

Examples – Social/Behavioral Sciences in Undergraduate General Education
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Example 1 - Learning outcomes for social science¹

- Assess the environmental, political, economic, behavioral, or cultural factors that shape human activity across time and space.
- Apply methods of inquiry, evaluate arguments, and draw conclusions in the social sciences.

Area E Social Sciences Rubric

Domain	Capstone 4	Milestones		Benchmark 1
		3	2	
Topic Selection or Question Articulation	Identifies a creative, focused, and manageable topic that addresses potentially significant yet previously less- explored aspects of the topic.	Identifies a focused and manageable/ doable topic that appropriately addresses relevant aspects of the topic.	Identifies a topic that while manageable/ doable, is too narrowly focused and leaves out relevant aspects of the topic.	Identifies a topic that is far too general and wide-ranging as to be manageable and doable.
Skills Empathy	Interprets intercultural experience from the perspectives of own and more than one worldview and demonstrates ability to act in a supportive manner that recognizes the feelings of another cultural group.	Recognizes intellectual and emotional dimensions of more than one worldview and sometimes uses more than one worldview in interactions.	Identifies components of other cultural perspectives but responds in all situations with own worldview.	Views the experience of others but does so through own cultural worldview.
Argument or Topic Selection: Generating an empirically evidenced and logical argument	Identifies a creative, focused, and manageable argument or topic that addresses potentially significant yet previously less-explored aspects.	Identifies a focused and manageable/doable argument or topic that appropriately addresses relevant aspects.	Identifies an argument or topic that while manageable/doable is too narrowly focused and leaves out relevant aspects.	Identifies an argument or topic that is far too general and wide-ranging as to be manageable and doable.
Existing Knowledge, Research, and/or Views: Distinguishing a scientific argument from a non-scientific argument	Synthesizes in-depth information from credible and relevant sources representing various points of view/ approaches.	Presents in-depth information from credible and relevant sources representing various points of view/ approaches.	Presents information from credible and relevant sources representing limited points of view/approaches.	Presents information from non-credible and irrelevant sources representing limited points of view/ approaches.
Conclusions and related outcomes (implications and consequences)	Conclusions and related outcomes (consequences and implications) are logical and reflect student's informed evaluation and ability to place evidence and perspectives discussed in priority order.	Conclusion is logically tied to a range of information, including opposing viewpoints; related outcomes (consequences and implications) are identified clearly.	Conclusion is logically tied to information (because information is chosen to fit the desired conclusion); some related outcomes (consequences and implications) are identified clearly.	Conclusion is inconsistently tied to some of the information discussed; related outcomes (consequences and implications) are oversimplified.

¹ Columbus State University. https://academics.columbusstate.edu/catalogs/current/degreesandprograms/degrees_genreqs.php#GenEdComp

Example 2 - Learning outcomes for distributive studies—history and social sciences²

Courses in this area introduce students to history and to the social science disciplines and their combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. It includes courses in criminology, economics, history, psychology, sociology, and other social sciences.

On completion of a History and Social Sciences course, students will be able to:

- Demonstrate knowledge of fundamental concepts and ideas in a specific topical area in history or the social sciences.
- Demonstrate understanding of the methods that produce knowledge in a specific field in history or the social sciences.
- Demonstrate critical thinking in evaluating causal arguments in history or in the social sciences and in analyzing major assertions, background assumptions, and explanatory evidence.
- Explain how culture, social structure, diversity, or other key elements of historical context have an impact on individual perception, action, and values.
- Articulate how historical change shapes ideas and social and political structures.
- Explain how history or social science can be used to analyze contemporary issues and to develop policies for social change.
- Use information technologies to conduct research and to communicate effectively about social science and history.

² University of Maryland. <http://www.gened.umd.edu/documents/TransformingGeneralEducation.pdf>

Examples 3 & 4

Both the University of Kentucky and Indiana University use two common student learning outcomes for their “cornerstone” courses that all students take (math, science, arts/humanities, social sciences).

Example 3 – Learning Outcome I: Intellectual Inquiry³

- Students will demonstrate an understanding of and ability to employ the processes of intellectual inquiry.

Rubric specific to social sciences:

	4	3	2	1	0
Identify multiple dimensions of a good question <i>Define and distinguish approaches investigating social questions/issues/problems</i>	Incorporates an understanding of conceptual approaches to investigating social questions/ issues/problems in an evaluation or critical analysis	Defines and distinguishes conceptual approaches to investigating social questions/ issues/problems, but does not fully distinguish these differences into an evaluation or critical analysis	Identifies conceptual approaches to investigating social questions/ issues/problems, but does not evaluate or critically analyze them	Acknowledges conceptual approaches to investigating social questions/issues/problems exist but does not identify, critically analyze or evaluate them	Does not acknowledge conceptual approaches to investigating social questions/ issues/problems
Multiple and complex answers to questions/ issues/ problems	Applies an understanding of multiple and complex answers to <i>social questions/ issues/problems</i> ; demonstrates how conceptions of the issue under discussion which are constructed from multiple perspectives	Describes multiple and complex answers to <i>social questions/ issues/problems</i> ; provides historical and cultural background to the issue under discussion	Identifies multiple and complex answers to <i>social questions/ issues/problems</i> ; exhibits a basic understanding of the issue under discussion	Does not correctly identify multiple and complex answers to <i>social questions/ issues/problems</i> ; exhibits a shallow or flawed understanding of the issue under discussion	Does not identify multiple and complex answers to <i>social questions/ issues/problems</i>

