

Assessing the Global Leadership Initiative: Using Direct Measures to Evaluate a High Impact Practice

Introduction

At the University of Montana, placing student success at the center of all we do is a top priority (see <https://www.umt.edu/president/strategicinitiatives/priorities-for-action.php>). One signature initiative within this priority is the Franke Global Leadership Initiative (GLI), a high impact practice that provides a wide range of applied and experiential learning opportunities for hundreds of students. This article outlines how direct measures have been used effectively to assess and enhance the GLI, providing an example of how high impact practices might be assessed at other NWCCU institutions.

The GLI is a foundational educational program at the University of Montana that prepares interdisciplinary problem solvers and leaders to work collaboratively with diverse groups in an interconnected world. In addition to interdisciplinary studies, the GLI program offers specialized courses, problem-solving experience and leadership training. The program is anchored by a set of common courses supplemented by GLI-approved electives.



GLI students work on a capstone project regarding refugees

Student demonstrations of leadership, teamwork, research and scholarly activity are brought together during the capstone component of the GLI. In their senior year, GLI students present their undergraduate interdisciplinary research capstone projects. The capstone projects provide students a more comprehensive understanding of broad global concerns, such as economic viability, population and environmental changes, effects of technological advances, ethical dilemmas, and the creation of wealth and resources.

Faculty and staff from the GLI have used rubrics, surveys, and focus groups to assess the programs' learning outcomes, and many of the most useful results have come through the direct assessments. As defined below, the assessment of the GLI focuses on the learning goals of critical thinking, leadership skills, developing a culturally aware lens, and effective teamwork.

GLI Learning Goals

GLI Fellows completing the 4-year program will:

- 1) Critically think about global challenges, incorporating a multi-disciplinary perspective.**
 - a) Objective: Choose a global theme to frame study of an interdisciplinary global challenge
 - b) Objective: Identify, research, and study a global challenge
- 2) Develop leadership skills.**
 - a) Objective: Appreciate diverse leadership styles.
 - b) Objective: Articulate how to approach a specific community challenge
 - c) Objective: Complete an experience that requires adaptation to new environments
- 3) Apply a culturally aware lens when considering global challenges**
 - a) Objective: Identify cultural factors inherent in tackling global challenges
 - b) Objective: Adapt to an environment different from one’s own to better understand others
- 4) Effectively work in teams to collaboratively solve problems**
 - a) Objective: Work in interdisciplinary research teams

Direct Assessments

The GLI oversight board has thoughtfully considered assessment results and made dedicated efforts to “close the loop.” In all cases, results have been shared with the full board and the curriculum committee. The results and analysis for critical thinking, leadership, and applying a culturally aware lens are outlined below.

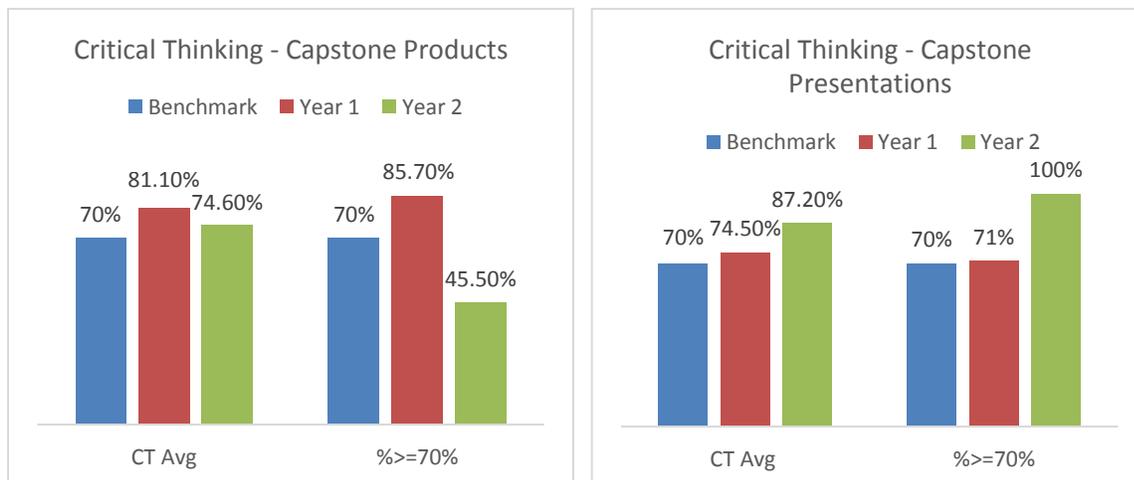
1. Critical Thinking – Students complete a year-long group capstone project during their senior year. We assessed critical thinking (1b) sampling from two different artifacts from the capstone course: judges’ evaluations of presentations at the undergraduate research conference, and board evaluations of the deliverable products (n=7 and 12, respectively). Scores on four factors (each rated 1-5) were combined for analysis, as shown in the following rubric:

