

Report on Assessing Baccalaureate Learning Goals at Sacramento State

Prepared for the General Education Program

September 14, 2008

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report details the university's progress in assessing student success in achieving Sacramento State's Baccalaureate Learning Goals. An analysis of data from at least 670 sections across 87 courses revealed six types of direct measures and a variety of indirect measures. An analysis considered compliance of responders in describing their reflections and plans for change and the types of data used for assessing each Baccalaureate Learning Goal. A summary of this data analysis revealed a great deal of variance in grade distribution among the different Baccalaureate Learning Goals and between lower and upper division courses. Four recommendations are offered: for standardizing assessment strategies and grading criteria, for more explicitly aligning the GE and Baccalaureate Learning Goals, and for simplifying the reporting process.

INTRODUCTION

This report was compiled using data from three sources: General Education assessment reports (see Appendix 1), academic program annual assessment reports¹, and academic program self studies².

It is possible to use General Education assessment reports as a proxy for assessing the Baccalaureate Learning Goals outcomes because the relationship between the Baccalaureate Learning Goals and the GE program was delineated by the Faculty Senate Working Group on University Learning Goals in Fall 1999/Spring 2000 (Table 1).³ Thus, data from courses spread across the university's five GE areas were used to assess five of the six Baccalaureate Learning Goals (Analysis & Problem Solving, Communication, Information Competence, Cultural Legacies, and Values & Pluralism).

In April, 2008, ten academic programs (Anthropology, Biological Sciences, Child Development, Communication Studies, Economics, English, Freshman Programs, History, Humanities & Religious Studies, and Teacher Education) of the 49 involved in GE were invited to submit assessment reports, with the expectation that faculty within them were following through with their approved assessment plans.⁴ The invited programs were selected to cover the five Baccalaureate Learning Goals and were provided with a form⁵ based on one developed by the late GE Faculty Assessment Consultant, Dr. Leah Vande Berg,⁶ which had been subsequently modified to reflect language developed under a changed Faculty Senate reporting policy.⁷ In the GE Assessment Report forms, faculty members were asked to provide, among other things, the following items: 1) the data described in assessment plans; 2) what was learned from

implementing the GE assessment plans about the GE area outcomes and the Baccalaureate Learning Goals; 3) descriptions of whether any changes to the course would be made as a result of GE assessment; and 4) descriptions of whether any changes would be made to the GE assessment plan.

Table 1. Baccalaureate Learning Goals Matrix taken from <http://www.csus.edu/acaf/Portfolios/GE/lrngls.htm>

GE AREA	LEARNING EXPECTATIONS					
	Competencies in the Disciplines	Analysis and Problem solving	Communication	Information Competence	Cultural Legacies	Values & Pluralism
AREA A						
A 1 Oral Communication			X	X		
A 2 Written Communication			X			
A3 Critical Thinking		X	X	X		
AREA B						
Area B 1 Physical Science		X				
Area B 2 Life Forms		X				
Area B 3 Lab		X				
Area B 4 Mathematical Quantitative Reasoning		X				
Area B 5 Further Studies in the above, B1, 2, & 4		X				
AREA C						
C 1 World Civilizations					X	X
C 2 Introduction to the Arts					X	X
C 3 Introduction to the Humanities					X	
C 4 Further Studies in the Arts and Humanities					X	X
AREA D						
D 1 A Foundations in Social and Behavioral Sciences						X
D 1 B World Cultures					X	X
D 2 Major Social Issues of the Contemporary Era						X
D 3 American Institutions					X	X
AREA E						
E Understanding Personal Development		X				

During June, 2008, the university's web-sites with annual academic program assessment reports and self studies were perused; three assessment reports (Government, Philosophy, Sociology) and eight self studies (Anthropology, Criminal Justice, English, Ethnic

Studies, History, Music, Psychology, and Sociology) were identified as having data useful for this report.

RESULTS

Eight of the ten invited programs responded and provided reports on 501 sections distributed over 40 courses (note: two programs did not provide the number of sections for the eight courses they were reporting on, but they did report the number of students [N=2924]; see Appendix 1 – Assessment Reports). The reports for 70% of the 40 courses used the provided forms while the remaining 30% used other formats (e.g., forms developed by departments, forms developed by individuals, no form). As a consequence, the invited reflections, as in items 2-4 above, were usually not provided for the 30% group.

In the three academic program assessment reports, GE assessment data were reported for 31 courses. The reports provided information on 169 sections (the reporters for eight courses either offered no numbers or used adjectives for the number of sections, such as *many* or *few*). For over half of the courses cited in the annual academic program assessment reports items 2-4 above were addressed.

In the eight programmatic self studies there was generally discussion of both the GE learning outcomes and Baccalaureate Learning Goals. Four programs explicitly discuss the Baccalaureate Learning Goals and the other four do not, although this latter group has two programs with program-specific learning outcomes that directly parallel the Baccalaureate Learning Goals. Three programs in particular provided direct and indirect data for 16 courses, some of which will be discussed below.

In total, data are available for 77 GE and ten non-GE courses. The data from all three categories of sources comprised two types: direct and indirect measures.⁸ The direct measures all addressed specific GE learning outcomes and in some cases Baccalaureate Learning Goals and included six types: 1) grade distributions for particular assignments, including essay exams, papers and speaking assignments; 2) percent of students correctly answering objective questions given in exams throughout the term and in all sections of a course; 3) scores on standardized tests; 4) value-added measured using pre- and post-tests; 5) course grades based on student performance on a variety of tasks, such as tests using compare/contrast questions, essays, assignments and projects; and, 6) course grades, percent passing course or learning objectives, without discussion of tests or assignments. A variety of indirect measures also were identified.

ANALYSIS

REFLECTION ON GE AND BACCALAUREATE LEARNING GOALS

The invited programs were asked to describe what was learned from implementing the GE assessment plans about the GE area outcomes, and about the Baccalaureate Learning Goals. As seen in Table 2, nearly half (i.e., 17 or 43%) of the invited reports quite explicitly, and often at great length, reflected on how well their course-specific learning objectives supported the GE learning objectives. Another 18 (45%) reflected on the GE outcomes, but not to the extent/level of the previous group. Together, these two show that more than $\frac{3}{4}$ of the reports' authors did as requested. Of the five that did not reflect, three used the proper form, but missed the prompt while the other two used idiosyncratic forms. Finally, more than half of the combined annual academic program reports and self studies did seriously reflect on how their courses were addressing the goals of the GE program. It should be noted that it is not required in the annual academic program reports to reflect on the GE outcomes, so it is heartening that more than half of them did!

Table 2. Number of reports that reflected on GE learning outcomes

	Invited Reports	Annual Reports	Self-Studies
Yes	17	18	6
Somewhat	18		10
No	5		
N/A		13	

The authors of twelve (30%) of the invited reports explicitly discuss how their course-specific learning outcomes satisfy or meet the various components of the relevant Baccalaureate Learning Goals (Table 3). Another 7 (18%) explicitly discuss how their course-specific learning outcomes satisfy the relevant Baccalaureate Learning Goals, without going into detail about which components. The authors of more than half (53%) of the invited reports did not discuss them at all. As to be expected, none of the annual academic program reports addressed the BA learning goals while all the self studies do address them in one fashion or another, as the authors were requested to do.

Table 3. Number of reports that reflected on the Baccalaureate Learning Goals

	Invited Reports	Annual Reports	Self-Studies
Yes	12		16
Somewhat	7		
No	21		
N/A		31	

PLANS TO CHANGE GE COURSE OR GE ASSESSMENT PLAN

The invited programs were asked to describe whether any changes to the course or assessment plan would be made as a result of GE assessment. As seen in Table 4, the authors of 26 of the 40 responses (65%) said that they planned to: change their course (N=7), their plan (N=14), or both (N=5). The proposed changes to the courses were not major. Instead, instructors planned to add more quizzes, emphasize issues, provide more review opportunities, change the reader, change the timing of assignments, etc. Changes to the plans include ideas such as changing the number of questions, change the way assessment is delivered (in-class versus non-credit WebCT), change style of assessment (from essays to pre- and post-tests), come to a more uniform strategy of assessing, updating because of new instructor, etc. For those who intend to change both, a combination of ideas listed above essentially describes their plans. Of the 40 invited responses, ten reported that they have no plans to change anything and four did not respond at all.

