



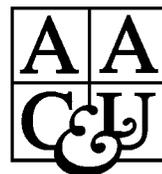
Using the VALUE Rubrics for Improvement of Learning and Authentic Assessment

BY Terrel L. Rhodes and Ashley Finley



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*Association
of American
Colleges and
Universities*



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Foreword

In 2005, the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) launched the Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) initiative, a long-term effort to promote the value of liberal education—for individuals, for a globally connected democracy, and for an economy dependent on innovation and creativity. Through this signature initiative, and in partnership with educators across all sectors of higher education, AAC&U has defined the aims of liberal education in terms of Principles of Excellence and a companion set of Essential Learning Outcomes (see fig. 1). The LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes represent a consensus among educators and employers about the kinds of learning students need as preparation for successful participation in civic life and the global economy.¹

Higher education has focused much attention on the Essential Learning Outcomes encompassed under the heading *Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Physical and Natural World*. A multiplicity of tests and ways to measure student learning in the knowledge category have been developed in disciplines and institutions across the country. However, for many of the outcomes—*Intellectual and Practical Skills*, *Personal and Social Responsibility*, and *Integrative and Applied Learning*—few useful assessments of student learning existed, yet these are hallmark outcomes of a liberal and liberating education. In response, AAC&U conceived and initiated a new approach to assessing these three strands of the Essential Learning Outcomes based upon authentic student work from the curriculum and cocurriculum and rubrics designed to probe the quality of that work.

This new approach, entitled Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education, or VALUE, began in 2007. The first indication that faculty and campuses were intrigued by this new approach came in response to the invitation to participate in rubric development teams: the teams were oversubscribed almost immediately. As the draft rubrics were tested on campuses by faculty and their students, the initial ten volunteer campuses were subsumed in a clamor from many sister institutions that also wanted to try out these new rubrics with their students and faculty and to provide feedback for further rubric development. Ultimately, the rubrics were tested and validated by faculty from more than one hundred institutions.

Since the initial release of the rubrics in 2009, thousands of campuses and individuals in the United States and around the world have used the VALUE rubrics in various ways to meet student learning and assessment needs in their departments, programs, or institutions. Entire university systems and multistate consortia of campuses have adopted the LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes and the VALUE rubrics as recommended guides for measuring student learning. In short, the VALUE rubrics have evoked a broad, positive embrace from faculty and institutions.

The VALUE rubrics have now been in use on some campuses long enough to yield questions about using them effectively and to identify challenges and lessons learned through their ongoing use. This third volume in AAC&U's series of VALUE-related publications shares what we are learning about moving students' own work to the center of our

1. For more information about the LEAP initiative, see www.aacu.org/leap.

assessment efforts. It also lifts up the experiences of twelve diverse campuses that are using the VALUE rubrics to gather information on student performance and then using the findings to adjust assignments, pedagogy, and curricula to enhance their students' learning.

We remain indebted to the hundreds of individual faculty, staff, student affairs professionals, and students whose work VALUE truly is. These individuals continue to help test, strengthen, and refine the robust VALUE assessment of authentic student work addressing the Essential Learning Outcomes that both academics and employers agree are critical for civic, personal, and employment success in today's world.

CAROL GEARY SCHNEIDER

President

Association of American Colleges and Universities

Figure 1. LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes²

Beginning in school and continuing at successively higher levels across their college studies, students should prepare for twenty-first-century challenges by gaining:

Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Physical and Natural World

- Through study in the sciences and mathematics, social sciences, humanities, histories, languages, and the arts

Focused by engagement with big questions, both contemporary and enduring

Intellectual and Practical Skills, including

- Inquiry and analysis
- Critical and creative thinking
- Written and oral communication
- Quantitative literacy
- Information literacy
- Teamwork and problem solving

Practiced extensively, across the curriculum, in the context of progressively more challenging problems, projects, and standards for performance

Personal and Social Responsibility, including

- Civic knowledge and engagement—local and global
- Intercultural knowledge and competence
- Ethical reasoning and action
- Foundations and skills for lifelong learning

Anchored through active involvement with diverse communities and real-world challenges

Integrative and Applied Learning, including

- Synthesis and advanced accomplishment across general and specialized studies

Demonstrated through the application of knowledge, skills, and responsibilities to new settings and complex problems

2. Reprinted from Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), *College Learning for the New Global Century: A Report from the National Leadership Council for Liberal Education and America's Promise* (Washington, DC: AAC&U, 2007), 12.

Acknowledgments

As with any publication, this volume results from the good work of many people over many months and years.

The authors express enormous gratitude to the individuals on the twelve campuses—Calumet College of Saint Joseph, Carroll Community College, Daemen College, DePaul University, Drake University, Lewis University, Loyola University Chicago, Midland College, Texas A&M University, University of North Carolina Wilmington, University of Mobile, and Winston-Salem State University—who devoted their time and energy to describing how they have used the VALUE rubrics on their respective campuses to enhance student learning and faculty effectiveness through multiple strategies, practices, and purposes. They have provided wonderful insights on best practices; presented collaborative strategies for engaging colleagues; and shared evidence of multiple benefits gained from authentic assessment.

We are also deeply indebted to the hundreds of individual faculty and other educators who joined with the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) as we undertook this bold Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education (VALUE) initiative to develop an alternative approach to the traditional standardized tests for assessing student learning.

VALUE was the result of the strong desire from AAC&U's members for assessment resources that reflected the nuances of learning characteristic of intellectual growth, the expertise and years of experience of the faculty as teachers and scholars, and the authentic student learning exhibited in their responses to assignments in the curriculum and cocurriculum. This initial band of intrepid volunteers devoted months to crafting, testing, and revising the original fifteen VALUE rubrics. They should be proud of what they accomplished.

None of the original VALUE initiative would have been successful without the skilled and inspired leadership and perseverance of the project manager, Wende Morgaine Garrison. She was the chief taskmistress, cajoler, organizer, scheduler, arbiter, and central intelligence that enabled our original teams of rubric developers on over 100 campuses to complete on schedule fifteen high-quality rubrics through multiple rounds of campus testing. She remains an amazing example of talent and personality.

AAC&U gratefully acknowledges the support of the State Farm Foundation, which provided support both for development of the VALUE rubrics and for this study. The US Department of Education's Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education also has supported the VALUE initiative.

Finally, we want to thank the extraordinary AAC&U staff in the Office of Communications, Policy, and Public Engagement for their contributions to ensuring quality publications through attention to detail, design, content, and intelligibility. A very special and heartfelt thanks goes to the senior academic editor, David Tritelli, who helped turn this manuscript into a coherent, readable, and hopefully useful volume that honors the work of the individuals and campuses that contributed to the VALUE initiative. Without his devotion to quality, this volume would not be nearly what it is.

Introduction

In 2007, the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) launched Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education (VALUE), a component project of AAC&U's Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) initiative that is rooted in a philosophy of learning assessment that privileges the authentic assessment of student work and the development of shared understandings of student learning outcomes over the administration of standardized tests to sample groups of students. Through the VALUE project, teams of faculty and other academic and student affairs professionals from all sectors of higher education across the United States gathered, analyzed, and synthesized institutional-level rubrics (and related materials) for fifteen specific areas of learning directly related to the LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes:

- civic engagement
- creative thinking
- critical thinking
- ethical reasoning
- foundations and skills for lifelong learning
- information literacy
- inquiry and analysis
- integrative and applied learning
- intercultural knowledge and competence
- oral communication
- problem solving
- quantitative literacy
- reading
- teamwork
- written communication

This process resulted in the creation of fifteen VALUE rubrics. (A sixteenth VALUE rubric, focused on global learning, was released in 2013.)

The VALUE rubrics represent a distillation and synthesis of the core elements of learning for each outcome. The development teams drew upon existing campus rubrics for the LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes on research on each learning outcome and on their own individual and collective expertise. In drafting the language used in the rubrics, the development teams strove to avoid disciplinary jargon. Moreover, recognizing that learning can be demonstrated visually, graphically, orally, digitally, and through performance, the teams sought to ensure that the rubrics' descriptors do not focus exclusively on text-based evidence to demonstrate levels of learning. The teams focused not on what students *cannot* do, but on what they *can* do. The VALUE rubrics describe higher levels of learning not in terms of doing the same thing, more or less, but rather in terms of attaining qualitatively higher orders of proficiency. Before the rubrics were made available for public use,¹ faculty participants in the project used their own students' work to test draft versions at more than one hundred colleges and universities.

1. The VALUE rubrics are available for free download at www.aacu.org/VALUE.

Final versions of the original fifteen VALUE rubrics, keyed to the LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes, were first published in a 2010 publication *Assessing Outcomes and Improving Achievement: Tips and Tools for Using Rubrics*,² which presents an approach to the evaluation of student learning that is focused on faculty judgment of the quality of student work originating from curricular and cocurricular assignments. The VALUE rubrics have since been broadly embraced across the United States and even internationally. Since the fall of 2010, the rubrics have been downloaded and used at more than four thousand discrete institutions, including schools, higher education associations, and more than three thousands colleges and universities in the United States, Australia, Japan, Hong Kong, Dubai, and Korea.

Meanwhile, those using the VALUE rubrics have been reporting on their experiences. One of the recurring themes in this campus feedback is that the rubrics provide a means of engaging faculty and other educational professionals from multiple disciplines and divisions in a common conversation about the respective contributions of each to the enhancement of student learning with respect to specified outcomes. In a sense, the rubrics have facilitated the creation of bridges for many faculty, enabling them to see their individual work as part of a shared endeavor among colleagues that leads to their students' attainment of degrees—degrees that represent demonstrated achievement at a high level of quality.

In addition to the ongoing work associated with AAC&U's LEAP initiative, the development and initial use of the VALUE rubrics coincided with the 2011 release of Lumina Foundation's Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP), a proposed framework for quality assurance that offers a baseline set of reference points for what students in any field should learn, understand, and do at each degree level, from associate's to master's.³ The DQP incorporates the LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes into its recommended strands of learning, and stipulates that a specified level of performance or attainment should be demonstrated prior to the award of a degree. This approach to the degree is based on a logic model whereby the learning required for the satisfactory completion of a degree program is clearly defined first, and then used intentionally to organize the collective effort to bring students from wherever they begin their education to successful completion of the degree requirements. Within this context, the VALUE rubrics can be used to help inform the design of educational pathways leading to the attainment of progressively more advanced degrees, to guide the development of standards for achievement at various degree levels, and to create shared expectations for learning that can be used to assess student progress.

In sum, there now exists a framework for learning that is directly linked to degree attainment (the DQP) and built upon a consensus that achievement in particular, well-defined areas of learning is essential for today's students (the LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes), as well as clearly articulated performance expectations that are directly linked to student work, learning outcomes, and degree levels and that enable the measurement of student progress and success (the VALUE rubrics).

2. Terrel L. Rhodes, ed., *Assessing Outcomes and Improving Achievement: Tips and Tools for Using Rubrics* (Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2010).

3. Lumina Foundation for Education, *Degree Qualifications Profile* (Indianapolis, IN: Lumina Foundation for Education, 2011), http://www.luminafoundation.org/publications/The_Degree_Qualifications_Profile.pdf.

USING THE VALUE RUBRICS

The chapters that follow address key components of a rubric-based approach to the authentic assessment of student learning. The first chapter presents responses to the questions most frequently raised about the VALUE rubrics by educators who have already begun to use them—questions about the intent, design, and application of the rubrics. The second chapter provides detailed information about who has been downloading the VALUE rubrics—and why.

