

Student Learning Assessment Plan

Academic Years 2024-2029

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Executive Summary

Student learning assessment provides evidence of student learning and indicates areas of improvement for instruction. This plan outlines:

- Connections to SACSCOC Reaffirmation Standards, the George Mason University Strategic Plan, the Mason Core Assessment Plan, and to the 2025 and Beyond Plan.
- A schedule for student learning assessment over a six-year cycle.

Significant Changes

There were several significant changes made to this plan from previous versions. Firstly, it is now a six-year plan instead of a three-year plan so that all student learning outcomes can be cycled through twice. The student learning outcomes have also been edited to reflect new teaching practices. Instead of providing suboutcomes, we are offered a list of skills that could be used to teach each of these outcomes. Finally, the assessment for the second half of the plan will align us with Mason Core and the Office of Institutional Effectiveness. This will involve all library instructors using the same rubric to measure student learning.

Purpose

Teaching students to critically engage with the research process is foundational to George Mason University Libraries' academic mission. In order to determine the University Libraries' instructional impact on student learning and to create a holistic picture of the information literacy instruction program, a systematic assessment plan is necessary.

The Student Learning Assessment Plan is designed to assess student learning during library instruction, not to evaluate library instructors. This document is based on the following definition of evaluation and assessment:

Evaluation is to determine significance or worth or judging the effectiveness or worth of educational programs. **Assessment** is to determine a rate or amount and is used as an activity to measure student learning and other human characteristics. Put more simply we assess people and evaluate things or objects. (Frank Hodnett, Evaluation versus Assessment, Spring 2001)

Student learning assessment addresses the strengths and weaknesses of our instructional practices and can be used to show both an impact on student learning and also improve these practices.

The results of these assessment efforts serve to:

- Improve student learning
- Inform and expand instructional practice
- Strengthen the University Libraries' instruction initiatives

The data gathered from the yearly required assessment projects will be used to report the University Libraries' instructional efforts, reinforce pedagogical practice and lead training programs. Assessment data will also serve as a catalyst for programmatic change.

Theory

This assessment plan grounds itself in the “assessment as learning to teach” theory. This theory asserts that moving through the assessment cycle – creating student learning outcomes, assessing those learning outcomes, and modifying instruction based on the results of assessment – results in student learning and improved instruction.

For more information, read <http://meganoakleaf.info/iliac.pdf>.

The nature of this assessment plan allows for the freedom of individual library instructors to teach using their own philosophies, styles, and pedagogies while implementing a plan of continuous improvement for library instruction.

Strategic Connections

[The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges \(SACSCOC\)](#) accredits George Mason University. This assessment plan calls for evidence in support of Section 11.1 and 11.3 from the December 2017 guidelines from SACSCOC.

Standard 11.1 “The institution provides facilities and learning/information resources that are appropriate to support its teaching, research, and service mission. (Learning/information resources)”

Standard 11.3: “The institution ensures that users have access to regular and timely instruction in the use of the library and other learning/information resources. (Instruction of library use)”

The Student Learning Assessment Plan also aligns with the following essential strategic documents of George Mason University:

- [The University’s Strategic Plan](#):
 - Mason’s student experience initiative: Student Experience Strategy 1: Enhance the academic experience for all learners to thrive throughout their lives.
- [The Mason Core Assessment Plan](#) – This plan supports the assessment practices of the Mason Core Assessment Plan.
 - Written Communication Outcome #4: 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.
- Link to the University Libraries’ 2025 and Beyond Plan will be added here when it becomes available

Additionally, the Association of College & Research Libraries’ (ACRL) Framework for Information Literacy in Higher Education (2015) serves as the theoretical foundation for this plan.

Structures

A variety of units exist at George Mason University to provide direction with the collection, analysis, and dissemination of student learning assessment. These units include, but are not limited to:

- [Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Planning](#)
- [Stearns Center for Teaching and Learning](#)
- [Office of Student Scholarship, Creative Activities, and Research](#)
- [Academic Assessment Council](#)
- [Mason Core Assessment](#)

Within the University Libraries, the Library administration supports the development of a student learning assessment plan. The Student Learning Assessment Community of Practice, led by the Teaching and Learning Assessment Team under the direction of the Student Success and Inclusion Librarian, is also available to support library instructors in their efforts to assess student learning.

In addition to these Mason-wide structures, the University Libraries also has an Assessment Unit consisting of a Head of Assessment and Planning as well as an Assessment Librarian. Assistance is also available through supporting documentation on the Student Learning Assessment webpage: <https://library.gmu.edu/learning/assessment>.

Student Learning Assessment Community of Practice

The Assessment Team, under the direction of the Student Success and Inclusion Librarian, will facilitate discussions around the Student Learning Assessment Plan and incorporate trainings and workshops to ensure understanding and adoption of the plan.

