



UNIVERSITY *of* ALASKA ANCHORAGE

General Education Requirements for Baccalaureate Degrees

Academic Assessment Plan

Adopted by

The GERA Task Force: AY 2014-15

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ayaac@uaa.alaska.edu

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Mission Statement

General Education Requirements (GERs) provide students with a common educational experience in order to provide a foundation for further study and broaden the educational experience of every degree-seeking student. They are designed to promote an elevation of the student's level in basic college-level skills (Tier 1), a breadth of exposure to traditional academic disciplines (Tier 2), and experience in applying his/her education in understanding and responding to the evolving state of knowledge and the world in the 21st century (Tier 3).

Tier 1: Basic College-Level Skills	12
Tier 2: Disciplinary Areas	22
Tier 3: Integrative Capstone	3
Total Credits	37

Tier 1: Basic College Level Skills

The UAA GERs begin with basic college-level skills enhancement in written communication, oral communication and quantitative skills:

- Courses in written communication and oral communication develop the critical reading, thinking and communication skills (writing, speaking and listening) necessary for personal and professional success.
- Courses in quantitative skills foster the analytical and mathematical abilities necessary for success in undergraduate study and professional life.

Tier 2: Disciplinary Areas

GERs continue with courses in four required disciplinary areas categorized by course content and academic discipline that are designed to guarantee a breadth of academic experience. These are fine arts, humanities, natural science and social science:

- Courses in the fine arts examine the historical, aesthetic, critical and creative aspects of art.
- Courses in the humanities consider the cultural, historical, literary, aesthetic, ethical and spiritual traditions shaping the contemporary world.

- Courses in natural science present theoretical and descriptive approaches to understanding the natural and physical worlds. Lab courses in the natural sciences emphasize gathering data and analyzing hypotheses according to the scientific method.
- Courses in the social sciences explore insights about individuals, groups and cultures derived from empirical methodologies.

Tier 3: Integrative Capstone

For baccalaureate students, the GER experience culminates with an integrative capstone, which includes courses from across the university that require students to integrate knowledge of GER basic college-level skills (Tier 1) and/or disciplinary areas (Tier 2) as part of their course design.

Integrative capstone (Tier 3) courses may be taken only after the student has completed all basic college-level skills (Tier 1) requirements.

The integrative capstone list includes courses from across the university that require students to synthesize across GER domains. Integrative capstone courses include knowledge integration of GER basic college-level skills (Tier 1) and/or disciplinary areas (Tier 2) as part of their course design. Integrative capstone courses should focus on practice, study and critical evaluation, and include in their student outcomes an emphasis on the evolving realities of the 21st century.

Students completing the integrative capstone requirement must demonstrate the ability to integrate knowledge by accessing, judging and comparing knowledge gained from diverse fields and by critically evaluating their own views in relation to those fields.

Brief History of General Education Assessment at UAA

UAA has engaged in various forms of general education assessment since at least 1998 with a two year general education assessment project in preparation for the 2000 NWCCU accreditation. The reports for each of those two years are available through OAA.

From 2000 to 2005 a UAA GER review committee examined national and local general education structures and practices (chaired by Dan Kline, English). Their efforts led to the formation, in 2004, of a General Education Review Committee (GERC) as a standing subcommittee of the Undergraduate Academic Board (UAB). The purpose of the GERC is to review the status of GER courses, and insure

that these courses meet the intent of the general education requirements. This body also developed a 3 Tiered division of the GERs: Tier I—basic college level skill in written and oral communication, and quantitative reasoning; Tier II—disciplinary introduction to the fine arts, humanities, natural science, and social science; and Tier III—Integrated upper division Capstone. This group also developed 9 GER Student Learning Outcomes and category descriptors for those outcomes and Tiers. Between 2005 and 2010 UAA underwent a major catalog review to insure that all current and new GER courses were updated to include the new GER SLOs. Additionally, beginning in 2005, many departments and programs created GER Integrated Capstone courses to help students fulfill this new requirement.

Beginning in 2005, the College of Arts and Sciences created a committee specifically entrusted with assessing the Associate of Arts (AA) degree. This AA assessment committee has filed an annual assessment report since 2006. The assessment of the AA degree has served as de facto assessment for the UAA GER courses, since the AA degree closely approximates the GER requirements. The AA degree requirements, however, do not include a natural science lab GER, a quantitative GER, or the GER Integrative capstone. In 2009 the GERC undertook a pilot assessment study of a selected sample GER Integrated Capstone courses. (See Appendix C for a summary report of the AA assessment from 2005-14).

In September 2012 the UAA Faculty Senate passed a motion creating a General Education Assessment Task Force (GERA), giving it a two year term to undertake the following duties (extended for a third year, 2014-15):

- Research national best practices in assessment of general education learning outcomes;
- Foster a campus wide dialogue on general education and GER outcomes assessment;
- Recommend next steps toward developing a GER assessment plan and any funding implications of that recommendation.

