

General Education Program Assessment Report, Sidebar Level: Cultural and Environmental Awareness 2015-2016

The table below summarizes the number of portfolios submitted in each Sidebar Level Category and the total number of students assessed in the courses.

Table 1: Summary of Course Portfolio Submission Data

	U.S. Diversity	Global Awareness	Environmental Responsibility
ePortfolios submitted:	17	22	17
Students assessed:	1,017	936	1,046

EVIDENCE OF STUDENT LEARNING

The table below summarizes the number of students whose academic performance was assessed specifically for each learning outcome in the Sidebar Level Categories. The data reveals that most of the students demonstrated satisfactory achievements in all three categories.

Table 2: Summary of findings from the review of course portfolios pertaining to student learning

LO#	Upon completing this requirement, students will be able to:	# of students assessed	% meeting the LOs
U.S. Diversity			
LO 1	Describe the various dimensions of diversity and marginalization within the United States.	837	84%
LO 2	Explain the means by which one or more persistently marginalized groups in the U.S. have negotiated the conditions of their marginalization.	440	90%
Global Awareness			
LO 1	Identify and explain various components of a culture that is distinct from those found within the United States.	879	84%
LO 2	Analyze how cultural similarities and differences are negotiated in ways that help shape the modern world.	288	87%
Environmental Responsibility			
LO 1	Recognize areas of interaction between human society and the natural environment.	567	86%
LO 2	Identify the individual, social, cultural, and ecological factors that influence environmental sustainability.	499	94%
LO 3	Evaluate competing scientific claims that inform environmental debates.	362	87%

INSTRUCTION REVIEW

The Faculty Learning Community assessed in 2015-2016 overall 60 course portfolios and examined the assessment results of learning activities that involved around 3,000 of students. Taking into consideration that the Sidebar Level Categories have been assessed for the first time since the implementation of the GEP Assessment Cycle launched in 2011, the results demonstrate positive findings: UWSP students are meeting the GEP learning outcomes and UWSP instructors are aligning their courses with the learning objectives of the General Education Program.

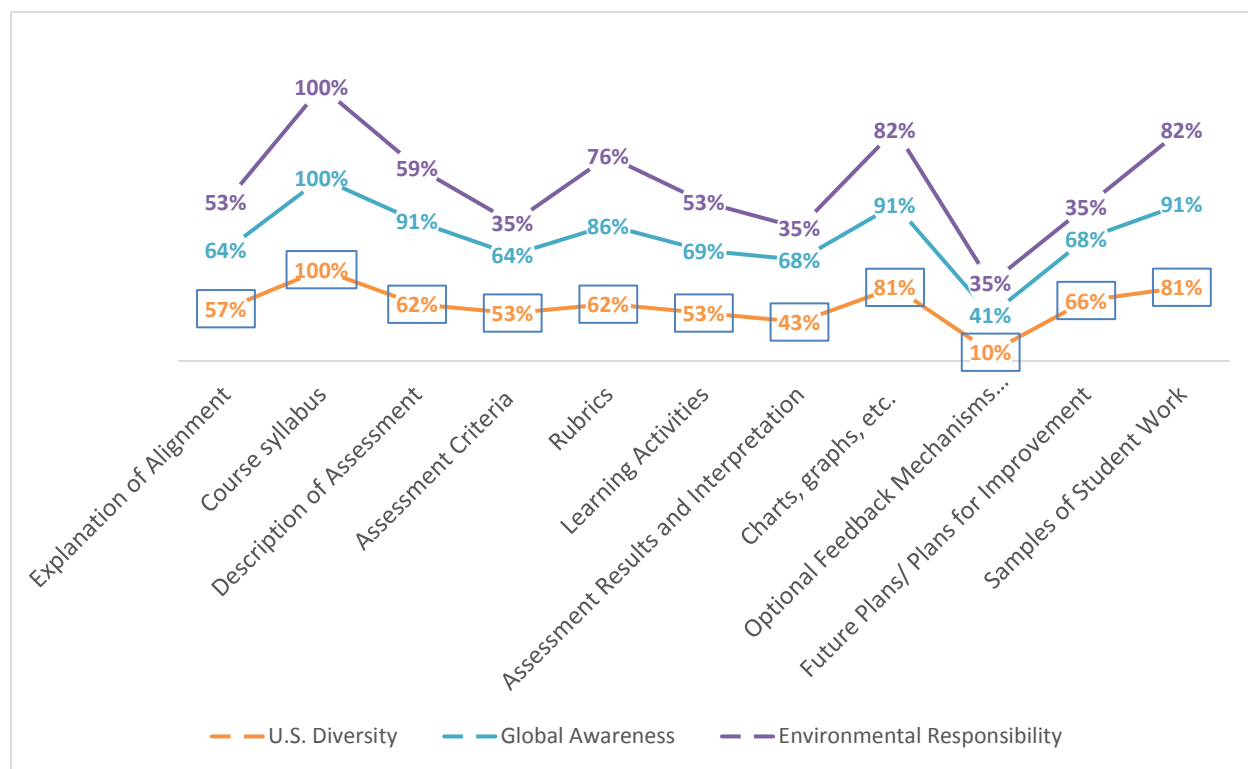
To preserve the anonymity of the instructors involved, the table below combines the summary data from Course Portfolio Rubrics for each category as well as the overall results.

