

## St. Lawrence University Gen Ed Social Science Assessment (Spring 2021) University Assessment Committee November 2023

In Spring 2021, the Assessment Committee began its first round of General Education assessment with courses that faculty members have designated as fulfilling the learning goals of our **Social Sciences graduation requirement**. This requirement was approved by the SLU faculty in 2013 as part of a larger curriculum revision.

Courses fulfilling the Social Sciences (SS) requirement have primary learning goals in which students develop:

- (a) an enhanced awareness of the diverse ways in which economic, political, and social institutions can be organized; and/or;
- (b) an understanding of the various ways in which evidence about social structures and interactions is acquired and handled; and/or
- (c) an understanding of how social science knowledge is gained through the formulation, testing, and reformulation of theories and hypotheses.

To this end, the Assessment Committee developed a simple, 4-point rubric with the scoring levels of “absent”, “emerging”, “proficient” and “exemplary”. All faculty who taught one or more social science courses in the Spring 2021 were asked to participate. A total of 19 faculty did, contributing to 266 scored artifacts at the end of the Spring semester. More than half of the artifacts were from courses at the 200-level or above.

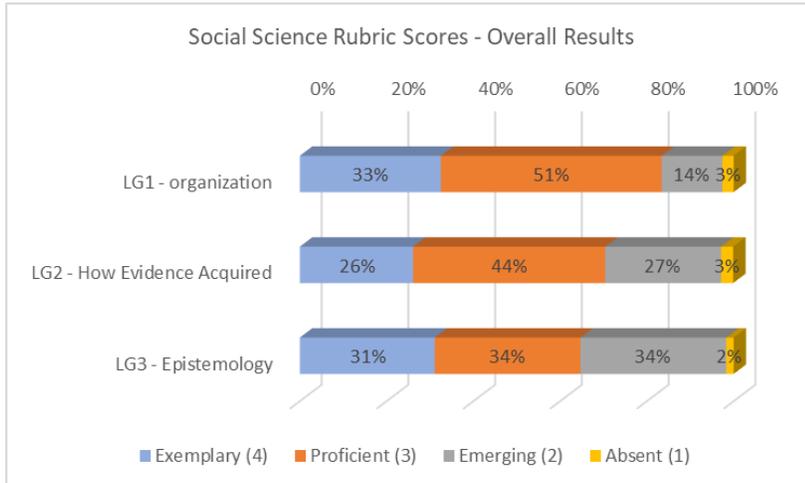
We then merged some demographic information into the file, such as students’ class year, gender, and race/ethnicity, academic division of major, how many social science courses (including this one) taken thus far, and off-campus study participation. Data were analyzed by student characteristics only (and not by course characteristics), as this is not a departmental assessment project but general education assessment. The discussion below is based on frequencies and regression analyses.

Nineteen faculty participated in assessing student work from ANTH, ECON, ENVS, FYP (2), GOVT (6), GS, PH, SOC (6). There were 266 scored artifacts—228 for learning goal (a), 176 for learning goals (b), and 119 for learning goal (c). The work of 246 unique students was assessed. Twenty students had multiple papers assessed across courses.

### Overview of Findings

**84 %** of all students who were assessed for a) **are meeting learning goal (a)** an enhanced awareness of the diverse ways in which economic, political, and social institutions can be organized; and **70%** who were assessed for (b) **are meeting learning goal (b)** an understanding of the various ways in which evidence about social structures and interactions is acquired and handled; **65%** of all students who were assessed for c) **are meeting learning goal (c)** an understanding of how social science knowledge is gained through the formulation, testing, and reformulation of theories and hypotheses see figure 1.)

Figure 1:



In 100-and 200-level courses data suggest lower levels of mastery of every learning goal compared to 300-level courses, which makes sense. The mean scores for all three learning goals at the 100-and 200-level are identical. There is a significant jump in the mastery of all learning goals at the 300-level, especially for learning goal (c) from 2.9 to 3.6 mean.

30% of the students assessed were FY students, 28% sophomores, 21% juniors and 21% seniors. In learning goal a) we see growth as we might expect from first through junior year and then a decline in mean scores in the senior year. There doesn't seem to be much growth from sophomore to senior year for learning goals b) and c)— Departments may want to look more deeply at the ways they are teaching social science methods and reinforcing those concepts and skills across levels.

Figure 2: Social Sciences Assessment Mean Scores by Gender & Class Year

Rubric Score							
	All	Female	Male	1-FY	2-SO	3-JR	4-SR
Exemplary (4)	33%	41%	23%	23%	31%	44%	35%
Proficient (3)	51%	43%	61%	52%	55%	44%	49%
Emerging (2)	14%	14%	15%	23%	14%	7%	10%
Absent (1)	3%	3%	2%	2%	0%	5%	6%
Total	228	126	102	60	74	43	51
<b>Mean</b>	<b>3.1</b>	<b>3.2</b>	<b>3.0</b>	<b>3.0</b>	<b>3.2</b>	<b>3.3</b>	<b>3.1</b>
Not evaluated	38	19	19	19	1	13	5

Other take-aways:

- International students demonstrate highest level of mastery of all three learning goals—mean 3.4.
- The numbers of domestic BIPOC students are too small to draw general conclusions, but one wonders why the percentages of exemplary scores is significantly lower for international and US white students—Black or African American mean 2.8, Hispanic mean 2.9, international mean 3.4, and US white mean 3.1.
- Women score higher than men, for all three learning goals.