³ University of Kentucky. <http://www.uky.edu/registrar/content/uk-core>

	4	3	2	1	0
Theses and conclusions <i>Explore empirical evidence or conclusions drawn from empirical evidence</i>	Critically evaluates the methodological issues involved in generating data and coming to conclusions about <i>social questions/ issues/ problems</i> ; clearly articulates an argument and cites appropriate evidence; identifies the actual or potential impact of different approaches	Articulates major methodological issues involved in generating data and coming to conclusions about <i>social questions/ issues/ problems</i> ; constructs an argument and supports assertions with a range of evidence	Identifies methodological issues involved in generating data and coming to conclusions about <i>social questions/ issues/ problems</i> ; clearly states a position, and supports assertions with some evidence	Refers to some methodological issues involved in generating data and coming to conclusions about the <i>social questions/ issues/ problems</i> ; states a position is important but does not support evaluation with evidence	Does not recognize methodological issues involved in generating data and coming to conclusions about <i>social questions/ issues/ problems</i>
Ability to explore the implications of differing approaches, methodologies or conclusions	Critically evaluates different approaches, methodologies, or interpretive models, fully demonstrating awareness of their implications on <i>social questions/ issues/ problems</i>	Critically evaluates different approaches, methodologies, or interpretive models, showing some awareness of their implications on <i>social questions/ issues/ problems</i>	To some extent, evaluates different approaches, methodologies, or interpretive models, acknowledging awareness of ethical implications on <i>social questions/ issues/ problems</i>	Identifies different approaches, methodologies, or interpretive models, but shows no awareness of the implications of these on <i>social questions/ issues/ problems</i>	Fails to identify or evaluate approaches, methodologies, or interpretive models; shows no awareness of their implications on <i>social questions/ issues/ problems</i>
Develop potential solutions to problems based on sound evidence and reasoning <i>Engage actively in the examination of a social questions/ issues/ problem in a way that demonstrates an understanding of the inquiry process</i>	Proposes solutions to <i>social questions/ issues/ problems</i> that demonstrates understanding of the generation/analysis of data and applies findings to potential solutions	Proposes solutions to <i>social questions/ issues/ problems</i> that demonstrates some understanding of the generation/analysis of data and how findings might be applied to potential solutions	Proposes solutions to <i>social questions/ issues/ problems</i> that demonstrates minimum understanding of the generation/analysis of data and how findings might be applied to potential solutions	Proposes solutions to <i>social questions/ issues/ problems</i> but demonstrates no understanding of the generation/analysis of data and how findings might be applied to potential solutions	No evidence of identifying solutions to <i>social questions/ issues/ problems</i>

Example 4 Student Learning Outcomes for “Social and Behavioral Ways of Knowing”⁴

- Access, use, and critically evaluate a variety of information sources.
- Apply principles of inquiry to define and analyze complex problems through reasoning and discovery.

Upon completion of inquiry in social and behavioral ways of knowing, students will be able to:

1. Demonstrate knowledge of major concepts, theoretical perspectives, empirical patterns, or historical contexts within a given social or behavioral domain.
2. Identify the strengths and weaknesses of contending explanations or interpretations for social, behavioral, or historical phenomena.
3. Demonstrate basic literacy in social, behavioral, or historical research methods and analyses.
4. Evaluate evidence supporting conclusions about the behavior of individuals, groups, institutions, or organizations.
5. Recognize the extent and impact of diversity among individuals, cultures, or societies in contemporary or historical contexts.
6. Identify examples of how social, behavioral, or historical knowledge informs and can shape personal, civic, ethical, or global decisions and responsibilities.

⁴ Indiana University East. http://www.iue.edu/catalog/policies/documents/IU_East_General_Education_Curriculum_2017.pdf

Example 5 – Revising Student Learning Outcomes⁵

“The 1997 Campus Learning Objectives were written by faculty, for faculty. The two examples below illustrate high aspirational goals with no clear path for attaining them within the university:

1. Educated persons should develop the skills to understand, accept, and relate to people of different backgrounds and beliefs. In a pluralistic world one should not be provincial or ignorant of other cultures; one’s life is experienced within the context of other races, religions, languages, nationalities, and value systems.
2. Educated persons should be expected to have some understanding of and experience in thinking about moral and ethical problems. A significant quality in educated persons is the ability to question and clarify personal and cultural values and thus be able to make discriminating moral and ethical choices.

The new Campus Learning Outcomes are written purposefully in a clear and concise language, which helps students understand expectations of them:

1. Communicate clearly and effectively in written and oral forms
2. Access, use, and critically evaluate a variety of relevant information sources
3. Apply principles of inquiry to define and analyze complex problems through reasoning and discovery
4. Demonstrate the ability to relate within a multicultural and digitally connected world
5. Demonstrate a deep understanding of a field of study

Each new outcome comes with an explanatory paragraph to provide clarity, which helps faculty members, students, and stakeholders better understand the intent of each outcome. It is clear that the new outcomes are simpler, streamlined, and easier to assess compared with the old objectives.”

⁵ Excerpts from Alexander, R., Blakefield, M., Frank, K., & Pomper, M. (2016). State Mandates and General Education: One Campus Responds to Challenges and Opportunities. *The Journal of General Education*, 65(1), 36–47.