

AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT IN PRACTICE

An Example from the Department of English and Philosophy

The following document was distributed to faculty in the Department of English and Philosophy as a means to provide an example of how “authentic assessment” looks and works in practice for that department.

Determining “Authentic” Student Learning Outcomes

For all our programs at DMC, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) provides program and course objectives broken into three main areas:

- Exemplary Educational Objectives (EEOs)
- Intellectual Competencies (ICs)
- Perspectives (Ps)

Programs and courses nominate EEOs, ICs, and Ps that reflect what is being taught and, more specifically, what students are learning. These become the course objectives, and **what students know** – or should know – **at the end of a class are the *student learning outcomes*** (SLOs).

Objectives need to directly relate to Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs). How that link is clearly established is by ensuring the objectives are:

- **Measurable:** able to be authentically assessed in order to measure student learning outcomes (SLOs);
- **Measured:** Implementing authentic assessment on a regular basis; and
- **Meaningful:** Doing something *with* the assessment data, such as modifying the way a course is taught

WEAVEOnline is a software program that not only replaces our old paper-based unit plans, but helps us more actively plan and assess an “authentic assessment loop” – one where the assessment data gathered one year actively feeds into the planning loop for teaching and assessment the next, and so forth.

Although our WEAVE program contains four distinct “group areas” for our department, (Developmental English, English, Philosophy, and the Stone Writing Center), our English courses have been separated into two assessment groups:

- Developmental English (ENGL 0305/0306 and ENGL 0307); and
- English (ENGL 1301, ENGL 1302 and Sophomore Literature)

Both have their own WEAVE mission statements that both guide and reflect course objectives and assessment measures.

Currently, the Developmental English mission statement reads as follows:

The Department of English, Philosophy, and Education offers students the opportunity to improve their writing, communication, and critical thinking skills to build a strong academic foundation in preparation for college-level courses.

And, the current, working mission statement for English reads:

Through the study of ideas expressed in the English language, the Department of English, Philosophy, and Education's mission is:

- to inspire depth and expression of critical thought
- to develop skill in communicating that thought; and to
- promote the value of compassionate, thinking human beings who actively contribute to development of self and society

Our assessment primarily focuses on the Exemplary Educational Objectives (EEOs), with a secondary focus on the Intellectual Competencies (ICs) and the Perspectives (Ps).

EEOs are divided into several areas, with some examples being:

- COMM: Communications
- MATH: Mathematics
- NSCI: Natural Science
- HVPA: Humanities and Visual/Performing Arts
- SOCI: Sociology

For our courses, we mainly look at two: COMM and HVPA

- COMM: Developmental English and First-Year Composition English classes
- HVPA: Sophomore Literature classes

There are six COMM objectives and seven for HVPA, a total of 13. This is why, originally, we had 13 EEO objectives for our English courses (developmental through to sophomore literature).

Each objective has its own descriptive definition; however, how we apply these definitions depends on the course for which it is being used for assessment.

COMMUNICATION

Used primarily for ENGL 0305/0306, ENGL 0307, ENGL 1301 and ENGL 1302

- COMM 1: To understand and demonstrate writing and speaking processes through invention, organization, drafting, revision, editing, and presentation
- COMM 2: To understand the importance of specifying audience and purpose and to select appropriate communication choices

- COMM 3: To understand and appropriately apply modes of expression, i.e., descriptive, expository, narrative, scientific, and self expressive, in written, visual, and oral communication
- COMM 4: To participate effectively in groups with emphasis on listening, critical and reflective thinking, and responding
- COMM 5: To understand and apply basic principles of critical thinking, problem solving, and technical proficiency in the development of exposition and argument
- COMM 6: To develop the ability to research and write a documented paper, and/or to give an oral presentation

HUMANITIES AND VISUAL/PERFORMING ARTS

Used primarily for Sophomore Literature

- HVPA 1: To demonstrate awareness of the scope and variety of works in the arts and humanities
- HVPA 2: To understand those works as expressions of individual and human values within an historical and social context
- HVPA 3: To respond critically to works in the arts and humanities
- HVPA 4: To engage in the creative process or interpretive performance and comprehend the physical and intellectual demands required of the author or visual or performing artist
- HVPA 5: To articulate an informed personal reaction to works in the arts and humanities
- HVPA 6: To develop an appreciation for the aesthetic principles that guide or govern the humanities and arts
- HVPA 7: To demonstrate knowledge of the influence of literature, philosophy, and/or the arts on intercultural experiences

OTHER EEOs

At times, there are other EEOs from other areas that apply to what we teaching and what our students are learning, such as:

- SOCI 12: To identify and understand differences and commonalities within diverse cultures

ICs and Ps

The breakdown of the Intellectual Competencies (ICs) are:

IC R:	Reading
IC W:	Writing
IC S:	Speaking
IC L:	Listening
IC CT:	Critical Thinknig

And, as is evident from the descriptions below, the secondary focus of the ICs and, to follow, the Perspectives (Ps), are “general” enough to be reflected in much of what we do:

IC R Reading

Reading at the college-level means the ability to analyze and interpret a variety of printed materials – books, articles, and documents. A core curriculum should offer students the opportunity to master both general methods of analyzing printed materials and specific methods for analyzing the subject matter of individual disciplines.

