George Mason University Update on
Learning Assessment and Quality in Undergraduate Education

Assessment Plan Overview

The University mission states, "George Mason University is a public comprehensive research university established by the Commonwealth of Virginia in the National Capitol Region, we are an innovative and inclusive academic community committed to creating a more just, free, and prosperous world." To fulfill the mission, there are multiple layers of assessment in place to ensure the quality of the undergraduate education at George Mason (see Figure 1). George Mason's Strategic Direction guides institutional priorities and progress towards the priorities are documented on this site. Through Academic Planning processes, schools/colleges examine standardized metrics aligned with strategic priorities and assess the impact of those practices on student success. In addition, academic departments engage in a holistic Academic Program Review (APR) every seven years[1] and individual programs conduct annual assessment of their student learning outcomes. Programs receive feedback on their annual assessment submissions from the Mason Academic Assessment Council utilizing the annual assessment feedback rubric.
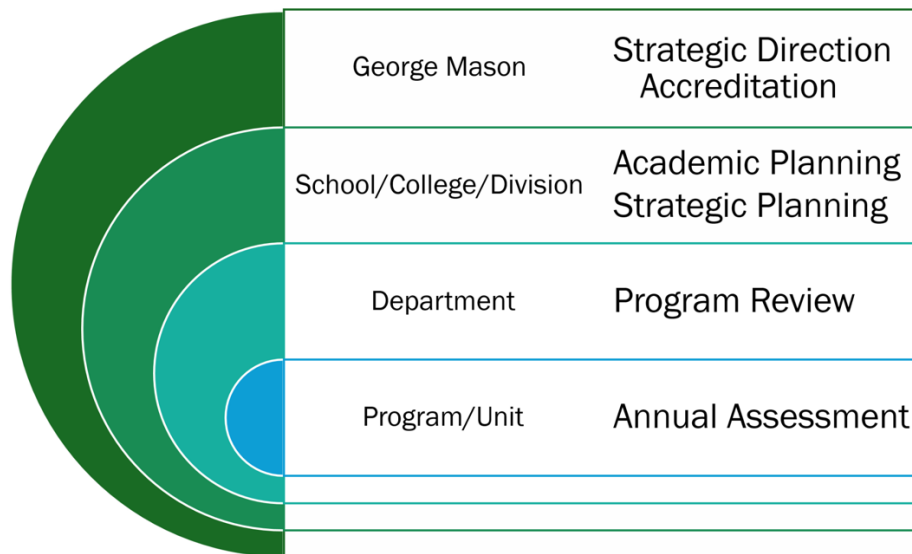

George Mason	Strategic Direction Accreditation
School/College/Division	Academic Planning Strategic Planning
Department	Program Review
Program/Unit	Annual Assessment

Figure 1. Levels of Assessment

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[1] Programs that undergo accreditation that include learning outcome assessment are not required to go through APR.

In addition to institutional academic assessment efforts, the general education curriculum, also known as Mason Core, implements a framework of regular assessment. There is a significant overlap between the Mason Core categories and SCHEV competencies. A complete listing of Mason Core student learning outcomes can be found here.

This report provides an update on student learning assessment for the following competencies:

- Civic Engagement (required SCHEV competency)

- Critical Thinking (required SCHEV competency)

- Inquiry Skills (selected by George Mason University)

- Oral Communication (selected by George Mason University)

- Quantitative Reasoning (required SCHEV competency)

- Written Communication (required SCHEV competency)

For each competency area, a definition, learning opportunities, and learning outcomes, along with assessment updates are provided below. In addition to learning outcomes assessment reports at the institutional level (e.g., Mason Core, Mason Impact, Quality Enhancement Plan), we also provide annual assessment findings from academic programs, highlighting how different disciplines address each competency within their respective fields[2].

