

Objective Review Committee Report

Objective 6: Social and Behavioral Ways of Knowing, Spring 2020

Committee Membership: Erika Fulton, Karl Geisler, Clayn Lambert, Shu-Yuan Lin, Mark McBeth, Kevin Marsh, Christian Peterson, Jim Skidmore, Jeremy Thomas, King Yik

A. Evaluate the assessment plan for each course, together with its implementation. Provide a brief summary of the Committee's findings in this area. Describe any recommended changes.

All of the courses in Objective 6 have an assessment plan approved by GERC, and it's clear that departments are implementing these plans in good faith (sometimes with minor changes). Assessment of general education courses is still in its early stages, and there are sometimes misunderstandings; however, the assessment process is helping departments correct problems. For example, Economics has up to now been assessing student outcomes by course section, but they note in their report that they will in the future assess the percentage of students meeting each outcome. Similarly, some departments have made adjustments to the assignments that they use to assess outcomes, realizing that earlier assignments were insufficient. These sorts of adjustments are a sign that the process is working.

Overall, the committee does not have any significant concerns in this area. Departments offering Objective 6 courses have reasonable plans for assessing the extent to which students in their courses are meeting general education outcomes, and they are making good-faith efforts to implement these plans.

B. Evaluate the assessment *outcome* for each course. To what extent are students in each course satisfactorily achieving the learning outcomes for the objective? Provide a brief summary of the Committee's findings in this area. Describe any recommended changes.

Assessment is in its early stages, and not all courses have at this point collected student data for every objective. The data that has been collected, however, suggests that a strong majority of students in each of these courses are demonstrating at least satisfactory achievement of the outcomes. Results range from 60% to 93%. Results do indicate that problems sometimes arise in individual sections, but it is again encouraging that departments have responded to these. For example, Global Studies reported problematic findings in a "late-8" version of GLOBL 2203, and they responded by working with the instructor to make adjustments in the curriculum and assignments. Similarly, some departments have expressed concerns with ECP sections of their courses, but they are responding with efforts to coordinate with ECP instructors to ensure that

these sections adequately address Objective-6 outcomes and that students are achieving these outcomes.

The committee does not have significant concerns in this area. While assessment is in its early stages, and while student outcomes vary from course to course and section to section, the data from departments suggests that, in all of these courses, *most* students are meeting Objective-6 outcomes to at least a satisfactory degree.

C. Evaluate the list of courses currently approved to satisfy the objective. To what extent does the current list contribute to a strong, coherent system of general education. Would a reduction or increase in the number or variety of courses in this objective strengthen the overall system? Provide a brief summary of the Committee's findings. Describe any recommended changes.

The committee finds the current list of courses to be strong. It provides students with the opportunity to explore courses in all the major social science disciplines. We do not recommend changes at this time.

D. Evaluate the stated learning outcomes of this general education objective. Are there any problems with the learning outcomes as currently described, or ways in which they might be improved? Provide a brief summary of the Committee's findings in this area. Describe any recommended changes.

ISU general education policy currently requires courses in Objective 6 to meet *four* of the five Objective 6 outcomes. It is our understanding that the SBOE's general education disciplinary group for Objective 6 has recommended that this statewide policy be changed to require that courses meet all five outcomes. The rationale for requiring only four out of five does not seem clear. (Objective 4 has a similarly flexible structure, but here there is a rationale: One of the outcomes involves "the creation of art or performance," which applies to some courses in the Arts but not to most in the Humanities.)

This committee supports the proposed change to require courses in Objective 6 to meet all five outcomes. We encourage GERC to advocate for this change. The change would only affect courses in two departments: Economics (ECON 1100, 2201, 2202) and Technical General Education (TGE 1150). All other courses currently assess all five outcomes. Should this change in policy be approved by the SBOE, it will be helpful for GERC to coordinate with Economics and Technical General Education to enable them to transition to assessing all five outcomes.

Individual departments have also expressed some specific concerns with the description of Objective-6 outcomes. There are questions, for example, regarding the extent to which some of

the outcomes are “measurable” in their current formulation, or the extent to which two outcomes are distinguishable or should instead be combined. Our committee has not attempted to come to a conclusion on these specific questions. Instead we recommend that GERC accord departments reasonable flexibility in interpreting outcomes in ways that make the most sense in the context of their disciplines.

E. Evaluate the objective itself and its place within the system of general education. To what extent does the objective, in its current form, contribute to a strong overall system of general education? Are there ways in which the objective could be modified to improve it? Could the system be improved with its elimination or replacement? Provide a brief summary of the Committee’s findings in this area. Describe any recommended changes.

The committee sees Objective 6 as crucial to general education. Eliminating this objective, or watering down its requirements, would be a serious mistake. The current 2-course requirement seems consistent with common requirements at peer institutions. The committee does not recommend changes to the requirements of Objective 6 and its role in general education.

Accepted by GERC: February 9, 2021

Accepted by UCC: February 18, 2021

Accepted by Faculty Senate: February 22, 2021

Accepted by Academic Affairs: February 25, 2021