## Conclusions

The assessment indicated that overall, most students appear to meet our learning goal as currently stated by the time they graduate. However, perhaps a more skill-based or precise verbs to define the competencies is required in goals b and c. for example, what do we mean “understanding” in goals b and c and how do we assess mastery of these goals?

We also note that some faculty commented on the difficulty in distinguishing clearly between goals b and c and that they may focus too much on quantitative reasoning and hypothesis testing and less on qualitative approaches and positionality.

It would be worthwhile to discuss what might contribute to the difference in scores by race/ethnicity, as these findings are still present when controlling for other factors such as class year, gender, etc.

Finally, comments from faculty suggest that there might be some interest in revisiting our existing Gen Ed Social Science learning goals.

The assessment committee would suggest that social science faculty discuss whether the current framing of the three discipline learning goals is still representative of your discipline and captures the state of the knowledge production and skill development in the field of social science and whether the wording in each learning goal is precise enough to be effectively assessed.

## Appendix 2 – Open-Ended Comments from Faculty

### Assessment

- Overall faculty felt the assessment was useful as it highlighted for them ways in which the students may or may not achieve the learning goal. One note is that most used papers to assess the learning goals. Some that used quizzes for example,

noted that the rubric was not helpful. ○ This assessment of the learning goals is useful for visualizing where my students are at this point in the semester (second assignment) and what tools I could have provided in the classroom earlier to better increase their competencies. I look forward to using this to guide improvements in my teaching.

#### Rubric

- Faculty found the rubric itself useful and easy to follow. Some faculty did not assess one of the goals in the rubric as it was not part of the assignment ○ This rubric is very useful, especially with respect to learning goals **(a) and (b)** ○ Only LG a and c were relevant for assessment. LG b was not examined here. ○ I REMOVED THE SCORES FOR C SINCE NOT EXPECTED AS PART OF ASSIGNMENT ○  
LG b and c

#### Wording

- In future assessment rubrics, it would be helpful if the descriptions for B and C were more clearly differentiated.
- My own observation on the rubric is that it seems to make little room for qualitative research. Learning goal (c) especially seems to tilt exclusively towards quantitative research, and so does not account for either qualitative human experience or students' own positionality, both of which this assignment was designed to highlight.

## RUBRIC FOR GENERAL EDUCATION ASSESSMENT

**Social Science (SS) Courses** have primary learning goals in which students develop:

- (a) an enhanced awareness of the diverse ways in which economic, political, and social institutions can be organized; and/or
- (b) an understanding of the various ways in which evidence about social structures and interactions is acquired and handled; and/or
- (c) an understanding of how social science knowledge is gained through the formulation, testing, and reformulation of theories and hypotheses.

Instructions:

1. Choose a course assignment in an SS course from the second half of the semester in which students must demonstrate an awareness or understanding of learning goal a) and/or b) and/or c).
2. Score each student's assignment and enter the score in the EXCEL spreadsheet that Christine will provide to you.
3. After scoring, please use the text box to provide feedback to the Assessment Committee reflecting on how the rubric and the scoring worked, what you learned from this assessment, and sharing any reflections on the Learning Goals as currently written.

Rubric for General Education Assessment

LGs	Exemplary	Proficient	Emerging	Absent
Awareness of the diverse ways in which economic, political, and social institutions can be organized.	Shows sophisticated awareness of the diverse ways in which economic, political, and social institutions can be organized.	Shows sufficient awareness of the diverse ways in which economic, political, and social institutions can be organized.	Shows minimal awareness of the diverse ways in which economic, political, and social institutions can be organized.	<p>Mark X if the student submitted the assignment, but evidence of an awareness of the LG was absent.</p> <p>Mark NA if the student did not submit the assignment.</p>

Understanding of the various ways in which evidence about social structures and interactions is acquired and handled	Shows sophisticated understanding of the various ways in which evidence about social structures and	Shows sufficient understanding of the various ways in which evidence about social structures and	Shows minimal understanding of the various ways in which evidence about social structures and	Mark X if the student submitted the assignment, but evidence of an awareness of the LG was absent.
	interactions is acquired and handled.	interactions is acquired and handled.	interactions is acquired and handled.	Mark NA if the student did not submit the assignment.
Understanding of how social science knowledge is gained through the formulation, testing, and reformulation of theories and hypotheses.	Shows sophisticated understanding of how social science knowledge is gained through the formulation, testing, and reformulation of theories and hypotheses.	Shows sufficient understanding of how social science knowledge is gained through the formulation, testing, and reformulation of theories and hypotheses.	Shows minimal understanding of how social science knowledge is gained through the formulation, testing, and reformulation of theories and hypotheses.	Mark X if the student submitted the assignment, but evidence of an understanding of the LG was absent.  Mark NA if the student did not submit the assignment.