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Introduction/Background

In the By-Laws of UNCG’s Faculty Senate (revised 09.17.2014), the General Education Council (GEC) is one of the advisory committees appointed by the Faculty Senate Electoral Divisions (Article II: Standing Committee Structure and Charges, Section 2: Committees Composed of Elected Members of the General Faculty and Ex-Officio Members, Subsection 3: Advisory Committees Appointed by the Faculty Senate Electoral Divisions).

The responsibilities of the Council include the ongoing review and maintenance of the General Education goals and the assessment of student achievement of those goals. The Council carries out the assessment of UNCG’s General Education Program with the help of the Office of Assessment and Accreditation.

General Education Learning Goals

UNCG’s General Education Program provides undergraduates “foundational knowledge, skills, and values necessary to be critical and creative thinkers, ethical decision-makers, effective communicators, and collaborative and engaged global citizens.” (UNCG General Education Mission and Goals, approved by the Faculty Senate and General Faculty in April 2009). Currently, this breadth of knowledge is offered to undergraduates through General Education courses distributed across five learning goals (LGs):

- **LG1. Foundational Skills:**
  Think critically, communicate effectively, and develop appropriate fundamental skills in quantitative and information literacies. [GRD, GLT, GFA, GPR, GMT, GNS, GSB, GL, GN, SI, WI]

- **LG2. The Physical and Natural World:**
  Understand fundamental principles of mathematics and science, and recognize their relevance in the world. [GMT, GNS]

- **LG3. Knowledge of Human Histories, Cultures, and the Self:**
  Describe, interpret, and evaluate the ideas, events, and expressive traditions that have shaped collective and individual human experience through inquiry and analysis in the diverse disciplines of the humanities, religions, languages, histories, and the arts. [GLT, GFA, GPR, GHP, GSB, GL, GN]

- **LG4. Knowledge of Social and Human Behavior:**
  Describe and explain findings derived from the application of fundamental principles of empirical scientific inquiry to illuminate and analyze social and human conditions. [GSB, GL, GN]
LG5. Personal, Civic, and Professional Development:

Develop a capacity for active citizenship, ethics, social responsibility, personal growth, and skills for lifelong learning in a global society. In so doing, students will engage in free and open inquiry that fosters mutual respect across multiple cultures and perspectives. [GFA, GPR, GNS, GSB, GL, GN]

Subsumed under the five General Education Learning Goals are eight categories with 19 separate student learning outcomes and four markers with eight separate student learning outcomes. Table 1 provides an overview of the learning goals and categories/markers.

Table 1. General Education Learning Goals and Categories/Markers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories:</th>
<th>UNCG General Education Program Learning Goals</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learning Goal 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fine Arts (GFA)</td>
<td>√</td>
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<tr>
<td>Historical Perspectives (GHP)</td>
<td>√</td>
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<tr>
<td>Literature (GLT)</td>
<td>√</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mathematics (GMT)</td>
<td>√</td>
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<tr>
<td>Natural Sciences (GNS)</td>
<td>√</td>
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<tr>
<td>Philosophical, Religious, &amp; Ethical Principles (GPR)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reasoning &amp; Discourse (GRD)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Social &amp; Behavioral Sciences (GSB)</td>
<td>√</td>
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<tr>
<td>Markers:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global Perspectives (GL)</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global Perspectives (GN)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Western</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking Intensive (SI)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Writing Intensive (WI)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The category-and marker-specific student learning outcomes (GEC SLOs) state how students will accomplish these five Learning Goals (see http://utlc.uncg.edu/genedu/slos for current SLOs). To ensure students are achieving the GEC student learning outcomes, the GE Program is assessed annually, using faculty-developed processes, by cycling through the GE categories and markers. This is accomplished by
the Council’s Assessment Subcommittee working closely with the Office of Assessment and Accreditation.

GE Program assessment processes

Course-embedded process (except for LG2 categories; using a three-point scale)

In May 2011, a group of faculty developed a process to assess the GE Program. The assessment process includes course faculty assessment, peer faculty validation, and data summary/presentation. The process was approved by the GE Council and has been used since spring 2012 to assess student achievement of the GE Learning Goals.

