Proposal #2 to Tufts Faculty of the Arts and Sciences

The Learning Outcomes Assessment Committee (LOAC) proposes the following resolution:

The Arts and Sciences faculty endorses the plan to adopt the Draft Distribution Area Learning Objectives for use in voluntary pilot projects intended to promote the assessment of student learning outcomes in courses taken to meet the Tufts Distribution Area requirements.

Rationale: In 2010, Tufts began a small scale project to assess student learning outcomes in the core curriculum in order to meet the NEASC requirements that Tufts assess student learning in its “general education curriculum” as well as in its departments and programs. In their report, NEASC noted that while the “well-defined and faculty-owned learning outcomes and assessment plans for the University’s undergraduate majors” were noteworthy, the “work is yet to be done to articulate and assess general education and institution-level learning outcomes.” (NEASC, Letter to President, November 4, 2013). Tufts will be required to give emphasis, in its 5-year report in 2018, to its “success in articulating and assessing student achievement of general education and institutional level learning outcomes and using the results for improvement.” (ibid). In order to develop a coherent plan for supporting faculty work in assessing student learning outcomes, we must “articulate” the learning objectives that will be used to guide such assessment.

To maintain the spirit of our “faculty-owned” process, we are seeking faculty approval of this resolution to affirm that the learning objectives developed by members of Tufts Arts and Sciences faculty to fulfill this “articulation” requirement will be used in the next round of projects, all voluntary, designed to assess student learning outcomes. These projects will be reported to NEASC in 2018.

We expect that faculty who teach courses students take to fulfill distribution requirements and who volunteer to participate in the next round of projects will use one or more of the Learning Objectives in their course syllabus (by creating course-specific learning objectives derived from these Learning Objectives). Participants in ongoing projects will be coached as they develop strategies for assessing student attainment of these objectives and use their results to improve teaching and curriculum. Faculty who participate in the projects will also revise the draft learning objectives based on their shared experience with them in an annual collaborative review process led by LOAC.

Members of LOAC:

Harry Bernheim, Drusilla Brown, Thomas Downes, John Fyler, Fulton Gonzalez, David Hammer, Heather Nathans, Donna Qualters, Laura Rogers (Chair), Susan Russinoff, Evan Simpson, Dawn Terkla, Nancy Bauer, Lauren Conoscenti, Sarah Herschel, and Carmen Lowe.

Faculty Participants in the Pilot Project on the Assessment of Learning Outcomes in Distribution Course Requirements:

Natural science: Susan Ernst, Jonathan Kenney, Anne Gardulski, Leon Gunther, George Elmore
Mathematical science: Boris Hasselblatt, Grayson Kimball, Susan Russinoff, Mary Glaser, David Garman
Social science: Chip Gidney, Helen Marrow, Natalie Masouka, Ayanna Thomas, Rich Eichenberg, Jim Ennis
Humanities: David O'Leary, Jeanne Penvenne, Susan Russinoff, David Ekbladh, Sonia Hofkosh, Alisha Rankin, George Scarlett
Arts: David Locke, Christina Maranci, Alice Trexler
Learning Objectives for Courses Fulfilling Distribution Requirements
(Not every course in a distribution area needs to meet all of the distribution-specific objectives.)

Learning Objectives for the Natural Sciences Distribution Requirement
Students will learn to:
1. Accurately use and communicate basic scientific vocabulary, terms, and concepts (including relevant quantitative concepts).
2. Gather or synthesize, evaluate, and critically interpret scientific evidence.
3. Evaluate scientific information presented in a variety of media and make decisions about its accuracy, validity, and implications.

Learning Objectives for the Mathematical Sciences Distribution Requirement
Students will:
1. Develop knowledge and problem-solving skills in using mathematical tools and procedures, and apply these skills in a variety of contexts.
2. Learn to discern underlying patterns or structure and represent these using abstract or symbolic representations.
3. Learn to reason precisely and systematically, and to critically assess the plausibility of claims or solutions.

Learning Objectives for the Social Sciences Distribution Requirement
In the context of at least one social science, students will be able to:
1. Identify the core concepts, theories, and methods used by social scientists to observe, to analyze, or to predict human behavior.
2. Identify patterns underlying everyday social phenomena that are otherwise invisible or taken-for-granted.
3. Describe the influence of historical, social, cultural, or political structures on human behavior and make comparisons and contrasts across contexts.
4. Communicate ideas clearly within the disciplinary standards of argument, evidence, analysis, and citation.

