

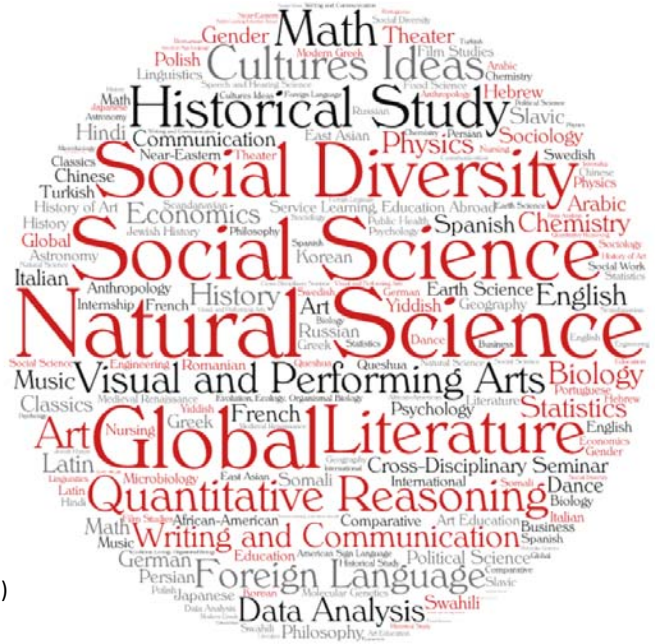
# Our Differences in Common

Teaching and Assessment in  
GE Courses

Melissa Beers, Ph.D.

Program Director, Introduction to Psychology (1100)

Course Coordinator, Social Psychology (2367.01)



## Session Goals

- Identify and develop strategies for understanding GE Expected Learning Outcomes (ELOs) in the context of a specific course
- Discuss resources and tools to communicate about the GE to instructors in your department or program
- Identify opportunities to reinforce the GE ELOs for students in your course



@mjbeers1

#TeachGE

# What is the goal of General Education?

HARVARD  
UNIVERSITY



“The material taught in general education courses is continuous with the material taught in the rest of the curriculum, but the approach is different. ***These courses aim not to draw students into a discipline, but to bring the disciplines into students' lives***”



“General Education initiatives address strengthening general education for transfer students, embedding high expectations and meaningful assessment of student learning, and **general education as essential for enhancing curricula and pedagogy.**”

