**Motion to Place the Current Process for Assessing General Education Under Review**

**Academic Affairs and General Education Committees**

**April, 2021**

Purpose

The General Education Committee recommends we place our current process for assessing general education under review. The committee has asked the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment (OIRA) to give us a short report on alternative assessment methods used by other Gen Ed programs. We would like to use this information to modify our current assessment.

Background

Faculty Senate created learning outcomes for each Gen Ed category in 2012. Faculty Senate worked closely with Office of Institutional Research and Assessment (OIRA) to create rubrics and an assessment process in 2017. The Ged Ed Committee recruited faculty from across campus, and these faculty teams designed our current rubrics and assessment process. They based the rubrics on the Association of American Colleges and Universities’ VALUE rubrics. The learning outcomes and rubrics/assessment required motions, which are on Faculty Senate’s webpage.

We assessed Western Cultural Tradition in spring 2018, Social Contexts and Institutions in spring 2019, and Cultural Diversity or International Perspectives in fall 2019/2020 (we needed a second session due to low participation in the first). Reports from these are on the Gen Ed Committee’s Faculty Senate webpage.

Description of current assessment method

The 2017 motion mandated that we conduct assessment of one Gen Ed category per semester. There are nine categories so we should assess them all in one five-year cycle. OIRA randomly selects 20 classes that teach the category we are assessing and asks faculty to submit samples of work from 10 students that OIRA randomly selects. OIRA removes student and class identities from these papers. The Gen Ed Committee chair recruits volunteers to assess these papers. Assessors use rubrics to do the scoring at an end-of-semester assessment session. The rubrics score five or six criteria from 0-4, so the output from an entire assessment session is the aggregate of these scores: one Gen Ed category scored from 0-4 along the five or six criteria. A sample rubric appears at the end of this report.

Drawbacks of our current assessment method

There are two major drawbacks:

* Results are less useable than desired
* Recruitment difficult/high effort level required for limited results

The list below enumerates these drawbacks in more detail:

1.) *Rubrics do not always fit Gen Ed category*: Faculty at the assessment sessions have noted that the rubrics do not always match the learning outcomes and they do not always fit what we assume the category should teach. In particular, the rubric for Cultural Diversity or International Perspectives never assesses anything about understanding another culture’s viewpoint. Others, especially science and math, look as though they will be hard to apply to what students actually produce in these classes.

2.) *Not all data usable*: Given the point above, some of the data seems unusable. If part of the rubric is not relevant, it is hard to see how faculty can use the data to modify courses. This a principal concern. It is also unclear what Faculty Senate, or faculty teaching these classes, should do with the data (see appendix for a sample, see Gen Ed Committee’s website for all three data sets).

3.) *No target scores*: There is no way of knowing what our target scores are. Is a 2.5 a sign that students are meeting our goals? Or is a 3.5 needed? Not only have we never decided this, it is unclear clear how we would reach such a determination. Scores are higher in 300 and 400 level classes, and perhaps this shows improvement over time, although students taking a Gen Ed class at the 400 level have likely taken more than one class in that category.

4.) *Misses large classes*: Many students earn Gen Ed credits in large classes that use multiple choice tests. Our process cannot assess these.

5.) *Data less reliable than desired*: We employ calibration sessions, but inter-scorer reliability is lower than we would prefer. In addition, the scores from Social Context were broadly similar to Cultural Diversity, even though faculty saw much more alignment with the learning outcomes in the latter. This suggests we are scoring based on the rubrics’ predetermined categories rather than on the student texts’ content. We have included these scores after the motion.

6.) *Recruitment*: The 2017 motion mandates we recruit fifty faculty to a half day assessment session every semester. This has proved difficult; our numbers have shrunk due to faculty fatigue. Numbers dropped each time we ran this, even before COVID. The motion’s level of faculty effort seems unrealistic and unsustainable. We should consider a new motion requiring chairs to send us participants. Prior participants have said that if we could point to improvements driven by the assessment, we would be more likely to recruit faculty at this level. In addition, the math and science assessments will require fifty faculty assessors with knowledge of those fields. Recruitment is a major concern going forward.

7.) *Process needs a home*: The General Education Committee chair recruits faculty and runs the faculty side of this process. However, Faculty Senate never discussed, to the best of our knowledge, the change this creates in the General Education Committee. It is now engaged in the regular administrative work of assessment. All other Faculty Senate committees make policy recommendation, none administer anything. This is a fundamental change we never discussed. It might be desirable but needs debate.

8.) *Faculty do not know the rubrics exist*: Who should inform new faculty, or faculty teaching new courses, about the rubrics and assessment process? This is another routine administrative task without a home.

