Competency-Level General Education Assessment Action Plan

Social Sciences

Part One: Results Discussion / Reflection

The general education Social Sciences assessments across six departments (Psychology, Sociology, Geography, Economics, Political Science, and Anthropology) reveal both successes and opportunities for strengthening student learning. Overall, students performed exceptionally well in SLO 1, with 91% achieving either "Meets Expectation" or "Exceeds Expectation." For SLO 2 and SLO 3, the percentages were 82% and 81%, respectively. While the results are strong, each department identified areas for improvement, including enhancing student comprehension, aligning course content more closely with outcomes, and refining assessment methodologies.

- **Psychology** students struggled with the concept of semantic memory, with fewer than half of face-to-face and only 20% of online students correctly identifying examples; approximately 60% of students across both modalities failed to recognize the importance of cultural norms in diagnosing psychological disorders, and 34% of online students provided incorrect answers to a basic question on the definition of validity.
- **Sociology** identified gaps in students' ability to apply discipline-specific knowledge, particularly regarding how cultural and historical contexts influence human behavior and society (SLO 2) and how to apply discipline-specific knowledge in the social sciences to explain the key factors that shape social institutions, structures, and processes that shape human behavior and social interaction (SLO 3).
- **GPE** faced difficulty in maintaining consistency across different course sections and modalities (online vs. face-to-face) and in aligning questions to specific SLOs.
- **Economics** students struggled with SLO 3, where 60% of microeconomics and 57% of macroeconomics students met expectations, particularly on complex topics like price controls, incentives, and the trade-offs between efficiency and equality in policy-making. Additional challenges included difficulties with understanding elasticity of demand, globalization and trade, and the tools of monetary policy.
- **Political Science** struggled with SLOs #2 and #3, where only 66% met expectations, particularly with questions related to public opinion and the U.S. political landscape.
- **Anthropology** identified knowledge gaps in prehistoric archaeology, state institutions, and understanding race as a cultural construct.

Part Two: Action Plan

1. Pedagogical / Curriculum Enhancements:

- **Increased Emphasis on Problematic Concepts:**

  - **Psychology** will, starting in Spring 2024, have PSYC 1000 instructors explicitly address the role of cultural norms in diagnosing disorders and provide a wider variety of examples of validity to help students better understand its connection to truth in everyday life. In addition, faculty will revise the wording of the semantic memory question to clarify the distinction between semantic and episodic memory, helping students more accurately differentiate between the two concepts.

  - **Sociology** will address the identified gaps by emphasizing Outcomes 2 and 3 at the first faculty meeting using the Undergraduate Director report, while the Undergraduate Committee will evaluate and revise assessment questions missed by 30% or more of students to improve learning outcomes.

  - **GPE** will engage all GEOG 1000 instructors in discussions about ECU's social science learning outcomes to ensure a consistent understanding of how course content meets these goals. This will include sharing syllabus language to help students connect content to learning outcomes, developing a list of commonly covered topics with agreed mapping to appropriate outcomes, and encouraging collaboration on question wording. Instructors will also convene at the end of the semester to review assessment results, and the department will discuss the potential benefits of using more frequent, lower-stakes assessments instead of exams.

  - **Economics** will review the SLO3 assessment questions to identify challenging topics and allocate additional class time to these areas or consider more effective means of instruction for these concepts, focusing on concepts like price controls, globalization, elasticity of demand, and monetary policy. They will also adopt high-impact practices, including active learning strategies such as classroom experiments, cooperative learning, discussions, clicker questions, increased use of data for instruction, and the involvement of learning assistants.

- **Political Science** will engage faculty in reinforcing the teaching of public opinion and the political landscape, addressing problematic assessment questions.

- **Anthropology** will introduce additional lectures, readings, and case studies to address gaps in student knowledge related to prehistoric archaeology, state institutions, social organization, and the concept of race. Faculty will use targeted readings and multimedia resources to reinforce key concepts and enhance student understanding.

- **Alignment of Content with Learning Outcomes:**

  - **Geography** will review and refine the alignment of course content with the university's general education outcomes, especially focusing on ensuring consistency across all sections.

2. Student Support Services:

- **Tutoring:**

  - **Sociology** will encourage top-performing SOCI 2110 students to become tutors at the Academic Success Center and inform students of available tutoring services.

  - **Political Science** will emphasize the importance of tutoring in public opinion and the U.S. political landscape, working closely with the Pirate Academic Success Center to enhance support in these areas.

  - **Anthropology** will continue to encourage students to use available tutoring services at the Pirate Academic Success Center, especially for 1000- and 2000-level courses, and visit during office hours if they need additional information and/or clarification about course content.

  - **Economics** will promote student support services, encouraging students to utilize resources such as tutoring from economics graduate students, the Pirate Academic Success Center, faculty office hours (both in-person and online), and learning assistant office hours.

- **Communication about Academic Resources:**

  - **Political Science** will use social media platforms and the department's ListServ to raise awareness of tutoring resources.

- o **Sociology** will promote the use of ECU Connect to keep students updated on their performance and provide early interventions.

- o **Anthropology** will provide students with review sheets and in-class review sessions prior to examinations. Some faculty will embed lecture notes in PowerPoint presentations, which will be posted on Canvas for students to review.

3. Faculty Development:

- **Faculty Training:**

  - o **Psychology** will provide faculty with resources to improve instruction on key concepts like cultural norms and semantic memory.

  - o **Sociology** will remind faculty at the start of each semester to focus on the general education outcomes.

  - o **Economics** will inform instructors of the assessment results, highlighting strengths and weaknesses, and hold a meeting with the UPC director, the chair, and faculty members to ensure they are aware of available resources and provide additional guidance.

  - o **Anthropology** will explore team-teaching options for Anthropology 1000, allowing students to learn from faculty experts in different subfields. The department will also explore the feasibility of offering multiple sections taught by specialized faculty.

4. Other Areas for Consideration:

- **Assessment Instrument Improvements:**

  - o **Sociology** will review the questions used in assessments to ensure they more effectively measure student understanding of the targeted outcomes. The Undergraduate Curriculum Committee will consider adding questions for each outcome.

  - o **Geography** will work to standardize assessment questions while still allowing faculty to tailor course content to their expertise. Discussions will focus on developing common themes and more consistent approaches to assessing learning outcomes across all GEOG 1000 sections.

- **Attendance and Engagement:**

- **Anthropology** faculty have raised concerns about declining student attendance over the semester and are discussing strategies to improve engagement. While mandatory attendance is not being considered at the department level, faculty have suggested that a university-wide attendance policy could improve student performance.