

## 8.2.b

### Student Outcomes: General Education

The institution identifies expected outcomes, assesses the extent to which it achieves these outcomes, and provides evidence of seeking improvement based on analysis of the results in the areas below:

- b. student learning outcomes for collegiate-level general education competencies of its undergraduate degree programs

### Judgment

Compliant  Non-Compliant  Not Applicable

### Narrative

Over the last five years, the University of South Carolina has made progress toward improvement of the assessment of general education of student learning outcomes in order to better serve our students. The remainder of this narrative will be used to identify the progress the University of South Carolina has made since the fifth-year interim report review in 2016. Regardless of the mode of delivery (face-to-face, hybrid, or online) or location (Columbia, the regional Palmetto College campuses, or off-campus sites) all general education courses are included in the general education assessment process.

### Identifying Student Learning Outcomes

The University of South Carolina Columbia has a history of commitment to student learning and the student experience. In 2005, University of South Carolina Provost Mark Becker called for a revision of the General Education curriculum. A group of more than 100 faculty, staff, and students across five campuses created a task force dedicated to addressing the question, "What do our students need to know to thrive as well-educated citizens in the twenty-first century?" In December 2007, the task force concluded its work and proposed new learning goals for a revised General Education curriculum. A General Education Committee was formed in early 2008 to oversee the General Education program, including but not limited to revision of the curriculum. The Committee included representatives from all colleges with undergraduate programs, as well as from the two-year regional Palmetto College campuses, the Division of Student Affairs, and the Department of Academic Support. The Committee refined the learning outcomes received from the task force and articulated the rationale, values, and guiding principles for the proposed curriculum revision. In January 2009, university Forums were held to receive comment from faculty, staff, and students at the University of South Carolina Columbia. Their final proposal, with the new learning outcomes, was presented to the Faculty Senate and adopted April 2009. The new general education requirements were renamed the [Carolina Core](#), and a website for communicating the new requirements for general education was designed in 2012. Assessment of the new Carolina Core learning outcomes started in fall 2013.

The general education competencies of the [Carolina Core](#) provide the common core of knowledge, skill, and academic experience for all University of South Carolina undergraduates. Each student graduating with an Associate's or Bachelor's degree from the University of South Carolina Columbia must fulfill all of the general education requirements represented by the Carolina Core as described in the [Undergraduate Bulletin](#). There are ten Carolina Core Learning Outcomes and they are listed below.

<b>Carolina Core Learning Outcomes</b>	
<b>Aesthetic and Interpretive Understanding (AIU):</b> Students must be able to create or interpret literary, visual or performing arts.	<b>Analytical Reasoning and Problem Solving (ARP):</b> Students must be able to apply the methods of mathematical, statistical, or analytical reasoning to critically evaluate data, solve problems, and effectively communicate findings verbally and graphically.
<b>Effective, Engaged, and Persuasive Communication - Spoken Component (CMS):</b> Students must be able to identify and analyze issues, develop logical and persuasive arguments, and communicate ideas clearly for a variety of audiences and purposes through writing and speaking.	<b>Effective, Engaged, and Persuasive Communication - Written Component (CMW):</b> Students must be able to identify and analyze issues, develop logical and persuasive arguments, and communicate ideas clearly for a variety of audiences and purposes through writing and speaking.
<b>Global Citizenship and Multicultural Understanding: Foreign Language (GFL):</b> Students will be able to communicate effectively in more than one language.	<b>Global Citizenship and Multicultural Understanding: Historical Thinking (GHS):</b> Students must be able to use the principles of historical thinking to understand past human societies.
<b>Global Citizenship and Multicultural Understanding: Social Sciences (GSS):</b> Students must be able to use the principles of the social sciences to explore diverse cultural identities and to analyze political and environmental issues.	<b>Information Literacy (INF):</b> Students must be able to collect, manage, and evaluate information using technology and communicate findings.
<b>Scientific Literacy (SCI):</b> Students must be able to apply the principles and language of the natural sciences and associated technologies to historical and contemporary issues.	<b>Values, Ethics and Social Responsibility (VSR):</b> Students must be able to examine different kinds of social and personal values, analyzing the ways in which these are manifested in communities as well as individual lives.

