

GER Assessment Report, Spring 2021
Written Communication & Information Literacy 24 May 2021

1.1 GER STRUCTURE & STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

The UAA GER was last revised from 1999-2003, resulting in the current structure that begins with “cross-cutting” or “basic skills” necessary in all courses (Tier 1), moves toward the disciplinary knowledge occupying curricular categories specified by BOR regulations (Tier 2), and culminating in the Integrative Capstone course (where Tier 1 skills are integrated with disciplinary content appropriate to the major):

UAA GERs: 3 Tiers, 7 Categories, 9 Outcomes

1. Tier 1: Basic Skills (12)

- Written Comm (6 cr)
- Oral Comm (3 cr)
- Quantitative Skills (3 cr)

2. Tier 2: Disciplinary Knowledge (22)

- Natural Sciences (7 cr)
- Social Sciences (6 cr)
- Humanities (6 cr)
- Fine Arts (3 cr)

3. Tier 3: Integrative Capstone (3)

- Meets GER in the major
- Integration of Tier 1 in major

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

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

Figure 1: GenEd Tiered Structure and Student Learning Outcomes

Since that basic reorganization of the UAA GER into a tiered structure that shows the pedagogical relationship between the cross-cutting skills required across the curriculum (Tier 1) and their foundational importance to the disciplines (Tier 2) and the major (Tier 3), UAA have identified several important refinements and innovative additions, all without adding additional credits to the GenEd:

- **Refinements to Tier 1:** Information Literacy and Creative & Critical Thinking
- **Supplements:** The Alaska Native Themed GER initiative (AKNT, Fall 2018) and the Diversity & Inclusion GenEd initiative (Fall, 2020), which a student can meet without adding additional credits.

The report below concentrates upon student achievement in Written Communication and Information Literacy and

- Provides an overview of the Spring 2021 GenEd assessment process,
- Recounts the GenEd Student Learning Outcome for each,
- Lists the indicators (the set of four simple statements defining student achievement in each SLO),
- Provides a graphical summary of both the median and the mean/ average (by course level and indicator, where appropriate),

- Supplies a summary overview of the results, and
- Offers brief analyses by course level.

The report ends with a set of **Recommendations** for further faculty discussion, for incorporation into course design and curriculum planning, and for further refinement of the GenEd assessment process. Additionally, the GenEd assessment process and recommendations since AY15-16 provide helpful insight into this accreditation cycle and the integration of the Core Competencies across the UAA campuses in curriculum and all aspects of the university.

1.0 Introduction

Drawing upon the experiences gained from AY15-19 to create a GenEd assessment process (1) that attends to the *general* dimension of GenEd outcomes across the curriculum, (2) that includes faculty from across the curriculum and UAA campuses, (3) that assesses student work from across the curriculum and course levels gain a sampled series of snapshots into student achievement, the Spring 2021 GenEd assessment task force focused upon two related Tier 1 GenEd Student Learning Outcomes: **Written Communication** ("Communicate effectively in a variety of contexts and formats") and **Information Literacy** ("Locate and use relevant information to make appropriate personal and professional decisions").

In a change from previous years that depended upon faculty volunteers to carry out the GenEd assessment, the Office of Academic Affairs requested that each college provide a faculty member (and in some cases two) to carry out the review, with a mind to institutionalizing GenEd assessment as a responsibility shared across the UAA colleges and campuses.

2.0 Overview

2.1 Process: The GER assessment process centers upon collaborative faculty work at three related levels.

Task Force: After task force members had been contacted, the GenEd director sent out notices to ask faculty across UAA to submit written materials from Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 for the GenEd assessment (with the assignment prompt, if possible). As the student work was turned in, the GenEd Director compiled the submitted work and established a tentative schedule and list of tasks. The task force met in Spring 2020 to review the assessment process, to discuss questions and concerns, to review and norm a sample of student work collaboratively, and then to break into three small groups to review the rest of the student work.

Small Groups: The small groups repeated the process of reviewing and norming a shared sample from its set of papers, and each group brought their issues to the larger group for review and discussion. Then, within each small group, each team member read three shared essays, scored the essays under the appropriate rubric, discussed their rationale for the scores, and then adjusted the scores according to shared feedback, thus norming the assessment.

