

USD General Education Assessment Handbook

PRINCIPLES AND PROCEDURES USED IN GENERAL EDUCATION
ASSESSMENT

Office of Institutional Research, Planning & Assessment
VERSION 1.1

Table of Contents

Introduction	2
USD Mission and Vision	2
Board of Regents Policies on General Education Assessment	3
Process Overview	4
Process Stages	4
Stage 1 – Selection of Course Section Sample	5
Stage 2 – Evaluation of Student Works	5
Stage 3 – Artifact Collection and Submission	6
Stage 4 – Assessment Summit	6
Stage 5 – Compilation of Campus-Level Report	7
Stage 6 – Compilation of System-Level Report	7
Typical Timeline	8

Introduction

The concept of “general” education – i.e., broad instruction across a variety of traditions, perspectives, and disciplines – has existed at the heart of the university experience for centuries. The University of South Dakota, with its distinct focus on the liberal arts, views its general education curriculum as a signature element of its core value proposition. Consequently, the quality of this curriculum occupies a position of tremendous importance in the life of the university.

This handbook outlines the processes and procedures used for general education assessment at the University of South Dakota. The handbook was developed by the USD Office of Institutional Research, Planning, and Assessment (IRPA), which is responsible for overseeing all general education assessment activities at the university.

USD Mission and Vision

South Dakota Board of Regents (SDBOR) Policy 1:10:1 defines the university’s mission statement as follows:

“The legislature established The University of South Dakota as the liberal arts university to meet the needs of the State and region by providing undergraduate and graduate programs in the liberal arts and sciences, and professional education in business, education, fine arts, law, and medicine, and other courses or programs as the Board of Regents may determine. (SDCL 13-57-1)

The Board implemented SDCL 13-57-1 by authorizing undergraduate and graduate programs in the liberal arts and sciences and in professional education and by requiring the University to promote excellence in teaching and learning, to support research, scholarly and creative activities, and to provide service to the State of South Dakota, the region, and beyond. The University of South Dakota is the comprehensive university with the South Dakota System of Higher Education.”¹

The vision of the University of South Dakota is to be the best small, public flagship university in the nation built upon a liberal arts foundation.

¹ Reproduced from SDBOR Policy 1:10:1.

Board of Regents Policies on General Education Assessment

The general education curriculum used at South Dakota’s public universities is underpinned by six learning goals adopted by SDBOR. These goals are articulated in SDBOR policies 2:7 and 2:26, and are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1
SDBOR General Education Goals

GOAL 1	<i>Students will write effectively and responsibly and will understand and interpret the written expressions of others.</i>
GOAL 2	<i>Students will communicate effectively and responsibly through listening and speaking.</i>
GOAL 3	<i>Students will understand the organization, potential, and diversity of the human community through study of the social sciences.</i>
GOAL 4	<i>Students will understand the diversity and complexity of the human experience through study of the arts and humanities.</i>
GOAL 5	<i>Students will understand and apply fundamental mathematical processes and reasoning.</i>
GOAL 6	<i>Students will understand the fundamental principles of the natural sciences and apply scientific methods of inquiry to investigate the natural world.</i>

Each of these goals is tied to a fixed list of courses – approved by the system Academic Affairs Council – that deliver content associated with the goal.² Further, each goal is operationalized by a distinct set of student learning outcomes maintained by the system General Education Committee. These learning outcomes represent the measurable skills and competencies that are expected to be delivered through the general education curriculum.³

The system General Education Committee ultimately is responsible for the assessment of the university system’s general education curriculum.⁴ However, each regental campus is charged with developing and maintaining a process for the regular, systematic assessment of student learning as it relates to the general education curriculum. The remainder of this document spells out the principles and procedures used at USD for this purpose.

² These course lists are published in SDBOR administrative guidelines 8.4 and 8.3. For reference, the system Academic Affairs Council (AAC) is a system-level committee that is responsible for academic policy management at the system level. AAC is constituted by senior academic affairs leaders from each campus.

³ General education student learning outcomes are given in SDBOR administrative guidelines 8.4 and 8.3. The system General Education Committee is a cross-institutional committee charged with advising the system Academic Affairs Council on all policy matters pertaining to general education.

⁴ See SDBOR policies 2:7, 2:26, and 2:11.

