

General Education Professional Learning Community 2020-2021 Report

Prepared by Dr. Leanne Merrill, Chair, Summer 2021

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Introduction

The General Education Professional Learning Community (henceforth GEPLC) seeks to engage in meaningful and actionable assessment of General Education Learning Outcomes each year. The GEPLC also continues to improve the assessment infrastructure and methodologies at Western Oregon University to benefit students and faculty. In this report, I will outline our progress and achievements in both areas in the 2020-2021 academic year.

As the outgoing chair of the GEPLC, I am proud of the work that the GEPLC members did this year, and I thank each member for their labor on this committee. I am also grateful to the many faculty who carefully submitted signature assignments and student work to the GEPLC for review. Participation in assessment work requires time, effort, reflection, and vulnerability from faculty. We also owe a debt to Jay Thompson and Beverly West in Academic Affairs for their back-end technical work and scheduling assistance. Each person who contributed their expertise and products of their labor is contributing to a collaborative and mutually beneficial assessment culture at Western Oregon University.

In addition to the data and observations presented in this report, there are several victories that are not captured here. Faculty on PLCs consistently report feeling enriched by their experiences working and learning together as a part of the group. The process of self- and university-wide reflection undergone by the PLC gives members new perspectives and ideas about how to approach their own teaching. PLCs are a place where we grow innovative ideas about teaching, curriculum, and assessment and make connections across disciplinary boundaries.

This is the second year of the GEPLC in its current form. Prior to Fall 2019, each PLC focused on a single learning outcome associated with the Liberal Arts Core Curriculum. This curriculum and its outcomes were supplanted by the new General Education Program and General Education Learning Outcomes in Fall 2019. The GEPLC therefore has a different scope and sense of direction than the previous PLCs did. Fortunately, the 2019-2020 GEPLC shared many members with the 2020-2021 GEPLC, which helped us to establish and clarify the norms of our work. In particular, the GEPLC is indebted to Dr. Erin Baumgartner for her pioneering work as General Education Director and previous GEPLC chair. We also gained new members who brought fresh

perspectives and asked deep questions about the nature and goals of our assessment process. Both historical and new perspectives shape how we conceive of and approach assessment, and we must take both into the future as we continue the work of assessing WOU's burgeoning General Education Program.

As you read this report, I encourage you to consider the context for the 2020-2021 GEPLC as a whole. This work was completed during the first (and likely only) academic year in which WOU functioned as a primarily online institution. We are only beginning to study the impact of Covid-19 on teaching and learning, but we must acknowledge that the public health, political, and social challenges of the last year dramatically changed how faculty taught and how students learned. We make no attempt to quantify or study this in a formal way, but its effect is evident from student work, faculty comments, and the nature of the assignments themselves.

Assessment frames our aspiration towards positive changes for our students. Our guiding questions as a campus should be: are we creating conditions in which students can succeed in meaningful ways? Are we supporting them along their journey? And how can we do this better year over year? This report attempts to add a small chapter to the story of Western Oregon University's assessment process, whose ultimate goal is ensuring that every student can succeed in their quest for a transformative education.

Dr. Leanne Merrill
General Education PLC Chair 2020-2021

Membership

The following people were members of the GEPLC in 2020-2021:

Chair

Leanne Merrill, Natural Science and Mathematics

Members

Lucas Cordova, Computer Science
Jessica Dougherty, Education and Leadership
Camila Gabaldón, Library
Katrina Hovey, Education and Leadership
Katherine Miller, Social Science
Mari Sakiyama, Criminal Justice Sciences
Jay Schwartz, Behavioral Science
Garima Thakur, Creative Arts
Tandy Tillinghast, Humanities

Ex-Officio

Erin Baumgartner, Natural Science and Mathematics, Director of General Education Program
Shaun Huston, Social Science, First Year Seminar Coordinator
Jay Thompson, Academic Affairs

Note: membership was heavily recruited from each Division across campus. All academic Divisions had the option to elect a representative to serve on the GEPLC.

Scope

Per the recommendation of the 2019-2020 GEPLC and the decision of the 2020-2021 members and chair, the PLC focused its study on General Education Learning Outcome 1: Intellectual Foundations and Breadth of Exposure in 2020-2021. Formally, this outcome says:

GELO 1: Intellectual Foundations and Breadth of Exposure. Put into practice different and varied forms of knowledge, inquiry, and expression that frame academic and applied learning.

Focusing on this outcome allowed us to build directly on the work of the 2019-2020 GEPLC, whose progress was stalled due to the Covid-19 pandemic in Spring 2020. It also allowed us to build our faculty understanding of the assessment process, introduce new faculty to the world of assessment, and continue to improve our mechanisms and faculty knowledge base.

Though many courses in the General Education Program align to GELO 1, we chose only to collect data from First Year Seminars, whose course numbers are FYS 107 and FYS 207. This narrow focus allowed us to effectively assess these courses as well as continue to improve the Foundational Skills rubric, which is our primary assessment tool for GELO 1. In the last section of this report, we make recommendations for broadening the GEPLC scope in a measured and efficient way in future years.

The FYS courses have several other unique features that made them ideal for this work. Nearly every non-transfer student (and some transfer students) take two of these courses during their first year at WOU, so our relative coverage of the student body is broad. They are also native to the General Education Program itself and are taught by a variety of faculty in different areas, so we are capturing many disciplinary areas and tendencies. By examining such a variety of signature assignments and student work, a clear picture of the meaning of learning outcome achievement begins to emerge, independent of a particular field or subject matter.

We did not pay attention to the differences between FYS 107 and FYS 207. We treated them as a single category for the purpose of this assessment.

In 2020-2021, there were a total of 63 sections of FYS courses offered. Of them, several were duplicated in multiple terms, either by the same instructor(s) teaching the course in multiple terms, or by a program that offers multiple sections of the same

course taught by different instructors across multiple terms. Such duplicated courses were directed to submit just one signature assignment to the PLC for the entire year.

