

# Cardinal Core Program Assessment

## Frequently Asked Questions

### *Why does the university assess the Cardinal Core Program?*

The university assesses its general education program, the Cardinal Core, not only because it is an expectation of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), but also because it is an expectation we have for ourselves as a university. With this expectation is a call for increased accountability. Therefore, the assessment of student learning is something that is—and will continue to be—important to us. The assessment plan implemented by the Cardinal Core Curriculum Committee (formerly the General Education Curriculum Committee) was only the first step in this process and was developed to be expanded and improved upon for years to come.

### *Alignment with the SACS Commission on Colleges (SACS-COC, 2018)<sup>1</sup>*

#### Section 8: Student Achievement

Student learning and student success are at the core of the mission of all institutions of higher learning. Effective institutions focus on the design and improvement of educational experiences to enhance student learning and support student learning outcomes for its educational programs. To meet the goals of educational programs, an institution provides appropriate academic and student services to support student success.

2. The institution identifies expected outcomes, assesses the extent to which it achieves those outcomes, and provides evidence of seeking improvement based on analysis of the results in the areas below:

a. Student learning outcomes for each of its education programs.

*(Student outcomes: educational programs)*

b. Student learning outcomes for collegiate-level general education competencies of its undergraduate degree programs.

*(Student outcomes: general education)*

c. Academic and student services that support student success.

*(Student outcomes: academic and student services)*

### *Connection to Kentucky Statewide General Education Assessment Plan (KCPS, 2012)<sup>2</sup>*

All Kentucky public universities and KCTCS colleges are expected to assess, in accordance with SACS-COC Principles of Accreditation and based upon nationally accepted standards, the student learning outcomes associated with their general education programs, indicate the relationship to the faculty-generated Statewide General Education Student Learning Outcomes, and provide evidence of ongoing assessment that ensures comparability for transfer purposes on a three-year cycle.

---

<sup>1</sup>Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges. (2018). *The principles of accreditation: Foundations for quality enhancement*. Retrieved from <http://www.sacscoc.org/pdf/2018PrinciplesOfAcreditation.pdf>

<sup>2</sup>Kentucky Council for Postsecondary Education (2012). *Kentucky Statewide General Education Assessment Plan*. Retrieved from <http://cpe.ky.gov/policies/academicaffairs/genedassessmentplan.pdf>

***Do instructors of Cardinal Core courses have to take part in this assessment?***

Yes. The assessment process is an important responsibility of the university, its departments, and its faculty, as SACS clearly requires us to assess student learning outcomes in our Cardinal Core courses. Failure to assess learning outcomes places our SACS accreditation in jeopardy. Therefore, the necessity to maintain and improve upon the current system through the assessment process cannot be overstated. Participation is *not* optional. It is required.

***Who is responsible for the assessment process?***

The assessment process is and will remain the responsibility of faculty. The assessment plan was proposed by the General Education Task Force faculty committee and further developed by the faculty Cardinal Core Curriculum Committee to be effective in 2018. The Cardinal Core Curriculum Committee has the responsibility for implementing the assessment plan, reviewing assessment results, and overseeing the implementation of unit and department plans for improvement. While the plan will evolve over time, the preeminent role of the faculty in this process will not change.

***Is each Cardinal Core course assessed each semester?***

No. The assessment process covers different content areas each semester which are determined by the Cardinal Core Curriculum Committee's assessment subcommittee.

***Is this process going to measure or evaluate individual instructors or students?***

No. This process does not assess individual faculty members, students, or courses. The goal is to assess student learning in the Cardinal Core program as a whole. Student and instructor anonymity in the process will be safeguarded.

***How does the process ensure anonymity?***

Under the guidance and assistance of the Cardinal Core Office, the course instructor or other department representative is responsible for collecting student work and the removal of student and instructor names and identifying course information prior to submission. The aggregated results are presented to departments as feedback on student learning across general education content areas. Department specific results are only provided for cases in which three or more instructors and course sections from a department are included in the assessment sample.

***What kinds of course materials are used for the assessment?***

Work submitted as part of the instructional substance, embedded artifacts, from current Cardinal Core courses will be evaluated as part of the assessment. These embedded artifacts will assure that the assessment considers work produced with the seriousness that students bring to any graded activity. This assessment framework does not utilize standardized assessment instruments, thus avoiding pressure on the curriculum and the possibility of compromising academic freedom in order to meet the expectations of an external test.

