#1 - Core Competencies at Chico State

Chico State integrates and assesses the five WASC core competencies in both major degree curricula and in General Education (GE). More focused attention to the core competencies was a critical focus of the 2009-10 GE redesign process that established the GE Pathways program. Four of the 10 GE program-level learning outcomes are WASC core competencies (oral communication, written communication, critical thinking, and quantitative reasoning), with the fifth, information literacy, being a component of the active inquiry learning outcome.

This is the first time that program-level goals were established for GE at Chico State. In the absence of Institutional Learning Outcomes, these GE outcomes also provide the best articulation of the overarching goals of an undergraduate Chico State education. Each course in GE is required to address at least one of these outcomes. A matrix on the GE website lists all GE courses and their associated GE learning outcomes.

The five core competencies are also incorporated in the program learning outcomes of many degree programs, and one college has begun college-wide assessment.

Assessing Core Competencies

In General Education

Prior to the launch of the GE Pathways program, the GE Implementation Team developed a GE Assessment Plan, based on work done at a 2011 CSU system-wide GE assessment conference. This plan identified the use of signature assignments and rubrics as the primary means of assessment. Subsequent assessment efforts, led by multi-disciplinary faculty teams, adapted AAC&U and other rubrics and developed campus-specific instruments for assessing critical thinking and information literacy. Quantitative reasoning was assessed using the Quantitative Literacy and Reasoning Assessment (QLRA).

The following table summarizes assessment of core competencies in the General Education Pathways program since its inception in 2012.

Link to Assessment Report	Year of Most Recent Assessment Report	Assessment Method	Traits Assessed	Percent Meeting Benchmark Competency	External Benchmark?
Written Communication	2017-2018	Signature assignments with common rubric	Content	79%	No
			Grammar/surface features	71%	
			Organization/argumentation	72%	
			Sources/evidence	64%	
Oral Communication	2014-2015	Signature assignments with common rubric	Organization 2.03	Average scores on 3-point scale shown; percent meeting	No
			Content 2.05		
			Delivery 1.92		

				benchmark not indicated	
Critical thinking	2016-2017	Signature assignments with common rubric	Identifies issues and tasks 2.23	Average scores on 3-point scale shown; percent meeting benchmark not indicated	No
			Identifies broader conditions 2.16		
			Reliable use of evidence 2.08		
			Avoids weak arguments 1.98		
			Draws logical conclusions 1.85		
		Common multiple choice performance test	No benchmarks established; average score 56%	NA	No
Information Literacy*	2014-2015	Instrument blending performance-based and perceptual measures of students' use of information sources	No benchmarks established; average score 42%	NA	No
Quantitative Reasoning	2016-2017	Quantitative Literacy and Reasoning Assessment (QLRA)	National comparisons, but no benchmarks; Average score 35%	NA	Yes

* Information literacy was assessed as an element of the Active Inquiry SLO.

Thus each competency has been assessed at least once in this period, but many benchmarks and baselines still need to be clarified, as discussed below under "Looking Ahead."

The Self-Study from the 2018 GE Five-Year Program Review offers the following summary findings from our core competency assessments:

Written Communication (2017):

- Overall between 64-79% students met the "benchmark" in each review criterion.
- White students had better scores than Hispanic/Latino students across all review criteria.
- Students in Upper Division (UD) GE courses showed gains vs. students in A2 courses, but nearly all the net gain is accounted for by White students and male students.
- UD GE students in 2017 did not show an improvement over UD GE students from 2012-13.

Oral Communication (2014)

- CSU, Chico students' oral communication skills are "adequate."
- Students currently enrolled in a class in Oral Communication outperform other students in the delivery of oral presentations.

Critical Thinking (2016)

- The ability of our UD students to correctly use critical thinking skills to make written arguments is wide-ranging but, on average, adequate.
- No significant differences in students' abilities to use their critical thinking skills to make written arguments were found based on students' gender, transfer status, college of study, or ethnicity.

