

Year 4 (2023) University Seminar (US) Core Working Group Assessment

Overview of Assessment

The Year 4 Core Assessment of general education requirements at Montana State University explored whether syllabi for core-designated courses aligned with their respective core perspective definitions and assessed whether University Seminar (US) core-designated classes aligned with the University Seminar (US) Core Perspective as outlined below:

University Seminar (US)

Rationale: University Seminar introduces and develops all three Core Qualities through multidisciplinary readings and collegiate level discourse. The seminar is designed to engage students in meaningful and respectful knowledge exchange with others, help students develop a strong sense of self and self-awareness through an exploration of their own values and beliefs and the values and beliefs of their peers, and foster a commitment to learning and excellence.

All three Core Qualities are assessed in US courses: Effective Communicator, Thinking & Problem Solver, and Local & Global Citizen.

Twelve US core-designated syllabi were reviewed; however, it was noted by the working group that for CLS 101/201 and HONR 201/301, the syllabi were identical despite the different levels of course and were treated as singular options when calculating percentage of compliance (n=10). Syllabi and course information, learning outcomes, and available examples of assignments were provided by the Core Committee through accessing the Courseleaf Course Inventory Management (CIM) system.

A Qualtrics survey was created, and questions were developed directly from the US core perspective and asked as Yes/No statements. Short answers were allowed to provide context for discussion later. Follow up emails were exchanged to norm some of the more nuanced language embedded in the US core perspective definition to provide continuity in assessment as explained in the notes below Table 1.

Results

As noted in Table 1 below, except for a few of the courses, the US core courses are largely in compliance with incorporating the US core perspective characteristics into their syllabi. There were a few areas that fell short, however. The “local and global citizen” Core Quality was left off a few syllabi, which also meant that it did not incorporate the quality into the curriculum directly.

Table 1*Percent of US Core Courses Incorporating US Core Perspectives Into Syllabi*

Qualtrics Questions	Compliance	Working Group Feedback
Does the Syllabus indicate all three Core Qualities are addressed? (Effective Communicators, Thinking and Problem Solvers, Local and Global Citizen)	85%	"Local and global citizen" was left off a few syllabi and the working group noted that even when listed, it wasn't always apparent how programs were incorporating this concept into the curriculum based on available assignment prompts.
Does the syllabus indicate the use of multidisciplinary readings to address the Core Qualities?	82%	In some cases, the syllabi didn't address this directly, but it was evident in the list of course texts provided; in other instances, it was listed in the syllabi but no list of course texts were provided to determine if it were true. It was noted by the working group that discipline-specific types of courses did not incorporate multidisciplinary readings in their curriculum to address this aspect of the core perspective either by explaining it was an "intro to major" course, or by the absence of any readings or texts other than discipline-specific textbooks .
Does the syllabus indicate the use of collegiate level discourse to address the Core Qualities?	97%	Most of the courses implement discussion in their curriculum in some manner; however, there were a few syllabi where the working group were unable to determine if discourse was a focus in the course or if the course was centered more on lecture.
Does the syllabus demonstrate the engagement of students in meaningful and respectful knowledge exchange?	93%	Most of the courses embed the intention of engaging students in meaningful and respectful knowledge exchange, but there were a few syllabi that did not express this overtly and left the working group wondering if there was a stronger reliance on lecture than discussions that involve an "exchange" between students rather than the faculty-student exchange.
Does the syllabus demonstrate helping students develop a strong sense of self and self-awareness through exploration of their own values and beliefs and those of their peers?	88%	Although "discourse" was embedded in syllabi, there was some question about how much self-reflection and self-awareness was being asked of students. There was an implied intention that students may be exploring the values and beliefs of their peers but not always that the development of self was a part of the process.
Does the syllabus demonstrate fostering a commitment to learning and excellence?	100%	The language "foster a commitment to learning and excellence" was hard to measure in a concrete way. The group determined that if there seemed to be evidence of the intention of fostering a commitment to learning and excellence embedded within the syllabus than the answer = Yes. Some of this may have been determined by boilerplate information expressing the expectations of academic honesty, engagement in the course through attendance and participation, or engaging in discussions in a respectful manner.
Do the assignment examples attached to the syllabus permit students to attain the Core Perspective learning outcomes as defined?	96%	Assignment examples or prompts were included in syllabi or in the CIM system for most of the courses, but the working group would have liked to see more information provided in the syllabi directly, rather than only relying on the CIM system.

