2023 Update on Assessment of General Education

Director of General Education, Leigh Shaw

This report updates the assessment of General Education through the analysis of program-level student learning outcomes, or GELOs. GELO 1 (Content Knowledge) is assessed through the biennial assessment process in which departments and programs provide assessment data for each of their Gen Ed courses that are reviewed by faculty serving on the General Education Improvement and Assessment Committee (a standing Faculty Senate Committee). The Office of Institutional Effectiveness coordinates the process.

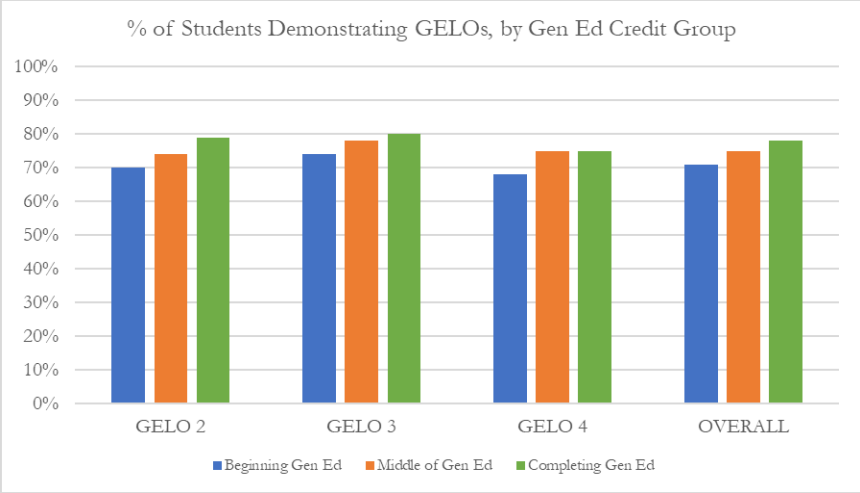
GELOs 2-4 are assessed by examining signature assignments (SAs), which require students to integrate and apply course content (GELO 4) to address an issue related to personal or social responsibility (GELO 3) through an intellectual tool (GELO 2). The SA assessment is performed by multiple volunteer faculty pairs working with the Director of General Education and the Office of Institutional Effectiveness. At the end of fall 2022, the OIE randomly selected 44 SAs from the spring, summer, and fall semesters of 2022 for assessment of student achievement on GELOs 2-4. The Director of General Education applied rubrics derived from the operational definitions of the GELOs to each SA. The OIE then extracted from Canvas the SAs from ~10 students in each course. One of the seven pairs of faculty reviewers coded each student on the rubric in January 2023. This update reviews SA assessments from 2018 through 2022. To date, dozens of faculty reviewers have volunteered and been trained as coders, the SAs from more than 225 Gen Ed courses representing every core and breadth area and WSU courses have been reviewed, and the SAs of more than 2400 students have been assessed. The incredible average interrater reliability (~.9) for all three GELOs affirms that reviewers are consistent in their coding.

Overall, students' GELO achievement scores were positively correlated with their final Gen Ed class grade ($r=.22$, $p<.001$), and their overall WSU GPA ($r=.17$, $p < .001$), independent of their academic status (i.e., freshman, sophomore, junior, senior) and number of prior Gen Ed credits. Analyses suggest that students who better learn course content knowledge, as reflected by their grades in Gen Ed and other courses, also tend to demonstrate general Gen Ed learning skills, independent of their background and experience. Results suggest that SAs assess skills related to student learning.

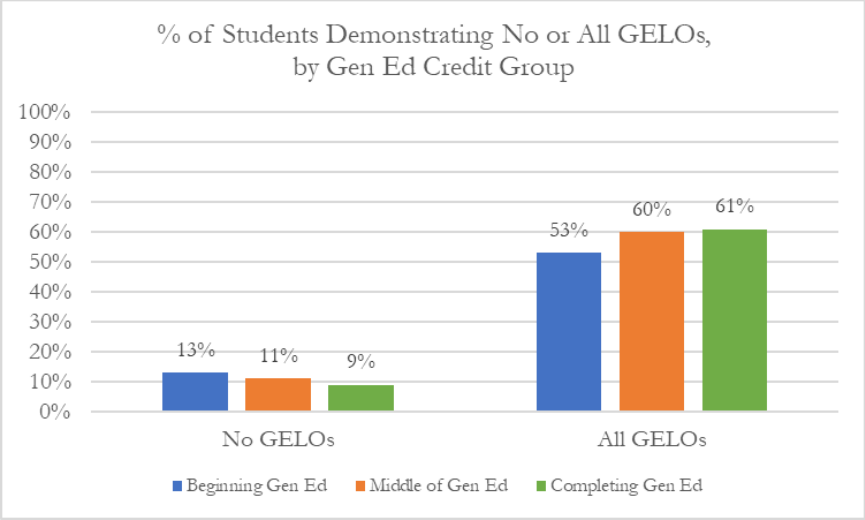
Analyses also explored differences in GELO achievement scores based on student status in the Gen Ed program. Students were grouped according to the number of Gen Ed credits completed in previous semesters:

