, and from knowledge of students' own goals. Where program purposes lack specificity or agreement, assessment as a process pushes a campus toward clarity about where to aim and what standards to apply; assessment also prompts attention to where and how program goals will be taught and learned. Clear, shared, implementable goals are the cornerstone for assessment that is focused and useful.

4. Assessment requires attention to outcomes but also and equally to the experiences that lead to those outcomes.

Information about outcomes is of high importance; where students "end up" matters greatly. But to improve outcomes, we need to know about student experience along the way -- about the curricula, teaching, and kind of student effort that lead to particular outcomes. Assessment can help us understand which students learn best under what conditions; with such knowledge comes the capacity to improve the whole of their learning.

5. Assessment works best when it is ongoing not episodic.

Assessment is a process whose power is cumulative. Though isolated, "one-shot" assessment can be better than none, improvement is best fostered when assessment entails a linked series of activities undertaken over time. This may mean tracking the process of individual students, or of cohorts of students; it may mean collecting the same examples of student performance or using the same instrument semester after semester. The point is to monitor progress toward intended goals in a spirit of continuous improvement. Along the way, the assessment process itself should be evaluated and refined in light of emerging insights.

6. Assessment fosters wider improvement when representatives from across the educational community are involved.

Student learning is a campus-wide responsibility, and assessment is a way of enacting that responsibility. Thus, while assessment efforts may start small, the aim over time is to involve people from across the educational community. Faculty play an especially important role, but assessment's questions can't be fully addressed without participation by student affairs educators,

librarians, administrators, and students. Assessment may also involve individuals from beyond the campus (alumni/ae, trustees, employers) whose experience can enrich the sense of appropriate aims and standards for learning. Thus understood, assessment is not a task for small groups of experts but a collaborative activity; its aim is wider, better-informed attention to student learning by all parties with a stake in its improvement.

7. Assessment makes a difference when it begins with issues of use and illuminates questions that people really care about.

Assessment recognizes the value of information in the process of improvement. But to be useful, information must be connected to issues or questions that people really care about. This implies assessment approaches that produce evidence that relevant parties will find credible, suggestive, and applicable to decisions that need to be made. It means thinking in advance about how the information will be used, and by whom. The point of assessment is not to gather data and return "results"; it is a process that starts with the questions of decision-makers, that involves them in the gathering and interpreting of data, and that informs and helps guide continuous improvement.

8. Assessment is most likely to lead to improvement when it is part of a larger set of conditions that promote change.

Assessment alone changes little. Its greatest contribution comes on campuses where the quality of teaching and learning is visibly valued and worked at. On such campuses, the push to improve educational performance is a visible and primary goal of leadership; improving the quality of undergraduate education is central to the institution's planning, budgeting, and personnel decisions. On such campuses, information about learning outcomes is seen as an integral part of decision making, and avidly sought.

9. Through assessment, educators meet responsibilities to students and to the public.

There is a compelling public stake in education. As educators, we have a responsibility to the publics that support or depend on us to provide information about the ways in which our students meet goals and expectations. But that responsibility goes beyond the reporting of such information; our deeper obligation -- to ourselves, our students, and society -- is to improve. Those to whom educators are accountable have a corresponding obligation to support such attempts at improvement.¹

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Support for Assessment Activities at Muhlenberg

The Dean of Institutional Assessment and Academic Planning will oversee and provide support for all academic assessment activities. The Director of Institutional Research and Records and the Registrar will provide additional support and resources as needed. The Institutional Research and Assessment website provides resources for general education and program assessment:

<http://www.muhlenberg.edu/main/aboutus/ir/>

General Education Assessment Plan

APC (Academic Policy Committee) and CC (Curriculum Committee) are responsible for broad oversight of General Education assessment as outlined in the Faculty Handbook. As needed, a joint ad-hoc committee of members from both committees will be created to target specific assessment activities. The Dean of Institutional Assessment and Academic Planning, the Director of Institutional Research and Records, and the Registrar will provide support for the committees' work.

