

SENATE STANDING JOINT COMMITTEE FOR GENERAL EDUCATION ASSESSMENT

Update on General Education Assessment 2024 – 2025

(Informational)

Introduction

The Penn State faculty have consistently reaffirmed their commitment to General Education as a keystone of undergraduate education. This commitment carries with it a collective responsibility to assess the effectiveness of the General Education curriculum. Administrative offices provide essential support for this work, while faculty play a critical role by contributing course-level data. The Joint Committee leverages insights from this work to recommend improvements to the University Faculty Senate (UFS). Since the establishment of the Senate's Standing Joint Committee for General Education Assessment, we have regularly shared assessment findings with the Senate, fostering a deeper understanding of the curriculum's strengths and areas for improvement. This report serves as the annual update to the faculty, highlighting our progress and reaffirming our shared dedication to continuous improvement.

General Education Assessment Timeline

Penn State's General Education assessment strategy is a multifaceted approach that combines faculty-led assessments, review of institutional data, and survey feedback to provide a comprehensive understanding of the curriculum's effectiveness. Faculty-led assessments involve direct evaluation of student work at the course-level, offering valuable insights into how General Education goals are achieved in practice (Table 1). Institutional data, such as course objectives, course enrollment patterns, and program requirements, provide a broader context for examining General Education (Table 2). Complementing these efforts, survey data—such as the General Education Student Survey—captures students' perspectives on the relevance, accessibility, and impact of their General Education experiences (Table 2). After careful consideration, the Joint Committee removed a previously planned alumni survey from the Table 2 datasets. We determined that the anticipated return in terms of response rate and data quality would not justify the resources for such an effort. Together, the remaining elements in Table 1 and Table 2 ensure a holistic and collaborative process that informs continuous improvement while maintaining the integrity and rigor of the General Education program.

General Education Dataset Update: Student Survey 2024 – 2025

The General Education Student Survey was first conducted in 2019 and repeated in fall 2024, following Penn State's [General Education assessment timeline](#). The survey included students with a seventh semester standing or higher who had no more than 15 transfer credits. A total of 10,405 students were invited to participate, and 1,348 responses were received, resulting in a 13% response rate. Sampling methods varied by campus location, with the Office of Planning, Assessment, and Institutional Research (OPAIR) employing a mix of census and random sampling depending on campus size. A public report and detailed dashboard will be released in late spring 2025, but preliminary analyses reveal encouraging trends. Respondents expressed general satisfaction with the selection, accessibility, and flexibility of General Education courses.

Two-thirds of 2024 respondents reported that their General Education courses helped them develop skills or knowledge they would use again (66%) and aided in understanding complex ideas and events (68%). Seventy percent of respondents agreed that these courses broadened their understanding of national and world events. Fifty-nine percent of respondents viewed General Education courses as a worthwhile part of their education, though fewer—30%—found them as important as their major courses. Additionally, while 47% saw General Education as complimentary to their major, 81% noted that the courses primarily covered topics outside their field of study. When selecting courses, students prioritized factors such as how well courses fit into their schedule, their interest in the topic, and the person who was teaching the course.

Table 1: General Education assessment timeline 2018 – 2029

Year	Category	Objective assessed
2018–2019	Learning Objective	Integrative Thinking
2019–2021	--Pandemic Pause--	--Pandemic Pause--
2021–2022	Learning Objective	Effective Communication
2022–2023	Learning Objective	Creative Thinking
2022–2023	Learning Objective	Global Learning
2023–2024	Learning Objective	Critical and Analytical Thinking
2023–2024	Learning Objective	Social Responsibility and Ethical Reasoning
2024–2025	Learning Objective	Integrative Thinking
2024–2025	Domain	GN
2025–2026	Domain	GA
2025–2026	Domain	GS
2025–2026	Learning Objective	Effective Communication
2026–2027	Domain	GHW
2026–2027	Domain	GH
2026–2027	Learning Objective	Creative Thinking
2027–2028	Foundation	GWS
2027–2028	Foundation	GQ
2027–2028	Learning Objective	Global Learning
2028–2029	Learning Objective	Key Literacies
2028–2029	Learning Objective	Critical and Analytical Thinking

Table 2: Core General Education dataset update timeline

Last completed	Dataset	Next scheduled	Periodicity
2019–2020	General Education courses mapped to General Education Learning Objectives	2029–2030	Every 10 years
2022–2023	General Education and undergraduate majors' relationship maps, General Education prescriptiveness in the majors	2032–2033	Every 10 years

