Office of the Provost
INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS AND PLANNING
George Mason University

Mason Core Assessment Update: Spring 2025

Mason Core Overview

The undergraduate degree requirements at George Mason University include 43 credit hours for general education, known as Mason Core (MC). Designed to provide students with the skills needed to be both an engaged citizen and well-rounded scholar in a diverse world, the Mason Core Committee (MCC) is charged with student learning outcomes assessment, in partnership with the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Planning (OIEP).

The Mason Core assessment framework is guided by three essential questions:

- Are students demonstrating achievement of the defined learning outcomes?
- How has student learning changed since the previous assessment cycle?
- What changes do the findings suggest for continuous improvement?

Findings are used to review and revise the Mason Core to ensure its continued effectiveness and alignment with institutional goals.

Assessment Framework

In contrast to student learning outcomes assessment for individual courses, MC assessment evaluates student learning in aggregate for twelve defined categories:

- Information Technology and Computing
- Quantitative Reasoning
- Arts
- Literature
- Social and Behavioral Science
- Natural Science
- Global History
- Writing Intensive
- Global Contexts
- Mason Apex
- Written Communication
- Oral Communication

The focus of the assessment is on both student learning and the opportunities provided through the MC curriculum. Given the volume of categories, the MC assessment timeline spans several years to include each category in turn. There are four distinct phases in the assessment process followed for each category under assessment.

Phase 1: Identify Outcomes and Measures
MCC develops measurable student learning outcomes (SLOs) and defines achievement targets for each category of the MC curriculum.

Phase 2: Data Collection and Sampling
OIEP leads the data collection phase which includes submission of syllabi, assignment descriptions, and at least three randomly selected student artifacts from each instructor for courses under review within the category. From those submissions, a stratified random sample of artifacts is selected for a representative evaluation of student performance.

Phase 3: Analyze and Interpret Evidence
Faculty members review and rate selected samples. Participation of recruited department instructors (provided with assessment process training) is critical as they are the subject matter experts. The ratings are merged with institutional data for deeper analysis.

Phase 4: Using Assessment Findings
Findings are shared with faculty, programs, departments, and at the institutional level to facilitate meaningful discussions and decisions about improvements to the MC category under review. Further, to support continuous improvement, OIEP, in partnership with the Stearns Center for Teaching and Learning, collaborates with MCC and faculty to offer professional development.

Mason Core Program Goals and Strategies

Based on the most recent assessment findings, an action plan was developed for implementation in 2025-2027. To support continuous improvement across all categories of the MC, specific curricular and pedagogical goals have been established.

Assessment Process

- The rubric was revised in March 2025 (see Appendix A for a sample) in collaboration with the Mason Core Assessment Council (MCAC) to enhance clarity and usability. Ratings were revised to the four categories: Meets, Partly Meets, Does Not Meet. A new section was added to allow raters to justify their ratings.
- The assessment timeline has been revised to collect data over one academic year to improve efficiency in collecting student work and the implementation of changes based on assessment findings. This shorter, more frequent data collection cycle is expected to reduce instructor burden while reinforcing the culture of assessment as a foundational expectation of Mason Core courses.

Professional Development

- Pre-assessment workshops targeting instructors participating in upcoming data collection groups were developed to support aligning assignments with learning outcomes.
- In partnership with the Stearns Center for Teaching and Learning, the Mason Core Instructor Certification Program (MC-ICP) is available to all Mason Core faculty, focused on strategies essential for teaching non-majors and promoting student success within the Mason Core framework.
    - Explore strategies, assignments, and approaches that enhance the effectiveness, engagement, and efficiency of teaching in general education courses.
    - Connect with a broader community of faculty teaching general education courses.
    - Document teaching efforts for reappointment or promotion processes.

Mason Core Action Plan: 2025-2027	
Curricular Goals	
Target Measures	By May 2026, establish a specific percentage benchmark for Meets ratings to define when students are considered to have fully achieved a learning outcome, and incorporate this measure into the tracking and reporting of assessment results.
Ratings	By May 2027, reduce the frequency of Insufficient Evidence ratings in assessment results by at least 25% compared to the previous assessment cycle, through the implementation of targeted faculty training and calibration sessions.
Pedagogical Goals	
Professional Development	By December 2025, increase professional development opportunities and trainings to faculty and departments to ensure familiarity with learning outcomes and the Mason Core Assessment process prior to their category's assessment cycle to support improvements in teaching strategies, assignment design, and assessment practices.
Department Contacts	By May 2026, appoint one departmental contact for each Mason Core category to enhance communication and coordination between faculty and Mason Core objectives, ensuring alignment between course design, assignments, and learning outcomes.

Appendix A. Revised Rubric

Mason Core Assessment Rubric

Instructions: Use this rubric to assess student learning by selecting the rating that best reflects the student's performance on the specific learning outcome, based on the provided student artifact. Ratings are assigned using a 3-point scale. When assigning ratings, evaluate the student's work holistically, and assign whole-number ratings only. If there is insufficient evidence available to assess the learning outcome, assign a rating of IE (Insufficient Evidence).

Optional:
Justification of Rating: Provide a brief explanation for the rating assigned that **partly meets** each learning outcome, detailing the rationale behind your assessment.

	Meets (2)	Partly Meets (1)	Does Not Meet (0)	Insufficient Evidence (IE)
Rating	**The student demonstrates evidence of fully meeting the learning outcome.**	**The student demonstrates evidence of partially meeting the learning outcome.**	**The student does not demonstrate adequate evidence of meeting the learning outcome.**	**There is insufficient evidence available to assess the learning outcome in the assignment.**
Explanation	*The components of the learning outcome are clearly presented or effectively applied. Evidence of learning is provided, demonstrating comprehensive proficiency of the learning outcome.*	*The components of the learning outcome are partially presented or applied. Evidence of learning is underdeveloped, demonstrating partial proficiency of the learning outcome.*	*The components of the learning outcome are unclear or incomplete. Evidence of learning is missing, demonstrating minimal to no proficiency of the learning outcome.*	*The assignment does not address the learning outcome. There is insufficient evidence to assess the student's proficiency of the learning outcome.*
Student Learning Outcomes: Information Technology & Computing	**SLO1: Digital Information and Storage Exchange**	Students will understand the principles of information storage, exchange, security, and privacy and be aware of related ethical issues.		
	SLO2: Critical Consumers of Digital Information	Students will become critical consumers of digital information; they will be capable of selecting and evaluating appropriate, relevant, and trustworthy sources of information.		
	SLO3: Employ Computing Technologies	Students can use appropriate information and computing technologies to organize and analyze information and use it to guide decision-making.		
	SLO4: Apply Algorithmic Methods	Students will be able to choose and apply appropriate algorithmic methods to solve a problem.		