For five of the courses reported in the 31 annual reports, there were plans to change the course (N=4) or the course and assessment plan (N=1). For one of the courses reported in the annual reports it was stated that no changes were planned. Finally, for the remaining 25 courses described in the annual reports there was no mention of changes. Likewise, no such statements were found in the cursory review of the self studies.

Table 4. Number of reports that stated plans to change the course or assessment plan

	Invited Reports	Annual Reports	Self-Studies
Yes	26	5	
No	10	1	
N/A	4	25	16

ANALYSIS BY BACCALAUREATE LEARNING GOAL

Table 1 shows the overlap of GE learning outcomes with the Baccalaureate Learning Goals and illustrates that certain GE areas can overlap with two or more Baccalaureate Learning Goals. Thus, Area A1 courses can inform the outcomes for two Baccalaureate Learning Goals, *Communication* and *Information Competence*, while Area A3 courses add *Analysis & Problem Solving* to the previous two. Likewise, Area C1, C4 and D1b courses inform the outcomes for the two Learning Goals: *Cultural Legacies* and *Values & Pluralism*. Other GE areas overlap with single Learning Goals: Areas B2, B3, B5, C3, D1A, D2 and E courses. Ten of the 16 courses reported on in the self studies were non-GE courses and by default are used only once to assess the Baccalaureate Learning Goals. Table 5 gives the number of courses that were used once or more.

Table 5. Number of times courses used

Type	N courses
Courses Used Once	51
Courses Used Twice	30
Courses Used Thrice (Area A3)	6

Analysis & Problem Solving

The Baccalaureate learning goal of *Analysis & Problem Solving* was assessed using 24 courses, distributed among seven programs. As Table 6 shows, most of the courses provided direct measurements of learning outcomes. Thirteen of the courses reported grades for particular assignments or course grades, which for subsequent analysis are grouped together as “grades.” Five course reports provided percent passing (objective questions or standardized tests), although one of these had data for only one term and was eliminated from the following discussion. Six of the 24 reported indirect measures and, therefore, had no data of use for this analysis.

Table 6. Number of courses by type of assessment

Data Type	N courses
Type #1: grades for particular assignments	2
Type #2: percent students correctly answering objective questions	2
Type #3: scores on standardized tests	3
Type #5: course grades with discussion	11
Indirect Measures	6

Grade Data. Many of the reports that provided their course grade data did so using a four tier system (Tier 1 – Incompetent, Tier 2 – Competent, Tier 3 – Above Average, Tier 4 – Excellent). For those that provided the frequency of A’s, B’s, C’s etc., the data were converted into the four tier system. Figure 1 presents histograms of grade distributions for the 13 courses from five programs that reported such data. Perusal of the graphs provides a quick assessment of the variation in this sample of reports. All but three (the first two courses in program four and the first in program five) is lower division. Clearly there is a great deal of variation among the courses, with the upper division ones having the fewest competent and incompetent grades.

Examination of Table 7 shows that there is more than twice the number of students earning the highest course grade (4) than the lowest (1), the latter of which combines both D’s and F’s. Not surprisingly, given the types of courses, there is some inconsistency in what constitutes an outstanding grade versus that given for not being competent.

Table 7. Descriptive statistics of course grades for thirteen courses

Tier	1	2	3	4
mean	13	20	29	35
min-max	0 - 27	0 - 33	20 - 39	14 - 80
range	27	33	19	66

Percent Passing Data. Figure 2 gives “timeline analyses” for courses in two programs that provide percent passing data. Program one had data for two courses over four terms. Program two had data for two courses over 12 terms. The two programs’ data are not really comparable, as program one gives the average passing score for standardized tests, while program two gives the average passing score per question. There is a lot more variation in program two’s timelines. Perhaps if the values for all the questions were averaged, the timelines would look more like program one’s.

Communication

The Baccalaureate learning goal of *Communication* was assessed using seven courses, distributed among five programs. As table 8 shows, all seven of the courses provided direct measures of learning outcomes. Four of the courses reported grades for particular assignments or course grades, which again are grouped together as “grades.” Two provided percent passing standardized tests, but one of the data sets was incomplete and is dropped from further discussion as is the other, which was presented above (course one of program one). Data were provided for the seventh course (value-added), showing that there were statistically significant improvements for all measures, but these are not analyzed further below.

Table 8. Number of courses by type of assessment

Data Type	N courses
Type #1: grades for particular assignments	2
Type #3: scores on standardized tests	2
Type #4: value-added using pre- and post-tests	1
Type #5: course grades with discussion	2

Grade Data. As with the analysis above, if the course grades provided were A’s, B’s etc., they were converted into a four tier system. Figure 3 presents histograms of grade distributions for four courses from three programs. Three of the four courses were presented in figure 1 (only course 2 in program 3 is new), and as was seen in the discussion under *Analysis & Problem Solving*, the variation is great.

Examination of Table 9 shows that in the descriptive statistics, there is again more than twice the number of students earning the highest course grade (4) than the lowest (1), the latter of which combines both D’s and F’s.

Table 9. Descriptive statistics of course grades for four courses

	1	2	3	4
mean	13	23	32	32
min-max	9 - 19	15 - 31	23 - 44	15 - 52
range	10	16	21	37

Information Competency

The Baccalaureate learning goal of *Information Competency* was assessed using the course grades for two courses in one program and in another program using the outcomes of a standardized test specifically designed by the Educational Testing Service to assess information competency.

Grade Data.

Figure 4 presents histograms for the two courses reporting course grades. There is not the range of variation seen for this learning outcome as there is above.

Examination of table 10, however, shows that in the descriptive statistics, there is again more than twice the number of students earning the highest course grade (4) than the lowest (1).

Table 10. Descriptive statistics of course grades for two courses

	1	2	3	4
mean	8	33	41	19
min-max	6 - 9	29 - 36	35 - 46	11 - 27
range	3	7	11	16

Standardized Test

The ETS standardized test assessed seven information competency skills using “real-time, scenario-based tasks.” The author of this program’s report described the ability of its students (all incoming freshmen) as “below the national median for 6 of 7 measures of [information competency skills]”. The test highlighted the specific skill sets with which the program’s students would need extensive help.

Cultural Legacies

The Baccalaureate learning goal of *Cultural Legacies* was assessed using 39 courses, distributed among seven programs. Of these, 31 courses reported some data, 21 of which are analyzed below. As table 11 shows, most of the 39 courses provided direct measurements of learning outcomes, with seven providing indirect measures. The 13 courses reporting grades, and eight of those reporting percent passing, were analyzed for

this outcome. Of the courses reporting percent passing, those with multi-term data were selected; one of these is with percent passing particular questions and seven of these used standardized tests.

Table 11. Number of courses by type of assessment

Data Type	N courses
Type #1: grades for particular assignments	4
Type #2: percent students correctly answering objective questions	4
Type #3: scores on standardized tests	8
Type #4: value-added using pre- and post-tests	7
Type #5: course grades with discussion	9
Indirect Measures	7

Grade Data.

Figure 5 presents histograms for the grade distribution of 13 courses. Again, there is some variation, though not as much as for the previous learning outcomes. Only two of the courses (the first and third of program two) were lower division.

Examination of table 12 shows that in the descriptive statistics, there is almost three times the number of students earning the highest course grade (4) than the lowest (1).