Learning Objectives for the Humanities (Revised 2012)
Students will:
1. Demonstrate skill in close reading and critical analysis while engaging questions within the humanistic tradition of interpreting text as well as oral, visual, kinetic, and other materials as expressions of human experience and thought.
2. Describe the influence of historical, social, cultural, and political contexts on human experience and make comparisons and contrasts across multiple contexts.
3. Recognize, evaluate, and use evidence effectively and in accordance with the standards of scholarship in at least one of the humanities disciplines.
4. Communicate ideas clearly and compellingly in writing and in oral presentation.

Learning Objectives for the Arts Distribution Requirement
In at least one art form, students will be able to:
1. Identify the style, concepts, materials, methods and techniques used to create a work of art or performance.
2. Recognize the historical, political, social, and/or aesthetic contexts of works of art or performance.
3. Appreciate the imaginative and expressive traditions of cultures through engagement with or creation of art work or performance.
4. Communicate effectively through or about the arts in one or more of the following ways:
   a. through a performance or personal expression that demonstrates creativity and foundational skills in the use of artistic techniques
   b. through critical analysis of a work of art or artistic tradition using evidence and formal language to support the analysis
   c. through reflective practices that integrate perceptions of the art form/art work with personal experience
Summary of the Tufts Pilot Project in Assessing Learning Outcomes in General Education

Tufts approached the requirements to demonstrate that the university is assessing student learning relative to established goals and criteria through an initiative at the Department and Program level. Every department and program developed learning objectives for majors and a method for collecting and evaluating student work to determine areas of program strengths and needs.

In the early stages of this process, Tufts learned that universities are also required to develop learning objectives and to evaluate students’ learning outcomes in the core or general education curriculum—that is, in the curriculum we require of all students and that therefore constitutes the intellectual core of a Tufts education.

In 2010, when the Learning Outcomes Committee began planning for this component, assessment of student learning in the core curriculum, we faced several challenges:

1. The core curriculum is expansive, includes several threads under two categories, and a significant number (well over half) of undergraduate courses satisfies one or more of the requirements. The core curriculum at Tufts includes Foundations requirements (College Writing, Foreign Language and Culture, World Civilizations) and Distribution requirements.
2. We decided to focus our efforts on the Distribution requirements—however, there were no learning objectives specified for these requirements.
3. We had not yet developed a culture of assessment among faculty—in fact, there was even some resistance to the assessment requirements. We needed a voluntary program enlisting faculty who were, if not enthusiastic, at least willing to work on a project to develop and assess the core curriculum.

Pilot Project workshops were planned to develop the assessment of learning outcomes in the Tufts core curriculum. To do this, we would need to:

- Recruit volunteers who teach courses designed to fulfill a distribution requirement to meet in distribution groups
- Facilitate defining shared learning objectives that would apply to courses taught to meet the distribution area requirements
- Develop guidelines for collecting data to inform course faculty about how well their students are meeting the learning objectives
- Support faculty in using data to improve instruction in their courses
- Encourage faculty to share the process with other members of their department

The project took place over two years; altogether 25 faculty members plus 2 additional faculty facilitators participated (5 faculty members participated both years). At every point, the goal was to develop meaningful, sustainable approaches to assessment that would be used to enhance teaching and learning.

In the first summer, each working group developed Learning Objectives for their distribution area. During the following year, faculty explored ways to evaluate student work using criteria derived from the learning objectives and samples of work from assignments/tests they were already using in their classes. In the second summer, we reviewed the learning objectives. The Humanities second year group revised their learning objectives; the other groups approved the original objectives. The working groups also reviewed the various methods used to evaluate student work relative to the learning objectives and to aggregate the results for the purposes of interpreting patterns in student outcomes. We developed guidelines for the second year of assessment data collection. Several faculty from each year received coaching in this process. At the end of the second year, all faculty who participated in either or both years met to review the pilot project and to make recommendations for the future. These recommendations included a request that Tufts provide more intensive coaching and support to faculty in assessing student learning outcomes using learning objectives.
For Reference: Working Definitions of the Distribution Areas (used by ARB) 2015

1. Humanities
The humanities focus on cultural, literary, historical, and philosophical questions. They rely on close reading, interpreting, and critical analyses of various expressions of human experience and thought.

2. Arts
The arts focus on the study of the critical and historical aspects of the creative and performing arts, as well as studio experience in those areas. Courses engage in the aesthetic interpretation and/or practice of the different art forms.

3. Social Sciences
The social sciences are concerned with the study of human behavior and institutions. They typically take an empirical approach.

4. Natural Sciences
The natural sciences systematically investigate through observation and experimentation the basic mechanisms and rules that deal with matter and energy, including living systems, and their interrelations and transformations.

5. Mathematical Sciences
The mathematical sciences use quantitative and symbolic reasoning to examine ideas derived from our perceptions of the natural world.

(These definitions are based on language that appeared in the Tufts Bulletin for a number of years before being deleted in 2006-2007 for unknown reasons.)