

Student Learning Assessment Plan

Academic Years 2017-2019

Executive Summary

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

- Connections to SACS accreditation standards, the George Mason University Strategic Plan, and the University Libraries' Strategic Plan
- Common learning outcomes for Research and Education Services
- A schedule for student learning assessment over a three-year cycle

Purpose

Teaching students to critically engage with knowledge sources serves as a foundation for George Mason University Libraries' academic mission. In order to determine if the University Libraries' instructional efforts impact student learning, we need to implement a robust and cyclical assessment plan.

Student learning assessment illuminates the strengths and weaknesses of our students' learning. The results of these assessment efforts serve to:

- Increase student learning
- Inform and improve instructional practice
- Strengthen the University Libraries' instruction initiatives

Evidence gathered by student learning assessment may reinforce our pedagogical practice or serve as a catalyst for programmatic change. The assessment data collected begins to create a holistic picture of the University Libraries' information literacy instruction program.

Theory

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

The nature of this assessment plan allows for the freedom of individual library instructors to teach using their own philosophies, teaching styles, and pedagogies.

Strategic Connections

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) accredits George Mason University. This assessment plan calls for evidence in support of [standard 3.8.2](#), “The institution ensures that users have access to regular and timely instruction in the use of the library and other learning/information resources.” It also provides evidence in support of institutional effectiveness standards, e.g. standard 3.3.1.3.

The University Libraries’ Student Learning Assessment Plan 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 University Libraries’ Strategy Map– This plan supports two of the University Libraries’ strategic goals, “We integrate the Libraries in the University’s teaching, learning and research activities,” and “Promote an organizational value of assessment and accountability.”
- [The Students as Scholars Master Rubric](#) – This rubric, as implemented in the Assessment in Action and subsequent Research Course Partnerships programs, informs the instructional outcomes and assessment initiatives described in this plan.
- [The Mason Core Critical Thinking Rubric](#) – This rubric, which was adapted from the AAC&U Critical Thinking rubric, serves as a guiding document for outcome and assessment development.

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 Assessment
- Assessment Council
- Center for Teaching and Faculty Excellence
- Office of Student Scholarship, Creative Activities, and Research

Within the University Libraries, the Library administration supports the development of a student learning assessment plan. The Instructional Assessment Committee oversees the implementation and revision of the Student Learning Assessment Plan. This Committee is led by the Instruction and Assessment Coordinator and has a rotating membership representative of the University Libraries’ instruction community.

Resources

The primary financial resource for student learning assessment is faculty and staff time. Assessment is a significant portion of the Instruction and Assessment Coordinator and the two Assessment Officers’ job descriptions, but will require time 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 must be sent to the Instruction and Assessment Coordinator once its collection is complete. It is the depositor's responsibility to remove personal and identifying student information from the data. If the depositor is unfamiliar with this process, please contact the Instruction and Assessment Coordinator for assistance. If both raw and cleansed data is available, please submit both versions. Submitted data will be stored in the three locations described below.

Storing Data

In keeping with sound data management policies, instructional assessment data will be stored in three password protected locations:

1. The Instruction and Assessment Coordinator's computer
2. An Assessment flash drive held in the Instruction and Assessment Coordinator's office
3. The shared Assessment Drive on the Library servers

Accessing Data

If an individual is interested in accessing raw instructional data, please contact the Instruction and Assessment Coordinator or the Assessment and Planning Officer. In order to protect the privacy of students and librarians, access may be limited to an individual librarian's data if identifying information is present in the data.

Reporting Data

Internally, instructional assessment reports will be posted on an annual basis to the University Libraries' Intranet page, "Student Learning Assessment," which is located under the unit Research & Educational Services (RES). 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 librarians use instructional assessment data to generate a report, scholarship, or other noteworthy communiqué, please provide Instruction and Assessment Coordinator with a copy for archiving.

