

UCA CORE

FYS TASK FORCE

Report and Recommendations

**Submitted to the
UCA Core Council**

FYS TASK FORCE

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BACKGROUND

This past summer a task force was convened to re-evaluate the UCA Core rubrics. The task force had the following charge:

- Review feedback about the UCA Core rubrics from instructors that used them during the 2013-2014 academic year
- Recommend to the UCA Core Council any needed substantive changes to the UCA Core student learning outcomes
- Recommend to the UCA Core Council any changes to the UCA Core rubrics, independent of recommended changes to the student learning outcomes

It was determined by the task force that the revisions of the rubric specific to FYS courses would be left to a separate FYS task force to be convened by Director of the UCA Core, Jacob Held. Dr. Held convened the FYS task force in late summer, early fall of 2014. The task force was composed of instructors familiar with FYS courses at UCA or with other relevant backgrounds that would provide insight into the type of course FYS is intended to be. One of the initial tasks of the task force was the revision of the FYS rubric in light of feedback gathered through the pilot process.

First-Year Seminar courses provide a highly interactive, small-class learning environment for entering freshmen. Students will work together in small groups to develop skills in team work and written communication as well as knowledge in one other Core area (Diversity, Critical Inquiry, or Responsible Living) as it applies to the intellectual subject matter of the course. Students will also learn about the importance of general education and its place in a college education as well as the way general education is structured at UCA as the Core. Finally, these courses offer support for the unique needs of first-year students, providing discussions about issues such as effective study skills and exam preparation as well as orientation information about the comprehensive services UCA provides to support students.

FYS courses should cover and assess for the following:

- Written discourse, which will be assessed using the writing rubric (Communication, Goal 1, Outcome B);
- Collaboration, which will be assessed using the collaboration rubric (Communication, Goal 1, Outcome C);
- An orientation to the UCA Core mission, purpose, and general learning outcomes, which will be integrated into the course and assessed (The assessment rubric title is "First-Year Seminar General Education and UCA Core Assessment.")
- A focus on the basic principles of the discipline, which will allow the course to fulfill one of the lower-division Core requirements other than communications.

Below is the current rubric used to assess FYS courses. It contains one goal split between two learning outcomes.

Goal: To understand (a) the mission, goals, and core values of the UCA Core, (b) how the four core competencies relate to the mission and goals, and (c) how the structure of the UCA Core contributes to developing those competencies throughout a student's course of study.

Outcomes: 1) Understands the mission, goals, and core values of the UCA Core and how the four competencies relate to its mission, goals, and values; 2) Demonstrates an understanding of the structure (in particular, the four competencies), components, and requirements of the UCA Core.

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Learning outcomes	4 - Exceptional	3 - Proficient	2 - Acceptable	1 - Failed
Understands the mission, goals, and core values of the UCA Core and how the four competencies relate to its mission, goals, and values	Reflects on the UCA Core's mission, goals and core values, and the role of the core competencies	Explains the mission and values of the UCA Core and shows how competencies contribute to the mission and values	Identifies the mission and values of the UCA core and the four core competencies, but demonstrates little understanding	No demonstrated understanding
Demonstrates an understanding of the structure (in particular, the four competencies), components, and requirements of the UCA Core	(a) Understands all of the components and requirements of the UCA core, <i>and</i> (b) Explains thoroughly how the structure of the UCA Core contributes to the mission and values of the UCA Core	(a) Understands most of the components and requirements of the UCA Core, <i>and</i> (b) Explains, by and large successfully, how its structure contributes to the mission and values of the UCA Core	(a) Identifies, but has little understanding, of the components and requirements of the UCA Core, <i>and/or</i> (b) Explains, but incompletely, how its structure contributes to the mission and values of the UCA Core	Neither identifies components and requirements of the UCA Core nor shows any basic understanding of its structure's contribution to the mission and values of the UCA Core

FEEDBACK FROM THE RUBRIC PILOT

During the initial pilot phase of the new UCA Core rubrics, faculty members who used the rubrics were asked to respond to the following open-ended questions:

1. Was this rubric useful to you, and was this rubric useable in your class? If so, how, or why? If not, why not? Please respond regarding both the usefulness and the useable-ness of the rubric.
2. How could this rubric be improved?

