

Course Portfolios for General Education Assessment

Binghamton University has chosen to use course portfolios in its assessment of student learning in the General Education program. In a course portfolio, samples demonstrate the range of student achievement of the desired learning outcomes. Students are not identified in portfolios, and instructors and particular courses are not identified in the periodic reports prepared by Assessment Category Teams (ACTs). The ACTs are composed of faculty who teach courses in the respective Gen Ed categories. ACT members read a collection of portfolios in various courses over time and recommend ways to bring desired and actual student learning outcomes closer together. ACT reports are prepared every three years for each Gen Ed category on a staggered schedule, and results are used to consider changes and improvements in the Gen Ed program.

Portfolio Contents:

Course portfolios will include the following:

1. Course syllabus: a copy of the same document distributed to students
2. Brief description of how the course fulfills the content requirements of the Gen Ed category (find these at <http://gened.binghamton.edu/guidelines.html>) and how it meets the learning outcomes for the Gen Ed category (find these at <http://assessment.binghamton.edu/gened.html>).
3. Brief (one-page) reflective statement by the instructor on the degree to which students met the Gen Ed learning objectives in the course, including a statement of strengths and weaknesses that the instructor has perceived in student performance with regard to the Gen Ed learning outcomes.
4. The instructor's estimate of the proportion of students finishing the course who fall into these categories: exceed, fulfill, approach, or fail to meet each Gen Ed learning objective. Course grades may include other considerations besides the learning outcomes for the Gen Ed category; to the extent possible, the estimate should be based only on the Gen Ed learning outcomes.
5. An example of student work (with names and any other identifying information removed) that falls into each of the categories (exceed, fulfill, approach, or fail to meet the learning objectives) represented in the previous item. Examples may be graded or not, but the instructor must identify each one's level of achievement of the specified Gen Ed learning outcomes. Typically, instructors choose work on only one assignment for the course, submitting a total of four papers or four tests, for example, if a single assignment reflects all of the learning outcomes.
6. Any other material (assignment instructions or explanations by instructor, test questions, etc.) that would help readers better understand student achievement of learning outcomes in the course.

Portfolio Size:

A portfolio could be 20-100 pages but should not be longer. Examples of student work provide illustrations of up to four levels of achievement; they could be selected either at random (choosing from among those that meet expectations, for example, any one) or they can be selected on the basis of the most representative work (choosing from among those that meet expectations the one that seems most

typical). Either way, the instructor chooses samples showing varied levels of achievement of the learning outcomes in a given Gen Ed category.

Copying Costs:

The Provost's Office will pay for copying expenses for course portfolios. Portfolios to be copied should be taken to the Copy Center. The following POETS string should be used:

P – IRP00001
O – Inst Research and Assessment
E – (will be listed on Copy Center form)
T – 08.01
S – I900811

Portfolio Audience—How Assessment Category Teams Use Course Portfolios:

Members of the Assessment Category Team (ACT) are faculty in various fields who have taught courses in this Gen Ed category themselves and thus grappled with how to achieve these learning outcomes.

The ACT reading a portfolio is *not* evaluating teaching or the success of any particular class or instructor. It is not re-evaluating the work of individual students, those whose work has been selected for sampling. It is not judging whether the samples judged to “meet” or “exceed” expectations have been appropriately categorized. It is not evaluating courses or trying to determine which are good or how courses might change.

The ACT, instead, assesses collective student progress toward the learning goals of General Education and the effectiveness of the Gen Ed program in one category (L, H, or N, for example). Each team evaluates the successes in student learning within one category as well as areas for improvement. The team weighs changes in learning over time, looking at portfolios from many courses over a three-year period. The ACT considers instructors' observations and suggestions, listening for similar themes in what instructors say about successful student learning and hindrances to learning across the group of portfolios. The ACT, without identifying specific courses or instructors, makes recommendations for improvements in the General Education program and especially in its particular category, including but not limited to clarification of learning outcomes so as to ensure consistency across courses and across faculty, so that students may better and more uniformly achieve the outcomes.

The ACT report goes to the Binghamton University Provost, who is charged to report every year in summary form the assessments completed and the improvements implemented. ACT reports, and the portfolios upon which they are based, do not leave campus.