Although not designed as standardized instruments, the VALUE rubrics must nonetheless yield valid and reliable results, and faculty from different disciplinary backgrounds must be able to score them reliably, both within and across institutions. The third chapter examines how the rubrics fare with regard to methodological standards of validity and reliability. Precisely because they are not standardized, the VALUE rubrics can be readily adapted to accommodate the language used to frame learning goals on individual campuses and to reflect different institutional missions and program variations. Issues related to such modification of the rubrics are addressed in chapter 4. The fifth chapter is focused on rubric calibration, a process that leads to a common understanding and a desired level of reliability for how a given rubric will be used to evaluate student work.

When students are expected to demonstrate learning related to specific outcomes, the nature and design of assignments become critically important. This is the subject of the sixth chapter. Chapter 7 examines how advances in educational technology—and, in particular, the development of e-portfolios—offer students multiple ways to demonstrate their ability to integrate learning across the curriculum, the cocurriculum, and life experiences outside the classroom or off the campus. Of course, measuring the impact of various educational practices on student learning is among the most critical aspects of assessment. Accordingly, chapter 8 explores various ways the evidence that results from the use of the VALUE rubrics can be used to improve student learning and campus practice.

Groups of faculty from several campuses often join together to form consortia, as they work to implement a rubric-based approach to assessment. Although typically focused on the assessment of different learning outcomes and using selected VALUE rubrics, members of such consortia are nonetheless united by their shared desire to improve practice and outcomes for student learning. Some of the benefits that invariably result from these cross-institutional collaborations are discussed in the final chapter.

In 2011, the VALUE project staff surveyed a random sample of individuals who had downloaded the VALUE rubrics from the AAC&U website. Among those respondents who indicated both that they were using the rubrics either “a great deal” or a “fair amount” and that they had begun to harvest data from their use of the rubrics in order to improve student learning, twelve were invited to prepare brief case studies. Each of the studies identifies which of the rubrics are being used, by whom, and in what areas of the curriculum and cocurriculum, and also describes how the resulting data are being used to improve student learning. Examples drawn from the case studies are used throughout this publication to illustrate key points. In the spirit of building a national learning community around direct assessment of student learning, the authors have allowed AAC&U to publish the full case studies online (see www.aacu.org/value/casestudies.cfm).

As the examples presented throughout *Using the VALUE Rubrics for Improvement of Learning and Authentic Assessment* clearly demonstrate, educators across all sectors of

higher education are working to graduate students who can deal with unscripted problems that do not have a “right” answer; who are able to integrate the knowledge and skills they have acquired in a variety of places, contexts, courses, and times as they engage with their communities; and whose inquiry and action are marked by a developed sense of personal and social responsibility. This publication is designed to be useful to the faculty and other educators who are engaged in this ongoing work, and who seek to reach out to colleagues at other institutions in order to learn more about the processes, pitfalls, and successes of engaging in authentic assessment through articulated, transparent frameworks for developing and demonstrating enhanced student learning.

Frequently Asked Questions about the VALUE Rubrics

As faculty and other academic and student affairs professionals have begun using the VALUE rubrics to assess student learning, many questions have been raised about the intent, design, and application of the rubrics. Following is a compilation of the nine most frequently asked questions, along with a brief response to each. Many of the issues raised below are explored further in subsequent chapters.

1. Why was this particular set of rubrics developed?

The Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education (VALUE) project is part of the broader Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) initiative of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U). The VALUE rubrics were developed to help assess the Essential Learning Outcomes around which the LEAP initiative is organized (see fig. 1, p. vi). These outcomes represent a consensus among educators and employers about the kinds of learning students need as preparation for successful participation in civic life and the global economy.

At the time the VALUE rubrics were developed, it seemed that some of the LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes—namely, those focused on areas of knowledge, rather than on skills or abilities—were already well covered by existing measurements and, therefore, did not require the development of rubrics. A reading rubric was added during the development process, however, as faculty insisted on the importance of assessing student reading as an underlying ability necessary for enhancing student writing, critical thinking, quantitative literacy, and other outcomes. Most recently, an additional rubric to address global learning has been developed with future possibility of rubrics on scientific literacy and other interdisciplinary outcomes.

2. How were the VALUE rubrics developed, and by whom?

The VALUE rubrics were developed by teams comprised of faculty members, academic and student affairs professionals, and other experts from public and private, two-year and four-year higher education institutions across the United States.¹ (For a detailed description of the process, see Introduction above.)

3. How were the VALUE rubrics' descriptors or labels determined for each level of achievement?

The goal was to identify descriptors or labels that do not have pejorative connotations when used to describe student achievement and that incorporate terms commonly used in academic settings. Hence, "capstone" was selected to describe the culminating level of achievement, whereas "benchmark" was chosen to describe the starting point for learning exhibited by entering students. "Milestones" simply represent progressively more

1. The team members who participated in the development of each of the fifteen VALUE rubrics are identified online at http://www.aacu.org/value/rubric_teams.cfm.

sophisticated or accomplished performance as students move from benchmark to capstone. Other terms can be substituted according to campus preference.

4. Do the performance-level numbers in the VALUE rubrics represent year in college (e.g., 1=freshman, 2=sophomore, etc.) or grades (e.g., 4=A, 3=B, etc.)?

The numerical scores do *not* represent years or grades. The development teams indicated that “4” represents the level of achievement expected for a student to be awarded a baccalaureate degree, whereas “1” reflects the level of performance the rubric developers found among entering students in their own classrooms. “2” and “3” represent intermediate milestones that indicate students are moving toward more complex and sophisticated demonstrations of learning. Community colleges often use “2” and “3” as expected levels of achievement for associate-level degrees and for transfer, although in practice their students often exhibit higher levels of achievement in various rubric areas. The VALUE rubrics initially included a total of six levels of achievement, but faculty testing the rubrics argued forcefully that four levels were sufficient and, indeed, preferable for programmatic and institutional assessment purposes.

5. How do the VALUE rubrics fit within the national accountability frameworks associated with accreditation requirements and standardized testing regimes?

The VALUE rubrics have been embraced by all the regional accrediting bodies as one acceptable approach for institutions to use in assessing student learning. The rubrics represent an alternative to standardized testing, providing more robust and nuanced information on areas of strength and weakness in student learning and across a wider range of outcomes than are addressed by the most commonly used standardized tests—the ETS Proficiency Profile, the Collegiate Learning Assessment, and the Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency. Moreover, the rubrics align with faculty and employer expectations for what college graduates should exhibit. Public institutions may now use the VALUE rubrics to display student learning as part of the Voluntary System of Accountability.²

6. How are the VALUE rubrics being used on campuses?

The VALUE rubrics are being used for multiple purposes. They are being used for summative assessment of the learning required for graduation and accreditation, for example, and for both formative and summative assessment of student learning for program achievement and progress—both within individual disciplines and across general education programs. At the level of the individual course, modified rubrics are being used for grading.

7. Can I use the VALUE rubrics in grading student work?

The VALUE rubrics were not developed as grading rubrics. They were developed as “meta-rubrics” to be used at the institutional or programmatic levels in order to assess student learning overall and over time, not for specific assignments. The rubrics can be translated into grading rubrics for specific courses, using the same criteria or dimensions for learning, *but*

2. Created through a partnership between the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges and the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, and with funding from Lumina Foundation for Education, the Voluntary System of Accountability provides comparable information about the undergraduate student experience at public colleges and universities in the United States.

the performance descriptors would need to be modified to reflect the course content and assignments being examined, while still preserving the dimensions of learning in the original rubric.

8. Are the VALUE rubrics valid and reliable?

Yes. The development process itself established the face and use validity of the VALUE rubrics, which was confirmed by the adoption and use of the rubrics on more than three thousand campuses since the fall of 2010. Campus-level calibration analyses have consistently demonstrated high levels of agreement among evaluators. In addition, a national reliability study and several consortia of campuses have achieved acceptable levels of reliability in projects focused on one or more of the rubrics.

9. Do the VALUE rubrics have to be used as they are, or can they be modified?

The VALUE rubrics are meant to be adapted in order to reflect the individual mission, program mix, and student demographics of the institutions where they are used. The performance criteria for each rubric represent the most commonly expressed dimensions of learning that the development teams found in their survey of existing rubrics. On many campuses, the language has been modified to reflect local terminology. And in some cases, dimensions or criteria have been added to a rubric in order to represent particular aspects of how the specific learning outcome is manifested on a given campus.

However, modifications should be considered carefully; the more modifications made to a VALUE rubric, the more difficult it becomes for the institution to place its findings within a broader national context.

Who Is Accessing the VALUE Rubrics, and Why

Since January 2010, AAC&U has collected information from visitors to the VALUE website (www.aacu.org/VALUE). In order to access the VALUE rubrics, each visitor must provide an e-mail address. Visitors entering their email addresses for the first time are also required to provide minimal information about themselves and their interest in accessing the rubrics. This information is required only on the initial visit; on subsequent visits, the e-mail address serves as a password for accessing and downloading the rubrics.

Between June 2010 and June 2012, there was a 520 percent increase in first-time visits to the VALUE website (see fig. 2). Visitors represent an array of institutional affiliations, primarily in higher education, across all fifty US states and all US territories. Affiliations are both foreign and domestic, and include associations other than colleges and universities—including, for example, university system offices and government agencies. Figure 3 depicts the growth in the number of first-time visitors overall and the growth in the number of first-time visitors affiliated with colleges and universities, while figure 4 shows the range of college and university affiliations by institutional type.

Figure 2. Total number of first-time visitors

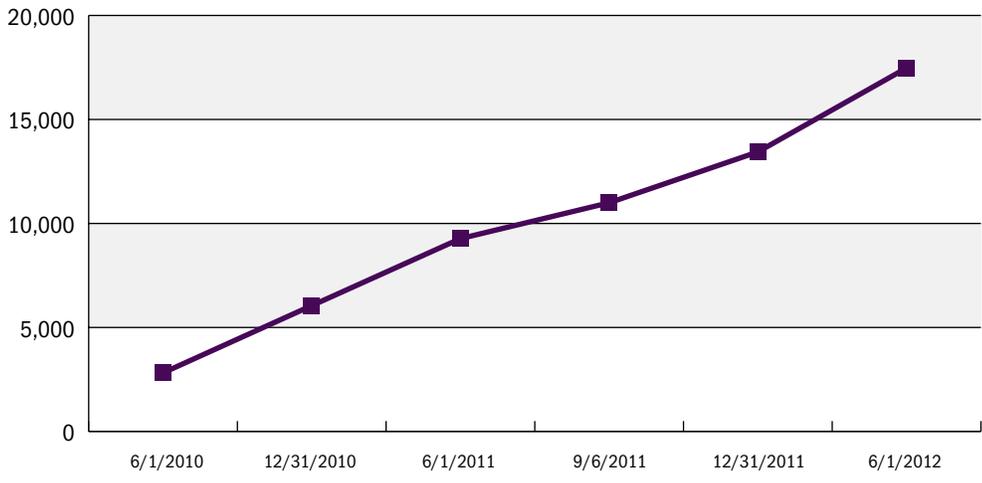


Figure 3. Total number of institutions, and colleges and universities represented by first-time visitors