Table 12. Descriptive statistics of course grades for 13 courses

	1	2	3	4
mean	11	22	34	32
min-max	3 - 24	3 - 34	8 - 49	17 - 84
range	21	31	41	67

Percent Passing Data.

Figure 6 presents the time-line data for two programs. The most notable pattern is that three of the courses, in particular, for program two, have very poor performance indicators over the course of two years.

Values & Pluralism

The Baccalaureate learning goal of *Values & Pluralism* could be assessed using 47 courses, distributed among seven programs. Of these, 27 were used in the previous analysis, so are not considered here. Of the 20 left, 11 reported out some data that could be analyzed here. As table 13 shows, course grades were reported for three courses and the remainder reported percent passing objective questions, standardized tests or percent competently passing the course.

Table 13. Number of courses by type of assessment

Data Type	N courses
Type #2: percent students correctly answering objective questions	3
Type #3: scores on standardized tests	3
Type #5: course grades with discussion	3
Type #6: course grades, percent passing course or learning objectives	2

Grade Data.

Figure 7 presents histograms for the three courses reporting grades. All three courses are upper division GE courses; clearly students are performing very well in these courses.

Examination of table 14 confirms the above as it shows that in the descriptive statistics, there is nine times the number of students earning the highest course grade (4) than the lowest (1).

Table 14. Descriptive statistics of course grades for three courses

	1	2	3	4
mean	3	19	51	27
min-max	2 - 4	15 - 25	42 - 60	21 - 39
range	2	10	18	18

Figure 8 illustrates that for the two courses in program two, in particular, some outcomes are showing some worrisome scores.

Summary of BA Learning Outcomes Grade Data

Perusal of table 15 clearly shows that the greatest variation in grade/tier assignment is at the tier 4 level, where on average the range is equal to the two lowest tiers combined. Further, it appears that the greatest variation is with the Baccalaureate Learning Goals of *Analysis & Problem Solving* and *Cultural Legacies*.

Table 15. Comparison of Ranges for Five Baccalaureate Learning Goals Measured with Course/Assignment Grades

	RANGES FOR TIERS 1 - 4			
BA LEARNING GOAL	1	2	3	4
Analysis & Problem Solving	27	33	19	66
Communication	10	16	21	37
Information Competence	3	7	11	16
Cultural Legacies	21	31	41	67
Values & Pluralism	2	10	18	18
Overall Range	25	26	30	51

It was occasionally noted above that for particular Baccalaureate Learning Goals there was a preponderance of lower or upper division courses. Table 16 gives the distribution

of lower and upper division courses with grades by learning goal. Lower division courses predominate in the first two learning goals while the opposite obtains for the last three.

Table 16. Numbers of lower and upper division courses with grades for Baccalaureate Learning Goals

BACCALAUREATE LEARNING GOAL	CLASS DIVISION	
	LD	UD
Analysis & Problem Solving	10*	3
Communication	4*	0
Information Competence	0	2
Cultural Legacies	2	11
Values & Pluralism	0	3

*Three classes are shared between these two goals, thus there are only 13 unique lower division classes.

Table 17 provides the descriptive statistics for the grades of courses in the two class divisions. Clearly the ranges are much greater for upper division courses than for lower division. It is uncertain whether this is an artifact of the sampling used, but assuming that it is not, it might be worth considering this difference in future discussions of the GE and major programs.

Table 17. Descriptive statistics of grades in lower and upper division courses

Class Division	# Courses	Statistics	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3	Tier 4
Lower	13	mean	15	23	33	26
		min-max	9 - 27	7 - 33	23 - 49	14 - 52
		range	18	26	26	38
Upper	19	mean	8	21	35	35
		min-max	0 - 24	0 - 36	8 - 60	11 - 84
		range	24	36	52	73

SUMMARY

Three sources of data were examined for information on how the Baccalaureate Learning Goals were being assessed. General Education outcomes data, collected from eight of the ten invited programs and three annual academic program reports were used as a surrogate for the BA learning goals. Eight programmatic self studies provided data on GE assessment as well as direct measures or discussion of the Baccalaureate Learning Goals themselves.

Six types of direct measures and various indirect measures were identified as being used by the sampled programs. They are described at length in Appendix 2, with examples making visible the good assessment work that is being performed across campus. It is

clear that programs have been consistently collecting and using their assessment data anywhere from one term through 12 terms, essentially paralleling the chronological implementation of assessment plans by GE Areas.

The analysis of the data examined: (1) whether programs reflected how well they were meeting the GE and Baccalaureate Learning Goals, (2) whether programs had plans to change their GE courses or GE assessment plans, and (3) the types of data used to assess each Baccalaureate Learning Goal. Not all programs considered the first two, but the strides that are being made on campus are nevertheless noteworthy.

The types of data used for each Baccalaureate Learning Goal were identified and grade data and percent passing data were examined using histograms and “time-series” plots. Descriptive statistics were also generated for the grade data. Both the graphs and the statistics made clear the huge range of variability among and within programs in grade distributions. An additional examination was made of the distribution of lower division and upper division courses by Baccalaureate Learning Goal and it was found that one or the other predominated for the samples used for particular goals. Further, the variation in grade distribution was far greater for upper division than for lower division courses, which may be evidence of value added in student learning as students progress through their university experience.

Given the extreme variability in grading practices, faculty members who teach GE courses might consider at least two recommendations:

First, they might develop a set of shared agreements about some simple assessment strategies that can be applied across-the-board within the GE Areas so that the faculty and external readers can get a reliable sense of what and how well students are achieving in relation to the Baccalaureate Learning Goals.

Second, they might develop criteria for what it means to score at various levels and then those criteria could be applied across-the-board in order to eliminate the extreme variability in grade distributions. Alternatively, if faculty members do not want to explore grading practices, then shared criteria could be developed and applied to samples of student work so that data can be collected apart from grade distributions.

A third recommendation concerns the alignment of the GE learning outcomes with the Baccalaureate Learning Goals. These need to be more explicitly articulated so that the faculty can readily and reliably assess the Baccalaureate Learning Goals while also assessing their GE learning outcomes.

A fourth recommendation concerns the reporting venue for assessment results. Currently there are two venues: 1) the annual program assessment reports, wherein progress in implementing programmatic assessment plans is reported; and, 2) the self studies produced for program reviews, in which progress in implementing programmatic and GE assessment plans is to be reported as well as reporting how the Baccalaureate Learning

Goals are being met. The examination of the annual program assessment reports shows that some programs use it as an opportunity to also report on their success in implementing their GE assessment plans. The examination of the available self studies revealed that, aside from their progress in programmatic assessment, nearly half explicitly addressed how their program met the Baccalaureate Learning Goals while one program provided data and reflection on their assessment of GE courses. Several of the self studies listed the courses that are in the GE program while others reported that their courses were approved during the cyclical review of their GE syllabi. Perhaps programs would find it easier to stay on top of their GE and Baccalaureate Learning Goals assessment progress if the results were also reported in the annual program assessment reports, as some programs currently do.

While there will always be work ahead for the faculty, the faculty needs to be recognized for the varied and extensive assessment activities that they have engaged in (for up to six years in some cases) and their accomplishments should be acknowledged by all involved at the various levels of the university and by accrediting bodies.

PLAN FOR 08/09 ACADEMIC YEAR

The faculty at Sacramento State has been building a culture of evidence for at least six years. As a consequence, we now have some baseline data on how well assessment data have been collected and how the data have been used by some programs to inform decisions about whether to change GE courses, GE assessment plans, or both. During the 08/09 academic year, the assessment report will be reviewed by the Faculty Senate's General Education/Graduation Requirements Policies Committee, which will use the data to inform their discussions on assessment. Additionally, there is going to be extensive discussion, among all the elements of the university, about our GE program. Part of this discussion will hopefully address the commonalities that programs share, and, as a consequence, how we might together assess how well we are achieving them.

