

2017—Student Learning Assessment Advisory Group (SLAAG) report to PACIE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY/ABSTRACT

The report below is a comprehensive analysis of the collective and comprehensive assessment efforts across all programs and colleges at FSU. Generally, the period covered in this report reflects assessment efforts over the last 18 months. Spring 2017 is not addressed in this report. Please note that all colleges at FSU submitted formal reports to SLAAG. This includes the assessment campaign involving our General Education Program (GEP). Thus, this composite document is meant as a commentary on the assessment efforts, procedures, and results from our College of Education (CoE), College of Business (CoB), College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (CLAS), and our General Education Program (GEP).

On a cursory analysis, the reader will find that the CoB, the GEP, and the CoE follow rather similar assessment procedures and standards. Generally, their systems reflect a certain level of centralization and standardization. Due to the variance of programmatic offerings found in CLAS, assessment leaders advocated and received approval from SLAAG and the Provost office to conduct a more decentralized assessment campaign. Hence, the results reported from CLAS reflect specific and tailored assessment efforts aimed at programs and at the department level. Of particular note, key assessment personnel and leadership all agreed on a common reporting format—a first in FSU’s efforts to improve our assessment culture.

In this report, high-level assessment themes and results from each domain will be discussed. At the conclusion of this document, specific action items, corrective actions, and resource allocations will be advanced.

FSU’s General Education Program (GEP)

As can be seen in other assessment efforts across our programs, the desire was for our students to achieve a ‘3’ or ‘Meets Expectations’ across all Rubric dimensions of the FSU GEP Learning Objectives. Generally, scores across all dimensions of all Rubrics situated between a ‘2’, ‘Below Expectations’ and ‘3’, ‘Meets Expectations’.

If we were to collapse all Rubric criteria into a single composite score, these would be the results across a total sample size just below 500 students:

<i>Learning Objective</i>	<i>MEAN Composite Score</i>
Written Communication	3.23
Oral Communication	2.96
Mathematical & Quantitative Reasoning	2.41
Critical Thinking & Reasoning	2.31
Appreciation of Cultural Identities	3.06
Values & Social Responsibility	2.26

Analysis revealed a “race or minority” effect. We chose race/minority status as a control variable in our regression models for a host of reasons to include policy imperatives aiming to understand, appreciate, and promote a diverse campus. Again, this is baseline data and inferences should be tempered, but it does appear that we have some statistically significant differences based on race. Minority students performed below non-Minority students in the following Learning Objectives: Written Communication,

Mathematical and Quantitative Reasoning, Oral Communication, and Appreciation of Cultural Identities. This deserves our enhanced attention and more dialogue. In our effort to understand this phenomenon and others related to GEP assessment, an IRB blanket application was submitted on February 3rd, 2017 and, later, approved.

Beyond the quantitative, several qualitative findings emerged that may spur resource allocations or possible resource/structural changes. Specifically, sentiment surfaced that Oral Communication may lack a true “home” or “center of excellence” within our GEP. Dialogue is occurring on whether FSU has the proper GEP curricula to support oral communication.

Also, the GEP assessment system relies heavily on direct assessment. This is a solid orientation. However, conversations are occurring to smartly supplement our direct assessment efforts with indirect assessment initiatives. This could include the CLA, which provides assessment intelligence regarding how well FSU students perform on critical thinking skills compared to a broader baseline of students. While our Assessment and Institutional Research (AIR) office has launched the CLA in the past, the return on this investment has been muted. Given our new and improved assessment ethos, there is discussion of initiating a CLA assessment—at least on a smaller scale.

FSU’s College of Business

The CoB assessment program earned high praise from their accrediting body, the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) during the Fall of 2015. During 2016, they sought to build on that success by embracing a continuous improvement mentality. For instance, CoB leadership, with approval from faculty, modified/changed some of their Learning Objectives. Specifically, they added Global Reasoning as a Learning Objectives. Also, the CoB is employing some indirect assessment tactics by executing an ETS Field Test in the Fall of 2017.