Individual Assessors: After norming 3 shared student artifacts, faculty evaluators each assessed 3 additional assignments (chosen randomly without overlapping) from each class to ascertain different "snapshots" of student achievement. Out of the 9 to 12 artifacts sampled in each class, any assessment result that was +/- 1 level of scoring from the consensus was reconsidered. Each team member entered their score into a spreadsheet for each assignment set, and these were rolled-up into a primary spreadsheet, which formed the basis for the charts below (noting both the mean and median scores for the four separate indicators per GER SLO). Each faculty member then selected three additional student artifacts from each course in their sets according to the Cross-Cutting Skills Rubric (Appendix 1) and in accordance with the

AAC&U 1 – 4 scale (see Figure 2). The NULL-value was used only when, after norming the student work for a specific SLO or indicator, the assessment team agrees that the SLO or a specific indicator is unsuitable for the student work under examination.

2.2Assessment Scale & Rubric: The GER assessment task force members adopted the scoring scale developed in the previous years of GER assessment, based upon the AAC&U Value rubrics, with the addition of a 0 or Null set to indicate student work unsuitable for assessment or inclusion in the evaluation.

Capstone	Milestones		Benchmark	UAA GenEd Revisions	
4 = Mastery	3 = Proficient	2 = Developing	1 = Beginning	0 = Absent	X = Null / NA
AAC&U Value Rubrics Scale				To account for unsuitable work	

Figure 2: Assessment Scoring Scale

2.3Student Work: The assessment is based upon the following set of student work submitted by UAA faculty from across the curriculum and campuses (see Figure 3):

Course Type	100-level	200-level	300-level	400-level
GER Written Communication	WRTG A1xx	WRTG A2xx, WRTG A2xx, WRTG A2xx, WRTG A2xx,	ENGL A3xx	
Other GER	ECON A1xx, HIST A1xx, HIST A1xx, HIST A1xx	HUM A2xx_a, MATH A2xx		ATA A4xx, TECH A4xx
Non-GER	WRTG A1xx, LS A1xx	CIS-A2xx	BA A3xx_a, BA A3xx_b*, ECON A3xx, HS A3xx	ACCT A4xx, ANTH A4xx, CSCE A4xx, EE A4xx, HIST A4xx, LEGL 4xx, ME A4xxL MEDT A4xx
N = Course / Students	7 / 70	6 / 91	5 / 81	10 / 124
Total Courses = 27 / Total Student Artifacts = 366				
Strikethrough = Excluded Assignment Set				
*Excluded from Information Literacy Assessment				

Figure 3: Summary of Courses Assessed in AY20-21

2.4Exclusions: During the small group work, faculty teams were allowed to exclude a set of student work if (1) it was a poor indicator of student achievement or (2) it was too sparse an assignment to allow full evaluation of either SLO. (For example, a set of assignments that asks only for responses only one or two sentences long, or an assignment set with only two or three brief responses). Those excluded were discussed by the entire group and are indicated above.

2.5A Note on the Charts: The task force decided to include both the median and mean scores because each provided a slightly different view of the results, with the average scores allowing a more fine-grained rendering of the assessment results.

AY20-21 Findings

Written Communication *Communicate effectively in a variety of contexts and formats*

The UAA Written Communication SLO (“*Communicate effectively in a variety of contexts and formats*”) is broken into the following descriptors aligned with the AAC&U’s VALUE rubric:

- **Responds effectively to the assignment**
- **Demonstrates effective organization**
- **Develops content adequately**
- **Controls syntax and mechanics**

In AY20-21, we assessed a total of 366 student artifacts from 27 courses for student achievement in the GenEd Written Communication SLO.

