

Assessment for Category 12 General Education First Year Experience

Assessment Team: Nancy Sprengeler, Tim Berg, Kellian Clink, Kristen Treinen, Chair

Assessment Analysis for Spring of 2004 through Fall of 2004

Background

According to the 2004-2005 *General Education & Cultural Diversity Bulletin*, CATEGORY 12: FIRST YEAR EXPERIENCE (requires 0-1 credits) promotes “further development of student success skills, such as reading, writing and speaking; help students gain intellectual confidence; build in the expectation of academic success; and to provide assistance in making the transition to the University” (p. 6). After fulfilling this requirement, students will be able to:

- (a) experience higher personal expectations of his/her ability to meaningfully participate in academic life;
- (b) define and give examples of critical thinking;
- (c) interact with other students regarding academic matters;
- (d) affirm that careful thinking is an important aspect of the educational process;
- (e) make a comfortable transition to college life. (p. 6)

The course which satisfies this category is First Year Experience 100.

Relation to University Mission and Goals

MSU’s mission statement is “Minnesota State University, Mankato promotes learning through effective undergraduate and graduate teaching, scholarship, and research in service to the state, the region and the global community.” The University’s strategic plan includes an initiative for promoting diversity across all levels of the University community. Category 12 is aimed at helping students develop the academic and personal skills necessary to make a successful transition to college life.

Methodology

At the beginning of the Spring 2004 and Fall 2004 semesters, the assessment team contacted the instructors of all classes meeting the Category 12 General Education category. During the course of the Fall 2004 semester, instructors were contacted via email and were also given a presentation during the First Year Experience workshop in October. We asked each FYE instructor to send us representative assignments for all students whose Tech ID’s ended in 2. We received over 137 assignments and selected those that demonstrated at least one of the Category 12 goals. In the Spring of 2004, 3 classes took part in this assessment project. There were 33 classes available in the Fall of 2004. The assessment team received materials from 137 assignments, including formal papers, reaction papers, completion essay questions and journal entries. Of the 137 assignments received, 100 addressed at least one of the goals. None of the assignments addressed all of the goals.

Each assessment team member analyzed nearly 35 assignments. A rubric was developed in order to help the assessment team analyze the material. This template utilized a checklist consisting of the five major goals for the Category 12: General Education First Year Experience. Our goal was to determine whether students are learning and achieving a majority of the outcomes at some level. The rubric allowed each team member to decide whether the student had reached mastery level of the goal (yes), or did not reach the intended goal (no) for Goals 1a, 1b, and 2b. The rubric also allowed each team member to decide whether the student had reached mastery level of the goal (yes), minimal level of achievement for the goal (maybe), or did not meet the goal (no) for questions 2a, 2c, 3, 4, & 5. During this inter-rater reliability phase, our evaluations of the samples revealed that the FYE course, at least minimally, helps students make a smooth academic and personal transition to college life. We also agreed that our analysis of the student work was liberal at times.

Quantitative Results

		Yes	Maybe	No	Total %
#1a	Student can identify personal expectations of performance in academic life (Y/?/N)	39	4	17	65%
#1b	Student can identify his or her expectations and relate them to his or her participation in academic life (Y/?/N)	40	3	15	68%
#2a	Student can define critical thinking (Y/N)	32		21	60%
#2b	Student can explain critical thinking (Y/?/N)	26	6	18	52%
#2c	Student can give examples of critical thinking (Y/N)	39		17	70%
#3	Student can interact with other students regarding academic matters (Y/N)	15		28	35%
#4	Student can affirm ways in which careful thinking is important (Y/N)	41		14	75%
#5	Student feels comfortable in college (Y/N)	55		15	78%

Qualitative Results: Student Voices

After a discussion of the quantitative results, the assessment team wanted to provide qualitative responses in the report to highlight examples of how students were achieving the goals set forth in Category 12 General Education First Year Experience. The following examples were indicative of student success.

Student voices: Goal #1b Student can identify his or her expectations and relate them to his or her participation in academic life.

One of my goals was probably achieving a B average or better in my classes. I'm pretty sure I've done that as my grades are two A's, 1 B and two unknowns. The unknowns are probably B or better at least. I'm sure another of my goals was along the lines of putting myself in uncomfortable situations to overcome my shyness. Well, I can't say I'm 100% satisfied in that area but I've made good progress.

Looking back at my first year at MSU, I find that I encountered many different emotions. I thought I would never last at MSU, or any college for that matter, because the material was too difficult to comprehend. However, after looking back at all the work I accomplished, I feel that it wasn't as bad as first predicted. I learned how to organize my time, MSU's campus and I also learned how to manage money.

Student voices: Goal 2 (a,b & c) Student can define, identify, and give examples of critical thinking.

I think more of a critical thinker because I am asking more questions and using information to solve problems. I believe that I have been making good decisions to help myself stay healthy and keep a good education.

I don't think that my critical thinking skills have grown as much as I would have liked them too [sic], but with each class I go to and the more questions I asked in class, the better I come at it. I think that my sociology class offered the most critical thinking by having discussions boards and opinionated reflection papers on what we were discussing in class.

Student voices: Goal 3 Student can interact with other students regarding academic matters

This [sociology class and discussion boards] gave me a whole new outlook on what I really thought about issues and also changed my opinion on something by hearing and analyzing others' views on the same subject.

Student Voices: Goal 4 Student can affirm ways in which careful thinking is important

I have noticed though that I am thinking more thoroughly than I ever have before. I think doing this; using my critical thinking skills has really helped my grades out and I can definitely notice a difference in my quality of work compared to high school.

Student voices: Goal 5 Student feels comfortable in college

Overall, I think my freshman semester went pretty well. I did have some tough times studying, but I got through it. I had some surprises that were different to me, for example the big class sizes, but I got used to them . . . I also think every freshman [sic] should get involved in some way. By joining a sport, intramural sport or even attending a movie or football game is a great way to become more familiar with Mankato State University [sic] and you will meet other students.

"I am doing well in most classes and the only class I am really having trouble with is Pre-Calculus. I wish I would've taken it more seriously, but I guess we learn from our mistakes"

"I feel that I have really grown up this year. At the beginning of the year I was big into drinking and partying every night, I had my own place, and no one telling me what to do. About mid semester I realized that college isn't about beer, it's about growing up and making new steps every day toward your career."

Observations:

- Use of various assignments, while difficult to assess, appeared to help students meet our curriculum goals in any number of areas such as critical thinking and the ability to set academic goals.
- Journal entries were most effective for assessment when specific questions are being asked of the students (For example, "How do you use critical thinking when communicating in the classroom?")
- Research projects at this level (100 level course) did not demonstrate any depth of critical thinking, but rather these assignments appear to ask the students to merely regurgitate the information they have learned and or collected from library research.
- Student interaction on academic matters was very difficult to measure. Creation of a new rubric for assessing student interaction on academic matters may prove useful for future assessment teams.
- The "Reaction Paper" assignment appeared to be quite popular with the instructors involved in our assessment; however, the content of these papers was not always useful. It would be beneficial for instructors to create criteria for such an assignment that specifically asks students to address one or two of the goals listed on the FYE syllabus.

Suggestions For Future Assessment

The assessment team strongly encourages a collaborative effort (between FYE instructors) be made to design one or two assignments that specifically meet Goals 1-5 of this assessment. While the instructors of FYE 100 courses are teaching valuable skills, the goals of the course are not always being met by the assignments given to the students. To clarify, we are not suggesting that instructors should be expected to stick to a standardized syllabus; rather, the instructors should be given at least

two specific assignments that clearly meet all of the Goals set forth for the General Education Category 12: First Year Experience.