It is important to note that with 2016 dedicated to a Programmatic Review after the AACSB visit, data collection occurred in the Spring of 2017 and is being analyzed by faculty in the Fall of 2017. The CoB reporting format does, indeed, mirror the format followed by our GEP and by the CoE. Also, there are some important and instrumental linkages between the CoB efforts and FSU’s GEP. In particular, the CoB assesses oral and written communication along with a variant of critical thinking/reasoning—all of which are assessed within our GEP. With the advent of their new Global Perspective Learning Orientation, there is some alignment between FSU’s GEP Learning Objective of Cultural Appreciation. Ideally, as an institution, there is a desire to have GEP Learning Objectives reinforced after the GEP is completed. The CoB provides solid evidence that this is, indeed, occurring. Also, given that the CoB has similar—but not exact—Learning Objectives compared to FSU’s GEP, some level of *pre* and *post* analysis becomes tenable.

FSU’s College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

Student learning is assessed, within CLAS, at various points in their academic careers through learning outcomes at the course and program levels. In addition, a number of programs are accredited at the national level. Importantly, all department learning outcomes are tied to the University’s Institutional Learning Goals. Departments map their departmental learning outcomes to these Goals and must be able to show how they are connected. Assessment in the college is decentralized, but all departments must make annual reports to the CLAS Assessment Council, as well as, have assessment plans reviewed by them. In this way, all faculty and employees across the departments that make up the college are

encouraged to engage in meaningful assessment for continuous improvement of the University as a whole and the student learning experience in particular.

In Spring 2015, the Senior Research Analyst for the AIR Office, the Chair of the CLAS Assessment Council, and an Associate Dean for CLAS, reviewed all of the plans and assessment updates for the major programs in CLAS, as well as, reviews by CLAS Assessment Council members. They then completed Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes Process Rubrics for the thirty-three programs as well as a comprehensive report for the University's Student Learning Assessment Advisory Group (SLAAG). As part of the "assessment of assessment" process, CLAS department chairs and undergraduate program coordinators completed an Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes Process Rubric for their major programs to identify student learning outcomes assessment strengths and weaknesses, as well as improvements that need to be made in their courses, curricula, and assessment processes. The Associate Dean met with all 33 program Coordinators to discuss student learning outcomes and the assessment practices. Written feedback was shared with each coordinator and Chair. A report was written for Middle States/SLAAG to provide information on the strengths and weaknesses of each program's SLO assessment plans and updates. In the past year, 26 updates were submitted with 11 new plans. New plans represent subsequent progress in improving assessment in the college.

Results are reported to the assessment committee and the department at a department meeting. English will be making changes to our freshman composition class to teach more about doing good research and using sources, though these changes will take anywhere from 1-4 years to reach the capstone assessment (we should not expect to see immediate results). These skills will also be reviewed in upper level courses. Additionally, in 2015 English agreed to focus more on editing and revision, and our scores in the Writing Process section of the rubric have improved in the past year. English agreed as a department to continue to seek improvement in this area across courses.

Also, as it relates to our Institutional Goal of **Core Skills**, English plans to teach more research outside of the 300 level courses, and attempt to encourage students to include papers from those research courses in their portfolios (additional evidence suggests that more research occurs in the program than appears in the assessment, so encouraging students to include that work in the portfolio should allow the assessment to be more accurate).

We continue to sample from the 33 departments to discuss progress towards the Institutional Goal of **Acquisition and Application of Specialized Knowledge**. Here, the Philosophy department plays a critical role. For instance, the Department discusses results at the beginning of each academic year which inform changes to the curriculum. More specifically, the department is currently revising the philosophy major curriculum, and this process is informed by assessment findings. As part of this curriculum revision, the department has decided to split PHIL 205: Logic into two distinct courses: a 100-level critical thinking course and a 300-level logic course. The 100-level critical thinking course will be a requirement for the philosophy major.

Another Institutional Learning Goal is that of **Values and Social Responsibility**, of which, The Social Work department plays a critical role in advancing. The Social Work department embraces a Competency based system. As such, they have committed to monitor competencies that fall below 90%. Currently, these results indicate no cause for radical change. However, one of the learning goals that tended to be rated lower involved the disconnect between social work practice and social work research; hence the goal of research-informed practice and practice-informed research. One attempt to address this was the redesign of SOWK 310: Statistics for Social Sciences. This redesign is explained in the previous year report in Compliance Assist, but these results replicate the previous findings in that this area is the lowest rated learning goal. This year the results indicate that 88.6 percent of the graduates meet the goal (well above the CSWE requirement of 80 percent), and the July 22, 2015 summary report that

closed out the previous learning goals found that 88 percent of our graduates met the benchmark. By AY 2016/17 at least some of the graduates will have benefited from the new program.

