

General Education Assessment Results: Global Understanding

George Mason University

I. Assessment Overview

Assessment of the general education Global Understanding category was conducted in the 2009-10 academic year. Global Understanding has the largest number of approved courses: 77 courses, with the majority at the 300-level. Courses were selected for assessment in late summer 2009, and faculty information sessions were held at the beginning of the fall semester. For courses with multiple sections, large lecture sessions were more likely to be selected for assessment than courses with fewer students. The assessment scope is as follows:

1. Total number of general education Global Understanding courses offered in fall 2009: **36** courses (**89** sections) by **68** faculty members in the following fields: Administration of Justice; Anthropology; Art History; Communication; Dance; Economics; English; Global and Community Health; Geography; Global Affairs; Government; History; Business Music; Religious Studies; Sociology; Theatre; Women and Gender Studies; and Tourism and Events Management.
2. Total number of students enrolled: **3,906**
3. Survey respondents: **696** (18% response rate)
4. Total portfolios collected: **13** from faculty members who taught approximately **746** students
5. Total reviewers: **7**
6. Total student work samples reviewed: **60**

Reviewers were tenured faculty members in relevant fields, and members of the University General Education Committee. Reviewers participated in a calibration session using one portfolio as an example. The reviewers then broke into teams of two and worked on their assigned portfolios. If a course was rated differently by two reviewers on its overall effectiveness in addressing the intended Global Understanding learning outcomes, a third review was conducted. Four portfolios received a third review.

Note: The results presented in Sections II – V were based on the ratings from the first two reviewers. Section VI presents a comparison of the courses rated by two reviewers and those rated by three reviewers.

II. Learning Outcomes

Upon completing a general education Global Understanding course, students will be able to:

1. Develop understanding of global patterns and processes and their interaction with society.
2. Demonstrate understanding of the interconnectedness, difference, and diversity of a global society.
3. Identify, evaluate, and properly cite resources appropriate to the field, such as audio/visual/online/print materials, or artifacts.
4. Apply awareness of global issues to a consideration of individual or collective responsibilities within a global society.
5. Devise analytical, practical, or creative responses to global problems or issues.

A general education Global Understanding course is required to address at least three of the above learning outcomes. The 13 portfolios collected represent 13 different courses offered by 12 departments. Five courses were 100-level, four were 200-level, and four were 300-level. The two largest courses had an enrollment of more than

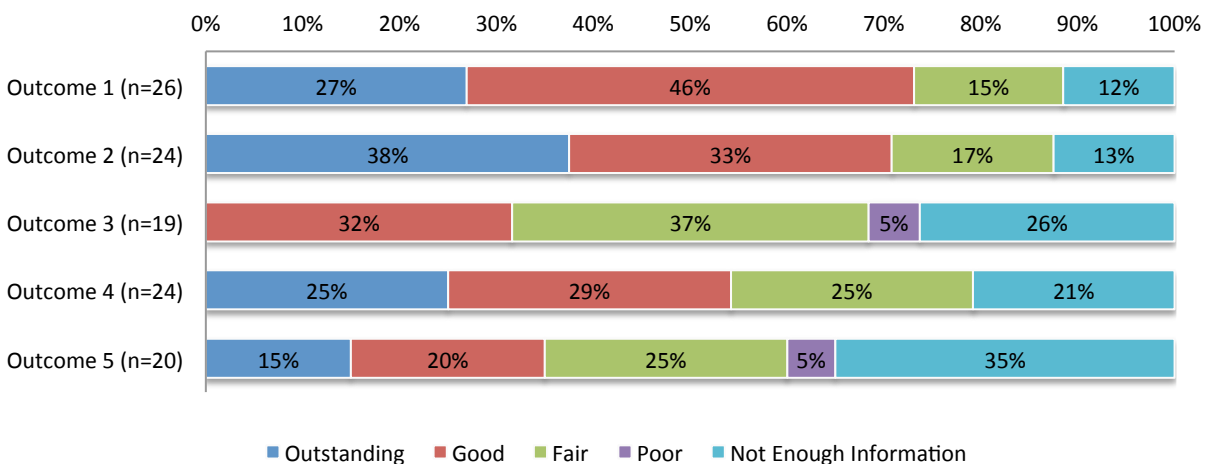
150 students each, and the remaining courses enrolled 30-50 students. Reviewers were able to identify at least three Global Understanding learning outcomes for every course reviewed. As shown in Table 1, Outcomes, 1, 2, and 4 were addressed by almost all courses. Outcome 3 was addressed by more than two-thirds of the courses, and Outcome 5 by three-fourths of the courses.

