

2024-25 IT General Education Assessment Report

For the 2024-25 general education core curriculum assessment cycle we focused on the assessment of the IT - Interpreting Texts - requirement. Assessment was conducted in two ways: 1) syllabus review and 2) direct scoring of student artifacts. This is year three of our general education assessment process and we continue to learn about what works and what does not. Clearly, faculty buy-in remains low (as demonstrated by the low participation rate), but interest in core assessment appears to be growing.

Note: the plan was to assess both IT and QR - Quantitative Reasoning, however, due to multiple QR faculty missing or overcommitted we elected to push QR assessment to fall 2025.

Syllabus Review → Not meeting expectations

We reviewed AY 24-25 IT course syllabi to evaluate clarity and consistency in the program. We wondered 1) how many spring courses named the gen ed requirements they meet and 2) how many list the learning outcomes tied to their gen ed requirements. Last year we also evaluated how many course syllabi connect learning outcomes to specific assignments. Importantly, while items 1 and 2 are long-standing expectations of the program, this 3rd evaluation criteria is aspirational and not required so we left it out this year. Syllabi were requested via email multiple times from February to May of 2025.

49 sections of IT - Interpreting Text were delivered during AY 24-25.

Syllabus Submitted - Yes	Syllabus Submitted - No	% of Courses Submitted
17	32	35%
Lists Gen Ed(s) Met	Gen Ed(s) No Listed	% of Courses Listing Gen Ed(s)
15 of 17	2 of 17	88%
Lists Gen Ed LOs* (n=17)	No Gen Ed LOs Listed	% of Courses Listing LOs
14 of 17	3 of 17	82%
<i>*Note: includes courses with LOs that clearly match Gen Ed LOs. The assumption is the instructor has merged the two.</i>		
Submitted Artifacts	Did Not Submit Artifacts	% Submitting Artifacts
15	34	31%

Discussion and Action Items

It is clear from the syllabus review (and from the subsequent assessment of student work) that our gen ed offerings are strong. The courses are interesting and call on students to develop core competencies in areas related to textual study. The courses are varied and provide excellent variety for students to choose from in meeting this requirement. However, these courses are not very consistent. We see great variation in how the LOs are taught based on disciplinary approach, faculty expertise/interest, and course number/level (i.e., 200- v. 300-level). While not inherently bad, variation introduces complexity for assessment.

The poor submission rate (35%) reflects a few challenges we have in terms of gen ed assessment. First and foremost, we have an “opt in” assessment culture. There is/has been no requirement that faculty teaching gen ed courses participate in the assessment process. Interest in participation is growing but that growth has been slow. Additionally, because there is no culture of assessment in general education, it can be difficult to communicate with faculty about expectations for and benefits of assessment. That is, more faculty would likely be interested in participating if our communications reached them. At present, email and conversations with deans/chairs are the strategies we’ve used. These strategies likely don’t see us reaching every faculty member teaching in the program and/or when we do reach them a single communication is inadequate for motivating action during a busy semester.

All that said, the 35% of submissions are encouraging. Of the syllabi submitted 88% included the Gen Ed element met by the course and 82% included the specific Gen Ed LOs. This is encouraging if we assume the sample reflects the larger whole. It is also an improvement on the VW and GE assessments last year.

The poor assignment submission rate--31% of all courses--is discouraging. Not only because the rate is low, but because here we heard more negative responses about administrative overreach and suspicion about how materials would be used. Assignment-level conversations seem to motivate concern about scrutiny, making faculty self-conscious about assignment quality.

Next steps for IT syllabi and document review, more generally:

- Continue working toward a culture of assessment and accountability that sees all tenure line faculty (at least) participating in the assessment process. This should be approx. 75 to 80% of offerings each year.
- Improve communication strategies to coordinate plans and expectations with gen ed faculty. For example, we might supplement emails with visits to college and department meetings. We can also better distribute assessment findings to help communicate the value of this process.
- Support faculty development in ways that align with sustainable assessment strategies so faculty are less self-conscious about sharing materials.

Core Requirement Direct Assessment → Partially Meeting Expectations

Interpreting Text (IT) assessment was conducted on Tuesday, May 28th. This four hour assessment workshop was led by the Dean of Assessment and included 1.5 hours of rubric norming, 1.5 hours of paper scoring, and 30 minutes of conversation. 16 raters from multiple departments joined the conversation, including Biology, English, French & Francophone Studies, Hispanic Studies, History, Political Science, Religion, and Sociology, as well as representation from the Library and Provost’s Office. Two members of the Core Curriculum Committee were present.