Resources

The primary financial resource for student learning assessment is faculty and staff time. Instructional assessment is a significant portion of the Student Success and Inclusion Librarian's time but will require contributions from all library faculty and staff who teach. While monetary resources do not exist at this time, additional resources may come from campus partnerships. Grant opportunities will also be explored as a funding mechanism for large-scale assessment initiatives.

Data Policies

Gathering Data

Instructional assessment data should be sent to the Student Success and Inclusion Librarian once its collection is complete, either at the end of the semester or once the library instructor has finished their analysis of the data via the collection form. This data should be cleaned of any identifiable student information before it is shared with the Student Success and Inclusion Librarian.

Storing and Securing Data

In keeping with sound data management policies, instructional assessment data is stored and secured through encrypted files and folders.

Library Instructors will also need to store data on their own computers in encrypted folders or on encrypted USB Drives.

Using Data

Library Instructors are encouraged to make incremental changes to their instruction as they gather data and not wait until the end of the assessment cycle.

Data from the reports will be used to report to the University the University Libraries' student learning impact.

Goals Outcomes

The learning outcomes given below are presented in an order which follows the research process, from topic development to publication. They incorporate mapping to the ACRL Framework to facilitate instructional best practices for information literacy. Each outcome is equally important and there is no expectation that a workshop or class will cover all outcomes. The descriptions and skills tables are meant to guide instructional efforts and spark ideas; the skills tables provided are by no means the only way to teach these outcomes and library instructors are encouraged to think creatively about how to meet these outcomes for the individual needs of your classes.

1. Students will be able to articulate their information need. (Research as Inquiry / Information Creation as a Process)
2. Students will be able to implement a focused search strategy. (Research as Inquiry / Searching as Strategic Exploration)
3. Students will be able to evaluate information, where it comes from, and how it's used. (Information Creation as a Process / Authority is Constructed and Contextual)
4. Students will be able to investigate how information sources work together around a topic. (Scholarship as Conversation/Research as Inquiry)
5. Students will be able to critically engage with their own identities, biases, and ideas in order to contribute to the scholarly conversation. (Information Creation as Process / Scholarship as Conversation)
6. Students will be able to critique the ways authority is constructed. (Authority is Constructed and Contextual / Information has Value)

Timeline for Continuous Assessment

The expectation of the plan is for individual library instructors or groups of library instructors to provide assessments on both outcomes scheduled for each year. The assessments do not need to happen in the same class or in the same semester.

Year	Outcomes to be Assessed
FY 24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students will be able to implement a focused search strategy. (Research as Inquiry / Searching as Strategic Exploration) • Students will be able to articulate their information need. (Research as Inquiry / Information Creation as a Process)
FY 25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students will be able to critically engage with their own identities, biases, and ideas in order to contribute to the scholarly conversation. (Information Creation as Process / Scholarship as Conversation) • Students will be able to evaluate information, where it comes from, and how it's used. (Information Creation as a Process / Authority is Constructed and Contextual)
FY 26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students will be able to critique the ways authority is constructed. (Authority is Constructed and Contextual / Information has Value) • Students will be able to investigate how information sources work together around a topic. (Scholarship as Conversation/Research as Inquiry)
FY 27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students will be able to implement a focused search strategy. (Research as Inquiry / Searching as Strategic Exploration) • Students will be able to critically engage with their own identities, biases, and ideas in order to contribute to the scholarly conversation. (Information Creation as Process / Scholarship as Conversation)
FY 28	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students will be able to investigate how information sources work together around a topic. (Scholarship as Conversation/Research as Inquiry) • Students will be able to articulate their information need. (Research as Inquiry / Information Creation as a Process)
FY 29	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students will be able to evaluate information, where it comes from, and how it's used. (Information Creation as a Process / Authority is Constructed and Contextual) • Students will be able to critique the ways authority is constructed. (Authority is Constructed and Contextual / Information has Value)

Appendix A: Outcomes and Skills

The learning outcomes given below are presented in an order which follows the research process, from developing a topic to publication. Each outcome is equally important and there is no expectation that a workshop or class will cover all outcomes.

The skills tables are meant to guide your instructional efforts and spark ideas; they are by no means the only way to teach these outcomes. Library instructors are encouraged to create unique sub-outcomes that are relevant to the courses and subjects that are taught.