Outcomes

Students will gain the following transferable, lifelong learning abilities:

1. Students navigate the complex information landscape in order to locate information.
2. Students evaluate a knowledge source to determine its suitability for their information need.
3. Students identify multiple knowledge sources in order to compare, contrast, and synthesize diverse perspectives.
4. Students will seek out evidence to inform challenging decisions while developing an open-minded approach to inquiry.
5. Students recognize how political, social, economic, and professional contexts shape knowledge sources in order to engage in scholarly conversation within and across disciplines.

6. Students will recognize that the Library’s value exceeds traditional information sources in order to transfer their knowledge to experiences beyond the classroom.

A list of sub-outcomes to help assess and contextualize these outcomes is located in Appendix A.

Timeline for Continuous Assessment

Assessment is an ongoing, cyclical process which informs instructional improvement. Assessment of the University Libraries’ Student Learning Outcomes will occur on a three-year cycle, as outlined below. The Instructional Assessment Committee will be responsible for overseeing the schedule.

YEAR	OUTCOME SCHEDULE
AY 17	Outcome 2: Students evaluate a knowledge source in order to determine its suitability for their information need.
	Outcome 4: Students will seek out evidence to inform challenging decisions while developing an open-minded approach to inquiry.
AY 18	Outcome 1: Students navigate the complex information landscape in order to locate information.
	Outcome 5: Students recognize how political, social, economic, and professional contexts shape knowledge sources in order to engage in scholarly conversation within and across disciplines.
AY 19	Outcome 3: Students identify multiple knowledge sources in order to compare, contrast, and synthesize diverse perspectives.
	Outcome 6: Students will recognize that the Library’s value exceeds traditional information sources in order to transfer their knowledge to experiences beyond the classroom.

The Student Learning Assessment Plan will be revised at the end of the three-year cycle (the conclusion of AY 19), or as needed.

Appendix A

Outcomes with their Sub-Outcomes

Sub-outcomes are not final and are intended to be measurable, discrete, and contextualize each outcome.

Students will gain the following transferable, lifelong learning abilities:

1. Students navigate the complex information landscape in order to locate information.
 1. Students identify a research question to begin their search process
 2. Students articulate how information within their discipline is organized and structured
 3. Students refine search strategies and search language (keywords, controlled vocabulary, natural language) based on search results
2. Students evaluate a knowledge source to determine its suitability for their information need.
 1. Students articulate and apply criteria for evaluating information sources
 2. Students are able to differentiate between a scholarly and popular source
 3. Students are able to analyze the authority of an information source in order to determine its suitability for an information need
3. Students identify multiple knowledge sources in order to compare, contrast, and synthesize diverse perspectives.
 1. Students describe various research methods utilized in their discipline
 2. Students expand their information searches through cited reference searching techniques
 3. Students compare how scholarly perspective changed over time on a particular topic within a discipline
4. Students will seek out evidence to inform challenging decisions while developing an open-minded approach to inquiry.
 1. Students conduct multiple searches using divergent (e.g., brainstorming) and convergent (e.g., selecting the best sources) thinking
 2. Students analyze a topic or research question to determine whether a single answer or multiple, conflicting answers exist
 3. Students reformulate research questions based on information gaps and possibly conflicting information
5. Students recognize how political, social, economic, and professional contexts shape knowledge sources in order to engage in scholarly conversation within and across disciplines.
 1. Students describe the commodification of information and how it affects access to various types of information
 2. Students identify how the format or medium of information affects how it is used
 3. Students analyze the factors that affect how information is disseminated
 4. Students assess how a topic within a discipline may or may not marginalize and isolate groups of people

6. Students will recognize that the Library's value exceeds traditional information sources in order to transfer their knowledge to experiences beyond the classroom.
 1. Students identify how their personal information and search habits affect search results
 2. Students value themselves as contributors to the public domain or scholarship
 3. Students seek help from experts in a field as needed
 4. Students apply the process of research inquiry in personal or professional contexts

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