Civic Engagement

Definition	Civic Engagement is an array of knowledge, abilities, values, attitudes, and behaviors that in combination allow individuals to contribute to the civic life of their communities. It may include, among other things, exploration of one's role and responsibilities in society; knowledge of and ability to engage with political systems and processes; and/or course-based or extra-curricular efforts to identify and address issues of public or community concern (SCHEV Definition).
Learning Opportunities	Civic Engagement at George Mason is assessed both as a SCHEV competency and through our Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), Transformative Education Through Anti-Racist Community Engagement. Faculty are encouraged to develop learning opportunities through different levels of Civic Engagement course designations:

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[2] In Fall 2023, George Mason launched a new assessment management system, Nuventive. In this platform, faculty who complete annual assessments for undergraduate programs can note if a student learning outcome of a particular program is affiliated with a SCHEV competency. As programs become familiar with this new feature, we anticipate the number of student learning outcome affiliated with each SCHEV competency to increase. We have built dashboards and reports within the platform to compare and view the program assessment data for each competency.

- CL (Civic Learning): courses that incorporate civic learning into readings, assignments, or discussions throughout the course.

- CBL (Community-Based Learning): courses that have a community-based learning or service-learning component where students engage in meaningful service connected to their course learning objectives and that respond to community identified needs.

- MI+CE (Mason Impact Civic Engagement): courses that engage students in the process of asking and answering an original question in partnership with a community organization.

- Additional learning opportunities are offered through signature programs in the Office of Community Engagement and Civic Learning: The Bonner Leader, Civic Fellows, and Engaged Summer.

Learning Outcomes

The following Civic Engagement student learning outcomes were established for George Mason:

At the exploring level, students will:

- Recognize theories and approaches to community engagement and anti-racism (Civic Knowledge).

- Develop awareness of personal values and intersecting identities and how they shape perspectives (Civic Identity).

- Explore a wide variety of ways of working towards social change (Civic Action).

At the developing commitment level, students will:

- Connect theories and approaches to community engagement and anti-racism to personal and academic experiences (Civic Knowledge).

- Critically reflect on values and intersecting identities and how they connect to community engagement and anti-racism (Civic Identity).

- Enact personal and collective actions that positively impact a community issue or the public good (Civic Action).

At the transforming level, students will:

- Apply knowledge of a particular community and/or issue through an engaged project or experience (Civic Knowledge).

- Establish commitment to community engagement and anti-racism that reflects an integrated sense of social responsibility and connection to community (Civic Identity).

- Collaborate with the community to analyze and take sustainable action to address injustices (Civic Action).

Institution-level Assessment Updates

The Civic Engagement student learning outcomes are currently being reviewed and potentially modified slightly to reflect feedback from the SACSCOC review committee in 2022, updates in the general education curriculum, and feedback from stakeholders. The finalized Civic Engagement student learning outcomes will be available by the end of the Fall 2024 semester and updated in future reports.

Another modification in the assessment of Civic Engagement on campus includes the development of a new Civic Engagement survey, in place of the National Survey of Student Engagement, that will be distributed to undergraduate students in Spring 2025. In addition to survey data, course evaluations for Civic Engagement-designated coursework will begin at the end of this semester and student artifact review for this coursework will begin in Spring 2025. A pilot artifact review took place in Spring 2023 to refine the Civic Engagement rubric.

With the modifications, the assessment results for Civic Engagement will be reported in 2025 and will be aligned with the five-year interim report provided to SACSCOC in 2027.

Program-level Annual Assessment Examples

The following link presents examples of Civic Engagement affiliated learning outcomes and their assessment findings at the program level.
[Civic Engagement Academic Annual Assessment](#)

Critical Thinking

Definition

Critical Thinking is the ability to subject one's own and others' ideas, arguments, assumptions, and evidence to careful and logical scrutiny to make an informed judgment, draw a sound conclusion, or solve a problem (SCHEV Definition).

Learning Opportunities

Critical thinking is articulated in the Mason Apex core requirements that are summative, experiential, and integrative experiences that take place within a major (400-level courses) after a student has taken at least 85 credits. Mason Apex courses provide students opportunities to apply and communicate their knowledge and involve integrative, applied, or experiential projects.

Learning Outcomes

Student learning outcomes for Critical Thinking competency are:

- Integrate skills, abilities, theories, or methodologies gained across a Mason student's undergraduate education to explore complex issues in original ways.

- Communicate effectively the results of the student's work with awareness of audience, purpose, and context using an appropriate

modality (e.g., written, oral, visual, material, embodied, multimodal).