	Poor		Fair/Good		Excellent
Was the problem under study clearly explained?	No single clear problem stands out, or the technical language used obscures the problem. Literature is not used to explain the problem.		The problem is clearly stated, but analysis appears to drift from the stated problem. Literature may be used but sometimes is irrelevant.		The problem is clearly explained in non-technical language. Literature is effectively synthesized to explain the problem.
	1	2	3	4	5
Was the methodology used to study the problem appropriate to the problem under study and executed well?	Inappropriate methodology is used, or the analysis addresses a different issue; hence, the analysis does not support the logic of the project.		Appropriate methodology is used, but the analysis does not provide meaningful insights into the problem under study.		Appropriate methodology and the analysis provides meaningful insights into the problem under study. Is used to offer support for the project’s analysis.
	1	2	3	4	5
Were conclusions	Inappropriate conclusions		Conclusions logically follow		Conclusions are clearly

	Poor		Fair/Good		Excellent
clearly grounded in the findings and project implementation?	given the research presented. Unconvincing or unclear about implementation.		from the findings but are not clearly presented. Implementation is addressed, but could be improved.		and logically connected to the research presented. Clear and convincing implementation.
	1	2	3	4	5
Was the documentation organized in a way that supported the project's logic?	The organization of the sections or of the ideas within each section detracts significantly from the project's logic.		The organization of the paper sections or of the ideas within each section does not enhance the project's logic.		The organization of the sections and of the ideas within each section lead to an easy understanding of the project's logic.
	1	2	3	4	5

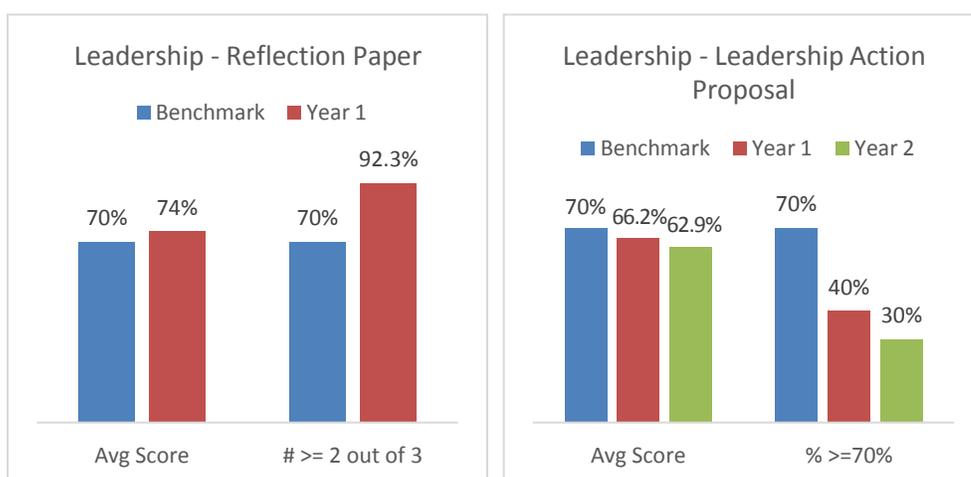
(rubric drawn from Washington State University Honors College)

Both the sample average and the count of projects at or above a benchmark were calculated. Results were acceptable in Year 1 and mixed in Year 2.