### Assessing Student Learning Outcomes

All academic programs on the Columbia and regional Palmetto College campuses engage in general education assessment. Specifically, the Associate of Arts and Associate of Science (AA/AS) degrees offered by the two-year regional Palmetto College campuses are primarily comprised of general education (Carolina Core) courses. As a result, the assessment of the Carolina Core doubles as the assessment of the (AA/AS) degree for the regional Palmetto College campuses. The Office of Institutional Research, Assessment, and Analytics (OIRAA) coordinates assessment of student learning for the Carolina Core under the direction of the Director of Institutional Effectiveness and SACSCOC Liaison. For the regional Palmetto College campuses, an Associate Professor of Political Science serving as the Director of Assessment for the regional Palmetto College campuses acts as a liaison between OIRAA and the Palmetto College, coordinates general education assessment and represents the Palmetto College on the university's larger Carolina Core Committee. The Carolina Core Committee meets annually to share updates on the assessment process and discuss areas for improvement. Archived copies of meeting minutes are available on the [Committee Governance website](#).

An effective assessment process that is ongoing and aimed at understanding and improving student learning involves making student learning expectations explicit and public; setting appropriate criteria and high standards for learning quality; systematically gathering, analyzing, and interpreting evidence to determine how well performance matches those expectations and standards; and using the resulting information to document, explain, and improve performance. For the Columbia Campus, [Carolina Core Specialty Teams](#) review and make decisions on the assessment activities for each Core area to include decisions on the timing of assessments, criteria in the rubrics used to rate student performance on Carolina Core outcomes, and decisions about student learning for the university's evaluation of general education. Each area has a Specialty Team Chair who acts as a liaison between department faculty, OIRAA and the Office of the Provost on all elements of the assessment process.

In order for an institution of our size to assess all of the student learning for general education, we must rely on assessment technology and a committed group of faculty and staff to execute our assessment activities. First, in 2016 OIRAA, working with the Specialty Team Chairs, developed a [schedule](#) for collecting student work from courses identified as meeting the learning outcomes for the Carolina Core for assessment. Next, OIRAA collaborated with the Office of the Registrar in 2016 to create a report in the Banner Enterprise Resource Planning system with indicators for the Carolina Core areas associated with each course. Being that most of the learning outcomes covered in each Carolina Core area are taught in a single department within the College of Arts and Sciences, the Specialty Team Chair would alert the members of his/her department to the plans for assessment, ask faculty teaching the designated course to select an assignment for assessment, and then later offer to serve as independent raters of the assignments that were collected. The university purchased the Blackboard Outcomes assessment system to link to the university's Blackboard Learning Management System used by the majority of our university faculty for course management. Collection, sampling and distribution of assignments to independent raters for scoring were all facilitated by the Blackboard Outcomes system. Once the assignments were collected, raters recruited by the Specialty Team Chair were invited to attend a rater training session to review the rubric criteria that would be used to assess

students' work. Raters were asked to calibrate their scores before independently scoring the collected assignments. At the conclusion of the rating period, OIRAA assessment staff accessed a report of raters' scores from the Blackboard Outcomes system and used the results to develop a summary report for the Specialty Team and the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Studies. Specialty Team members were then asked to provide suggestions for improvement based on the assessment results contained in each report.

The University of South Carolina Columbia and regional Palmetto College campuses' progress in the area of general education assessment for each Carolina Core outcome is documented in our [Carolina Core Results Website](#). This site contains the assessment results of for each Carolina Core learning outcome for the Columbia and regional Palmetto College campuses along with the associated rubrics and assessment reports for each assessment conducted in the last five years. As a safeguard, a login is required to access the Carolina Core results website. Your login is username: **XXXX**; password: **XXXXX**.