The purpose of this assessment was to evaluate student learning for the Interpreting Text requirement. All three learning outcomes for this requirement were evaluated.

Interpreting Text (4): Students will learn to analyze text, examining both their constructions and the cultural, social, philosophical, and/or historical contexts from which they stem.

- Students will apply critical frameworks to the study of historical, artistic, literary, and/or cinematic texts.
- Students will analyze and explain how language and genre shape meaning in cultural and political contexts.
- Students will develop arguments by drawing on multiple perspectives and relevant evidence.

In preparation for the meeting, the Dean of Assessment held an “opening the loop” meeting for IT assessment (early March, 2025). All faculty teaching IT courses in AY 24-25 were invited to attend. Seven IT instructors and two Core Curriculum Members attended the meeting. The conversation focused on a few key areas: 1) how do you interpret the IT learning outcomes for your course; 2) how do you teach them and what assignments do you use to assess them; and 3) what are your own standards to understand when an assignment exceeds, meets, or approaches expectations.

From this conversation, the Dean of Assessment developed a rubric to use in the end of year assessment (see appendix). This rubric merged elements of the AAC&U VALUE rubrics on reading, writing, and inquiry. Instructors were invited to review the rubric a week or so before the workshop. The direct assessment began with a lengthy conversation about the rubric, leading to several small scale revisions to be applied during the scoring session. Further revisions would be applied later.

Only 15 of the 49 total sections of IT submitted artifacts (31%). From these submissions 85 samples were selected. This is almost 30% of the sample submitted but only 8.6% of the total number of students who completed an IT course in AY 24-25 (984 students total).

	Total Mean; n=85	100/200 Mean; n=47	300 Mean; n=38
Learning Outcome 1	2.31	2.37	2.24
Learning Outcome 2	2.45	2.40	2.52
Learning Outcome 3	2.3	2.24	2.36
Interrater Reliability	85%	96%	87%

Following norming, readers were assigned to one of three tables. Each table was assigned approximately ⅓ of the sample. Readers were asked to score each artifact using the rubric, assigning a score of 0-4 for each LO. They were allowed to use half scores (e.g., 2.5) to facilitate more nuance in scoring. Each paper was meant to be scored twice (once by two

different raters) with widely divergent scores (more than 1 whole number) read by a third reader. 55 samples (65%) were read twice. However, a high level of agreement following norming led to using single scores to maintain the larger sample size.

Discussion and Action Items

This process continues to be productive for instructors who attend. The discussion that followed scoring was thoughtful and wide-ranging, including observations about student work, course design, and the challenges of assessing our gen ed program--this element and all elements. The conversation is summarized below, but a couple things are worth calling out specifically:

There isn't a huge difference in scores between students in 200-level courses and 300-level courses. We attribute this to several things. First, the increase in difficulty of the 300-level courses means that students at both levels experience these courses as new and challenging. Second, the rubric was perhaps designed to ensure that most students would struggle to get a "3" and very few would get a "4." Some raters felt this is correct--following a single IT course students should probably be approaching expectations. One term simply isn't enough time to master these skills. Others felt the rubric should be adjusted so that a "3" would be the norm. Since we are only asking for the one IT course we should want students to be meeting expectations. Importantly, both groups noted there are related changes that can be made to course design and delivery, as well as in prompt design and artifact selection.

Additionally, it is clear--as it was for VW and GE last year--that the wide variation in course material and approach makes it difficult to arrive at a common understanding of what the LOs mean and how they should be assessed. In some courses/disciplines, the skills described by the rubric as a "3" would be very common. In others, a "3" would be very aspirational, particularly at the 200-level. With so few common requirements it will be very difficult to ever say with certainty if our students are meeting common benchmarks for learning. This is maybe not a terrible thing, as it reflects the messiness of education. We can say our students are learning and we can see the excellent work they produce. We need to consider options for how to better "see" this learning in action. Potentially, this might be something like a course-embedded assessment done by faculty who know the students and can see their learning in action.

