

# General Education Assessment

## Summary of Individual Reports, 2017-18

### **Learning Objective 1. Reading Closely: Literary Analysis and Interpretation.** *One course.*

The ability to read closely provides a foundation for informed and reflective critical analysis that is fundamental to lifelong learning and literary experiences of lasting value. Instruction in reading closely equips students to pay careful attention to the constitutive details and stylistic concerns of significant works of literature so as to arrive at a meaning that can be defended with confidence. In addition to promoting responsible ways of taking a literary work of consequence on its own terms, courses satisfying this requirement enable students to become proficient at identifying, interpreting, and analyzing new ideas, perennial topics, universal themes, and vivid descriptions of sensory and internal experiences.

Outcomes:

SLO 1: Students can identify and analyze constitutive details and literary style.

SLO 2: Students can produce interpretations of literary meaning.

SLO 3: Students can produce convincing arguments for their interpretations.

Sample formal assessment tools:

- Final in-class essay
- Final exam, with specific questions tied to specific SLOs
- Extended essay focusing on a close reading of a passage / poem

Sample uses of data:

- Recognized need for more conferences with students to focus on literary analysis
- Required additional short papers during semester to offer more consistent feedback on quality of analysis
- Designed new in-class exercises to assist with development of argument
- Required multiple drafts of written arguments at different stages in process
- Recognizing inherent emphasis on writing, added requirements / incentives for students to use the Writing Center
- Modeled close reading in class (ex: passage on screen for all to see, patiently work through close reading as a class)
- Assigned fewer pages of reading to allow for more attention to particular passages
- Implemented “conference grading” wherein the student is present as the instructor grades the paper and explains its strengths and weaknesses, especially in terms of its success as a “convincing argument” centered upon close reading of the text

### **Learning Objective 2. Understanding the Arts: Creativity, Performance, and Interpretation.** *One course.*

The need to create, experience, and comprehend art is a defining human activity. Learning in the arts fosters aesthetic development, self-discipline, imaginative insights, and the ability to make

connections between seemingly disparate ideas and issues. Many courses provide insight into the discipline, craft, and creative processes that go into making a work of art, while others focus on analyzing and interpreting the products of that artistic creativity. Developing the ability to think in intuitive, non-verbal, aural, or visual realms enhances creativity, and provides students a way to address problems that do not have conventional solutions.

Outcomes:

SLO 1: Students are able to identify and appreciate non-verbal or intuitive modes of thought.

SLO 2: Students can comprehend a creative process through experience OR analysis.

SLO 3: Students can produce interpretations of artistic work, OR artistic works themselves, which display an understanding of creative processes.

Sample formal assessment tools:

- Writing portfolio
- Short writing assignments
- As part of final exam, in-class analysis of several artifacts the students had not studied before (to apply the analytical skills developed in the course)
- The class maintained a blog throughout the semester, with students required to post images and commentary (minimum 500 words) and to comment on others' posts
- Collaborative small-group capstone project focusing on artifacts within the Sewanee community, with required website and presentation

Sample uses of data:

- Integrating additional media (visual and textual sources, for example)
- Modeling the process of analysis through in-class analysis of visual work
- Inclusion of physical artifacts (not just images of such), using the resources of the University Archives and the University Art Gallery (and of the campus buildings themselves)
- Creating more opportunities for students to create artistic work
- Emphasis on connecting projects / assignments to specific SLOs in a more overt way

### **Learning Objective 3. Seeking Meaning: Wisdom, Truth, and Inquiry.** *One course.*

The quest to answer fundamental questions of human existence has always been central to living the examined life. Through this learning objective, students examine how people in diverse times and places have addressed basic human questions about the meaning of life, the source of moral value, the nature of reality and possibility of transcendence, and to what or whom persons owe their ultimate allegiance. Courses that explore texts and traditions dedicated to philosophic questions and ethical inquiry, or that examine religious belief and practice as a pervasive expression of human culture, encourage students to develop a deeper understanding of what it means to be human.

