

General Education Program Assessment

ENMU is currently using two complementary measures of the General Education program. These measures give us at least two measures of four basic components of the general education program: critical thinking, writing, reading, and numeric literacy/mathematics.

Aspect	Measure
Critical Thinking	International Critical Thinking Test [ICAT] Measure of Proficiency and Progress [MAPP]
Writing	International Critical Thinking Test [ICAT] Measure of Proficiency and Progress [MAPP]
Reading	International Critical Thinking Test [ICAT] Measure of Proficiency and Progress [MAPP]
Numeric Literacy	International Critical Thinking Test [ICAT]
Mathematics	Measure of Proficiency and Progress [MAPP]

What did we learn about student learning in the general education program in 2006?

- MAPP Scaled Score: ENMU students are performing at a level where 37% of the other institutions score below; a relative showing considering ENMU students' ACT scores are below the national average.
- MAPP Writing: ENMU students show a slight increase [4%] in the number of students performing at the "proficient" level in the highest writing Level 3.
- MAPP Mathematics: ENMU students also show a slight increase in the number of students performing at the "proficient" level in the two highest levels of mathematics performance [1 and 3 percent respectively.]
- ICAT: 53.4% of ENMU students tested in spring 2006 perform at the "mixed or above" levels of performance. Spring 2006 was the first full testing of rising juniors; the exam was piloted spring 2005.

MAPP 2006	ENMU Scaled Score	National Percent of Institutions Below ENMU Scaled Score
Total Score	438.03	37
Critical Thinking	110.69	49
Reading	115.90	28
Writing	113.41	31
Mathematics	111.10	33
Humanities	113.41	35
Social Sciences	112.05	41
Natural Sciences	113.96	31

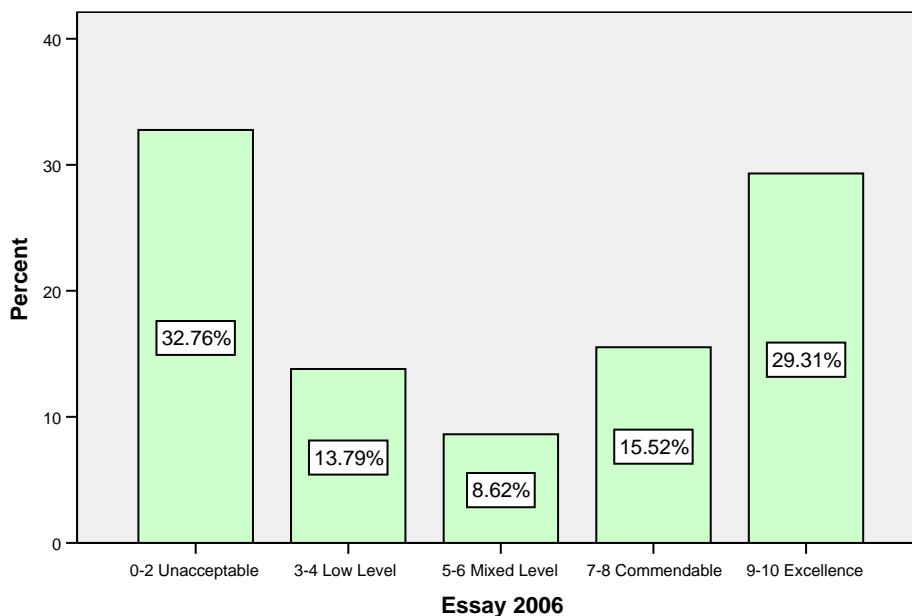
MAPP 2006 Skill Dimension and Level	Proficient		Marginal		Not Proficient	
	ENMU % 2006	% Change 05-06	ENMU % 2006	% Change 05-06	ENMU % 2006	% Change 05-06
Critical Thinking	4	2	10	-3	86	0
Reading, Level 2	22	0	19	-2	58	1
Reading, Level 1	55	4	21	-5	24	1
Writing, Level 3	7	4	23	3	70	-7
Writing, Level 2	13	1	33	9	54	-9
Writing, Level 1	54	-10	32	7	14	3
Mathematics, Level 3	3	1	10	2	87	-3
Mathematics, Level 2	17	3	25	-1	58	-3
Mathematics, Level 1	42	-5	29	-2	29	7

Note: Levels run from the low of 1 to high of 3. Details of the different competencies in each level can be found on the Assessment Resource Office web page under "Academic Profile Test."

The ICAT writing assessments demonstrate (in the graph below) a bimodal performance, with 45% of students writing excellent or good essays, and 46% writing very poor essays.

