

Core Objective Assessment Plan The University of Texas Arlington

The state of Texas prescribes the general education curriculum, known as the Texas Core Curriculum, for all Texas public institutions of higher education. The TCC is a 42-semester credit hour (SCH) general education curriculum for all Texas public higher education institutions. Each institution selects specific courses to fulfill the TCC Foundational Component Areas, which include Communication (6 SCH), Mathematics (3 SCH), Life and Physical Sciences (6 SCH), Language, Philosophy, and Culture (3 SCH), Creative Arts (3 SCH), American History (6 SCH), Government/Political Science (6 SCH), Social and Behavioral Sciences (3 SCH), and a Component Area Option (6 SCH). TCC requirements designate three to four (out of six) Core Objectives that must be addressed within the course.

The Core Objectives are as follows:

- Critical Thinking Skills (CT) - creative thinking, innovation, inquiry, and analysis, evaluation and synthesis of information
- Communication Skills (COM) - effective development, interpretation and expression of ideas through written, oral and visual communication
- Empirical and Quantitative Skills (EQS) - manipulation and analysis of numerical data or observable facts resulting in informed conclusions
- Teamwork (TW) - ability to consider different points of view and to work effectively with others to support a shared purpose or goal
- Social Responsibility (SR) - intercultural competence, knowledge of civic responsibility, and the ability to engage effectively in regional, national, and global communities
- Personal Responsibility (PR) - ability to connect choices, actions and consequences to ethical decision-making

See Appendix A for the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Boards matrix of Foundational Component Areas and their respective Core Objectives.

UTA's core curriculum is recognized as a foundational aspect of university undergraduate education, encompassing courses in humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, mathematics, and communication. The core curriculum plays a crucial role in broadening knowledge, developing critical thinking and communication skills, promoting ethical reasoning, and preparing students to be responsible citizens. This assessment plan aims to evaluate the effectiveness of the core curriculum in achieving these goals. The broad assessment objectives include:

- Ensuring the effectiveness of the implemented curriculum.
- Making necessary adjustments for continuous improvement.
- Providing valuable insights for enhancing student learning outcomes.

Assessment Types and Approaches

Assessment can be broadly categorized into two types: *direct* and *indirect*. Direct assessment requires students to demonstrate knowledge, skill, or behavior. It measures student learning outcomes through a student work product, such as exams, essays, presentations, or portfolios. Indirect assessment asks students to reflect on their learning using surveys or focus groups. To contextualize student learning, the results of both direct and indirect assessments are commonly benchmarked against other institutions or national standards.

At UTA, the assessment of student learning within the core curriculum is conducted using one of two assessment approaches: communal (juried) and sole. The former involves scoring of student works (signature assignments) by a panel of university faculty with the help of a rubric. The latter relies on a single entity, such as a designated faculty member or an academic unit, to design and execute the assessment process. The choice between communal and sole assessment depends on factors such as the institution's size, structure, assessment culture, and desired stakeholder involvement.

Assessment Implementation at the UTA

At UTA, the Core Curriculum Committee has allowed academic departments to choose between *communal assessment* and *sole assessment* options. The communal assessment process starts with faculty members proposing core curriculum courses and related signature assignments that are designed to allow students to demonstrate achievement of the Core Objectives aligned with the course. At an institutional level, these assignments are collected, sampled, and scored by a faculty panel using modified VALUE rubrics from the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U).

The sole assessment option is used for Core Objectives, where communal assessment is unsuitable, mostly due to logistical considerations (for example, teamwork and oral communication objectives). Both options are designed to demonstrate the student achievement of the state's six Core Objectives at the UTA.

Most of UTA's academic departments that provide Core Curriculum instruction have chosen the communal approach. However, those who initially opted for the sole assessment option can switch to the communal assessment option. UTA's Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Reporting (IER) facilitates communal assessment scoring sessions, data collection and analysis, and report generation.

The benchmark for direct assessment using the communal assessment approach is set at a Milestone of 2 on a scale of 0 to 4 on the selected AAC&U VALUE Rubrics. This level of performance is considered appropriate for the typical classification of student who completes Core Curriculum coursework (i.e., freshmen and sophomores) and aligned with the good practices among institutions of higher education that use the AAC&U VALUE rubrics.

Critical Thinking Skills

Critical thinking skills are essential for undergraduate students navigating their academic studies and preparing for future careers. These skills enable students to analyze information, evaluate arguments, and make informed decisions. Critical thinking skills encompass creative thinking, innovation, inquiry, information analysis, evaluation, and synthesis.

The communal approach will be used for the direct assessment of critical thinking skills. A panel of faculty will apply a modified version of the AAC&U VALUE rubric for critical thinking to student works collected from signature assignments. These assignments demonstrate students' abilities in creative thinking, innovation, inquiry, information analysis, evaluation, and synthesis.