Table 3: Summary of Course Portfolio Rubric Data from Faculty Learning Community

	U.S. Diversity		Global Awareness		Environmental Responsibility		Overall Results	
	Meet & Develop	Do Not Meet	Meet & Develop	Do Not Meet	Meet & Develop	Do Not Meet	Meet & Develop	Do Not Meet
1. Explanation of Alignment	95%	5%	94%	6%	94%	6%	94%	6%
2. Course Syllabus	100%	0%	100%	0%	100%	0%	100%	0%
3. Description of Assessment	95%	5%	100%	0%	100%	0%	98%	2%
4. Assessment Criteria	90%	10%	100%	0%	100%	0%	97%	3%
5. Rubrics	100%	0%	100%	0%	100%	0%	100%	0%
6. Learning Activities	95%	5%	94%	6%	94%	6%	94%	6%
7. Assessment Results and Interpretation	90%	10%	100%	0%	100%	0%	97%	3%
8. Charts, Graphs, etc.	100%	0%	100%	0%	100%	0%	100%	0%
9. Optional Feedback Mechanism Results	90%	10%	94%	6%	94%	6%	93%	7%
10. Future Plans/ Plans for Improvement	86%	14%	94%	6%	94%	6%	91%	9%
11. Samples of Student Work	86%	14%	88%	12%	88%	12%	87%	13%

As the chart above illustrates, the majority of instructors successfully completed all required components of the course portfolio and received positive feedback from the Faculty Learning Community. Still there is room for improvement (See Appendix for detailed summaries for each category). During this round of assessment, course portfolios, which were deemed developing towards meeting the expectations specified in the feedback rubric, received satisfactory overall feedback; however, it is highly desirable that the numbers of courses meeting the expectations increase in the future.

Graph 1: 2015-2016 Sidebar level Assessment – Percentage of course portfolios meeting (versus developing and not meeting) GEP Requirements per category



As the graph above illustrates, the areas for future improvement are “Explanation for Alignment,” “Assessment Criteria,” “Learning Activities,” and “Assessment Results and Interpretation.” The FLC members felt that the alignment between GEP and course learning outcomes should be made more explicit and that the learning activities could target more directly the GEP learning outcomes. They also stressed that assessment results need to be sufficiently explained and quantifiable. More detailed FLC comments and recommendations are here directly quoted with their permission.

QUALITATIVE FEEDBACK FROM THE COMMUNICATION FACULTY LEARNING COMMUNITY

Three groups of Faculty Learning Community reviewed all course portfolios, completed a Course Portfolio Rubric for each instructor, and uploaded completed rubrics into D2L for each instructor’s viewing. Although the numbers seem very reassuring: on average, 96% of submitted course portfolios either meet or develop towards meeting expectations, the qualitative feedback, provided by the FLC members, sheds a more discriminating light on the assessment results and the suggested changes in the assessment process. Here are some quotes from the FLC feedback summary reports for each category.

