

Actions in Response to General Education Assessment at Delta College

General education assessment at Delta College has been used to make changes and improvements in several different areas including large-scale changes to the general education curriculum model, improvements to the assessment process, and improvements to individual courses. All these changes are made with the goal of improving student success.

Changes to General Education Curriculum Model

The large-scale changes to the general education curriculum began in 2015. There were 38 total general education outcomes divided into 12 areas. This was too many to effectively assess in a 3 to 5-year cycle. From 2013-2015 only 5 of the 12 general education areas had at least one outcome that was assessed. So, starting in 2015, the General Education Curriculum and Assessment Committee (GECAC) held several meetings with faculty and Student Services representatives to revise the general education outcomes using a more holistic approach. In April 2016, faculty voted to adopt six new general education outcomes to replace the prior 38 which can be easily assessed during a 3 to 5-year cycle. The six General Education Learning Outcomes (GELOs) are Think Critically, Communicate Effectively, Think Civically, Cultivate Wellness, Utilize Technology Effectively, and Reason Quantitatively.

Under the general education model prior to 2016, not all students met all outcomes before graduation because of the multiple paths possible to complete the graduation requirements for different degrees. Reducing the number of outcomes to 6 and reassessing the general education audit ensured that all degree programs met all the GELOs.

Prior to 2016, the general education audit was not routinely evaluated or updated. Since the restructuring of the outcomes, the GECAC chair, as part of the Curriculum Development Office, reviews the general education audit for all courses going through the curriculum process. Curriculum Council also ensures that at least one course in each degree program has an M (Mastery) listed for each GELO. Faculty can make changes to the general education audit by submitting an updated discipline audit to the GECAC chair who will then send it to Academic Services who updates the information in Curriculog. Every year when a new catalog is published the general education outcome database is synced with Acalog. The general education outcomes are embedded in all degree programs at the college.

Changes to Assessment Process

After making these large-scale changes to the general education curriculum, several improvements needed to be made in order to make the process of assessment more manageable and useful. The following changes have been made during the first two assessment cycles of the 6 GELOs to address problems in the assessment process.

Some students who were selected for a general education assessment were no longer in the course when the assessment took place, artificially lowering the average score. A separate level X score was added to the spreadsheet for students who had dropped the course, so they are not included in the final sample size. The goal of general education assessment is to determine the knowledge and skills of our students the semester before they graduate and if students are dropping a course, then it is unlikely that they will graduate that semester. Therefore, they should not be included in the sample.

Resource group scoring was not always consistent. Each resource group created their own rubric, resulting in different standards between GELOs. As a result, a common rubric was created for scoring of student work by both the faculty and resource group members. This rubric has 4 levels; Level 0 – No Evidence (No student work was submitted), Level 1 – Emerging, Level 2 – Developing, Level 3 – Mastery.

Resource group benchmarks were not consistent. Each resource group set their own benchmark or standard which made it hard to determine strengths and weakness and compare data between learning outcomes. Previous benchmarks included the following, 75% of the students will score at a level 3, 80% of the students will score at a level 3, 80% of the students will score at a level 2 or 3. As a result, a common benchmark of 70% of students scoring at a level 2 or 3 on the standard rubric was established for all outcomes. However, this benchmark was met for all 6 of the GELOs during the first assessment cycle from 2017 to 2019. So, the benchmark was increased from “70% of students will score at a level 2 or 3” to “80% at a level 2 or 3” for the second cycle.

Due to the nature of each GELO being assessed within many courses and across many disciplines, resource groups had trouble scoring student work from multiple disciplines across the college. In addition, samples of student work without assignment instructions and answer keys were hard to interpret, particularly for faculty who teach in different disciplines. Consequently, resource groups now score samples of student work in partnership with GECAC members. This allows the members of both resource group and GECAC to ask questions and compare notes, increasing internal reliability since GECAC consists of faculty from each of the five divisions. Faculty are also asked to submit a copy of the assignment instructions and answer key when submitting student work.

In the past, resource groups analyzed and presented data in very different formats, sometimes losing sight of the larger goal of the general education assessment. To address this issue, a PowerPoint template was created for all resource groups to use to summarize and present data to faculty and to the Student Learning Assessment Committee (SLAC). Data required for reporting purposes is clearly identified.

Another problem was that GELO assessments were not being uploaded to the OATS database and the reports were not stored in a centralized location. The GECAC Chair is now responsible for adding yearly assessment reports to the OATS database. Reports for all six outcome assessments have been uploaded to the database. Presentations and reports are also shared on the General Education Assessment eLearning site.

During the first cycle of assessment for the six GELOS, two outcomes were assessed each winter semester. This created confusion for some faculty and increased workload for support staff. For the second cycle, one outcome was assessed during both fall and winter semesters. This continues to allow two outcomes to be assessed each year, establishing a three-year cycle to assess all GELOs.

Previously we were only collecting numerical data for the majority of students. As a result, when students scored low on an assessment it was hard for GECAC and resource groups to know why the students were struggling or to determine where improvements to teaching needed to be made. Now, qualitative comments are also requested from faculty along with the scores from student work. The comments are then summarized in the reports from each resource group.

