

Queensborough Community College, CUNY

**General Education Assessment Task Force
Report to Academic Senate, September 2017**

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General Education Assessment Task Force

The General Education Task Force is a group of faculty and administrators that is charged with developing and implementing general education assessment practices for the institution. Using rubrics that have been internally developed for each general education outcome at the college, the group facilitates the collection of student artifacts across curricula, scores them in a two-week session in June, and helps to prepare a report to the campus community on the status of general education, making recommendations for better implementation of assessment practices and procedures and for improvement of student outcomes.

I. Charge and summary of tasks completed June 2014 - June 2017

Charge

Constituted in April 2014, the task force has the following charge: *to develop and recommend a process for regular, cross-disciplinary, anonymous review of student artifacts as evidence of student learning outcomes (college-wide) for each of the college's educational objectives.* The original charge was expanded in fall 2014 to include: *review Queensborough's existing Educational Outcomes and recommend possible modifications to the Academic Senate.*

Highlights of General Education Assessment Task Force Work, June 2014 – May 2017

- Created, revised, and normed rubrics for the first four General Education Outcomes: Outcome #1, Communication, Outcome #2 Analytical Reasoning, Outcome #3 Quantitative Reasoning, and Outcome #4 Information Management.
- Used the rubrics to score several thousand student artifacts collected from faculty teaching courses across all disciplines. Scoring conducted in June 2015, June 2016, January 2017, and June 2017.
- Obtained IRB approval for faculty to use data on outcomes from their class sections for research, with student consent; individual reports sent to each participating faculty member, beginning spring 2016.
- Read and discussed national literature on general education outcomes and assessment. Surveyed QCC faculty and conducted two faculty forums on the General Education Outcomes, and proposed revision of the 2007 QCC Educational Outcomes; **the revised General Education Outcomes approved by the Academic Senate in December 2016, effective fall 2017.**
- Wrote annual reports to the Academic Senate, prepared guidelines for faculty selecting assignments for participation in General Education assessment, and reviewed the trends in assessment outcomes over three separate semesters.

- Used several data collection systems (Dropbox, Digication) before adopting Taskstream Aqua as easiest to use.
- Prepared rubrics to support assessment of the discipline-specific General Education Outcomes.

II. Revised General Education Outcomes

General Education Outcomes 2017

At Queensborough Community College, the General Education learning outcomes are embedded in courses across the disciplines, both in the Common Core and in the Major for each academic program. In December, 2016, the Academic Senate approved a revision of the College's General Education Outcomes (previously revised in May 2007), effective fall 2017:

1. Communicate effectively through written and oral forms
2. Use analytical reasoning to identify issues or problems and evaluate evidence in order to make informed decisions.
3. Reason quantitatively as required in various fields of interest and in everyday life
4. Apply information management and digital technology skills useful for academic research and lifelong learning
5. Discipline-Specific Outcomes
A robust general education is founded on the knowledge, concepts, methods and perspectives that students gain through study of the social sciences and history, the natural sciences, the arts and the humanities. These disciplinary studies stimulate intellectual inquiry, global awareness, and cultural and artistic appreciation; they equip students to make informed judgments and engage with life beyond the classroom.
5A. Apply concepts and perspectives from history or the social sciences to examine the formation of ideas, human behavior, social institutions, or social processes and to make informed judgments
5B. Apply concepts and methods of the natural and physical sciences to examine natural phenomena and to make informed decisions.
5C. Apply aesthetic and intellectual criteria to examine or create works in the humanities and the arts and to make informed judgments.

Outcomes Supporting General Education

The outcomes below, which support students' General Education, are included in the program specific outcomes for each academic program:

- A. Integrate knowledge and skills in the program of study
- B. Make ethical judgments while recognizing multiple perspectives, as appropriate in the program of study.
- C. Work collaboratively to accomplish learning objectives

III. Findings and Preliminary Conclusions

A. Collaborative development of rubrics

The General Education Task Force consists of faculty from a broad range of disciplines: Music, Art, History, Architecture, Mathematics, Physics, English, Massage Therapy, History, Chemistry, Business, Economics, and Library Science. The diverse constituency of the group allowed for an interdisciplinary dialogue among faculty who worked on developing the rubrics for the General Education Outcomes.

The collaboration on drafting, revising, and norming the rubrics highlighted the disciplinary differences and similarities among faculty. While the Task Force developed four rubrics for the original general education outcome on communication skills, it became apparent that creating rubrics that encompass a wide range of assignment form various disciplines was a lengthy process. Faculty adopted a different approach which entailed working in smaller groups to produce a draft of a rubric; later, after sharing different versions of the rubrics, faculty worked together to consolidate the ideas that garnered the largest support, to clarify the terminology and expectations of student outcomes, and to reach consistency across all rubrics.