2023–2024	General Education course enrollment dataset and analysis	2027–2028	Every 4 years
Fall 2024	Student survey (dates subject to revision based on the University Survey Calendar)	2029–2030	Every 5 years

General Education Learning Objective Assessments: Critical and Analytical Thinking, Social Responsibility and Ethical Reasoning

Critical and Analytical Thinking and Social Responsibility and Ethical Reasoning are two of the seven learning objectives in Penn State’s General Education curriculum. The Office for General Education (OGE) and OPAIR assessed the University’s effectiveness at addressing these objectives in 2023 – 2024 using rubrics developed and applied by faculty. Penn State’s General Education rubrics can be viewed at the [General Education Assessment website](#).

- Critical and Analytical Thinking is the habit of mind characterized by comprehensive exploration of issues, ideas, artifacts, and events before accepting or formulating a conclusion. It is the intellectually disciplined process of conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action.
- Social Responsibility and Ethical Reasoning is the ability to assess one’s own values within the social context of problems, recognize ethical issues in a variety of settings, describe how different perspectives might be applied to ethical dilemmas, and consider the ramifications of alternative actions. Individuals should acquire the self- knowledge and leadership skills needed to play a role in creating and maintaining healthy, civil, safe, and thriving communities.

Across both studies, instructors reported their expectations of and actual student performance via surveys with students evaluated on faculty established criteria for the Critical and Analytical Thinking and SRER. The criteria for Critical and Analytical Thinking are Exploration, Analytical Thinking, and Judgement/Conclusion. The criteria for Social Responsibility and Ethical Reasoning are: Ethical Self Awareness, Ethical Issue Recognition, and Application of Ethical Perspectives and Concepts. Each criterion is articulated in the relevant rubric (see the [General Education Assessment website](#) to view the rubrics). Performance categories for reach criterion were: not demonstrated, developing, satisfactory or exemplary. The findings from these studies were reviewed by the Joint Committee.

For the Critical and Analytical Thinking study, 352 instructors submitted 379 surveys across 178 courses, with 82% of students scoring satisfactory or exemplary in Exploration, 80% in Analytical Thinking, and 78% in Judgment, while fewer than 6% received a not demonstrated rating across each criterion. Analysis showed the greatest gap between expected and actual performance occurred in 300/400-level courses for Judgment, and students exceeded expectations across knowledge domains, particularly in the Arts.

The Social Responsibility and Ethical Reasoning study involved 114 instructors completing 117 surveys across 75 courses, where 80% of students scored satisfactory or exemplary in Ethical Self-Awareness, 82% in Ethical Issue Recognition, and 74% in Applying Ethical Perspectives, with fewer than 8% rated not demonstrated across each criterion. The largest performance gaps

were found in 100-level courses for ethical issue recognition and 000-level courses for applying ethical perspectives.

Both studies revealed that students generally performed well and exceeded expectations across course levels and domains. Details reports for the Critical and Analytical Thinking and the Social Responsibility and Ethical Reasoning studies, as well as prior assessment studies, can be found on the [General Education Assessment website](#).

General Education Course Recertification

Between 2018 and 2022, all General Education courses went through a robust recertification process requiring a formal curricular review in which faculty had to demonstrate alignment between their courses and the updated ([UFS Agenda 3/15/16 Appendix B](#)) General Education attributes (foundations and domains) and learning objectives (GELOs, [UFS Agenda 3/15/16 Appendix C](#)). Following that effort, a process was put into place whereby a subset of General Education courses would be re-evaluated every five years to ensure that the courses give students the opportunity to accomplish the intended learning of the General Education curriculum and to ensure curricular alignment with the GELOs, and across all sections and locations offering a course. Two-hundred and fifty-two courses were flagged for recertification in 2023 – 2024 and, in fall 2024, a recertification process guided by the recommendations approved by the UFS in 2023 ([UFS Agenda 2/28/23 Appendix C](#)) was piloted by the Senate Committee on Curricular Affairs (SCCA), in collaboration with the OGE and OPAIR. The goal of the process was to ensure that General Education attributes and learning objectives continue to be appropriately applied, while reducing faculty and administrative effort in the verification process. Overall, 73% of invited faculty provided data for 216 (86%) of the 252 courses. SCCA is currently reviewing the findings, which will be shared with the Senate in a future report from that committee.