- UD Students in 2016 scored lower than students just completing A3 courses from 2012-13. The ability of UD students to answer questions based on systematic use of logic and reasoning had faded since they completed an A3 course.

Mathematical Reasoning (2015)

- Students in MATH 105 (A4) showed gains in their knowledge of statistics.
- UD GE students' mathematical reasoning scores on a normed instrument were low, but not substantially lower than scores of students at comparable institutions.

Information Literacy (via "Active Inquiry") (2015)

- Students' Information Literacy performance was unimpressive.
- Students do appear to develop more of these skills as they move from lower to upper division courses.
- Students were lukewarm in recognizing the integration of these skills in their university experience.

While promising in some areas, these findings do not provide the resounding endorsement of core competency development that we would like to see in GE. In particular, we are attending to equity gaps in the achievement levels of underrepresented minority students, as demonstrated in the assessment of written communication. In response to this finding, the English Department is using 2018-2019 Graduation Initiative 2025 funding to strengthen support services for non-native speakers of English and to develop and pilot a version of the first-year writing course for heritage language learners. The most recent critical thinking assessment in GE finds similar gaps in critical thinking performance. It is clear that more consistent program improvement needs to become a consistent feature of our assessment processes, including identifying problems with the instruments themselves that may disadvantage certain student populations.

Assessment is occurring in the 5-year-old GE Pathways program on a well-established schedule and driven by deliberative and committed faculty teams. These teams originally worked in funded faculty learning communities; assessment work is now done by Pathway Coordinators (who receive limited release time for that role) and by additional faculty who receive modest stipends. These teams have discovered the challenges of assessing across a program with over 200 diverse courses and a very large and changeable set of instructors. Lessons learned include the importance of instructor participation, the use of consistent and high quality instruments and rubrics, and critical role of norming for all participants involved in assessing student work. The use of assessment for actual program improvement across so large a program has proved challenging; further reflection on this issue appears below under "Looking Ahead."

<u>At the College and Program Level</u>

Beyond GE, core competencies are incorporated into many degree programs, and evaluated as part of the annual assessment process. The most recent inventory of core competency assessment in degree programs was done in 2016, with results shown in the table below.

Core Competency Assessment Across Colleges 2008-16

College (Number of college programs)		Total number of Core Competency SLOs assessed (By number of programs responsible for the assessed SLOs)			
	Oral Communication	Written Communication	Critical Thinking	Quantitative Reasoning	Information Literacy
AG (3)	1 (1)	3 (2)	1 (1)	3 (2)	3 (1)
BSS (15)	19 (11)	25 (10)	22 (7)	10 (9)	12 (8)
COB (2)	8 (2)	4 (2)	4 (2)	0	2 (2)
CME (8)	9 (3)	21 (6)	12 (6)	4 (3)	7 (3)
ECC (11)	46 (11)	32 (9)	39 (9)	25 (6)	41 (11)
HFA (16)	16 (7)	17 (9)	8 (4)	4 (2)	3 (2)
NS (12)	4 (4)	6 (4)	2 (2)	2 (2)	6 (2)

In the past three years, several colleges have begun to systematically align core competencies with the learning outcomes of their degree programs. The College of Engineering, Computer Science and Construction Management, for instance, developed an alignment matrix correlating engineering and computer science program learning outcomes with both WASC core competencies and ABET accreditation standards.

The College of Behavioral and Social Sciences (BSS) has gone further to initiate a college-wide assessment of the five core competencies. Specifically to evaluate their majors' proficiency of the WASC core competencies at or near the point of graduation, BSS launched a college-wide assessment strategy in 2016-2017, starting with written communication. Using a common rubric aligned with the GE written communication rubric, all departments in the college participated in norming and assessing senior-level signature writing assignments. The BSS Written Communication Report demonstrates the value of this level of assessment, which provides (1) a college-wide measure of competency (67% of students sampled "met or exceeded expectations" across all four categories of the assessment); (2) a comparison with writing performance in General Education; and (3) a foundation for college-wide writing support interventions. Based on this successful pilot, BSS is carrying out similar college-wide assessments of oral communication and information literacy in 2018-2019. Across campus, core competency assessment also occurs in the many degree programs that include or integrate these competencies as program outcomes.