Process Overview

The basic process for general education assessment in the South Dakota university system is delineated in SDBOR administrative guideline 8.6. As outlined in this document, each SDBOR general education goal will be reviewed on a regular three-year rotation. The full schedule of upcoming reviews is shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2
Assessment Schedule

2017-2018	Goal 1 (Written Communication) Goal 5 (Mathematics)
2018-2019	Goal 3 (Social Sciences) Goal 6 (Natural Sciences)
2019-2020	Goal 2 (Oral Communication) Goal 4 (Humanities and Arts)
2020-2021	Goal 1 (Written Communication) Goal 5 (Mathematics)
2021-2022	Goal 3 (Social Sciences) Goal 6 (Natural Sciences)
2022-2023	Goal 2 (Oral Communication) Goal 4 (Humanities and Arts)

The assessment process itself focuses on the evaluation of student learning outcomes associated with system general education goals. In a general sense, the complete assessment cycle for a given goal can be thought of as occurring in two phases. First, a sample of campus faculty will evaluate progress toward student learning outcomes by reviewing student artifacts in goal-associated general education sections they themselves lead. Second, aggregate data generated from these rubric-driven artifact reviews, as well as the reviewed artifacts themselves, are then forwarded to a system-level “Assessment Summit” for validation by system-level faculty panels. Data from the complete process are then used to support curricular and pedagogical improvement across the campus and system.

Process Stages

To carry out the basic assessment framework prescribed in SDBOR guideline 8.6, the USD Office of Institutional Research, Planning, and Assessment (IRPA) has developed the following six-step cycle for general education assessment on the USD campus.⁵

⁵ In some cases, the USD process may – in an effort to generate better or more targeted data – entail procedures that exceed SDBOR minimum requirements.

For any given goal under review, the following process will be used:

Stage 1 – Selection of Course Section Sample

Under SDBOR guidelines, campuses are expected to select a sample of course sections from the total population of scheduled sections associated with the goal under review. Accordingly, IRPA staff annually will generate a sampling frame showing all eligible sections for fall and spring terms combined, and will select up to 30 sections for review.⁶ For section populations of 30 sections or fewer, all sections will be selected. For section populations greater than 30 sections, 30 sections will be randomly sampled from the full population.

No individual faculty member will have more than one course section selected for review in any one assessment cycle. Further, in an effort to provide selected faculty members with as much lead time as possible, this sampling procedure ordinarily will be conducted during the summer preceding the subsequent fall-spring review period.

Stage 2 – Evaluation of Student Works

This stage can be divided into two sub-stages: (1) Selection of artifact type(s) and (2) Review of student artifacts.

Stage 2a – Selection of Artifact Type(s)

The SDBOR general education assessment model is founded on the direct evaluation of student learning outcomes through a review of student artifacts. Consequently, for each course section selected in stage one above, the instructor of record will select one or more artifact types (e.g., mid-term essay, research paper, final exam) through which the goal's student learning outcomes will be directly evaluated. The selected artifact type(s) should offer an effective means of measuring student achievement of at least one goal-associated learning outcome. Faculty must select at least one artifact type for each student learning outcome, but may use the same artifact type for multiple student learning outcomes.⁷ IRPA staff will provide all selected faculty with a list of goal student learning outcomes and suggested artifact types prior to the start of the term of review.

Stage 2b – Review of Student Artifacts

Once the faculty member has selected an appropriate artifact type (or types), she or he may proceed with the actual review of student artifacts. All artifact reviews must be conducted using rubrics approved by the system General Education Committee. Approved rubrics will be provided to faculty members by IRPA staff prior to the start of the term of review.

⁶ Course section populations will vary considerably by goal. For example, USD offers only a few courses associated with general education goal two (i.e., oral communication), but offers over fifty courses associated with goal four (humanities and arts). The number of sections offered under each of these courses is similarly variable.

⁷ For instance, for a general education goal with two student learning outcomes, a faculty member may evaluate the two learning outcomes using two different artifact types (e.g., an essay and a portfolio) or a single artifact type (e.g., the essay alone).

For course sections with 30 or fewer enrolled students, the faculty member should review all artifacts (of a given type) using the rubric. For example, if the faculty member elects to use the course's final exam as a selected artifact type, she or he should assess (using the rubric) final exams submitted by all students enrolled in the section. However, for large sections (those with more than 30 enrolled students), 30 artifacts should be randomly sampled for review. IRPA staff will – upon faculty request – assist in the sampling of students in large sections.

Rubric reviews will result in the assignment of all reviewed artifacts into one of three performance categories: *below proficient*, *proficient*, and *exemplary*. Descriptions and criteria for these categories are provided in each rubric. The overall performance distribution for a given section will be recorded by the faculty member – along with other basic information about the section – on a cover sheet template provided by IRPA staff.

Following artifact review, faculty will transmit the following materials to IRPA staff: (1) the completed cover sheet template showing the aggregate results of the rubric review, (2) the syllabus for the reviewed section, and (3) electronic copies of all reviewed artifacts with associated rubric grades. IRPA staff will coordinate with individual faculty members in arranging an efficient, secure file transfer method. All materials must be transmitted to IRPA staff by the regular grading due date for the term of review.