Outcomes:

SLO 1: Students have deepened their understanding of humanity's quest, in diverse times and places, to address questions about the meaning of life, the source of moral value, the nature of

reality and possibility of transcendence, and to what or whom persons owe their ultimate allegiance.

SLO 2: Students have gained a critical appreciation of texts and traditions that are dedicated to philosophic questions and ethical inquiry, *or* that examine religious belief and practice as a pervasive expression of human culture.

Sample formal assessment tools:

- Extended essay
- Multiple shorter essays
- Brief daily writing assignments focusing on critical analysis

Sample uses of data:

- (For a class with two G-attributes) Changed assignments so that they were specific to respective Learning Objectives, rather than blended
- Reconsidered reading load to promote more meaningful class discussions
- Modified delivery (lecture plus discussion, class activities)
- Re-evaluating course structure to approach content not chronologically but thematically
- Provided clearer framework for discussion by giving discussion prompts ahead of time
- Adding daily assignments allowed regular and immediate feedback on analysis
- Implemented one-on-one grading of longer assignments to offer more focused feedback relevant to the SLOs

#### **Learning Objective 4. Exploring Past and Present: Perspectives on Societies and Cultures.** *Two courses.*

Curiosity about society and its institutions is central to the engaged life. In addition, informed citizens should have an understanding of individual and collective behavior in the past and present. To address the challenges facing the world today, citizens must understand how these challenges arise and the roles that individuals, communities, countries, and international organizations play in addressing them. Learning how to pose appropriate questions, how to read and interpret historical documents, and how to use methods of analysis to study social interaction prepares students to comprehend the dynamics within and among societies. These skills enable students to examine the world around them and to make historically, theoretically, and empirically informed judgments about social phenomena.

Outcomes:

SLO 1: Students are able to make informed judgments about social phenomena by reading and interpreting historical documents OR by using methods of analysis appropriate to social science.

Sample formal assessment tools:

- Students created own survey, based on questions raised and knowledge gained in course, and asked peers to complete survey; they then wrote an analysis of findings
- Extended formal research assignment, analyzing primary document(s)
- Extended formal research assignment, analyzing contemporary issue and proposing solution
- Analysis of primary document on final exam

- Formal presentation on artifact, placing it within its historical / social context
- Multiple short essays
- Writing assignments that necessitated analysis of a current news event in light of past documents

Sample uses of data:

- Modified assignments so that students did not just summarize works but analyze them
- Greater attention to being sure students know historic facts so that artifacts can be placed more accurately within a context
- Recognizing that not all students know the same computer programs, some attention given to basic instruction in necessary programs
- More frequent (and briefer) writing assignments to assist with practicing analysis
- Developed grading rubric—shared with students—detailing expectations for analysis
- Developed “simulation” to allow students to demonstrate and apply knowledge
- Developed guide to help students with critical reading (e.g., differentiating between fact and opinion)
- Diversified content (more audio-visual media, for example)
- Updated course texts to be consistently current
- Assigned multiple drafts of major analysis
- Brought in guest speakers
- Developed more small-group assignments to promote peer-to-peer education

**Learning Objective 5. Observing, Experimenting, and Modeling: The Scientific and Quantitative View.** *Three courses. One must include substantial quantitative, algorithmic, or abstract logical reasoning. One must be a science course with a substantial experiential or experimental component.*

The study of the natural world through careful observation, construction and testing of hypotheses, and the design and implementation of reproducible experiments is a key aspect of human experience. Scientific literacy and the ability to assess the validity of scientific claims are critical components of an educated and informed life. Scientific and quantitative courses develop students’ ability to use close observation and interpret empirical data to understand processes in the natural world better. As they create models to explain observable phenomena, students develop their abilities to reason both deductively and inductively.

Outcomes:

G5 SLO 1: The student can evaluate scientific information and/or scientific texts, and distinguish data or facts from interpretation and opinion.

