

RHETORIC ASSESSMENT

In 2023-24, CLAS undertook the assessment of the Rhetoric area of the CLAS Core general education curriculum. A committee of faculty from Rhetoric and other academic departments gathered data, consulted with key stakeholders, and analyzed the information they gathered. This led to a report of findings and recommendations. The details of the assessment process and key findings and recommendations of the report are summarized here.

The Assessment Process

The topics considered by the committee included:

- Student learning in general education Rhetoric courses (RHET 1030, 1040, and 1060)
- Challenges faced by students and instructors in general education Rhetoric courses
- Rhetoric's place in the broader CLAS Core and in students' entire undergraduate education

The committee's report was reviewed and approved by the GECC and UEPC in Spring 2024 and many of its recommendations implemented beginning in 2025



EVIDENCE USED BY INSTRUCTORS IN ASSESSMENT REPORTS

- Feedback from Rhetoric instructors
- Quantitative data on student learning and student comments from ACE surveys
- Listening post session with faculty and administrators from other departments and colleges
- Online survey of faculty and administrators from other departments and colleges
- Comparison of writing and public speaking requirements at peer institutions

Findings and Recommendations

The assessment process identified several strengths of the University of Iowa's general education Rhetoric courses, as well as several challenges, including:

Area Strengths

- A course structure that asks students to consider and analyze others' arguments before moving to researching and developing their own arguments.
- Assignments that promote analysis, information literacy, and the elements of persuasion.
- Topics that are engaging for students and provide diversity, balancing the shared structure of the courses.
- Courses develop students' reading, writing, communication, and critical thinking skills, preparing them for further coursework and introducing them to library research and information literacy, including AI use.

Area Challenges

- Persistent student concerns with public speaking and class participation combined with more recent challenges to student learning arising in the aftermath of the COVID pandemic and the development of artificial intelligence.
- A need for more consistent focus on Rhetoric learning outcomes in courses with different topics.
- Differences in student demographics in RHET 1030 vs. RHET 1040 and 1060.

Recommendations

- The three general education Rhetoric courses are renamed to better communicate the skills developed by students: RHET:1030 Rhetoric: Writing and Communication, RHET:1040 College Writing and Reading, and RHET:1060 College Communication and Reading (implemented beginning in Fall 2025).
- One of four shared course assignments will be eliminated to strengthen focus on student learning outcomes and better communicate a shared learning experience.
- The number of themed sections of courses will be strategically reduced, and themed sections will be listed as such for course registration.
- Incoming students who score a 4 or 5 on the AP exams for AP Research and AP Seminar will receive credit for RHET 1030 (implemented for students enrolling beginning in Fall 2025).
- The Rhetoric area learning outcomes have been revised to better reflect the competencies developed in the three courses (implemented beginning in Fall 2025).

“The breakdown of how specific essays should be written or thought about was very helpful as I learned what the parts of a rhetorical analysis were in specific detail.”
 – RHET 1040 Student

Revisions to Area Outcomes

Original Learning Outcome	Revised Learning Outcome
1. Students use reading and listening to comprehend and consider arguments, both as separate constructs and in conversation with one another.	1. Students will be able to analyze arguments across media, assessing their structure and persuasiveness.
2. Students use writing and speaking to discover and explain, question and justify positions in a controversy.	2. Students will be able to research and articulate multiple perspectives within controversies.
3. Students understand and use basic rhetorical concepts such as purpose and audience and use them in composing effective spoken and written communication; understand and use research as responsible inquiry.	3. Students will be able to advocate their own informed positions within controversies using basic rhetorical concepts and college-level writing and communication skills.
	4. Students will be able to demonstrate familiarity with the uses and ethics of information literacy, including artificial intelligence (AI).

The Value of Rhetoric

General education courses in Rhetoric prepare students for success in their subsequent academic studies, including courses in their majors across all disciplines. Rhetoric courses also provide students with skills they will need in whatever career path they choose.

Understanding and Analyzing Texts

- Rhetoric students learn to understand and analyze a wide variety of texts (including written texts and multimedia texts), including those they encounter outside an academic setting.
- Students learn how to identify the audience for a text and how rhetorical strategies are adapted to the intended audience.
- Rhetoric students reflect on effective supports for arguments, how to make appeals persuasive, and how to identify biases and logical fallacies.
- Rhetoric students learn how to research contemporary issues about which people disagree, discovering sources representing different perspectives.
- Students gain skills in evaluating sources, develop responsible critical thinking skills, and listen generously to others with a range of perspectives on a given issue.

*"This class in general made me more comfortable and confident when participating in a college level class."
– RHET 1030 Student*

Effective Composition and Communication

- Students who have completed a general education course in Rhetoric should be able to compose an effective presentation to their peers or supervisors and write a well-organized and well-supported document or report.
- Students learn how to craft effective introductions, provide logical support for claims, make smooth transitions, and draw impactful conclusions.
- Rhetoric students will be able to receive constructive feedback and engage in the process of revising and polishing their work.

WHAT CAN YOU EXPECT FROM STUDENTS WHO HAVE TAKEN RHETORIC?

Faculty from all disciplines can expect students who have taken general education Rhetoric:

- to be able to evaluate the credibility and effectiveness of texts;
- to understand that all communication is tied to context and audience expectations;
- to appreciate the nuances of multiple forms of media;
- to be familiar with university's high expectations for academic integrity and rigor.