Responses to the open-ended questions included:

- The rubric was somewhat helpful to me, but I would like to see one that is more student-friendly.
- In all honesty, I am one of the people who still doesn't understand how teaching ABOUT the Core should be part of a catalog course. That is the type of thing that should be presented during Student Orientation. But I wasn't here when the new Core was developed so I'll go with it while it exists. I think the first outcome is generally OK as it can be tweaked to indicate conceptual understanding of the value of general education. Memorizing the physical structure doesn't seem appropriate as substance in a college classroom.
- The rubric wasn't all that useful because it wasn't very clear what constituted evidence of the SLO's. There needs to be some suggestions of the kinds of teaching and assignments the CORE wants us to do to reach these not very-well-worded SLO's.
- In order to implement the use of this rubric I had to create an independent assignment completely outside the sphere of the subject matter in which I teach. I knew this would be the case, but it is important to note that it does take away time from teaching the teaching of the discipline. I created a take home assignment that required students to read about the UCA Core and respond in writing to several questions about it. I plan to revamp this assignment in the future, but for the purposes of this initial assessment I found it to be adequate. My grading of the assignment and consequent discussion about it during class leads me to believe that the level of competency with most students is lads squarely at level 2 (acceptable). My feeling is that students will eventually attain to level 3 or 4 only to the extent we are committed in subsequent Core classes to reinforcing the concepts taught initially in the FYS course and continuing to build upon that foundation as the students' progress through the remaining Core courses during their matriculation at UCA.

The responses seemed to indicate three general concerns with the FYS assessment rubric. 1) Training: Faculty need to be trained to interpret and apply this assessment rubric, both in terms of its value and its relation to FYS courses. 2) Support: Faculty need support in communicating information about the core to their students in FYS courses. The IDC is a valuable resource that can be utilized to this effect. 3) The Rubric: the rubric itself needs to more clearly indicate that learning about the core is not about rote memorization of the structure of the UCA Core, but about gaining an appreciation and deep understanding of the role the core and a general education plays in the students overall educative experience.

TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS

Assessment Rubric for FYS: Knowledge of the Core

Goal: Demonstrates an understanding of the mission, goals, and core values of the UCA Core, how the four core competencies relate to the mission and goals, and how the structure of the UCA Core contributes to the student's education.

Learning outcome	4	3	2	1	0
Demonstrate an understanding of the UCA Core.	Fully articulates the meaning and interconnections, of the components and requirements of the UCA Core as well as their contribution to the student's education	Discusses the meaning and interconnections of the components and requirements of the UCA Core as well as their contribution to the student's education but with minimal depth and/or clarity.	Describes the components and requirements of the UCA Core as well as either their interconnections or contributions to the student's education.	Identifies components and requirements of the UCA Core, but not their interconnections or contributions to the student's education.	Assign a zero for performance that does not meet the one (1) score.

Revisions to the FYS Rubric

We recommend making the following revisions to the rubric for FYS.

- Replace the extant two learning outcomes with a single outcome that reflects the concept of the original two:
 - Demonstrate an understanding of the UCA Core.
 - Previously the second outcome was about understanding of the core whereas the first outcome required specific knowledge of the core, such as competencies, missions, goals, etc. This seemed redundant. An understanding of the Core and its role respective to one's education generally will include this specific knowledge. In addition, these specific knowledge requirements have been included in the cells of the rubric indicating greater and deeper understanding of one's education. We have thus collapsed the two outcomes into one, making a neater more user friendly rubric that affords each instructor greater leeway in how they choose to integrate the material into their course.
- Revise the cell descriptions to create student learning outcomes that improve clarity and distinctiveness, and are better assessments of the specific knowledge and skill areas.
 - Each cell now reflects a notable step up from the previous cell. For example, moving from a 1 to a 2 indicate the student is able to not simply identify the components and requirements of the Core (mere rote memorization) but is able to describe them, thus demonstrating a greater level of understanding. The same step can be seen between levels 2 and 3 and 3 and 4, culminating in a full grasp of the Core as demonstrated through the student's ability to articulate the

interconnection between the various components of their education as well as their relative value.

One of the major criticisms of the FYS rubric was that it required faculty to teach simply about the UCA Core, what it was. There is little value in memorizing diagrams and regurgitating mission statements. The rubric thus failed to capture the intention of the requirement that faculty in FYS educate students about the core, namely, that they educate students about education, the value of education, and the overall structure of their educative experience at UCA. The newly revised rubric allows faculty the freedom to integrate discussions of education more freely into their courses.

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