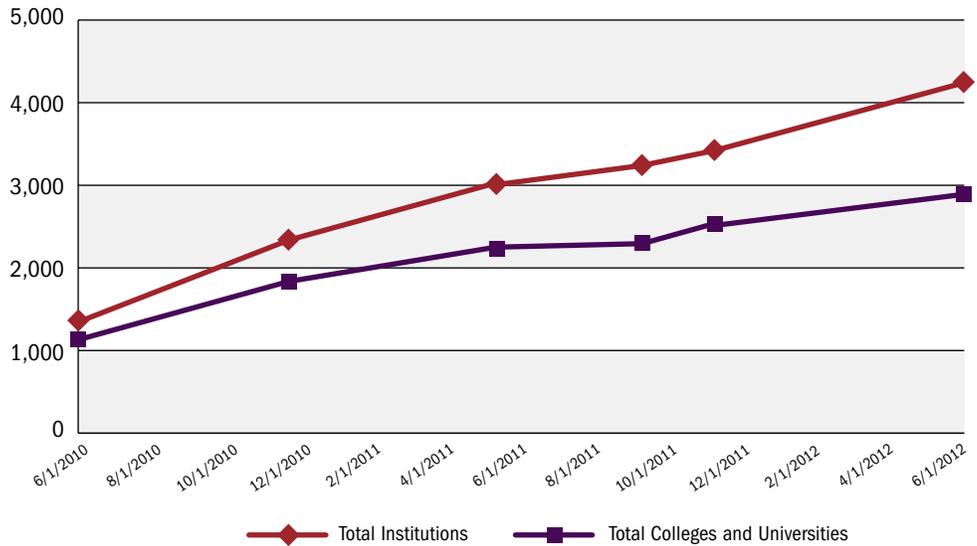
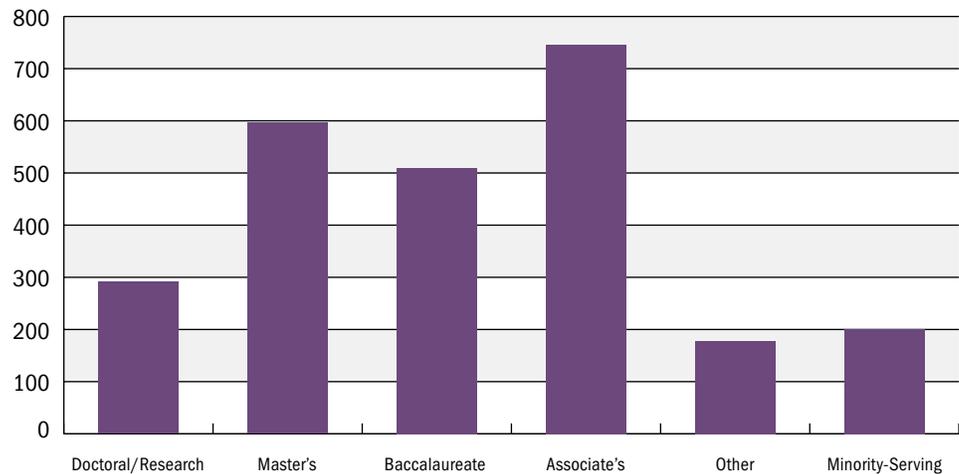


Figure 4. College and university affiliations by Carnegie classification and minority-serving status (June 2012)



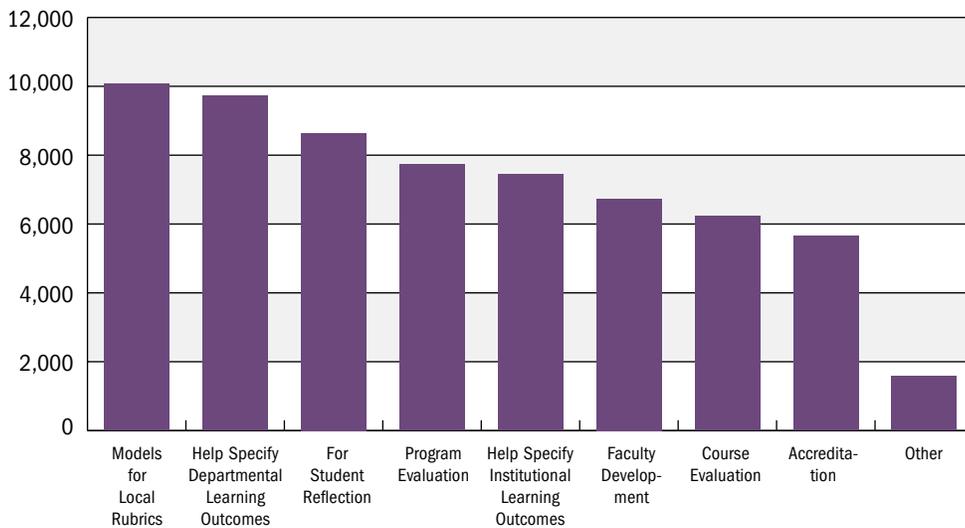
Of the more than seventeen thousand individuals who first visited the VALUE website between June 2010 and June 2012, 44 percent were instructional staff (faculty, adjunct faculty, instructors, and lecturers), 33 percent were mid-level administrators (deans, directors, coordinators, and chairs), and 6 percent were upper-level administrators (provosts, vice presidents, chancellors, and presidents). The remaining 17 percent of first-time visitors were primarily librarians, students, graduate assistants, administrative assistants, and student affairs professionals.

After providing the name of his or her institution or organization, every first-time visitor to the website is required to indicate the intended or most likely use of the VALUE rubric(s) to be downloaded by selecting one or more responses from the following list:

- to help specify learning outcomes within academic departments
- to help specify institutional learning outcomes
- to help with accreditation efforts
- to serve as models in order to establish department or campus-specific rubrics
- to facilitate faculty development efforts
- for course evaluation
- for programmatic evaluation
- to assist students in reflection on their learning and learning development
- other (please specify)

First-time visitors most commonly indicated an interest in the rubrics either as models for developing local rubrics or specifying departmental learning outcomes, or as aids for student reflection on learning outcomes (see fig. 5). Among those who selected “other,” most specified interest in general education and assessment.

Figure 5. Reasons for accessing the VALUE rubrics



The VALUE rubric for critical thinking is the most viewed rubric. The reading rubric is the least popular. Among the least often viewed rubrics are those that address outcomes pertaining to personal and social responsibility—the rubrics for intercultural competence and knowledge, civic engagement, ethical reasoning, and foundations and skills for lifelong learning. Of these four, the rubric for intercultural competence was viewed most often; out of the fifteen VALUE rubrics, it ranks seventh in terms of frequency of viewing. The rubrics for ethical reasoning and for lifelong learning were viewed least often, ranking thirteenth and fourteenth, respectively.

It is important to note that these low rankings do not necessarily reflect a failure to recognize the importance of outcomes related to personal and social responsibility. For reporting purposes, campus-level assessment tends to be more focused on outcomes associated with intellectual and practical skills and with integrative learning ability. Given the increasing national attention to civic learning and the growing importance of connecting knowledge with global problem solving, it is likely that institutional assessment will become more focused on students' civic and social competencies over time.

All twelve campus case studies are available online: www.aacu.org/value/casestudies.cfm

USE OF THE RUBRICS

To learn more about how the VALUE rubrics are being used on college and university campuses, AAC&U launched an online survey in 2011. A randomly selected sample of first-time visitors to the VALUE website were asked whether they were actually using the rubrics and, if so, which rubrics and in what areas of the curriculum or cocurriculum. Survey participants were also asked whether they had modified the rubrics, and whether data had been gathered from use of the rubrics to inform the improvement process. The survey was not designed to provide a representative picture of rubric use nationally; rather, it was intended as a means to understand how particular campuses—especially those not involved in the initial VALUE project—were using the rubrics, if at all.

Of the 214 survey respondents, 14 percent indicated that the rubrics were being used “a great deal,” while 21 percent indicated they were being used “a fair amount.” Thirty-eight percent of respondents indicated “only limited use” of the rubrics, and 27 percent responded that the rubrics were not being used at all. Among respondents who indicated a great deal or fair amount of rubric use on campus, the most commonly used rubrics pertained to outcomes related to intellectual and practical skills (i.e., critical thinking, oral and written communication, inquiry, and analysis). The ethical reasoning rubric was the most commonly used rubric among those rubrics intended to address outcomes related to personal and social responsibility, followed by the intercultural knowledge and competence rubric.

Overwhelmingly, survey respondents indicated that the rubrics were being used with some modification. Modifications, however, tended to be “slight” and the original rubrics were left mostly intact. In some cases, elements of two or more different rubrics had been combined into a single outcome. Survey respondents also indicated that the primary users of the rubrics were faculty members, followed by campus assessment center staff and campus administrators, respectively.

When asked about the degree to which data had been gathered from the direct assessment of student work, the majority (59 percent) of respondents on campuses where the rubrics were being used either “a great deal” or “a fair amount” noted that the data had been gathered primarily to assess general education or for course-level assessment. Nevertheless, approximately half of these respondents also reported that the data had not yet been used to make program-level improvements. Many of those who had not yet used data obtained from the implementation of the rubrics intended to do so in the future in order to assess learning in both general education and the majors. Indeed, the use of rubrics for assessment of the majors was, for many respondents (39 percent), a “plan for future use.” In contrast, the overwhelming majority of respondents had neither used the rubrics to assess learning in the cocurriculum nor did they intend to do this in the future.

CONCLUSION

Whether from the information obtained about first-time visits to the VALUE website, the online survey of a random sample of first-time visitors to the site, or from anecdotal information gathered by project staff during campus visits and interactions with campus representatives, it is evident that recognition of the VALUE rubrics has grown exponentially since their release in the fall of 2010. More and more faculty members and campus administrators recognize the need to incorporate the direct assessment of student learning into their assessment portfolios, and have begun to see the use of rubrics as a way to achieve this. As the use of the VALUE rubrics continues to grow and develop on college and university campuses, examples of best practice will continue to emerge. As they do, these best practices will be shared through national outlets such as the AAC&U website and the Collaborative for Authentic Assessment and Learning, a planned national repository devoted to the aggregation and benchmarking of data drawn from campuses,¹ as well as through reporting from the Voluntary System of Accountability, which has approved the use of the VALUE rubrics as one of several accountability measures.

1. For more information about the Collaborative for Authentic Assessment and Learning, see <http://www.aacu.org/caal>.

Validity and Reliability

In the push for campuses to produce truly sound evidence of student gains and skill acquisition, increased scrutiny has been placed upon measures of learning that meet certain expectations of validity and reliability. A cadre of standardized assessments is already available to measure a small set of learning outcomes related to intellectual and practical skills (e.g., written communication, analysis, and complex reasoning). Instruments like the Collegiate Learning Assessment, the ETS Proficiency Profile, and ACT's Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency are designed and psychometrically calibrated to achieve high degrees of reliability and to meet specified standards of validity. Given that the VALUE rubrics were not designed as standardized instruments, how do the rubrics fare with regard to methodological standards of validity and reliability? This chapter presents evidence of the soundness of the rubrics, based on national and campus-level findings regarding validity and reliability.¹

VALIDITY

Because it can be difficult to establish whether an assessment instrument truly captures the outcome for which it is intended, it is preferable for instruments to demonstrate more than one type of validity. In important ways, the rubric development process itself provided the VALUE rubrics with substantial degrees of two types of validity. First, because the VALUE rubrics were created by national teams of faculty—that is, by those closest to student learning and outcomes assessment on college and university campuses—the rubrics hold a high degree of *face* validity. The face validity of the rubrics is apparent in the scale of interest and circulation of the rubrics to date, evidenced by the more than seventeen thousand people from more than four thousand institutions and organizations, international and domestic, who accessed the rubrics between June 2010 and June 2012.