IC W Writing

Competency in writing is the ability to produce clear, correct, and coherent prose adapted to purpose, occasion, and audience. Although correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation are each a *sine qua non* in any composition, they do not automatically ensure that the composition itself makes sense or that the writer has much of anything to say. Students need to be familiar with the writing process including how to discover a topic and how to develop and organize it, how to phrase it effectively for their audience. These abilities can be acquired only through practice and reflection.

IC S Speaking

Competence in speaking is the ability to communicate orally in clear, coherent, and persuasive language appropriate to purpose, occasion, and audience. Developing this competency includes acquiring poise and developing control of the language through experience in making presentations to small groups, to large groups, and through the media.

IC L Listening

Listening at the college level means the ability to analyze and interpret various forms of spoken communication

IC CT Critical Thinking

Critical thinking embraces methods for applying both qualitative and quantitative skills analytically and creatively to subject matter in order to evaluate arguments and to construct alternative strategies. Problem solving is one of the applications of critical thinking, used to address an identified task

... and some of the Perspectives as they relate to the courses we teach:

- P1** Establish broad and multiple perspectives on the individual in relationship to the larger society and world in which he or she lives, and to understand the responsibilities of living in a culturally and ethnically diverse world
- P2** Stimulate a capacity to discuss and reflect upon individual, political, economic, and social aspects of life in order to understand ways in which to be a responsible member of society
- P5** Develop personal values for ethical behavior
- P8** Integrate knowledge and understand the interrelationships of the scholarly disciplines

Not Finished Yet ...

Additionally, we are asked to align our courses to reflect aspects of the **DMC Mission Statement** and the **Strategic Plan Goals and Objectives**. In WEAVE, each portion of the Mission Statement and the Strategic Plan have their own references.

For the Mission Statement, the references are prefaced by the letter M, to indicate Mission and are listed under the heading **Institutional Priorities**.

The Strategic Plan Goals are delineated into Objectives, listed as A1, A2, A3, B1, B2, B3 and so forth, and listed in WEAVE as **Strategic Plan Initiatives (SPIs)**.

Many portions of the Mission Statement reflect what we teach in the department; some of the Strategic Plan Goals and Objectives are directly related to what we do. As such, the Mission statement portions are presented here in full, but the Strategic Plan Goals and Objectives are indicated only in part.

Mission Statement/Institutional Priorities

- M1:** To provide fully accredited occupational, academic and pre-professional courses leading to certificates, associate degrees, and/or the first two years of transferable credit toward baccalaureate degrees
- M2:** To provide opportunities to train for economic independence; and to prepare for job entry, occupational advancement, and career development
- M3:** To provide developmental, adult literacy, and basic skills instruction to help entering students to perform successfully in their chosen academic or occupational fields of study
- M4:** To provide student support services, including a continuing program of counseling and guidance, to assist students in their chosen academic or occupational fields of study

- M5:** To provide opportunities for lifelong learning in occupational and avocational pursuits, personal enrichment, and general education based on a liberal arts curriculum
- M6:** To provide opportunities to increase intellectual capacities; to develop aesthetic awareness; to expand the dimensions of personal, social, ethical and cultural development; and to develop civic responsibility and qualities essential to good citizenship
- M7:** To provide educational activities for workforce and economic development, and for community and academic initiatives in cooperation with area independent school districts, other institutions of higher education, area industries and area military bases; and to encourage and provide cultural activities, both independent of, and in cooperation with, organizations and groups in the community

Strategic Plan Initiatives (SPIs)

- A1:** Assure academic quality across the curriculum for transfer preparation
- A3:** Provide instructional and student support resources and services that enhance educational success opportunities for all students

Putting It All Into Play ...

Earlier, the concept was raised of applying each objective descriptive definition depending on the course for which it is being used in assessment. A specific example of how this is done comes from COMM 4. The EEO reads as follows:

- COMM 4:** To participate effectively in groups with emphasis on listening, critical and reflective thinking, and responding

Keeping in mind that authentic assessment is genuine, applicable, and meaningful, this EEO needs to reflect the perception of just what constitutes “effective participation in groups” for the class to which it’s applied.

We have two working perceptual frameworks for “**effective group participation**” in English: One for developmental English courses and one for first-year/sophomore literature. They are:

- Developmental English:** Participate effectively in groups, especially in relation to interacting with others for the purposes of building a supportive, community network of academic and social resources.
- First Year/Soph. Lit:** Through participation in groups, students will demonstrate skill in evaluating diverse opinions while reflectively examining their own.

Both descriptions exemplify what it means to “participate effectively in groups.” Where they differ is that effective participation in groups for students in developmental English classes is not

the same as for a student in a sophomore literature or even first-year composition class. In this way, we are attempting to avoid the “one-size-fits-all” mentality by tailoring our assessment of effective group participation in a way that strives to be an **authentic** and **meaningful** measure of what “good group work” means to two quite different sets of students: one, students of developmental English; and, two, students of first-year composition and sophomore literature.