In the course faculty assessment:

1. Faculty choose existing course assignments aligned to student learning outcomes (SLOs) specific to the course’s General Education category and/or marker(s).
2. Faculty send unmarked student work products for six students, along with the assignment description, to the Office of Assessment and Accreditation (OAA). The students are selected by OAA, through a random-selection process, and their student identification numbers are provided to the instructors.
3. Faculty apply a three-point rating scale (Highly Proficient, Proficient, Not Proficient) to all students’ work for each SLO.
4. Faculty complete an on-line survey, recording aggregate (class) results for each SLO.

In the peer faculty validation:

1. The General Education Council invites faculty to participate in a workshop (held in early January before classes begin) to evaluate student work products. A monetary incentive is provided to eligible participants.
2. Workshop reviewers are grouped by General Education category/marker and paired within each group. Each pair receives the same set of student work.
3. Using the same three-point scale as course faculty, reviewer pairs rate student work products (SWPs) provided by the course faculty. Each member scores the work independently. Two scores are gathered for each student work.
4. The workshop concludes with large-group discussion.

In the data summary and presentation:

1. OAA summarizes data from the course faculty assessment and from the peer faculty validation workshop.
2. The General Education Council presents these summarized data to the University in open forums.
3. Forum participants make observations, suggestions, recommendations, etc., to the Council.
4. A summary report is prepared and posted on the Council’s website.

Course-embedded process (Mathematics only)

In fall 2011, Math faculty pilot-tested an assessment process to collect data on every GMT class. This process included embedding five multiple choice questions in the final exam of every GMT class. Each of the five questions was intended to measure exactly one of the five (at that time) GMT student learning
goals. The questions were identical for all GMT courses. Upon examination of the results, the Math faculty determined this process was unsuitable due to the variation of course content.

In spring 2012, Math faculty varied the initial assessment process by embedding questions into GMT class final exams, but this time the questions were based on course content. Math faculty made adjustments to the final exams to ensure that every GMT student learning outcome was adequately represented by a meaningful number of problems assigned to measure it. After they collected and reviewed the data, the Math faculty decided that this was the approach with which they would use going forward.

**Course-embedded process (2015-16 GNS pilot assessment)**

In the 2009-2010 and 2012-13 academic years, the JMU Scientific Reasoning test (SR-9) had been used to assess the GNS student learning outcomes. The SR-9 is a 49-item multiple choice test, developed by science and mathematics university faculty for use at the program level. It was created to demonstrate student learning resulting from participation in scientific components of general education programs. (See [http://www.madisonassessment.com/assessment-testing/scientific-reasoning-test/](http://www.madisonassessment.com/assessment-testing/scientific-reasoning-test/).)

In re-evaluating the use of the SR-9 to assess the newly revised GNS student learning outcomes, it was the consensus of GNS faculty that the SR-9 was unsuitable for this purpose. The outcome of a workshop of GNS faculty in September 2015 was to pilot in spring 2016 the Test of Scientific Literacy (TOSLS), which appeared to fit GNS SLO-1 and possibly GNS SLO-3, and course-embedded assessments for GNS SLO-2.

Upon the completion of the pilot, a post-pilot meeting was convened on May 10, 2016. Eleven faculty, representing seven departments, attended including those that participated in the pilot. Faculty reviewed and discussed the aggregated results from the pilot. A number of faculty indicated that the TOSLS was not a good fit for GNS courses in their department. At the conclusion of the meeting, the overall consensus was that faculty teaching GNS courses would use a course-embedded process to assess each of the GNS student learning outcomes.

For GNS courses, course instructors will identify their process for assessing each GNS student learning outcome, e.g., whether a particular test was used, a group of questions from a test, a lab report, etc. In addition, the instructor will determine how s/he defined what a “proficient” student can do. By the end of fall 2016, course faculty will complete a template for reporting GNS assessment results.

**UNCGA General Education Competencies**

In early 2013, the UNC Board of Governors released its new five year strategic plan for the UNC system. Then President Ross appointed the General Education Council (GEC), a working group composed of faculty and administrators from each of the 17 UNC institutions. The GEC was asked to define and assess common competencies across a system of multiple institutions with different missions, different programs of study, and different student bodies. To accomplish its work, the GEC organized itself into five subcommittees, one of which was the Core Competencies subcommittee.