U.S. Diversity

“Our recommendations include:

1. Eliminate “silver bulleting” from the GEP. Instructors and students should be expected to teach, and achieve, no more than one set of GEP outcomes per course.
2. Specify that the USD requirement may be met only by courses numbered 200 and above. Doing so will encourage (but not require) students to take them in the sophomore year or beyond, when they will be better able both to perform the requisite analytical skills and to grapple with evidence that challenges deep-seated cultural beliefs and assumptions.

In effect, these reforms will move the “sidebar” categories into a new tier within the GEP hierarchy, in between the (mostly 100-level) “investigations” requirements and the (mostly upper-level) “integration” requirements. The restructuring will be credit-neutral. Under the current GEP, students who do not complete the soon-to-be-eliminated First Year Seminar must complete 24 credits at the Investigations level, 9 of which are typically silver-bulleted. Under our proposal, students would complete fifteen credits at the investigations level (three from each of five categories) plus three more from each of the USD/GA/ER categories: a total of 24.

Restructuring the GEP in this way will also help protect the program’s intellectual integrity. Under the current requirement, students may complete up to nine of their 24 investigations credits within a single category (Arts, Humanities, etc.), and up to fifteen of those credits within two categories: credits that in many cases double as major requirements. “Integration” requirements are often satisfied “in-the-major” as well. As a result, many students’ outside-the-major GEP requirements amount to less than two semesters of coursework: 6-9 credits of written/oral communication, 15 credits of silver-bulleted investigations courses (or as few as 9, if the major crosses two different categories), a passing score on the math placement exam, and a single credit in Wellness. By eliminating silver bulleting, UWSP would both strengthen students’ cultural and environmental awareness and provide a stronger, multidisciplinary foundation for their university careers.

In addition, we recommend the following measures to clarify and strengthen the USD requirement:

3. Amend the USD learning outcomes as follows. After completing the USD requirement, students will be able to:
 - Describe complexity and diversity within marginalized groups.
 - Explain how multiple facets of identity and discrimination – such as ability, class, gender, nationality, race, religion, and sexuality – intersect and overlap with one another.

- Explain how marginalized groups in the U.S. have negotiated the conditions of their marginalization.
 - Explain how American popular culture has contributed to and/or helped challenge discrimination and marginalization.
4. Remove the USD designation from courses that do not focus **primarily** on the USD learning outcomes (i.e., enabling students to describe and explain the complex social and political phenomena listed above). Given the systemic nature of the problems we have found, we recommend a thorough review of all courses in this category.
 5. Ensure that the remaining (and future) USD courses require work that demonstrates student achievement of the learning outcomes. For example, a course in which students do not complete assignments in which they “describe” or “explain” marginalization, etc., should not carry the USD designation. By the same token, USD courses should require a certain level of engagement (via reading assignments or other means) with examples of marginalized groups altering or challenging or otherwise negotiating discrimination. Learning about what a given group has suffered, or how professionals might better serve a given group, is not the same as learning about the agency of marginalized peoples.
 6. Require that faculty and staff who teach USD courses have scholarly training in the study of social diversity, discrimination, and intersectionality, including marginalized people’s efforts to negotiate conditions etc. HLC guidelines specify that instructors of general education courses “hold a master’s degree or higher” in a relevant discipline or subfield, and that instructors with master’s degrees in unrelated fields “should have completed a minimum of 18 graduate credit hours” in a relevant discipline/subfield (see Higher Learning Commission Guidelines, “Determining Qualified Faculty through HLC’s Criteria for Accreditation and Assumed Practices”). Just as UWSP expects that instructors in fisheries management have expertise in fisheries management, so too we should expect that instructors in the study of social and cultural marginalization have expertise in the study of social and cultural marginalization.”

Global Awareness

“ The [two] Global Awareness learning outcomes seem to be adequate. It would be good to have the instructors show assessment and evaluation for both within a course.

1. We still need to continue our discussions for how to streamline the assessment process, on both sides of the portfolio experience. But also, the rubric, although improved from previous rounds, still seems to be structured such that even weak portfolios fair well because of the nature of what is assessed or included. There were portfolios that we discussed as having some fundamental flaws in the nature of the assignment OR in the lack of scaffolding in terms of what constitutes cultural awareness in a global or international context, and yet if the instructor submitted materials then there is little recourse to question sufficiently the substance of the materials.