## Impact

Enrollments in GE courses  
in 2015-16: 173,093

Over 1,350 courses count for  
one or more GE categories

- *50% of GE enrollments  
come from 53 courses*

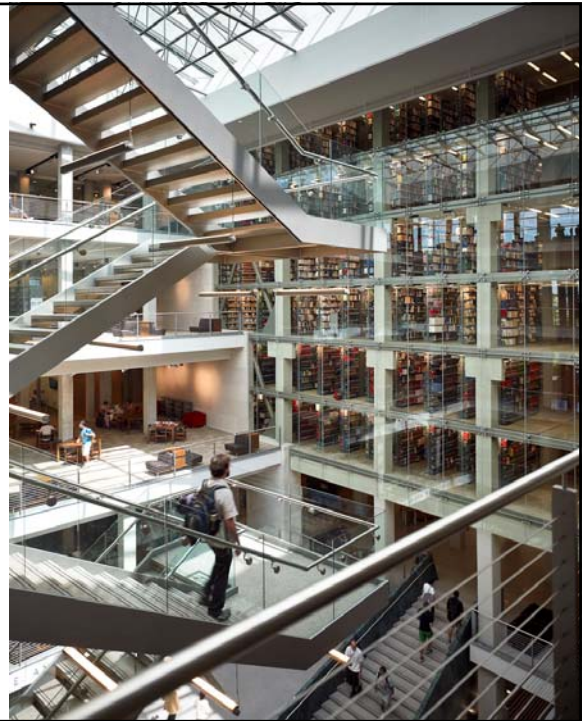
11% are taught online

58% of students in GE  
courses are taught by  
associated faculty and GTAs



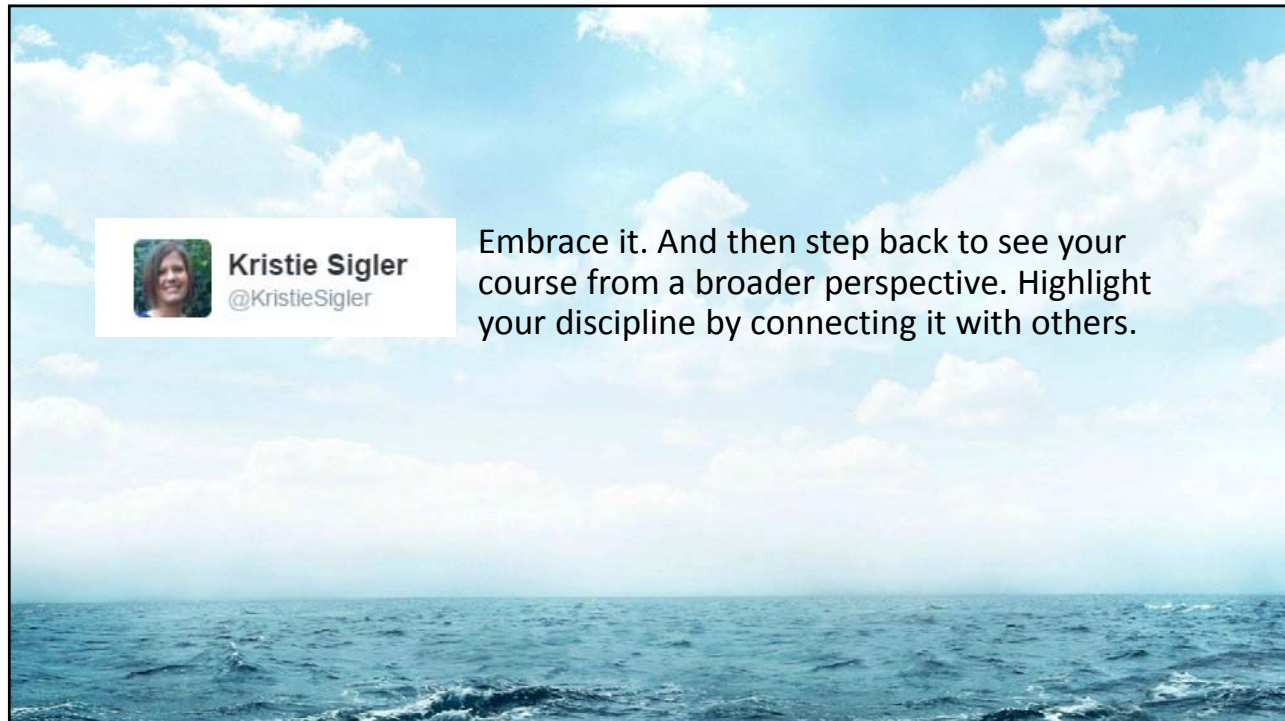
## Breadth of Knowledge

- Social Sciences - 73 courses
  - *Language Across Cultures; Gender, Sex, and Power; Freakonomics*
- Historical Studies - 166 courses
  - *The Sixties, the History of Mexico, Islam in Africa*
- Visual and Performing Arts - 61 courses
  - *History of Rock and Roll, Renaissance Art, Russian Film*
- GE courses may be students' only exposure to some disciplines



## How do we know what students gain?

- Assessment should help us understand what students gain from their experience in a course
  - Assessment is not evaluation
  - Assessment helps us be better teachers, meet students' needs, improve
- We must **teach** in a way that meaningfully incorporates the GE learning objectives into our courses
- GE creates an **emphasis** that benefits students and teachers alike.



## Six Strategies to Improve Teaching and Assessment in GE Courses

1. Understand the meaning of the GE ELOs in your course
2. Relate specific content to the GE ELOs
3. Listen to students
4. Pool resources and collaborate
5. Create degrees of freedom
6. Assess, discuss, reflect



# 1. Understanding the GE ELOs

We can't teach something we don't understand

ELOs are written broadly – both a challenge and a strength  
Department history – who requested GE status? Why is this  
course considered GE?

Correlation between instructors' understanding of the GE ELOs  
and their perceived importance in the course they teach:

$$r = .61 (p < .01)$$

## SOCIAL SCIENCE

Students understand the political, economic, and social trade-offs reflected in individual decisions and societal policymaking and enforcement and their similarities and differences across contexts.

## HISTORICAL STUDY

Students construct an integrated perspective on history and the factors that shape human activity.

## GLOBAL STUDIES

Students understand some of the political, economic, cultural, physical, social, and philosophical aspects of one or more of the world's nations, peoples and cultures outside the U.S.

## CROSS-DISCIPLINARY SEMINAR

Students understand the benefits of synthesizing multiple disciplinary perspectives.

## PHYSICAL SCIENCE

Students describe the interdependence of scientific and technological developments.

## Strategies

- Talk with colleagues, instructors to improve shared understanding of the GE
- Hold professional development focused on GE ELOs – one at a time
- Training/orientation—“onboarding” for instructors
- Instructor manual or guidelines to set expectations
- Create formal and informal opportunities to connect instructors teaching the same ELOs in other disciplines

## 2. Relate specific content to GE ELOs

- Where do GE learning objectives fit in your course?
- What content relates to which ELO?
- How does your course operationally define those objectives?



