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# Approaches to Assessing Learning Outcomes in General Education Programme: Experience at CUHK

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## What OBA means for GE?

- Contradiction in terms?
- “Assessment movement” in liberal education in the US, advocated by AAC&U (Association of American Colleges and Universities)

Website: [www.aacu.org](http://www.aacu.org)

- OBA in GE as an opportunity for thoughtful deliberation on education values

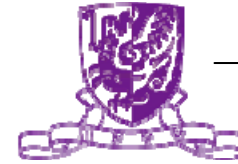
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## Real difficulties

- GE outcomes are “fuzzy”
- Large GE community makes consensus even more difficult
- Can be labour intensive
- Can easily become a mechanical bureaucratic exercise

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# UGC consultant Peter Ewell:

- “Adopting a learning outcomes perspective and emphasizing demonstrated student achievement has proven beneficial in many higher education settings across the world....”

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# UGC consultant Peter Ewell:

- “....But these gains have only been achieved through deliberate and balanced approaches that reflect stakeholder values and perceptions, and that keeps the ultimate goal of improving student learning clearly in mind....”

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# UGC consultant Peter Ewell:

- “....Conceptual reification and rigidity in implementation will always be the worst enemies of a thoughtful outcomes-based approach.”

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## Some Principles

### Do's

- Believe that teachers are thoughtful and responsible
- Genuine consultation on programme ILOs
- Pedagogy from the bottom up: Identify early adopters and share good practices
- Consolidate existing strengths
- OBA to improve

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## Some Principles

### Don'ts

- Top-down uniformity
- Scientific perfection
- Assume that without your instruction, the teachers know not how to teach
- Turn everything into “new initiatives”
- OBA to prove

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A tentative plan shared at CUHK GE teachers' retreat in Dec 2007

# OBA for GE

Vertical alignment



GE Programme  
Intended learning outcomes (ILOs)

University GE ILOs

Individual College GE ILOs

GE Foundation Programme ILOs

Area A  
ILOs

Area B  
ILOs

Area C  
ILOs

Area D  
ILOs

Faculty  
Development

Assessment  
Plan

Courses ILOs

- Alignment of teaching and learning activities
- Alignment of assessment methods



## Ensuring/Verifying Curriculum Alignment

### Aligning faculty's expectations

1. Two teachers' retreats on programme mission and objectives
2. Four workshops on University GE area outcomes
3. Retreats also discussed possible approaches for OBA
4. Lunch seminars to clarify concepts involved in the assessment of GE
5. Guidelines and web resource for teachers under development

\* Participation is voluntary in all staff development activities.



## Ensuring/Verifying Curriculum Alignment

### Course approval and review process to examine:

- if course syllabi, assignments and course assessment methods are aligned with the programme outcomes;
- if students are given opportunities to develop these outcomes;
- if students works demonstrate attainment of outcomes.

\*These themselves are a form of programme assessment.



## An Assessment Plan

### 1. Locating where learning opportunities take place (thus also data collection points)

GE requirement	Year 1		Year 2-4			
	CGE <u>1</u>	GEF	College activities	Four Areas	CGE <u>2</u>	
1. Broad intellectual perspective	I	D	D	D, G	D, G	<u>Direct</u> : E
3. Connecting intellectual pursuits and life	I	D	D	D, G	D, G	<u>Direct</u> : E
6. Critical thinking	I	D		D, G	D, G	<u>Direct</u> : E Embedde courses,



## An Assessment Plan

### 2. Choosing the appropriate, and most importantly, viable assessment tools

Year 2-4			Assessment plan
College activities	Four Areas	CGE 2	
D (Broad intellectual perspective)	D, G	D, G	<u>Direct</u> : Embedded course assessment in GEF in each offering + <u>Indirect assessment</u>
D (Connecting intellectual pursuits and life)	D, G	D, G	<u>Direct</u> : Embedded course assessment in GEF in each offering + <u>Indirect assessment</u>
(Critical thinking)	D, G	D, G	<u>Direct</u> : Embedded course assessment in GEF in each offering; Embedded course assessment for <i>CGE and Four Areas</i> courses, reviewed by SCGE SC every 4 years using rubrics + <u>Indirect assessment</u>



## An Assessment Plan

2. Choosing the appropriate, and most importantly, viable assessment tools

### Direct assessment of students' works

#### *For the centrally offered core courses (GEF and College GE):*

- Embedded assessment for all directly linked GE programme-level outcomes, e.g., reflections on perennial issues, connecting intellectual pursuits and life, working in teams



# Opportunity for embedded assessment

## *GE Foundation (GEF) Programme*

1. a knowledge of major ideas that shape the world today
2. an intellectual inquisitiveness when addressing issues related to their life and society
3. the willingness and capacity to examine new and different ideas
4. the ability to engage in intensive and close reading
5. the readiness to articulate their own ideas clearly and systematically in writing and in oral communication.

## *Overall GE Programme*

1. Broad intellectual perspective
2. Reflections on perennial issues
3. Connecting intellectual pursuits and life
6. Critical thinking
7. Self-expression & communication
10. Read widely



## Direct assessment of students' works

### *For courses in the Four Areas (distribution model):*

- Due to the diverse subject content across GE courses, direct assessment shall focus on generic skills, e.g., critical thinking, self-expression & communication.
- Each of these are to be assessed across the programme every four years.
- Second reading of students' works using agreed rubrics
- Done by a Standing Committee, which is also in charge of internal course review and scrutiny of new course proposals





## An Assessment Plan

### 2. Choosing the appropriate, and most importantly, viable assessment tools

#### Indirect assessment

- Course evaluation (every term)
- Graduate year student survey and focus group (annual, to be analyzed against a freshmen baseline survey)
- Alumni survey and focus group (every six years)



## Limitations

- Limited use of real embedded assessment
- Lack of a common GE capstone
- Not every outcome is assessed directly
- Methodology is not perfect

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## OBA as a means

- OBA is only a means, not an end
- OBA can be a powerful tool for improvement only when it takes into account local situations

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Thank You

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