

Comprehensive Standard

3.5.1 The institution identifies college-level general education competencies and the extent to which students have attained them. (General Education Competencies)

NSU has identified twelve competencies that form the General Education Core, and the university has provided a list of the courses (discipline and area) that satisfy these competencies. Further, the university delineates the general education requirements for baccalaureate and associate degrees, as well as for the Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Science. These requirements and the assessment methodology for the general education competencies are listed in the University Catalog. Although the University states that “departments closest to the competency requirement” are given the responsibility of developing assessment tools, only one “course-wide rubric” (Persuasion Speech Rubric) was provided as evidence. The institution did not address the extent to which students have attained the competencies. A NSSE comparative table was provided. It was not clear how the NSSE results demonstrated that students had attained the identified competencies.

The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee finds that the institution provided evidence of institutional assessment of college-level general education competencies in its Taskstream Academic Assessment Workspace. Data were provided for AY 2014-2015 and AY 2015-2016; the Executive Director of Institutional Effectiveness and Human Resources indicated that assessment results from prior to 2014 were stored in a locally developed program, which became inaccessible after updating to Banner. While there is some evidence of student attainment of several of the competencies, the record is incomplete; the assessments are not always effective measures; and the data are not mature.

Also, in an interview with the General Education Committee, it was clear that while assessment of the core competencies was being undertaken, the information was not being reported out beyond the Department/College level.

While there is now an Institutional Effectiveness Plan—which combines assessment with the strategic plan and the budgeting process—it is just now being implemented, and thus as yet there are no consistent data to indicate the extent to which NSULA students are attaining all the stated general education competencies.

Recommendation 7: The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee recommends that the institution assesses the extent to which students have attained college-level general education competencies

University Response

Note: All supporting documents referenced in this response are located at <https://www.nsula.edu/institutionaleffectiveness/>. In most cases, a link to each supporting document is located directly below the link to the narrative University response. Please download the response so that you can easily navigate between it and its supporting documents. The supporting documents are in numerical order in accordance with the sequence in which they appear in the response. If the documents referenced are located at another location on the institutional effectiveness website, they are listed by category name (i.e., STRATEGIC PLANNING); sub-category name (i.e., Strategic Communications); and the cited name of the reference (i.e., "1 - Dr. Henderson - Week of 2 February 2015").

General Education Competencies

Northwestern maintains a "core curriculum" of general education competencies for every undergraduate student. These competencies are consistent with and supportive of the competencies mandated by the Louisiana Board of Regents (BOR) for its general education requirements in Academic Affairs Policy 2.16. The Provost/Vice President of Academic Affairs coordinates the review of these competencies to ensure relevance, currency, and measurability. Any changes or updates to the core curriculum must be approved by the University's Curriculum Review Council (CRC) and the President. The 2016-2017 University Catalog lists general education competencies on page 23.

To assess the attainment of each competency, the University identifies courses which closely align with the relevant competency. The faculty responsible for these courses, in coordination with the General Education Committee, identifies student learning outcomes (SLOs), methods, measures, and performance targets that assess the extent to which students have attained these competencies during their course of study. The responsibility for content, quality and effectiveness of the curriculum lies with the faculty.

The University develops assessment reports for each competency as evidence that it assesses the extent to which its students have attained college-level general education competencies. Identified as documents 1-12, these are provided on the Institutional Effectiveness webpage ([1- 12: General Education Competency Assessment Findings 1-12](#)). These reports further demonstrate that associated academic programs use assessment findings to make decisions and recommendations that promote continuous improvement.

Table 1 provides a summary to identify each core competency, the courses that the University assigns to assess it, and associated SLOs, measures, and targets as determined by departmental faculty. The table also identifies the extent to which students have attained each competency (target met/not met) in AY 2014-15, AY 2015-16, and AY 2016-17 ([13: General Education Competencies Table 1](#)).

Institution-Wide Assessment Process

The University's Institutional Effectiveness (IE) Model evolved from the systematic review of institutional mission, goals, and outcomes dating to the University's "Go for Greatness 2011-2018" strategic plan. The University took a deliberate approach to the structure of its assessment process particularly regarding the identification of outcome measures. The Office of Institutional Effectiveness provided faculty and staff with a guide to assist in standardizing the development of Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) ([14: Guide to Outcome - Measure Development 15 April 2017](#)).

According to the University's *Guide to Outcome – Measure Development*, SLOs should be specific, measurable, attainable, results-oriented, and tied to a specific timeframe. Each outcome addresses knowledge, skills, attitudes, or dispositions. The model requires that outcome statements specify what students will know or be able to perform or demonstrate when they have completed or participated in the course, project, or activity. As described in the *Guide*, measures combine the assessment methodology and the target for the outcome. A direct measure, which is preferred, requires a student demonstrate the skill or knowledge. The University encourages setting targets that are difficult to attain so that there is a constant pursuit of improvement.

The University's assessment calendar is derived from the academic calendar with each assessment cycle concluding with spring commencement. Faculty and department heads that are responsible for each competency identify SLO findings, complete analyses, and determine decisions/actions necessary to drive the improvement cycle. They compare current results to those of the previous two years to better develop plans for the upcoming year. Once assessments are completed and approved by department heads, they are submitted for consideration by the General Education Committee, University Assessment Committee, and the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs. Minutes from the May, June, and July meetings of the General Education Committee are available on the website ([15: General Education Committee Minutes AY 2016-17](#)).

Closing the Loop

All units responsible for assessing general education core competencies have reviewed their assessment methodology and assessment data and have made decisions to drive continuous improvement. The following departments, which are responsible for nine of the twelve competencies, have chosen to revise their assessment methodology: the Department of Mathematics; the School of Creative and Performing Arts; the School of Biological and Physical Sciences; and the Department of English, Foreign Languages, and Cultural Studies. The General Education Committee is reviewing professional literature concerning best practices in general education assessment and the use of nationally-normed instruments related to competencies. To ensure that information about the assessment of general education competencies moves beyond the Department and College level, the General Education Committee meets regularly

and the chair of committee reports findings and recommendations to the University Assessment Committee. This action enhances the alignment of assessments University-wide.