Removing these duplicates, there were 44 distinct sections of FYS courses offered in 2020-2021. The PLC received 33 submissions of signature assignments and sample student work, so our 2020-2021 yearly submission rate was 75%. This is an improvement over the previous rate of 29% in 2019-2020, but as noted in the 2019-2020 report, there was a dramatic dropoff in Winter and Spring submissions in 2020 due to Covid-19.

Of the 33 submissions we received, there were 16 Fall 2020 submissions, 13 Winter 2021 submissions, and 4 Spring 2021 submissions. Due to the timing of the submission process and availability of PLC members, the Spring 2021 submissions are not included in the assessment data in this report. Those submissions will be considered with the Fall 2021 data, which will be reviewed by the 2021-2022 GEPLC. Thus, for the purposes of this report, we consider the 29 Fall/Winter submissions as our available sample.

Methodology

Foundational Skills rubric

Our primary tool for assessing the signature assignments and sample student work was the Foundational Skills rubric, which has been designed to align to GELO 1. Initially drafted by a group of faculty in Spring 2019, this rubric has undergone significant revisions since then, including several in 2020-2021. The names of the features (rows) of the rubric have not changed, nor have the numerical values of the levels (which remain 1-4 in parallel to the LEAP rubrics), but much work has been done to eliminate deficit language, clarify ambiguous terminology, and streamline the feature and level descriptions. The current Foundational Skills rubric is included in the appendices of this document, as well as a draft of a rubric companion sheet intended to further clarify language used in the rubric. Throughout the rest of the report, “the rubric” refers to the Foundational Skills rubric.

Collection and storage of assessment materials

Our methodology for assessment was similar to that used by previous PLCs. From each distinctly named FYS course offered in 2020-2021, we requested a *signature assignment* and corresponding *sample student work*. These are described below.

By *signature assignment*, we mean a significant task assigned to students in the course such as an essay, activity, portfolio, performance, exam question(s), or other item. Each signature assignment should provide students the opportunity to demonstrate achievement of one or more FYS course learning outcomes, and should align to one or two features of the rubric. We asked instructors to provide specific numerical and contextual information about the alignment to the rubric when they submitted their assessment materials.

By *sample student work*, we mean a student response to the signature assignment that is representative or typical of the class’s performance. We let instructors choose how to interpret the representativeness based on their local course context. We also asked instructors to provide a narrative summary of the entire class’s achievement level on the assignment as it pertained to the Foundational Skills rubric. Finally, we asked instructors to identify the level of achievement on the rubric they believe was reflected in the sample student work.

Additionally, we gave instructors the option to submit a piece of *exemplary student work* if there was an outstanding response to the signature assignment that they wanted to

share. Unfortunately, there was insufficient time to fully review these exemplary student work items. We have cataloged them for future review.

We also asked instructors to provide an overall rationale for assignments, including any context for the assignment that they wished to provide. This helped the GEPLC members understand whether certain instructions or class norms not included in the signature assignment directions affected how students completed the assignment.

Instructions for submitting signature assignments and student work were communicated via email to FYS instructors that term. Each term, FYS instructors were sent an informational email near the start of the term, a call-for-submissions email around Week 7, and a reminder email near finals week. These emails, whose text can be found in the appendices, explain the purpose and mechanisms of assessment. The non-strict deadline for submissions was typically about 2 weeks after the term ended. Instructors expressed gratitude for this amount of time to submit their materials, rather than being required to submit their work during finals week.

Additionally, the GEPLC chair added “office hours” during Finals Week each term for instructors who wanted to ask questions or get help with the submission process. While these were online and not well attended, and the communication of availability was appreciated by several instructors.

A potential drawback of this term-by-term process is the lack of coordination of submissions for the same course taught across multiple terms, or multiple instructors who teach a course of the same name. In the future, this could be remedied by earlier communication with all instructors who plan to teach the assessed course in a given academic year, and clearer directions for coordinated submissions.

We used a Google form as our initial collection mechanism, since Google forms are familiar to most of campus, allow many types of questions, and accept file uploads. The form responses were processed by Jay Thompson in Academic Affairs and uploaded to Tk20, our campus-wide assessment software.

Norming and scoring

In Fall 2020, prior to scoring of 2020-2021 submissions, the GEPLC participated in a rubric-norming activity with samples taken from the 2019-2020 GEPLC collected work. This exercise gave new GEPLC members a chance to practice the scoring process and understand how the rubric functioned, and also gave returning members a chance to review and rethink their own scoring protocols. The data from this norming activity was discussed as a group. During this process, we identified points of agreement and areas

of uncertainty. Often, these areas of uncertainty pertained to certain words in the rubric itself, or in how they related to the signature assignments. We clarified the purpose and scope of the assessment during this activity, and preliminarily identified suggested rubric revisions that would make the rubric easier to use. The GEPLC expressed that this activity was helpful but somewhat cut short. More time discussing in small groups based on particular samples would likely have been helpful to further clear up discrepancies in rubric interpretation and use.

Then, in Winter and Spring 2021, GEPLC members then used Tk20 to score the submissions from the previous term. Each member was given between four and six signature assignments/corresponding student work to score each of the two terms, and each signature assignment was assigned to between four and six reviewers, but the samples were mixed so that any two people shared relatively few of the same assignments to assess. Note that the Spring 2021 submissions have not been scored but will be added to the data for Fall 2021.

In the scoring process, members were presented with a summary of the responses to the questions from the Google form, as well as the signature assignment itself, followed by the sample student work. GEPLC members were asked to identify the rubric features that aligned to the assignment, and were asked what level on the rubric was demonstrated by the included student work (levels 1-4 for each feature). Reviewers were also given the choice to select "N/A" which means that the assignment did not give the student the opportunity to demonstrate achievement in the rubric feature. They were also given a choice of "0" not present on the rubric, which means the assignment gave students an opportunity to demonstrate this feature, but it was not demonstrated in the sample student work. Reviewers also had the option to comment on each rubric feature, and on the assignment as a whole, but that was not required.