Changes in Written Communication Requirements and Oversight

In 2017, oversight of University writing requirements moved from the GE Curriculum Advisory Board to the University Writing Committee, under EM 17-009, the Writing Across the Curriculum and Graduation Writing Assessment Requirement policy. This policy also reduced the complexity of writing requirements and substitutions and included a more discipline-specific writing course specified by the department of the student's major. This shift was accompanied by the drafting of a recently developed ambitious plan (in LOI folder, titled #1-Writing Assessment and Professional Development Plan) to link assessment of student writing to professional development for faculty teaching writing courses and to support the development of department-level writing assessment based on the "writing-enriched curriculum" model. While some aspects of the plan are still being discussed and determined, the

university has committed to the part of the plan that involves assessment of writing in "W" courses on a regular schedule using the Chico-adapted VALUE rubric.

Looking Ahead

Chico State has a strong foundation for developing and measuring our students' achievement of WASC core competencies; we are now shoring up this work in the several ways, and have identified additional important areas for improvement.

Core Competencies as GE Program Learning Outcomes

The GE program's Curriculum Advisory Board is currently preparing revisions to GE policy for Academic Senate approval in spring 2019 that will redefine the learning outcome Active Inquiry as Information Literacy, enabling use of national assessment tools and benchmarks, and make the core competencies the sole learning outcomes of General Education, allowing for more concentrated assessment and program improvement.

Benchmarking

We recognize that in the absence of benchmarks with well-defined standards, assessment of core competencies has limited value. To institutionalize the use of benchmarks, the Annual Assessment Guidelines for every degree program have been updated to require data-driven benchmarks for each competency; these guidelines will go into effect for 2019-2020. Proposed revisions to the GE program also require benchmarks for the program-level assessment of core competencies. If approved, this policy will also be effective for 2019-2020. These changes will allow departments and CAB to more consistently and reliably track and support the achievement of core competencies.

Coordination and Support for Assessment

Oversight and assessment of core competencies at Chico State is largely decentralized, occurring in academic departments, some colleges, and General Education. The Academic Assessment Council (AAC) and the GE Curriculum Advisory Board are both exploring improvements to the coordination of these efforts, including the possibility of establishing an office of assessment; delegating assessment of core competencies solely to CAB, leaving departments free to focus their attention on discipline-specific learning; and establishing the core competencies as institutional learning outcomes with their own assessment process. These conversations are ongoing, pending budgetary priorities.

The AAC is currently chaired by the Associate Dean of the College of Behavioral and Social Sciences. Given that college's recent work with college-level assessment, and the findings of the GE Five-Year review, the Council is in a good position to advance a model of integrated assessment informed by these efforts. Another future task for the AAC is to complete an inventory of which core competencies are being addressed by which degree programs and what assessment measures are in place, in order to coordinate with campus-wide core competency assessment and improvement. Some greater investment in core competency assessment will likely be necessary to realize such efforts.

Continuous Improvement

Identifying, defining, and assessing core competencies should enable us, most importantly, to improve our students' mastery of them. Limited faculty support for core competency assessment, particularly in GE, can be attributed at least in part to the limited visibility of these assessments and their impact on how we practice teaching and support learning. Current efforts to improve faculty support include greater outreach and transparency in the work of the Curriculum Advisory Board and focused efforts to close the assessment loop with such interventions as the support for writing instruction among English language learners noted above. Particularly given our current campus-wide commitment to innovation for student success, the work of establishing good benchmarks, achieving a clear picture of our progress in achieving them, and using that data to drive equity-minded interventions in curriculum, student support, and faculty development is work we are well poised to undertake.