2. Maybe it goes without saying, but again we should consider how to rework the learning outcomes for Global Awareness. Many of the assignments do not really seem to produce student work that is either truly global and in many cases not so culturally aware. What does this category mean, what is it supposed to accomplish? How do we have "global citizenship" throughout the mission of the General Education program, and yet when we get down to the everyday embodiment of these ideas, we fail to be able to capture what they should mean, what students should be able to do in demonstrating they are globally aware. The outcomes still read too superficial AND too Euro-American centered. We should also discuss how we can be globally aware without international experiences or foreign languages.

3. Echoing the perspective of other FLCs in the Cultural Awareness category, it might be time for the GEC to revisit the workability of the sidebar silver bullet options. Although some courses are clearly global in their reach, the ability to sufficiently address outcomes from two categories in a meaningful and robust way proves increasingly impossible. It might be time to have distinct courses in these sidebars.

4. The question of qualifications for the instructors is also once again relevant to this discussion. Given that the HLC will be emphasizing qualifications more, we should really ask if everyone teaching in the cultural awareness categories are actually qualified, meaning they have a relevant PhD field in the particularly General Education category. Again, the question should be raised, who is actually trained, at a professional level, with PhD exams or dissertation research, to teach global awareness, U.S. Diversity, or environmental responsibility. Simply stating that you teach to the outcomes is not enough, having scholarly training and discipline specific skills (in the case of global awareness inherently interdisciplinary skills) must be relevant as well [...].”

Environmental Responsibility

“We did not encounter problems pertaining to the number of learning outcomes in the ER GEP category, nor did we find faculty expressing difficulty finding ways to assess the outcomes (with the possible exception discussed below). There was, of course, a broad array of portfolios from an equally broad array of disciplines that the FLC had to review, and faculty used a diversity of methods to assess the learning outcomes.

Our committee did not find, however, that there were courses falling unacceptably short of working towards the ER outcomes, even though some were substantially farther along in this effort than others.

Although different faculty members were able to select different learning outcomes to assess, obviously they had to explain how their courses aligned with all three learning outcomes in this GEP category. In most cases, faculty members did this in a more or less satisfactory way.

But there were a number of remarks made in relation to the wording of the third learning outcome that ought to be mentioned.

The third ER learning outcome reads "Evaluate competing scientific claims that inform environmental debates." Two different faculty members suggested possible revisions to this phrasing. In both cases, the suggestions came from faculty not working in the sciences, and both included some rationale for their comments. One said:

A more inclusive, but in my view still appropriate, phrasing of the objective might be: "Evaluate ways in which scientific claims inform environmental debates." This would encompass the original phrasing of the objective, while not requiring that ER courses (many of which are not based in the sciences) have units specifically focused on examining scientific facts and the means by which those facts can be verified or falsified.

Another wrote:

I suggest to the Faculty Learning Community that this particular learning outcome delete "scientific" and replace it with "scholarly." This amendment would recognize that critiques of sophisticated arguments of all types—including scientific, but also historical and others—are essential to participating in environmental debates today.

Both of these comments suggest that there may be some confusion among faculty in interpreting what the third ER learning outcome is asking of them, or concerns that it targets an objective that is too narrow. This may be especially true among faculty in disciplines other than natural resources or the natural sciences.

It is worth mentioning, too, that in at least one case a faculty member cited the third learning outcome differently than it is stated on the college website, as: "Evaluate competing scientific and political claims that inform environmental debates." It isn't clear whether this was an error on the part of the faculty member, or if there is some source that actually lists the learning outcome in this way. In this particular portfolio, however, the alignment was explained in a way that focused on "political" more so than "scientific" claims. It could be, then, that this faculty member, too, would be in favor of a revision of the learning outcome in line with the two aforementioned suggestions."

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the quantitative and especially qualitative feedback provided by the FLC members for the three categories of the GEP Sidebar Level – Cultural and Environmental Awareness, here are the general considerations and recommendations for the General Education Committee.

