General Education Outcomes Assessment
Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

1. What are our general education outcomes (also referred to as core competencies)?

Answer: **Civic Engagement** – the ability to contribute to the civic life and well-being of local, national, and global communities as both a social responsibility and a life-long learning process; **Critical Thinking** – the ability to use information, ideas and arguments from relevant perspectives to make sense of complex issues and solve problems; **Professional Readiness** – the ability to work well with others and display situationally and culturally appropriate demeanor and behavior; **Quantitative Literacy** – the ability to perform accurate calculations, interpret quantitative information, apply and analyze relevant numerical data, and use results to support conclusions; **Scientific Literacy** – the ability to apply the scientific method and related concepts and principles to make informed decisions and engage with issues related to the natural, physical, and social world; and **Written Communication** – the ability to develop, convey, and exchange ideas in writing, as appropriate to a given context and audience.

2. Why do we measure core competencies and report our findings?

Answer: At the course- and program-levels, we already assessed many of these competencies informally because we recognize these skills as valuable. Our regional accreditor, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC), and the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) both recognized that while many institutions are informally assessing these skills, they were not documenting and showing the public the findings of our cycle of assessment – to observe, design, measure, reflect, and improve. For this reason, it is now a requirement, both at the State and regional levels. Good assessment is not the work of one person, one discipline, or one program. It is a thoughtful process, founded on shared governance and collaboration, with the intention of continuous improvement. Beyond any formal process, good assessment requires a culture devoted to student success.

3. Who measures and reports outcomes assessment?

Answer: The most basic answer is EVERYONE. Consider this: if you assess a student's performance over the course of a semester, the series of assessments culminates in a student's final grade. That grade is a measure of the potential for a student to be successful in subsequent courses, in transferring to another school, and/or in their careers after college. Now, let's look at assessment from 10,000 feet, where there is no longer a focus on an individual student's performance. Since all the scores are collected from all sections in aggregate, there is no longer a focus on course success either. At 10,000 feet, the formal assessment is a collective examination of student skills, knowledge, and/or abilities. It is also a means to identify potential gaps in understanding. In formal outcomes assessment, the key players are students, faculty, the General Education Committee, and the Office of Institutional Effectiveness. The General Education Committee consists of teaching and administrative faculty, who collaborate to identify and develop assessments for each of the six outcomes. Lead faculty collaborate with supporting faculty to develop, train (e.g., norming a rubric to make sure everyone assesses levels of achievement similarly), validate (Does the assessment measure what we want it to?), and administer a consistent assessment. Lead faculty collect data from supporting faculty and send it to OIE for analysis. OIE performs an analysis and communicates findings to lead faculty, college-wide committees, and maintains a public facing webpage with overall findings. If any changes need to be made to the assessment, lead faculty will meet with OIE for guidance.

4. When is the outcomes assessment data due, and who do I send it to?

Answer: After administering and collecting the assessment data, send the SIS (not Canvas) student IDs (EMPLIDs) and student assessment scores on a master spreadsheet to Miles Keller (mkeller@jtcc.edu) in OIE. **Fall data is due December 15th**. **Spring data is due May 15th**. If you need to collect additional data after the due dates for the respective semesters (i.e., dual enrollment sections), please contact Keri-Beth Pettengill (kpettengill@jtcc.edu) in OIE to discuss an appropriate due date for your assessment. The data should be sent by lead faculty only.

5. The process above mentions a "master spreadsheet." Why can't I just run an assessment in Canvas, and then have the OIE pull the assessment results down?

Answer: Unfortunately, Canvas is not an assessment tool, and will not cleanly download the assessment data/reports you need. Canvas does not even identify a student by their SIS student ID #, but by a Canvas ID#. Furthermore, OIE does not have access to all Canvas courses, nor do they know how assessments are titled from one class or section to another, so they would not know what to look for in yoru course if they did have access. Lead and supporting faculty can run any assessment through Canvas, but please be aware that all data from that assessment must be reported on the single master spreadsheet, and submitted to OIE. OIE can also help faculty by helping them design Google forms and Qualtrics surveys to collect data.

6. How often do we need to assess core competencies?

Answer: Every fall and spring semester.

7. What if we, as lead faculty, set an assessment goal, and then reach it?

Answer: That's great! Document this in your plan for improvement that you will continue to measure and monitor this outcome. If you meet the target, but want to make improvements, you can do that, too. Please keep in mind, though, that reaching an outcome does not mean that you no longer need to work on continuous improvement. You can change the target, administer student focus groups, evaluate different methods for teaching the concepts…the sky is the limit.

8. How do we pilot outcomes assessment?

The Start

If you are already a member of the General Assessment Committee, you are also most likely on a subcommittee tied to one of the competencies. You are probably also a lead faculty member who has identified a course in which a core competency can be assessed. **Example**: You're an English faculty member who decides to assess Written Communication in ENG 112.

Step 1. Choosing (or Building) an Assessment

You (along with other lead faculty in your discipline) choose an assessment tool to adopt or you build a tool that clearly and effectively assesses the core competency in a specific course. **Example:** English faculty elected to assess Written Communication in ENG 112, English Composition II. The course-level student learning outcomes align with the core competency. They have chosen to adopt the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) rubric on Written Communication to assess this outcome. The rubric has been validated by an external source and faculty review determined it aligned with the core competency. Faculty develop and provide consistent directions as to what the requirements of the assignment are for all faculty administering the assessment. Faculty collaborate with OIE to develop a collection tool for student scores.

Step 2. Administering the Assessment

For the first semester of an assessment, or the pilot, a small group of faculty will administer the assessment. The pilot is a trial run of the assessment, to determine if any changes should be made to the assessment before the first year expansion. **Example:** A small number of ENG 112 faculty piloted the Written Communication Value rubric assessment in a few sections in the spring of 2019, collecting student scores on a spreadsheet. (Following the pilot semester, the assessment is administered by more faculty until 100% of faculty are administering the assessment, at least by year 4.)

Step 3. Reporting Assessment Data to OIE

Once faculty administer the assessment in the pilot, supporting faculty will provide lead faculty with their data. Data required includes SIS (not Canvas) student IDs (EMPLIDs) and the individual student assessment scores. **Example:** Lead faculty in ENG 112 compiled the data into a master spreadsheet and provided the data to OIE for analysis.

Step 4. Making Any (Final) Changes to the Assessment—Optional—Pilot Only

After piloting the assessment for one semester, faculty review the findings and make adjustments based on the findings. Final changes must be reported to the director of OIE for tracking purposes. No changes should be made to the assessment after initial changes resulting from the pilot, as the assessment must remain static and consistent for five years. **Example:** For the ENG 112 Written Communication pilot, OIE performed an analysis and communicated the findings to lead faculty. The department chair requested that the director of OIE attend a department meeting to discuss the findings with all English faculty. Based on the findings, faculty made adjustments to the assessment, and expanded the number of faculty using the assessment in the following fall semester. From this point forward, focus is on expansion or roll-out of the assessment; the assessment, itself, is static.

After the pilot, follow steps 2 and 3 for each semester, expanding the number of faculty administering the assessment until you reach 100% of faculty, at least by year 4.