Second, the specific employment of faculty and other institutional and national experts in particular outcome areas to populate the development teams provided the rubrics with additional *content* validity. Experts are commonly used to establish content validity because they are able to verify that a “measure covers the full range of the concept’s meaning.”² Because the VALUE rubrics meet at least two specifications for establishing validity, rubric users can have a high degree of confidence that a particular rubric is capturing the specified learning outcome.

RELIABILITY

Methodologically sound assessment instruments should have acceptable levels of both validity and reliability, thereby ensuring that the intended outcome is actually being measured (validity) and that it can be assessed consistently over time or in different contexts

CASE STUDY INSIGHT

Provide faculty professional development.

— Mary Braselton, Midland College

1. Statewide studies of validity and reliability are underway in Massachusetts. These studies are designed to conform to the procedures for establishing methodological standards, and the results will further expand the evidentiary base of VALUE rubric assessment.

2. Daniel F. Chambliss and Russell K. Schutt, *Making Sense of a Social World: Methods of Investigation* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, 2009), 76.

CASE STUDY INSIGHT

Attainment of oral communication skills should not rest solely with the completion of one freshman-level course.

— Anne Lowery, University of Mobile

(reliability). A common method for establishing reliability for rubrics is through inter-coder or inter-rater scoring, a method by which two or more coders evaluate the same work sample, score it according to a common rubric, and calculate a reliability score.

In the fall of 2012, AAC&U conducted a national inter-rater reliability study, developing preliminary reliability scores for the VALUE rubrics for critical thinking, integrative learning, and civic engagement. The forty-four faculty members who participated in the study represented four broad disciplinary areas: humanities, natural sciences, social sciences, and professional and applied sciences. Each faculty member scored three samples of student work for each of the three rubrics.³

Notably, the faculty participating in this study did not engage in a traditional calibration training session, where they would have gathered to discuss elements of the rubrics, pose questions regarding the interpretation and application of rubric language, and come to a consensus on the use of the rubrics. Instead, due to geographic constraints, the faculty scorers participated in an individual calibration round of scoring and then, when questions or concerns arose, talked one-on-one with the project manager. Given that calibration improves reliability testing, the virtual approach taken for this study might theoretically compromise the findings, making agreement among raters even more difficult to achieve. Even without a fulsome calibration training session, however, the faculty scorers were found to have perfect agreement on scores nearly one-third of the time (or 32 percent, on average). Moreover, most assessment experts do not consider it necessary to have perfect agreement; rather, it is assumed that close scores also count as agreement. When a rule of approximate agreement was used, the average agreement among scorers increased to 57 percent and 80 percent, depending upon how approximate the categories were (the less approximate, the higher the score). Additionally, low standard deviations across the scores suggested little variation among faculty scorers, despite differing disciplinary affiliations.

Campus-based case studies have provided considerable supporting evidence for the reliability of the VALUE rubrics. Local reliability analyses have consistently indicated high levels of inter-rater reliability. For example, following calibration training, Carroll Community College, DePaul University, Midland College, and Texas A&M University all reported high inter-rater reliability results among faculty scorers. Previously published case studies on the VALUE rubrics have also reported favorable reliability findings.⁴

Because the bulk of data from rubrics is gathered at the level of the individual campus, local tests of reliability will be essential for continued affirmation of the VALUE rubrics. The results of such tests will also be essential for building trust among faculty members, who are the core users of the rubrics. In the meantime, as this local work continues to develop, a strong case can be made for both the validity and the reliability of the rubrics.

3. Ashley Finley, "How Reliable Are the VALUE Rubrics?" in "Assessing Liberal Education Outcomes Using VALUE Rubrics," *Peer Review* 13/14, no. 4/1 (2012): 31–3. This article provides a full review of the methodology of the AAC&U inter-rater reliability study.

4. See Shelley Johnson Carey, ed., "Assessing Liberal Education Outcomes Using VALUE Rubrics," special issue, *Peer Review* 13/14, no. 4/1 (2012).

Rubric Modification

The VALUE rubrics represent the most common characteristics or dimensions of student learning for sixteen widely adopted student learning outcomes. These dimensions were determined after extensive collection and examination of existing rubrics, review of the literature on each of the outcomes, careful consideration of the work of centers and other entities devoted to researching specific areas of student learning, and close consultation with faculty experts. As developed, the VALUE rubrics allow for the assessment of student performance against national articulations of expectations for liberal learning that are broadly shared by faculty across all institutional types.

The precise terminology used to describe learning expectations is likely to differ from campus to campus, and accordingly the language used in the VALUE rubrics may be adapted to accommodate local variations. The main purpose of rubric modification is to increase faculty and student understanding of the stated criteria so that the resulting assessments will accurately reflect actual learning as it is framed on a particular campus.

In addition to linguistic modification, individual campuses may also consider adding criteria or dimensions that reflect institutional mission or capture program variations. In this approach, the specific emphases of programs or signature aspects of a campus's student experience can be encompassed within the shared framework for learning. At Lewis University, for example, the College of Business had begun work on a new assessment plan while the VALUE rubrics were still in development. Once they were made publicly available, the VALUE rubrics for quantitative literacy, critical thinking, written communication, and oral communication were used to validate the college's choice of criteria and the elements included in its own rubrics. After comparison to the college's existing rubric, the VALUE rubric for oral communication was adopted—with program-specific modifications, and as adapted to a scan-capable form (see fig. 6). The criteria of the other three VALUE rubrics were already included in the rubrics developed by the college, which were now described as “based on the VALUE rubrics” and used throughout all business programs—including common core courses and capstones.

At Winston-Salem State University, the provost led a faculty review of the general education curriculum beginning in 2009. The results were a revised framework for the university's general education requirements and courses, and a revised set of seven institutional learning outcomes: critical thinking, scientific literacy, critical reading, quantitative literacy, written communication, information literacy, and oral communication. Then, in 2011, the review committee developed rubrics for use in assessing the newly revised outcomes. In addition to other sources, for six of the outcomes the committee relied on the corresponding VALUE rubrics, with slight modifications. For the seventh, scientific literacy, the VALUE rubrics for problem solving and inquiry and analysis were used as points of reference to create a new rubric. In 2012, the full set of seven rubrics—modified versions of the VALUE rubrics—was formally approved. (For a sample modified rubric, see fig. 7.) Use of the rubrics is now required in all courses approved for inclusion in the new general education curriculum. Moreover, faculty teaching general education courses are required to create

CASE STUDY INSIGHT

Improvement:
**After each round
of scoring, we
solicit feedback.**

—Linda Stiefert, University of
North Carolina Wilmington

and administer assignments for which they can use the rubrics to assess students' performance on the new outcomes, and all resulting data are recorded in the university's electronic assessment data system.

Figure 6. Oral presentation assessment rubric (School of Business scan-enabled format)

Date/Time: _____ Course: _____
 Presenter: _____ Evaluator: _____

	1	3	5 - MEETS THE 3 LEVEL PLUS...	CATEGORY SCORE
Organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Organizational pattern is <i>minimally</i> observable or not observable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Organizational pattern is <i>clearly</i> observable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Organizational pattern is <i>clearly</i> and <i>consistently</i> observable and is skillful ○ Content of the presentation cohesive 	
Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Language choices are <i>unclear</i> and either minimally support or do not support the effectiveness of the presentation ○ Language is not appropriate to audience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Language choices <i>thoughtful</i> ○ Language choices generally support the effectiveness of the presentation ○ Language is appropriate to audience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Language choices are <i>imaginative, memorable, and compelling</i> ○ Language choices enhance effectiveness 	
Delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Delivery techniques <i>detract</i> from the understandability of the presentation ○ Speaker appears <i>uncomfortable</i> ○ Style and manner of dress detract from presentation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Delivery techniques make the presentation <i>understandable</i> and interesting ○ Speaker appears <i>comfortable</i> ○ Style and manner of dress are <i>appropriate</i> for presentation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Delivery techniques make the presentation <i>compelling</i> ○ Speaker appears <i>polished</i> and confident ○ Style and manner of dress <i>enhance</i> presentation 	
Supporting Material	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Insufficient</i> or non-existing supporting materials ○ Either non-existing references or the reference to information or analysis <i>minimally supports</i> the presentation or establishes credibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Supporting materials <i>sufficient</i> ○ Reference to information or analysis that <i>generally supports</i> the presentation or establishes credibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Supporting <i>materials more than sufficient</i> ○ A variety of types of supporting materials used ○ Reference to information or analysis that <i>significantly supports</i> the presentation or establishes credibility 	
Central Message	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Either <i>non-existing</i> central message or the central message is <i>not explicitly stated</i>, but can be deduced 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Central message basically <i>clear</i> and understandable ○ Central message <i>consistent</i> with supporting material 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Central message is <i>compelling</i> ○ Central message <i>strongly enhanced</i> by supporting material 	
Source: Lewis University				
OVERALL SCORE:				

Figure 7. Oral communication VALUE rubric for general education, with addition of single criterion (highlighted in yellow)

Oral communication includes the use of appropriate language, conventions, elocution, poise, organization, supporting evidence, and content to effectively communicate through the spoken word for the purpose and audience.

	CAPSTONE (4)	MILESTONE (3)	MILESTONE (2)	BENCHMARK (1)
Context / Audience/ Medium	Speaker skillfully adapts style and message to the context (e.g., public speaking, interpersonal, small group and teams) and consistently demonstrates respect and sensitivity for diverse audiences	Speaker adapts to the context (e.g., public speaking, interpersonal, small group and teams) and demonstrates respect and sensitivity for diverse audiences	Speaker attempts to adapt to the context (e.g., public speaking, interpersonal, small group and teams) and inconsistently demonstrates respect and sensitivity for diverse audiences	Speaker fails to adapt to the context (e.g., public speaking, interpersonal, small group and teams); and demonstrates some cultural bias and is insensitive to the needs of a diverse audience
Organization	Organizational pattern is clearly and consistently observable, well structured, and makes the content of the message cohesive	Organizational pattern is observable within the message	Organizational pattern is attempted within the message	Organizational pattern is not observable within the message
Delivery	Speaker consistently demonstrates mastery of delivery techniques and appears polished and confident	Speaker demonstrates mastery of delivery techniques and appears comfortable	Speaker demonstrates some mastery of delivery techniques and appears hesitant	Speaker fails to demonstrate mastery of delivery techniques and appears uncomfortable
Language	Language choices are imaginative, memorable, compelling, and appropriate and enhance the effectiveness of the message	Language choices are thoughtful, appropriate, and generally support the effectiveness of the message	Language choices are mundane and commonplace and partially support the effectiveness of the message	Language choices are unclear, inappropriate to the audience and minimally support the effectiveness of the message
Supporting Materials	Provides a variety of supporting material and makes appropriate reference to information or analysis that significantly supports the message or establishes the speaker's credibility/authority on the topic	Provides supporting material and makes appropriate reference to information or analysis that generally supports the message or establishes the speaker's credibility/authority on the topic	Occasionally provides supporting materials and makes reference to information or analysis that supports the message or establishes the speaker's credibility/authority on the topic	Fails to provide supporting materials or make reference to information that supports the message or establishes the speaker's credibility/authority on the topic
Central Message	Central message is compelling and strongly supported	Central message is clear and consistent with the supporting material	Central message is basically understandable but is not often repeated and is not memorable	Central message is not explicitly stated or understandable

Source: Winston-Salem State University

Like Winston-Salem State University, Daemen College also adopted modified versions of the VALUE rubrics, tweaking the language used in the performance descriptors and adding criteria (for example, see fig. 8). Institutions may also develop additional performance levels, if students and faculty want greater nuance when tracking progress more precisely across the outcomes. Occasionally, a campus may find it desirable to combine aspects of two rubrics into one.