While it became apparent that faculty cannot shorten the time to arrive to a common rubric speedily, the Task Force reached a number of conclusions. First, each one of the members arrived with his or her own disciplinary terminology and ways of thinking. While faculty valued critical thinking and analytical thinking, they were pressed to reach a common definition of these concepts. As a result, further research was conducted. Frequently faculty needed to uncover the disciplinary assumptions under each concept. To facilitate the development of the rubrics, faculty regularly referred to the rubrics designed by the American Association of Colleges and Universities. In addition, the discussions prompted a consideration of implications of the rubric scale. Faculty determined that the rubric scale reflects the student progress over a four-year period of studies rather than the learning progress over a two-year period, which is the scale used by other schools. During these discussions faculty were invariably led to reflect on what general education means and what each of the QCC General Education Outcomes suggests. The norming sessions were also productive allowing faculty to discuss the extent to which a score like 'non-applicable' would affect the results and to refine

the rubrics and make them broader encompassing as wide variety of assignments and disciplines as possible.

B. Reviewing and Revising the General Education Outcomes

Summary of Changes

- Discussed the existing rubrics and assessment results
- Reorganized the General Education Outcomes into three categories
- Revised the language of some of the General Education Outcomes to be more parallel and easier to assess
- Continued iterative process of perfecting rubrics
- Began development of rubric templates for discipline-specific Outcomes
- Identified some of the General Education Outcomes as more appropriately assessed at the Program level and therefore moved them to Academic Program Outcomes

During its review, the Task Force distinguished between General Education Outcomes which are cross-disciplinary and those which are discipline-specific. Students develop and demonstrate achievement of the cross-disciplinary outcomes both in liberal arts and sciences courses and in major courses in all degree programs. The discipline-specific General Education Outcomes are best developed and demonstrated in the disciplinary courses.

Cross-disciplinary General Education Outcomes

To initiate the process of revising outcomes, we recognized that a broad array of courses already required by programs at QCC demonstrate student competence in these areas. With this in mind, the General Education Task Force proceeded with the work of revising and clarifying the following outcomes to their present form:

1. Communicate effectively in written and oral form.
2. Use analytical reasoning to identify issues or problems and evaluate evidence in order to make informed decisions.
3. Reason quantitatively as required in the fields of interest and in everyday life.
4. Apply information-management and digital technology skills effectively for academic research and lifelong learning.

Discipline-Specific General Education Outcomes

Although it was proposed to eliminate discipline-specific outcomes, faculty, after some discussion, agreed that certain discipline-specific studies stimulate intellectual inquiry, global awareness, and cultural and aesthetic appreciation, as well as equipping students to make informed judgments beyond the classroom. Indeed, our own rich discussions demonstrated the value of disciplinary outcomes and awareness, not only to our students, but to the clarity and rigor of the assessment process itself. It was therefore decided, that these discipline-specific

outcomes could be left largely intact, but should be evaluated within disciplinary clusters of faculty. They are listed below.

5A. Apply concepts and perspectives from history or the social sciences to examine formation of ideas, human behavior, social institutions, or social processes and to make informed judgments.

5B. Apply concepts and methods of the natural and physical sciences to examine natural phenomena and to make informed judgments.

5C. Apply aesthetic and intellectual criteria to examine or create works in the humanities or the arts and to make informed judgments.

Program Outcomes vs. Gen Ed Outcomes

Program outcomes include those that require students to integrate skills and concepts across their respective curricula. Thus, it was deemed appropriate to assess these Outcomes as part of Academic Program Review, as they support students' General Education. These Outcomes are listed below, with the proviso that the wording and order of these Outcomes may be revised as appropriate to the individual academic program:

- A. Integrate knowledge and skills in the program of study
- B. Make ethical judgments while recognizing multiple perspectives, as appropriate to the program of study
- C. Work collaboratively to accomplish learning objectives.

Program-level Outcomes were so designated to respect concerns that they were critical to a robust General Education but also best evaluated by faculty in particular disciplines.

Furthermore, the Task Force understood and emphasized that refining both Outcomes and Rubrics is a continuous process that requires feedback from faculty as to how best capture students' learning and growth.

Utility to faculty of the new Outcomes

While it was understood that not every assignment in every course will demonstrate all General Education Outcomes, the Mission Statement of the College states that any student who successfully completes a program at QCC exhibits competency in all these skills.