- Implement Revisions/ Changes to GEP Sidebar Level. Some suggestions include,
 - Divorce the sidebar requirements from the Investigation Level
 - Revise the LO for each subcategory
 - Evaluate the viability of assessing a double set of learning outcomes for courses carrying multiple GEP designations to adequately meet all the learning outcomes
- Revise policy/decisions regarding what happens when course portfolios do not meet expectations for GEP designation. Some suggestions include,
 - Remove the GEP designation for the courses which do not provide substantial learning activities to achieve the GEP requirements for this level
 - Consider qualifications for the instructors teaching such GEP courses as per the HLC requirements
 - Further evaluate grandfathered courses in this category
 - Invite course instructors and their chairs to consult with the Director of General Education Program prior to removing the GEP designation from the course
 - Arrange a professional development workshop lead by the Director of General Education Program and the Assessment Coordinator with FLC Representatives (potentially) to provide instructors an array of pedagogical resources, illustrating which types of learning activities and assessment tools could support the learning outcomes for the particular GEP learning outcomes
- Update Course Portfolio Rubric
 - Refine the criteria descriptions. For instance, for the criterion “Explanation of Course Alignment with GEP LOs,” it would be beneficial to concentrate on the substance (i.e. how profound the alignment is) rather than on the mere fact that there is an alignment between the course LOs and GEP LOs.
 - Consider when and/or whether future course portfolios will need to show evidence of meeting all the GEP Category Learning Outcomes.
 - Consider to include overall score to the feedback rubric
- Take advantage of campus resources, for instance, the Center for Inclusive Teaching and Learning
 - Dr. Lindsay M. Bernhagen’s expertise in diversity issues would be instrumental in creating professional development workshops for the Sidebar Level Categories.
- Change structure and formatting for the course portfolios. Some suggestions include,
 - Simplify format. PDF format seems to be preferred by the FLC members.
 - Fix box-formatting issues with cutoff word limit in the current forms in Word.
 - Evaluate other programs for data submissions

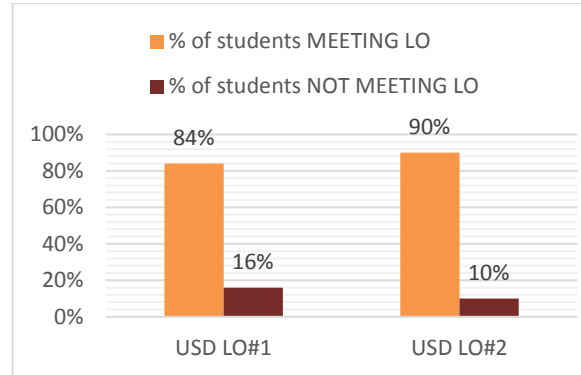
CONCLUDING REMARKS

The GEP Assessment Process for the Sidebar Level was successful in revealing satisfactory student learning in these categories as well as the areas of improvement in General Education instruction that need to be addressed in the future.