It should be noted that while instructors who submitted signature assignments were also asked both about their expectation for student work in each rubric area, as well as the actual level achieved by the sample. The reviewers were provided with the information about the rubric features chosen by the submitting instructor, but not about their level of expectation for the student, nor their own assessment of the student's score. This semi-blinding was done at the recommendation of the previous GEPLC. However, some 2020-2021 GEPLC members expressed that it would be interesting and helpful to see the instructors' responses to these questions. At the time this data is not available to compare with the reviewers' responses. In future years, it may be illustrative to compare instructors' responses to reviewers' responses on an assignment level to gauge the level of rubric agreement and understanding across campus.

In the scoring process, student work was as anonymous as possible, in most cases redacting all identifying information. (An example exception was an assignment about names, in which students were required to research their own first name, so it was not possible to fully redact this content from the student work.) Faculty signature assignments were also anonymized and given identifying numbers within Tk20, but in many cases due to the nature of FYS courses and their titles, it was very clear which department and often which individual faculty member(s) had made the submission. This could be seen as a flaw with the system, but in a positive culture of assessment it should not be a problem for a particular faculty member's name to be associated with their signature assignment in the context of the PLC. It is also likely that other areas of the General Education Program will not run into the same issue with unique or person-tied courses as much as in the FYS.

Discussions following scoring

Following the scoring process, which was completed asynchronously between meetings, GEPLC members discussed both in small and large groups about the scoring process and what they noticed in the assignments and student work. They were given the opportunity to review each other's comments on the submissions and see the aggregate scoring during these discussions. These discussions were reported to be fruitful by the GEPLC members.

While the specific data from scoring will be shared in the next section, we mention here some of the other major topics and action items that arose out of these discussions aside from the comments about the assignments and student work themselves. Notably, GEPLC members continue to be concerned about interrater reliability, and suggest that more specific training or a longer GEPLC commitment term (multiple years) could address this problem. They also note issues about missing or unclear information in Tk20 itself. For example, rubric feature definitions do not appear in Tk20, so scorers were required to have the rubric open in a separate window. Additionally, there seems to be inconsistent application of the N/A vs 0 level in the rubric scoring process.

GEPLC members also noted several successes related to faculty participation, as well as some areas that can continue to improve. Notably, faculty are more often choosing 1-2 rubric features and are providing a variety of target scores, rather than choosing all features and setting target scores at the maximum level, which had been a problem in the past. However, faculty may not be "reading up" the rubric completely, and by giving too strict or narrow of directions, may actually be preventing students from achieving higher levels on the rubric. There is also a lingering sense that instructors themselves are being "scored" which will take continued messaging from Academic Effectiveness and Academic Affairs to dispel.

Data from reviews

In this section, we present both quantitative and qualitative data from the review process. We present the data organized by rubric features: Context, Evidence, Analysis, and Conventions, and include a summary graph of all four features together. (See Appendix A for the Foundational Skills rubric.)

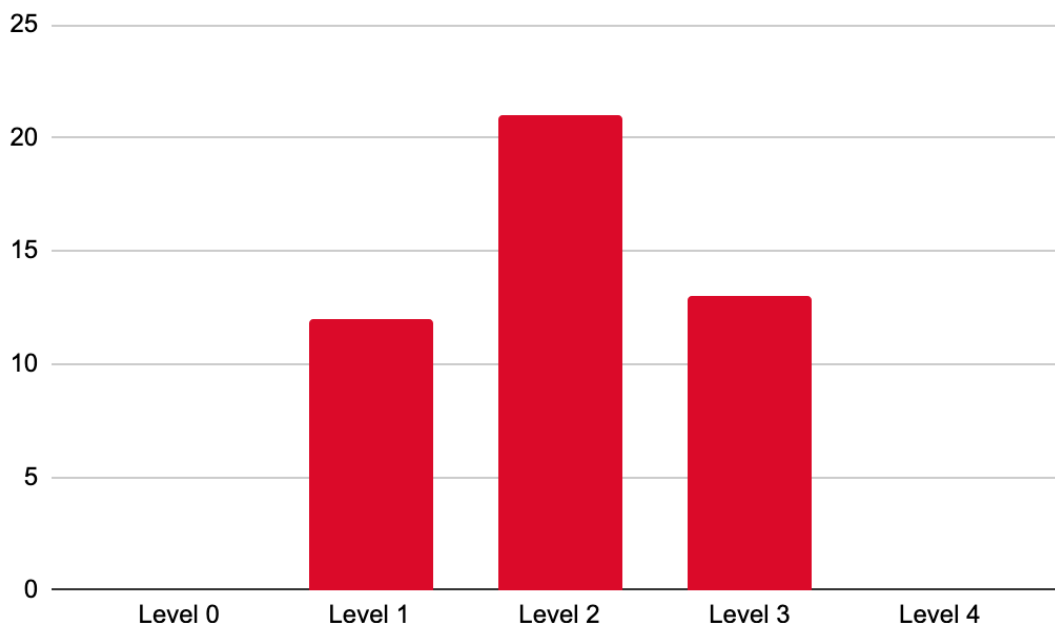
The quantitative data consists of the rubric ratings for each review, aggregated across the Fall and Winter FYS 107 and 207 sections that made submissions to the GEPLC. The total number of courses considered here is 29. However, most courses received multiple ratings because the ratings were distributed across multiple faculty. Therefore, we consider the sample to be the total number of ratings ($n=78$). The charts below reflect that data. There are minor errors and omissions in this data; for example, not all submissions included both student work and a signature assignment, and in some cases a submission was not fully scored on each feature of the rubric. These are rare and have negligible effects.

In addition to the numerical data from the ratings, there is qualitative information from the GEPLC from two sources: the comments left by the GEPLC members while scoring the submissions, and discussions in both small and large group meetings following the scoring process. These are summarized in bullet point form after the quantitative data for each section of the rubric. These are general in nature and should be understood not to refer to a particular discipline or course, but could be useful for faculty who are interested in learning more about the assessment process.