Faculty who choose to participate in assessment may find these revised Outcomes, with their improved uniformity and clarity, to be helpful in choosing, revising, or developing assignments that clearly showcase student learning.

C. Developing Best Practices: Selecting and developing assignments for submission

The General Education Assessment Task Force facilitates the collection, scoring, and reporting on anonymous student artifacts across the curriculum. The end goal of the Task Force is to make recommendations for improving assessment practices to successfully determine if our student learning outcomes are being achieved.

We invited faculty participation to help assure that our students' work best reflects their achievement of General Education Outcomes within and across disciplines. To participate, faculty selected assignments most relevant to one (or more) of the General Education Outcomes and then collected student work for that assignment. We provided *guidelines* for the adoption or creation of an assignment that not only achieved their specific learning goals, but also aligned with the General Education rubric(s). This was a faculty and campus wide invitation. We appreciated all faculty participation.

When the Task Force reviewed the results of January's assessment we found our students' results were consistently lower than previous semesters. Additionally, as this is our third year of review, we knew it was time to fine-tune our assessment efforts and asked ourselves the following questions.

1. Would it make a difference if students were in the first semester or last semester? This led us to ask, should we be assessing courses where students are completing their degrees at QCC or in the beginning? Should we be comparing their first semester results to their last semester results?

We came to the consensus that since the general education outcomes are to be achieved by the time they graduate from QCC, we believe, at this time, the best courses to be assessed would be towards their last semester. We also realize, that while a comparison of their first semester to their last semester would be worthwhile, it would prove very time-consuming, costly, and difficult to track this information.

2. Did all assignments that were assessed align with the GE rubric for scoring? Were we assessing student artifacts that were similar to the rubric that scorers were using to assess? How do we ensure that we are assessing student outcomes fairly and getting informative results? Are we impinging on academic freedom if we work with faculty to align assignments to rubrics?

We concluded that the best way to improve the accuracy of our assessment would be to continue to use voluntary participation and to offer workshops for faculty to better define alignment of assignments.

3. Did a variety of scorers of student artifacts cause discrepancies in the results? Should scorers receive additional training to ensure consistency?

The training of scorers and the norming of rubrics among scorers provided sufficient training. This factor was determined to not be a factor in our results.

D. Developing Best Practices: Scoring student artifacts

Most helpful in scoring

Aqua software was used in the scoring and was found to be very helpful in accessing and scoring the artifacts as it made the relevant rubrics and assignments available for quick reference. Availability of the specific assignment along with the artifacts is very important. The discussions and norming during the scoring sessions greatly helped as well.

Challenges during scoring

Some of the artifacts were not accompanied by the specific assignment. In the absence of specific and clear assignments it is hard for the scorer to evaluate the artifacts properly. Some assignments as well as artifacts were not readable and some seemed to be plagiarized. Large number of artifacts did not match or were not suitable/ not aligned for the rubric for which they were scored. Many times scorers felt inadequately qualified to evaluate and score the artifacts based on the scorer's area of expertise.

Recommendations

The Task Force recommends requiring that artifacts be accompanied by respective assignments that are clear and specific. It was also felt that rubrics need to be better developed so that faculty can score any artifact; however science/math artifacts should be scored by scorers with respective expertise. It is also important that more faculty should be involved and should be more aware of aligning the artifacts with the given rubric.

E. Interpreting assessment results

The General Education Assessment Task Force scored numerous artifacts over the last two and a half years. During this period the procedures used have improved significantly, particularly in the areas of faculty outreach, faculty participation, and alignment between rubrics and submitted artifacts. Logistically, the software, Taskstream Aqua, has helped to streamline artifact collection organization, and scoring.

The Task Force has gained valuable experience in developing rubrics that assess student learning as well as in identifying types of assignments that work well in demonstrating

students' abilities. However, a gap often remains between what is measured through the rubrics and what is demonstrated through the artifacts. This gap was particularly profound in the area of quantitative reason. Sharing information with participating faculty, regarding which artifacts work and which don't, will reduce the gap.

With respect to the rubrics, students tend to achieve at, or slightly above, the "developing" range. Also, artifacts from upper level courses are rated higher than artifacts from lower level courses indicating that students with more academic experience achieve higher than incoming freshmen.

The lack of an accepted longitudinal set of data from community colleges to serve as a reference, makes it more difficult to interpret the results. There is a consistent set of faculty, across the curriculum, who volunteer artifacts for evaluation. This is advantageous in that there is a constant supply of artifacts having improved rubric alignment with each iteration. This consistency, however, may reduce the representativeness of the sample, in terms of student population and of work assigned.