Discussion is taking place among the various "players" in the university about how to collect the data, such as using technology (e.g., a shared data base), and how we might sample programs using a timetable that is known by all involved. It is critical that whatever system is developed to gather data, it should consider the abilities and desires of the faculty to share their understanding of student development in more detail than simply course grades. This is not beyond the substantial ability of the faculty, as they certainly have grades for particular assignments that very likely address any one of the Baccalaureate Learning Goals. It is necessary that the university makes it possible for faculty to report what they know, in an "unchallenging" format, on the progress that students are making in meeting Sacramento State's Baccalaureate Learning Goals.

Figure 1. Grade distributions for five programs that assess the Baccalaureate Learning Goal of *Analysis & Problem Solving*.

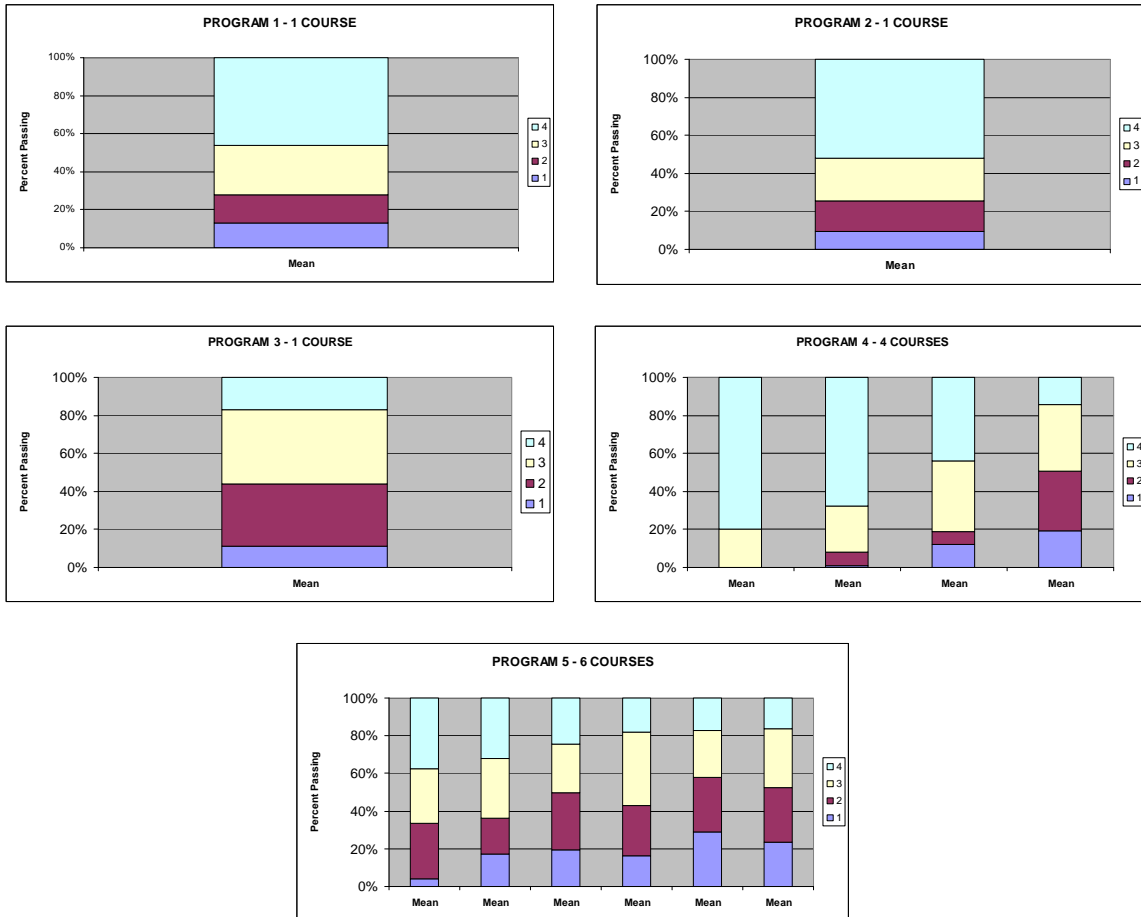


Figure 2. Percent passing either standardized tests or specific questions for two programs that assess the Baccalaureate Learning Goal of *Analysis & Problem Solving*.

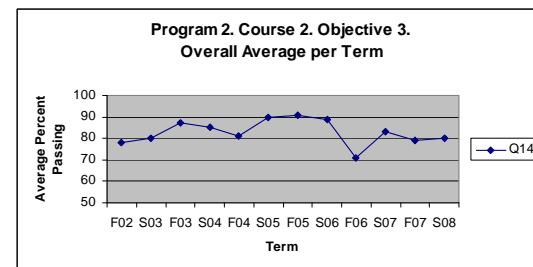
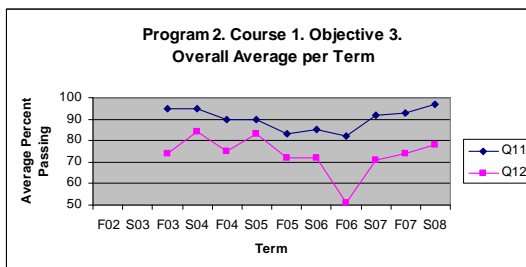
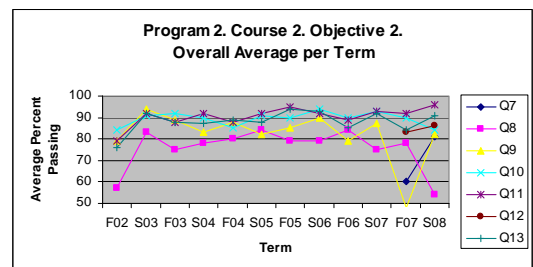
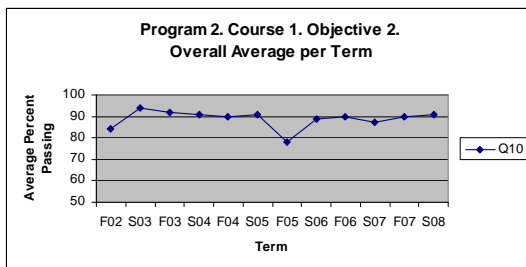
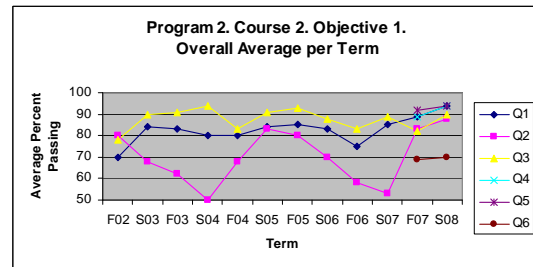
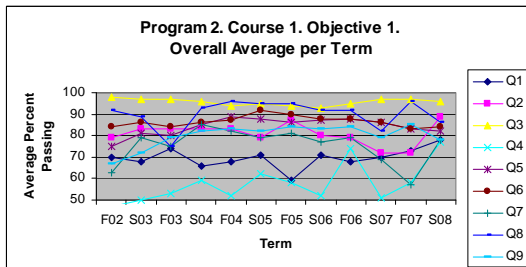
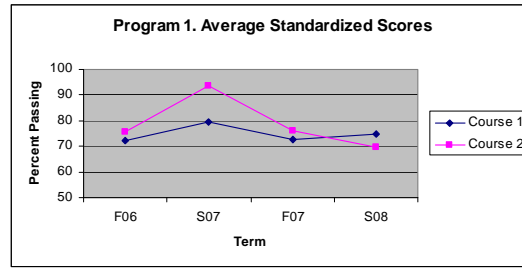


Figure 3. Grade distributions for three programs that assess the Baccalaureate Learning Goal of *Communication*

