

Student Learning Assessment Plan Academic Years 2021-2023

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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 the Future of Library Services Plan
- A schedule for student learning assessment over a three-year cycle

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 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](#) – “Innovative Learning,” Goal 1 of the Strategic Plan, supports the purpose of student learning assessment within the University Libraries. The assessment data gathered through this plan will improve student learning and library instruction.
- [The Future of Library Services Plan](#)- The Student Learning Assessment Plan supports Priority Area 1: Student Success. “Empower, guide, and support students to achieve “The Mason Graduate” ideal (engaged citizens, well-rounded scholars, and career-ready individuals) through instructional and programmatic learning environments that develop information, digital, data, primary source, and media literacy; critical thinking; and research skills.”

- [The Mason Core Assessment Plan](#) – This plan supports the assessment practices of the Mason Core Assessment Plan. Note that the current assessment plan for Mason Core is for 2017-2020. When a new plan is announced, this section will be updated.

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 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 the Student Learning Assessment Toolkit and Curriculum Map, both of which are found in the appendices of these documents.

Student Learning Assessment Community of Practice

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.

This Community will meet throughout the year to discuss assessment efforts and share ideas. This will culminate in a yearly training session where participants will share their assessment efforts for the year.

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. This data needs to be sent via an encrypted file. For directions on encrypting files, please see Appendix B. When submitting data, library instructors are responsible for removing personal and identifying student information. If the depositor is unfamiliar with this process, they may contact the Student Success and Inclusion Librarian for assistance. Raw data is everything you collected (including identifiable student information) and must be sent via an encrypted file. Cleansed data is any data where identifiable information has been removed. If identifiable student data is not needed to complete the assessment project, it is not recommended to collect this type of information and exclude collecting students' names or G Numbers from data.

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 (see Appendix B for directions).

Accessing Data

If an individual is interested in accessing raw instructional data, they should contact the Student Success and Inclusion Librarian. In order to protect the privacy of students and library instructors, in certain situations, access may be limited to the submitter.

Reporting Data

Internally, instructional assessment reports will be posted on an annual basis to the shared Assessment Drive on the Library servers and to the University Libraries' Intranet page,

“Student Learning Assessment.” Externally, annual reports will be published on the Assessment page of the University Libraries’ website. Additionally, instructional assessment data may be used for reporting to George Mason’s Office of Institutional Assessment, SACS, ACRL, and other relevant reporting agencies. If library instructors use instructional assessment data to generate a report, scholarship, or other noteworthy communicate, they should provide the Student Success and Inclusion Librarian with a copy for archiving.

Additionally, the Student Success and Inclusion Librarian will submit new student learning assessment projects (not continuous or yearly projects) to the University Libraries’ Data Inventory each year/on a yearly basis

Data Retention

The Student Success and Inclusion Librarian will store the data for the cycle of the Student Learning Assessment Plan. At the end of each cycle, the data will be deleted and it will be the responsibility of library instructors to ensure they still have access to any necessary data.

Using Data

Library Instructors are encouraged to make incremental changes to their instruction as they gather data.

Goals Outcomes

The learning outcomes given below are presented in an order which follows the research process, from topic development to publication. Each outcome is equally important and there is no expectation that a workshop or class will cover all outcomes. The descriptions and sub-outcomes are meant to guide instructional efforts and spark ideas; the sub-outcomes provided are by no means the only way to teach these outcomes and library instructors are encouraged to create unique sub-outcomes that relate to instruction needs and levels.

Students will be able to:

1. Articulate their information need. **(Research as Inquiry / Searching as Strategic Exploration)**
2. Locate resources using appropriate search tools and strategies for their information need. **(Research as Inquiry / Searching as Strategic Exploration)**
3. Critically evaluate information and where it comes from. **(Authority is Constructed and Contextual / Information Creation as Process)**
4. Synthesize information from multiple sources. **(Research as Inquiry)**
5. Describe the information creation and dissemination process. **(Information Creation as Process / Information Has Value)**

6. Identify the legal, economic, and social context of the use and creation of information.
(Information has Value / Scholarship as Conversation)

Timeline for Continuous Assessment

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

Year	Outcome Schedule
FY 21	Outcome 1: Articulate their information need. Outcome 5: Describe the information creation and dissemination process
FY 22	Outcome 3: Critically evaluate information and where it comes from. Outcome 6: Identify the legal, economic, and social context of the use and creation of information.
FY 23	Outcome 2: Locate resources using appropriate search tools and strategies for their information need. Outcome 4: Synthesize information from multiple sources

Appendix A: Outcomes

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 descriptions and sub-outcomes 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.**

Students will be able to:

Outcome 1: Articulate their information need. (**Research as Inquiry / Searching as Strategic Exploration**)

Students will be able to express the type and amount of information needed based on a given context, discipline, question, or problem.

- Students identify a research question to begin their search process.
- Students articulate how information within their discipline is organized and structured.
- Students analyze a topic or research question to determine whether a single answer or multiple, conflicting answers exist.

