

Objective Review Committee Report

Objective 1, Written Communication, Spring 2023

Objective Review Committee Membership: Jim Skidmore, Shannon Kobs Nawotniak, Margaret Johnson

A. Evaluate the assessment plan for each course, together with its implementation. Provide a brief summary of the Committee’s findings in this area. Describe any recommended changes.

There are approved plans for ENGL 1102 and HONS 1101, and the committee sees no problem with these plans. The implementation of the plan for ENGL 1102 has been consistent, with methods modified over time. As the 5-year report from English states, “This past five-year period has been primarily a period of finding the best assessment instruments, the best rubric, and best processes for assessment.” At the time of the last Objective 1 Review in 2018, implementation of the HONS 1101 plan had not yet begun. Significant progress has now been made, and several annual reviews have been conducted. The 5-year report from Honors outlines some gaps that have occurred in the annual assessment of learning outcomes, and it notes that these can be fixed in the future with better communication during “handoffs” of assessment responsibility. The committee does not have any significant concerns or recommendations regarding ongoing assessment for courses in this objective.

B. Evaluate the assessment *outcome* for each course. To what extent are students in each course satisfactorily achieving the learning outcomes for the objective? Provide a brief summary of the Committee’s findings in this area. Describe any recommended changes.

Annual assessment for both HONS 1101 and ENGL 1102 have consistently demonstrated that most students are satisfactorily achieving the learning outcomes in these courses. Results for HONS 1101 have typically ranged from 70-80%. The data for ENGL 1102 is more complicated in recent years due to experimentation with different methods of assessment. As the English 5-year report indicates, in some years only indirect assessment tools were used, including student surveys; and these resulted in unusually low percentages of students deemed to have satisfactorily achieved the outcome. It’s quite clear that this inconsistency in the data is an artifact of the changing review methods, rather than any changes in the courses themselves or in student learning. English has now implemented a “capstone” assignment for ENGL 1102, and it expects that this assignment will allow for a more accurate assessment of student achievement of the learning outcomes. The review committee does not recommend to the programs any changes in this area beyond those that have already been proposed by the programs themselves.

The committee does, however, have recommendations to the General Education Requirements Committee regarding the current annual assessment procedures and expectations. We find that there are features of the current process that increase the burden of assessment on programs without any clear benefit. This leads to frustration among faculty and a tendency not to take the process seriously. These features include: 1. The emphasis on conducting a review of direct assessment tools—i.e., the work of a large numbers of students—*every year*, rather than on a less frequent interval such as every other year; and 2. A tendency to dismiss or discount any role for *instructor reflection* in assessing student achievement of learning outcomes.

It is likely that direct assessment of student work, with the use of a rubric, is favored over instructor reflection because the former produces *numbers* (percentages) whereas the latter does not. These numbers can have the appearance of objectivity, whereas instructor reflection can seem merely subjective. But it is very important to acknowledge the apparent objectivity of the numbers produced by the rubrics is mostly *illusory*.

For this reason, the committee recommends that programs be accorded more flexibility in how they conduct annual assessment. Programs can then use this flexibility to design assessment methods that remain thoughtful and instructive while minimizing the burdens placed on faculty.

C. Evaluate the list of courses currently approved to satisfy the objective. To what extent does the current list contribute to a strong, coherent system of general education. Would a reduction or increase in the number or variety of courses in this objective strengthen the overall system? Provide a brief summary of the Committee’s findings. Describe any recommended changes.

It is clear to the committee that the first-year writing sequence (ENGL 1101/1102) is crucial to a system of general education that is academically strong. It also sees HONS 1101 as an appropriate alternative for students in the Honors program. These courses must remain at the core of Objective 1. In light of this objective’s focus on fundamental writing skills, it is not clear that a wider variety of courses would be helpful. We do not recommend changes in this area.

D. Evaluate the stated learning outcomes of this general education objective. Are there any problems with the learning outcomes as currently described, or ways in which they might be improved? Provide a brief summary of the Committee’s findings in this area. Describe any recommended changes.

The committee does not see a need for alteration in the current learning outcomes for Objective 1. The English 5-year report notes that its faculty have representation on the statewide disciplinary group for Objective 1, and it has directed any occasional concerns through those representatives.

E. Evaluate the objective itself and its place within the system of general education. To what extent does the objective, in its current form, contribute to a strong overall system of general education? Are there ways in which the objective could be modified to improve it? Could the system be improved with its elimination or replacement? Provide a brief summary of the Committee's findings in this area. Describe any recommended changes.

The committee does not have changes to recommend in this area. As mentioned above, it is very clear that Objective 1 is a crucial component of the general education system. The current 2-course sequence is in line with national best practices and should not be altered.

Accepted by GERC: October 10, 2023, with a note that GERC will revisit the assessment process in a future meeting.

Accepted by UCC: October 19, 2023

Accepted by Faculty Senate:

Accepted by Academic Affairs: