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University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign: Aligning Diversity and Inclusion Outcomes in General Education

Anthony B. Sullers Jr., Desirée Y. McMillion, & Ronald W. Bailey

The [University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign](#) is a public, four-year, research university. Since its founding in 1867, the institution has worked to meet its land-grant mission and improve the lives of the Illinois community and society overall. Each year, the institution enrolls over 32,000 undergraduate students across nine undergraduate divisions. With approximately 5,000 courses, over 150 fields of study, and conferring close to 7,000 new degrees each academic year, the university utilizes assessment to support its various endeavors. The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign was chosen as a case study site to provide insight into how its Department of African-American Studies utilizes assessment in course design, being mindful of aligning diversity and inclusion outcomes within the course and program goals, and ensuring students attain these outcomes in both in-person and online courses.

The mission of the [Department of African-American Studies](#) at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign is to teach our students about the distinct experiences of people of African descent in the United States and across the globe. Through our courses, we believe in providing clear, obtainable learning outcomes that fulfill our mission while staying in alignment with the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign's [campus-wide learning outcomes](#). Equitable assessment practice for our department means providing every student with courses and assignments that will educate them about the rich historical and contemporary experiences of people of color. This involves strategically including students in the assessment process of these courses as a purposive means to enhance and improve courses for the near future.

In preparation for the university's 2019-2020 reaccreditation process, the department used our AFRO 100: Introduction to African American Studies course (which hosts between 65 to 100 students per semester) to serve as the pilot program as we close with the development of our departmental assessment plan. Offering the course as both in-class and online, we aimed to present students with assignments that accurately display their knowledge of the materials throughout the course. In addition, these assignments require students to review and evaluate all aspects of the course (i.e. assignments, course design, instructors, etc.) so that we can gain valuable data to help improve the course on a more consistent basis.

Background Context

In 2017, the Academic Senate at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign decided to require all undergraduate students to take at least one U.S. [minority culture course](#) to fulfill their [general education](#) requirements in cultural studies. In the spring of 2019, the Department of African-American Studies, along with many other programs within the College of Liberal Arts and Science, began to offer more course sections to help more students fulfill this requirement. Through the latest assessment activities surrounding our AFRO 100 course, we are working to establish a foundational model of assessment for departments that primarily focus on the studies of underrepresented

minority populations. Departments of this nature are intricate in producing students capable of investigating how culture and cultural-awareness create and transform their individual experiences in everyday life. In the spring of 2016, the Office of the Provost created the [Council for Learning Outcomes Assessment](#) (C-LOA) to promote and guide assessment activities and foster a practice of assessment that is ongoing and meaningful at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. The Illinois Student Learning Outcomes are measured in three core capacities: program assessment, co-curricular assessment, and general education assessment.

In the case of the general education assessment process, the Department of African American Studies is looking to contribute largely through our assessment practices surrounding AFRO 100. Over the past few years, Illinois has worked effectively to engage in building learning outcomes for each of the general education categories through faculty, staff, and student engagement. For example, effective Summer/Fall 2018 all newly admitted and transferred undergraduate students are required to complete at least one course in U.S. Minority Cultures (USMC) to graduate. With the collaboration of 38 departments, Illinois is now offering over 169 courses that can fulfill this requirement for students. Ultimately, the Department of African American Studies plays a key role in this developmental process, considering that it offers 25 U.S. Minority Culture courses. This case study aims to provide evidence of assessment in the field of African-American studies at the campus-wide, departmental, and individual course level.

Exploring AFRO 100: Transitioning from In-Class to Online Teaching

AFRO 100 was designed to emphasize the role of intertwining interdisciplinary perspectives to analyze the Black/African American experience. The combination of historical studies, social sciences, and the humanities, including art, music, literature, and media, provides students with a comprehensive introduction to the various forms of knowledge about African descent. The course motivates students to gain confidence about the topic of diversity through expressions of what they learned and their reflections about the material while fulfilling their general education requirements. As a guide throughout the course, we provide students with the following key questions to explore while taking AFRO 100:

- What is the Black experience? Does it include factors in addition to “color”?
- What is Black history? What are the major stages?
- What are some major theories about the Black experience? What are the fundamental ideologies/theories in Black Studies?
- What are the great debates regarding social change and Black history?
- What does it mean to adopt a multidisciplinary perspective? What role does history, art and culture, and the social sciences play in studying the African American experience?