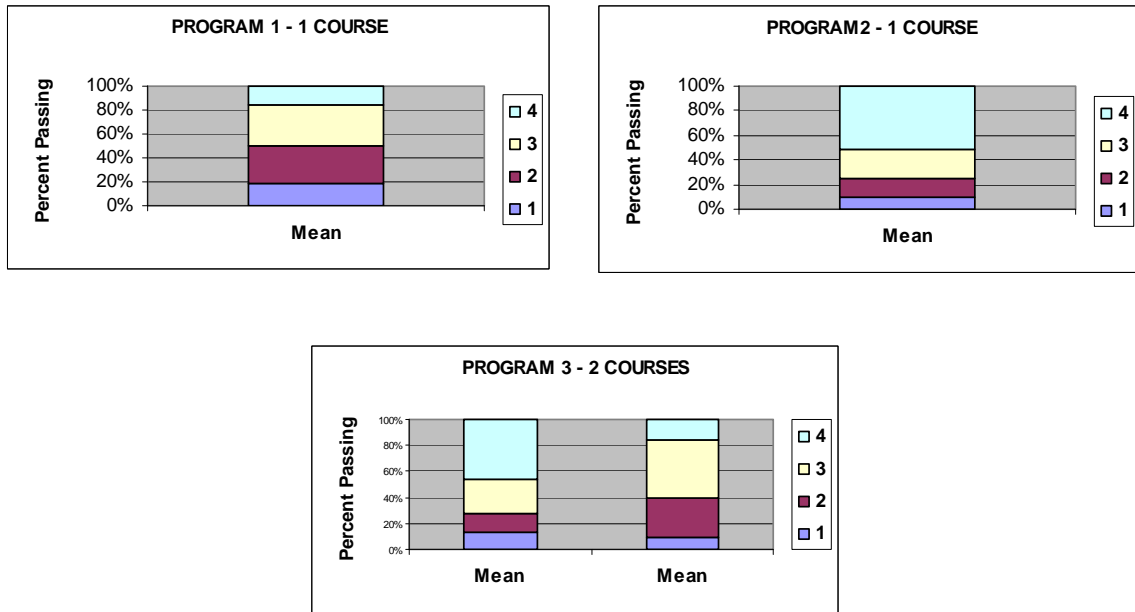


Figure 4. Grade distributions for one of the programs that assesses the Baccalaureate Learning Goal of *Information Competence*

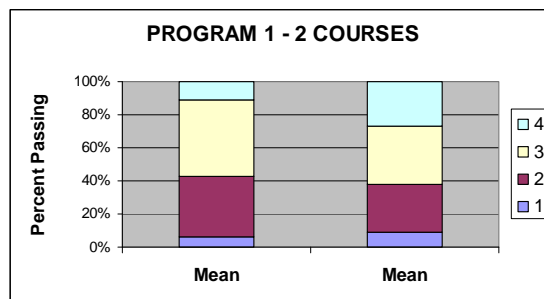


Figure 5. Grade distributions for three programs that assess the Baccalaureate Learning Goal of *Cultural Legacies*

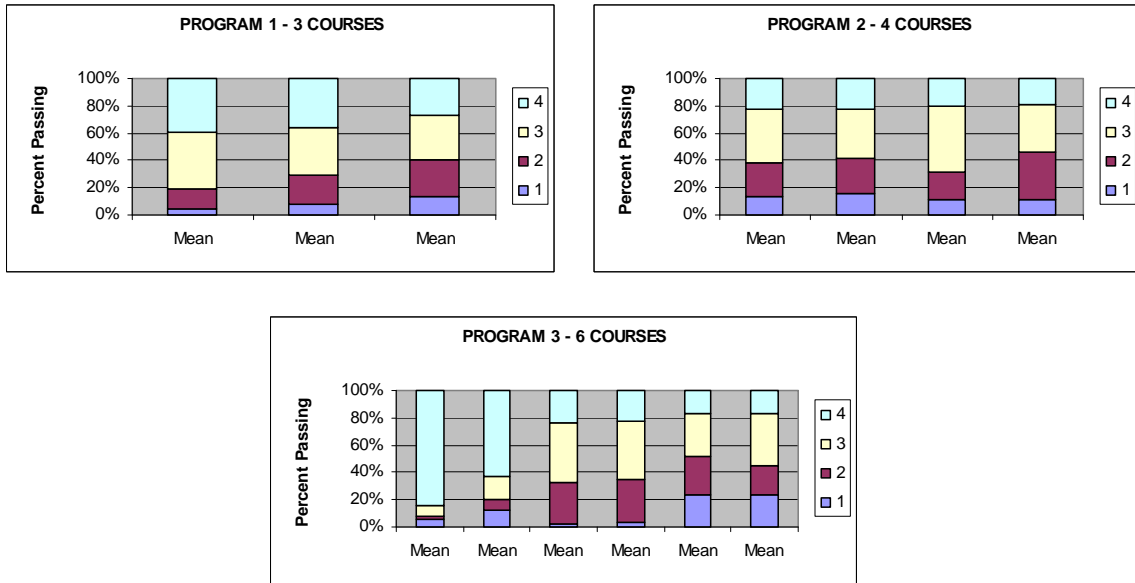


Figure 6. Percent passing either standardized tests or specific questions for two programs that assess the Baccalaureate Learning Goal of *Cultural Legacies*.

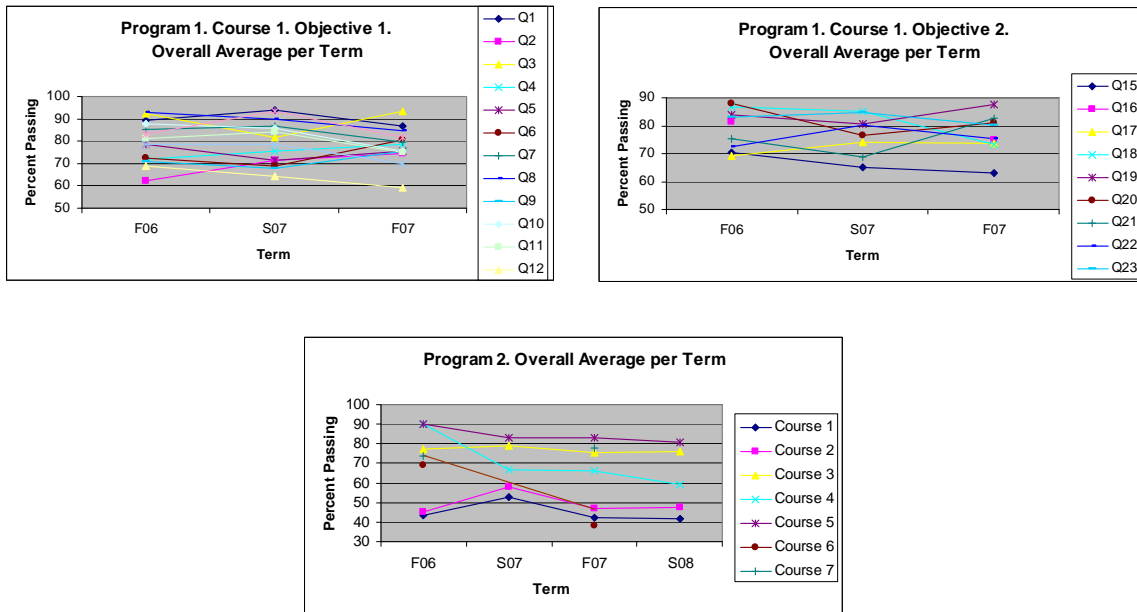


Figure 7. Grade distributions for one program that assesses the Baccalaureate Learning Goal of *Values & Pluralism*.