Office For General Education

The Office for General Education (OGE) provides comprehensive support for the General Education program to faculty, staff, and students across Penn State University. The office advances institutional priorities related to General Education by facilitating meaningful assessment practices and serving as a resource for policy and curriculum-related matters. Although housed within Undergraduate Education, the OGE collaborates extensively with various units across the University, including the Office of the University Registrar, UFS, OPAIR, and the Schreyer Institute for Teaching Excellence (SITE).

A key initiative within the OGE is the General Education Scholars program, which consists of 16 faculty members representing the intellectual and geographic diversity of Penn State. This cohort includes seven faculty members from University Park (one from each General Education area), one faculty member from each Commonwealth Campus, and four from the University College. These faculty members, who receive compensation for their work—including summer commitments—play a critical role in advancing General Education initiatives. In addition to contributing to various projects, they serve in advisory roles and act as liaisons across the University, further elevating the prominence of General Education.

The OGE also plays an integral role in promoting Penn State's presence in national discussions on General Education. Notably, Maggie Slattery, Director of the OGE, and Laura Cruz of SITE have been appointed as the incoming co-editors of *The Journal of General Education*, a

publication of Penn State University Press and they both contributed to a forthcoming two-volume publication by the Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U) and Routledge in association with the Assessment Institute in Indianapolis on General Education reform.

Recent OGE initiatives and highlights:

Support For Students

- Developed Canvas modules to enhance student understanding of recent elections, including the 2024 General Election.

Support For Faculty

- Established a new book club in Spring 2025 focused on curiosity, facilitated by General Education Scholars. The inaugural book selection was *Curious Minds: The Power of Connection* (MIT Press, 2022) by Perry Zurn and Dani S. Bassett (PSU BS '04).
- Continued the *Curiosity and Collaboration Colloquiums* in Fall 2024, featuring two collaborative projects:
 - *A New Strategy for CHEM 101: Providing the Help They Need When They Need It*, presented by Chemistry faculty from six PSU campuses.
 - *Short Film Festival Showcasing the Value of the Humanities in the Real World*, a collaborative initiative between Greater Allegheny and the Penn State Humanities Institute.
- Provided ongoing microgrant support, awarding more than \$19,000 to over 50 faculty members for the 2024–2025 academic year.
- In collaboration with SITE, the General Education Tool-kit—a comprehensive resource designed to support the study of General Education teaching and scholarship—currently facilitates approximately 25 ongoing research projects. This initiative includes built-in IRB approval, streamlining the research process. Many of these projects have already resulted in presentations and publications in peer-reviewed venues.
- Offered professional development opportunities in collaboration with OPAIR, SITE, and other University units. Recent offerings include:
 - A [recorded online presentation](#) on utilizing forced choice (i.e., multiple-choice) exams in General Education assessment, developed in partnership with the University Park STAT 200 team.
 - An in-person session titled [Enhancing General Education: Implementing Penn State's Assessment Approach](#), conducted in collaboration with Penn State Harrisburg and OPAIR in Summer 2024.

The OGE remains committed to advancing the General Education program through strategic initiatives, faculty engagement, and ongoing collaboration across the University and beyond.

General Education Assessment Process Review and Response

Over the past six years, the Joint Committee, the Office for General Education, and OPAIR have developed a systematic assessment process for General Education. In 2023, OPAIR recognized

the need for an objective assessment of the University's learning assessment processes, operations, impact, and potential areas for growth and decided to invite external experts to review Penn State's processes. Also, in March 2024, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) completed its self-study evaluation visit, which included a review of General Education assessment.

In their visit report, MSCHE praised Penn State for its comprehensive, cyclical oversight and review process of the General Education program, highlighting its role in creating a "modern, robust, and thoughtful curriculum" that remains flexible and relevant to evolving needs. Additionally, the external assessment review recognized Penn State's advancements in General Education assessment and offered several recommendations for further enhancement. Some of these suggestions are already being implemented or are planned for the coming year, including personalized invitations and thank-you messages for participants, and distributing study findings to all faculty invited to participate in assessment efforts.

Summary

In summary, the Joint Committee for the Assessment of General Education finds that:

- The University's General Education assessment plan continues to be on track.
- Students are generally satisfied with the selection, accessibility, and flexibility of their General Education courses, with 70% reporting that these courses broadened their perspectives.
- Penn State students are demonstrating proficiency in the General Education Learning Objectives (GELOs). Three-quarters or more of students assessed as part of the CAT and SRER studies were scored as satisfactory or exemplary.
- The Office for General Education continues to provide critical University and faculty support for General Education.
- Two sets of external reviews, including one from Penn State's accrediting body MSCHE, have commended Penn State's General Education assessment process and improvements continue to be made with input from faculty.

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