Over the years, AFRO 100 served as the principal course for students majoring and minoring in the Department of African American Studies. This course is listed as an: “interdisciplinary introduction to the basic concepts and literature in African American studies; (it) surveys the major approaches to the study of African Americans across several academic disciplines including economics, education, psychology, literature, political science, sociology, and others.” One of AFRO 100s most unique features is its latest transition to becoming a student-led online course. In Spring 2018, the Department of African American studies collaborated with the Center for Innovation in Teaching & Learning to compress the traditional classroom setting into an 8-week online course. AFRO 100 has traditionally been offered as a 16-week in-class course, comprising weekly lectures, discussions, and research-based writing assignments. Now, through the Learn@Illinois (Moodle) platform, AFRO 100 provides a wealth of information in a condensed 8-module setting, utilizing video recorded lectures, weekly discussions and quizzes, and a group Wiki project. The table on the next page classifies the student enrollment of AFRO 100 between Fall 2018 and Spring 2020.

Table 1. Enrollment trends for AFRO 100 Enrollment, Fall 2018 – Spring 2020

	Fall 2018		Spring 2019		Fall 2019		Spring 2020	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Gender								
Female	42	60.9	50	49.0	38	54.3	48	59.3
Male	27	39.1	52	51.0	32	45.7	33	40.7
Race/Ethnicity								
Asian	1	1.4	22	21.6	5	7.1	14	17.3
Black/African-American	44	63.8	19	18.6	31	44.3	16	19.8
Hispanic/Latinx	6	8.7	9	8.8	7	10.0	7	8.6
White	10	14.5	39	38.2	19	27.1	35	43.2
Multi-Race	6	8.7	1	1.0	5	7.1	2	2.5
American Indian/Alaskan Native	0	0	1	1.0	0	0	0	0
International	2	2.9	11	10.8	3	4.3	3	3.7
URM Status								
Yes	56	81.2	30	29.4	42	60.0	26	31.5
No	13	18.8	72	70.6	28	40.0	55	68.5
Major Type								
General Studies	20	29.0	4	3.9	17	24.3	17	21.0
Liberal Arts and Sciences	30	43.5	39	38.2	28	40.0	32	39.5
Engineering	7	10.1	30	29.4	6	8.6	6	7.4
Business	1	1.4	7	6.9	3	4.3	17	21.0
Other Majors	11	15.9	22	21.5	16	22.8	9	11.1
Student Type								
New First-Time Freshman	36	52.2	0	0	16	22.8	0	0
Continuing	26	37.7	101	99.0	48	68.5	81	100
Transfer (Undergraduate)	6	8.7	1	1.0	5	7.1	0	0

Note. URM = Underrepresented racial minority; composed of American Indian/Alaska Native, Black/African-American, Hispanic/Latinx, and some Multi-Race.

Assignment and Assessment Examples

Over the past two years, AFRO 100 has given us a deep understanding of the role of online teaching and how it can impact student learning in the Department of African-American Studies. With this information, we can adequately assess the difference between teaching AFRO courses in-class and online. Here is an overview of the different assignments and assessments offered in both the in-class and online portions of the course:

3 Tools of Critical Thinking

The 3 Tools of Critical Thinking assignment is based on an analytic framework called the “3 Tools of Critical Thinking,” which looks at three tools that become central in teaching African American Studies (Alkalimat & Bailey, 2012). Students are expected to write a paper about the three tools: the paradigm of unity, the three

environments (natural, human, built), and science/ideology/action. The paradigm of unity focuses on two key components: the historical periods of social cohesion and social disruption over the period (Africa, Slave Trade, Slavery, Emancipation, Rural, the Great Migration, Urban) and the six units of analysis used to analyze those periods (culture, class, color, consciousness, gender, age). The three environments focus on the world during the natural, human, and built environment focusing on the rise of human interaction and how it impacted the world over time. The final tool, science/ideology/action, consider the phenomenon based on facts and data, identifying the different ideologies attached to the said phenomenon, and the actions needed to create change. Ultimately, students are asked to consider the value of these tools in the course and throughout other fields of study.

Slave(ry) Trade Database

The Slave(ry) Trade Database assignment challenges students to examine the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and make factually based inferences about its impact on the Black experience. Students are expected to use research data to understand how scholars are more accurate in their discussions of the slave trade and capable of demonstrating the impact of the slave(ry) trade on many aspects of Africa’s economy, political life, and social structures. Information is drawn from *Emory Libraries and Information Technology*—www.slavevoyages.org—a primary source database that has collected a vast amount of information about the actual ships that were used during the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. Our biggest goal is to allow students to select their variables of interest in determining the outcomes of the slave trade provided from the database to better connect with their respective research interests.

Slave Narrative Database

The Slave Narrative assignment incorporates the analysis of the real-time experiences of enslaved Africans in America through the Library of Congress’s Federal Writers Project database containing 2,000+ first-hand slave narratives, to help students create their own stories of understanding of “what it means to be a slave.” The goal is for students to use the narratives to convey how these accounts enable them to shed additional light on a key aspect of slavery in which they are particularly interested. Using the Units of Analysis, students summarize the experience of slavery in America by identifying how slaves were treated differently. Students close out the paper by reflecting on the overall assignment and shed light on the importance of using primary sources, particularly in the study of history.

Critical Book Review

For this assignment, students are required to read and provide a critical review of William Attaway’s *Blood on the Forge*. The novel is based on the experience of African-American writer William Attaway, a Mississippi native and University of Illinois alum (Class of 1935), whose family was a part of ‘the Great Migration’ population shift from South to the North (Chicago) when he was a child. The book looks to explain the dynamic between the Rural and Urban periods of Black history in America and its effect on the Black experience. For the Fall 2019 semester, we transitioned this assignment into a group project where students are expected to develop: a) a group work plan, b) a collective group summary, and c) an individual reflection and evaluation of the impact this change had on the course.

Policy Document Analysis

For this assignment, we ask students to read and critique two policy statements from the contemporary Black Liberation movement; *Freedom Manifesto* (2016) and *A Vision for Black Lives* (2017). Students explore both statements to list some of the contemporary issues that are being raised by Black people in America and even across the world. We challenge them to describe examples that reveal the strengths and limitations of today’s information technologies and how they can be utilized in current social and cultural movements. By the end of the assignment, students should be able to identify and compare the various strategies and tactics that were used in previous waves of social justice movements, and whether or not similar issues and approaches are being used today.

Contemporary Perspectives Reflection

The Contemporary Perspectives assignment serves as the closing written assignment for AFRO 100. During this stage in the course, we begin to focus on the role of popular culture in the Black experience, with a special focus on artistic production such as the award-winning films *Hidden Figures* and *Black Panther*, and musical productions by artists including Beyoncé, Childish Gambino, and Kendrick Lamar. The key question of the assignment asks how do these artforms compare with the artist and art movements of the earlier periods (i.e., the Harlem Renaissance) and what does the future hold? Overall, students get to assess the contemporary impact of popular culture and make suggestions for innovations that can be effective and engaging for themselves and their peers.

Final Portfolio Project

The Final Portfolio Project was designed to provide students a sense of relief from the traditional norm of a final assignment. Instead of a final exam, students are asked to compile a database of their work for the semester. The portfolios must contain the following; a) a cover page, b) a table of contents, c) and all of the completed/revised assignments. Once students complete the portfolio, they are asked to submit them into the Digication platform provided by the university. More details on Digication are provided later.

Weekly Readings and Lectures (Online)

For the online course, students are provided with weekly readings and lecture videos equipped with learning check questions designed to help reinforce key concepts and ideas. The course lists the assigned readings and video lectures, along with key terms, guiding questions, and suggestions for further exploration. Lectures cover major topics from the readings but do not necessarily include all important information from the readings. The learning checks are repeatable and record students' highest score in the course grade book. From the very beginning of the class, students have access to the majority of instructional activities in order to give students greater flexibility in completing their coursework.

Weekly Discussion (Online)

Weekly discussions allow students to engage with their classmates on topics covered throughout the course. Each weekly module provides a discussion prompt and reply guidelines. In these discussions, students are expected to post three times each week: one "Initial Post" in response to the prompt and two shorter "Reply Posts" in response to something that their peers have written.

Weekly Quizzes (Online)

Weekly quizzes cover key terms, concepts, and applications from the readings and video lectures. These quizzes consist of 10 multiple-choice, true-false, and matching type questions. Weekly quizzes have a 10-minute time limit and allow a single attempt.

Course Wiki Project (Online)

The Course Wiki Project requires students to work in groups to create a Wiki page using the 3 Tools of Analysis to analyze the historical periods addressed throughout the course. The project is completed in five stages. First, students randomly select a group and read more about the specific project components. Next, each group uses a provided template to develop a work plan to select which historical period each student will address and to organize the project work. The third phase is students filling out their designated Wiki portion. The fourth phase is an individualized written synthesis report that utilizes the Science, Ideology, and Action tool to consider the entire spectrum surrounding their selected historical period. For the final phase, students conduct an assessment comparing their project findings with the findings of two other group members.

AFRO 100 Student Survey

At the beginning of each semester, we motivate our students to participate in our AFRO 100 Student Survey, which consists of two distinct AFRO 100 surveys: Getting to Know You (Student Background Survey) and What's In Your Mind (Prior Knowledge Survey). The purpose of this 33-item survey is to assess our student demographics and their understanding of the African American experience before enrolling in AFRO 100. Data from this survey provides rich, detailed information about the students we serve and helps strengthen the course's assessment on a case-by-case basis. The AFRO 100 Student Survey is offered in both the in-class and online portions.

Course-Embedded Assessment

The assignments from AFRO 100 are integral to our department's assessment efforts of student learning. In our assessment process, AFRO 100 students' work responding to assignments have been used as evidence to show how well students are achieving our programmatic and departmental goals. We intentionally select activities and assignments that are in direct alignment with the cognitive levels of learning outcomes of other mainstream higher education institutions (i.e., Lumina Foundation and the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education). After each semester, we actively revise AFRO 100's course activity to help students better attain the intended course learning objectives.

Digication ePortfolios

Digication is a new educational software designed to serve the core needs of teachers and students by opening the lines of communication by combining elements of ePortfolios and learning networks. For AFRO 100 in-class, we instruct students to compile all of their assignments from the semester into a final portfolio project. The project includes the assignments, a title page, table of contents, and an open-ended assessment question. With this assignment, we require students to create a Digication profile and upload their portfolio. The purpose of using Digication in AFRO 100 is to introduce students to a form of technology that will allow them to retain past projects and writings for future use (i.e., applying for graduate school and needing a template for future employment) that they otherwise may lose access to after graduating. In terms of assessment, we can use students' portfolios as evidence of their learning.

AFRO Course Assessment Questionnaire

As previously mentioned, during the in-class portion of AFRO 100, we would offer students an opportunity to provide insight into ways to improve the course via their final assignment portfolio. The final question of the assignment asks students to discuss what they learned from the course, how they might use it in the future, and how the course can be better. Students are asked to consider all aspects of the course, including instructors, lecture and discussion material, assignments, topics, etc. We encourage students to address both the strengths and limitations of the course genuinely. For the Fall 2019 semester, we removed the assessment from the final assignment and developed a 7-item questionnaire with a few Likert scale and open-ended questions about student learning outcomes.

End of the Semester Online Course Survey

The purpose of the Center of Innovation in Teaching and Learning (CITL) 's End of the Semester Online Course Survey is to examine the effectiveness and perceived quality of Illinois Online courses to improve students' overall online learning experience. The results of this student-centered survey are analyzed both for individual courses and in aggregate form, which is sent to the AFRO 100 Team following the end of a course. CITL administrative staff and the AFRO 100 Team often use the data collected from these surveys to improve online course design and development processes, improve processes related to marketing and student services, and facilitate educational and institutional research.

General Instructor & Course Evaluation System Forms

The Instructor & Course Evaluation System (ICES) is used across campus as the official end-of-semester student rating system for faculty and teaching assistants. ICES ratings are often utilized for course improvement, promotion & tenure review, teaching award decisions, and student registration assistance. ICES ratings are only one indicator of teaching effectiveness and should be used in conjunction with other teaching quality measures such as student learning outcomes, peer observations, document analysis, and self-review.

