The Great Lakes College Association Project to Advance Learning
Outcomes Assessment
Frequently Asked Questions for Faculty Participants

The Great Lakes College Association Project is an agreement among 9 GLCA Schools and the AAC&U to work together in the development and pilot testing of a process for system level learning outcomes assessment.

Introduction: This Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document has been created to help interested faculty members understand the Great Lakes College Association project and the components of the model. It provides information of particular interest to potential faculty participants and addresses what we expect to be faculty concerns. The goal is to emphasize how critical faculty involvement and ownership are in the success of this Collaborative.

What is the Great Lakes College Association Project and who is involved?
With the active support of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), 9 GLCA schools – Allegheny College, College of Wooster, Denison University, DePauw University, Earlham College, Hope College, Kenyon College, Ohio Wesleyan University, and Wabash College—have agreed to collaborate in the development and pilot testing of a different model for learning outcomes assessment—a model that is rooted in campus/system collaboration and in faculty curriculum development, teaching activity, and assessment of authentic student work. The model is based on the use of Essential Learning Outcomes and associated VALUE rubrics developed by faculty members under the auspices of AAC&U’s LEAP initiative.

How were the VALUE rubrics developed?
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) to create rubrics for sixteen specific areas of learning. Each rubric underwent multiple revisions based upon feedback provided through campus testing of rubrics against samples of student work. Since 2009, over 32,000 people have accessed the rubrics, hundreds of campuses have used them to assist with institutional or program-level assessment. Campus examples of use of the rubrics can be found at: http://www.aacu.org/value/casestudies/.

How did the Great Lakes College Project evolve and what is the push for GLCA participation?
• The AAC&U is engaged in a similar project with the Multi-State Collaborative (MSC) and the Minnesota Collaborative Project. The Multi-State Collaborative involves public institutions in 9 states (CT, IN, KY, MA, MO, MN, OR, RI, and UT). The Minnesota Collaborative project involves 10 public and private schools. The AAC&U initiated the Great Lakes College Project to ensure that the methodology would work in smaller private institutions.
• The MSC has been a collaborative initiative developed in the hopes of avoiding potential federal/state mandates of using standardized tests to determine what students are learning.
• The goal from the beginning has been to create a program of learning outcomes assessment that builds on faculty- and campus-based formative assessment while adding features that provide for public reporting of results for different types of institutions (e.g., community colleges, state universities, and universities) and for comparisons across states.
• Financial support comes for the Great Lakes College Project comes from a grant from the Sherman Fairchild Foundation. Support for the MSC and Minnesota Collaborative Project comes from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. For more information on this work, see: http://www.aacu.org/value/msc.

What is the timeline for the project?
The overall project is a large-scale, ambitious project that will take several years to design and implement. At a minimum, the Great Lakes College Project is a pilot project that has funding for two years.

What is the purpose of the pilot study?
The Great Lakes College Project pilot study is designed to:
• Advance our understanding of the feasibility and sustainability of a common model of assessment using actual student work. The project will examine whether a methodology designed for larger campuses can be used and sustained on smaller campuses.
• Test the methodology used in sampling and collecting student work, including examination of the ability to create a representative sample of student work on smaller campuses with an appropriate degree of randomization.
• Allow for evaluation of the ability to produce useful assessment data for campus use, to organize aggregated data for cross peer institution comparisons, and to measure student learning using VALUE rubrics.
• Test the reliability of using the VALUE rubrics in the assessment of student work.

How were the GLCA schools selected?
All GLCA schools were invited to participate and nine schools voluntarily accepted the invitation.

What roles are faculty being asked to play during the pilot phase?
Faculty may choose to participate in different ways throughout the project:
• Faculty will provide student artifacts for specified learning outcomes for analysis.
• Faculty will engage in professional development activities focused on creating, revising, and selecting assignments designed to generate student products demonstrating particular learning outcomes. These activities will vary across campuses.
• Faculty will participate in a face-to-face scoring sessions with other faculty from the Great Lakes Colleges Association Project, the Multi-State Collaborative and the Minnesota Collaborative Project.
• Faculty will participate in face-to-face scoring sessions with faculty on their campuses to score work produced by their students.
• Faculty will be involved in discussions regarding findings to provide their perspective on what the data suggest. Faculty will bring insights back to their local states and campuses in order to be instrumental in curricular redesign and the improvement of student learning.

What are the Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) being assessed?
As a starting place, the Great Lakes College Association Project will examine 3 initial Student Learning Outcomes:
Written Communication—the development and expression of ideas in writing. Written communication involves learning to work in many genres and styles. It can involve working with many different writing technologies, and mixing texts, data, and images. Written communication abilities develop through iterative experiences across the curriculum.
Critical Thinking—a "habit of mind" characterized by the comprehensive exploration of issues, ideas, artifacts, and events before accepting or formulating an opinion or conclusion.