The results are summarized as follows:

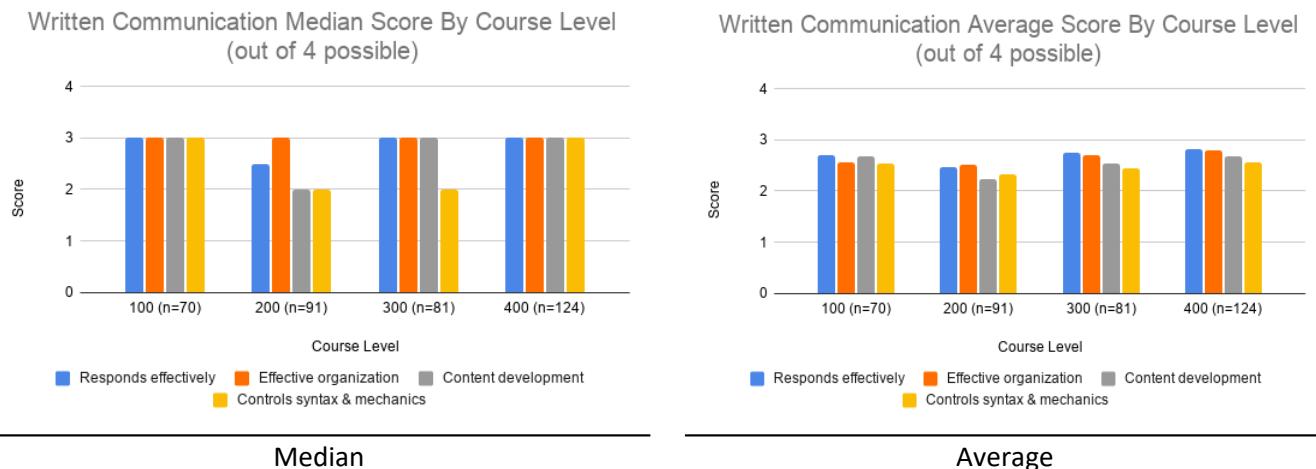


Figure 4: Summary of Written Communication SLO Assessment Results by Course Level

Overall, the scores indicate that students have a good sense of what they are expected to address in the specific assignments assessed (Indicator 1 - Responds Effectively), with a slight drop in the 200-level courses. At the same time, one might expect that 300- and 400-level students would show an increase in this area. The scores for Indicator 2 (Effective Organization) remain consistent across the course levels, while the score for Indicator 2 (Content Development) drop at the 200-level. However, Indicator 4 (Controls Syntax and Mechanics) drops at the 200- and 300-level.

100-level writing

At the 100-level, students are strongest in responding to the assignment (**proficient**) while median scores in organization, content development, and control of syntax/mechanics are the same (2.0). Students work in organization and controlling language and syntax is **proficient** with 3.0 median scores that meet expectations for 100-level courses. Student scores in this area may indicate that they are successfully adapting to a new set of academic writing skills. Additionally, assignment instructions at the 100-level may be

more detailed, structured, and easier to understand, and assignments may also more closely meet students' expectations.

200-level writing

In a pattern that repeats findings from previous GenEd assessments, the scores in the 200-level courses show a consistent downward shift, with **developing** skills in Content Development (Indicator 3) and Controls Syntax & Mechanics (Indicator 4). For Indicator 1 (Responds Effectively), the scores for 200-level courses dips below the other course levels (with a median of 2.0-2.5). At the 200-level, students often have their first exposure to theoretically-informed and discipline-specific writing; they also may be tasked with working with academic journals or field research. As they are exposed to increasingly difficult assignments and content, more students may be struggling to express their ideas and meet assignment expectations in their 200-level writing. Additionally, first-year students often take 200-level courses, so they may be less prepared for the more advanced material.

300-level writing

Students in 300-level courses show an improvement, with scores at the 3 range across three of the four indicators, indicating that they are writing (in the aggregate) at the appropriate course-level (**proficient**) and having increased their abilities in three of the four indicators from the 200-level (response, organization, and development) showing that they are beginning to become more sophisticated writers. Although the median score for Controls Syntax (2.0) appears to be lower than the other course levels, the average score shows that student achievement at all course levels in Indicator 4 is between 2 and 3 (between **developing** and **proficient**), indicating that students need continued practice with appropriate writing conventions. The consistency may also show that students are learning to match their audience and purpose with both the assignment guidelines and the disciplinary expectations.

