

Pathways Syllabi Assessment Project 2019-20

Project Overview

The Pathways Common Core has been fully implemented across CUNY's undergraduate colleges since Fall 2013. Now in our 7th year of the program, more than 2,000 courses have been reviewed and approved by the Common Core Course Review Committee (CCCRC) for inclusion in the Pathways Common Core. These courses are required to meet specified student learning outcomes (see attached). As part of the course review process, a sample syllabus must be submitted to the review committee demonstrating course activities or assignments that ensure students meet the learning outcomes for the area.

To evaluate whether the learning outcomes have been uniformly communicated and implemented at the course level, a selection of course syllabi from approved general education courses from each of the eight Common Core areas were evaluated to determine two things:

- 1. Are the Pathways student learning outcomes listed on the syllabus?**
- 2. Are there activities or assignments included on the syllabus that indicate students will meet the learning outcomes?**

Two courses were randomly selected from each of the eight Pathways areas. Following this selection, two sections were randomly selected from each course to submit Spring 2020 syllabi. We selected a total of 30 syllabi from the following 15 courses (one of the selected courses had just one section running in Spring 2020, and another selected course turned out to be a lab section):

CMLIT 101W	Global Literature I	WCGI
SPAN 203	Intermediate Spanish I	WCGI
HIST 103	American History, 1607-1865	USED
HNRS 126W	The Peopling of New York City: Seminar 2	USED
PSYCH 101	General Psychology	SW
ANTH 103	American History 1607-1865	SW
MATH 131	Calculus w/Applications to the Social Sciences I	MQR
MATH 231	Linear Algebra I	MQR
PHYS 146.4	Principles of Physics II	LPS, SW
BIOL 11	Introduction to College Biology	LPS, SW

ECON 100	Economics and Society	IS
ECON 102	Introduction to Microeconomics	IS
LIBR 170	Writing with Research	EC
HIST 190	Writing and History	EC
ENGL 165W	Introduction to Poetry	CE
ARTH 113	Survey of Modern Art	CE

Dean Cheryl Littman reached out to the instructors of the selected sections to collect the syllabi. Instructors were invited to use a [Google Form](#) to upload PDF files of their syllabi.

Summary of Findings

Of the 30 syllabi selected for collection, 27 syllabi were submitted for evaluation. At least three syllabi were received for each Pathways area, excepting LPS for which only two syllabi were submitted.

Are the Pathways student learning outcomes listed on the syllabus?

Required Core: Overall, 35% of Required Core Pathways outcomes were partially or fully described as course learning goals on Required Core syllabi:

- EC 87% of EC outcomes were partially or fully described as course learning goals
- MQR 8% of MQR outcomes were partially or fully described as course learning goals
- LPS 20% of LPS outcomes were partially or fully described as course learning goals

Of the 9 Required Core syllabi received, just one course, an EC course, contained learning goals that aligned to all of the learning outcomes required of EC courses.

Flexible Core: Of the 18 Flexible Core syllabi, just 3 contained learning goals that aligned to each of the required Pathways outcomes for Flexible Core courses:

Gather, interpret, and assess information from a variety of sources and points of view.
Evaluate evidence and arguments critically or analytically.
Produce well-reasoned written or oral arguments using evidence to support conclusions.

Just 6 satisfied the requirement of containing learning goals that align to at least three of the other outcomes specific to a Flexible Core area.

Are there activities or assignments included on the syllabus that indicate students will meet the learning outcomes?

35% of Pathways outcomes aligned directly to activities or assignments on syllabi.

Concluding Remarks:

While Pathways learning outcomes are not explicitly mentioned on the syllabi of Pathways courses, this would not be a problem if (1) the syllabus of a Pathways course explicitly mentions the Pathways area that course satisfies and (2) the course learning goals mentioned on the syllabus align to the Pathways outcomes the course is supposed to cover. However, this study indicates that for most Pathways courses at Queens College, neither is the case. Especially grievous is that some syllabi still cite the old general education requirements of PLAS while making no mention of Pathways. In addition, most syllabi do not connect all their course learning goals to the assignments or activities of the course. Hence, it is not clear to students either that (1) a Pathways course is a Pathways course, or (2) what learning goals they are expected to achieve or (3) what course work will help them be able to achieve those goals.

Why this is an issue: Educational psychologists have long promoted the importance of metacognition for supporting student learning. As a result of research into metacognition, we understand that the effective use of basic cognitive processes is a fundamental part of learning. These cognitive processes include memory and attention, the activation of prior knowledge, and the use of cognitive strategies to solve a problem or complete a task. For a learner to ensure that they are making the best use of these basic cognitive processes, they need to have an awareness and an ability to monitor and adapt them - a metacognitive approach. The student uses metacognitive strategies to plan, monitor and evaluate their own progress towards achieving the learning goals which have either been set by the teacher or identified by the student themselves. Without clear learning goals, students may not effectively apply metacognitive strategies or they may spend time on activities that do not lead to a course's intended outcomes, which can undermine both student motivation and learning. With clear learning goals in place, students can plan strategies that will help them to achieve the goals of the course and will be encouraged to monitor their progress towards achieving these goals.