Context

The bar graph below shows the occurrence of each rating on the Context feature.

Context Aggregate Scores



The following statistics characterize the data:

Mean:	2.02
SD:	0.75
Median:	2
Mode:	2

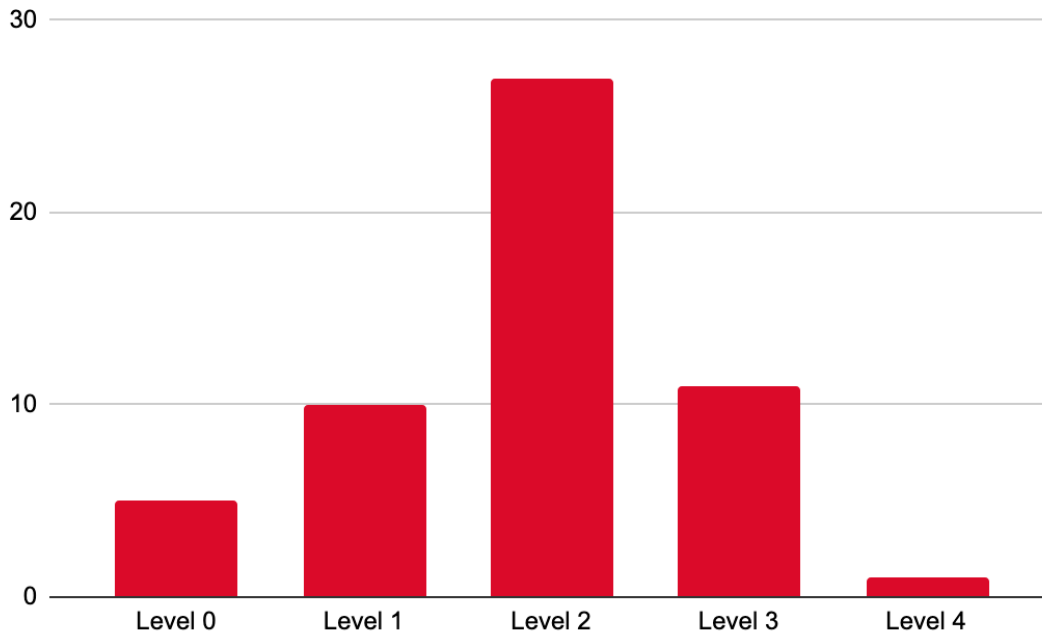
Comments and observations:

- In order for students to adequately develop and demonstrate their understanding of context, students must be allotted the physical, mental, and/or temporal space to do so. Assignments that score well on the context feature intentionally build this into the assignment, allow longer/more in-depth answers, and prompt students to consider context in their thinking.
- It is helpful to understand the course context; accompanying remarks from the instructor can help clarify what this is, in the case that it is not included explicitly in the assignment directions.
- Students often demonstrate knowledge of context more if they are prompted to do so in the assignment instructions, and this can be done creatively.

Evidence

The bar graph below shows the occurrence of each rating on the Evidence feature.

Evidence Aggregate Scores



The following statistics characterize the data:

Mean:	1.87
SD:	0.91
Median:	2
Mode:	2

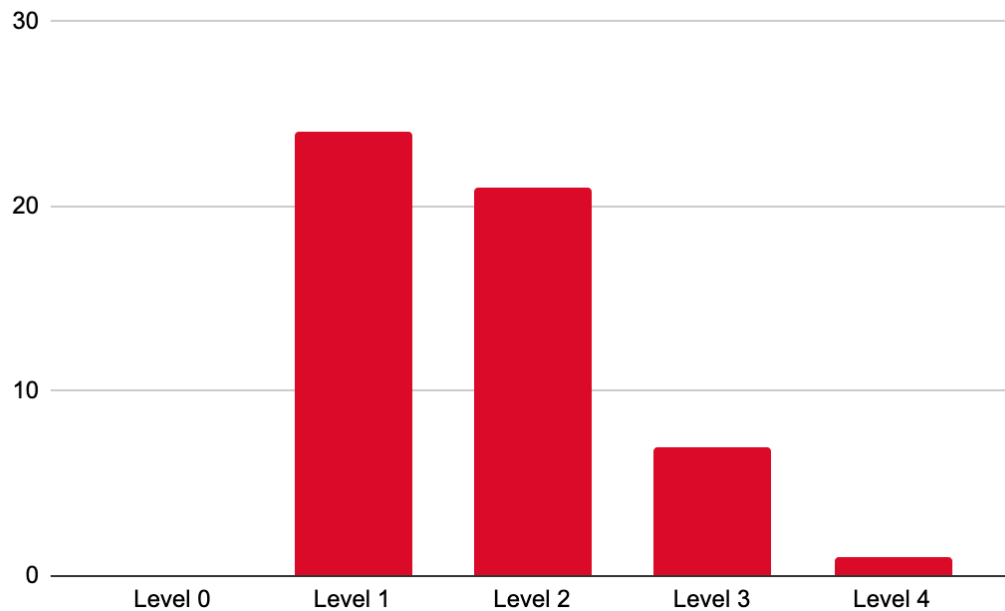
Comments and observations:

- It is unclear what constitutes a source in some cases; while the GEPLC has a fairly broad interpretation of the word, certain instructors may have narrower or broader interpretations of it, leading to potential confusion.
- Students often use sources according to assignment directions, but it is often unclear whether they have explicitly evaluated them. Explaining the evaluative process, or explicitly including evaluation in the assignment directions, shows that students have an opportunity to demonstrate this important skill.
- Students often are better able to demonstrate this skill if they are given some framework for evaluation of sources. Information literacy appears to be a theme.

Analysis

The bar graph below shows the occurrence of each rating on the Analysis feature.