Stage 3 – Artifact Collection and Submission

IRPA staff will collect and collate all section-level materials (i.e., cover sheets, syllabi, and artifacts) submitted by faculty. All cover sheets and syllabi will be forwarded to the SDBOR system office for use in summer Assessment Summit activities (described below). Additionally, IRPA staff will randomly select a sample of 60-90 evaluated student artifacts for secondary review by Assessment Summit faculty.⁸ Prior to transmission to the SDBOR system office, IRPA staff will ensure that all personally-identifying data are redacted from student artifacts, and that necessary tracking codes (e.g., institution and course) are affixed to all submitted materials. All materials must be transmitted to the system office prior to the start of the summer Assessment Summit.⁹

Stage 4 – Assessment Summit

Each year, the SDBOR system office organizes and coordinates a two-day summer Assessment Summit. As described in SDBOR guidelines, Assessment Summits are undertaken with at least three primary aims in mind. First, these events are used to validate approved rubrics through a secondary review of student artifacts by panels of system faculty. Second, Summits offer a forum for faculty to develop recommended changes to student learning outcomes, associated rubrics, and suggested artifact types. Third, Assessment Summits provide an opportunity to benchmark student learning outcome data across institutions.

⁸ This estimate refers to the number of artifacts submitted per goal per year.

⁹ The exact dates for summer Assessment Summits will be determined by the system General Education Committee. Summits are expected to begin within four weeks of the end of the spring term.

Both goals under review during a given year are addressed at the same Assessment Summit. For purposes of Assessment Summit staffing, USD is required to provide one assessment staff member (total) and two faculty members (per goal) for each Assessment Summit. Faculty participation by USD faculty will be coordinated by IRPA staff, and is limited to tenured, tenure-track, or term contract faculty who (1) are from disciplines offering sections associated with a goal under review or (2) are from a closely related field or (3) have direct experience related to the goal being assessed. Stipends and per diem payments will be provided to all participating USD faculty members.

Findings surfacing from each Assessment Summit will be communicated from the system office back to campus personnel for use in the development of Institutional Assessment Reports (described below).

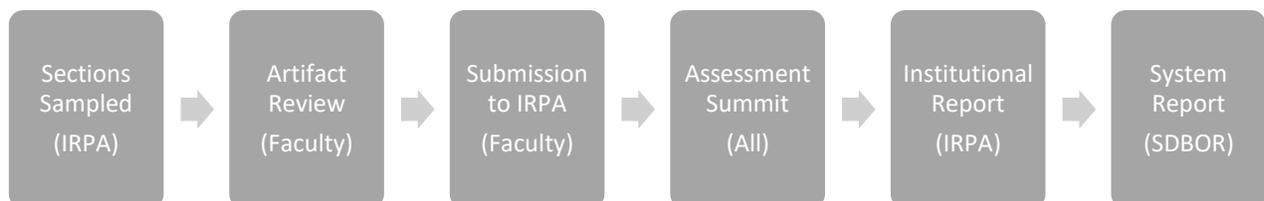
Stage 5 – Compilation of Campus-Level Report

Following each Assessment Summit, IRPA staff will compile an Institutional Assessment Report for each goal reviewed during the latest assessment cycle. At a minimum, this report will include cumulative performance data distributions for all selected course sections. In addition, the report should include institutionally-germane findings emerging from the most recent Assessment Summit. The report also may include discussion of institutional actions that will occur as a result of the review, as well as new insights regarding the overall assessment process. Institutional Assessment Report documents must be submitted to the SDBOR system office no later than October 31st of the year immediately following the associated artifact review period.

Stage 6 – Compilation of System-Level Report

Following a review of Institutional Assessment Reports from all regental campuses by the system General Education Committee, the SDBOR system office will develop a system-level report to be delivered to the system Academic Affairs Council. This report will encapsulate the cumulative findings from all preceding process stages (see Figure 1), and will provide a starting point for any system-level policy change sought as a result of the completed assessment process.

Figure 1
Assessment Stages and Responsible Parties



Typical Timeline

Table 3 below summarizes the major waypoints and expected timeline for general education assessment activities for any individual assessment cycle. This timeline is subject to change pending future system-level or campus-level policy actions.

Table 3
Assessment Cycle Timeline

AUGUST	IRPA selects course sections for review and notifies faculty; IRPA provides selected faculty members with (1) text of general education goal, (2) text of student learning outcome(s), (3) approved rubric, (4) list of suggested artifact types, (5) cover sheet template
FALL TERM ENDS	Selected faculty (fall term) submit to IRPA (1) completed cover sheet template for selected section, (2) syllabus for selected section, (3) electronic copies of all reviewed artifacts with associated rubric scores
SPRING TERM ENDS	Selected faculty (spring term) submit to IRPA (1) completed cover sheet template for selected section, (2) syllabus for selected section, (3) electronic copies of all reviewed artifacts with associated rubric scores
MAY	IRPA submits to the SDBOR system office (1) completed cover sheet templates from all selected sections, (2) syllabi from all selected sections, (3) sample of redacted student artifacts
JUNE	Assessment Summit held; system office reports results to campuses
OCTOBER	IRPA submits Institutional Assessment Report to SDBOR system office
DECEMBER	System office presents final system report to the full Board of Regents