It should be noted that findings were based solely on the final deliverable product from the spring capstone course. While the capstone product provided a summative example of a student's progress toward *some* of the GLI learning goals, it could not stand as a single indicator of a student's progress toward all of the GLI learning goals. For example, the critical thinking assessment factors include features that students addressed in their fall proposals – a separate product not evaluated – and that may not have been demonstrated in the spring deliverable (e.g., the fall proposal had a literature review, project outcome descriptors, and other details that evidence student learning; yet, the final capstone product was a website that grew out of prior learning in the program but that did not on its own provide evidence of that learning). Similarly, the final product may not have included a conclusion, which was one of the evaluation factors. This phenomenon was primarily evident in Year 2, as more projects were to create things (e.g., a curriculum or website) rather than to do things (e.g., hold an event).

2. Develop Leadership Skills – We sampled two course-embedded measures from a new required course, Models of Leadership, to assess development of leadership skills. The assessment committee evaluated the first measure in Year 1, and the board assessed the second measure in Year 1 and Year 2. A short reflection on examples of how leaders can be effective was the first artifact, evaluated using a rubric loosely based on the “Identify Strategies” portion of the AACU Problem Solving VALUE Rubric. Results were satisfactory. A Leadership Action Proposal, which outlines how the student would approach a challenge or question of the student’s choice, was the second artifact evaluated for leadership. We used the assignment rubric for scoring.



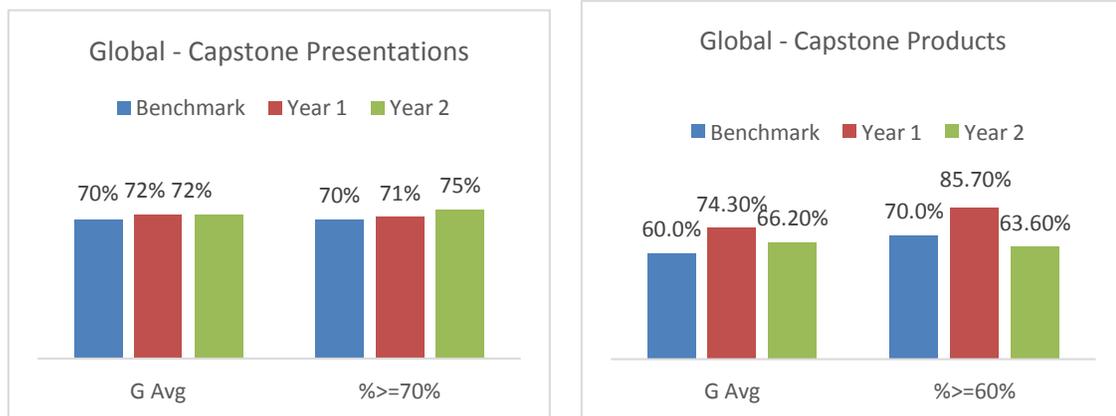
The overall average scores on the Leadership Action Proposal were below benchmark, so we also analyzed the sub-scores on the factors. In Year 1, students scored lowest on two factors: describing the challenge and explaining planned actions. In Year 2, students scored lowest on another two factors: using SMART goals and describing planned measurement/reporting of success.

3. Apply a Culturally Aware Lens– As was the case for critical thinking, independent judges scored all capstone presentations, and the GLI board scored all capstone products. In addition to the four factors related to critical thinking, one factor specifically evaluated global context of the groups’ capstone projects.