400-level writing

Students in 400-level courses are solidly at **proficient** (median of 3.0) and show increased achievement from the 200- and 300-level , showing that they are writing are with proficiency for their course-level. This is a change from AY17-18 when approximately the same number of courses showed some variation (with a 3.5 in responds effectively, a 3.0 in organization and content, but a 2.5 in syntactical control).

Summary Reflection

The data, particularly the median scores, may reflect that the task force assessed the samples relative to the course-level expectations rather than a single "absolute" scale across course levels. In other words, a 100- level paper could be a 4 for 100-level expectations. The task force chose to not to use 400-level expectations for all levels, which may show student growth and development more clearly from the 100- to the 400-levels.

However, a consistent upward trend is apparent in the mean scores.

INFORMATION LITERACY

Locate and use relevant information to make appropriate personal

The UAA Information Literacy SLO ("Locate and use relevant information to make appropriate personal and professional decisions") is broken down into the following descriptors aligned with language in the AAC&U's VALUE rubric:

- **Determines** information needs
- **Demonstrates** relevant use of evidence

- **Uses information sources critically**
- **Follows appropriate documentation conventions**

Unlike the other GER SLOs, Information Literacy does not have a dedicated course (or courses). Instead, it is taught throughout the curriculum, and so we have assessed it in a number of courses. In AY20-21, we assessed a total of 27 courses and 366 student artifacts for the Information Literacy SLO.

The results are summarized as follows:

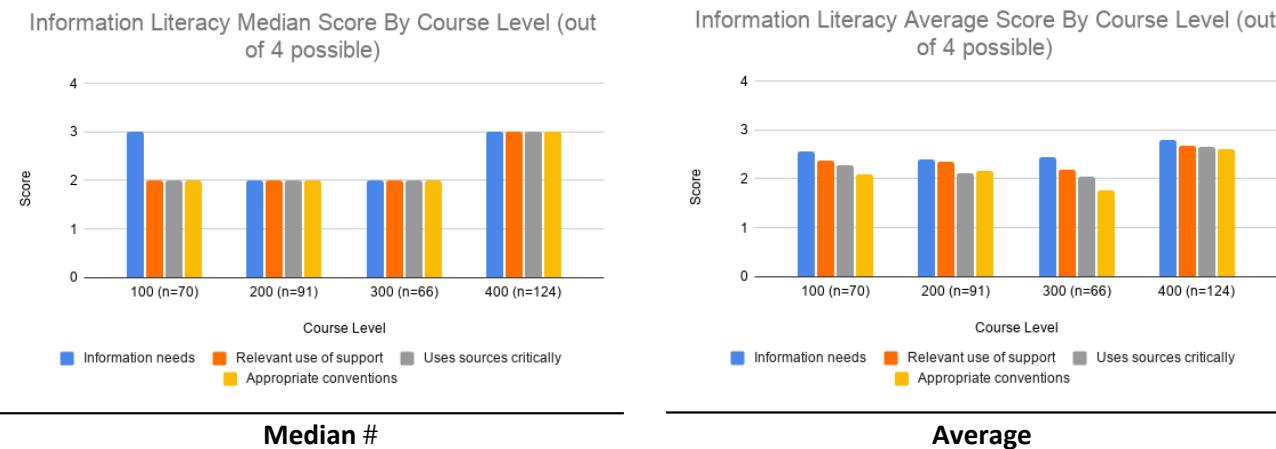


Figure 5: Summary of Information Literacy SLO Assessment Results by Course Level

Summary: Overall, students evidence **developing** skills at the 100-level (with a slight bump to 3.0 for determining information needs) and sustain these skills through the 200- and 300-levels. The median scores show that the Information Literacy descriptors remain flat (**developing**) at the 200- and 300-level before moving to proficient at the 400-level. However, the average / mean scores show a slight upward trend from 100- to 400-level with a slight drop off at the 300-level. Consistently, the task force rated the students' use of **appropriate conventions** as the weakest dimension of the Information Literacy SLO across the board.