## Strategies

- Review/map the curriculum
  - Identify relevant content and why it's relevant
  - Know where the gaps are
  - How do your course materials stack up? Do you need more or less in a particular area?
- Develop a “quick reference guide” for new instructors with most important/top level info—communicate how and why those topics are relevant

## Sample Curriculum Map

Social Cognition GE Topics: Gilovich et al.					
Page	Description	ELO1a: Theories	ELO1b: Methods	ELO2: Culture and Groups	EL03: Policy Making
109-112	Minimal information: inferring personality from physical appearance	✓	✓	✓	✓
112-113	Misleading firsthand information: pluralistic ignorance	✓		✓	✓
114-116	Misleading secondhand information	✓	✓	✓	✓
116-117	Order effects		✓		✓
117-120	Framing effects		✓		✓
120-121	Temporal framing		✓		✓
121-123	Confirmation bias	✓	✓		✓
123	Motivated confirmation bias	✓		✓	✓
125-129	The influence of schemas	✓	✓	✓	
129-134	Which schemas are activated and applied	✓	✓	✓	✓
136-141	The availability heuristic	✓			✓
141-147	The representativeness heuristic	✓		✓	✓
147-149	The joint operation of availability and representativeness	✓	✓		✓



## Sample GE Instructional Tool

*S3: Recognize individual differences and how individual and social values play a role in social problem solving;  
Develop abilities to comprehend and assess individual and social values and recognize their importance in social  
Problem solving and policy making*

Chapter	Term/Concept	Example/Relation to S3 GE Objective
Research Methods	Scientific Method and Hypothesis	Discuss how before these were developed, people relied on authority figures or institutions for answers to questions about the world and social problems. Science allows us to search for answers via observation and experimentation. Discuss with students if they believe public policies and social problems should be addressed using science and facts.
Sensation & Perception	Signal detection theory	Laws about how loud music can be played, window tinting, electric car noise to not hit blind people. Red/green color blindness
Consciousness	Drug regulation	Schizophrenia vulnerability triggered by drugs. Also, drug policy generally
Memory	Memory Suggestibility and Eyewitnesses	Fallibility of eye-witness testimony, "recovered" memories, sequential vs. simultaneous police lineups (Gim video), differences in memories for details of ingroup (race, sex) vs. outgroup people
Learning	Punishment	Individual differences in sensitivity to punishment (psychopathy)
Learning	Environmental cues	Gentrify NY communities, decrease crime?
Learning	Operant conditioning	How could you use these principles to increase various social outcomes (increase graduation rates, decrease crime, increase education, employment)

### 3. Listen to students

- How do students interpret the GE ELOs?
- What do they see as relevant in the course?
- Students have a distinct advantage – they take multiple GE courses, see your discipline in a broader context

## Strategies

- Compare direct vs. indirect assessment measures—do students perceive the class as relevant to the GE?
- Use in-class reflection or activities to have students relate course content to GE ELOs—what topics do students see as most relevant and why?
- Ask students what they see as unique about your discipline
- Draw students' attention to where the GE ELOs are relevant in the curriculum—why is a particular topic or assignment relevant? Be explicit.
- Don't just list GE ELOs on syllabus, chart them to course content and assignments—which assignments are relevant to the learning objectives?

Coursework Related to Goals and Objectives

	Paper 1	Paper 2	Paper 3	Paper 4	Paper 5	MT 1	MT 2	Final	Partic
W1. Through critical analysis, discussion, and writing, students demonstrate the ability to read carefully and express ideas effectively.	X	X	X	X	X				X
W2. Students apply written, oral, and visual communication skills and conventions of academic discourse to the challenges of a specific discipline.	X	X	X	X	X				X
W3. Students access and use information critically and analytically.	X	X	X	X	X				X
SS1. Students understand the theories and methods of social scientific inquiry as they apply to the study of individuals and groups.	X	X			X	X	X	X	X
SS2. Students understand the behavior of individuals, differences and similarities in social and cultural contexts of human existence, and the processes by which groups function.			X		X	X	X	X	X
SS3. Students comprehend and assess individual and group values and their importance in social problem solving and policy making.				X	X	X	X	X	X

## Psychology 1100—Extra Credit Reflection Paper Prompt

GE SOCIAL SCIENCE 3— AU15 S3

In order to partially fulfill the University's General Education (GE) Social Science component, Psychology 1100 aims to help you understand similarities and differences in human thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, as well as the scientific methodology used to examine these processes. This extra credit opportunity allows you to reflect upon and integrate the information you learned in Psychology 1100 that reflects GE goals. You can earn up to 4 extra credit points for this assignment. Please read the prompt, guidelines, and rubric carefully. Use the checklist on the back of this sheet to be sure that you have followed the prompt guidelines.