Figure 8. Modification of the VALUE rubric for civic engagement (tracked changes show relabeling of criteria, combination of two criteria, and additional changes to reflect campus context)

	CAPSTONE 4	MILESTONE 3	MILESTONE 2	BENCHMARK 1
<u>Civic Literacy (Knowledge)</u>	<u>Connects and extends knowledge (facts, theories, etc.) of civic contexts, structures and systems within one's own academic study/field/discipline and beyond (multidisciplinary)</u>	<u>Analyzes knowledge (facts, theories, etc.) of civic contexts, structures and systems by making relevant connections to one's own academic study/field/discipline.</u>	<u>Begins to connect knowledge (facts, theories, etc.) of civic contexts, structures and systems to one's own academic study/field/discipline.</u>	<u>Begins to identify knowledge (facts, theories, etc.) of civic contexts, structures and systems.</u>
Analysis of Knowledge	Connects and extends knowledge (facts, theories, etc.) from one's own academic study/field/discipline to civic engagement and to one's own participation in civic life, politics, and government.	Analyzes knowledge (facts, theories, etc.) from one's own academic study/field/discipline by making relevant connections to civic engagement and to one's own participation in civic life, politics, and government.	Begins to connect knowledge (facts, theories, etc.) to civic engagement and to one's own participation in civic life, politics, and government.	Begins to identify knowledge (facts, theories, etc.) from one's own academic study/field/discipline that is relevant to civic engagement and to one's own participation in civic life, politics, and government.
Civic Communication and Skills	Tailors communication strategies, <u>participation and advocacy skills</u> and advocacy skills to effectively express, listen, and adapt to others to establish relationships to further civic action	Effectively communicates, <u>participates and advocates</u> in civic context, showing ability to do all of the following: express, listen, and adapt ideas and messages based on others' perspectives.	Communicates, <u>participates and advocates</u> in civic context, showing ability to do more than one of the following: express, listen, and adapt ideas and messages based on others' perspectives.	Communicates, <u>participates and advocates</u> in civic context, showing ability to do one of the following: express, listen, and adapt ideas and messages based on others' perspectives.
<u>Civic Responsibility (Values)</u>	<u>Demonstrates ability and commitment to collaboratively work across and within community contexts and structures to achieve a civic aim.</u>	<u>Demonstrates ability and commitment to work actively within community contexts and structures to achieve a civic aim.</u>	<u>Demonstrates experience identifying intentional ways to actively participate in civic contexts and structures.</u>	<u>Demonstrates a willingness for passive but not active participation in civic context and structures.</u>

Source: Daemen College

MAINTAINING COMPARABILITY

Increasingly, accrediting organizations are recommending that most of the core elements and performance descriptors of the VALUE rubrics be retained for use in the assessment of student learning. For the large proportion of students who attend more than one higher education institution during their undergraduate careers, maintenance of comparability between local and national VALUE rubrics could help facilitate transfer based on actual evidence of achievement, rather than just number of credits earned. The transfer of abilities and achievement is enhanced when institutions and their faculties share common expectations for student learning.

The University of North Carolina Wilmington, for example, utilized the VALUE rubrics in conjunction with its decennial reaccreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. To assess student reflections after applied learning experiences in the university's newly piloted Quality Enhancement Plan projects, part of the university's accreditation self-study, faculty members selected dimensions from three of the VALUE rubrics: "analysis of knowledge" from the civic engagement rubric, "transfer" from the foundations for lifelong learning rubric, and "connections to experience" and "reflection and self-assessment" from the integrative learning rubric. This assessment strategy allowed for comparison of results with national findings for the VALUE rubrics (improvement) as well as comprehensive assessment of the student learning addressed in the Quality Enhancement Plan projects for accreditation (accountability).

As greater modifications in the original VALUE rubrics are made, the more difficult it becomes to place local results in broader contexts of student performance. AAC&U is working to develop a national repository of VALUE rubric assessment results that will eventually permit national benchmarking similar to that used for the National Survey of Student Engagement and the Community College Survey of Student Engagement. Those modifying the VALUE rubrics should proceed with caution if they intend to use local results for national comparison.

Rubric Calibration

When using rubrics as tools of measurement, it makes sense to ensure that users have both a common understanding of what the tool is and a common approach to applying it. Calibration is a process in which those using a rubric or rubrics gather to achieve a common understanding of how the rubric was designed and how it ought to be applied. Conversations typically occur among faculty members from across disciplines and may also include administrators and student affairs professionals.

THE CALIBRATION PROCEDURE

The calibration process begins with a close reading of the rubric to identify any ambiguities in phrasing or wording. This applies to both the “front page” of the rubric (the definition, framing language, and possibly a glossary) and the “back page” of the rubric (the outcome criteria and performance descriptors). Participants are asked to review each part of the rubric carefully, identifying areas for discussion and raising specific questions. The calibration session is *not* the time to make changes to the rubric. During the calibration session, participants are asked to discuss the questions raised and come to agreement on how the rubric’s language should be interpreted for the purposes of practice scoring. Once the entire rubric has been reviewed, participants are given a sample of student work to read and score. It is critical that each participant supports his or her decision to assign a particular score with specific references to the work sample provided.

Practice scoring is typically done one criterion (or row) at a time. After each row has been scored, the scores are reviewed to determine the degree to which consensus has been reached. It is the responsibility of the session facilitator to ask participants to explain their reasoning and offer evidence to support their scores. For example, a faculty member who gave the work sample a “2” on a particular criterion should be asked to identify places in the work sample that support that decision. Next, a participant who assigned a “1” should be asked to provide similar rationale. Following discussion of each criterion (or row), participants may be given the opportunity to change their scores. The goal of calibration is not to achieve convergence on a single score; rather, the goal is to identify the two scores around which the majority clusters. This clustering indicates a common understanding of the rubric’s application. It is ideal to score at least two practice work samples for calibration before moving on to actual scoring.

THE BENEFITS OF CALIBRATION

In addition to providing peace of mind that the scores on student work will not be wildly divergent, the process of calibration is beneficial in a number of other ways. First, calibration is a starting point for beginning to develop sound inter-rater reliability. The opportunity to review and reflect on the rubric as an instrument is a valuable and necessary first step toward obtaining sufficient reliability estimates. Campuses that have undertaken inter-rater reliability analyses have consistently obtained high inter-rater scores. It is important to note, however,

CASE STUDY INSIGHT

The result of the project is meaningful information.

— Ryan McLawhon, Texas A&M University

that in every instance in which campuses have reported such positive results, actual scoring had been preceded by a calibration session—highlighting the essential nature of this step.

Second, calibration provides the opportunity for faculty members to engage in a conversation across disciplines about learning outcomes that span their individual courses and disciplinary content areas. Campus experience with rubric calibration has shown that faculty members from very different fields can talk inclusively about shared standards for student learning. As AAC&U's national inter-rater reliability study demonstrated (see chap. 3 above), there is typically very little divergence in scores across a range of disciplines—natural sciences, social sciences, humanities, and applied and professional programs. Though content varies significantly, what students *do* with that content can provide a source of commonality.

Following from this, a third benefit of calibration is the opportunity it provides for faculty members to learn how to apply their expertise in new ways. In this sense, calibration can be a powerful form of faculty development. The exercise challenges faculty to think globally about student learning outcomes, from articulation to application. Additionally, the calibration experience illustrates why student success is predicated upon outcomes being understood and utilized beyond the classroom of any single faculty member or beyond any one program or major. *All* faculty members have a stake in student learning. Though every faculty member does not need to assess every outcome, each faculty member does have a role in students' overall learning development.

Finally, the calibration process often leads to productive conversations about assignment design. As faculty and other campus practitioners review existing artifacts of student work alongside articulated standards for outcomes—critical thinking, say, or integrative learning—questions are raised about the components of a good assignment. Building upon a common understanding of learning outcomes, faculty members across disciplines—and, perhaps, in conjunction with student affairs professionals—can begin to identify criteria for assignment design that are not standardized or uniform, but that challenge students to think holistically about particular learning outcomes. This process can be further developed as data from the scoring of student work samples become available and are used to inform the improvement process. Chapter 6 below provides greater elaboration on the components of well-designed assignments and on the mechanisms for developing such assignments for the purpose of direct assessment.

THE CALIBRATION SESSION

Although calibration is widely recognized as an essential starting point for rubric implementation, the facilitation of the calibration session itself can vary considerably from campus to campus. At Daemen College, for example, the process began with faculty submission of ungraded student assignments from their courses. Next, a random sample of this student work was evaluated by faculty members from across the college who had been invited to participate in the session. The rubric was then calibrated, or “normed,” and the results were discussed.

As part of the Writing Assessment Project at Texas A&M University, approximately thirty faculty members participated in a daylong calibration session during which they used a modified version of the VALUE rubric for written communication in order to score student papers. Each paper was scored by two faculty members, with a third becoming involved whenever the two initial scorers did not reach approximate agreement—a process that achieves the desired levels of inter-rater reliability. Meals were provided during the

session, and each faculty member received an honorarium for participation. Overall, the Writing Assessment Project yielded meaningful information about the writing skills of students in the participating departments, and each department was provided with an individualized report comparing the achievement of its students with those in its respective college and with those in the university as a whole.

Approximately three-quarters of the academic technology faculty were involved in the calibration process at Midland College. Expert faculty and administrative volunteers were selected to serve as evaluators for each of the five areas to be assessed: reading, writing, speaking, listening, and critical thinking. During an in-depth professional development workshop, the evaluators scored artifacts in pairs; in the event of disagreement, a third evaluator was engaged to break the tie. In addition to theoretical frameworks, the evaluators utilized the benchmarks and milestones from the VALUE rubrics to ensure the validity and reliability of the grading.

Assignments

At many institutions, faculty members have been using the VALUE rubrics to assess student learning for several years. After using a rubric for a particular outcome and then examining the assignment that had yielded the student work being assessed, faculty members often discover that the assignment had not actually asked students to address the learning outcome. Indeed, one of the most commonly reported benefits of using the VALUE rubrics has been heightened awareness of the importance of well-crafted assignments that ask students to exhibit not only mastery of content, but also the ability to use content knowledge for problem solving, analysis, communication with others, ethical reasoning, or other learning outcomes and to apply content knowledge in a “real-world” situation.

Most faculty members are entirely capable of constructing good assignments that elicit content knowledge. However, they typically find it more difficult to craft assignments that ask students to integrate their content knowledge in order to analyze a new situation or event, or to apply their knowledge in order to address complex “real-world” issues or problems. At many institutions, faculty members have responded by collaborating with staff from campus teaching and learning centers, faculty development offices, and student affairs divisions to create engaging assignments that go beyond recall and require application.

Through the assessment process at Daemen College, for example, student assignments are aligned with modified versions of the VALUE rubrics. These assignments, in turn, yield artifacts that demonstrate student achievement levels. In addition, grading rubrics have been developed for specific assignments intended to reflect students’ development of critical thinking and writing skills. Faculty members are now using these rubrics as a guide to help them focus on the particular competencies expected of graduates in their respective disciplines.