Graphical Representation of Information Literacy Scores: On its face, the graphical representation raises the question why information literacy performance by students does not, as might be expected, rise from beginning at the 100-level to developing at the 200-level and then proficiency at the 300-level and mastery at the 400-level.

- Because students exceeded beginning-level performance at the 100-level, this restricted how much students could improve – from developing to mastery or two (rather than three) levels.
- Assignments assessed were voluntarily provided and may not be a representative sample of student information literacy performance at the 100 through 400-levels.
- The larger number of artifacts and individual values (without a broader range of courses) show some regression to the mean.

Variety of Written Assignments: An additional constraint discussed by task force members that may affect the assessment scores is the wide variety of information that UAA faculty rightly call for in their assignments but that does not require formal documentation. For example, assignments that call for students to reflect upon their personal experiences or those that build upon a common set of classroom readings (and so do not require

formal documentation) do not fall easily into the traditional definition of information literacy as we have defined it for assessment. Rather than calling for only formally documented written assignments to assess information literacy, the task force considered the necessity for broadening the definitions drawn from the AAC&U Value rubrics.

100-level information literacy

One might expect students to evidence beginning information literacy skills at the 100- level, but across the board, students at this level exceeded this expectation and exhibited **developing** skills across three descriptors. These findings suggest that the processes in place to support student success (e.g., prerequisites, test scores required, availability of preparatory courses, academic advising) are appropriate and effective. The available data suggests students are well prepared for 100-level work in that median scores placed students at the developing level (2) rather than, as might be expected, at the beginning level (1) across all four information literacy descriptors.

200-level and 300-level information literacy

Like students at the 100-level, student information literacy performance was at the **developing** level across the four descriptors. In AY15-16 (using average scores and a smaller sample of assignments) students at this level showed a slight drop in performance compared to the 100-level as to all four descriptors. In AY16-17 (using median scores and increased sample sizes) there is no evidence that student information literacy performance advanced at the 200-level, while AY17-18 showed a slight advance. Since evidence of sustained student information literacy performance at the developing level emerged, it could be argued that students at the 200-level are meeting expectations (in contrast to students at the 100-level who exceeded expectations). The flat **developing** scores at the 200- and 300-level are consistent with our findings since AY15-16, and rather than indicating a lack of development across the student experience, we believe it indicates greater expectations for information literacy at the sophomore and junior levels, where students meet increasingly difficult and specific information requirements for their assignments, as the average scores suggest a slight upward trend.

400-level information literacy

Student performance at this level is at or near **proficient** (3), and the data clearly suggest that continuing students are advancing their information literacy skills as to all four descriptors. Given the promising start of students at the 100-level (developing rather than beginning) and their increase at the 200-level, students this year seemed to lose momentum at the 300-levels and the 400-level. The open question is whether student information literacy performance should be closer to mastery as they near the completion of their undergraduate careers. The lack of appropriate progression as to information literacy skills from the 100-level to the 300-level may mean that students at the 400-level appear to be prepared to achieve mastery of information literacy.

Summary Reflection

As in the Written Communication assessment, the data, particularly the median scores, may reflect that the task force assessed the samples relative to the course-level expectations rather than a single “absolute” scale across course levels. In other words, a 100-level paper could be a 4 for 100-level expectations. The task force chose to not to use 400-level expectations for all levels, which may show student growth and development more clearly from the 100- to the 400-levels. However, a consistent upward trend is apparent in the mean scores. We suspect that if we were to define an “absolute” scale tied, for example, the AAC&U Value Information Literacy rubric, or to the University of Alaska Board of Regents course-level definitions, or the UAA Grading Scale (all strictly interpreted), the upward trend across course levels would be much more apparent.