With respect to the regional Palmetto College campuses, in the fall of 2018, OIRAA, partnered with the Associate Provost for the Extended University (now Palmetto College) to identify the general education courses meeting the requirements for the Carolina Core and when students typically registered for these courses across the two-year regional campuses. This information was then used to develop a curriculum [alignment matrix](#) for the regional Palmetto College campuses from which an [assessment schedule](#) could be developed. Once the courses were identified, the Associate Provost and Dean of Extended University collaborated with the academic deans at each of the regional Palmetto College campuses to select the sections from which assessments would be collected and sent these to the regional Palmetto College (PC) campuses Specialty Team Chair for the appropriate core area. The PC Specialty Team Chair then contacted the instructors of the sections selected for assessment and provided them with the appropriate rubric developed by the larger Columbia Carolina Core Specialty Team.

Instructors were asked to select an individual student assignment from their course that addressed the appropriate Core learning outcomes, and to use the rubric to evaluate their own students' assignments from the course. Instructors were to return the completed rubrics to the Palmetto College office in Columbia at the conclusion of the semester for analysis.

To help ensure that all rubric criteria were applied properly across sections, instructors were provided with a [link](#) (username: **XXXX**; password: **XXXXX**) to training videos recorded by the Assistant Director for Assessment and the PC Specialty Team Chair. The training videos introduced the rubric, reviewed common rater errors, and outlined the process for collecting assessment results across the various regional Palmetto College campuses upon their return. By Fall of 2019, the training videos were also supplemented by rater training sessions offered by the regional Palmetto College campuses. Midway through the semester, the Associate Provost asked the academic deans of the regional Palmetto College campuses to appoint faculty members to serve on a core area Specialty Team Subcommittee for the regional Palmetto College campuses that would review assessment results upon their return.

At the conclusion of the semester, the assessment results for the appropriate core areas were compiled by the regional Palmetto College campuses and then forwarded to OIRAA for analysis and for preparing [summary reports](#) (username: **XXXXX**; password: **XXXXX**). This report was then used by the PC Specialty Team Subcommittee members to make recommendations on areas for improvement of the AA/AS degree, and overall general education, as it pertained to regional Palmetto College campus students. A visual depiction of the process employed by the regional Palmetto College campuses to drive curricular improvements of general education is available [here](#).

### **Providing Evidence of Seeking Improvement**

The University of South Carolina Columbia employs a systematic assessment process for general education that directs and guides decision making, strategic planning, program evaluation and improvement across the university. In other words, we expect programs to not only participate in assessment and report results periodically, but also make changes to educational programs in areas including but not limited to assessment, curriculum design, and delivery of educational programs. It is our expectation that program faculty meet to discuss assessment results, determine what impact(s) the assessment results have on student learning outcomes and to recommend needed changes to courses or curriculum in these discussions. We encourage programs to take detailed notes during these meetings that can be used to document actions the program will take in response to assessment results. A [template](#) for capturing future program actions is available on the OIRAA website.

The regional Palmetto College campuses approach to driving these discussions is to have the academic deans for each campus appoint faculty members from each campus to serve on a Palmetto College Carolina Core [Specialty Team Subcommittee](#). The subcommittees review the assessment results from students in the regional Palmetto College campuses and offer suggestions for improvement. Areas for improvement may include students' mastery of general education learning objectives, curricula, the assessment process, and/or delivery and instruction of general education courses. The Palmetto College Carolina Core Specialty Team Subcommittee drafts its findings and forwards them to the AA/AS Curriculum/System Affairs Committee for decision. In order to close the feedback loop, the Palmetto College Carolina Core Specialty Team Subcommittee notifies the Office of the Associate Provost, the Specialty Team Chair of the larger Columbia Carolina Core Specialty Team and all regional Palmetto College campus instructors teaching general education courses, of any changes adopted by the AA/AS Curriculum/System Affairs Committee to be made as a result of assessment findings.

As a result of completing the process mentioned above, the regional Palmetto College campuses seeks improvement in the following areas of general education assessment. The first is to give instructors advance notice, before the semester begins, that their class has been chosen for assessment. The second action is to select a random sample of classes for assessment that comprises approximately half of all available Carolina Core classes each semester. Academic Deans at the regional Palmetto College campuses must express the importance and necessity of assessment to faculty. Final assessment reports should be returned to faculty so that they may see the value of their assessment efforts. Faculty need more training to understand how to assess their courses. Discipline-specific raters should be appointed to serve as independent raters so that faculty are not asked to rate their own students. And finally, options for "Not Able to Rate" and "Comments" sections should be added to each Carolina Core rubric.