The faculty have reported several benefits of aligning assignments and rubrics in this way. It helped them differentiate between evaluation and assessment, and it led them to view assessment as a means to improve instruction and learning—rather than as a task imposed on the faculty. For faculty members who had initially criticized the rubrics as overly vague, the process demonstrated that it is possible to adapt the language of rubrics to the needs of specific disciplines, courses, and assignments. The process also demonstrated the necessary linkage between assignment and product. The rubric-based assessment process also led to discussion of what the competencies mean; what a competency-based core curriculum entails; how best to implement a core curriculum; how best to communicate this curriculum as a coherent, well-integrated whole, rather than as a checklist of requirements (in this the overlap of certain rubrics played a crucial role); and how to make the competencies central to undergraduate education at the college.

SIGNATURE ASSIGNMENTS

Increasingly, as they use VALUE rubrics either for formative assessment of student learning or in reporting for accreditation and accountability purposes, campuses have begun to establish signature assignments. The creation of a signature assignment is an opportunity for faculty members to focus intentionally on learning experiences that are specifically intended

CASE STUDY INSIGHT

Rubrics ...

demonstrat[e] the necessary linkage between assignment and product.

*— Robert Morace and
Intisar Hibscheiller,
Daemen College*

CASE STUDY INSIGHT

Adapting the integrative learning rubric increased consistency in guiding and assessing students' learning.

— Gretchen Wilbur, Kathryn Wozniak, and Susan Reed, DePaul University

to address one or more learning outcomes. The label “signature” is a flag for the assignment’s intentionality of design and for its use in assessment at either the institutional or the programmatic level. “Signature” is simply a label; these assignments could be highlighted using different names (e.g., “key” or “core”). Regardless of the label, however, the purpose of such assignments is to create visible areas within the curriculum—and even within the cocurriculum—where student work is expected to exemplify particular levels of competency for particular learning outcomes. Signature assignments can be adapted from existing assignments, or they can be newly created. They can be developed collaboratively by faculty members within a department or across disciplines, or by faculty members working with student affairs professionals.

When creating signature assignments, faculty members and other campus educators are encouraged to think carefully and creatively about the assignment’s intended outcome(s) and about the best ways to prompt students’ application of the outcome(s) to knowledge areas appropriate to the course. To help ensure that the assignment is both effective and meaningful, the following four questions should be used to guide the development process.

1. What particular dimension(s) of the outcome is the assignment intended to address?

Those developing signature assignments should spend time reviewing the criteria articulated in the rubric that will be used to score the assignment. The review process can be done individually, but a group review to parse criteria can help expose ambiguities and promote collaborative thinking.

2. How should students be guided to use the material in order to meet the outcome criteria?

Signature assignments should enable students to *do* something with what they have learned, beyond recounting material in organized and factual ways. Particular attention should be paid to the use of action verbs within the assignments—e.g., “synthesize,” “demonstrate,” “integrate,” and “apply.”

3. Is the assignment intended to meet more than one outcome?

This is a deceptively simple, but nonetheless crucial, consideration. If the assignment will be used to evaluate student competency in both critical thinking and writing, for example, then components of each learning outcome will need to be taken into consideration when developing the assignment. Failure to do this could lead to an inordinate and unhelpful number of “n/a” (not applicable) marks, rather than actual scores.

4. What types of learning experiences and associated assignments will be most helpful in allowing students to demonstrate their learning on a particular outcome?

As faculty members and other campus educators adopt and amend existing assignments, time should be spent thinking critically about how best to engage students with their learning, and about the role of assignments in prodding students to think in new ways. Creativity among faculty and staff is a critical resource for assignment construction and development. This question also raises the possibility of seeking out others on campus who can help develop new ideas for assignments—faculty from other departments, staff in a teaching and learning resource center, or specialists working with technology resources.

HARVESTING DATA FROM SIGNATURE ASSIGNMENTS

Once signature assignments have been established, selection criteria can be developed to help gather a representative and manageable sample of student work. The curriculum map is a visual tool commonly used to pinpoint the courses that address particular learning outcomes. By using an “assignment map” to chart signature assignments within courses, faculty members can identify specific parts of a course on which to focus their efforts. This is often a welcome way to ease faculty anxiety about time spent on developing direct assessments and signature assignments.

Once signature assignments have been identified across a program (e.g., general education) or department, a sampling protocol can be devised to gather a manageable number of artifacts from each course. For example, Carroll Community College follows a simple plan for breaking down the student artifact collection process that helps ensure the collected work samples are representational but not overwhelming in number. Five signature assignments were developed for five learning outcomes. These assignments are mapped at five points in the curriculum so that they can be used to assess student learning throughout the general education program (see fig. 9). Those charged with analyzing or facilitating the analysis of student artifacts should be cognizant of the total sample size needed for institutional improvement. There are risks associated with data collection: if not enough data are collected, then faculty, administrators, and staff may be less inclined to trust the results; if too many data are collected, then faculty members’ ability to fully analyze what is collected and to locate trends may be compromised. Assessment coordinators are encouraged to think strategically about *how much* evidence is needed to ground a constructive conversation about the improvement of learning.

Figure 9. Assignment map for general education (five signature assignments utilized across the general education program)

	COURSE				
Learning Outcome	First-Year Seminar	English 100	Biology 100	Political Science 200	Capstone
<i>Critical Thinking</i>	Assignments 1 and 3	Assignments 3 and 4		Assignment 2	Assignment 1
<i>Written Communication</i>	Assignment 2	Assignment 1	Assignment 2	Assignment 5	
<i>Civic Development</i>		Assignment 1			Assignment 3
<i>Ethical Reasoning</i>	Assignment 1		Assignment 3		
<i>Integrative Learning</i>		Assignment 4			Assignment 5

Source: Carroll Community College

At Drake University, student artifacts are collected from both the first-year seminar program and the cocurriculum. Drake faculty have discovered how unlikely it is that a single assignment will address all dimensions of a rubric, especially in lower-division general

CASE STUDY INSIGHT

[We] use the VALUE rubrics to support co-curricular assessment.

– Kevin P. Saunders, Drake University

education courses. A laboratory report in an introductory biology course, for example, does not require students to select a topic or summarize existing knowledge in the field. While this limitation does not diminish the usefulness of the information received from scoring other dimensions, it does underscore the importance of gathering evidence from a wide variety of courses and assignments in order to get a more complete picture of what students are capable of doing.

At some institutions, a signature capstone assignment is used to summarize levels of learning at graduation. For example, students at DePaul University’s School for New Learning complete a capstone assignment called the Advanced Project. This assignment is not completed in a specific course but, like a senior thesis, is developed independently over time and with the guidance of a committee. Upon completion, the committee also assesses the project. Although assessment criteria had been established for the Advanced Project, it was ultimately determined that the implementation of a rubric would lead to greater consistency in their application by faculty members and professional advisors as well as greater transparency and improved guidance for students. The DePaul faculty chose the VALUE rubric for integrative learning because it aligned well with the existing assessment criteria and also with the associated “meta-competences” that are developed throughout the curriculum and demonstrated through the Advanced Project. Moreover, because the VALUE rubric is a nationally validated tool, the faculty saw the prospect of comparing their students’ levels of achievement to national standards for college-level learning as an additional benefit. The language of the VALUE rubric for integrative learning was modified to conform to DePaul’s own usages and also to reflect the university’s distinctive expectations for its graduates.

Increasingly, the VALUE rubrics are being used as the starting point for the development of signature assignments deliberately designed to foster and demonstrate students’ competency levels. For example, at a meeting sponsored by the Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, faculty members from multiple campuses used the VALUE rubric for creative thinking to generate original assignments that engage students with the dimensions of learning associated with this outcome (see fig. 10).

While some institutions use a signature capstone assignment to assess students’ cumulative learning, others require students to complete signature assignments every year or at entry, middle, and capstone points. Regardless of the approach taken, it is essential that all signature assignments include questions, projects, or problems that require students to demonstrate the specific learning outcomes expected of all graduates of the institution. As the Common Core State Standards take root in secondary education,¹ high school teachers and college faculty can collaborate to develop assignments that help prepare students for the transition from school to college.

1. Sponsored by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers, the Common Core State Standards initiative seeks to align state K-12 curricula through the adoption of clearly defined standards for student learning. The standards define the knowledge and skills that high school graduates need to succeed in entry-level, credit-bearing academic college courses and in workforce training programs.

Figure 10. Signature assignments based on the VALUE rubric for creative thinking

ASSIGNMENT 1

(To be assessed with the VALUE rubric for creative thinking)

Overview

You are to select a contemporary issue in health (other area could be substituted) and develop a point of view regarding this issue. Then, create a social media campaign to educate a specific population and persuade them of your point of view. Materials may include text, photographs, video, etc.

OPTION 1

Write a proposal for your project. In this proposal you will

- identify the issue or problem, your point of view, and the population/target audience;
- describe your approach to the issue;
- discuss your approach and its advantages relative to other approaches that have been taken to the issue.

OPTION 2

Write an Implementation Plan for your project. In this plan you will

- describe in detail how you will get your message across to your audience; your description may include story boarding, choice of media, samples of images, video and text, etc.
- specify needed resources.

Further assignments may include actual implementation of the campaign and assessment of the results.

ASSIGNMENT 2

(To be assessed with the VALUE rubric for creative thinking)

Overview

You have been invited to prepare the introduction to our special speaker who will be here in less than forty-eight hours. The individual originally assigned to prepare the introduction has been called away on a family emergency. Your introduction is to be interesting, entertaining, and concise. To help you prepare, you have decided to make two ten-minute calls to individuals who know the special speaker.

NOTES

You are to identify the speaker for the event and why you selected this speaker.

You are given the option of delivering the Speaker Introduction or, if you do not give the address, you can select someone whom you will coach and prepare through the process to make the presentation engaging and personable.

ASSIGNMENT PRODUCTS

- Abstract—this is the interesting, entertaining, and concise introduction
- Chronicle—a chronicle of your performance including:
 - Whom you selected as the speaker
 - Which two individuals you will call, why, and the process for engaging and contacting them
 - A reflection on your problem solving
 - Are you delivering the Speaker Introduction or coaching another
 - Evaluation of the process

Another assignment option would be to do a Public Service Announcement.

Source: Developed through WASC Accreditation Workshop

E-portfolios

A digital, electronic portfolio, or “e-portfolio,” is an online tool that allows students to collect evidence in multiple formats in order to demonstrate their learning as it develops over time and in a variety of contexts. Over the past several years, the availability, functionality, and affordability of e-portfolios have improved substantially. Many commercial products, open-source options, and freeware tools now allow institutions to offer various pricing structures and levels of technical support for e-portfolios. Moreover, improvements in e-portfolio design have made it possible for faculty members to use e-portfolios in their courses and programs without themselves having to construct e-portfolios from scratch or create a structure for organizing the collection and interpretation of student work within the e-portfolio. With the emergence of degree frameworks such as Lumina Foundation’s Degree Qualifications Profile, which call for demonstration of the broad set of learning outcomes associated with success in life and work in the world today and expected by employers,¹ the e-portfolio has become an ideal medium. Using e-portfolios, students can demonstrate not only their ability to integrate knowledge and intellectual skills and to apply knowledge and skills to real-world problems, but also their commitment to civic engagement and their development of personal and social responsibility.

One of the most promising assessment approaches involves the use of rubrics in conjunction with e-portfolios. A central benefit of a rubric is that, as an articulation of expected learning, it helps faculty and students identify what essential learning looks like over time. A rubric also facilitates discussion and judgment by providing common language and a common vocabulary. As products of a national development process, the VALUE rubrics allow faculty members to place their individual judgments and local evaluations of learning within a broadly shared set of national benchmarks for learning. Students benefit from having a clearer articulation of what faculty seek as evidence of learning and from the stronger insight into their own strengths and weaknesses as learners that they gain through analysis of and reflection on their own learning throughout their educational pathways.