Institution-level Assessment Updates	Mason Apex courses will be assessed in AY 2025-2027. Instructors teaching Mason Apex courses are required to address both Mason Apex learning outcomes and submit student artifacts demonstrating achievement of the student learning outcomes. Student artifacts collection will occur in Fall 2025 and Spring 2026. The collected student artifacts will be rated and analyzed in Fall 2026. The assessment results will be available in Spring 2027.
Program-level Annual Assessment Examples	The following link presents examples of Critical Thinking affiliated learning outcomes and their assessment findings at the program level. [Critical Thinking Academic Annual Assessment](#)

Inquiry Skills

Definition	Inquiry is a systematic process of exploring issues, objects or works through the collection and analysis of evidence that results in informed conclusions or judgments. Analysis is the process of breaking complex topics or issues into parts to gain a better understanding of them (AAC&U, Inquiry & Analysis VALUE Rubric).
Learning Opportunities	At George Mason, Inquiry Skills are taught and assessed through Mason Impact Undergraduate Research Scholars Program (URSP). URSP is designed to provide undergraduate students with an authentic, creative, and scholarly research experience under the guidance of a mentor.
Learning Outcomes	Learning outcomes for Mason Impact URSP are:

- Demonstrates ability to formulate questions and hypothesis within the discipline.

- Demonstrates ability to properly identify and/or generate reliable data.

- Shows understanding of how knowledge is generated, validated and communicated within the discipline.

- Recognizes that problems are often more complicated than they first appear.

- Approaches problems with an understanding that there can be more than one right explanation or even none at all.

- Displays accurate insight into the limits of their own knowledge and an appreciation for what isn't known.

Institution-level Assessment Updates	The latest data collection and analysis for Inquiry Skills assessment took place in AY 2023-2024. In AY23-24, a total of 68 students participated in URSP, with 66 students and their mentors completing the assessment. The following assessment report details the assessment method and findings. [Inquiry Skills Institutional Assessment](#)
Program-level Annual Assessment Examples	The following link presents examples of Inquiry Skills affiliated learning outcomes and their assessment findings at the program level. [Inquiry Skills Academic Annual Assessment](#)

Oral Communication

Definition	Oral Communication competency is the ability to use oral communication as a way of thinking, learning, and sharing ideas with others (George Mason's definition).
Learning Opportunities	At George Mason, Mason Core courses (COMM 100, COMM 101) equip students with the oral communication skills needed to be successful in future courses, careers, and communities.
Learning Outcomes	Learning outcomes for Mason Core Oral communication courses are: • Students will demonstrate understanding of and proficiency in constructing and delivering multiple message types. • Students will understand and practice effective elements of ethical verbal and nonverbal communication. • Students will develop analytical skills and critical listening skills. • Students will understand the influence of culture in communication and will know how to cope with cultural differences when presenting information to an audience.
Institution-level Assessment Updates	In this past assessment cycle (AY 2017-2020), a total of 1,489 students enrolled in COMM100 and COMM101 courses, and 87% of those enrolled students passed COMM 100 and 90% of those enrolled students passed COMM 101 with a grade C or higher. The report below details the assessment method and results for Oral Communication. [Oral Communication Institutional Assessment](#)
Program-level Annual Assessment Examples	The following link presents examples of Oral Communication affiliated learning outcomes and their assessment findings at the program level. [Oral Communication Academic Annual Assessment](#)

Quantitative Reasoning

Definition	Quantitative Reasoning is the ability to manipulate, analyze, and/or evaluate numbers and numerical data. It may involve calculation and/or analysis, and interpretation of quantitative information derived from existing

databases or systematic observations, and may be based in a variety of disciplines, not limited to mathematics and the natural and physical sciences (SCHEV Definition).

Learning Opportunities

Quantitative Reasoning is taught and assessed through Mason Core courses. Quantitative Reasoning courses equip students with critical thinking skills using mathematical and statistical concepts (i.e., formulas, graphs, tables, models, and schematics) to analyze and make sense of data, patterns, and relationships.

Learning Outcomes

Below are Quantitative Reasoning learning outcomes:

- Interpret quantitative information (i.e., formulas, graphs, tables, models, and schematics) and draw inferences from them.

- Formulate a given problem quantitatively and use appropriate arithmetical, algebraic, and/or statistical methods to solve the problem.

- Evaluate logical arguments using quantitative reasoning.

- Communicate and present quantitative results effectively.