Table 1. Which of the gen ed learning outcomes does the faculty member intend to address in the course?

	Count	%
Outcome 1	13	100%
Outcome 2	13	100%
Outcome 3	9	69%
Outcome 4	11	85%
Outcome 5	10	77%

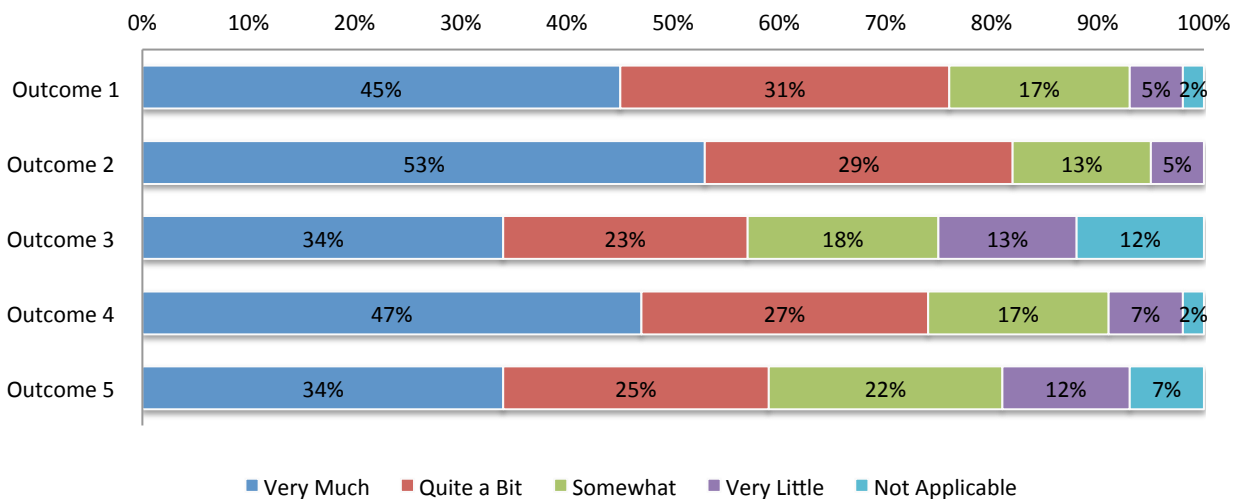
Reviewers found that Outcomes 1 and 2 were addressed the best of all the outcomes; two-thirds of the ratings were either “outstanding” or “good”. Outcome 3 was rated lowest overall; “good” ratings accounted for 32% and “fair” ratings, 37%. For Outcome 5, “not enough information” accounted for 35% of the ratings (see Figure 1). Reviewers rated an item as “not enough information” when there was insufficient evidence in the portfolio to make a judgment.

Figure 1. How well are the intended learning outcomes addressed in the course?



At the end of the spring 2010 semester, a student learning outcomes survey was administered to all students who were enrolled in Global Understanding courses—including courses that were not selected to participate in the assessment process. Caution should be taken in interpreting the data, as the response rate was low (18%). Students were asked to rate the course’s contribution to their knowledge and skills in the same five learning outcomes. Students’ responses were overwhelmingly positive. For Outcome 2, over half of respondents selected “very much”, and nearly one-third selected “quite a bit”. For Outcomes 1 and 4, about 75% selected either “very much” or “quite a bit.” Twelve percent of students reported that their courses did not address outcome #3. See Figure 2.

Figure 2. Student Perception: To what extent has this course contributed to your knowledge and skills in the following areas?



III. Student Work Samples

Work samples were requested for a random sampling of 4-10 students from each assessed course section. Faculty members were asked to identify an assignment and submit one work sample from each randomly selected student, and, if they preferred, an additional exemplar. A total of 60 student work samples were submitted. The work samples represented a variety of forms: research papers, short essays, final exams, etc. When faculty members provided exams as evidence of student learning, they were asked to identify and map selected exam items to the general education Global Understanding learning outcomes.