As a starting point, the Core Competencies subcommittee compiled a comprehensive list of the competencies stated or implied in each UNC institution’s general education program. Based on this
General Education Program Assessment Plan
F2016 – S2019

compilation and the list of AAC&U Essential Learning Outcomes that have been derived, in part, from
employer surveys, the subcommittee developed a survey instrument and deployed it across the
campuses to solicit faculty input on those competencies viewed as most important. Over 3,000 people
participated in the survey, allowing the subcommittee to identify two competencies that were strongly
endorsed by the majority of participants: **critical thinking and written communication**. The
subcommittee obtained the UNC Faculty Assembly’s endorsement and the endorsement of all 17
Faculty Senates (or Councils) for the two Core Competencies.

Because developing clarity around the definitions is essential in reaching agreement around an
assessment strategy for system-wide use and because both critical thinking and written communication
are complex skills and abilities made up of multiple component skills, the subcommittee deployed a
second system-wide survey in December 2013 to determine the perceived relevance of these
component skills, or subcompetencies. Over 1,900 people from more than 100 disciplines responded to
this second survey and overwhelmingly agreed that each of the identified component skills of critical
thinking and written communication (below) are considered central or relevant to their disciplines.

The following are the prioritized competencies and sub-competencies from the January 2014 Report of
the UNC General Education Council:

**Critical Thinking**

*Definition:* Critical thinking is a habit of mind characterized by the comprehensive exploration of issues,
ideas and assumptions, artifacts, data, and events before accepting or formulating an opinion, hypothesis
or conclusion.

*Sub-competencies* (students can . . .):
- Formulate a statement of the issues or define the problem
- Evaluate evidence and/or data
- Consider context and assumptions
- Propose an interpretation, perspective, model, or hypothesis
- Articulate arguments, conclusions, implications, and/or solution

**Written Communication**

*Definition:* Written communication is the development and expression of ideas in writing. Written
communication involves learning to work in many genres and styles. It can involve working with many
different writing technologies, and mixing texts, data, and images. Written communication abilities
develop through iterative experiences across the curriculum.

*Sub-competencies* (students can . . .):
- Demonstrate understanding of context and purpose
- Select appropriate, relevant, and compelling content
- Comply with genre and disciplinary conventions
- Select credible sources and evidence to support argument/ideas
- Utilize correct syntax and mechanics to clearly and unambiguously communicate ideas and
perspectives

This set the stage for UNCG’s piloting the use of the VALUE rubrics for assessing its General Education
Program in 2014-15.
2014-15 pilot: replacing three-point scale with AAC&U VALUE rubrics

In response to the UNC-GA General Education Council’s identification of two system-wide General Education competencies—Critical Thinking and Written Communication, UNCG’s General Education Council agreed to pilot the AAC&U VALUE rubrics for Critical Thinking, Written Communication, and Information Literacy to determine if they were viable replacements for the currently used three-point proficiency scale.

The Council decided that 7 to 10 sections each in the following categories/markers would be asked to participate in the fall 2014 pilot:

- GRD, which would pilot the VALUE Critical Thinking rubric
  - Criteria 1, 2, 3 for GRD student learning outcome (slo) 1, and
  - Criteria 4, 5 for GRD slo2

- GL/GN, which would pilot the VALUE Information Literacy rubric for GL and GN slo1

- WI, which would pilot the VALUE Written Communication rubric for the new slo1.

These categories/markers were chosen because they were last assessed in the 2012-13 academic year.

At the end of the pilot, both course faculty and workshop faculty were asked for their feedback regarding the use of the VALUE rubrics in place of the three-point rating scale.

Course faculty commented on the complexity of the VALUE rubrics. While the rubrics may be helpful to instructors when designing course assignments, the rubrics were time-intensive to use and results may not have been an accurate reflection of student learning. In addition, currently General Education courses are designed around the GEC student learning outcomes, which do not align directly with competencies.

Workshop faculty commented on the standardization the rubrics provided, i.e., they eliminated the ambiguity of using a three-point scale thus making scoring more objective. Some faculty thought the rubrics could be used to standardize expectations for student learning. One faculty commented, “If we moved to a competencies-based GE, rubrics would allow for streamlined assessment, consistency across courses, and provide a unifying aspect that is currently missing in our GE program.”