For the indirect assessment, the IER office will collect the relevant National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) data. The NSSE items related to critical thinking skills to be used are:

During the current school year, how often have you done the following?

- Combined ideas from different courses when completing assignments
- Examined the strengths and weaknesses of your own views on a topic or issue
- Tried to better understand someone else's views by imagining how an issue looks from his or her perspective
- Learned something that changed the way you understand an issue or concept
- Connected ideas from your courses to your prior experiences and knowledge

During the current school year, how much has your coursework emphasized the following?

- Applying facts, theories, or methods to practical problems or new situations
- Analyzing an idea, experience, or line of reasoning in depth by examining its parts
- Evaluating a point of view, decision, or information source
- Forming a new idea or understanding from various pieces of information

During the current school year, about how often have you done the following?

- Identified key information from reading assignments

How much has your experience at this institution contributed to your knowledge, skills, and personal development in the following areas?

- Thinking critically and analytically
- Solving complex real-world problems

Communication Skills

Effective oral and written communication skills are essential for undergraduate students as they prepare for their future. These skills are crucial for expressing ideas clearly, persuasively, and professionally, whether in a classroom setting, a job interview, or everyday interactions.

The communal approach will be used for the direct assessment of written communication skills. A faculty panel will score student works collected from signature assignments using a modified version of the AAC&U VALUE rubric for written communication.

Oral communication will be assessed using the sole assessment approach. A faculty member in the communication department, teaching core curriculum courses with oral communication component in the Department of Communication, will evaluate student works (e.g., class presentations) using a version of the AAC&U VALUE rubric for oral communication.

For the indirect assessment of written and oral communication skills, the IER office will collect the relevant NSSE data. The following NSSE items related to communication skills will be used:

During the current school year, about how often have you done the following?

- summarized what you learned in class or from course materials.
- give a course presentation.

How much has your experience at this institution contributed to your knowledge, skills, and personal development in the following areas?

- writing clearly and effectively
- speaking clearly and effectively?

Empirical and Quantitative Skills

Empirical and Quantitative Skills involve manipulating and analyzing numerical data or observable facts, leading to well-informed conclusions. These skills are essential for understanding complex issues and making informed decisions in various fields. Assessing students' proficiency in these skills is crucial for evaluating the effectiveness of educational programs.

For the direct assessment of empirical and quantitative skills, a communal assessment will be used. A panel of faculty will apply a modified version of the AAC&U VALUE rubric for quantitative literacy to student work collected from signature assignments.

For the indirect assessment of this objective, the IER office will collect the relevant NSSE data. The NSSE items related to empirical and quantitative skills are as follows:

During the current school year, how often have you:

- Reached conclusions based on your own analysis of numerical information (numbers, graphs, statistics, etc.)
- Used numerical information to examine a real-world problem or issue (unemployment, climate change, public health, etc.)
- Evaluated what others have concluded from numerical information

How much has your experience at this institution contributed to your knowledge, skills, and personal development in the following areas?

- Analyzing numerical and statistical information

Teamwork

Teamwork is a vital skill for students to develop as it prepares them for collaborative work environments in their academic and professional lives. By working in teams, students learn to leverage each other's strengths, communicate effectively, and resolve conflicts constructively.

For the direct assessment of teamwork skills, the Department of Communication and the Department of Theatre Arts & Dance will conduct sole assessments. Faculty members will use a designated AAC&U VALUE rubric for teamwork to evaluate students' performance in group projects or other teamwork activities and provide feedback on their teamwork skills.

For the indirect assessment of this objective, the IER office will collect the relevant NSSE data. The following NSSE items related to teamwork skills will be used:

During the current school year, about how often have you done the following?

- Prepared for exams by discussing or working through course material with other students
- Worked with other students on course projects or assignments

Which of the following have you done or do you plan to do before you graduate?

- Work with a faculty member on a research project

How much has your experience at this institution contributed to your knowledge, skills, and personal development in the following areas?

- Working effectively with others

Personal Responsibility

Personal Responsibility encompasses understanding the connection between choices, actions, and consequences, particularly in ethical decision-making. This skill is crucial for individuals to navigate complex ethical dilemmas and make responsible choices in various aspects of their lives. Assessing students' development of personal responsibility provides insights into their ethical reasoning and decision-making abilities.

A communal assessment will be used for direct assessment of personal responsibility skills. A panel of faculty will apply a modified version of the AAC&U VALUE rubric for ethical reasoning to student works collected from signature assignments. These assignments assess students' ability to understand the connection between their choices, actions, and consequences, particularly in ethical decision-making. For the indirect assessment of personal responsibility skills, the IER office will collect the relevant NSSE data. The NSSE items related to personal responsibility are as follows:

How much has your experience at this institution contributed to your knowledge, skills, and personal development in the following areas?