ICAT Level of Performance	Key Question	Important Information	Main Conclusion	Essay
Unacceptable or Low Level	48.3	65.5	39.7	46.6
Mixed Level and above	51.7	34.5	60.3	53.4

ICAT--Essay



Critical Thinking

The level of critical thinking as measured by MAPP show only 4% of ENMU rising juniors being “proficient” in critical thinking, 10% are “marginal,” and 86% are “not proficient.” And while the ENMU mean score on the MAPP ranks within the 50th percentile national ranking, these results are disturbingly low. The ICAT assessment provides some insight into the problem students may have in scoring well in critical thinking tests. ICAT (scored on international standards by ENMU faculty and staff members of the Assessment Committee) indicates 51.7% can determine the “key questions,” 34.5% the “important information,” and 60.3% can define the “main conclusions” from a college level reading prompt. Our students, however, are having difficulties determining basic components of critical reading and addressing them in a critical essay.

Writing

The ICAT indicates 53.4% performing at the “mixed and above level,” and 46.6% at the “unacceptable or low level” when asked to write a critical thinking essay from a college level reading prompt. MAPP results find only 7% “proficient,” 23% “marginal,” and 70% “not proficient” in the highest level 3 writing skills. There has been a slight 3% improvement from 2005 to 2006 in the number of students assessed as “proficient” in writing at level 3.

Reading

Both the MAPP and ICAT results show disappointing levels of reading performance. MAPP results indicate 22% “proficient,” 19% “marginal,” and 58% “not proficient” at highest Reading Level 3; ICAT results indicate only 34.5% can determine the “important information” of an essay. We see no improvement in MAPP reading results from 2005 to 2006.

Numeric Literacy and Mathematics

MAPP results indicate 3% “proficient” at the highest Level 3 of Mathematics, 13% at Level 2, and 54% at Level 1. At the other end of the performance scale, 87% are “not proficient at Level 3, 58% “not proficient” at Level 2, and 29% “not proficient” at Level 1.

How can we use this information to improve student learning?

A Robust Conversation about Student Learning in the General Education Program. At the very least, the low performance of ENMU students on general education assessment testing merits a robust discussion of several questions.

- What do we expect our students to learn upon completion of their General Education program?
- What key student learning objectives do we value in the General Education program and how do these results guide us to improve student learning within the program?
- To what extent are these “student learning objectives” being “taught” within courses in the General Education program?
- Are there other standardized student learning measures and rubrics that can serve as “authentic” classroom based assessments? Such assessments could provide aggregate data about the level of student learning in the General Education program.

Faculty “Ownership” of the General Education Program and its Assessment. ENMU has just had a conversation on the many aspects of the General Education program driven by the “required core” set out by the state. We are in an excellent position to extend this conversation to the assessment of student learning within the program. If we, as a university community, are clear about what we are requiring and valuing in the general education program, then we have a clear path to assess student learning within the program. Assessment results can guide our reasoned conversation.

The General Education Committee and the Assessment Committee are two excellent venues for these conversations. Discussions among faculty teaching within the General Education programs areas would bring together the “experts” in determining “authentic” and standardized ways to assess student learning.

Assessment Committee’s “Sense of Assessment” and General Education Student Learning

The Assessment Committee is concerned with the relatively low levels of performance of ENMU’s rising juniors on student learning objectives they believe are key parts of the philosophy of a General Education program—reading, writing, critical thinking, and mathematics. And they strongly believe that the questions raised by these assessment results require an immediate and spirited conversation by all the academic community?

Given their concern, the Assessment Resource Office and the Assessment Committee implemented two initiatives in 2006 to deal with student commitment and “authentic assessment.”

Student Commitment to General Education program assessment testing continues to be a concern. The Assessment Resource Office and the Assessment Committee initiated several measures in spring 2006 to address this concern:

1. Student brochures to explain the students’ part in assessment as a means to “improve student learning.”
2. Student incentives such as “book scholarships,” a variety of prizes, and “ENMU Top Ten Scholars” program highlighting students with the top 10 general education assessment scores, and students performing in the top 10% in general education assessment with certificates of achievement, a reception and publicity pictures.

“Authentic Assessment.” One concern all universities share in assessment testing is the lack of student commitment to nationally normed testing that is not directly tied to performance in a course. In the assessment literature, assessment tied to course performance is called “authentic assessment.”

The Assessment Committee has been struggling with this concern and has proposed a way to integrate a degree of “authentic” general education assessment. The proposal calls for the upper division Global/Diversity courses to be the vehicle where critical thinking, reading and writing are assessed using the ICAT critical thinking exam format. These courses serve as an informal “capstone” course for General Education. Within the ICAT format, each instructor would choose one writing prompt from the course and administer the ICAT test as a graded assignment. This proposal was briefly introduced to the General Education Committee at the end of the fall 2006 semester. Many details need to be addressed, but the concept of embedding an “authentic” assessment measure within a required upper-division General Education course required of all ENMU students would be a powerful assessment measure.