### AU15 S3 Reflection Question:

When a crime occurs on campus at the Ohio State, university policies dictate what and how much information about the crime can be shared to students. People may have various opinions on this matter. Should crime alerts be general and not contain specific information about suspects or crimes, or rather should campus crime alerts contain more detailed information about incidents that might impact students, faculty, and staff—even though that information may be marginalizing or targeting to students with certain racial or ethnic identities?

**Argue both sides of this issue**—what arguments might be used in support of more detailed crime alerts? What arguments might be used to oppose more detailed alerts? Choose at least **two** topics discussed in Psych1100, and discuss how they are relevant to the issue of what and how much information (particularly race and ethnicity) should or should not be included in the crime alerts at OSU. Importantly, try to "think like a scientist," and do not rely on your own personal opinions in this paper. Rather, be objective and try to include information that you have learned in PSYCH 1100 to strengthen your arguments.

Because the purpose of this paper is to give you the opportunity to reflect upon the knowledge you have gained as a result of taking Psychology 1100, **please use specific course material** to answer this question. When discussing specific concepts or examples from the course, **please remember to cite the source** (either the page numbers of the textbook or a lecture topic).

*The goal of the AU15 S3 Prompt is to promote critical thinking about individual behavior, affect, and cognition within social and cultural contexts. For this reflection paper prompt, students should demonstrate abilities to comprehend and assess individual and social values and recognize their importance in social problem solving.*

## 4. Pool resources and collaborate

- Share the work - Divide and conquer!
- Develop common materials
- Collaborate on assignments, in-class resources, assessment tools

## Strategies

- Individual instructors contribute ideas to shared repositories
- “Steal my idea” competitions—have instructors submit their best ideas for the instructional team to vote on
- Observe one another teaching, see how others do it
- Focus on one thing at a time - prioritize and rotate assessment strategies.
- Create an “instructor portal” in Carmen or BuckeyeBox where instructors can share resources, create a course YouTube channel
  - Provide rationale, explanations

## 5. Create degrees of freedom

- There will be individual variation in teaching GE and foundational courses – capitalize on it.
- Build in variation to accommodate instructor differences when assessing, just like in teaching.
  - “Play to your strengths”
- GE ELOs provide an emphasis or a direction—it doesn’t mean we all need to walk in lock-step.

## Strategies

- Develop several prompts or assignments aligned with the same ELO for instructors to choose from.
  - Give students a choice of prompts to respond to
- Collaboratively develop a set of MC questions and ask instructors to use at least a portion of them on exams (e.g., 10 out of 12)
- “Objective oriented” assignments that can take any form as long as they target one or more specific learning objectives.
  - Look at each others’ assignments, learn from them

## 6. Assess, discuss, reflect

- Assessment of the GE ELOs is important to understand what we are doing well and where we can improve.
- Discuss results so everyone understands where we are and what our goals are.
- **Assessment cannot be done independently of teaching**
- Effective teaching requires assessment to ensure we are getting our desired results

## Teaching without assessing is like....



**R. Eric Landrum**  
@ericlandrum

Throwing darts with your eyes closed.



**Rob McEntarffer**  
@rmcenta

Singing a song with your back to the audience wearing noise-canceling headphones



**Stephen Chew**  
@SChewPsych

Planting seeds & assuming they will grow without care because 1) you're an excellent planter 2) it's the seeds' responsibility

## Strategies

- Review results in kick-off or beginning-of-term meetings; highlight successes and areas of focus for the coming term
- Create working groups to tackle big projects
- Involve instructors in writing reports
- Meet at the end of the term to debrief and share results
- Share results with other instructors, at teaching conferences, interdisciplinary teams (WAC).
- Take one step at a time—assessment is an iterative process that happens over time!

## What has helped you understand the GE ELOs?

Kick-off and end-of-semester meetings have been very helpful in understanding these objectives. Seeing the data and what they suggest about what we're teaching, and where we can improve, has been eye opening.

*Grading rubrics related to the GE objectives help me understand them better.*

Discussions with other instructors about the nature of the objectives and how they can be approached in the classroom are always valuable.

If not for stressing them in the teaching class, I don't think I would have even given the GE learning objectives a second thought.

The teaching class that went over the objectives in the summer was a nice overview and it was solidified by going through past instructors' slides.

## What about the GE learning objectives do you not understand well, or could understand better?

*What exactly the "individuals and groups" goal of the Social Science GEs seeks to accomplish.*

Figuring out how to incorporate these things into a classroom context is important and probably a never-ending endeavor.

It would be good to have a clearer understanding for why the university focuses on these GE objectives.



Thank you!

Melissa Beers, Ph.D.  
Department of Psychology  
[beers.3@osu.edu](mailto:beers.3@osu.edu)  
[@mjbeers1](https://twitter.com/mjbeers1)