IMPLEMENTATION

The University of Minnesota Duluth began implementing e-portfolios more than a dozen years ago. The accompanying change of emphasis, from a traditional teaching-centered educational environment to a learning-centered educational environment, has resulted in significant shifts in values and pedagogies. Students now actively participate in the varied learning environments and collaborate with their peers to develop proficiency in areas related to the desired learning outcomes. The students themselves are responsible for documenting their learning through the use of e-portfolios, which can include multimedia artifacts as well as evidence of critical reflection and integration. For students and faculty on campuses that have implemented e-portfolios, the shared language of a rubric can be an invaluable aid not only for the gathering of evidence but also for its assessment.

1. See Hart Research Associates, *It Takes More Than a Major: Employer Priorities for College Learning and Student Success* (Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2013).

CASE STUDY INSIGHT

Rubrics will be utilized in classes beyond general education.

—Carolynn Berry, Winston-Salem State University

CASE STUDY INSIGHT

The adapted integrative learning rubric is utilized to evaluate the final portfolios.

— Patrick Green and Ashley Kehoe, Loyola University Chicago

The staff of the Center for Experiential Learning at Loyola University Chicago adapted the VALUE rubrics for civic engagement and integrative learning as part of a plan to document and assess the outcomes of experiential learning. Both rubrics are used by members of the center's staff, professionals in Loyola's Division of Student Development, and faculty members to assess service-learning courses, community-based research, academic internships, and other high-impact educational practices. Many of the academic courses utilizing the VALUE rubrics meet the civic engagement and leadership requirement of the university's general education program, and the rubrics are used to assess assignments, projects, and culminating e-portfolios in a range of academic disciplines. The Center for Experiential Learning conducts program-level assessments in order to identify areas of strength and opportunities for future program development.

E-portfolios can be organized around learning outcomes at the institutional, programmatic, and course levels. To demonstrate achievement of expected outcomes, students can include in their e-portfolios the work they do through the curriculum and the cocurriculum, as well as evidence derived from their experiences in non-institutional venues (e.g., internships and community-based research). Faculty members can review the student work placed in the e-portfolios at their own convenience, either for grading purposes or to assess levels of performance on essential learning outcomes. Early research shows that engaging students through the presentation of, and reflection on, their work through e-portfolios has the effect of deepening their learning.²

At Virginia Tech, grades, comments, and assessments can all be recorded through a digital portfolio system. Students prepare e-portfolios using multimedia (e.g., Facebook) that link classroom and on-campus learning with external communities, and faculty members use rubrics to assess levels of achievement on each dimension of the learning outcome (see fig. 11). The highlighted performance descriptions (see p. 36) reflect assessment of Facebook communication. The results of the rubric-based assessment of the e-portfolios can be readily aggregated for reporting purposes.

BEST PRACTICES

As e-portfolio use has expanded around the country and, indeed, around the world, several best practices have emerged. In particular, e-portfolios should

- be purposeful collections of student work, scaffolded and organized around learning outcomes at progressively more accomplished levels of achievement;
- include multiple types of assignments and modes of demonstrated learning;
- require student self-assessment and reflection, providing multiple and intentional integrative opportunities for students to connect their learning across curricular and cocurricular experiences as well as between formal academics and participation in the broader community;
- build direct evidence of an empowered, informed, responsible learner that can be easily shared with employers, graduate programs, family, and colleagues.

E-portfolios are portable and flexible, allowing for cumulative learning and assessment that encompass other high-impact practices associated with deep learning. The digital medium

2. The Inter/National Coalition for Electronic Portfolio Research provides multiple examples of campus projects assessing the impact of e-portfolios on student learning. (See <http://ncepr.org>.)

of the e-portfolio can capture student learning in all of its manifestations and modes of representation, including texts, videos, performances, and graphics created through individual and group projects. Students develop their capability for self-assessment when they are encouraged to gather evidence of their best work.

Although employee recruiters and graduate programs alike continue to rely heavily on standard resumes and other traditional credentials from applicants, students are increasingly finding ways to use their e-portfolios to connect with opportunities for employment or advanced education. The digital resume environment now allows reviewers to click on links embedded in the resume in order to see samples of students' actual work that exemplify specific skills or capabilities. Some institutions create employer advisory boards, inviting employers to use rubrics in order to review student e-portfolios and provide feedback. Such external reviews can provide both students and faculty with valuable insight into employers' perceptions of student achievement levels.

E-portfolios may not be *the* answer to helping students integrate their learning, but they do nonetheless represent the most promising of the approaches currently available. The use of e-portfolios not only facilitates direct assessment of student work—by faculty and by students themselves—but also joins faculty and students together in a shared context of learning. Designed to assess growth and development of student learning outcomes, the use of the VALUE rubrics, in particular, ensures that this context is marked by common language and by shared expectations for achievement.

Figure 11. Screen shot from student e-portfolio, followed by performance descriptors from the associated VALUE rubric for integrative learning (highlighted in yellow)



Rubrics scoring continued on next page

Figure 11. (continued)

	CAPSTONE 4	MILESTONE 3	MILESTONE 2	BENCHMARK 1
<p>Connections to experience <i>Connects relevant experience and academic knowledge</i></p>	<p>Meaningfully synthesizes connections among experiences outside of the formal classroom (including life experiences and academic experiences such as internships and travel abroad) to deepen understanding of fields of study and to broaden own points of view.</p>	<p>Effectively selects and develops examples of life experiences, drawn from a variety of contexts (e.g., family life, artistic participation, civic involvement, work experience), to illuminate concepts/theories/frameworks of fields of study.</p>	<p>Compares life experiences and academic knowledge to infer differences, as well as similarities, and acknowledges perspectives other than own.</p>	<p>Identifies connections between life experiences and those academic texts and ideas perceived as similar and related to own interests.</p>
<p>Connections to discipline <i>Sees (makes) connections across disciplines, perspectives</i></p>	<p>Independently creates wholes out of multiple parts (synthesizes) or draws conclusions by combining examples, facts, or theories from more than one field of study or perspective.</p>	<p>Independently connects examples, facts, or theories from more than one field of study or perspective.</p>	<p>When prompted, connects examples, facts, or theories from more than one field of study or perspective.</p>	<p>When prompted, presents examples, facts, or theories from more than one field of study or perspective.</p>
<p>Transfer <i>Adapts and applies skills, abilities, theories, or methodologies gained in one situation to new situations</i></p>	<p>When prompted, presents examples, facts, or theories from more than one field of study or perspective.</p>	<p>Adapts and applies skills, abilities, theories, or methodologies gained in one situation to new situations to solve problems or explore issues.</p>	<p>Uses skills, abilities, theories, or methodologies gained in one situation in a new situation to contribute to understanding of problems or issues.</p>	<p>Uses, in a basic way, skills, abilities, theories, or methodologies gained in one situation in a new situation.</p>
<p>Integrated Communication</p>	<p>Fulfills the assignment(s) by choosing a format, language or graph (or other visual representation) in ways that enhance meaning, making clear the interdependence of language and meaning, thought or expression.</p>	<p>Fulfills the assignment(s) by choosing a format, language or graph (or other visual representation) to explicitly connect content and form, demonstrating awareness of purpose and audience.</p>	<p>Fulfills the assignment(s) by choosing a format, language or graph (or other visual representation) that connects in a basic way what is being communicated (content) and how it is said (form).</p>	<p>Fulfills the assignment(s) (i.e., to produce an essay, a poster, a video, a powerpoint presentation, etc.) in an appropriate form.</p>
<p>Reflection and Self Assessment <i>Demonstrates a developing sense of self as a learner, building on prior experiences to respond to new and challenging contexts (may be evident in self assessment, reflective, or creative work)</i></p>	<p>Envisions a future self (and possibly makes plans that build on past experiences) that have occurred across multiple and diverse contexts.</p>	<p>Evaluates changes in own learning over time, recognizing complex contextual factors (e.g., works with ambiguity and risks, deals with frustration, considers ethical frameworks).</p>	<p>Articulates strengths and challenges (within specific performances or events) to increase effectiveness in different contexts (through increased self awareness).</p>	<p>Describes own performances with general descriptors of success and failure.</p>

Source: Virginia Tech

Using Results for Improvement

The use of rubrics is intended to yield meaningful evidence of demonstrated learning from students doing their best work. But nothing undermines the assessment process more than unused data. As campuses implement the VALUE rubrics, we are learning more about the specific ways in which the evidence they gather can be used to improve many different facets of student learning and campus practice—from the curriculum to the cocurriculum, from individual courses to entire programs. Such improvements are typically focused on the assessment process itself, on modification of the rubrics, on the development of recommendations for best practices, on assignment redesign—or on some combination of these. The examples discussed below are drawn from colleges and universities where specific steps have been taken to gather data, discuss findings, and pursue evidence-based action.

FACULTY DEVELOPMENT

At campuses that have implemented rubric-based assessment, faculty members have engaged in conversations about student learning across varied areas of the curriculum and cocurriculum. An important outcome of these conversations has been the realization of a new outlet for engaging in productive faculty development. Even as faculty have discussions about rubrics, they are also having broad discussions about what matters in terms of learning outcomes, pedagogy, assessment, and student learning in general.

During faculty development sessions focused on using the VALUE rubrics for assessment at Daemen College, for example, the discussion expanded to include consideration of the meaning of the competencies being assessed as well as what a competency-based curriculum entails. The goal was for the competencies to become central to undergraduate education at Daemen. Faculty members also discussed the importance of communicating the coherent nature of such a curriculum effectively, making it clear that it is more than a simple checklist of requirements. Similarly, faculty development initiatives at Carroll Community College use rubric data to guide instructional improvement strategies.

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT FROM GENERAL EDUCATION TO THE MAJORS

Evidence gathered through the use of rubrics to assess student learning can help guide programmatic development. At Lewis University, use of the VALUE rubrics for written communication, quantitative literacy, and critical thinking has led to improvements in student learning within the school of business. Texas A&M University used the VALUE rubrics to guide improvement across academic departments: assessment results are disaggregated by major, and reports are generated for each participating department. These reports, which compare the achievement of each department's majors to that of students across the respective college and across the university as a whole, are used to inform ongoing efforts to improve the major programs.

At the University of Mobile, data obtained from the implementation of the VALUE rubrics are used at the beginning of a cycle of improvement that is focused on the general education program. In the fall of 2011, for example, a university assessment committee

CASE STUDY INSIGHT

Our use of the writing rubric and writing portfolio has had a positive impact throughout the institution.

— Kirk Robinson, Calumet College of Saint Joseph

CASE STUDY INSIGHT

Assessment efforts ... help determine if and what instructional strategies are most fruitful.

— Anne P. Davis and Janet L. Ohlemacher,
Carroll Community College

identified as a desirable outcome a mean overall score of 3.0 or above on each of the five dimensions of the VALUE rubric for oral communication—organization, language, delivery, supporting material, and central message. While all the student work that was evaluated met this goal, the committee identified the two dimensions with the lowest mean scores—language (3.0) and delivery (3.06)—as areas for improvement. The committee recommended that faculty members place greater emphasis on the specific language of each discipline, and that the components associated with delivery be addressed in both the first-year orientation course and the upper-level courses in the majors.

The VALUE rubrics are used at a more advanced stage of assessment at the University of North Carolina Wilmington, where a process for disseminating results is clearly defined. After reviewing results, the Learning Assessment Council issues specific recommendations for actions to improve student learning, and these recommendations are provided directly to both the provost and the faculty senate. Final reports are disseminated to the faculty through the faculty senate, made available on a general education assessment findings website, and used to inform workshops conducted by the university's Center for Teaching Excellence.