U.S. Minority Cultures General Education Course Survey

Due to UIUC's new general education requirements, the Office of the Vice-Chancellor for Academic Affairs and Provost has begun to administer the U.S. Minority Cultures (USMC) General Education pre-test/post-test survey. The purpose of this survey is to understand better the impact of the USMC General Education requirement on students' learning and attitudes about diversity. The survey was created around the student learning outcomes developed by the Committee on Race and Ethnicity (CORE). The items on the survey were adopted by the Diversity Awareness Scale and the Color-blind Racial Attitude Scale.

Lessons Learned from AFRO 100

Now that the Spring 2020 semester has come to an end, we have been able to identify some distinguishable differences between offering AFRO 100 in-class and online. One of the most prominent outcomes in offering AFRO 100 has been the course enrollment patterns over the past couple of years. First, we noticed that between Fall 2018 and Spring 2020, the number of students majoring in engineering and business increased over the years, both in-class and online. This outcome was primarily due to the policy change requiring all students to take at least one USMC course as a general education requirement. Another change in enrollment that caught our attention was the decrease in the number of underrepresented racial minority students enrolled in the online version of AFRO 100. One thing we noticed in this outcome is that when looking at the in-class version of AFRO 100, the majority are students who identify as Black/African-American; however, it is students who identify as White/Caucasian who are the majority in the online version.

What these differences ultimately brought to our attention is the need to address “the digital divide” that offering online courses may cause amongst our students. When admitting their students, higher education institutions have the presumption that its student body will have the technological skills to navigate through this digital environment. However, it is still possible that students can come to college without proper formal technological training and lack the necessary skills to adapt academically and socially. Despite research indicating a positive relationship between technology use and educational attainment, there remains a gap in technological proficiency when stratified by gender, race, and class (Relles & Tierney, 2013). With the high likelihood of transitioning to all online courses in the upcoming fall semester due to the COVID-19 pandemic, our faculty must figure out the best ways to continuously address the inequities of technological access for all of our students to succeed.

A few lessons learned about AFRO 100 can be attributed to our AFRO Course Assessment Questionnaire distribution. Recall that this survey was constructed as a 7-item questionnaire that contains Likert scale and open-ended questions about the course student learning outcomes. To investigate AFRO 100's evidence of assessment at the campus-wide, departmental, and course level, we designed this survey as an indirect assessment tool to connect its questions with the intended learning outcomes directly. The first five questions were created using the intended learning outcomes as individual statements in which each student can indicate the extent they agree or disagree with (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). The table below represents the number of students who reported they either “agree” or “strongly agree” with the specified AFRO 100 learning outcomes between Fall 2019 and Spring 2020.

Table 2. AFRO 100 Student Learning Outcomes Alignment Chart

Disciplines	UIUC Campus Learning Outcomes	AFRO Departmental Learning Outcomes	AFRO 100 Course Learning Outcomes	AFRO 100 In-Class Assignments	AFRO 100 Online Assignments
Knowledge Bases	Intellectual Reasoning & Knowledge	Gather Knowledge	Gather Knowledge (SLO #1)	3 Tools of Critical Thinking Assignment	Module 1 Discussion and Quiz
Critical Thinking	Creative Inquiry & Discovery	Create and Design	Create and Design (SLO #3)	Final Portfolio Assignment	Course Project: Wiki Development
Intrapersonal Attributes and Competencies	Social Awareness & Cultural Understanding	Evaluate Alternatives	Evaluate Alternatives (SLO #4)	Slave(ry) Trade Database Assignment	Modules 2 – 8 Discussion and Quizzes
Interpersonal Relations with Diverse Others	Global Consciousness	Apply Global Perspectives	Apply Global Perspectives (SLO #5)	Slave Narratives Assignment	
Ethics				When and Where YOU Enter: Then & Now Assignment	
Management & Collaborative Leadership					
Professional Skills	Effective Leadership & Community Engagement	Analyze with Multi-disciplinary Lenses	Analyze with Multi-disciplinary Lenses (SLO #2)	Critical Book Review of Blood on the Forge	Course Project: Wiki Development
Life-long Learning				Are We Free Yet? Assignment	Course Project: Wiki Synthesis
					Course Project: Comparative Assessment

Table 3. Responses for AFRO Course Assessment Questionnaire, Fall 2019 – Spring 2020

Student Learning Outcomes	Fall 2019 (N=39)		Spring 2020 (N=74)	
	N	%	N	%
SLO 1: Gather Knowledge	32	82.1	63	85.1
SLO 2: Analyze with Multidisciplinary Lenses	37	94.8	63	85.1
SLO 3: Create and Design	28	71.8	56	75.7
SLO 4: Evaluate Alternatives	35	89.7	63	85.1
SLO 5: Apply Global Perspectives	34	87.2	60	81.1

Note. This table represents the number of students who reported they either “agree” or “strongly agree” with the specified learning outcome. SLO = student learning outcomes. See Table 2 to identify specific learning outcomes.

From the entire group of respondents (N = 113) of the survey, we were able to learn about the degree to which students felt they engaged in the following course learning outcomes:

- **SLO1: Gather Knowledge** - 84% of the student respondents indicated they were able to describe the main stages in the historical development of the African American experience after taking the course.
- **SLO2: Analyze with Multidisciplinary Lenses** - 88% of the student respondents reported that they could analyze Black people’s experiences using the perspectives, data, and interpretations from two or more disciplinary fields.
- **SLO3: Create and Design** - 74% of the student respondents felt capable of developing strategies and tactics that provide a solution to a major civic or social challenge facing Black communities in various parts of the world.
- **SLO4: Evaluate Alternatives** - 87% of the student respondents indicated that they could adequately evaluate successes and failures to achieve social justice for African Americans and people of diverse social backgrounds.
- **SLO5: Apply Global Perspective** - 83% of the student respondents reported that they could assess the historical development of peoples of African descent in a broad global context, emphasizing historical, contemporary, and future implications.

When looking at the mean scores from the Fall 2019 (N = 39) and Spring 2020 (N = 74) student surveys, the largest gap between the in-class and online sections existed in analyzing with multidisciplinary perspectives and applying a global perspective to their learning in the course. Overall, the results showed that students in the in-class portion of AFRO 100 perceived themselves to have a slightly stronger understanding of the learning outcomes compared to the online class after completing the course. See Table 4 for the mean differences for each student learning outcome.

Table 4. Mean (*M*) scores for AFRO Course Assessment Questionnaire responses, Fall 2019 – Spring 2020

Student Learning Outcomes	Fall 2019 <i>M</i>	Spring 2019 <i>M</i>	Difference in <i>M</i> %
SLO 1: Gather Knowledge	4.12	4.14	0.48
SLO 2: Analyze with Multidisciplinary Lenses	4.436	4.14	-7.44
SLO 3: Create and Design	3.97	3.92	-1.26
SLO 4: Evaluate Alternatives	4.25	4.20	-1.18
SLO 5: Apply Global Perspectives	4.23	4.08	-3.61

Note. ‘-’ indicates a decrease in the mean from Fall 2019 to Spring 2020

In addition to the 678 responses collected from the two latest sections of AFRO 100, we were able to gauge students through an open-ended question that asks to share an in-depth reflection about what they learned from the course considering all aspects of the course including instructors, course material, and assignments. Students were able to briefly assess the course by providing their views on the course’s strengths and limitations. With this question, we wanted to provide our students with an assessment opportunity that intentionally regards the diverse methods of demonstrating their knowledge (Montenegro & Jankowski, 2017). As recommended by Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995), educators should use relevant pedagogy to allow students from underrepresented

populations to maintain their cultural integrity while succeeding academically. Aligning with this theory of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy, we were able to take in several recommendations by our students on methods of enhancing our assignments in AFRO 100.

One key recommendation from our students for the upcoming offerings of AFRO 100 online was to revise the design of the final Course Wiki Project assignment. Recall that the Course Wiki Project requires students to work in groups to create a Wiki page analyzing the historical periods addressed throughout the course. After analyzing student feedback, we developed the goal of offering two culturally relevant options for students to display their knowledge gained from the course by emphasizing the use of contemporary technologies within the Wiki while adhering to the project's initial objectives. The first recommended approach is to have students create a **digital photo museum** representing the historical period of their choice by gathering a collection of pictures they feel portrays the Black experience. The second approach is to have students orchestrate a **musical playlist** representing the historical period of their choice. Both of these assignments would still require a brief written report for grading. For students not interested in these options, we still offer students to write a traditional research summary on their selected historical period recognizing that this option may work best for students who prefer only to write. Ultimately, this direction for the final project assignment allows the instructors to examine various patterns of SLOs based on their choices in project design, but it also helps us learn more about the creative attributes our students may possess.