Assessment methods were very labor intensive and involved significant amounts of data entry by support staff. The process is all electronic now and some data entry has been automated. Communication

with faculty takes place through a designated email address: assessment@delta.edu. Faculty can enter student scores into a spreadsheet and submit copies of student work electronically.

A global pandemic caused campus to close in Winter 2020. GECAC was forced to work remotely for the remainder of that semester and the 2020-2021 academic year. Nonetheless, assessment must go on! GECAC was able to host all meeting virtually via Zoom. Samples of student work are uploaded to GECAC's Microsoft Teams page. The student work is divided amongst small groups of GECAC and resource group members who can access them on the Teams page and discuss them in breakout rooms on Zoom. Scores are then recorded in a shared spreadsheet on the Teams page. This scoring process has proven to be sustainable as it has continued to be used during the three academic years since the pandemic began.

General education assessment results used to be shared with faculty across the college at Faculty Forum once each academic year. This did not seem to get general education assessment enough of the spotlight, nor provide faculty an opportunity for professional development in this area. In addition, a governance restructuring at the college resulted in the loss of Faculty Forum as a venue for presenting. To get general education more exposure, GECAC members regularly present results and offer professional development sessions at Fall and Winter Learning Days. A general education assessment eLearning course site was also developed to house assessment reports, historical records, GELO resources, and excellent examples of assignments used by faculty to assess each outcome. Faculty can self-enroll in the eLearning site to have access to all these documents for professional development purposes. The link to this site, <https://elearning.delta.edu/d2l/le/discovery/view/course/2943363>, is included in email communications with faculty. Finally, faculty who participate in the assessment for each outcome are invited to attend the GECAC meeting in which the assessment report is presented by the resource group chair. This allows interested faculty to provide feedback directly to GECAC and resource groups, as well as have their questions answered.

In the past, GECAC did not have any information on how faculty were changing their teaching and assignments as a result of the assessment. Now, faculty are asked to add comments about what they are going to change based on the assessment results. Collecting this information will help us track data driven changes in the classroom.

Changes to Courses

When faculty submit scores and student work to the Assessment Office, they are now asked to submit ways in which the assessment process has motivated them to adjust their course. Faculty can select from five options: 1) continue to monitor, 2) change a class assignment or activity, 3) adjust a grading rubric, 4) update course content, and 5) change materials provided.

In Fall 2020, there were 27 faculty who participated in the Cultivate Wellness assessment. 12 faculty will continue to monitor, 2 changed a class assignment or activity, 2 updated course content, and 1 changed materials provided.

In Winter 2021, there were 81 faculty who participated in the Reason Quantitatively assessment. 48 faculty will continue to monitor, 11 changed a class assignment or activity, 4 adjusted a grading rubric, and 3 updated course content.

In Fall 2021, there were 97 faculty who participated in the Utilize Technology Effectively assessment. 60 faculty will continue to monitor, 2 changed a class assignment or activity, 3 adjusted a grading rubric, 3 updated course content, and 2 changed materials provided.

In Winter 2022, there were 113 faculty who participated in the Think Critically assessment. 51 faculty will continue to monitor, 6 changed a class assignment or activity, 5 adjusted a grading rubric, 4 updated course content, and 2 changed materials provided.

In Fall 2022, there were 133 faculty who participated in the Communicate Effectively assessment. 69 faculty will continue to monitor, 1 changed a class assignment or activity, 4 adjusted a grading rubric, 2 updated course content, and 1 updated outcomes (changed from “change materials provided”).

As a result of participating in general education assessment, faculty have revised assignments and assessments they give to students or introduced new projects into their courses. For example, one faculty in the Psychology Discipline wrote, “The course I teach, Introduction to Psychology, is an assessment site for our Critical Thinking outcome. Participating in the General Education assessment process has helped me think about the goals I have for my students. Not only do I want to them to develop a basic understanding of the field of psychology, but I also want to help them develop critical thinking skills. As a result, my assessments in the course have shifted from focusing on content knowledge to application of critical thinking, from multiple choice tests to essays. I believe this is a positive change which will help my students succeed in future courses and in their careers after graduation.”

Another faculty in the Mathematics Discipline wrote, “My College Algebra course is used to assess the Reason Quantitatively outcome. I have redesigned how I teach and assess the sections on Linear and Quadratic Regression as a result of this assessment process. I now designate one class period to teaching both topics together, working through examples of each type of regression in class. I have prepared a worksheet with real-world examples of each type of data to supplement the homework in the text. I then give an in-class quiz to the students on this material rather than including it on a larger test. This quiz is then used in the assessment process when the Reason Quantitatively outcome is being assessed by GECAC. I found in the past, that students would tend to skip this regression question on tests due to the length of the question and the pressure to finish other shorter questions in a timely manner. The amount of time the problem took due to typing data into the calculator was not proportional to the point value of the problem. It was actually a wise test-taking strategy to skip that problem when time was short. By separating it into a stand-alone quiz, participation on that problem has increased, as has the student’s focus on learning that topic outside of class.”