	Poor		Fair/Good		Excellent
Was the problem under study connected to a wider view, such as problem in other cultures, organizations, or countries?	Connection is missing or inadequate.		Connection is clearly explained but not purposefully integrated into the paper; modest cultural lens in the literature review.		Connection is clearly explained and purposefully integrated into the project; cultural challenges (if any are noted; cultural lens is well informed by literature review.
	1	2	3	4	5

rubric drawn from Washington State University Honors College

Because only one factor (on a scale of 1-5) related to this learning goal, individual student scores were discrete rather than continuous. Thus, we set the benchmark at 3 out of 5 (60%) rather than 3.5 out of 5 (70%). Results were acceptable in Year 1 and mixed in Year 2.



4. Work in Teams – The culminating capstone project requires students to work in interdisciplinary teams. This is the only place in the GLI program where teamwork is required. Assessment for this learning outcome is still in progress.

Other Measures

We also conducted a senior exit survey, an indirect assessment, to address all of the learning goals. Results were acceptable based on student responses to their perceptions of learning related to each of the learning goals. One-on-one required advising has also been used as another way of receiving informal feedback.

Post-Assessment Actions

Based on assessment results, extensive efforts have been made to increase learning in GLI program. The board realizes the importance of identifying root causes of below-benchmark results. In some cases, it could be curriculum or delivery deficiencies. In other cases, it could be suboptimal assessment techniques. As outlined below, action steps have been developed for critical thinking, leadership, and applying a culturally aware lens.

Critical thinking: Evaluators have looked more holistically across a student’s GLI experience as a critical thinker. Artifacts for assessment have included the fall proposal, the spring finished product, and a “bridge” document where students describe how and why they changed their project after the initial proposal. We expect having the full package will provide better evidence of the students’ critical thinking skills as they develop over the course of the two-semester capstone experience.

Developing leadership skills: The board added the leadership course as a GLI component in response to informal student/faculty feedback that indicated the program’s development of leadership skills needed improvement. The formal assessments in Year 1 and Year 2 were in the first two experimental offerings of the new 1-credit course. The course has been expanded to two credits to allow for more content and classroom contact with the instructor, which should translate to higher quality Leadership Action Proposals.

Applying a culturally aware lens: The mixed results in Year 2 may reflect some uncertainty among evaluators over what demonstrates proficiency in the “global” category, a common challenge when using a diverse group of evaluators. In response, the board devoted significant time to this topic to come to consensus on the meaning of “global” in the GLI. While our name references “global,” our learning goal was “culturally aware.” The assessment committee analyzed the capstone products that scored highly in

the “global” category, using this information to begin a discussion with the board around what we do and should value, especially as these values relate to the AACU Global Learning VALUE Rubric. We now have a clearer understanding of what we mean by “global.” More importantly, we concluded that students and GLI faculty need better guidance on how to integrate global awareness and perspective into their classes and specifically into the culminating capstone project. The updated statement on “global” is given below.

What does “global” look like in the context of a successful capstone project? A project with a strong global connection accomplishes the following:

- **Considers the problem in context:** identifies and analyzes how the problem is expressed similarly or differently in other geographic, cultural and historical contexts;
- **Provides diverse perspectives:** incorporates perspectives from other countries or cultures, ideally through direct contact and collaboration;
- **Examines interrelationships:** recognizes the interrelationships between the self and larger local and global communities and/or recognizes the complex interrelationships among worldwide natural and human phenomena; and
- **Applies global knowledge in designing a solution:** uses this global knowledge (of contexts, of different perspectives, and of interrelationships) to propose a solution that reflects the student’s awareness of the problem’s global nature.

Conclusion

As illustrated in the above examples, specific findings from the direct assessments have been applied to enhance the Global Leadership Initiative. This high impact practice is constantly being modified in an iterative process of continual improvement, a process that is being emphasized in NWCCU’s student success efforts. We will continue to close the loop in our assessment practices in order to maximize students’ success in this program.