- 1) The Dean of Institutional Assessment and Academic Planning will provide annual reports on results of national surveys that align with Academic Program Goals to APC and CC. APC and CC will use results to inform faculty discussions, to develop proposals for review of specific curricular elements, and to suggest revisions to the General Education Assessment Plan.
- 2) The Registrar will provide annual reports to APC and CC to track how students fulfill their general education requirements.
- 3) Faculty who teach courses that fulfill specific General Education requirements will be involved in the direct assessment of student work for their respective curricular elements. They will contribute to the development of a common rubric, the selection of relevant assignments, the evaluation of student work, the interpretation of results, and the outline of strategies for using findings to improve student learning.
- 4) For each curricular element, faculty (1-2) who teach courses that fulfill that area will be in charge of the actual assessment work. Each of these assessment coordinators will receive a stipend to support their work over a 2-year period. These faculty will oversee the development of a rubric or tool to evaluate student work, the sampling of assignments, and the assessment of student work. The faculty members will organize a discussion with participating faculty to review and interpret the findings, and draft a report on the project for APC and CC. The Dean of Institutional Assessment and Academic Planning will oversee and support the work.

Suggested General Education Assessment Timeline

The suggested timeline is informed by assessment activities in process and takes into account the implementation dates for elements in the General Education program. This plan may be altered at any time due to curricular revisions, staffing issues, or other factors.

Cluster courses

Learning Goals

- Cultivate curiosity
- Build an interdisciplinary knowledge base
- Understand that knowledge is embedded in multiple contexts (e.g., social, historical, cultural, ethical, etc.)
- Develop and apply different modes of inquiry to pose questions and address problems

Assessment Schedule

Fall 2014 – develop assessment tool and method

Spring 2015 – evaluate student work

Fall 2015 – share and discuss results

Human Difference and Global Engagement courses (HDGE)

Learning Goals

- Understand the multiple contexts (e.g., cultural, ethnic, racial, socioeconomic, etc.) that shape construction of human difference
- Recognize how hierarchies and disparities share and are shaped by institutions and social relations
- Make principled decisions as individuals and citizens of local, national, and global communities
- Develop a capacity to act on the basis of one's own reasoned beliefs

Assessment Schedule

Spring 2016 – develop assessment tool and method

Fall 2016 – evaluate student work

Spring 2017 – share and discuss results

Culminating Undergraduate Experiences (CUEs)

Learning Goals

- Demonstrate competence in their field of study at an appropriate level as determined by the department/program
- Practice integrative and applied learning

- Construct a bridge between past learning experiences and the future

Assessment Schedule

Fall 2017 – develop assessment tool and method

Spring 2018 – evaluate student work

Fall 2018 – share and discuss results

Writing Across the Curriculum Requirement

The WPC (Writing Program Committee) will oversee assessment of writing in FY Seminars and writing in W courses across the curriculum.

Learning Goals

- Communicate clearly and cogently
- Write and discuss as a means of learning and discovery

These goals are accomplished in the general curriculum through three required writing-intensive courses: one of these is a first-year seminar, one is a writing-intensive course in a student's major, and the third can come from any other writing-intensive course offered.

First Year Seminar courses are “small, discussion-oriented courses that focus on the development of effective thinking, writing, and speaking skill.” Students learn the kinds of analytical thinking and writing skills that will be expected of them during their college experience.

Assessment Schedule

Fall 2011 – Fall 2012

WPC conducted a direct assessment of student writing in the First Year Seminar. First Year Seminar instructors completed an on-line rubric to assess each student's writing ability in specific areas: 1) Quality of Ideas, 2) Organization and Development of Ideas, 3) Write with effective style, 4) Evidence in developing analysis, 5) Mechanics of grammar, and 6) Writing as a process. Faculty also provided an overall evaluation of each student's preparation for future college writing (strongly prepared, prepared, minimally prepared).

Spring 2013 – Fall 2013

WPC developed an indirect assessment to measure student perceptions of their writing in the First Year Seminar, specifically student writing load, the process of writing engaged in by the student, and student perceptions of their preparedness for college level writing.

Spring 2014 – Fall 2014

WPC began work on a direct assessment of non-FYS Writing-Intensive courses (W). Modeled after the on-line rubric used to assess writing in First Year Seminars, faculty who teach W

courses will be asked to evaluate their students on a range of writing-related criteria that reflect Muhlenberg’s writing learning goals.

Language Requirement

The Languages, Literatures, and Cultures department will oversee assessment of the Language requirement.