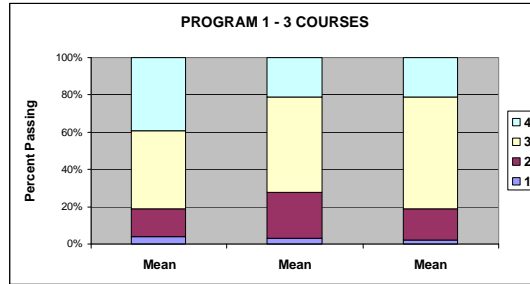
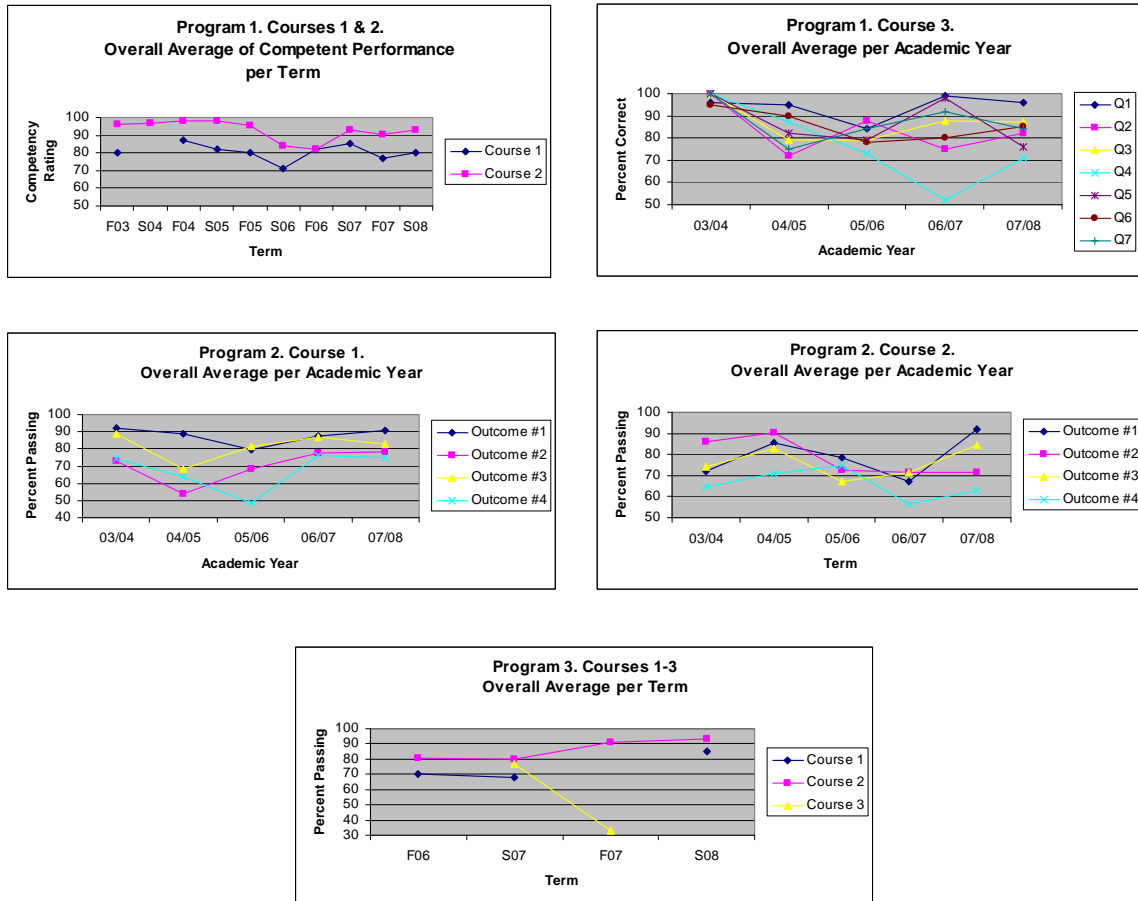


Figure 8. Percent passing either standardized tests or specific questions for two programs that assess the Baccalaureate Learning Goal of *Values & Pluralism*.



¹ <http://webapps2.csus.edu/assessment/Reports/>

² <http://www.csus.edu/acaf/progReview/prgmrvrpts.stm>

³ <http://www.csus.edu/acaf/Portfolios/GE/lrngls.htm>

⁴ [Assessment_Data_Request.pdf](#)

⁵ E.g., [Assessment_Summary_Reporting_Form.pdf](#)

⁶ http://www.csus.edu/acse/archive/0102/02fsa_apr_11_B_attachment.doc

⁷ <http://www.csus.edu/acaf/Portfolios/GE/index.stm>

⁸ See Appendix 2 for an analysis, with examples, of the six types of direct data and the indirect data

APPENDIX 1 – INVITED ASSESSMENT REPORTS

The following invited reports, selections from annual academic program reports and from self studies, are organized alphabetically by programs.

[Anthropology](#)

[Biological Sciences](#)

[Communication Studies](#)

[Economics](#)

[Teacher Education](#)

[Freshman Studies](#)

[Government](#)

[History](#)

[Humanities and Religious Studies](#)

[Philosophy](#)

[Sociology](#)



California State University, Sacramento
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Date: April 18, 2008

MEMORANDUM

TO: Nick Burnett, Robert Pritchard, Nick Ewing, David Zeanah, Mark Siegler,
Lynn Tashiro, Sheree Meyer, Chris Castaneda, Jackie Donath, Karen O'Hare

FROM: Greg Wheeler

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Gregory Keith Wheeler'.

Associate Dean for Undergraduate Studies

SUBJECT: GE program/Baccalaureate Learning Goals Assessment

The General Education/Graduation Requirements Policy Committee (GEGRPC) is charged with conducting a review of the overall GE program. The need to provide to the campus and to WASC, our accrediting body, significant and timely evidence that our program faculty know what and how well GE students are learning and that our program has benefited from analysis of student learning data leads me to this request. Your department offers a number of courses in General Education and has approved course assessment plans in place that articulate course-specific learning outcomes with the GE area learning outcomes. The GEGRPC needs to submit a report explaining what and how well students are learning in these courses relative to the stated learning outcomes. This report needs to include an explanation of how you made use of what you learned about your students to improve the courses. I have attached a sample reporting form. Beth Strasser and I would like to meet with you in the next two weeks. We will give you the forms specific to your area of GE and answer any questions you may have.

You will be asked to select a minimum of three courses and the appropriate sections to formulate your report. A requirement of our accrediting body is this: We must provide documentation that we have assessed student learning, discussed the results, and used the results to improve our curriculum and instruction. I have attached a table showing how your courses relate to the Baccalaureate Learning Goals and to the GE areas. If you can comment on the connections between these larger learning goals and your course goals, the commentary would be useful. I will be in contact with you soon with some meeting times.

General Education Outcome Assessment Summary Form

General Education faculty are asked to report the results of their outcomes assessment in their GE courses. The purpose of this request is: 1) to encourage faculty to reflect on their students' success in accomplishing the learning outcomes of GE courses, and 2) to ensure that multiple sections of one GE course all share the same general teaching objectives and that they are using assessment findings to improve student learning with respect to those objectives.

Please use this form to summarize what you have found about student learning relative to the GE outcomes including how well the students are achieving these outcomes. You are also asked to describe any action you have taken and/or are planning based on the assessment findings.

Course Prefix and Number _____ Course Title _____

Course coordinator if more than one section _____

Number of sections of the course _____

Number of sections included in summary _____

Provide the data you have collected for the course-specific learning outcomes that your department articulated with the GE Learning Outcomes in your GE Assessment Plan.

1. What information have you gleaned from implementing your General Education assessment plan about the GE¹ and related Baccalaureate Learning Outcomes²?
2. Do you plan any changes to your General Education course as a result of your assessment?
3. Will you make any changes in your General Education assessment plan?