IMPROVEMENT AT THE COURSE LEVEL

At Midland College, evidence obtained by using the VALUE rubrics to score student work led to the development of a series of specific action steps:

- Systematically analyze sophomore-level courses to determine whether they reflect additional rigor above the freshman level; discuss with faculty how to infuse rubric content into the curriculum.
- Offer professional development training to faculty in the “art” of teaching general education knowledge and skills.
- Offer professional development training on how reading skills relate to student success in all general education courses, and ensure the content of the reading rubric is being reflected in the curriculum.
- Investigate a broader range of core and general education courses, thus ensuring a more diverse group of artifacts to select from.
- Ensure that faculty are familiar with the content and structure of the VALUE rubrics so that assignments can be aligned properly.
- Provide faculty professional development for recording speaking assignments in core courses with the goal of providing ample artifacts for evaluation.

Further, the use of VALUE rubrics to assess reading and writing competencies at Midland has led to specific conclusions and suggestions for change. For example, the assessment process revealed the existence of discrepancies between individual course objectives and their measurement. Some departments articulated learning outcomes for each course more clearly than others, and only some focused on internal measurement. Discovery of these discrepancies led to the suggestion that additional professional development should occur related to the use of assessment tools.

At DePaul University, where the VALUE rubric for integrative learning is used to assess the capstone project in the School for New Learning, the assessment process has led to several improvements. For example, common language and criteria have been developed for the Advanced Project (AP) program. Shared expectations for self-assessment and reflection

have been built into the AP process, and greater consistency in guiding and assessing student learning has been achieved.

IMPROVEMENT IN SPECIFIC OUTCOMES AND AREAS

Many campuses have used the VALUE rubrics to focus their direct assessment efforts on specific learning outcomes, often in particular areas of the curriculum or cocurriculum or in particular programs. For example, Texas A&M University has developed projects focused on improving two outcome-specific areas: written communication and intercultural competence. In connection with the reaccreditation process, the university is using the VALUE rubrics for lifelong learning and integrative learning to help advance efforts to increase students' access to high-impact experiences. Similarly, Lewis University has used the VALUE rubrics to make improvements in the College of Business. Rubric data were used to identify problem areas, and specific goals for improvement have been set with respect to each area assessed. For critical thinking, the business faculty developed and implemented a three-year plan that includes fifteen specific activities designed to improve student achievement in this especially challenging area.

Implementation of the VALUE rubrics has also helped campuses address targeted outcomes that had been under-assessed or that were not clearly articulated. For example, Loyola University Chicago, Texas A&M University, and Calumet College of Saint Joseph have all identified ways in which the VALUE rubrics for civic engagement, intercultural knowledge, and lifelong learning can be used to help improve student achievement in areas related to the development of personal and social responsibility.

On some campuses, the direct assessment of student learning outcomes is aligned with cocurricular experiences, and students themselves engage in discussions of outcomes-based assessment. At Drake University, for example, staff members of the Office of Student Involvement and Leadership work together with members of the Student Activities Board in using the VALUE rubric for teamwork as a foundation for cocurricular assessment. Drake students use a self-rating instrument as a pre- and post-measurement tool and discuss their progress in relation to the criteria with student life staff. Similarly, at Calumet College of Saint Joseph, the VALUE rubric for foundations and skills for lifelong learning serves as a tool for talking with students about persistence and retention issues. In addition, the VALUE rubric for writing, which is used to assess student work in a first-year writing portfolio, serves as a mechanism for informing student success efforts.

No single part of a curriculum is solely responsible for ensuring that students achieve the essential learning outcomes of college. Rather, students must be given opportunities to practice the full range of competencies repeatedly—across courses and outside of courses. Thus, as the preceding examples attest, the improvement process must necessarily include specific plans for the dissemination of data, opportunities to gather feedback from multiple stakeholders, and actionable next steps. The case studies from which the examples are drawn provide a window into the broad range of approaches that can be undertaken to engage conversations around assessment data. Although there is no one-size-fits-all model for assessment or improvement, these examples share a common thread of progress—purposeful, incremental, significant, and demonstrated—toward gathering meaningful evidence and using it to improve student learning.

CASE STUDY INSIGHT

We now are considering deployment of an Assessment Dashboard.

— George G. Klemic, Lewis University

Beyond a Single Campus

Regardless of institutional type, all higher education institutions are engaged in awarding degrees or other certifications of learning. It is also the case that there is uncertainty and dissatisfaction among many policy makers and employers about exactly what the degree represents in terms of the preparation of graduates. With the emergence of Lumina Foundation's Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP) as an articulation of what any degree should represent and the level of student performance associated with attaining the degree,¹ the definition of a degree has shifted from the number of credit hours and the grade point average attained to the quality of the learning associated with the degree or credential. For each of the DQP's five areas of learning that have been identified as essential for student success in employment and life in a global environment—specific and general knowledge, intellectual abilities, application of learning, and civic learning—suggested levels of attainment have been developed for three degree levels: associate's, baccalaureate, and master's.

As the DQP continues to be tested and refined, the VALUE rubrics offer one way to articulate for students and faculty alike what achievement of desired levels of learning should look like for each of the outcome areas. The rubrics provide faculty members with a common language and a common set of reference points for comparing performance expectations across courses, programs, and institutions. At the same time, they provide students with a statement of what learning is expected of them as they progress toward their respective degrees or credentials.

Initially, the VALUE rubrics were designed to be used for institutional or campus-level assessment of learning. Yet, one of the lessons learned from campus adoption of the VALUE rubrics is that the rubrics also provide a common framework and language for faculty and students to talk across institutional boundaries about learning and achievement. A particularly useful finding in conjunction with the DQP framework is that the VALUE rubrics are providing a shared approach to the assessment of desired levels of learning, regardless of where the degree is attained and regardless of the specific disciplinary focus of the degree.

CAMPUS CONSORTIA

Several cross-campus consortia have used the VALUE rubrics to examine student learning on their respective campuses. Through a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services of the American Council of Research Libraries, for example, a consortium of ten institutions used a modified version of the VALUE rubric for information literacy as a vehicle for professional development, enhanced student learning, faculty development activities and resources, and assessment and accountability.

Through the Rubric Assessment of Information Literacy Skills (RAILS) project, these ten institutions joined together from July 2010 to June 2013 to investigate the potential

1. Lumina Foundation for Education, *Degree Qualifications Profile* (Indianapolis, IN: Lumina Foundation for Education, 2011), http://www.luminafoundation.org/publications/The_Degree_Qualifications_Profile.pdf.

for a rubric-based approach to the assessment of information literacy in higher education. The VALUE rubric for information literacy was used as a common starting point, and individual campuses shared their own modified versions of the rubric on the project's website (www.railsontrack.info). At each of the participating institutions, the lead librarian gathered one hundred student artifacts for scoring, selected ten librarians or disciplinary faculty members to assist with the assessment, and planned and led a rubric calibration session. The RAILS project produced customizable tools that can be used to demonstrate the value of academic libraries, respond to calls for accountability, strengthen instructional programs, and improve student learning—both alone and in collaboration with faculty.

Through another three-year project, funded by a grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education and coordinated by La Guardia Community College/City University of New York, a network of twenty-two community colleges, private colleges, and research universities is developing broadly applicable models for using rubrics in conjunction with e-portfolios. Titled “Connect to Learning: ePortfolio, Engagement, and Student Success,” the project focuses on reflective pedagogy and student learning, and seeks to identify correlations between rubric-based assessment and other measures of student success, including student retention (see www.lagcc.cuny.edu/connections). Participating campuses use the VALUE rubric for integrative learning to examine the role of e-portfolios in helping student integrate their learning across the curriculum, cocurriculum, and beyond.

The issue of student transfer has become another key motivation for adopting the VALUE rubrics. By establishing a shared set of expectations for student achievement and performance across a student's educational homes, the rubrics can be used to help facilitate successful transition from one institution to another. The South Metropolitan Higher Education Consortium in Chicago encompasses twelve campuses—two-year and four-year, public and private—that share a swirl of students who take courses at multiple institutions. After discussing and testing the VALUE rubric for writing, the members of the consortium determined that the development of a common assignment would facilitate students' cross-campus work by creating shared expectations for preparation and, thereby, increasing the likelihood that students would be able to transition successfully. In the fall of 2012, to calibrate student achievement across the campuses, all twelve members of the consortium implemented a common assignment for use in required writing courses (see fig. 12).

BENCHMARKS AND CROSS-CAMPUS COMPARISONS

As a check on local judgments and a way to gain a sense of how students at one institution are doing in relation to similar students elsewhere, it is important to situate assessment results within larger contexts. To facilitate this good practice and, more generally, to improve the availability of information about student learning trends and levels of achievement, AAC&U brought together the e-portfolio and learning management system communities to help create a repository of findings from VALUE rubric assessment conducted nationwide. If funding is successful, the resulting Collaborative for Authentic Assessment and Learning will enable the creation of national benchmarks for learning.² Additionally, the aggregation of results from campuses using the VALUE rubrics to assess student learning will provide a landscape of learning that any institution or state can use to benchmark local

2. For more information about the Collaborative for Authentic Assessment and Learning, see www.aacu.org/caal.

performance with relevant peer groups.

Two statewide efforts to assess student work using selected VALUE rubrics are currently underway. The first of these is focused on public institutions in Massachusetts, and the second is focused on both public and private institutions in Minnesota. In addition, several other states seeking to base assessment on actual student work are planning to use the VALUE rubrics as the shared standard for student achievement and faculty judgment through a multi-state collaboration.

The further development of the VALUE rubrics will continue to be informed by the growing movement within higher education toward authentic forms of assessment that are, increasingly, tied to the LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes (see fig. 1, p. vi). As this movement has progressed, it has validated the broad approach of the VALUE project, an approach to assessment that is firmly grounded in faculty judgment and in shared expectations for demonstrated student achievement and competence.

Figure 12. Common writing assignment

After reading the article provided, write two paragraphs. In your first paragraph, discuss the author's argument. What evidence does the author provide to support his argument? What position is he responding to? Cite examples from the text to support your answer.

In the second paragraph, either identify the author's strongest claim and explain why it is strong, or identify the weakest claim and explain why it is weak. Use examples from the article to illustrate your point.

After you have written your paragraphs, proofread and make appropriate revisions.

This assignment is to be completed for both of the following readings:

1. "What You Eat is Your Business" by Radley Balko
2. "We, the Public, Place the Best Athletes on Pedestals" by William Moller

Following are the agreed criteria for the assignment:

- Students may not discuss their essays.
- Students may discuss the assignment.
- Students are to be given one week to complete each assignment (out of class).
- Students should revise their essays on their own within the one-week timeframe.

Source: South Metropolitan Higher Education Consortium

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About the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U)

AAC&U is the leading national association concerned with the quality, vitality, and public standing of undergraduate liberal education. Its members are committed to extending the advantages of a liberal education to all students, regardless of academic specialization or intended career. Founded in 1915, AAC&U now comprises nearly 1,300 member institutions—including accredited public and private colleges, community colleges, research universities, and comprehensive universities of every type and size.

AAC&U functions as a catalyst and facilitator, forging links among presidents, administrators, and faculty members who are engaged in institutional and curricular planning. Its mission is to reinforce the collective commitment to liberal education and inclusive excellence at both the national and local levels, and to help individual institutions keep the quality of student learning at the core of their work as they evolve to meet new economic and social challenges.

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