Learning Goals

Elementary I & II

- read, write, speak and understand the target language ranging from the low to the high novice level according to ACTFL standards
- appreciate the links between language and cultural meaning at a basic level
- recognize that there are linguistic and structural differences between English and the target language

Intermediate I & II

- read, write, speak and understand the target language ranging from the low to the high intermediate level according to ACTFL standards
- appreciate the links between language and cultural meaning at a somewhat more advanced level
- recognize the ways in which the target language has influenced American English and culture at a somewhat more advanced level

Goal 1: Speaking - Grammatical Accuracy (verb tenses, vocabulary, ease of expression)

Goal 2: Listening - Aural comprehension of questions

Goal 3: Writing - Grammatical Accuracy (verb tenses, vocabulary, spelling, ease of expression)

Goal 4: Reading - Recognition of contextualized words and/or phrases, verb tenses, main ideas, description and narration

Goal 5: Cultural Competency – Cultural norms of specific regions, linguistic differences within cultural contexts

		Goal 1	Goal 2	Goal 3	Goal 4	Goal 5
		Speaking	Listening	Writing	Reading	Cultural Competency
101	Elementary I	I	I	I	I	I
102	Elementary II	I	I	I	I	I
203	Intermediate I	D	D	D	D	D
204	Intermediate II	D	D	D	D	D

I: Introductory D: Developing M: Mastery

Assessment Schedule

2013 – 2014

LLC faculty developed an embedded assessment in elementary and intermediate language courses to assess listening comprehension and writing skills. Faculty will evaluate student performance using a common rubric. Results will be aggregated across courses for each language level.

2014 – 2015

LLC faculty plan to develop an embedded assessment in elementary and intermediate language courses to assess speaking skills and cultural competency.

Information Literacy

The Trexler Library will oversee assessment of Information Literacy skills across the curriculum.

Learning Goals

- Locate, analyze, evaluate, and share information using emerging and established technologies.

Assessment Schedule

Spring 2009

The HEDS Research Practices Survey was administered to First Year and Senior students to assess information literacy competencies, experiences, and attitudes.

Fall 2010

Focus groups with first-year students were conducted to better understand students' high school research and writing experiences.

Spring 2012

Direct assessment of student work was reviewed in three classes where librarians taught a library instruction session.

Fall 2012

Focus groups with juniors and seniors provided insight into how upper-class students have learned about and done academic research.

Fall 2013 – Spring 2014

The Assessment in Action Information Literacy involved a review of library instruction data, faculty and student surveys, and instructors' direct assessment of information literacy skills on embedded course assignments. The goal of the project was to assess information literacy competencies and identify factors that support students' development of these skills.

Reasoning Requirement

Learning Goal

- Reason effectively with words, numbers, and symbols

Assessment Schedule

Fall 2015– develop assessment tool and method

Spring 2016 – evaluate student work

Fall 2016 – share and discuss results

Divisional Distribution Requirements

To provide students with a broad interdisciplinary knowledge base, Muhlenberg students complete courses in the four divisions: Arts (1 course), Humanities (3 courses), Social Sciences (2 courses), and Natural Sciences (2 courses). Assessment of Divisional Requirements will focus on student learning in courses with these designations that enroll primarily nonmajors.

Arts

Learning Goals

- develop and apply the technical skills, problem-solving ability, judgment, and courage necessary to create new work appropriate to one's discipline
- express a knowledge of the theory, history, and social context of artistic practice

Assessment Schedule

Fall 2015– develop assessment tool and method

Spring 2016 – evaluate student work

Fall 2016 – share and discuss results

Humanities

Learning Goals

- employ analysis, critical reasoning and historical reflection to interpret and evaluate matters of human concern, experience and expression
- apply knowledge and understanding of human activity and world views across time, geography, and cultures

Assessment Schedule

Fall 2017 – develop assessment tool and method

Spring 2018 – evaluate student work

Fall 2018 – share and discuss results

Natural Sciences

Learning Goals

- understand and apply biological, computational, mathematical, and physical theories and paradigms
- develop quantitative and scientific problem solving skills to investigate natural phenomena.

Assessment Schedule

Spring 2015 – develop assessment tool and method

Fall 2015 – evaluate student work

Spring 2016 – share and discuss results

Social Sciences

Learning Goals

- describe and analyze the development and practices (i.e., social, political, economic, and cultural) of individuals and institutions
- identify the influence of individual choice, group behavior, and public policies on individuals and institutions
- recognize the operations of power and ideology across social contexts, relationships, and practices

Assessment Schedule

Fall 2016 – develop assessment tool and method

Spring 2017 – evaluate student work

Fall 2017 – share and discuss results