Learning Goals and Outcomes: Explanations and Means of Assessment

The learning goals and outcomes are inspired by feedback provided by faculty, students, and alumni and the American Association of College and University's LEAP (Liberal Education & America's Promise) Initiative. The General Education Learning Objectives (GELO) working group used the scholarly literature from this initiative in conjunction with SU's Mission Statement and recently approved General Education Program Principles to craft a set of five broad learning goal categories, within which specific outcomes are articulated. Many of these outcomes corresponded to the results of a recent faculty, student, and alumni survey conducted by the General Education Steering Committee. Furthermore, many of the individual outcomes map very closely to the LEAP Initiative's VALUE (Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education) rubrics, which provide more detailed descriptions for assessment purposes. In other words, the list of broad learning goals and the longer list of learning outcomes represent a combination of SU's unique undergraduate experience and the best practices of general education as defined by AAC&U.

The GELO working group developed descriptions, rationales, and/or source materials for the specific outcomes below.

Where possible, the GELO working group tied specific capabilities to LEAP Rubrics and other available assessment models. The following represents the best scholarship in each area in order to define and assess specific outcomes.

Foundational Knowledge

This category is an attempt to reconcile the new SU Experience (General Education) with COMAR regulations concerning the distribution of classes across disciplines. In addition, the first category of the AAC&U's "Essential Learning Outcomes" includes "Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Physical and Natural World," which, according to AAC&U is accomplished "through study in the sciences and mathematics, social sciences, humanities, histories, languages, and the arts."

Essential Capabilities

The second category of the LEAP "Essential Learning Outcomes," titled "Intellectual and Practical Skills," includes "inquiry and analysis, critical and creative thinking, written and oral communication, quantitative literacy, information literacy, and teamwork and problem solving." According to AAC&U, these skills should be "practiced extensively, across the curriculum, in the context of progressively more challenging problems, projects, and standards for performance."

The General Education Learning Outcomes working group and the General Education Steering Committee used this as the basis for their description and categorization of our "essential capabilities." In addition, the Steering Committee expanded our list of literacies to include areas that appeared frequently in student and faculty surveys, such as financial literacy.

- **Written and Oral Communication**: the LEAP Initiative provides specific rubrics for both written and oral communication that define milestone competencies—*LEAP VALUE rubric on Written Communication* and *LEAP VALUE rubric on Oral Communication*
- **Information Literacy:** According to both the LEAP Initiative and the National Forum on Information Literacy, Information Literacy is "the ability to know when and where there is a need for information, to be able to identify, locate, evaluate, and effectively and responsibly use and share that information for the problem at hand."—*LEAP VALUE rubric on Information Literacy*
- **Quantitative Literacy**: "A 'habit of mind,' competency, and comfort in working with numerical data. Individuals with strong QL skills possess the ability to reason and solve quantitative problems from a wide variety of authentic contexts and everyday life situations. They understand and can create sophisticated arguments supported by quantitative evidence and they can clearly communicate those arguments in a variety of formats (using words, tables, graphs, mathematical equations, etc.)"— *LEAP VALUE Rubric on Quantitative Literacy*
- **Critical Reasoning:** "A habit of mind characterized by the comprehensive exploration of issues, artifacts, and events before accepting or formulating an opinion or conclusion"—*LEAP VALUE rubric on Critical Thinking*
- **Aesthetic Literacy:** This capability borrows heavily from the Lincoln Center Institute's (LCI) "Capacities for Imaginative Learning"—an approach to aesthetic education that builds upon the works of philosophers and educational advocates John Dewey and Maxine Greene. For more than 30 years the LCI has worked with teachers and students to integrate the arts across the curriculum. At its heart, the "Capacities for Imaginative Learning" incorporates two of John Dewey's most famous comments about education. They are defined as the "principles designed to articulate and assess what might be learned and understood by students within aesthetic and education practice. They represent the habits of mind of a vigorous and creative intellect. And they are the framework and benchmarks . . . to further develop and measure imagination and its impact on the curriculum."—Scott Noppe-Brandon, *Aesthetic Education, Inquiry, and the Imagination* (New York: Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, 2007).
- **Scientific Literacy:** Scientific Literacy **"**is a general understanding of science as a way of knowing and the types of questions that science can and cannot answer."—James Trefil and Robert Hazen, *Science and the Educated American: A Core Component of a Liberal Education* (American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2010).

<u>Personal Development</u>

The third category of the AAC&U's Essential Learning Outcomes includes "Personal and Social Responsibility." These two areas seemed most directly connected to SU's most recent mission statement, which highlights our university's responsibility to "empower our students with the knowledge, skills, and core values that contribute to active citizenship, gainful employment, and life-long learning in a democratic society and interdependent world." In addition, the mission statement includes a series of values that include "civic engagement and diversity." Thus, the General Education Learning Outcomes working group and the General Education Steering Committee separated Personal and Social Responsibility into two categories in order to highlight their importance to the SU Experience.

