

Diverse Communities Assessment 2019

Overview

The Diverse Communities assessment work has been illuminating and professionally rewarding, and all members of the assessment team are grateful for the real support, in terms of AWA funding and the sustained interest of our peers, that made this possible. It's our belief that the results will benefit our students and the university community. Our team met several times, in person and online, to consider the rubric and to norm, score, and discuss samples. Generally, the results were positive, with 44%-50% of artifacts scoring at 3 or 4 for every outcome. Following the assessment, our team devoted time to carefully considering the meaning of our results and their implications for how we might make J courses at WCU even more successful.

Process

Our team first discussed the Revised Goal 5 Rubric. The one minor modification we made was the stipulation that in order to score a "4" in any category, the artifact had to "show evidence of applying a critical/theoretical frame appropriate to J courses," as this is one of the criteria for J courses that has historically distinguished WCU from general education diversity requirements at other institutions. The team then scored samples independently and discussed the results. Once we seemed to be on the same page regarding where to draw the lines in terms of what constitutes a 1, 2, 3, or 4 for outcomes A, B, C, and D, we moved on to the second norming session. Thereafter, faculty entered scores on Qualtrics, with two faculty members scoring each of the 95 artifacts [27 of which had multiple parts, which were assessed as one], and there were additional meetings to discuss results and discrepancies. The team then reflected on and wrote brief responses to the following questions:

1. What did you learn about general education and assessment from this experience?
2. How will your experience with assessment impact your teaching of the course in the future?
3. What can the university do to strengthen student learning outcomes for the J goal?

At our final meeting, we discussed our thoughts about these questions, the process, and ways to improve student experiences with J courses. The assessment leader then synthesized our discussion and prepared this report.

Results

The data from our assessment appear on the attached spreadsheet. A simple average of the entered scores for the 95 artifacts revealed the following for each learning outcome:

A	B	C	D
2.46	2.43	2.41	2.36

Table 1

In terms of average scores, then, there was little variation between the outcomes. Table 2 (below) shows the breakdown (as a percentage of the 95 assessed artifacts) by learning outcome and score:

Outcome	A	B	C	D
Score				
4	13	12	19	16
3	36	38	29	28
2	36	36	35	41
1	15	14	17	15

Table 2

Generally, these are encouraging results, as we see that 44%-50% of artifacts scored at 3 or 4 for every outcome. (Outcome D was the weakest, while Outcome B was the strongest). The distributions seem relatively similar across outcomes A, B, and D. So, for each goal, we had most scores falling in the middle range (between 2 and 3); approximately 15% scoring 1; and 12-16% scoring 4. The one outlier is outcome C, for which we had almost 20% scoring 4. After looking at the breakdown of scores across the outcomes here, it seems to me that we had more scores of 4 for outcome C because outcome C is best suited to the application of the “critical/theoretical frame appropriate to J courses” which we specified must be manifest in order to receive a 4.

Lessons Learned and Suggestions

This assessment work has been a rewarding experience in several respects. First, as professional development, the discussions with colleagues on the assessment team have been valuable to us all in thinking about the ways we frame our own assignments for students in J classes. As the assessment team included junior and non-tenured, as well as senior faculty, the exchange of ideas has been both a learning experience and a mentoring opportunity. Here are some of the lessons we took away from this experience:

1. Faculty should understand that the ways that we frame our questions or assignments can direct or guide students to fulfill more of the higher level outcomes.
2. The language of the Revised Goal 5 Rubric is a valuable resource for planning assignments and curricula. It could be useful to share with students, as well.
3. J courses are one facet of general education at WCU intended to enhance learning and student success. We want faculty from diverse disciplines teaching J classes, and we must accept that the ways that courses achieve the J goals might look different for each class.

Our team also discussed measures that we believe will help faculty be more successful at creating curricula that promote student achievement of J learning

outcomes. Some are easy and cost nothing, while others require real resources and support at many levels.

1. Make the Revised Goal 5 rubric more accessible to all faculty teaching J classes.
 - i. A link next to the J Handbook on the CAPC GenEd page would be a good start. The campus media team could also make a short video to advertise/promote it.
2. In our experience, the artifact cannot tell the entire story. We might consider a poll or survey for faculty teaching J courses to complete at semester's end: did students meet these criteria? We might also survey students with the same question.
3. The support of administrators and colleagues is crucial to those teaching J courses, especially if they are new to Diverse Communities teaching assignments and/or facing adverse reactions of students. Accordingly, we would suggest, for example, that department chairs exercise care in assigning J courses and insure that those who are new to teaching Diverse Communities are familiar with the rubric and resources available for promoting J learning outcomes.
4. Consider more AWAs and funding of other sorts to support professional development/mentoring of faculty who teach Diverse Communities courses.
5. Potential targets for new and additional funding might include: updating the J Handbook; a faculty forum or university-wide event related to J courses, (which might include a showcase of examples assignments, etc.).

What is more, our learning outcomes for J classes, as for other areas of general education, are not discrete to particular assignments or courses, but are integrated with and dependent upon our university community and the world beyond. Accordingly, hiring faculty from diverse backgrounds who specialize in areas of study within their discipline suited to teaching J classes, as well as recruiting a diverse cohort of students, are intertwined with students' experiences in J courses.

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