IV. Next Steps

1. Present trends from General Education assessments so far to community, fall 2017, and discuss implications of the findings.
2. Pilot disciplinary assessment using rubrics and rubric variants for each of the three disciplinary clusters, fall 2017
3. Create an appropriate governance structure for maintaining ongoing general education assessment.
4. Solicit (or designate, to support academic program review) upper level courses for fall 2017 and spring 2018 general education assessment
5. Create a schedule for rotating assessment of outcomes in appropriate courses to ensure all the outcomes are assessed sufficiently without burden on faculty
6. Develop guidelines for assessing the Outcomes supporting General Education within academic program review.

V. Appendix

1. Membership:

Led by the Vice President for Strategic Planning, Assessment and Institutional Effectiveness and the Director of Policy Analysis for General Education and Student Learning Outcomes, the task force members include the Dean for Accreditation, Assessment and Institutional Effectiveness, a faculty representative from each academic department recommended by department chair, one representative from the Academic Senate Curriculum Committee and one from the Senate Assessment Committee.

Faculty Membership 2016-17

- Art and Design – vacant
- Biological Sciences and Geology - Mangala Tawde
- Business - Shele Bannon
- Chemistry – Derek Bruzewicz
- Engineering Technology – Craig Weber
- English –Tanya Zhelezcheva
- Foreign Languages and Literatures – Monica Rossi-Miller
- Health, Physical Education and Dance – Gene Desepoli (Sp 17), Andrea Salis (F 16)
- History – Emily Tai
- Library – Sheila Beck
- Mathematics and Computer Science – Kostas Stroumbakis
- Music – Neeraj Mehta
- Nursing – Kathleen Pecinka
- Physics – Todd Holden
- Social Sciences - John Gilleaudeau
- Speech Communication and Theatre Arts – Barbara Lynch
- Academic Senate Assessment Committee representative: Changiz Alizadeh
- Academic Senate Curriculum Committee representative: Todd Holden

Note: Task Force reports and membership from previous years can be found at <http://www.qcc.cuny.edu/assessment/geatf.html>

2. 2007 General Education Outcomes

Educational Goals

Students graduating with an associate degree will:

- *for transfer programs*: meet requirements for successful transfer into upper division of baccalaureate programs
 - *for career programs*: demonstrate mastery of discipline-specific knowledge, skills, and tools required for entry into or advancement in the job market in their field
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Educational Objectives

To achieve these goals, students graduating with an associate degree will:

1. communicate effectively through reading, writing, listening and speaking
2. use analytical reasoning to identify issues or problems and evaluate evidence in order to make informed decisions
3. reason quantitatively and mathematically as required in their fields of interest and in everyday life
4. use information management and technology skills effectively for academic research and lifelong learning
5. integrate knowledge and skills in their program of study
6. differentiate and make informed decisions about issues based on multiple value systems
7. work collaboratively in diverse groups directed at accomplishing learning objectives
8. use historical or social sciences perspectives to examine formation of ideas, human behavior, social institutions, or social processes
9. employ concepts and methods of the natural and physical sciences to make informed judgments
10. apply aesthetic and intellectual criteria in the evaluation or creation of works in the humanities or the arts

3. Artifact Collection and Individual Reports to Faculty

Process

An email was sent to all faculty members describing the General Education Assessment project and inviting them to participate. Included in the email was a link to a Survey Monkey survey that allowed faculty to identify the courses they were submitting for assessment. They were also able to identify the rubric(s) they wanted their student artifacts assessed against.

After volunteers were identified, each faculty member was sent an email describing the process for submitting student artifacts for the project. Faculty had several options for submitting student artifacts. They could upload their student artifacts into Blackboard and then their artifacts were uploaded to the assessment platform Taskstream-TK20 Aqua. They could also upload their student artifacts into Aqua directly. Students were also able to upload artifacts into Blackboard and then their artifacts were uploaded to Aqua. After all of the artifacts were uploaded to Aqua two raters scored each artifact.

As part of the artifact collection process, in April of 2016, CUNY Institutional Review Board (IRB) research exemption was sought and granted. Specifically it was determined that the QCC General Education research protocol met the criteria for exemption and was not subject to IRB review

Upon completion of the cycle of assessment, each faculty member who submits artifacts receives a report of her/his results. The report summarizes statistics such as the average score obtained across all the dimensions of a rubric. The average score on each dimension of the rubric is also reported. The report also identifies areas of the rubric where faculty members' student artifacts scored lower than their peers. The report includes charts that support the analysis outlined in the report.

During the Spring 2017 semester there were 718 artifacts assessed from 12 departments. Ninety percent of the artifacts were from introductory courses.