APPENDIX

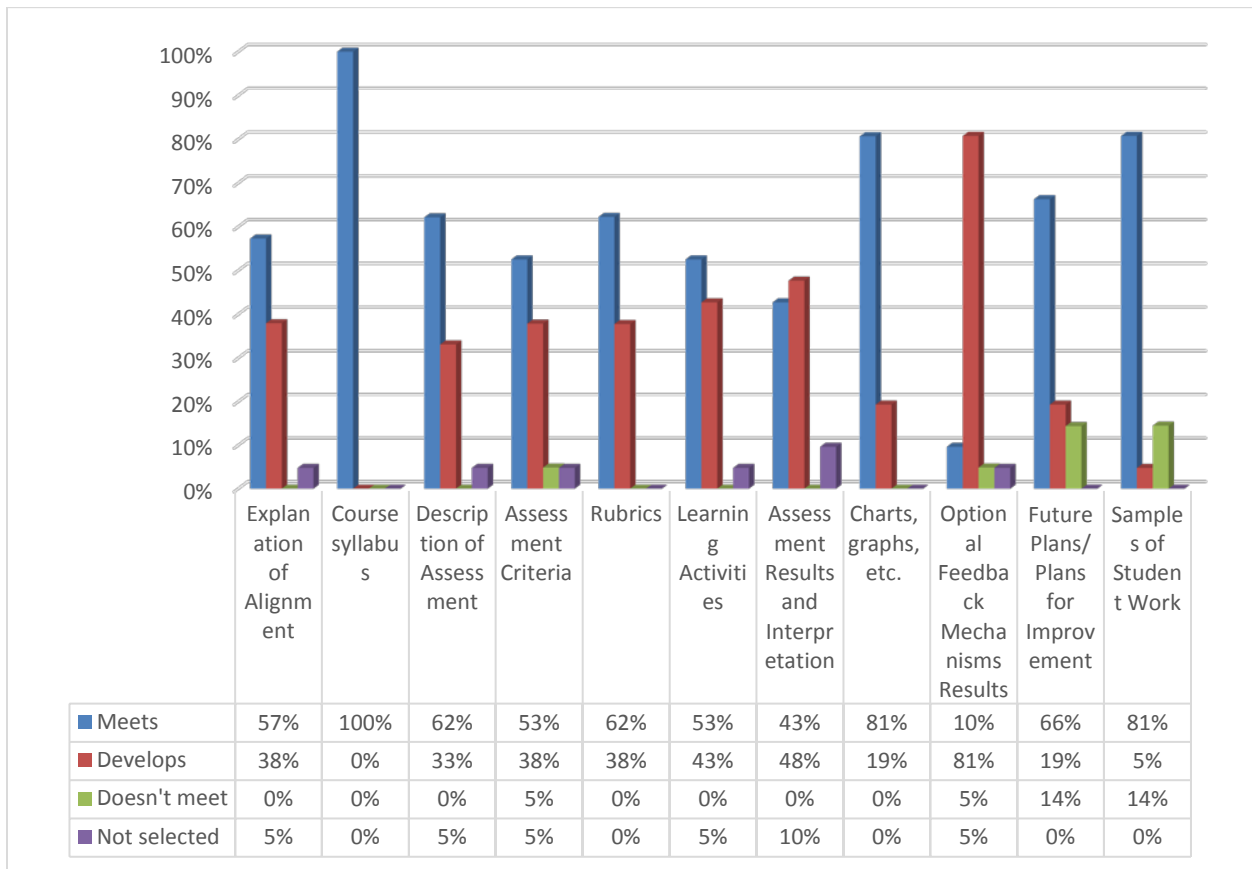
Graph A.1: Detailed Summary of Student Learning Assessment for U.S. Diversity

	# of students assessed for LO	# of course portfolios assessing LO	% of students MEETING LO	% of students NOT MEETING LO
USD LO#1	837	17	84%	16%
USD LO#2	440	9	90%	10%



Total number of students assessed in this category = 1,017

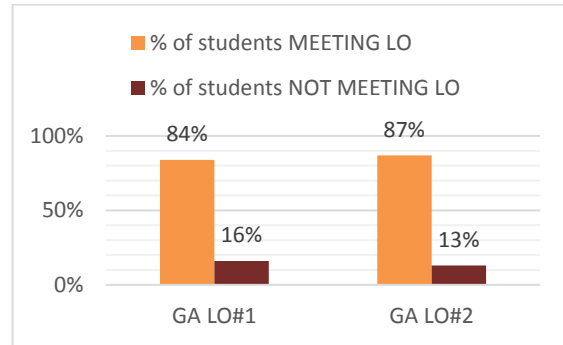
Graph A.2: Detailed Summary of Course Portfolio Rubric Data from Faculty Learning Community for U.S. Diversity