The following assessment plan is part of the GERA charge. GER assessment should be faculty driven and student focused, based on “authentic” teaching and assignments that grow out of the classroom. Modeled after national best practices, this GER assessment process is built around a model of flexibility, simplicity, sustainability and usefulness. Assessment should be seen as inquiry, dialogue, and engagement, as a part of the scholarship of teaching and learning.

GER Program Student Learning Outcomes

After completing the GERs, UAA students shall be able to:

1. Communicate effectively in a variety of contexts and formats;
2. Reason mathematically and analyze quantitative and qualitative data competently to reach sound conclusions;
3. Relate knowledge to the historical context in which it developed and the human problems it addresses;
4. Interpret different systems of aesthetic representation and understand their historical and cultural contexts;
5. Investigate the complexity of human institutions and behavior to better understand interpersonal, group and cultural dynamics;
6. Identify ways in which science has advanced the understanding of important natural processes;
7. Locate and use relevant information to make appropriate personal and professional decisions;
8. Adopt critical perspectives for understanding the forces of globalization and diversity; and
9. Integrate knowledge and employ skills gained to synthesize creative thinking, critical judgment and personal experience in a meaningful and coherent manner.

Pre-Assessment Activities

1) Curriculum Mapping:

- a) GER Outcomes mapped to GER Courses:** Map out which GER courses develop and assess which GER student learning outcomes. See timeline for process. Filled out at department level. Overseen by GER Faculty Director and Advisory Committee.
- b) GER Outcomes mapped to program level courses and outcomes:** Program level mapping whereby each program maps out which of its courses and PSLOs meet which of the GER 9 SLOs, either directly through a GER course offering, or indirectly as a program outcome. For example, History might offer courses that specifically meet the GER Humanities SLO (relate knowledge to the historical context in which it developed and the human problems it addresses), but at the program level it also seeks to develop student skills in historical thinking, research and writing. These would map indirectly to GER SLOs of effective communication, information literacy, and knowledge integration. These maps of program outcomes to GER outcomes will be filled out by all UAA programs. See timeline for process.

Assessment Measures

1) Faculty Community of Practice Inquiry Groups: Across courses and disciplines. Staggered, sampled collection of faculty reporting at the GER and program course level on student performance towards the relevant GER SLO. Faculty share syllabi, key courses assignments, collect and share student products, use and/or redesign assessment rubrics (for example, work off AAC&U rubrics), report out findings and recommendations. AA Assessment is piloting such a project for Spring/Summer 2015, with a small faculty group assessing the Humanities AA/GER SLO.

2) Student Demographic Information and Surveys: Use Noel Levitz SSI survey and IDEA to gather information on GER student demographics, student pass rates, and student perceptions of their knowledge and skill acquisition on GER SLOs. Administered by UAA IR, overseen by GERA and Director of General Education.

Process

Tool	Description	Frequency/ Start Date	Collection Method	Administered by
Faculty Community of Practice Inquiry Groups Assess GER SLOs	Small working groups of faculty teaching selected GER and program courses report out on student performance on targeted GER SLO/s from course embedded assignment/s. They meet to share syllabi, key course assignments, collect and share student products, use and/or redesign assessment rubrics, report out findings and make recommendations.	Every year, staggered and sampled (1-3 SLOs/year). Reporting forms sent out in Sept.; reports due in May.	Members of the Faculty Inquiry groups gather course assignments and student products from own GER and program course to use for group assessment work.	GER Assessment Plan indicates which SLO/s to be assessed. Teaching faculty report out; Director and Advisory Committee assist process.
GER Curriculum Mapping: Course Level	Departments fill out Curriculum Mapping Template that identifies if they offer any GERs, and which GER SLO/s those course meet.	Implemented at the beginning of GER assessment, over a 3 year period	Departmental Faculty/Chair	GER/Program Course Mapping Template. Facilitated by Director.
GER Curriculum Mapping: Program Level	Each program maps out which of its courses and PSLOs meet which of the GER 9 SLOs, either directly through a GER course offering, or indirectly as a program outcome.	Three year process, part of the same template as the GER course mapping.	Departmental Faculty/Chair	GER/Program Course Mapping Template. Facilitated by Director.