Recommendations

1. GenEd assessment needs a better, more systematic way to acquire student materials.
 - First, the task force notes the difficulty of assessing the wide range of student materials (with very different topics, purposes, audiences, and assignment types) according to the rather stringent rubric definitions derived from the AAC&U Value Rubrics.
 - Second, the task force notes the importance of being able to identify and gather student artifacts that are better suited to assess the SLOs.
 - Third, conversely, the rubric descriptions (the definitions given in each cell of the rubric that serves as a guide) could be revised to reflect the broader range of written student materials that reflect a UAA student's curricular experience.
 - Fourth, a systematic rotation should be established to garner student work from across the programs and campuses to create a more representative sample of student work from throughout the curriculum.
2. GenEd assessment needs a greater cross-section of (and additional) faculty assessors to sustain the effort.
 - First, departments that teach GenEd courses should be required to submit student material for GenEd assessment.
 - Second, departments that teach GenEd courses should have faculty assigned who will be responsible for GenEd assessment and who will return the lessons to their departments.
 - Finally, OAA's spring initiative to include faculty from each UAA college should be continued, if not expanded.
3. GenEd assessment needs to be paired with additional efforts to "close the loop." Possibilities include:
 - Workshops using the assessment results for assignment creation, course design, curriculum planning.
 - Addition of appropriate GenEd outcomes to relevant syllabi across campus.
 - Additional faculty discussion concerning "vertical alignment" of GenEd and program/major SLOs from the 100- to 400-level.
 - Additional faculty discussion concerning "horizontal alignment" of GenEd courses to create some consistency in across Tier 1 and Tier 2 courses.
 - Additional faculty discussion concerning the revision of the Tier 3 Integrative Capstone to better meet institutional accreditation and GenEd programmatic needs.

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Herminia Din (CAS – Art), Ian Hartman (CAS – History), Seta Kabranian (Health – Human Services),
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Ashley O'Connor (Health – Social Work), Tara Palmer (CTC – ESL & BSATL), Sarah Priell (CTC – Writing),
Mark Schreiter (Kodiak – History & Humanities), Scott Wasmer (CTC – Aviation)

PROVOST SECTION (Due to the faculty on January 15)

After completing the Provost Section and signing it, the provost should email this form to the faculty, and copy uaa_oaa@alaska.edu for posting. If the program is delivered on one or more community campus, the provost should consult with the appropriate community campus director(s) on the response and copy the appropriate community campus director(s) when emailing the response to the faculty.

1. Based on the faculty's responses above, what guidance and support do you have for the faculty moving forward? Is there a particular area the faculty should focus on? (750 characters or less)

The assessment and reflections of the faculty represent hours of work and commitment to better understand how well our students are achieving the GER learning outcomes and how well our GER is set up to support that learning. The report presents opportunities for improvements of both the process and the potential use of the results. I also concur that the current process evidences some limitations that likely inform results, as well as the ability of faculty who teach GER courses to use them to implement further improvements. Specifically, I would suggest that faculty explore the potential to use *common, or shared assessment prompts* across a variety of courses, as is common in many other universities. For example, a common, broadly-worded prompt crafted by teams of faculty could be included with exams or other assessment activities in a predetermined set of 100/200 and 300/400-level courses to assess written communication and information literacy and point more directly toward growth and development of these skills across the student lifecycle. In such a process, courses (and the faculty who teach them) would agree in advance to utilize the common assessment question(s) and to submit student work for evaluation. The assessment would then directly feed back to the course level, providing potential for actionable information within a single year from the time of the assessment.

Second, faculty should also consider, as they note above, whether the decision should be to use an absolute scale, rather than a more nuanced approach. One way to frame this is to think of what we (ultimately) want students to be able to do. Even though it is not our expectation that students in 100 level courses can write proficiently at a level expected of graduating seniors, using that expectation as our scale allows us to more clearly demonstrate not only that growth is occurring, but potentially when and perhaps even "how."

Third, faculty should continue to explore changes to the integrative capstone. It may make sense to conduct a special, one-time assessment to determine its efficacy and to provide input into the discussions.

2. Is there something the faculty is doing particularly well in terms of its processes for the assessment and improvement of student learning, including the closing of equity gaps, that might serve as a model for other programs? If yes, please explain. You may skip this question. (750 characters or less)

Yes; the faculty's commitment to a broadly inclusive process, one that involves faculty who teach a wide range of GER courses to students across various levels, is particularly noteworthy. In addition, the continued use of nationally-developed and normed instruments to inform the UAA process appears to keep the process well-grounded in best practices without being restrictive or limiting.

Provost's signature:



Date: 1/14/2022