Outcome 2: Locate resources using appropriate search tools and strategies for their information need. (**Research as Inquiry / Searching as Strategic Exploration**)

The tools and strategies a researcher use will vary by the type of information they need. Students will be able to translate their information need into a set of tools and strategies that are appropriate for their context.

- Students refine search strategies and search language (keywords, controlled vocabulary, natural language) based on search results.
- Students expand their information searches through cited reference searching techniques.
- Students reformulate research questions based on information gaps and possibly conflicting information.
- Students match information needs and search strategies to appropriate search tools.

Outcome 3: Critically evaluate information and where it comes from. (**Authority is Constructed and Contextual / Information Creation as Process**)

Understanding that the credibility and reliability of a source depends on how and where it will be used, successful students will be able to evaluate the information they find. They will also be able to evaluate their information's sources, examining them for potential bias.

- Students describe various research methods utilized in their discipline.
- Students define different types of authority, such as subject expertise (e.g., scholarship), societal position (e.g., public office or title), or special experience (e.g., participating in a historic event).
- Students recognize that information may be perceived differently based on the format in which it is packaged.

Outcome 4: Synthesize information from multiple sources. **(Research as Inquiry)**

Students will be able to take information from diverse sources and synthesize them into their own work, being able to compare, contrast, and analyze that information.

- Students compare how scholarly perspective changed over time on a particular topic within a discipline.
- Students draw reasonable conclusions based on the analysis and interpretation of information.

Outcome 5: Describe the information creation and dissemination process. **(Information Creation as Process / Information Has Value)**

The process by which information is created and distributed varies by discipline and within different contexts. Students will be able to discuss that process within their own context or discipline and understand their own place within it as both consumer and creator of information.

- Students articulate the capabilities and constraints of information developed through various creation processes.
- Students recognize that a given scholarly work may not represent the only or even the majority perspective on the issue.

Outcome 6: Identify the legal, economic, and social context of the use and creation of information. **(Information Has Value / Scholarship as Conversation)**

Information is created within a set of environmental contexts, and successful students will be able to identify those contexts. These legal, economic, and social factors also create inequities in information access and production. Students will be able to identify those inequities and their own information privilege as students at George Mason University. Library instructors

will not give out legal advice to students, but introduce legal issues surrounding information (copyright, etc).

- Students describe the commodification of information and how it affects access to various types of information.
- Students understand how and why some individuals or groups of individuals may be underrepresented or systematically marginalized within the systems that produce and disseminate information.
- Students recognize issues of access or lack of access to information sources.
- Students articulate the purpose and distinguishing characteristics of copyright, fair use, open access, and the public domain.

Appendix B: Data Encryption

Data security is essential to prevent unauthorized access, use, disclosure, disruption, modification, inspection, recording or destruction of data. Failure to implement data security could result in increased risk to students. At all times, instructional assessment data must be securely stored and securely transferred. When securing data, you must ensure:

1. All data collection and storage devices must be password protected with a strong password. A strong password is at least 8 characters long, uses 4 out of 4 character groups: Uses a combination of UPPERCASE, lowercase, numeric and special characters and does not contain an easily-guessable mnemonic string. Do not use the same password you use for any other purposes to secure instructional assessment data.
2. All data/research files must be encrypted. To encrypt it is recommended to use [AES Crypt](#). AES Crypt is open source and multi-platform. It can be installed on any operating system. For instructions on how to install and use this [software follow this link](#).
3. Identifiers, data, and keys should be placed in separate; password protected/encrypted files and each file should be stored in a different secure location.
4. For secure data transmission, Transport Layer Security (TLS) (a.k.a. SSL), and a minimum key length of 128 bits must be used for any data that is transmitted electronically. Ensure first that the data itself is encrypted before you send it securely.
5. Identifiers should not be stored on smartphones, laptops, Android and iPad tablets, flash drives or other portable storage devices. If it is necessary to use portable devices for initial collection of identifiers, the data files should be encrypted, and the identifiers moved to a secure system as soon as possible. Additionally, the portable device should be locked up in a secure location when it is not in use. If there is any confusion on how to correctly configure desktop computers, laptops, and other external devices for safe use in the collection and storage of research data, please consult the Student Success and Inclusion Librarian.
6. All communication with students or communication about data collected from students must be encrypted using end-to-end encryption. When a message is protected by end-to-end encryption, only the sender and recipient are able to read it. This includes but is not limited to email, phone, chat, if using email for communication or to collect data from students in cases where such communication is not encrypted, include a statement to the students that email is not secure. If email will be used to transmit research data, students should be cautioned to respond only from email addresses to which only they have access. Email encryption in Office 365 see below.
7. No protected health information should be transmitted via email.

8. It is recommended to encrypt your files and store them on Mason Library servers before submitting them to the Student Success and Inclusion Librarian if the instructor needs time to analyze the data. If there is any technical difficulty in accessing Mason servers, and the instructor elects to use any cloud-storage services that is not OneDrive, the instructor should ensure that the company offering these services maintain RSA-2048, TLS, and AES 256-bit encryption for the data it stores. The service should also be HIPPA, GDPR, and PIPEDA compliant. A recommended solution is [Sync](#). In addition, the instructor should also encrypt the data before temporarily storing it there.