Analysis Aggregate Scores



The following statistics characterize the data:

Mean:	1.71
SD:	0.77
Median:	2
Mode:	1

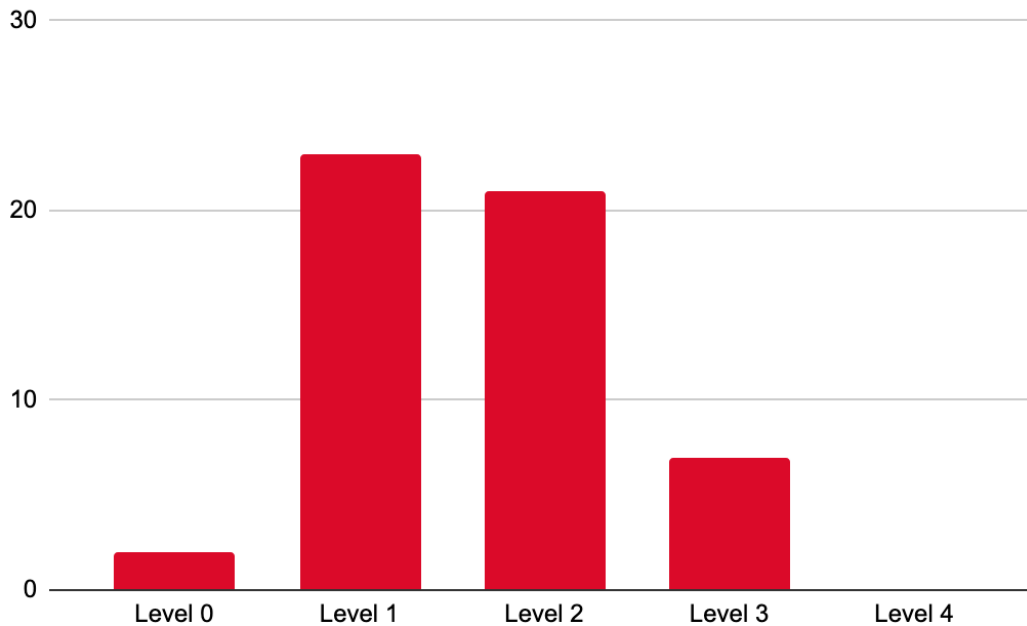
Comments and observations:

- Reviewers often identified analysis as a feature even when the instructor did not. It is possible that the first level of the Analysis feature is present in nearly all signature assignments, which would explain the skew.
- The word “lens” is not well-defined and may be confusing to instructors. It is helpful to have a clearly articulated set of lenses for a class and for that to be included in the assignment itself or the accompanying information, and it is necessary for future GEPLCs to further reflect on and clarify this language.
- The upper levels (3 and 4) of the Analysis feature seem conflated and confusing, and several changes have been suggested to clarify them and make them more broadly applicable. This remains a continued topic of discussion.

Conventions

The bar graph below shows the occurrence of each rating on the Conventions feature.

Conventions Aggregate Scores



The following statistics characterize the data:

Mean:	1.62
SD:	0.76
Median:	2
Mode:	1

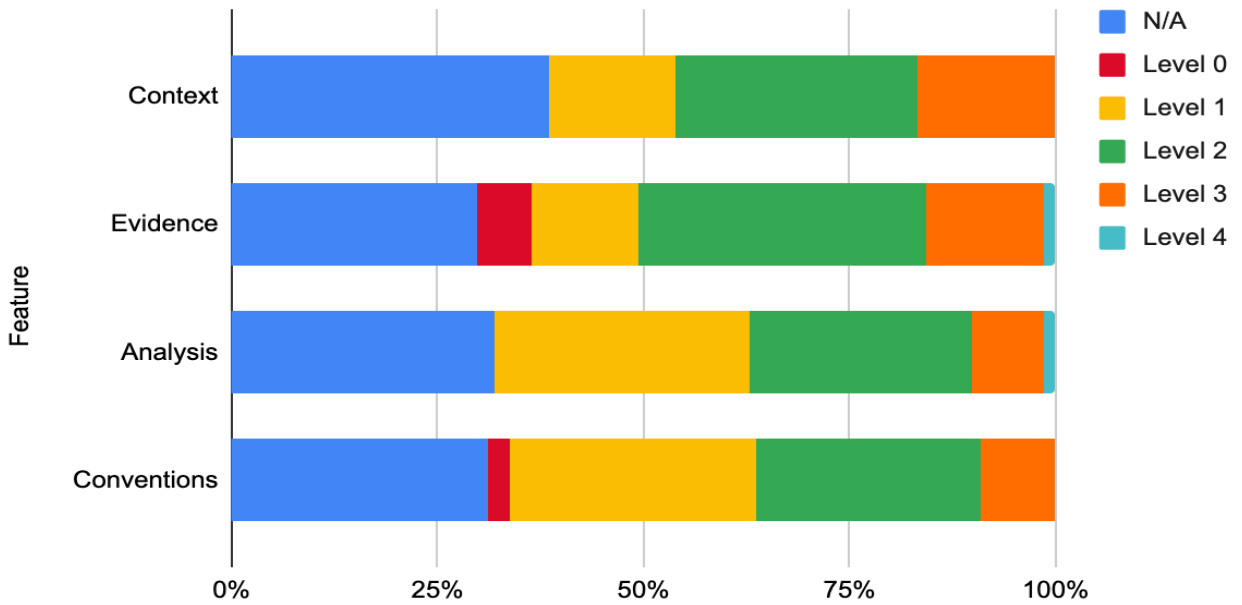
Comments and observations:

- Because of the way the rubric is worded, it may be the case that students are not able to demonstrate understanding at higher levels of the rubric if they are given very specific and prescriptive assignment instructions, thereby removing their chances to make types of formatting and organizational decisions.
- The area of conventions takes into account both mechanical elements of the work, as well as choices about formatting and organization made by the student. Since the mechanical elements are more easily quantified, they tend to be more emphasized in the assignment directions.