The assignments were most likely to address Outcomes 1, 2, and 4. Reviewers determined that about one-third of the assignments addressed Outcomes 3 and 5. For a few assignments, reviewers had difficulty making a connection between the intended outcomes and the general education outcomes. Reviewers judged that over half of the assignments gave students the opportunity to demonstrate their competence for the intended outcomes (see Figure 3).

Reviewers evaluated the extent to which the work samples manifested the intended outcomes. More than 30% of the work samples “completely” or “mostly” demonstrated the intended outcomes, and another third did so “somewhat adequately”. “Inadequately” and “unable to judge” ratings accounted for the final third (see Figure 4). Overall, 38% of the work samples were determined to be “highly competent” by the instructors, 37% were “competent,” 11% were rated “marginally competent,” and 14% judged “less than competent.”

Figure 3. To what extent does the assignment give students the opportunity to demonstrate their competence in the intended outcome(s)?

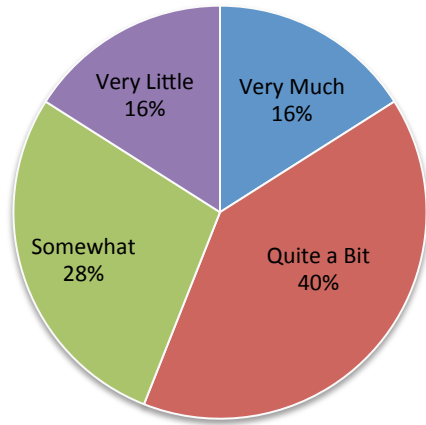


Figure 4. How fully do the student work samples manifest the intended outcomes?

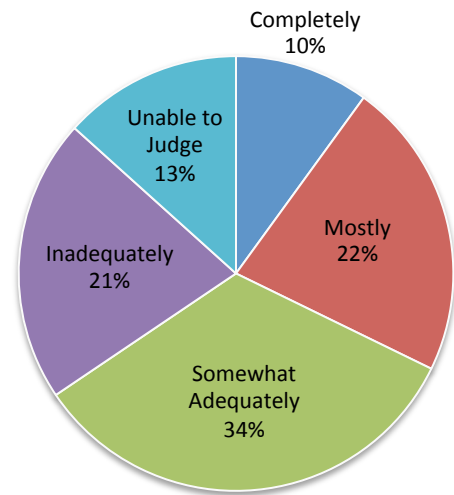


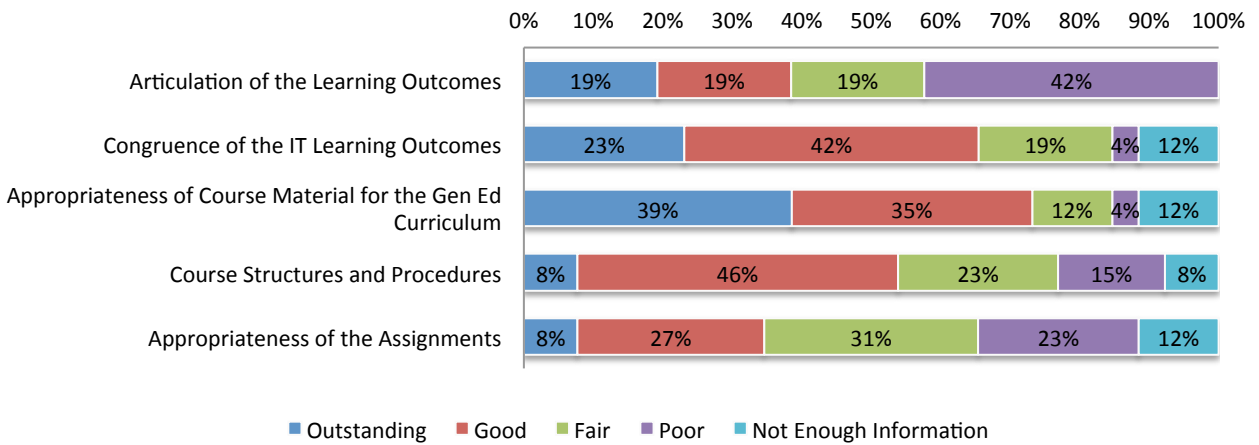
Table 2. Instructors' Assessment of Student Competence Reflected in the Work Samples

		Highly Competent	Competent	Marginally Competent	Less than Competent
Student Work	Count	25	23	5	7
	%	42%	38%	8%	12%