***What Cardinal Core competencies are assessed and why?***

When the General Education Program Assessment was first developed in 2005, the General Education Curriculum Committee decided on a system of assessment that would use holistic readings of sample papers, projects, and other course assignments aligned with the general education learning outcomes. The initial phase of assessment focused on the assessing three overarching competencies outlined in the program’s description—critical thinking, effective communication, and understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity.

The General Education Task Force was formed in 2014 and asked to review the existing General Education Program and make recommendations for improvement. The resulting program was the Cardinal Core Program, effective summer 2018. The Cardinal Core Proposal, as outlined by the task force, would assess competency in critical thinking, effective communication, quantitative reasoning, and understanding of historical, social, and cultural diversity.

***Are the rubrics available?***

Yes, the rubrics are always available for review at <http://louisville.edu/provost/ger/rubrics>. In addition, the rubrics and scoring criteria are provided to departments before they are assessed. Individual instructors are also provided the Cardinal Core student learning outcomes and assessment rubrics before each semester.

***How does the process work?***

The Cardinal Core Curriculum Committee determines the assessment schedule for each of the Cardinal Core content areas—Arts & Humanities, Natural Sciences, Oral Communication, Quantitative Reasoning, Social & Behavioral Sciences (including Historical Perspectives), and Written Communication. Departments and individual faculty are notified of the assessment based on the assessment schedule and course sections offered during the semester. After the semester drop/add date has passed, the Cardinal Core Office sends each faculty member a course roster indicating which students have been systematically selected for inclusion in the assessment sample, along with instructions for submitting an electronic copy of the assignment prompt and the ungraded, unmarked copy of the selected students’ work to the Cardinal Core Office. All identifying information (student name, instructor name, course/section number) should be redacted before they are submitted to the Cardinal Core Office to protect anonymity.

Upon receipt of materials from faculty, the Cardinal Core Office reviews each artifact to ensure all identifying information has been removed and the artifact is legible and assessable.

Assignment descriptions and student artifacts are loaded into LiveText©, an electronic outcomes assessment system designed to support postsecondary education institutions as they implement and actively review results of student learning outcomes assessment.

A panel of assessors is then recruited to electronically review the collected sample of student work. Each student artifact is assessed and scored with the assigned rubric(s) by three separate assessors to determine inter-rater reliability.

After completion of the assessment, the Cardinal Core Office generates an assessment report. The Cardinal Core Curriculum Committee reviews and provides feedback on the report before finalizing and sharing with academic departments.

Starting in spring 2019 academic departments will be asked to review the findings presented in the assessment reports and document changes to curriculum based on those findings.

***Who selects the assessors?***

Assessors are selected based on expertise with assessment, past experience with the Cardinal Core/General Education assessment, members of the Cardinal Core Curriculum Committee, faculty teaching Cardinal Core courses, and recommendations from deans and department chairs. The Cardinal Core Office makes every effort to include faculty and graduate teaching assistants who are directly involved in the development and teaching of Cardinal Core courses.

***What kind of time commitment are assessors expected to make?***

The assessors are expected to participate in a half-day training session and a full-day of assessment. The training is mandatory to ensure validity and reliability of assessment measures.

***How are assessors compensated?***

Assessors receive \$150 for the half-day of training and \$350 for the full-day of assessment. Participation in both days is required.

***How are assessors trained?***

The half day of training is conducted by the Cardinal Core Office and the Director of Cardinal Core Assessment in which assessors learn about Cardinal Core Assessment and gain practice using the rubric(s) to score student work.

***What happens to the data?***

Once the assessment is complete, the Cardinal Core Office generates an assessment report, which is presented to the Cardinal Core Curriculum Committee. The committee uses the report to evaluate whether changes should be recommended for the Cardinal Core Program. Reports are shared with academic departments for further reflection and continuous improvement of the Cardinal Core curriculum. Reports are shared to the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education annually and to the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools as part of the accreditation process.

***Are individual student artifacts or course performance data available after the assessment?***

No. For anonymity to be maintained, no individual artifacts or individual course performance data is available. The Cardinal Core Office will provide department level data when greater than three courses and three instructors from one department were included in the assessment and the anonymity of faculty and students can be ensured.

***Where can I direct other questions?***

Questions can be directed to the Cardinal Core Office:

Katie Shanahan, Ph.D.  
Director of Cardinal Core Assessment  
Cardinal Core Office  
(502) 852-8113  
katie.shanahan@louisville.edu