Institution-level Assessment Updates

Quantitative Reasoning assessment is currently in the student artifact review phase. Instructors teaching Mason Core courses that fulfill the Quantitative Reasoning competency were required to address all relevant learning outcomes and submit student artifacts demonstrating student learning. In Spring 2025, faculty reviewers will participate in an in-person training and norming session, after which they will begin rating the student artifacts. Each artifact will be rated twice, with a third evaluation for any discrepancies. The ratings will be completed in Spring 2025, with assessment results available by the end of the semester. Based on these results, recommendations for policy, resources, and future assessment design will be developed.

Program-level Annual Assessment Examples

The following link presents examples of Quantitative Reasoning affiliated learning outcomes and their assessment findings at the program level. [Quantitative Reasoning Academic Assessment](#)

Written Communication

Definition

Written Communication is the ability to develop and communicate ideas effectively in writing as appropriate to a given context, purpose, and audience. It includes a variety of styles, genres, and media, including computer mediated communications (SCHEV Definition).

Learning Opportunities

George Mason offers lower-level (ENGH 100/101/123) and upper level (ENGH 302) written communication courses through Mason Core which provides students opportunities to learn to use writing to explore, construct, and communicate knowledge by building a framework for writing as a social, imaginative, inquiry-based recursive action and creating texts in a

range of academic and public genres that attend to particular rhetorical contexts through considerations of audience and purpose.

Learning Outcomes

The learning outcomes for lower-level written communication courses are:

- Students are able to analyze and respond to a range of rhetorical situations with increased awareness of the purposes, audiences, and contexts of writing. They are able to identify appropriate rhetorical strategies and apply them in their own writing.

- Students develop strategies for anticipating and using audience response as they engage in and reflect upon a recursive writing process that includes exploration, inquiry, and invention, as well as drafting, organizing, revising, peer-reviewing, and editing.

- Students gain emerging college-level proficiency in critically reading and writing nonfiction genres to develop analysis, reflection, exposition, argumentation, and research skills.

- Students are able to use research strategies for topic exploration and refining research questions; locate, select, evaluate, synthesize, and document sources; and incorporate outside facts, perspectives, and ideas in their writing to complicate and extend their own ideas. They are able to employ appropriate technologies and resources to support their reading, thinking, researching, and writing.

- Students develop knowledge of linguistic structures and writing conventions through critical reading and practice (writing and revision). They understand why writing conventions vary based on genre and audience and apply this knowledge by composing different types of texts.

The learning outcomes for upper-level written communication courses are:

- Students will be able to analyze rhetorical situations–audience, purpose, and context–in order to recognize the expectations of readers and understand the main purposes of composing across multiple contexts relevant to their fields of study.

- Students will understand the conventions of academic and non-academic genres, to include usage, specialized vocabulary, format, and attribution/citation systems.

- Students will be able to apply critical reading strategies that are appropriate to advanced academic and non-academic texts of relevance to their fields of study.

- Students will identify and synthesize multiple perspectives in articulating and refining a research question relevant to their fields of study.

- Students will engage in a recursive process of inventing, investigating, shaping, drafting, revising, and editing to produce a range of academic and non-academic texts of relevance to their fields of study.

Institution-level Assessment Updates

For assessment, students who completed both a lower-level and an upper-level written communication course were randomly selected. Lower-level written communication courses enroll over 3,000 students each year with an average class size of 19. ENGH 302 enrolls an average of 6,700 students per year with class sizes capped at 22. Their work samples were evaluated at two points in time: Spring 2019 and Spring 2022. The link below provides a four-year longitudinal report examining how their writing developed from the lower-level to the upper-level course.
Written Communication Institutional Assessment

Program-level Annual Assessment Examples

The following link presents examples of Written Communication affiliated learning outcomes and their assessment findings at the program level
Written Communication Academic Annual Assessment

Next Steps

For future assessment reports, we are exploring how to effectively visualize and communicate findings on competencies to different audiences. Additionally, George Mason University's updated Student Learning Assessment and Quality in Undergraduate Education plan will be available in December 2024. In the spirit of continuous improvement of institutional assessment efforts, this iteration of the assessment plan will include details about assessment methodology, targets for each competency, and an up-to-date reporting schedule. Progress reports on assessment of each competency will be posted annually on the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Planning website.