In conclusion, this Executive Summary just sampled some of the progress occurring in CLAS. No significant “red flags” or major/structural corrective actions exist currently.

FSU’s College of Education

The College of Education believes that P-12 students deserve teachers who are totally committed to the profession and who display advocacy for children and their communities. The theme of the Unit, Linked Hands, Heads, and Hearts: Building Powerful Learning Communities, incorporates the proficiencies, knowledge, skills, and dispositions that the College values. The COE updated the Conceptual Framework to the most recent version of the InTASC standards in Spring, 2016. These standards provide the learning **objectives for the COE** which ensure that candidates across the Unit understand and apply strategies for (1) learner development, (2) learning differences, and (3) the learning environment. They demonstrate (4) content knowledge and (5) application of content knowledge. (6) Candidates are able to use multiple assessment strategies, (7) plan appropriate instruction and (8) implement multiple instructional strategies. They also (9) demonstrate professional learning and ethical practices as well as (10) leadership and collaboration. All syllabi and assessments are being tagged to the InTASC standards. Unit Common Assessments were developed using the new conceptual framework and have been analyzed by disaggregating the InTASC standards to determine the strengths and weakness of all candidates across the Unit. These standards provide the framework to ensure that our candidates meet the College of Education Learning Goals. The standards have also been linked to the University's institutional learning goals.

Of the CoE’s 10 Learning Objectives, three required significant close-the-loop/corrective actions. Those are detailed below in summary form.

Learning Differences (OBJ 2): The teacher uses understanding of individual differences and diverse cultures and communities to ensure inclusive learning environments that enable each learner to meet high standards. This links to: Institutional Learning Goal Linkage: **UGIL Goal 5- Appreciation of Cultural Identities**. The results are based on rubric scores. InTASC Standard 2 data show candidate progress across the Unit. The Spring, 2016 overall score (aggregated by standard across all rubrics) was 82.06% (average 3.282/4) for Initial Certification Candidates (N=89) and Advanced Certification Programs was 84.49% for Spring/Summer 2016. Based on these results, the following Close-the-Loop activity was identified. The data revealed that Differentiated Instruction was one of the weakest areas of our candidates as they planned instruction to meet the needs of the diverse learners in their classrooms. The COE has shared this data with all previously mentioned stakeholders. Action Plans have included: additional seminars for candidates on Universal Design for Learning principles, intentional modeling of differentiated instruction on the part of all faculty in education courses, a book study on Fisher and Frey’s Gradual Release of Responsibility Model, development of a diversity course (EDUC 310) for secondary education majors, and the development of diversity modules which will be used as part of the Teacher Quality Partnership Grant with Coppin State University.

Application of Content (OBJ 5): The teacher understands how to connect concepts and use differing perspectives to engage learners in critical thinking, creativity, and collaborative problem solving related to authentic local and global issues. This links to: Institutional Learning Goal Linkage: **UGIL Goal 3- Acquisition and Application of Specialized Knowledge**. The results are based on rubric scores. InTASC Standard 5 data show candidate progress across the Unit. The Spring, 2016 overall score (aggregated by standard across all rubrics) was 92.88% (average 3.72/4) for Initial Certification Candidates (N=89) and Advanced Certification Programs was 82.41% for Spring/Summer 2016. Based on these results, the following Close-the-Loop activity was identified. Following the data analysis, the P-9/Secondary/P-12

faculty indicated possible steps that could be taken in order to both improve the quality of the collected data and to address those specific areas of weakness. In relation to the candidates' knowledge and the application of content, we hope that the transition to the focus on these standards program wide and the use of the new revised EPP assessment tools may help to better reflect candidates' strengths and weaknesses in relation to these areas. We will continue to involve students in learning and applying the Maryland College and Career Ready Standards, as well as other standards in science, social studies and technology, both in planning and teaching experiences. The rigor of the current standards requires that we more deeply engage candidates in developing their own higher order thinking skills and problem solving abilities, as well as to help them see ways to use questioning, inquiry and creative innovations in order to build higher order thinking skills in their students. We will also work to make explicit the connections between content and application (InTASC 5), through highlighting necessary knowledge needed to plan and deliver lessons, as well as modeling more clearly the thinking skills and processes used during teaching. This could be done through demonstration lessons, where instructors, acting as teachers, guide candidates in analyzing the decisions or moves made during the planning and teaching of the components of that demonstration lesson. Candidates would then use this model to plan, deliver and reflect on their own lessons. This process, similar to Lesson Study, could be used to both improve candidates understanding of how their knowledge is applied within teaching, as well as to improve their critical thinking and reflection skills (InTASC 5).