¹<http://www.csus.edu/acaf/Portfolios/GE/geareacriteria.stm>

²<http://www.csus.edu/acaf/Portfolios/GE/lrngls.htm>

APPENDIX 2 – TYPES OF DATA

DIRECT MEASURES

The direct measures all addressed specific GE learning outcomes and in some cases Baccalaureate Learning Goals and included six types: 1) grade distributions for particular assignments, including essay exams, papers and speaking assignments; 2) percent of students correctly answering objective questions given in exams throughout the term and in all sections of a course; 3) scores on “standardized” tests; 4) value-added measured using pre- and post-tests; 5) course grades based on student performance on a variety of tasks, such as tests using compare/contrast questions, essays, assignments and projects; and, 6) course grades, percent passing course or learning objectives, without discussion of tests or assignments. Each type of direct measure is described below.

TYPE #1: Grade Distributions for Particular Assignments

The instructors or course coordinators for nine (10.5%) of the 87 courses provided grade distributions for particular essay exams, paper assignments and speaking assignments. As seen in Table 1, the majority of courses of this type reported data collected over one term. Below are several descriptions of reports produced for this type of assessment.

Table 1. Number of terms for which data were collected

# terms data collection	# courses
1	8
6	1

Example 1. One of those that gathered data for one term implemented the assessment plan in spring 2008, when the course was first offered. The instructor of this single-section course assessed the GE area outcomes as part of the final exam using two take-home essays, only one of which students needed to do. Half of the class chose the first essay and the other half the second. The instructor described which of the GE learning outcomes was addressed by each of the essays, gave the grade distribution for each question, and described what constituted an A/B, a C, and a D/F essay, illustrating the descriptions with quotes from some of the essays. The instructor does not plan changes to the course or the plan because s/he felt that the students accomplished exactly what had been intended.

Example #2. Another of the instructors that gathered data for one term includes a single-section course in which s/he used an essay designed to specifically address GE outcomes and Baccalaureate Learning Goals. The instructor discusses how and why the components of the essay address the learning outcomes/goals and provides a thorough discussion of the distribution of grades for the essay.

Example 3. One of the courses for which data had been collected for two terms has multiple sections and assessed the GE outcomes in fall 2004 and fall 2007.

In 2004, a common essay prompt was used in all 34 sections and three to four essays were collected from each. After a norming session, readers graded the papers. In the 2004 report, the average score was given for three of the four dimensions (content, organization, mechanics) and showed that students did, on average, C-level, work. Only 19% of the students earned any points for the fourth dimension (title page and references). It was determined that there was too much variability in how the essay prompt was presented (e.g., as part of the final in some sections, included in other assignments in other sections, etc.). The readers felt that that part of the rubric should be eliminated. It was not eliminated, but instead it appears that the variability in how the prompt is presented was eliminated (see below).

In fall 2007, two essays were selected at random from 53 sections. The readers again participated in a norming session before reading. If two reader's total scores differed by more than four points out of a possible 25, a third reader was used (this happened once). The average of the readers' scores was taken and student scores on each of the dimensions and the total were graphically presented using histograms. Examination of the graphs shows that for three of the four dimensions >70% of the students did *Very Good* or *Outstanding* work and 46% of the students did as well when it came to the title and reference pages. While it was not stated in either of the reports whether any action was going to be taken or had been taken as a result of the assessment, it appears that something had, given the overall improvement in student scores.

Example #4. One of the courses that provided data for six terms is also a multi-section course and has student outcomes for 521 students from an unknown number of sections. In the report it is stated that an assignment has been administered since fall 2005 to assess student abilities in meeting the learning outcomes for its particular GE area, but the assignment was not described. Given the GE area and the timing of GE area review process (i.e., when courses in a particular GE area had to have assessment plans produced¹), it is likely that the assignment was described in the approved plan. The report provides the four tier scale used to assess student learning. Based on the grade distribution, the author of the report reflects that while students are generally doing well, there is room for improvement.

TYPE #2: Percent of Students Correctly Answering Objective Questions

For nine (10.5%) of the 87 courses, the instructors provided the percentage of students who correctly answered specific objective questions that are used in all sections of the courses. As seen in Table 2, for this type of assessment, there is a longer history of collecting data, with the majority of courses reporting data for more than a single term. Below are several descriptions of reports produced for this type of assessment.

Table 2. Number of terms for which data were collected

# terms data collection	# courses
1	1
2	1
4	2
10	3
12	2

Example #1. A course for which data are reported for one term was taken from part of the larger academic program annual report. The data were collected on the performance of 155 students from four randomly chosen sections. The report contrasts student success for the particular year with that of student success in two previous annual reports. The assessment coordinator organized the presentation of data by GE learning outcome, but does not present the questions themselves. The percentage of students choosing the correct answer is given per question number, and this is followed by comparison to previous years, and in three cases with an extended discussion of student performance. The data presentation is followed by discussion of a number of issues. There is a discussion on student performance and how some students, who did not answer correctly, nevertheless chose a reasonable, albeit wrong, answer. The program’s use of more than one question per GE learning outcome lead its faculty to conclude that “most students show an understanding of the required concepts.” There was also discussion of what changes they had made (e.g., substantially rewriting a question) and plans for others.

Example #2. One of these nine courses is offered as a single-section course. Since the assessment plan was approved, data have been collected on the performance of 454 students from five sections offered over three terms. The instructor organized the data presentation by GE outcome, with the BA Learning Goals related to that outcome provided under it. The strategies used for assessment are then presented, along with a statement of how the instructor will know if the learning objectives are being achieved (in this case, “if more than 60% of the students respond to assessment questions correctly”). Then the questions used per GE outcome are given followed by a table with question identifiers, the percent of students who chose the correct answer and the total size of the sample per term. The table is followed by an analysis, which itself is followed by a section on future steps, in which the instructor describes, for instance, “...overall performance is consistently lower on certain, more difficult questions (2,12) whose topics may receive additional attention in future sections.”

Example #3. The course coordinator for a multi-section course reported data for 16 sections gathered over ten terms. The data are accumulated by randomly sampling sections each year. The (presumably common) questions address each of the four outcomes expected in this GE area. The values for the percent passing (choosing the correct answer) are grouped by GE learning outcome. The department is confident that >75% of its students are achieving three of the four GE outcomes for the relevant area. One of the outcomes, however, does pose a challenge for the department, about which it

intends to direct its Assessment Committee “to discuss ways in which Learning Outcome #4 can be better integrated into the flow of... [the course].”

Example #4. Ever since the assessment plan was approved for one of the multi-section courses, data have been collected on the performance of 3986 students from 78 sections over the course of 12 terms. The course coordinator reports that at the end of every academic year, the data are collected from all the instructors and compiled in a spreadsheet with the instructors listed anonymously. At the beginning of the following academic year, the instructors review the data, and the success (or not) of the questions is assessed. According to their plan, “sections will be judged to be achieving learning objectives satisfactorily if more than 60% of students respond correctly to assessment questions.” The coordinator reports that as a consequence of this annual review, questions have been modified over the years for clarity, questions have been added for particular GE learning outcomes, and questions have been dropped.

The report submitted for this analysis organizes the data presentation by GE learning outcome, with course specific learning outcomes subsumed beneath them. The results are presented graphically (i.e., line plots for overall average percent of students choosing the correct answer per term for each question). The coordinator also discusses, among other things, the range of values by section, the success rate of some instructors vs others, and steps for improvement. The report also addresses how the course meets each of the expectations of the Baccalaureate Learning Goals. It currently meets three of them and the instructors are discussing how the fourth can be met.

TYPE #3. Scores on Standardized Tests

For 14 (16%) of the 87 courses, the instructors provided the average score on standardized tests.ⁱⁱ The department chair reported the average score for 92 sections for four terms, but focuses his/her discussion on a few lower division courses. S/he notes that for one course, in particular, the scores are “uniformly low, with occasional high ones.” The assessment committee introduced a new standardized test in response to faculty complaints, but the scores did not change significantly. These data were taken from two academic program reports; as such there was no discussion of GE or Baccalaureate learning outcomes.