IV. Overall Ratings

Of the five summative items displayed in Figure 5, over half of the ratings were either “outstanding” or “good” for two items: *appropriateness of course materials* and *congruence of the Global Understanding learning outcomes with course content and goals*. *Articulation of the general education learning outcomes for students* was rated the lowest: “outstanding” and “good” ratings accounted for 38%, and “poor” ratings accounted for 42%. Another notable low rating was the *appropriateness of course assignments or forms of assessment*: one-third of the ratings fell into the “outstanding” or “good” categories, and less than one-third were “fair.” Some reviewers considered knowledge-based multiple-choice exams as not effective for some courses to properly assess the Global Understanding outcomes that they intended to address (see Section VI for more information). For two courses, reviewers were unable to make a judgment due to the insufficient materials presented in the portfolios.

Figure 5. Given the mission of the General Education program, please rate the course in the following categories



On the overall effectiveness of the course in addressing the intended Global Understanding learning outcomes (Figure 6), “outstanding” ratings accounted for 12%, and “good” ratings accounted for 46%. The majority of students reported that the courses had improved their understanding of global issues “quite a bit” (32%) or “very much” (45%) (see Figure 7).

Figure 6. Reviewers: Overall, how well does the course address the intended gen ed learning outcomes for the category?

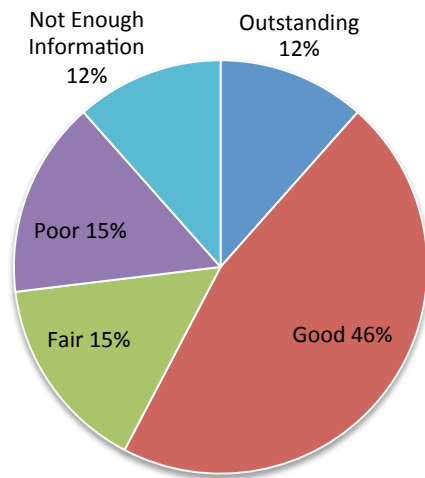
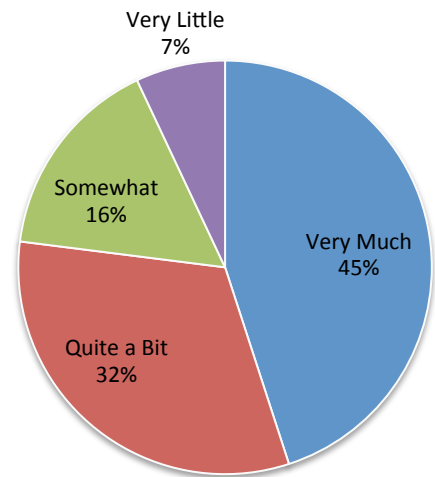


Figure 7. Student Perception: To what extent has this course increased your Global Understanding?



V. Examples of Reviewers' Comments

Reviewers were given the opportunity to comment on features of the course and provide recommendations. The following presents selected verbatim comments:

1. What elements/features from the course would you recommend to other faculty members who also teach general education courses in Global Understanding?

- Clear connection and nice balance of personally specific inner experience to the outer larger global universal human experience. Macro and micro levels of understanding encouraged through assignments and course design.
- Outstanding assignment design especially in the Group Presentation Project-- gives substantial guidance and process direction without being overly prescriptive or answering all the questions for the student.
- The combination of an emphasis on visual and cultural literacy with a critical analysis of representations of gender is an admirable one that gives the course the best of interdisciplinary approaches to subject matter. In a kind, the experiential nature of the assignment under examination, the Cultural Event Assignment, affords students the opportunity to apply the outcomes of the course to immediate and local contexts.
- The course objectives are clear and comprehensive, and while they do not explicitly articulate the gen ed learning outcomes in Global Understanding, they converge with them in practice. Assignments were appropriate and geared towards assessment. As well, the grading rubric adopted seemed fair and clear, and also was conducive to assessment.
- The strategy of assigning optional extra credit short essays seems a good solution to the challenge of creating active student engagement in large-enrollment gen ed courses; the fact that some 90-95% of the students avail themselves of the option suggests that it could well be made a requirement instead of an option.
- This course, more than some others in this category, seems to invite students to think about their own very personal interactions with a global society, i.e., as tourists. This strikes me as a useful framework to elevate tourism from something merely recreational to an opportunity for significant cross-cultural learning. I also appreciated that the learning outcomes were prominently highlighted in the syllabus.
- Very good at integrating theory and practical experiences. Very nice assignments, particularly having student attend an event outside of their own cultural experience, and then reflecting upon it.