The regional Palmetto College campuses have already begun implementing improvements to its assessment process. Videos created by the OIRAA are used in addition to several live sessions that are recorded and posted for faculty and the regional Palmetto College campuses are currently creating a software program to assist in the organization and completion of assessment that will be shared with the Columbia campus for assessing general education. A [website](#),(username:XXXX; password: XXXXXX) similar to the Carolina Core Assessment Results website used by Columbia, has been created to share reports, Carolina Core rubrics, and other assessment related information.

In order to drive the use of assessment results for the improvement of general education for the Columbia campus, in the fall of 2019, OIRAA collaborated with the Office of the Provost and the Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE) to convene meetings of the University of South Carolina faculty from the Columbia and regional Palmetto College campuses. The purpose of the meetings was to bring groups of faculty together to discuss general education, i.e. the Carolina Core, and to comment on the university's assessment of undergraduate student learning.

In preparation for these meetings, a [website](#) was developed that contained summaries, rubrics and reports of the assessment results collected for all ten areas of the Carolina Core since 2013. Specialty Team Chairpersons for each Core area were provided with email addresses for instructors that previously taught a Carolina Core course, so that they could share the link to the website and invite instructors to in-person discussions of assessment results. In addition, Specialty Team Chairs were provided with a list of guiding questions developed by the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Studies, in advance of the meeting to consider for discussion.

A total of ten meetings were held between October 2019 and February 2020. OIRAA representatives took notes of these discussions and confirmed the accuracy of the notes with Carolina Core Specialty Team Chairpersons before posting them to the Carolina Core assessment results website.

In April of 2020, an executive summary with the questions along with detailed comments from each meeting was compiled in the form of a Carolina Core [Synthesis of Faculty Sentiment](#) document.

The table below is a sample of the actions faculty from the Columbia campus are seeking to improve general education for each Carolina Core area (learning outcome).

<b>Carolina Core Action Items/ Recommendations</b>				
<b>Carolina Core Area</b>	<b>Learning Outcomes</b>	<b>Face to Face Teaching</b>	<b>Assessment</b>	<b>Online Instruction</b>
<b>Core Area: (ARP) Analytical Reasoning &amp; Problem - Solving</b>				

<p>ARP</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It may be time for ARP learning outcomes to be rewritten for clarity and specification.</li> <li>• There is a lack of homogeneity among all of the disciplines., e.g, Philosophy, Computer Science, Math, which also includes a wide variety of courses in each discipline.</li> <li>• Guidance would be appreciated on how ARP learning outcomes apply to each discipline and/or course.</li> <li>• Faculty recommend an assignment guide so they may develop course specific assignments for assessment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In the future, faculty will focus on making connections between the numerical calculations students perform to expressing conclusions in words.</li> <li>• In Computer Sciences courses, the instructor will require students to write code instead of relying on "drag and drop" coding applications.</li> <li>• Instructors will assign additional homework assignments.</li> <li>• The department has added gateway courses which are designed to review mathematical operations so that class time can be devoted to more conceptual calculus problems.</li> <li>• Pursue better advising of undergraduate students so that ARP courses are taken earlier because the concepts covered in these courses are useful for many science courses.</li> </ul>	<p>Instructors...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• want to rate their own students.</li> <li>• want to rate the assignments at the time of collection to result in larger sample sizes and reduce the burden of volunteer raters.</li> <li>• prefer to collect samples on a course by course basis.</li> <li>• OIRAA should test a process where the same set of assignments are rated by instructors of the course and also by a pair of independent raters. Then compare the instructors' scores to the raters' scores</li> </ul> <p>to determine whether there were differences.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• want more openness and better communication from OIRAA on the ARP rubric, nature of the artifacts and the differences between assessment and grading.</li> <li>• appreciate a short video on artifact collection and rating would be useful in the future.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Possibility of restricting who can register for online courses</li> <li>• Preferable that freshmen be prohibited from taking online courses.</li> </ul> <p>Faculty...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• must be vigilant in the review of courses proposed for online delivery.</li> <li>• may have to police themselves with respect to offering additional courses online.</li> <li>• must be careful that as online offerings are increased across the university, we may face problems in the future with properly educating people.</li> </ul>
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**Core Area: (CMS) Effective Communication – Speaking**