Another of the 87 courses used a test produced by the Educational Testing Service. This standardized test was given during two terms to 239 students and was used in a pre- and post-test format. No statistical difference was found between the scores of the pre- and post-tests.

TYPE #4. Value-Added Measured Using Pre- and Post-Tests

For eight (9%) of the 87 courses, the instructors provided the means and standard deviations on a random selection of pre- and post-tests taken from a selection of non-GE

courses.ⁱⁱⁱ The authors of the programmatic self study reporting these data state: “All courses yielded statistically significant gains in student knowledge. It thus appears that students learned material in our courses beyond what they knew at the start of the courses.”

TYPE #5. Course Grades Based on Student Performance on a Variety of Tasks

For 17 (20%) of the 87 courses, the instructors provided course grades. As seen in Table 3, for this type of assessment, like type #2, there is a longer history of collecting data, with the majority of courses reporting data for more than a single term. Below are several descriptions of reports produced for this type of assessment.

Table 3. Number of terms for which data were collected

# terms data collection	# courses
1	2
2	5
3	3
4	5
6	2

Example #1. The course coordinator for one multi-section course produced a report that reflects the evolution of the course over the six terms since its assessment plan was accepted. After being solicited, the course coordinator also provided course grades for 248 students from 12 sections over two terms. The report is a detailed recounting of student and faculty activities, changes in course texts, and “increased opportunities for students to show what they know.” The discussion is explicitly linked to each GE area learning outcome, showing how student activities illuminate those outcomes. Along with changes made to the course, the faculty plan to change their assessment plan to reflect the course changes.

Example #2. The department chair for another multi-section course provided data for six of eight sections of a lower-division course gathered over four terms. S/he described how the course meets its area requirements and the variety of methods instructors use to assess student learning of GE outcomes. The department chair also discussed the variation in the measured levels of competency among students and reports that the course “appears to be sufficiently challenging.” S/he also states that the instructors of the course continue to modify the delivery of materials in the course to keep student attention. Finally, the department is considering other methods of GE course assessment.

TYPE #6. Course Grades, Percent Passing Course or Learning Objectives, Without Discussion of Tests or Assignments.

For 22 (25%) of the 87 courses, the instructors provided either course grades or percent passing specific learning objectives (presumably using specific questions, but it is unclear) or the percent passing the course at a C- level or better. As seen in Table 4, for this type of assessment, like types #2 and #5, there is a long history of collecting data, with the majority of courses reporting data for more than a single term. Below are several descriptions of reports produced for this type of assessment.

Table 4. Number of terms for which data were collected

# terms data collection	# courses
1	4
2	6
6	2
10	2
12	8

Example #1. The department chair provided course grades for 1100 students for five multi-section courses for which data were collected for two terms and a sixth single-section course for which data were collected for one term. The chair described how in the approved GE assessment plans the department had “relied upon faculty to ensure that learning outcomes were assessed through exam questions and exercises embedded in each course.” Further, the chair states that his/her colleagues recognize that course grades do not adequately measure student learning of GE outcomes. The department plans to revise its GE assessment plans in order to successfully assess specific learning outcomes. The department chair also discusses how the distribution of course grades suggests that a significant number of students are not achieving the GE learning goals. However, for a newly designed GE course, grade performance showed a drop in the number of unsatisfactory grades from the first term it was offered to the next. The chair reports that the department also plans to assess how well it is meeting the Baccalaureate Learning Goals.

Example #2. The chair of the assessment committee in this department summarizes the assessment reports provided by instructors and along with the committee members makes recommendations, if needed. In this example, the percent passing scores for the three learning objectives were based on qualitative and quantitative data, none of which were described. The scores for the qualitative data showed that “for the first two [learning objectives], the students displayed passing levels as high as 90%, while the third was an average of 86%. The quantitative data did not reflect as high, presenting average pass scores much lower (65% learning objective 1; 70% learning objective 2; 55% learning objective 3).” After discussion with the instructor, changes were made to both the assessment tools as well as the course, for the latter by emphasizing particular items more than had been done in the past.

Example #3. The course coordinator for this multi-section course produced a report that included data for 57 sections of the course collected over ten terms. The coordinator states "...the outcomes in our original assessment plan are tightly-knit to both the Values and Pluralism Baccalaureate Learning Outcomes and to the GE Area...criteria." Discussion of the general topics covered in the course certainly supports the coordinator's assertion. As a result of assessment the instructors have "...agreed to experiment over the course of the next two years...of requiring all instructors to use a common primary textbook..." The instructors also intend to change their assessment method and, consequently, their plan.

INDIRECT MEASURES

For eight (9%) of the 87 courses indirect measures of student success with the GE learning outcomes were provided, and for four of the five, there were also reflections on the Baccalaureate learning outcomes. Six of the eight courses used essay assignments as the primary instrument for gauging student learning. The other two used in-class writings or journal reflections that were read after each class and directed subsequent classes. Of the eight, one course also used in-class presentations, two used research papers, and only one also used objective questions.

There was a variety of responses by instructors as to how well students were successfully achieving the learning outcomes. One coordinator reports that "The faculty....stresses the importance of a fair and equitable learning environment and the assessment methods supports this position. Offering students a variety of areas to succeed helps with student achievement in the course." The coordinator of another reports the concern of instructors that students' lack of experience with reading challenging material and the general deficiency in the students' historical background was a problem in an upper-division course where discussion is the format. The coordinator states that the "...instructors intend to refocus some attention on strategies that will reinforce the need to read to learn." Finally, an instructor reports that students who take advantage of the prompts the instructor provides report back that they are "gaining insight into the connections between past and present" and also report "feeling rewarded that they took the time to observe and analyze a small piece of another culture from within."

HOW IS SUCCESS MEASURED?

How do we know when we are meeting our objectives? Seven (8%) of the 87 documents explicitly state what percentage of students must succeed in order for the instructor to determine if the course is meeting the stated learning objectives. These reports represent two programs and for six of these the acceptable percentage is 60% and for the seventh it is 75%. For 12 (14%) of the 87 documents from four different programs, it is implicit that the acceptable percentage is 70%, because they all use a four tier system in which anything less than "competent" is given the lowest rank (it is assumed here that competent is taken to be analogous to C- to C+ work). The remainder of the documents

says nothing, although the majority of the discussions in the reports indicated that D and F work was obviously not desirable.

Perusal of instructions to faculty and some approved plans over the five years that GE assessment had been implemented makes it clear that the process has evolved or drifted slightly. In the first iteration, there was an *Area Assessment Plan Checklist*, of which item V (Performance criteria that will be used to evaluate student achievement of these learning objectives.) was typically answered as above. Another common response for those using pre- and post-tests was that the criterion for assessing student outcomes would consist of a statistically significant difference between pre-test and post-test scores.

A later iteration of instructions reads similarly (V. Assessment Methods: Explain how you will know that the objective has been met. That is, specify what level of performance meets each objective). Yet, plans were approved with long descriptions of how instructors would engage with students via WebCT, how on-line discussions would allow instructors to evaluate the students' understanding of concepts, etc., but with no statement about grades or percentages, per se.

Finally, the language currently on the GE Website at the *Outcomes Guide Area C^{iv}* does not include the earlier language that prompted most faculty to give a percentage value. Thus, for example, when preparing this report the instructor of example #1 under Type #5 was asked for course grades and the instructor quite rightly questioned the request, as no such data had been required or promised in the course assessment plan.

ⁱ <http://www.csus.edu/acaf/GE/GE%20Self%20Study%202006.pdf>

ⁱⁱ Note: it is unclear how the tests were standardized

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.csus.edu/acaf/progReview/prgmrevrpts.stm>

^{iv} <http://www.csus.edu/acaf/GE/outcomes.stm>