Finally, the conversation revealed a growing understanding among faculty about the uses of assessment. They observed variation in course design and assignment selection, and noted how this variation impacted their scoring. For example, they could see that a sample submitted from the middle of a course showed early learning, where a final assignment showed more refined learning. We discussed parameters on submissions--for example, asking for final work that presumably reflects the best work the student can do. This wouldn't apply to every course/assignment, but in several cases the raters felt that we weren't seeing the student's best work. This idea was confirmed by IT faculty in attendance who could sometimes attest that the artifact wasn't appropriate for this kind of assessment scoring.

Action Items:

1. Revise the rubric (and perhaps the LOs) to be more clear and student-friendly. Consider breaking the LOs into more manageable pieces--specific "moves" we're asking students to learn and practice.
2. Determine the appropriate "rigor" for the rubric--should a score of "2" or "3" be the norm. Ask this question more intentionally of all gen ed rubrics.
3. Identify and implement potential commonalities across IT courses, potentially including reflection assignments or common parameters for artifact submission.

Post-Scoring Discussion Summary

Discussion points from the assessment workshop highlighted several areas for improvement and consideration regarding the IT (Interpreting Text) learning outcomes and their assessment.

There was a general consensus on the need for clearer definitions of the learning outcomes. Specifically, questions arose about the interpretation of "critical framework" in LO 1, with participants noting that students are often asked to trace themes and analyze details rather than formally apply advanced frameworks, especially at the 200-level. It was observed that students performed well on genre observations (LO 2) but struggled with critical lenses and multiple perspectives (LO 3), which are often addressed more in classroom discussions than in written assignments. There was also a discussion about whether the current rubric scoring accurately reflects expectations, with some suggesting recalibrating it so that a "3" aligns with 200-level expectations and a "4" with 300-level, while others felt a "4" should remain rare and exceptional.

Participants also noted that students' struggle to achieve higher scores might be due to assignment design, as prompts may not always explicitly ask students to demonstrate LO-related learning, and much of the learning occurs in class beyond what is captured in artifacts. It was recommended that faculty be encouraged to submit final projects to provide students with the maximum opportunity to demonstrate learning. Regarding artifact types, traditional written work was found easier to assess than formats like PowerPoint slides, which often lacked sufficient explanation.

The discussion also touched on the need for common assignment parameters across IT sections to ensure consistency, potentially through word counts, source requirements, or common reflective activities. While there was general agreement that LOs are being taught, the prompts often don't explicitly focus on them, as IT courses cover a broader scope. For LO 3, it was observed that many students did not fully draw conclusions or provided limited evidence. For LO 1, students often did not explain the critical lens they were using, suggesting that this formal explanation might be an upper-division skill.

Finally, there was a suggestion to rephrase LOs and rubrics into student-centered language for clarity, potentially creating a student version for syllabi. It was also considered whether LOs should be broken down into more specific "moves" or if the rubric should be revised to account for distinct elements within each LO, as their current broadness makes scoring challenging.

PLU Interpreting Text (IT) Assessment Rubric

This rubric was designed with input from the faculty who teach courses that meet this general education requirement at PLU. Inspired by the AAC&U VALUE rubric program, it articulates specific criteria for each learning outcome related to the core requirement. Faculty teaching these courses should deliver the learning outcomes generally in accordance with the standards outlined in this rubric. Use of the rubric itself is encouraged but not required. The central purpose of this rubric is to increase coherence in our general education core program and to ensure some consistency across the curriculum.

Because this rubric is meant to be used in courses from across the curriculum and at different levels (e.g., 200-level and 300-level), the standards listed (levels 1-4 or Beginning to Exceeding Expectations) may not be directly applicable to a single assignment or activity. Depending on the context, LOs may be assessed using multiple distinct assignments.

Description

Interpreting Text (4 credits): Students will learn to analyze text, examining both their constructions and the cultural, social, philosophical, and/or historical contexts from which they stem.

In IT courses, students learn to “read” critically and thoughtfully, drawing on disciplinary (or inter/cross-disciplinary) tools and frameworks to draw conclusions about the texts they examine. Note that “reading” and “text” are meant to be broadly conceived, and may include traditional print and non-print modes of communication. This requirement introduces students to the interpretive strategies used to study historical, artistic, literary, *and/or* cinematic texts. At the 200-level, we often find students working with critical tools and resources provided by the instructor as part of classroom assignments. At the 300-level, we might find students doing independent research and/or applying critical tools to texts they’ve selected from outside the required course materials. Regardless, they should be expected to pay attention to form, structure, and language, as well as how choices about the composition of a text shapes meaning in particular contexts. They should understand the role of genre in how creators create meaning and how readers find meaning. They should synthesize information from multiple sources and perspectives, and mobilize textual materials into compelling arguments suitable for particular audiences and purposes.