G5 (experiential) SLO 1: The student demonstrates the ability to use scientific methodologies to study and draw reasonable conclusions about the natural world through detailed observations, carefully recorded data, and data analysis techniques appropriate for their field of study.

G5 (experiential) SLO 2: The student can evaluate scientific information and/or scientific texts, and distinguish data or facts from interpretation and opinion.

G5 (experiential) SLO 3: Students demonstrate the ability to calculate and analyze empirical data sets and/or demonstrate the ability model mathematical theory.

G5 (quantitative) SLO 1: The student demonstrates the ability to calculate and analyze empirical data sets and/or demonstrate the ability model mathematical theory.

Sample formal assessment tools:

- Periodic tests
- Final exam with specific questions tied to specific SLOs
- Weekly quizzes
- Analysis of real-life case study or of contemporary issue
- Writing assignments addressing current topics in science
- Analysis of primary and secondary sources
- (G5E) Laboratory experiments, with formal lab report
- (G5E) Scientific paper based on results of own lab work
- (G5E) Students designed and implemented their own research study
- (G5Q) Paired students work as “coder” and “observer” in developing computer code

Sample uses of data:

- Modified lectures to address areas of weakest class performance
- Updated course texts to be consistently current
- Additional emphasis on vocabulary pertinent to the subject (not assuming familiarity with topic)
- Guided students toward more online resources
- Additional daily quizzes to promote continued engagement in course content
- Assigned multiple drafts of papers in progress
- Developed research assignment that was Sewanee-specific
- Developed grading rubric to promote consistent assessment across multiple sections of a course
- (G5E) Continue to update lab assignments to keep them current
- (G5Q) More frequently required students to solve problems at the board, in class
- (G5Q) Dedicated more time to assisting students with how to write a paper on a mathematics topic

**Learning Objective 6. Comprehending Cross-Culturally: Language and Global Studies.** *One 300-level or higher foreign language course OR foreign language through the 200 (3rd semester) level together with one course in a related culture.*

The cross-cultural comprehension requirement at Sewanee helps to prepare students for full citizenship in our global society. Upon completion of this requirement, students have developed a range of communicative strategies in a foreign language, recognition of another cultural perspective, and the capacity for informed engagement with another culture. These skills lead students to understand a variety of texts: oral, visual, and written. Students practice writing, public speaking, conversing, critical thinking, and textual analysis. Success in a foreign language gives students knowledge that they can apply broadly to academic and non-academic settings. The study of at least a second language is and always has been a hallmark of liberal arts

education, providing not just access to the thought and expression of a foreign mentality and culture, but also a useful way to reflect on one's own mentality, language, and culture.

Outcomes:

G6 (language) SLO 1: Students can read and comprehend authentic text in the target language, with the help of a dictionary, and can express themselves (in the case of modern languages) in the target language.

Note: Competency in this SLO can be demonstrated by passing the intermediate (200-level) language course. Those students who place out of the 200-level course must demonstrate competency at the 300-level.

G6 (culture) SLO 1: Students can analyze and discuss texts related to a culture and recognize another cultural perspective.

Sample formal assessment tools:

- Final exam (whole or in part)
- Periodic tests
- Short written assignments
- (language) Student presentation in target language
- (culture) Analytical essay on current topic in target culture

Sample uses of data:

- Provided class notes through shared computer file (Google Drive)
- Updated course texts to be consistently current
- (language) Ongoing review of grammar and vocabulary
- (language) Prompt greater use of the language lab and related resources
- (language) Decreased volume of reading in target language to emphasize clearer comprehension
- (language) Used more authentic texts (e.g., newspapers) rather than textbook examples
- (culture) Assigned small groups for discussions, with designated leaders and recorders
- (culture) Required multiple drafts of papers in progress
- (culture) Spent more time on historical facts (i.e., not assuming that students had a common context)
- (For a culture class with two G-attributes) Changed assignments so that they were specific to respective Learning Objectives, rather than blended