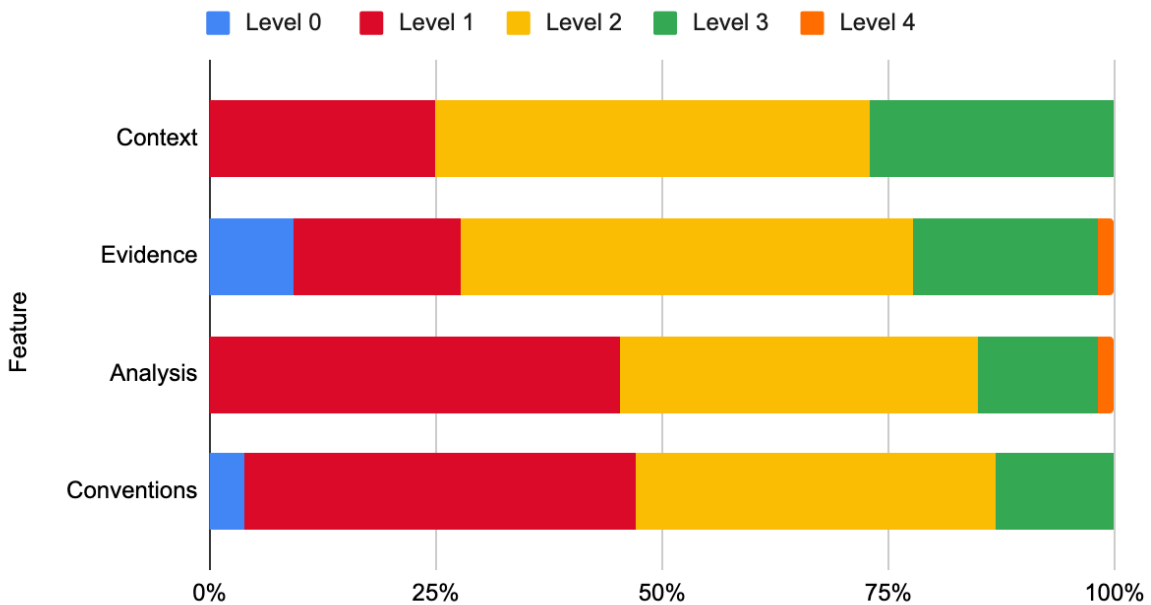
Summary data and comments

Here are two percentile charts as is typical in PLC reports. The first includes the N/A choices in each category, and the second includes only the levels.

Rubric level percentiles



Rubric level percentiles (no N/A)



Finally, we present some overarching comments related to the rubric scoring process:

- It is important to keep faculty autonomy in mind. We must keep the rubric and our scoring of it flexible enough to accommodate the many ways in which faculty use the rubric to shape their assignments. The rubric is not an exhaustive way to measure this learning outcome.
- At the same time, we must continue to work towards a shared understanding of language used in the rubric so faculty can communicate more effectively across disciplines about how students demonstrate learning outcome achievement in a variety of areas.
- Though our rubric has four levels, they need not coincide with either the outdated “class labels” (freshmen, sophomore, etc) nor the level of the course (100-400). Student work samples should be viewed independent of these other axes solely using the rubric language understood in the context of the assignment and course, as described by the instructor, understanding that different courses will have different expectations and norms.
- Since we are assessing just FYS courses this year, it may be the case that what we are seeing is somewhat heavily affected by previous school experience and its context than what is happening at WOU itself. Capturing a more holistic view of the WOU student experience requires assessing the entire General Education Program and, ideally, looking longitudinally at small cohorts of students as well as latitudinally across courses.

A final note on the data

It should be noted that the scores here are reported on a by-score basis rather than a by-course basis. This choice was made because the data is more readily available and may be more representative in this format. Because of the way in which assignments were distributed amongst reviewers and the varying levels of completion of review, reporting on a by-course basis may serve to more heavily weight extremal scores of certain submissions that only received one or two reviews, and deemphasize submissions that received many reviews. In the future, the GEPLC might consider solutions to this problem including grouped reviews (all members of a small group review the same set of assignments). There are advantages and disadvantages to both approaches.

Also missing from this data is the comparison between what submitting instructors chose and what the reviewers identified. Because of the decentralized, multi-system data collection and storage methodology, this data is not easily accessible. An improvement in the data collection and storage process would make this data easier to access and inspect.

Reflection and improvement

Through the process of rubric norming and scoring, the GEPLC engaged in consistent reflection and improvement of their own processes and of the infrastructure of the assessment process itself. Notably, the GEPLC made more changes to the rubric, and we assert that it is nearing a finalized form.

Appendix A contains the revised Foundational Skills Rubric - Spring 2021 Revision. Here is a summary of the changes:

Context: Eliminated deficit language in levels 1 and 2. Streamlined feature definition, moving some language to rubric companion sheet.

Evidence: Changed language in levels 3 and 4 to make it easier to differentiate between them. Fixed parallel language issues. Streamlined feature definition.

Analysis: Change language in levels 2, 3, and 4 to make it more flexible and broader. Streamlined feature definition.

Conventions: Streamlined feature definition, moving some language to rubric companion sheet.

In addition to its rubric changes, the GEPLC identified and implemented process changes that allowed them to more accurately assess student work. In particular, we implemented additional contextualizing questions on the submission form itself that asked submitting instructors to clarify their choices around the rubric areas they chose. This change was made only for Winter and Spring 2021 submissions. GEPLC members reported finding this helpful, but some submitters correctly identified that the submission form seemed longer than in the past. There is continued work to be done balancing the GEPLC's desire for understanding of course context with the already-large burden placed on instructors who are asked to submit materials to the PLC. We are grateful for the many instructors who happily supplied us with this additional information this year.

The GEPLC also developed a short onboarding sheet (see Appendix C) that explains the mission, scope, and basic responsibilities of GEPLC members. The hope is that this sheet can be used to recruit and onboard new GEPLC members in future years with appropriate changes to the language.