Tool	Description	Frequency/ Start Date	Collection Method	Administered by
GER Student Demographics	UAA wide demographic snapshots of GER students— who, when, where, how, DFW, etc.	Annually	UAA IR, with guidance from the Director	UAA IR, with guidance from the Director
Student Survey	Survey of student perceptions of performance, knowledge base and skill acquisition on GER SLOs.	Annually	Through UAA National Survey and IDEA	Questions designed by the Director and Advisory body and administered by IR

Timeline:

Academic Year	GER SLOs to Assess	Indirect Measures	Direct Measures	Reflection & Action
2015-2016	1, 7 (Effective Communication, Information Literacy)	UAA IR demo. nfo. Noel Levitz SSI	Student achievement in GER and program courses	
2016-2017	2, 6 (quantitative reasoning, scientific thinking)	UAA IR demo. Info. SSI and IDEA	Student achievement in GER and program courses	Reflection and action, SLOs 1, 7
2017-2018	3, 4, 5 (historical thinking, aesthetic appreciation, and understanding of the social world)	UAA IR demo. Info. SSI and IDEA	Student achievement in GER and program courses	Reflection and action, SLOs 2, 6
2018-2019	8, 9 (critical, global and integrative thinking and perspectives)	UAA IR demo. Info. SSI and IDEA	Student achievement in GER and program courses	Reflection and action, SLOs 3, 4, 5
2019-2020	Begin process again (1, 7)	UAA IR demo. Info. Noel Levitz SSI	Student achievement in GER and program courses	Reflection and action, SLOs 8, 9

Appendix A: Current UAA Associate of Arts Assessment Narrative Reporting Form (to be adjusted for GER assessment reporting)

The questions below serve as a guide to the basic information that will be need from each AA division. In either case, please get the results back by June 1st.

1. Which of the outcomes below was/were assessed?

Students graduating with an AA degree from UAA will be able to:

- 1) Communicate effectively with diverse audiences (individual, group, or public) using a variety of verbal and nonverbal communication strategies;
- 2) Respond effectively to writing assignments using appropriate genres and standard written English;
- 3) Use library and electronic research responsibly and appropriately;
- 4) Identify, describe, and evaluate the aesthetic, historical and philosophical aspects of material culture, including artistic expressions, language, and texts;
- 5) Apply critical thinking skills to identify the premises and conclusions of arguments, evaluate their soundness, and recognize common fallacies;
- 6) Use appropriate mathematical language and symbols to develop and communicate solutions and demonstrate quantitative and analytical skills and knowledge;
- 7) Articulate the fundamentals, developments, and impacts of one or more scientific disciplines and develop and analyze evidence-based conclusions about the natural and social world.

2. Describe the assessment process and findings for your division:

- a. Which assessment mechanism/s were used to assess the AA outcomes?
- b. How many students were assessed?
- c. What was the overall level of achievement for students, either on a grade or 4-point scale? If more than one outcome was assessed, please indicate. Analyze and explain the results of the assessment for each outcome.
- d. Were there any faculty discussions or meetings, either within disciplines or across disciplines, to discuss the AA assessment process or findings?

2. Actions and Recommendations: Based on the findings, are there any recommendations for changes or improvements? Please describe (this could be changes in assignments, instructional methodology, course design, assessment measures or process).

3. Discuss any actions or recommendations made from the past year within your division and/or programs that deliver AA courses. Any results or findings on those actions, changes or recommendations made in the past year/s?

Appendix B: AA/GER Assessment, 2005-2014—A Brief History

Overall Take-away on AA assessment, 2005-14

UAA, through its AA Assessment Committee, has engaged in a substantial and meaningful assessment of the AA program, and by proxy, the GER student learning outcomes from 2005-14. Some brief highlights are as follows:

- 1) Created a complete assessment plan, and revised it 3 times to incorporate process changes and teaching improvements driven by the assessment process.
- 2) Created an assessment process for all three Tiers of the AA/GER.
- 3) Tier I courses and outcomes in Math, Written and Oral Communication assessed rigorously and continuously every year since 2006.
- 4) Multiple improvements and changes made in Tier 1 due to assessment: for example, enhanced informational literacy projects with Oral Comm.; changes in course structures and assignments for Math 105; and refocused teaching approaches in English writing courses.
- 5) Piloted a Tier III Integrative Capstone assessment project in Spring 2009.
- 6) The AA assessment process generated a vigorous, multi-year debate within the Social Sciences on what are the proper SLOs—“hard” vs. “soft” science approaches; content vs. application; scientific method vs. knowledge of the social world—as well as debate on best assessment measures for tracking student performance on Social Science SLOs.
- 7) Overall review of yearly reports reveals some faculty frustration and fatigue over scale and demands of assessment (participation did wane in some categories for some years).
- 8) A possible solution to the challenge of AA/GER assessment fatigue: Move from model of every SLO, every year, every discipline, to a targeted sampling and staggered rotation of SLOs, categories and disciplines. See GERA Final Report of May 2014 and new GER assessment plan.
- 9) Creation of new pilots emphasizing assessment as faculty dialogue and reflection: for example a new pilot assessment pilot for the Humanities AA/GER, Spring 2015; English “What Writing Does” series on disciplinary writing approaches and outcomes in the classroom during the Spring 2015.
- 10) GERA (General Education Requirements Assessment) Task Force created, Fall 2012. GERA has investigated and reported to the campus on national best practices in general education assessment and structures; it has fostered a campus wide dialogue on the value of general education and assessment; it has put forth recommendations for revised assessment of GERs, and the creation of a standing faculty body and faculty fellow to guide and GER assessment.