Total number of course portfolios assessed in this category =17

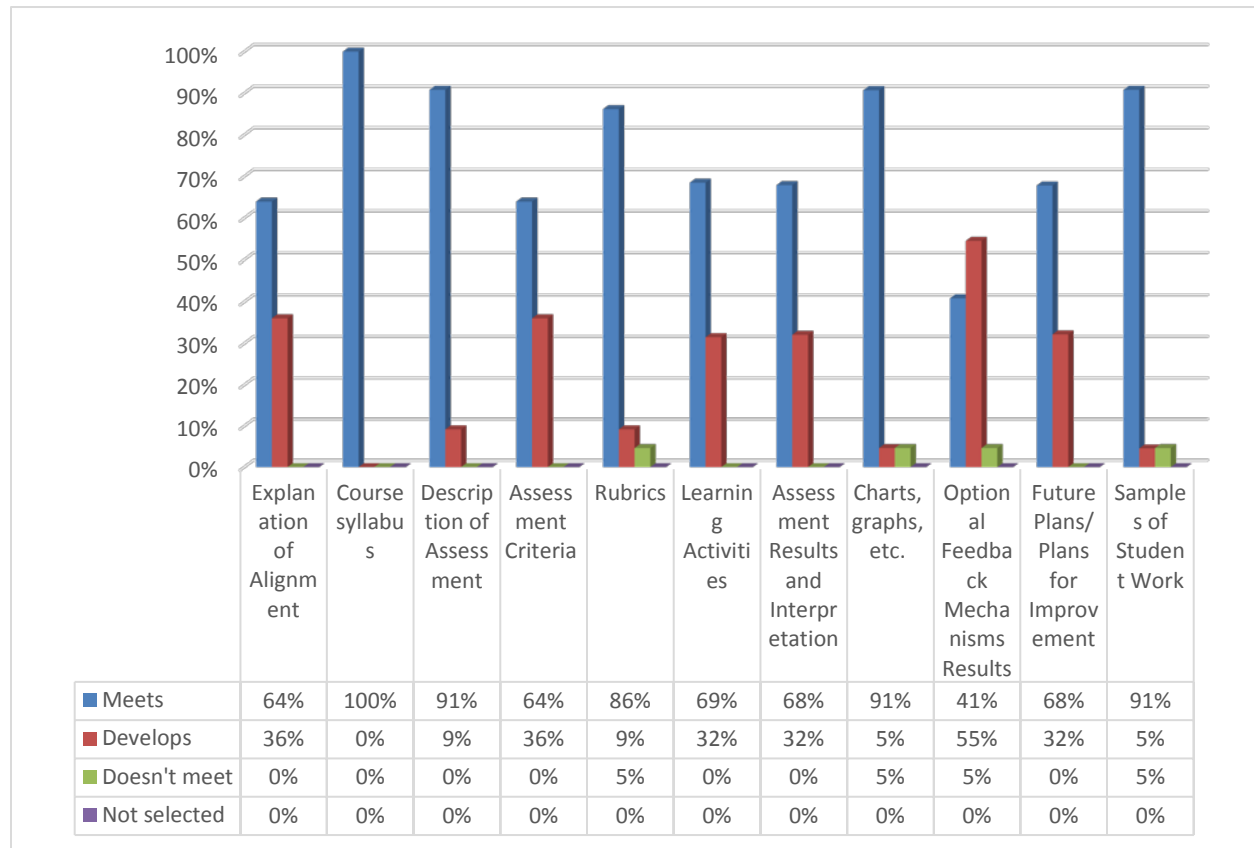
Graph A.3: Detailed Summary of Student Learning Assessment for Global Awareness

	# of students assessed for LO	# of course portfolios assessing LO	% of students MEETING LO	% of students NOT MEETING LO
GA LO#1	879	20	84%	16%
GA LO#2	288	7	87%	13%



Total number of students assessed in this category = 963

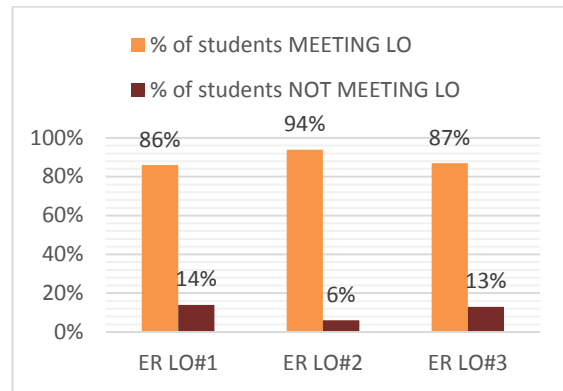
Graph A.4: Detailed Summary of Course Portfolio Rubric Data from Faculty Learning Community for Global Awareness