Conclusion

In summation, the assessment efforts for AFRO 100 have provided much information and experience for us to build upon at the course, departmental, and maybe even campus level. Along with gaining evidence of our students' learning, this assessment work is set to invoke change in the practices within the Department of African American Studies. We are in a better position to apply our current assessment tools to all departmental courses as we are promoting the faculty's ability to create embedded assessments that align with our departmental level assessment plans. As we begin to review our departmental assessment goals for the future, we plan to continue listening to our students through their reflections and work; to our faculty through their teaching experiences and philosophies; and through our future conversations with our fellow campus colleagues who are immersed in the practice of assessment.

Future research will utilize future data to contribute to the gaps in knowledge regarding classroom-based research with a focus on US minority culture courses (Loyd, Kern, & Thompson, 2005). We believe that both the in-class and online AFRO 100 settings present a valuable opportunity to understand better the impact of offering these types of courses on the experiences of diverse student groups. For example, we are interested in investigating students' empathetic processing before and after taking a USMC course using Mark Davis's (1983) Empathy Scale, a 28-item questionnaire consisting of four discrete, seven-item subscales representing fantasy, perspective-taking, empathic concern, and personal distress. In terms of future assessment practices, we have quite a few ventures in using AFRO 100 to help us make more informed decisions about the course and within the department. First, we are looking to engage in transforming AFRO 100 into a "flipped classroom" when given the capability of hosting classes in person post-pandemic. The flipped classroom approach uses a model in which students gain first-hand learning before attending class and focus on the processing part of learning (synthesizing, analyzing, problem-solving) in class (Walvoord & Johnson-Anderson, 1998; Brame, 2013). Through combining aspects of both the in-class and online portions of AFRO 100 into one, we have the opportunity to engage our students about the course material more flexibly.

The final new practice on our list is the development of an additional learning outcome that incorporates mental health awareness for our students. In the previously mentioned AFRO Courses Assessment Questionnaire, we incorporated the following statement in which students have been able to indicate whether or not they felt the course and its instructors were supportive of their mental health needs;

- My AFRO instructor(s) displayed genuine awareness in my overall health wellness as a state of optimal well-being oriented toward maximizing my potential as a student.

In essence, we are looking to use this data to identify the role our courses play into the mental health development of AFRO students and to better support the emotional health of our students by incorporating a holistic approach. With this new approach, we are looking to engage the assessment community in the discussion of charging higher education institutions to develop new learning about our students' mental health. By developing a student-centered mental health learning outcome, we believe that institutions are proactively supporting student health needs by introducing the concept of mental health to students at an important stage of their early-adult lives. In closing, through these various approaches, we will continue to take what we have learned from AFRO 100 with hopes of using it as an essential model towards opening more online courses within the Department of African American Studies, especially during these times of social uncertainty.

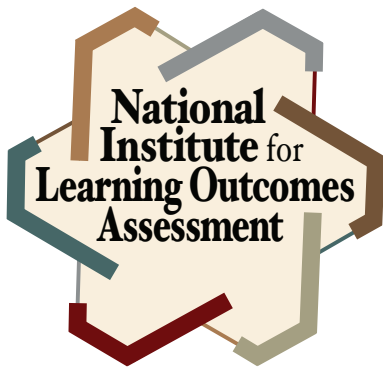
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About NILOA

- The National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) was established in December 2008.
- NILOA is co-located at the University of Illinois and Indiana University.
- The NILOA website contains free resources and can be found at <https://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org>
- NILOA supports institutions in designing learning experiences and assessment approaches that strengthen the experience of diverse learners within a variety of institutional contexts.
- NILOA works in partnership with a broad range of organizations and provides technical assistance and research support to various projects focused on learning throughout the U.S. and internationally.
- NILOA's Vision is to broaden the dialogue and conversation on meaningful and sustainable assessment practices that address issues of design and implementation, and position institutions, organizations, and individuals to achieve their goals.

National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment



For more information, please contact:

National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA)
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
51 Gerty Drive,
Suite 196 CRC, MC-672
Champaign, IL 61820

[learningoutcomesassessment.org](https://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org)
niloa@education.illinois.edu
217.244.2155