Note: Percentages were determined based on the number of total responses received in the survey itself. If a question had only three responses (instead of 4), an n=3 was used to determine the percent of compliance.

Recommendations for Improving Student Attainment of US Core Perspective

The working group makes the following recommendations that may support improved student attainment of the US core perspective as it is currently defined:

- All US core courses should incorporate diverse readings, texts, and perspectives to meet the expectations of developing the Core Qualities through “multidisciplinary texts.”
- All US core courses should expressly state that they are discussion-focused rather than lecture-focused to meet the expectations of developing the Core Qualities through “collegiate level discourse.”

Recommendations to Core Committee

The following are recommendations for the Core Committee to consider:

- 1) As noted in Table 2 below, there were a few areas where a few of the programs fell short in incorporating the intention of the University Seminar (US) core perspective. The Core Committee may want to discuss what the expectation is for courses using this designation in terms of incorporating the perspective. Should all courses be meeting the perspective characteristics 100% and, if so, how can they do so if the characteristic does not fit into the paradigm of the program’s intentions for the course? (e.g. “intro to major” courses have a programmatic agenda that may or may not meet all of the perspective characteristics.) If courses do not *have* to meet the perspective characteristics 100%, where is the line? And if that is permitted, does that water down the intention of the US core purpose overall?
- 2) The working group recommends that for future assessment of Core perspectives:
 - All syllabi submitted to CIM have a brief description of the assignments and how those assignments address the Core Qualities for assessment as well as transparency for students.
 - Include at least a sample of readings in the submitted syllabus, even if those readings change from semester to semester.
- 3) Programs that offer more than one US core class (i.e., CLS101/201 and HONR 201/301) should consider why they offer two different levels and develop curriculum that demonstrates the differences between the courses that reflects why students take them at a different time in their college journey and how that impacts the development of Core Qualities.
- 4) Regarding the Core Quality “Local and Global Citizen” – the working group acknowledges that the way that this is defined contains many “lofty ambitions” that are important for students to strive for but may be difficult for first-year students in the US core classes to attain beyond a basic or foundation-level understanding. Some discussion was had related to how all the aspects of this core quality can be addressed in one course.

Table 2*Incorporation of US Core Perspective Across Individual US Core Courses.*

	AGED140	BGEN104	CLS101 CLS201	COLS101	COMX111	EDU101	HLD121	HONR201 HONR301	LS101	US101	Compliance Across all US Core Courses
Does the Syllabus indicate all three Core Qualities are addressed? (Effective Communicators, Thinking and Problem Solvers, Local and Global Citizen)	100%	25%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	25%	100%	85%
Does the syllabus indicate the use of multidisciplinary readings to address the Core Qualities?	25%	25%	100%	100%	100%	100%	67%	100%	100%	100%	82%
Does the syllabus indicate the use of collegiate level discourse to address the Core Qualities?	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	67%	100%	100%	100%	97%
Does the syllabus demonstrate the engagement of students in meaningful and respectful knowledge exchange?	100%	75%	100%	50%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	93%
Does the syllabus demonstrate helping students develop a strong sense of self and self-awareness through exploration of their own values and beliefs and those of their peers?	100%	75%	88%	100%	67%	100%	100%	100%	50%	100%	88%
Does the syllabus demonstrate fostering a commitment to learning and excellence?	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Do the assignment examples attached to the syllabus permit students to attain the Core Perspective learning outcomes as defined?	75%	100%	83%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	96%
Note: Percentages were determined based on the number of total responses received in the survey itself. E.g., if a question had only three responses (instead of 4), an n=3 was used to determine the percent of compliance. CLS101/201 and HONR201/301 had the same syllabi for each pairing and data was compiled together. As noted above, percentages were determined based on number of total responses with n=8 being the full number of responses expected unless the survey responses indicated fewer.											