- Developing or clarifying a personal code of values and ethics
- Being an informed and active citizen

About how many hours do you spend in a typical 7-day week doing the following?

- Preparing for class (studying, reading, writing, doing homework or lab work, analyzing data, rehearsing and other academic activities)

Social Responsibility

Social Responsibility encompasses intercultural competence, knowledge of civic responsibility, and the ability to engage in regional, national, and global communities effectively. These skills are essential for individuals to understand diverse perspectives, address societal challenges, and contribute meaningfully to their communities. Assessing students' development of social responsibility provides insights into their ability to navigate diverse environments and engage in civic life.

A communal assessment will be used for the direct assessment of social responsibility skills. A panel of faculty will apply a selected version of the AAC&U VALUE rubric, appropriate for social responsibility skills, to student works collected from signature assignments. These assignments are designed to assess students' ability to demonstrate intercultural competence, knowledge of civic responsibility, and effective engagement in communities.

For the indirect assessment of social responsibility skills, the IER office collects the relevant NSSE data. The NSSE items related to social responsibility are as follows:

During the current school year, how often have you done the following?

- Connected your learning to societal problems or issues.
- Included diverse perspectives (political, religious, racial/ethnic, gender, etc.) in course discussions or assignments.

During the current school year, how often have you had discussions with people from the following groups?

- People from a race or ethnicity other than your own
- People from an economic background other than your own
- People with religious beliefs other than your own
- People with political views other than your own

How much does your institution emphasize the following?

- Encouraging contact among students from different backgrounds (social, racial/ethnic, religious, etc.)
- Attending events that address important social, economic, or political issues

About how many hours do you spend in a typical 7-day week doing the following?

- Doing community service or volunteer work

How much has your experience at this institution contributed to your knowledge, skills, and personal development in the following areas?

- Understanding people of other backgrounds (economic, racial/ethnic, political, religious, nationality, etc.)

Frequency and Timeline of Institutional Assessment

At UTA, the state's six Core Objectives will be assessed on a schedule that ensures regular assessment of every Core Objective in each Foundational Component Area (FCA). Figure 1 illustrates the scheduled assessments Core Objectives in their FCAs through academic year 2025-2026.

Four Years Assessment Schedule for the Evaluation of Texas Core Curriculum Objective								
Cycle	Semester	Foundational Component Area (FCA)	Required Core Objective					
			CT	COM	EQS	TW	SR	PR
AY 2022-2024 Cycle	Summer 2023	Mathematics			X			
		American History						X
		Language, Philosophy & Culture					X	X
		Social and Behavioral Sciences						X
	Spring 2024	Language, Philosophy & Culture	X					
		Communication (Written) Communication (Oral)~		X X				
AY 2024-2026 Cycle	Fall 2024	Language, Philosophy & Culture						X
		Social and Behavioral Sciences						X
		Mathematics			X			
		Creative Arts ~				X		
		Communication ~				X		
	Spring 2025	American History					X	
		Life and Physical Sciences	X					
	Fall 2025	Communication (Written)		X				
		Communication (Oral) ~		X				
		Creative Arts ~				X		
	Spring 2026	Mathematics			X			
		American History						X
Language, Philosophy & Culture							X	
Social and Behavioral Sciences							X	

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Legend:

CT Critical Thinking

COM Communication

EQS Empirical & Quantitative Skills

TW Teamwork

SR Social Responsibility

PR Personal Responsibility

Figure 1. Core Curriculum assessment schedule for academic years 2022-2023 through AY 2025-2026.

Analysis, Actions, and Follow-up

At the course level, faculty members teaching core curriculum courses will assess students and their attainment of the state's six objectives. Institutionally, IER will analyze direct and indirect assessment data and create appropriate reports. These reports will be publicly available on the IER website (<https://www.uta.edu/administration/ier>).

The resulting analysis will be presented to the faculty during the annual Faculty Engagement Day (FED). During the event, faculty members will be organized into interdisciplinary groups based on Core Objectives and presented with complete data sets, including Core Objective assessment results and relevant NSSE data and Exit Survey data. Through individual reflection and group discussion, participants will interpret the data and suggest improvements.

The resulting findings, summarized by IER, will be presented to the Core Curriculum Committee for approval and subsequent recommendation to the Undergraduate Assembly for its endorsement.

Conclusion

At UTA, the assessment plan for evaluating the core curriculum aims to ensure its effectiveness and continuous improvement. By employing various assessment types and approaches, institutions can gather valuable data to enhance student learning and prepare students for success in their academic and professional endeavors. Ultimately, UTA aims to ensure that the state's six Core Objectives are adequately embedded throughout the Core Curriculum. The emphasis of these Core Objectives is well-documented through signature assignments, highlighting UTA's focus on students and these critical 21st-century skills.

The Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Reporting prepared the Core Objective Assessment Plan, and the Undergraduate Assembly approved the plan on November 19, 2024.