- **Personal Wellness:** Wellness includes many different components, including physical, spiritual, emotional, and social health. While AAC&U has not yet developed a VALUE rubric for Personal Wellness, other universities have used the VALUE rubric model to develop their own (we might use these as templates for our own assessment). For example, the University of Central Oklahoma has produced a VALUE-like rubric for Health and Wellness
- **Ethical Reasoning:** "Ethical Reasoning is reasoning about right and wrong human conduct. It requires students to be able to assess their own ethical values and the social context of problems, recognize ethical issues in a variety of settings, think about how different ethical perspectives might be applied to ethical dilemmas, and consider the ramifications of alternate actions."—*LEAP VALUE rubric on Ethical Reasoning*
- **Personal Values and Self Identity:** Students will examine topics in relation to their own values and be challenged to explore differing perspectives and gain a greater appreciation for how their own beliefs and values are formed and continue to be formed.
- **Intellectual Curiosity and Academic Inquiry:** Students will develop an understanding of the process in "designing, evaluating, and implementing a strategy to answer an open-ended question or achieve a desired goal." *LEAP VALUE rubric on Problem Solving*
- **Lifelong Learning:** Students will be prepared to carry their knowledge, skills, intellectual curiosity, and values beyond the university and into their post-graduate lives. According to the *LEAP VALUE rubric* on "Foundations and Skills for Lifelong Learning," lifelong learning is "all purposeful learning, activity, undertaken on an ongoing basis with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competence."
- **Financial Literacy:** Although we have not identified a means for assessing this as part of general education, nor have we found a national standard for financial literacy as a component of general education, we included it here due to the high volume of student and faculty feedback that identified it as an essential skill. Salisbury University offers Financial Literacy options through Student Affairs and has established Financial Literacy rubrics and standards as part of the TRiO-Achieve program. These workshops and sessions are available to students as mandated by the United States Financial Literacy and Education Commission, which was established by the Fair and Accurate Credit Transactions (FACT) Act of 2003. http://www.salisbury.edu/trio/financial-literacy.html

Social Responsibility

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- **Civic Engagement:** "Working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values, and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes."—Thomas Ehrlich, ed., *Civic Responsibility and Higher Education* (Oryx Press, 2000). In addition, AAC&U provides rubrics and milestones for assessing Civic Engagement in the classroom—see *LEAP VALUE rubric on Civic Engagement*
- **Intercultural Knowledge:** "A set of cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills and characteristics that support effective and appropriate interaction in a variety of cultural contexts."—J.M. Bennett, "Transformative Training: Designing Programs for Cultural Learning" in *Contemporary Leadership and Intercultural Competence* (Sage, 2008).
- **Racial and Cultural Diversity:** Students will be able to articulate differences in how race intersects with other cultural markers, including class, gender, religion, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. In addition, students will investigate varied forms of historical racism and explore what it means for individuals to navigate within a multi-cultural world.— language borrowed from the Diversity and Difference requirements of Towson University's Core and the Race and Diversity requirement of Temple University
- **Knowledge of Emerging and Global Issues:** Students will investigate the consequences of an increased migration of people, goods, and information around the globe shapes in the twenty-first century and how the volume and speed of these migrations influences economies, nations, people, and the natural world.

Making Connections and Addressing Big Questions

This concept of connected learning and "Big Questions" comes directly from the AAC&U. Part of the AAC&U's "Essential Learning Outcomes" includes courses that are "focused by engagement with big questions, both contemporary and enduring." This concept drives the general education curricula of other USM institutions, such as UMD's I-Series courses and the Towson "Perspectives" Seminars. While at at the annual AAC&U conference on general education assessment, SU faculty and staff listened to other universities explain their general education revisions, such as Indiana University-Purdue University at Fort Wayne's "Wicked Problems" approach. For an example of what these "Big Questions" might entail, please see the Center for the Study of Technology and Society's webpage: https://www.bigquestionsonline.com/

In addition, the AAC&U LEAP Initiative provides a means of assessing a couple of means of accomplishing interconnected learning, including:

- **Teamwork**: "Knowledge of effective team building, ability to perform effectively in teamwork."—*LEAP VALUE rubric on Teamwork*
- **Interdisciplinary Perspectives:** "Students will connect, synthesize, and transform ideas across disciplines."—*LEAP VALUE rubric on Integrated Learning*

ACCOMPANYING DOCUMENTS