2. In terms of addressing the intended gen ed learning outcomes, what suggestions would you give to the faculty member?

- Knowledge-based multiple choice test questions don't assess any of the gen ed outcomes. It's possible that some of these tests would be helpful to students' learning of the material, but without other forms of assessment, such as short sentence answers, the material is not reinforced for students and the reviewer cannot make a judgment about the connection between gen ed and the course.
- The course materials that the students see (syllabus and assignments) could be more explicit/intentional with regard to the Global Understanding outcomes-- much of the time the global nature of the course is implicit, but the same material could be enlivened in a global context with a bit of foregrounding of that aspect of the issues. The syllabus, ideally, could make specific reference to the global outcomes that the course addresses; the instructor's reflection makes it clear that she addresses these issues verbally but some written articulation for the students would make it even clearer.

- The employment of multiple-choice exams as primary assessment instruments makes it difficult to verify that outcome 5 is being addressed (though it may well be through the final "itinerary" assignment, which this reviewer would have liked to see as the work sample). In a course with this kind of enrollment, it seems that more active forms of assignments/assessments could be used.
- Providing clearer instructions about the writing assignment and guiding students toward topics more focused on Global Understanding would significantly improve the ability of the course to be highly rated as a Global Understanding general education course.

VI. Third Reviews

Four of the 14 course portfolios received a different rating for the item, "Overall, how well does the course address the intended general education learning outcomes for Global Understanding?" A third reviewer re-assessed these four portfolios. Table 3 displays the mean scores for the four courses that needed extra review. For comparison, mean scores for the courses that did not need an extra review are also included.

Table 3. Comparison of Overall Rating Means for Courses that Received an Additional Review

	No Extra Review Needed (9 courses)		Extra Review Needed (4 courses)	
	Two Reviewers		Two Reviewers	Three Reviewers
	<i>Mean*</i>		<i>Mean</i>	<i>Mean</i>
Articulation of the gen ed learning outcomes for students	2.39		1.62	1.67
Congruence of the gen ed learning outcomes with the course content and goals	3.29		2.00	2.33
Appropriateness of course material for the gen ed curriculum	3.59		2.17	2.70
Course structures and procedures that contribute to the likely achievement of the gen ed outcomes by students	2.88		1.57	1.91
Appropriateness of the assignments or forms of assessment, in relation to the gen ed learning outcomes	2.53		1.33	1.80
Overall, how well does the course address the intended gen ed learning outcomes for the category?	3.00		1.50	1.89

** Mean scores were calculated on a 1-4 scale with 1= Poor and 4 = Outstanding. "Not enough information" ratings were excluded from the analysis.*

On every item, the mean scores for the four courses needing a third review are significantly *lower* than those of the nine courses that needed no additional review. The third reviews raised the mean scores for those courses slightly. It should be noted that the quality of a course portfolio (e.g., its clarity, comprehensiveness, instructor's reflection on teaching and learning, etc.) has a significant impact on reviewers' judgment. An incomplete or unclear faculty reflection often led to reviewers' difficulty in understanding the context of the course as well as its goals and processes. One reviewer had the following observation about one course portfolio:

There is insufficient material here to fairly evaluate this portfolio. The syllabus does not list any course objectives; the faculty reflection statement is descriptive of the course materials but does not discuss how these materials translated into specific objectives (nor does it describe how students were assessed). It seems, moreover, that students were given three exams (two tests and one final exam) as well as three homework assignments. None of these items were described. We were only provided with the second test as evidence of evaluation, and the test itself does not allow the students adequate opportunity to demonstrate any kind of learning outcomes.

VII. Subsequent Actions

Two debriefings were held in fall 2010, one with all the reviewers and the other with the participating faculty members. After the faculty debriefing, individual results were sent to the faculty members confidentially. The Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education, the Associate Provost for Institutional Effectiveness and the Director of Institutional Assessment then presented the aggregated results to the University General Education Committee and met with department chairs to discuss the assessment results, issues of particular concern, and possible ways to use the results to improve teaching and learning.