1. Students will be able to articulate their information need. (Research as Inquiry / Information Creation as a Process)

Some skills that teach to this outcome:

- Developing a research question
- Pre-research
- How information is organized
- Matching needs to source types
- Identify researcher gaps in knowledge
- Identifying appropriate databases for research
- Determine the scope of the research investigation
- Topic development
- Identify stakeholders who might produce information about their topic

2. Students will be able to implement a focused search strategy. (Research as Inquiry / Searching as Strategic Exploration)

Some skills that teach to this outcome:

- Refining searches
- Citation Mining
- Keywords
- Using appropriate search tools for information needs
- Subject Headings, MeSH
- Boolean Operators
- Database Filters
- How to organize and save sources (Zotero)

3. Students will be able to evaluate information, where it comes from, and how it's used. (Information Creation as a Process / Authority is Constructed and Contextual)

Some skills that teach to this outcome

- Storyboarding the research/publication process
 - Algorithms, bias, and the personalized internet
 - How authority is constructed and received
 - Research methods used in different disciplines
 - Marginalized Voices: where they fit and how/where to find
 - Media Literacy
4. Students will be able to investigate how information sources work together around a topic. (Scholarship as Conversation/Research as Inquiry)

Some skills that teach to this outcome:

- Scholarly Conversation
- Identifying gaps in research
- Understand they are entering ongoing research and not a finished conversation
- Audit their own bibliography to determine what sources they need to add and how their sources work together
- Rhetorical analysis of sources
- Evaluation Tools: SIFT, RADAR, CRAAP, News You Can Use
- Critical reading of sources – what is the source saying? How are they saying it?
- The role of publishers in the information dissemination process and how they can bias a source
- Types of information – scholarly, popular, grey, trade
- Discipline Specific Information Types

5. Students will be able to critically engage with their own identities, biases, and ideas in order to contribute to the scholarly conversation. (Information Creation as Process / Scholarship as Conversation)

Some skills that teach to this outcome:

- How institutional collections are built
 - Recognizing they need to find multiple sources with different pieces of their topic
 - Information Cycle
 - Identifying the scholarly conversation
 - Audit their own bibliography to determine what source they need and how they fit together
 - BEAM
 - Understand how sources fit together to make an argument
6. Students will be able to critique the ways authority is constructed. (Authority is Constructed and Contextual / Information has Value)

Some skills that teach to this outcome:

- How publishing processes disadvantage marginalized groups
- Flaws surrounding scholarly information: when is it appropriate to use scholarly information and when isn't it?
- Who we cite, when we cite them, and how we cite them
- What is positionality and how can it affect the ways you interpret and use information?
- Recognize that systems privilege authorities and that not having a fluency in the language and process of a discipline disempowers their ability to participate and engage
- maintain an open mind and a critical stance;
- IF I APPLY
- Understand the role of cognitive biases, such as confirmation bias and anchoring bias, in interpreting information
- Solicit feedback from others
- Respectfully provide feedback to others
- Evaluation of a collection for biases

Appendix B: Rubrics

For the first three years of the project, library instructors will create their own projects and measures for reviewing if students in their courses met the student learning assessment plan outcomes.

However, FY27-29, library instructors will be applying the same rubric to their instructional artifact in order to determine if students met the outcomes in their classes and through library instruction overall at the University Libraries. This rubric will be developed by a team of library instructors. This new practice will connect our assessment efforts to the Mason Core Assessment Project more cohesively and incorporate best practices from the Office of Institutional Effectiveness. Our reports will be able to be incorporated into their results and

Appendix C: Submission Form Questions

1. Library Instructor(s): Who were the library instructors who implemented the assessment? This may be one library instructor, multiple instructors, or a team!*
2. Academic Year:*
3. Course: Include the course, workshop, or event that you assessed*
4. How many people were in attendance?
5. Select the overarching outcome(s) that you assessed:*

 - a. will be able to articulate their information need.
 - b. Students will be able to implement a focused search strategy.
 - c. Students will be able to evaluate information, where it comes from, and how it's used.
 - d. Students will be able to investigate how information sources work together around a topic.
 - e. Students will be able to critically engage with their own identities, biases, and ideas in order to contribute to the scholarly conversation.
 - f. Students will be able to critique the ways authority is constructed.

6. What are your specific sub-outcomes that relate to the overall outcome? Include the specific sub-outcomes you used for this course.*
7. Summary: What were you hoping to learn from this project? Why is it significant to your instruction? Is there any background information that may be needed to understand how and why this project was selected?*
8. Methods: How did you measure student learning in this course? Include any instruments (activities, surveys, quizzes, etc.) that you used. Be sure to include a copy of any rubrics that you used as well. *

9. Results: What were your findings? Include the exact data of what you found as well as an overview. You should at least include totals, averages, and percentages of your analysis. You are welcome to include more in-depth statistical analysis. *
10. Future Action: After reviewing the data, what do you plan to change, if anything? This may include your instruction, the assessment tool, or something else. Could you use this data to leverage your library instruction skills to advocate for your instruction for other classes*
11. Would you be interested in giving a lightning talk about this project to other library instructors at Mason? *
12. Supporting Documents. Please upload your rubric, data without identifiable student information, your activity description, etc.