Additionally, the GEPLC identified several technical issues that might make both submission and scoring easier and quicker if remedied. For instance, the GEPLC

recommends developing a rubric “companion sheet” that explains the terms in the rubric. A draft of this can be found in Appendix B. Additionally, we recommend creating a video of the submission process that explains the basic philosophy and process of assessment, how to submit work, and what sort of additional information is most helpful to the GEPLC. Finally, they recommend including the rubric feature definitions more clearly on the submission form itself (where they had been present but obscured), as well as in the Tk20 scoring interface, and standardizing the order in which the features appear.

On a broader scale, the GEPLC discussed the need to differentiate and clarify exactly what the scores mean. In particular, we need to make clear whether we are assessing the signature assignment, the student work, or both; if indeed we are assessing both, we should perhaps be assigning two sets of ratings or comments, or considering the assignment itself in a purely qualitative way.

The GEPLC also discussed the need to more clearly “close the loop” on assessment. While this report will be disseminated to campus and presented at Faculty Senate, there is interest from both GEPLC members and many faculty who submitted work to receive targeted and specific feedback about their assignments. We seek a way to do this that respects faculty autonomy and time limits, FERPA and other legal considerations, academic freedom, and other potential barriers.

Two ideas to address this became popular amongst GEPLC members. First, create an opt-in program for deeper study of a course or set of courses by working with small groups of faculty to examine their courses holistically. Second, create professional development opportunities targeted at areas seen to be somewhat deficient in the current rubric scores. Such programs would require investment of resources at the institutional level but the GEPLC recommends exploring these options.

Lastly, the GEPLC, and in particular the chair, recognize that there is not enough logistical support for the work of the GEPLC. While the staff members in Academic Affairs are professional, reliable, and kind, it is unclear whether they have any dedicated time to assist with the back-end of the assessment process, and there is no clear division of labor amongst the staff, GEPLC chair, and General Education Program Director. To support a robust assessment infrastructure, it is necessary that staff FTE be dedicated to the logistics of the assessment process, and clear roles and directions be given to all those involved. At a minimum, 0.1 FTE would ensure that necessary form changes can be made, reports run, and meetings scheduled in a timely manner. If additional FTE is allotted, it is possible that the assessment system could move away from the clunky and slow Tk20 software to a more streamlined Google Form system.

Conclusion and charge

Above, we presented the findings of the 2020-2021 GEPLC work, as well as suggestions for improvement of the process and mechanisms of assessment going forward.

We conclude with a recommendation for the charge of the 2021-2022 GEPLC. Our recommendation is two-fold. First, we recommend that they continue to use the Foundational Skills rubric to assess FYS courses, and if they so choose, finish the improvements to this process. Notably, the rubric may still need slight tweaks, the rubric companion sheet can continue to be updated, a video describing the assessment process could be made, and exemplary submissions could be reviewed.

Additionally, we recommend that the 2021-2022 GEPLC broaden its scope of assessment to include all courses aligning to GELO 1: Intellectual Foundations and Breadth of Exposure. This will allow the rubric to be used in other contexts, likely leading to further refinement. Broadening the scope of assessment will also give a longer view of the full journey of a WOU student, rather than focusing only on their work in their first year.

We also recommend that the 2021-2022 GEPLC begin planning the assessment of GELO 2: Critical Thinking. Critical thinking is not yet a well-understood term at WOU, and it will be necessary to have a collaborative campus conversation about the meaning of this outcome and how to assess it. Conversations in the 2021-2022 academic year could lead to the development or enhancement of existing draft and LEAP rubrics to assess this learning outcome. Eventually, the goal would be to transition (perhaps in 2022-2023) to assessment of this outcome, once assessment of GELO 1 is largely complete. This would set up a cycle of assessment that eventually works through all four GELOs within the next 6-8 years.

Appendices

These documents are all found in the "Final Version of Report and Appendices" folder on the GEPLC 2020-2021 Team Drive. The links below should give access, but if they do not, email Leanne Merrill (merrill@wou.edu) to request access. In the pdf version of this document, they are included at the end.

- Appendix A: The [Foundational Skills Rubric - Spring 2021 Revision](#) to be used in Fall 2021 and beyond.
- Appendix B: The [Draft Rubric Companion Sheet](#) for the Foundational Skills Rubric.
- Appendix C: The [2020-2021 Gen Ed PLC Quick Reference Guide](#), to be used as a template for future such guides.
- Appendix D: The [Timeline for future PLC chairs](#), a suggestion for how to schedule the work of the PLC on an annual basis.

Foundational Skills Rubric | Spring 2021 Revision

Feature	1	2	3	4
<p style="text-align: center;">Context</p> <p>Student understands, applies, or brings together knowledge using the appropriate skills, tools and frame of reference for the context as understood in the class.</p>	Student recognizes the local context through work that fulfills the basic task of the assignment.	Student both shows awareness of local context and can relate the work to a broader context.	Student shows awareness of the context and can differentiate, compare, and contrast to better understand the context.	Student shows a thorough/deep understanding of what the context is and how it reflects and/or influences their work.
<p style="text-align: center;">Evidence</p> <p>Student uses sources of information, which may include evidence produced by original student work, reasoning, existing non-peer reviewed and peer-reviewed evidence.</p>	Student includes at least one source of information appropriate to the context of the assignment, that they have evaluated for accuracy/validity.	Student includes more than one contextually appropriate source of information that they have evaluated for accuracy/validity and describes relevance of the sources.	Student incorporates multiple contextually appropriate and relevant sources of information that they have evaluated for accuracy/validity and for bias.	Student integrates multiple contextually appropriate and relevant source of information, including sources from differing perspectives, that they have evaluated for accuracy/validity and bias.
<p style="text-align: center;">Analysis</p> <p>Student separates any material or abstract concept into its fundamental elements to study the nature or determine its essential features and their relationships.</p>	Student identifies constituent elements of something complex.	Student uses a lens, through which to see the component parts of a complex concept.	Student distinguishes how one or more parts work in relation to the greater whole, selecting and using an appropriate lens.	Student evaluates how the parts relate and shape the greater whole of complex concept(s) using multiple views or lenses to yield different interpretations or conclusions.
<p style="text-align: center;">Conventions</p> <p>Student applies formal and informal rules that guide formatting, organization, and stylistic choices to convey meaning.</p>	Student follows the formatting, organization, and style requirements specified in the assignment prompt.	Student uses a consistent system for organization and presentation of ideas to fulfill the assignment.	Student makes appropriate choices about organization, presentation, formatting, and style to fulfill the assignment.	Student executes a wide range of conventions particular to a specific discipline including organization, presentation, formatting, and stylistic choices to enhance meaning.