4. Timeline of Task Force Work, June 2014 – May 2017

2014- 2015

- June 2014 – created and normed rubric for Outcome #2, Analytical Reasoning; scored student artifacts
- Fall 2014: created and normed four rubrics for Outcome #1, Communication (Reading, Writing, Speaking, and Listening)
- Fall 2014: reported to the Senate that the outcomes themselves needed to be reviewed with possible revision; the Senate approved this additional goal in Fall 2014.
- Spring 2015: collected student artifacts for scoring with the rubrics created so far; began review of outcomes, reading literature on General Education assessment, and looked at other colleges' outcomes, wrote General Education Mission Statement and Guiding Principles, May 2015
- June 2015: scored 858 artifacts (276 from the HIPS Assessment Project) from 54 class sections (from all academic departments) using the rubrics for Outcomes #1, Communication, and #2, Analytical Reasoning. Report to Senate in Fall 2015

2015-16

- Fall 2015: created and normed rubrics for Outcome #3, Quantitative Reasoning and Outcome #4, Information Management; created Faculty Survey on General Education Outcomes, administered December 2015-January 2016. Report on results sent to all faculty early Spring 2016
- Fall 2015: Faculty pilot using Digication to upload assignments and evaluate student artifacts in Digication, using Writing and Analytical Reasoning rubrics; scoring in January 2016. The WI initiative used Digication for artifact collection and scoring Spring 2016
- March 21 and 22, 2016: presented **Faculty Forum on General Education Outcomes**
- April 2015: reviewed all feedback (faculty survey, Gen Ed forum, task force literature review and discussion), drafted proposed modifications for outcomes on Communication, Values, and Collaboration; and recommended further discussion on several possible changes, including addition of civic responsibility, and possible deletion of discipline-specific outcomes. Report sent to Curriculum Committee, which forwarded to the Academic Senate May 2016
- Spring 2016: IRB approved use of scores of student artifacts for pedagogical research, as long as students gave informed consent. Researchers visited all participating classrooms to collect consent forms. Student artifacts were requested and collected for scoring with

all the rubrics for the first four Outcomes; Taskstream launched to facilitate artifact collection and faculty scoring process in June 2016

- June 2016: faculty submitted 693 student artifacts (from 40 class sections across disciplines). Student consent forms were collected from 254 students; 225 artifacts were matched with student consent forms and were scored, using rubrics for all four of the outcomes. Report on outcomes will be reviewed by the Task Force in September 2016, and then sent to Academic Senate.
- June 2016: a subset of the task force and June faculty scorers prepared a faculty invitation to participate in general education assessment Fall 2016 and Spring 2017, and guidelines for selecting assignments aligned with QCC's general education rubrics. These were distributed to all faculty August 4, 2016.

2016-17

- September 2016: the Task Force reviewed Curriculum Committee comments on spring 2016 report and scores from spring 2016 assessment and presented its draft proposals at the **September 28, 2016 Faculty Forum: General Education Outcomes II**, and conducted a follow-up survey of faculty about the proposed revisions and the use of General Education outcomes in their classes.
- Fall 2016: After reviewing responses, the Task Force prepared a proposal for General Education Outcomes revision and assessment process for the Curriculum Committee and Senate and prepared for the first Fall collection of student artifacts for scoring with the rubrics for the first four outcomes. The Curriculum Committee recommended minor revisions and sent the proposal to the Academic Senate
- December 2016: the **Academic Senate approved the revisions of the General Education Outcomes, effective Fall 2017.**
- January 2017: Fifteen task force and other faculty members scored 566 student artifacts, from 47 courses, submitted during the fall 2016 term.
- Spring 2017: reviewed the Fall assessment results, revised the Information Management rubric to include a dimension for “digital technology,” prepared rubrics to support assessment of the discipline-specific General Education Outcomes, reviewed the trends in assessment outcomes over three separate semesters, and prepared a draft report summarizing the Task Force work 2014-17 with recommendations for next steps. The revised General Education Outcomes were incorporated in the Academic Program Outcomes for all degree and certificate programs, currently being reviewed and revised for posting on the College website.
- Spring 2017: for the Spring 2017 assessment of the first four General Education Outcomes, forty-three faculty members, from fourteen academic departments,

volunteered to submit student artifacts. Faculty will score the student artifacts during the first two weeks in June.

- Spring 2017: Items for further consideration include selection of appropriate courses for scheduled, rotating assessment of General Education Outcomes, so faculty are not burdened, and creating a governance structure for ongoing oversight of general education assessment, with the primary goal of using assessment results to benefit student learning.

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