<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In a couple of cases, the way the learning outcomes are worded might bear some clarification. To include clarifying to what extent some standards in the learning outcomes are understood and evaluated vis a vis “objective or semi-objective standards”.</li> <li>• Should there be some further articulation of learning outcomes or revision of them?</li> <li>• Pedagogical and philosophical questions still to be answered include: What are we trying to accomplish with CMS? Is it communication efficacy? Cultural education? How does CMS overlap with other outcomes in analytical reasoning?</li> </ul>	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adding back in a third option for “excellent” which was removed.</li> <li>• Add back a third option if consensus or move to Cohen’s Kappa to find a way to compare across different competencies.</li> <li>• The CMS rubric should be designed for three points using a Likert scale.</li> <li>• What remains to be seen are what are the ideal modes of assessment? What are the least intrusive options for students vs. the particular, practical possibilities we are facing?</li> <li>• We believe that rating our own students is a best world scenario.</li> <li>• One recommendation is to pair an instructor with an independent reviewer for their own course sections and norm them together across all those sections.</li> <li>• One way to reduce tendency towards inter-rater disagreement is by keeping paired raters. The raters could meet before the assessment started so that they could train and agree on standards and expectations. The assessor would then be known to the instructor and the instructor can prepare students for the assessor’s presence.</li> <li>• Another option would be to have rater pools from which to choose assessors.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Live, synchronous exchange, even if it is mediated, could/should be built into those CMS outcomes.</li> <li>• Two different levels of adaptation: one in preparing to speak and one is in the speaking moment.</li> </ul>
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**Core Area: (GHS) Global Citizenship and Multicultural Understanding – Historical Thinking**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some members of the committee would prefer more clarification and specificity in the verbiage of the learning objectives.</li> <li>• Desire by the committee to make the objectives broad enough to address the variety of courses in which they would be applied.</li> <li>• The university will need to undergo a cultural shift and explain in clear terms that at the 100-level, our priorities are to teach the skills required for learning.</li> </ul>	<p>Faculty...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• will share the knowledge gained from the assessment results to improve their training of the teaching assistants for introductory courses.</li> <li>• are exploring a teaching assistant bootcamp over the summer to prepare teaching assistants to deliver their courses prior to the start of the semester. The department will need to find sources of funding as incentives for TA's to attend the training.</li> <li>• could benefit from sharing approaches to pedagogy and to review what approaches, if any, are not serving the needs of the faculty or of our students.</li> </ul>	<p>Faculty...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• want better identification of particular assignments to use for assessment</li> <li>• require more advance notice of assessment for instructors.</li> <li>• would like the assessment results to be shared with persons outside the Department of History.</li> <li>• recommend more guidance on the criteria so that ratings are consistent along with improved rater training for the next assessment.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meet students where they are</li> <li>• Remedy the issue of meeting students where they are is to assess students' skills prior to entering the university.</li> </ul>
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More detailed notes along with background on the faculty comments to support these suggestions for improvement can be found on the Carolina Core Results Website under the "Faculty Feedback" link.

## Sources

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <a href="#">Assessment Action Plan Form</a></li> <li> <a href="#">Carolina Core Assessment Schedule_Revised 02.22.16</a></li> <li> <a href="#">Carolina Core Results Website (Password Needed)</a></li> <li> <a href="#">Carolina Core Website</a></li> <li> <a href="#">Committee Governance</a></li> <li> <a href="#">PC Assessment Schedule for AA-AS thru fall 2019</a></li> <li> <a href="#">PC Core Committee Members</a></li> <li> <a href="#">PC Curriculum alignment matrix</a></li> <li> <a href="#">PC Program Assessment Process</a></li> <li> <a href="#">Rater Training Videos (Password Needed)</a></li> <li> <a href="#">Summary Reports (Password Needed)</a></li> <li> <a href="#">Synthesis of Faculty Sentiment</a></li> <li> <a href="#">UofSC Columbia Undergraduate Bulletin</a></li> </ul>
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