Rubric Companion Document Skeleton

Terms to define/explain/exemplify (need to discuss as a PLC first):

- Local vs. Broad Context (in Context feature)
- Contextually Appropriate (in Evidence feature)
- Give examples of acceptable sources (use a broad definition of source - in Evidence feature)
- Lens (in Analysis feature)
- Complex (in Analysis feature)

Terms and phrases with already defined meanings and boundaries:

- *Conventions* apply to: “particular text, image, symbol, audio, multimodal, movement, or performance”
- *Context as understood in the class* refers to “the historical, ethical, political, cultural, environmental, or circumstantial settings or conditions that influence and complicate the consideration of any issues, ideas, artifacts, and events.” - See page 16 of: <https://wou.edu/academic-effectiveness/files/2017/05/All-16-Leap-Rubrics.pdf>

Ideally, the rubric companion document will be printable on the back side of the rubric, and linked within the rubric digitally. The explanations will include examples and clarifying comments to help instructors more effectively use the rubric.

Gen Ed PLC: 2021- 2021 Quick Reference Guide

Who?

We are the General Education Professional Learning Community. We consist of faculty representing nearly all academic Divisions at WOU. We are stewards of the campus-wide assessment process, and we act as conduits of information and inquiries to and from our Divisions about this process.

What?

Our primary job is to observe and document the extent to which WOU is meeting our four [General Education Student Learning Outcomes](#) (GELOs). This year, we are focusing on GELO 1, Intellectual Foundations and Breadth of Exposure:

“Put into practice different and varied forms of knowledge, inquiry, and expression that frame academic and applied learning.”

We have chosen to focus on First Year Seminar courses in 2020-2021 for several reasons. First, the learning outcome above is shared by every FYS course. Additionally, most native WOU students take two FYS courses, so we are capturing the progress of a significant portion of the WOU student body (albeit early in their WOU careers). Finally, FYS is the only course prefix that is offered by the General Education Program itself. The interdisciplinary and cross-campus FYS offerings make FYS a rich area to study.

Last year’s PLC recommended we use the [Foundational Skills](#) rubric as our primary quantitative measurement tool. This rubric gives us a shared language and framework by which to assess student work. This tool is admittedly still in development, but it continues to improve with each round of faculty use and reflection.

We may also plan to expand future assessment processes. For an aspirational, holistic vision for what General Education assessment, see [this document](#). As with all of these documents, continued faculty use and reflection will make these future plans stronger as we continue to learn about the assessment process together.

Why?

The most straightforward is that we are mandated by our accrediting agency, NWCCU. [Here](#) are their accreditation standards, which explain in broad terms our purpose.

Longer answers involve the purpose of assessment in our own roles as faculty.

Gen Ed PLC: 2021- 2021 Quick Reference Guide

First, assessment captures a snapshot of where we are right now, through the lens of student learning outcome achievement. We are called to document our progress every year so we can observe changes and make informed choices about how to improve. This extraordinary year is an important chapter in that story.

Secondly, assessment can be aspirational, and lead to calls for change. It asks: what are the best ways we know to support our students and create opportunities for them to succeed? By looking at the General Education curriculum, we can see where our students are already successful, and where we need improvement -- both from within the curriculum and outside of it -- to serve, support, and challenge students even more.

Moving forward, there must be an interplay between assessment and pedagogy. This is sometimes referred to as “closing the loop.” Because WOU is still in its assessment infancy, we have not established clear processes for this yet. This is part of the future plans we can consider as we work towards a more effective assessment process.

How?

We collect signature assignments and work samples from our focus classes. We then look at these work samples in the context of the rubric, with small groups of faculty evaluating both the assignment and the student work against the rubric.

The goal here is not to score high, but rather to come to a consensus about the current achievement levels of students in these courses, and to set reasonable targets for the future. Evaluation of pedagogy or faculty practices should be completely avoided.

The outputs of the process this year will be:

- Quantitative assessment results, derived from small-group scoring of the sample work using the rubric, which provides an objective mechanism to identify student demonstration of learning outcomes in a variety of contexts;
- Qualitative assessment results, based on experiences of PLC members, comments associated to rubric use and decisions, and comments submitted by faculty during the assessment process;
- Recommendations for expansion and improvement of the assessment process, including continued involvement of more faculty, more robust qualitative assessment methods, and other ideas PLC members have.

If you want to learn more about the history and scope of assessment at WOU, you can visit the [Academic Effectiveness website](#).

Below is a rough timeline for the PLC chair duties for the year. Depending on the goals of that year, the timeline may vary.

- September/October
 - Find members, figure out meeting schedule
 - Email to Fall instructors about assessment
- November
 - Norm rubric using old materials
 - Send reminder email to instructors
 - Make sure assessment mechanism is set up
- December
 - Continue norming and discussion of goals
 - Collect Fall Term materials (due end of December or early January)
 - Email to Winter instructors about assessment
- January
 - Members score Fall Term materials
 - Continued work on rubric as needed
- February
 - Collect results from scoring
 - Discuss scoring as a group
 - Make necessary changes to process/rubric
- March
 - Continued discussion of goals and future plans
 - Collect Winter Term materials (due end of March or early April)
 - Email to Spring instructors about assessment
- April
 - Members score Winter Term materials
 - Continued work on rubric/plans as needed
- May
 - Collect results from scoring
 - Discuss scoring as a group
 - Begin to draft report
- June
 - Collect Spring Term materials (due mid-end of June)
 - Finish report (over summer is ok)