Additional Required Data Security (For sensitive data)

1. All data should be downloaded from local devices to Mason Library servers as soon as possible and immediately encrypted.
2. The Instructor should delete or destroy identifiable information as soon as possible.

Sensitive Data: Protected Health Information, Personal Identifying Information, and Sensitive Information

(Borrowed from Guidance and Procedure: Data Security in Research, UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program (OHRPP), February 24, 2011)

Sensitive data in this context is data about a student, which includes any of the identifiers below. While it can be assumed that some of the identifiers below may never be required when it comes to library instructional data. It can never be assumed that there won't be a circumstance in which one or more of these identifiers will be captured inadvertently.

- Name
- Mason G#
- Street address
- All elements of dates except year
- Telephone number
- Fax number
- Email address
- URL address
- IP address
- Social security number
- Account numbers
- License numbers
- Medical record number
- Health plan beneficiary #
- Device identifiers and their serial numbers

- Vehicle identifiers and serial number
- Biometric identifiers (finger and voice prints)
- Full face photos and other comparable images
- Any other unique identifying number, code, or characteristic
- Account number, credit or debit card number, in combination with any required security code, access code or password that would permit access to an individual's financial account
- Device identifiers and their serial numbers
- Vehicle identifiers and serial number
- Biometric identifiers (finger and voice prints)
- Full face photos and other comparable images

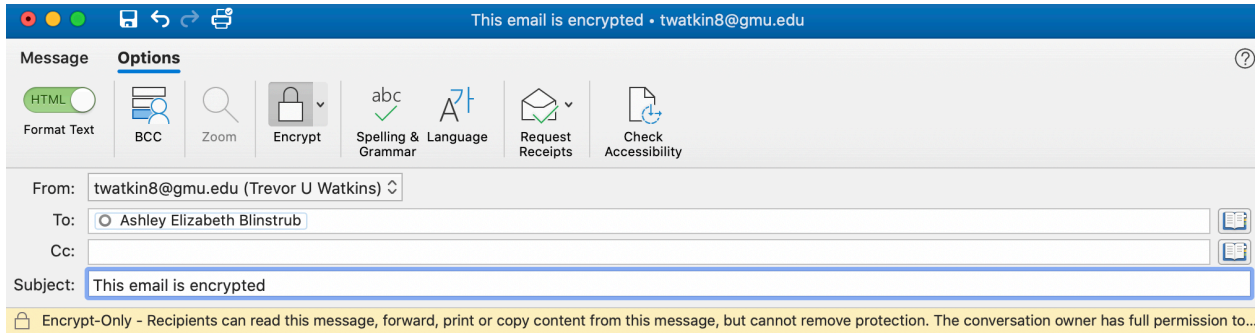
To encrypt an email using Office 365:

1. Click New → Options → Encrypt

The image shows a screenshot of an email client interface. At the top, the window title is "Untitled • twatkin8@gmu.edu". Below the title bar is a "Message" toolbar with various options: "Format Text" (HTML), "BCC", "Zoom", "Encrypt", "Spelling & Grammar", "Language", "Request Receipts", and "Check Accessibility". The "From" field is populated with "twatkin8@gmu.edu (Trevor U Watkins)". The "To:", "Cc:", and "Subject:" fields are empty. Below the composition area, contact information for Trevor Watkins is listed: "Trevor Watkins, MS, MCIS, MLIS", "Pronouns: He, Him, His", "Teaching and Outreach Librarian", "Teaching and Learning Team", "Gateway Teaching and Learning Services, University Libraries", "George Mason University", "4400 University Drive, MS 1A6", "Fairfax, Virginia 22030", "E-mail: twatkin8@gmu.edu", "Phone: 703.993.2244", "Web: <https://trevorwatkins.info>", "Research Gate: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Trevor_Watkins", and "Orcid ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2874-3741>".

Overlaid on the bottom right of the email client is a login window for George Mason University. The window features the university's logo at the top, followed by the text "Office 365 Employee Services". Below this, it says "Faculty & Staff:" and "Sign in using your NetID and Patriot Pass strong password:". There are two input fields: one for the email address, which contains "twatkin8@gmu.edu", and one for the password, which is currently empty. A blue "Sign in" button is positioned below the password field. At the bottom of the login window, there is a link for students: "Students: Go to MASONLIVE.GMU.EDU" and a "HELP" link.

2. After you enter your password and login, click on encrypt again you will then see the encrypt-only message. See below. You may then go ahead and complete and send your email.



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To encrypt USB devices: Using Microsoft Windows via [Wayne State University](#) verified
To encrypt a USB device using other platforms using [USB encryption software](#) verified

You can also purchase encrypted USB flash drives: Recommended [DataTraveler](#) verified

Verified: Either purchased and used device or went through the process of encrypting and using the device.

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Created by Ashley Blinstrub, Student Success and Inclusion Librarian