Learning Outcomes

- Students will apply critical frameworks to the study of historical, artistic, literary, and/or cinematic texts.
- Students will analyze and explain how language and genre shape meaning in cultural and political contexts.
- Students will develop arguments by drawing on multiple perspectives and relevant evidence.

Some key terms re: the LOs

- Critical (LO 1) -- "Critical" in this case refers to the process of examining something thoroughly and thoughtfully, asking probing questions, and looking beyond the surface to understand underlying assumptions, meanings, and connections. It is not necessarily tied to the critique of social structures or power dynamics.
- Language (LO 2) -- Language, in this case, describes elements of a text and how they are structured. It could describe print, visual language, and more.
- Genre (LO 2) -- A particular kind of text as defined by commonly accepted conventions. Genre often dictates what texts are about, how they are structured, and how they might or should be understood.
- Multiple Perspectives (LO 3) -- Refers to how we understand texts differently based on perspective and/or context. This could mean different/distinct readings of a text or how cultural differences might shape the reading of a text.

IT Evaluation Rubric *[Evaluators are encouraged to assign a score of “0” to any sample that does not meet the criteria for “beginning” work.]*

Learning Outcome	Exceeding - 4	Meeting - 3	Approaching - 2	Beginning - 1
Students will apply critical frameworks to the study of historical, artistic, literary, and/or cinematic texts.	Identifies (e.g., selects/locates) and explains an appropriate critical lens, framework, or method. Integrates this lens effectively to analyze text, demonstrating sophisticated understanding of its value or impact within particular communities.	Explains an appropriate critical lens, framework, or method. Effectively applies the critical lens, framework, or method to analyze text, demonstrating some understanding of its value or impact within particular communities.	Demonstrates understanding of an appropriate critical lens, framework, or method. Shows some attempt to apply the critical lens, framework, or method in textual analysis.	Reads thoughtfully, but without the use of any discernible critical lens, framework, or method.
Students will analyze and explain how language and genre shape meaning in cultural and political contexts.	Offers an insightful and nuanced analysis of textual features, demonstrating a deep understanding of how these choices contribute to a text's purpose and overall effectiveness. Uncovers and articulates the implications of the text(s) for diverse contexts and broader societal issues, extending beyond the classroom task and the author's apparent intent. Identifies and explains distinctions of genre and their conventions, as well as how those conventions shape meaning.	Identifies and explains specific textual features, using these tools describe the purpose and effectiveness of a given text (or texts). Uses the text, background knowledge, and/or specific knowledge of the author's context to draw inferences about the author's message, attitude, or perspective. Identifies distinctions of genre and their conventions, as well as how those conventions shape meaning.	Notes specific textual features to offer a general description of the purpose of a given text (or texts). Draws basic inferences about context or the purpose of the text based on limited evidence or understanding. Describes genre conventions of particular texts.	Identifies general aspects of a text but doesn't effectively connect them to the working of the text as a whole. Reads without attention to the context or purpose of the text. Demonstrates awareness that genre conventions exist.
Students will develop arguments by drawing on multiple perspectives and relevant evidence.	Synthesizes details from relevant sources representing multiple points of view on a text and/or the contexts that shape a text. Organizes and synthesizes evidence to reveal insightful patterns, differences, or similarities related to the text(s) under analysis. States a compelling and persuasive conclusion that emerges from the evidence presented and offers a fresh perspective on the subject.	Presents details from relevant sources representing multiple points of view on a text and/or the contexts that shape a text. Organizes evidence to reveal patterns, differences, or similarities related to the text(s) under analysis. States a compelling and persuasive conclusion that emerges from the evidence presented.	Presents information from somewhat relevant sources representing a single or limited point of view on a text or the contexts that shape a text. Organizes evidence, but in so doing doesn't reveal patterns, differences, or similarities related to the text(s) under analysis. States a conclusion that may lack specificity but which is clearly related to the evidence presented.	Presents information from sources marginally related to the subject and not reflective of more than one point of view. Includes evidence, but it is not organized and/or is not clearly related to the text(s) under analysis. States a general conclusion that is only somewhat connected to the evidence presented.