Total number of course portfolios assessed in this category =22

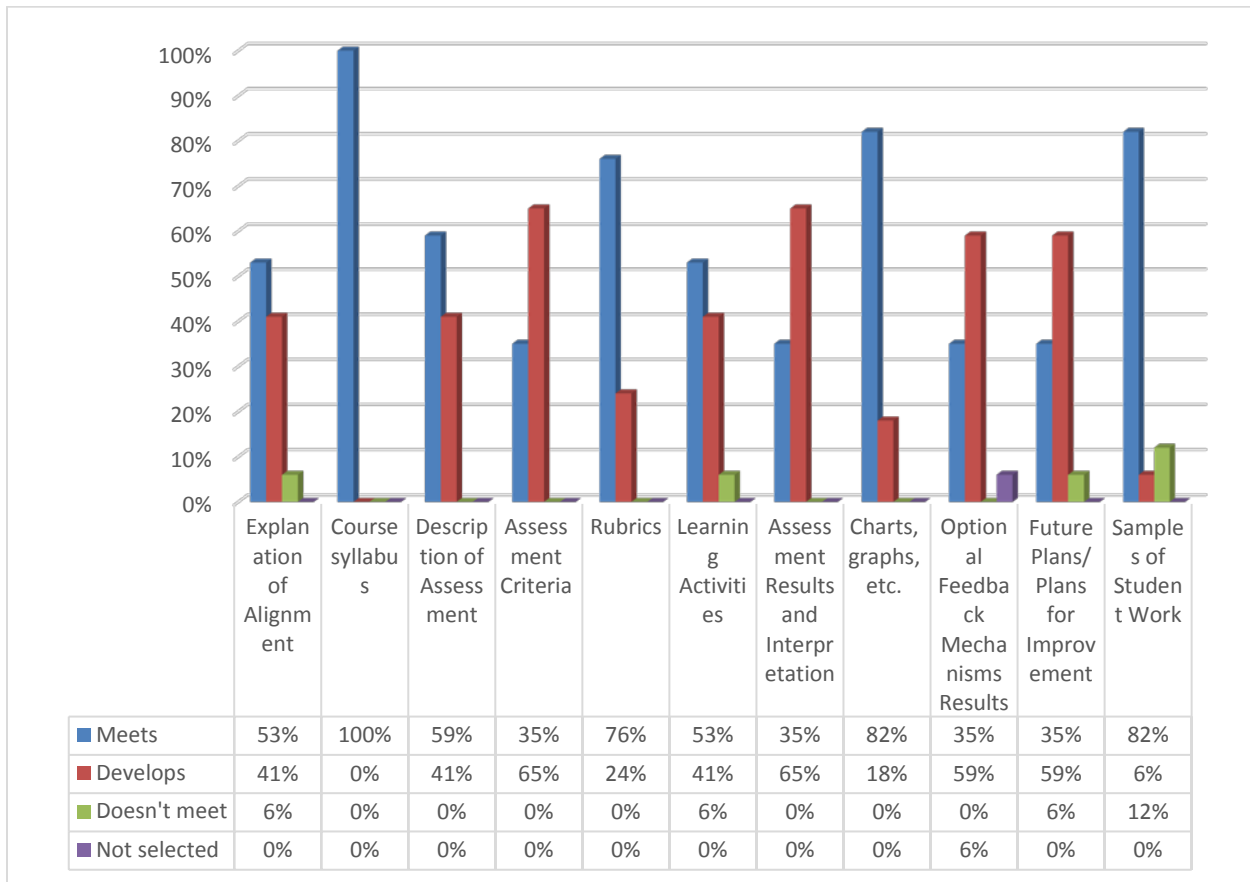
Graph A.5: Detailed Summary of Student Learning Assessment for Environmental Responsibility

	# of students assessed for LO	# of course portfolios assessing LO	% of students MEETING LO	% of students NOT MEETING LO
ER LO#1	567	10	86%	14%
ER LO#2	499	7	94%	6%
ER LO#3	362	6	87%	13%



Total number of students assessed in this category = 1,046

Graph A.6: Detailed Summary of Course Portfolio Rubric Data from Faculty Learning Community for Environmental Responsibility



Total number of course portfolios assessed in this category =17