To address the current movement toward assessing competencies and the consensus among past participants of the General Education Program assessment that defined achievement levels of student learning outcomes would aid assessment practices, the General Education Council Chair in February 2016 expanded the charge to ad hoc committees responsible for the review/revision of student learning outcomes (SLOs). In addition to their review/revision of the SLOs, the Ad Hoc Recertification Subcommittees are also charged with defining achievement levels of Highly Proficient, Proficient, and Not Proficient for each SLO and linking the category or marker to the UNC GA competencies (currently critical thinking and written communication).
Timeline (2016–2019)
The following is a timeline of the categories and/or markers scheduled to be assessed over the next three academic years.

| GE Program Assessment: Next Three Years (2016-2019) |
|---------------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| **GE Category/Marker**         | **Assessment Method** | **2016-17**                | **2017-18**                | **2018-19**                |
| GFA (LGs 1,3,5)                | Plan A<sup>1</sup>              | assess sample of GFA courses                         |                                |
| GHP (LGs 1,3)                  | Plan A<sup>1</sup>              | assess sample of GHP courses                         |                                |
| GLT (LGs 1,3)                  | Plan A<sup>1</sup>              | assess sample of GLT courses                         | assess sample of GLT courses |
| GMT (LGs 1,2)                  | Plan B<sup>2</sup>              |                                | all GMT courses assessed    |
| GNS (LGs 1,2)                  | Plan C<sup>3</sup>              | assess sample of GNS courses                         | assess sample of GNS courses |
| GPR (LGs 1,3,5)                | Plan A<sup>1</sup>              | assess sample of GPR courses                         | assess sample of GPR courses |
| GRD (LG 1)                     | Plan A<sup>1</sup>              | assess sample of GRD courses                         |                                |
| GSB (LGs 1,4)                  | Plan A<sup>1</sup>              |                                | assess sample of GSB courses |
| GL (LGs 1,3,5)                 | Plan A<sup>1</sup>              |                                | assess sample of GL courses |
| GN (LGs 1,3,5)                 | Plan A<sup>1</sup>              |                                | assess sample of GN courses |
| SI (LG 1)                      | Plan A<sup>1</sup>              | assess sample of SI courses                          | assess sample of SI courses   | assess sample of SI courses |
| WI (LG1)                       | Plan A<sup>1</sup>              | assess sample of WI courses                          | assess sample of WI courses   | assess sample of WI courses |

<sup>1</sup>Plan A: course and faculty peer reviewers assess student work products from course-embedded assignments; a three-point rating scale is used for scoring.

<sup>2</sup>Plan B (GMT only): assess using course-content questions, matched to GMT SLOs, embedded in GMT courses’ final exams.

<sup>3</sup>Plan C (GNS only): assess using course-embedded process.
## 2016-17 Calendar of Activities

<table>
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<th>F2016</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8/1</td>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; email to selected course faculty, advising them they have been selected to participate in 2016-17 GEPA</td>
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<tr>
<td>~8/22</td>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; email to course faculty, providing more detailed information regarding the assessment process and timetable (e.g., GEPA training PPT)</td>
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</table>
| 9/1/   | 3<sup>rd</sup> email to course faculty:  
- provide names of their six randomly selected students,  
- reiterating the collection of:  
  - assignment(s) chosen to assess category/marker SLOs and scoring rubric (if applicable), and  
  - ungraded/unmarked SWPs  
- provide links to Google Drive folder for them to record class results. |
| ~12/1 | GEC chair to invite GE faculty (other than those who were part of the course faculty sample) to participate in Jan 5-6, 2017 peer validation workshop (eligible faculty will be paid $250/day) |
| 12/1--23 | GE Assessment Coordinator prepares SWPs for Jan 2017 workshop |

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>early 1/2017</td>
<td>Peer validation workshop (takes place before classes begins)</td>
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<tr>
<td>after workshop</td>
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- GEAC prepares comparative results (CF, WF) and draft Forum PPT  
- GEAC works with GEC Assessment Subcommittee to finalize Forum PPT and to plan the Forum (dates, times (had best turnout to a Forum when we did it in the following fall semester during the 2<sup>d</sup> week of classes), faculty presenters, etc.)  |
| in 2<sup>d</sup> week of F2017 classes | GEPA Forum |

*for courses that have been approved by the GE Council through May 2016*