

OFFICE OF
STRATEGIC INSIGHTS

DATA SPOTLIGHT

CHARTING STUDENT SUCCESS
THROUGH DATA & RESEARCH

ASSESSMENT STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES AT NOVA

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NOVA
Northern Virginia
Community College

ORIGINS OF ASSESSMENT AND STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

The assessment of student learning outcomes in higher education began during the 1980s in response to public criticism of both poor program and student performance at the college and university levels.¹ The assessment movement officially began in 1985 at the first assessment conference in Columbia, South Carolina. Assessment was initially used as a procedure for determining student selection in higher education and around the mid-twentieth century, educators began to broaden assessment practices and focus was placed on instruction, student performance, and overall college and university worth. The goal was to respond to public concern about poor program and student performance in higher education by shifting focus to demonstrating program quality, accountability, quality of instruction, and standards in teaching and learning. Eventually, both federal and state governments came on board and demanded proof of standards in teaching and learning at the college level by agreeing that schools must join a nationally recognized regional accreditation agency to continue to receive government funding.² Assessment of student learning outcomes is a requirement for regional accreditation.³

WHY ASSESS STUDENT LEARNING

Assessment of student learning is a process to collect and analyze student learning results with the intent to improve student learning.³ The assessment process provides essential feedback to the faculty and the students on how well student learning outcomes are being met. Assessment also provides evidence demonstrating that effective learning has taken place, and provides the instructor with meaningful information to reflect upon when preparing future instruction. Furthermore, assessment also informs internal and external stakeholders of the schools' quality of programs, and it serves as a standard for regional accreditation.



Student Learning Outcomes are being met



Evidence demonstrating that effective learning is taking place



Instructor preparing for future instruction



Informing stakeholders of quality of programs

ASSESSING STUDENT LEARNING AT NOVA

Assessment of student learning is critical to ensure that students are gaining the knowledge and skills they need to be successful at NOVA. Each year, instructional programs conduct assessments on three student learning outcomes (SLO), one college-wide core learning outcome (CLO), and program goals, which include graduation and program-placement results. Instructional programs document four areas in their annual reports that address: 1) the outcome being assessed; 2) the method utilized to assess each outcome; 3) the results of the assessment; and 4) how the program will use the results to continuously improve student learning.

The data below illustrate the effectiveness and quality of reporting of college-wide NOVA programs and disciplines at meeting the requirements of the four areas in the annual assessment report from the past two assessment cycles.⁴

CRITERIA	2020-21	2021-22	% POINT CHANGE
SLO, CLO & PROGRAM GOALS	94.4%	96.0%	+1.6
ASSESSMENT METHODS	98.5%	97.8%	-0.7
ASSESSMENT RESULTS	99.3%	98.5%	-0.8
USE OF RESULTS	97.1%	93.3%	-3.8
AVERAGE:	97.3%	96.4%	-0.9

¹ Banta, T. (2002). *Building a Scholarship of Assessment*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.

² Altbach, P., Arthurs, A., Boyers, E., et al. (2003). *Refinancing the college dream*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

³ Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). <https://sacscoc.org/accrediting-standards/>.

⁴ Pacific Crest. (2000). *Program Assessment Handbook*. Lisle, IL: Pacific Crest, Inc.

⁵ NOVA Office of Strategic Insights.

TOP FIVE SUBCATEGORIES OF THE INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS REPORT

The Office of Strategic Insights (OSI) evaluates the annual Student Learning Outcomes and the Discipline Assessment Reports and provides program-level and college-wide analyses of all action items identified in the reports designed to promote program or discipline improvement. These improvement actions are captured under the Continuous Improvement (formerly known as Use of Results) section of the reports. A coding system is used to categorize all improvement actions, and these categories are comprised of sub-categories and included in an institutional effectiveness audit and later presented in the annual Institutional Effectiveness Audit Report for internal and external stakeholders to review.⁴



The data below show the results of the top five college-wide subcategories from the program and discipline improvement actions over three years. The chart shows the highest percentage of action improvements made college-wide by subcategory, between the 2019–20 and 2021–22 assessment cycles.⁴

CHANGE IN ACTION IMPROVEMENTS RANKING: 2019–20 THROUGH 2021–22



LEARN MORE

CORE LEARNING OUTCOMES (CLO) ASSESSMENT AT NOVA

Core Learning Outcomes (CLO) are six general education competencies that NOVA graduates must achieve, and each program and stand alone discipline must assess one CLO each assessment cycle.



WHY DO WE NEED CLOS?

Core learning outcomes are required for three essential reasons:

- **For Faculty:** Knowledge and improvement of teaching effectiveness
- **For Students:** To improve core student learning
- **For Public Accountability:** Also required by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC), the Virginia Community College System (VCCS), and the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV)



WHO SHOULD ASSESS CLOS?

All degree-awarding programs, stand alone disciplines, and select certificates should assess at least one CLO per year in addition to three SLOs for the programs and one SLO for the disciplines.



WHAT IS NOVA'S COLLEGE-WIDE CLO ASSESSMENT SCHEDULE?

- 2023-24: Critical Thinking, Quantitative Literacy
- 2024-25: Civic Engagement, Written Communication
- 2025-26: Professional Readiness, Scientific Literacy
- 2026-27: Critical Thinking, Quantitative Literacy
- 2027-28: Civic Engagement, Written Communication



WHAT ARE NOVA'S CLOS?

VCCS General Education Policy (5.0.2.0) defines six General Education Competencies for which all Virginia Community Colleges must determine learning outcomes and assess in accordance with SACSCOC accreditation standards and SCHEV policy. The general education competencies are:

- Civic engagement
- Critical thinking
- Professional readiness
- Quantitative literacy
- Scientific literacy
- Written communication



HOW OFTEN SHOULD WE MEASURE EACH CLO?

CLOs are assessed each academic year on a college-wide rotating schedule. Programs and disciplines have the option to choose between two available CLOs. All CLOs should be assessed at least 2-3 times in every 10-year period.



HOW DO WE MEASURE OVERALL STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT OF CLOS?

The most common way to gather information on CLOs is to use student assignments faculty already administer in their courses. This is called "embedded assessments" and they provide the most direct evidence of CLOs.

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