Assessment (OBJ 6): The teacher understands and uses multiple methods of assessment to engage learners in their own growth, to monitor learner progress, and to guide the teacher's and learner's decision making. This links to Institutional Learning Goal Linkage: **UGIL Goal 3-** Acquisition and Application of Specialized Knowledge. The results are based on rubrics scores. InTASC Standard 6 data show candidate progress across the Unit. The Spring, 2016 overall score (aggregated by standard across all rubrics) was 82.38% (average 3.30/4) for Initial Certification Candidates (N=89) and Advanced Certification Programs was 84.46% for Spring/Summer 2016. Based on these results, the following Close-the-Loop activity was identified. Faculty are teaching additional assessment methods beyond paper and pencil tests. Candidates must have more direct instruction in the assessment-instruction cycle in Seminar, as well as in the subject-specific methods courses. They do not use assessment data to inform instruction. They will also receive instruction in EDUC 325 Educational Technology on how to create and use formative assessments.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER—RECOMMENDATIONS for PACIE

There are several themes that emerge from this comprehensive review of all College assessment efforts to include that of our GEP. Notably, and most important, assessment is becoming cemented into the fabric of our university. The ethos of assessment is anchored and getting stronger. We all should have collective confidence that assessment is occurring and we are using that assessment to better impact student learning. Of course, it is difficult to advance recommendations from PACIE that, indeed, cover all Colleges and our GEP. An attempt, though, is made below at some global corrective actions that are either structural or resource focused.

1. **Diversity and race.** PACIE may want to investigate how race/minority status influences learning outcomes. The GEP analysis showed that minorities, in general, differed in their performance on a host of GEP Learning Objectives. Also, the CoE identified the managing of diversity and cultural differences as a core focus. When this information is coupled with other findings across the university (e.g., AACSB mentioning that our CoB faculty is not nearly as diverse as the student population that it educates) or the fact that nearly 75% of all students on Academic Probation or Warning are of minority status, it suggests that more needs to be done. Perhaps,

augmenting the CAAR office with additional resources could be one corrective action. Maybe, more than anything, a Special Focus team should be convened to better understand this challenge and identify action plans to correct.

2. **Critical Thinking & Augmenting the CTE.** Across the board, there is some evidence that the student skill of Critical Thinking is not quite where we want it. One possible manner to address this is to employ (and possibly augment) internal resources to improve our student's ability to Critically Think. Our Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE) could be one such avenue to help build the pedagogical capability to improve in this area. Also, FSU does have an internal expert on Critical Thinking, Dr. Alan Bensely, who may want to be consulted on how best to improve in this area.
3. **Indirect Assessment.** The CoB is taking a giant step forward by selectively and judiciously using ETS to benchmark our students' learning against others. By and large, most of our assessment is Direct Assessment, which, by all accounts, is good. However, the best assessment programs selectively employ Indirect Assessment to inform Direct Assessment efforts. For instance, our previous efforts in employing the Collegiate Learning Assessment did not yield a return. Given the expense of this tool to capture critical thinking, that is unfortunate. However, SLAAG recommends revisiting and resourcing the CLA (especially given point 2 above) and developing a targeted and focused roll-out/execution plan for the CLA. Given that all Colleges to include our GEP aim to assess this area, SLAAG thinks more resources should be planned and allocated here.
4. **Oral Communication.** The General Education Program Review Committee (GEPRC) is investigating this issue. But, a bird's eye view, suggests that students are not being exposed to oral communicative skills in a consistent and focused manner. Perhaps, adding a singular section of a Communication Studies course to the GEP would be appropriate. This, of course, could be piloted and we could perform control and experimental testing to gauge whether students perform better on oral communication by participating in a focused Communications course.

These recommendations, of course, are not exhaustive, but warrant further attention by PACIE and other University bodies.

Questions or comments should be directed to the undersigned.

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