- Students **beginning** their Gen Ed coursework, who had earned 9 or fewer Gen Ed credits (N=847 or 36% of total sample, of which 66% are freshmen)
- Students in the **middle** of their Gen Ed coursework, who had earned 10-29 Gen Ed credits (N=1051 or 44% of total sample, of which 77% are freshman and sophomores)
- Students **completing** the Gen Ed coursework, who had earned 30 or more Gen Ed credits (N=484 or 20% of total sample, of which 64% are juniors and seniors)

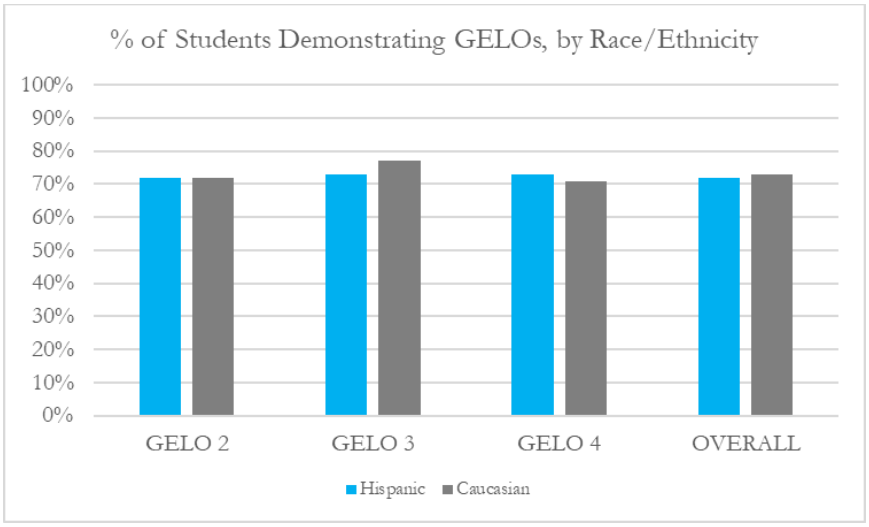
The figure below shows the percentage of students demonstrating GELO 2, GELO 3, and GELO 4 and the overall average achievement score (computed as the sum of GELO scores for each student) by Gen Ed Credit Group (beginning, middle, completing). The majority of students (>70%) achieved the GELOs, and more students achieved GELO 3 (M = 77%) than GELO 2 (M = 73%) or GELO 4 (M = 72%). GELO achievement varied by Gen Ed Credit Group. Students in the completing group (78%) and the middle group (75%) earned significantly higher scores than students in the beginning group (71%). These differences between Gen Ed Credit Groups on overall GELO achievement are statistically significant independent of students' academic status, which suggests that the differences are not due to the completion of more college credits. Beginning students had a significantly lower GELO achievement scores than students in the middle of or completing their Gen Ed program, with the latter two groups not being significantly different. Results suggest that the increase in GELO achievement is not simply a result of more experienced students who have completed more college credits.



As further evidence of the differences between Gen Ed Credit Groups, a significantly higher percentage of students beginning (13%) as compared to completing (9%) Gen Ed achieved no GELOs (i.e., failed to meet threshold on each GELO). Similarly, a significantly lower percentage of students beginning (53%) as compared to in the middle (60%) or completing (61%) their Gen Ed program achieved all GELOs (i.e., met threshold on each GELO). However, only the achievement of all GELOs varied by Gen Ed Credit Group controlling for student academic status (e.g., freshman). The achievement of no GELOs did not vary by credit group. These findings suggest that the increase in students achieving all GELOs may be independent of overall credits earned, but the decrease in students achieving no GELOs may reflect such experiences.



Finally, students' SA performance was disaggregated to explore whether there are equity gaps in GELO achievement. To this end, students were classified as Caucasian (75%, N= 1574), Hispanic/Latino (14%, N=292), or other (11%, N=227). Analyses revealed no significant differences by race/ethnicity on the individual GELO or overall GELO achievement. Furthermore, there were no race/ethnic group differences in background variables, including previous Gen Ed credits, overall GPA, and grade in the Gen Ed course.



The data provide preliminary support for the claim that Gen Ed program outcomes are being effectively assessed and, perhaps, promoted by signature assignments. Student GELO achievement was reliably coded by volunteer faculty reviewers and related to academic outcomes (e.g., course grade, overall GPA), but not to ethnicity. There is a pattern of improvement in student GELO achievement (both their average and complete GELO achievement rate) among those just beginning and completing the Gen Ed program, unrelated to their student status or credits earned in college. Longitudinal evidence is needed to affirm that the improvement in GELO achievement can be attributed to students completing signature assignments and not to other factors (e.g., attrition).