

Communicating General Education Assessment Results

The Insight

The faculty represent the best group to evaluate and interpret the findings of General Education assessment results.

Implications

Multiple communication mechanisms need to be used to ensure that the greatest number of stakeholders are able to participate in the evaluation and use of assessment results.”

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Arguably, the most important step in the assessment of student learning involves what has been termed “closing the loop”. In this process, various stakeholders meet to discuss the interpretation and application of assessment results so as to refine programs and improve student learning. Such discussions require both an adequate amount of time for critical reflection and a forum that allows free and robust conversation to occur. Too often, assessment reports are generated by a few individuals and are presented as *fait accompli* in large public meetings – more of a monolog than a dialog. While those reports *do* document the assessment process, they largely miss out on the opportunity for a more effective faculty discussion. As a consequence, many assessment reports are filed away and have little permanent impact on the institution or programs. We believe that our faculty represent the best group to evaluate and interpret the findings of General Education assessment results. Therefore, our revised General Education program assessment plan includes several different strategies to involve the faculty in all stages of reporting and using assessment results. Through the use of multiple report formats over an extended period of time, we hope to provide an opportunity for everyone to contribute to the General Education assessment process.

All assessment results are available online in a public report repository located at <https://ferris.edu/HTMLS/academics/general-education/evidence/repository.htm>.

Four different formats are available for every report: printable (PDF), web (HTML), version-controlled code (GitHub), and project archive (OSF). The PDF documents are easily printed, read, and shared. However, they are also static and not readily editable. As such, they are good for disseminating results but not so great for generating a useful conversation. Therefore, the contents of these documents are also presented online as web pages. These pages contain moderated discussion boards that allow faculty and other stakeholders to actively discuss the data reported, contextualize any interpretations, and recommend possible action steps. The discussion boards will be open for one year for each report, and relevant entries be incorporated and acknowledged in the actual reports over time.

The use of GitHub allows even greater interaction with the reports. GitHub is a free, open source version control platform on the web. All of our General Education assessment reports (PDF and HTML), as well as the de-identified data and analysis code used to generate them, are publicly available in separate repositories. Interested individuals can transfer a copy of all of these materials to their own computers through a process called “forking”. The text and code within these copies can then be explored, modified, or expanded. These changes can later be submitted for inclusion in the actual report online. This mechanism allows faculty to improve the reports all the way from issues of grammar and syntax to the selection and interpretation of statistical tests.

Finally, all reports will be publicly posted in the Open Science Framework (OSF). The OSF is a free and open-source workflow management tool that enables transparent and reproducible science (assessment). Using this tool, all of our assessment work is made available to and citable by groups doing similar work at other institutions. Our faculty can also provide further comments using this tool and contribute to an online wiki associated with the report.

Taken together, these four report formats should provide an excellent opportunity for many stakeholders to be directly involved in the analysis, interpretation, and use of General Education assessment results. As we do so, we will be establishing a community of practice at Ferris that is truly focused on “closing the loop”.