Strengths of our current assessment method

1.) We were able to detect a lack of alignment between learning outcomes and the Social Contexts and Institutions learning outcomes. This was the qualitative evaluation made by scorers in the group discussion after the scoring, and it was borne out by the scores (see end of this document). Our current systems shows us broad patterns of alignment, which is the most important goal of assessment.

2.) Faculty felt the group discussion after the scoring was useful and should be built upon. These sessions have started a culture of assessment around Gen Ed that is necessary and valuable. Faculty told us that the discussion after the scoring was the best part of the assessment.

**Motion:** In order to build on the culture of General Education assessment created by our 2017 motion, and in order to better align our General Education courses with their learning outcomes, the Faculty Senate of the University of Maine moves to place the current process for assessing General Education under review. Faculty Senate also asks the General Education Subcommittee to work with Office of Institutional Research and Assessment to propose modification of our current system that will help us achieve better alignment between our courses and their learning outcomes.

Appendix I: Cultural Diversity or International Perspective Rubric

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| Cultural Diversity or International Perspectives **Preamble**  |
| A course included in the Cultural Diversity or International Perspectives category satisfies one or more of the following criteria: (a) it places primary emphasis on the experiences, perspectives, and cultural work of one or more groups who are not dominant within a particular culture; (b) it has a primary goal encouraging students to become aware of the diversity of American culture and to discover their roles within that diversity; or (c) it places primary emphasis on the relationships among or within different cultures in the past or present; (d) it introduces students to a culture other than their own through an intermediate or advanced course in the language of that culture.  |
| Description  | Capstone  | Level 3  | Level 2  | Benchmark  |
| Civic Identity and Commitment  | Provides evidence of experience in civic- engagement activities and describes what she/he has learned about her or himself as it relates to a reinforced and clarified sense of civic identity and continued commitment to public action.  | Provides evidence of experience in civic-engagement activities and describes what she/he has learned about her or himself as it relates to a growing sense of civic identity and commitment.  | Evidence suggests involvement in civic-engagement activities is generated from expectations or course requirements rather than from a sense of civic identity.  | Provides little evidence of her/his experience in civic- engagement activities and does not connect experiences to civic identity.  |
| Evidence Selecting and using information to investigate a point of view or conclusion  | Information is taken from source(s) with enough interpretation/evaluation to develop a comprehensive analysis or synthesis.  | Information is taken from source(s) with enough interpretation/evaluation to develop a coherent analysis or synthesis.  | Information is taken from source(s) with some interpretation/evaluation, but not enough to develop a coherent analysis or synthesis.  | Information is taken from source(s) without any interpretation/evaluation.  |
| Student's position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis)  | Specific position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis) is imaginative, taking into account the complexities of an issue. Limits of position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis) are acknowledged. Others' points of view are synthesized within position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis).  | Specific position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis) takes into account the complexities of an issue. Others' points of view are acknowledged within position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis).  | Specific position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis) acknowledges different sides of an issue.  | Specific position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis) is stated, but is simplistic and obvious.  |
| Application of Ethical Perspectives/Concepts  | Student can independently apply ethical perspectives/concepts to an ethical question, accurately, and is able to consider full implications of the application.  | Student can independently apply ethical perspectives/concepts to an ethical question, accurately, but does not consider the specific implications of the application.  | Student can apply ethical perspectives/concepts to an ethical question, independently (to a new example) and the application is inaccurate.  | Student can apply ethical perspectives/concepts to an ethical question with support (using examples, in a class, in a group, or a fixed-choice setting) but is unable to apply ethical perspectives/concepts independently (to a new example.).  |
| Global Self-Awareness  | Effectively addresses significant issues in the natural and human world based on articulating one’s identity in a global context.  | Evaluates the global impact of one’s own and others’ specific local actions on the natural and human world.  | Analyzes ways that human actions influence the natural and human world.  | Identifies some connections between an individual’s personal decision-making and certain local and global issues.  |
| Personal and Social Responsibility  | Takes informed and responsible action to address ethical, social, and environmental challenges in global systems and evaluates the local and broader consequences of individual and collective interventions.  | Analyzes the ethical, social, and environmental consequences of global systems and identifies a range of actions informed by one’s sense of personal and civic responsibility.  | Explains the ethical, social, and environmental consequences of local and national decisions on global systems.  | Identifies basic ethical dimensions of some local or national decisions that have global impact.  |

Appendix II: Selected scores from 2019 and 2020 assessment sessions.

Average scores of Not Applicable (student text does not fit that rubric category at all):

Social Contexts and Institutions: 53.6%

Cultural Diversity or International Perspectives: 22.5%

Full scores from Cultural Diversity of Internal Perspectives (excerpting NA scores):