How will the Student Learning Outcomes be assessed?
• The Great Lakes Colleges Association Project calls for Written Communication, Critical Thinking, and Intercultural Knowledge and Competence LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes to be used in this project, assessed using the LEAP VALUE rubrics developed by teams of faculty members and other experts from public and private institutions of higher education across the United States.
• Involved faculty will develop/adapt/select an assignment as needed to allow students to demonstrate competency in relation to campus learning outcomes and VALUE rubrics and provide student work for assessments to the Project to be assessed. For the pilot, the student work must align to the rubrics described above.
• The institution/department may choose to assess the same student work as it relates to their degree program within their institution; however, the GLCA Project requires a separate evaluation to be conducted by trained faculty evaluators using the VALUE rubrics indicated above.
• The student work will be evaluated both holistically (one overall score) and analytically (one score for each dimension) against each learning outcome and corresponding rubric.
How will the results from the pilot be used?
Campuses may use results however they choose. Assessment results from the pilot study will be aggregated and reported out for all dimensions of the rubric associated with each learning outcome. There will be no public presentation of results from the pilot study with the exception of identified trends in the data, but the results will be analyzed by the AAC&U as part of their consideration of proof of concept, feasibility, validity, and reliability for the model.

But what if my institution has adapted the VALUE rubrics to be more appropriate to our campus?
Many institutions have modified the VALUE rubrics to reflect their own unique needs. However, in order to place the findings from this project within a broader national context, it is essential that the student work samples selected to be scored at a multi-institutional level are evaluated using unmodified VALUE rubrics. Institutions could, of course, evaluate their student work using modified rubrics for their own purposes.

What will the pilot study process consist of and who is involved?
The 2014-2016 pilot study will involve the collection of samples of student work during the 2015 and 2016 academic years.

- Assignments: Assignments and corresponding student work that provide students with the opportunity to demonstrate either written communication, critical thinking, or intercultural knowledge and competence will be collected. Faculty will be asked to submit the assignment instructions and the corresponding completed student work. Faculty will be asked to indicate which, if not all, of the dimensions of the appropriate VALUE rubric the assignment addresses.
- Number of Student Artifacts: Institutions will collect a targeted minimum of 75 samples of written student work per outcome per institution.
- Sampling: Institutions will be provided with sampling guidelines that provide each institution with the flexibility to account for local constraints or preferences. Examples of parameters that will be part of the sampling guidelines are: requiring submitted student work to be drawn from more than one course, from across a range of disciplines, and from students nearing graduation.
- De-identification: Assignment instructions and student work will go through three levels of de-identification to ensure confidentiality at the institution level and anonymity at the state and project level.
- Scoring: Faculty scorers will be selected from the institutions participating in all of the VALUE initiatives; the MSC, the Minnesota Collaborative Project and the Great Lakes Colleges Association Project.
- Faculty scorers will be blind to the institution the work originates from. Scorers will not assess artifacts from their own institution.
- Results: Individual institution results will be returned to each participating institution so that campus leaders can determine who should have access to them. No state leaders or campus personnel (e.g., faculty, provosts, presidents, or deans) will have access to individual institution results.
- Professional Development: The project will offer faculty professional development activities and networking to support the work.

What is the time commitment and what are the expectations for faculty if I am interested in participating?
The time commitment will vary among faculty depending on level of participation. Faculty will need to select one assignment (student work) that directly aligns to one of the VALUE rubrics indicated above. If faculty are familiar with the VALUE rubrics, the time needed is minimal. If, however, faculty are not familiar with the VALUE rubrics or dimensions identified in each, there may be more of a time commitment to ensure the student work they select directly aligns. The decision on whether to become a faculty scorer will also increase the time commitment needed.

If I choose to participate, are there any resources available?
Compensation will be provided for faculty members who volunteer to score student artifacts in the national or project scoring sessions. Each campus has some resources to help in this process and campuses should be able to provide opportunities to gain experience with LEAP-based assessment and assignment design.

What are the benefits for faculty and students participating?
The project provides an opportunity

- To work with other faculty to develop an assessment process based on authentic student work
- To learn more about using rubrics to assess learning, specifically the VALUE rubrics
- To learn how assessment is conducted. Based on this knowledge, faculty may come across new ideas on how to improve their own teaching, and faculty may receive a clearer understanding of what they want to accomplish in their own courses
- To view and evaluate student work from other institutions.
- To share knowledge with colleagues and peers
To offer the faculty perspective on what the data suggest
To be instrumental in curricular redesign and using assessment to improve student learning at their local campuses

What is an assessable artifact and what types of assignments can be used as the assessable artifact?
An assessable artifact is simply a graded assignment in the course that addresses the three VALUE rubrics. By using assignments and the student work to fulfill the assignments from the class for assessment, the instructor does not have to design any other kind of assessable material. However, the instructor will need to ensure the selected student work directly aligns to the appropriate rubric. Designing an aligned assignment takes practice and requires using the selected rubric to guide the design. This graded assignment ensures that students take it seriously and allows instructors to really know if students can perform the student learning outcome. By using materials designed by faculty for assessing individual performance in the class, the artifact can also be used in program assessment. The assessable artifact is any assignment that a faculty member believes will best demonstrate a student's ability to meet the LEAP Learning Outcome that the course addresses. The assessable assignment in this project will be one from a student who is just starting the degree or nearing completion of the degree.

Where can I find the rubrics that will be used to assess the assignments?
Please go to http://www.aacu.org/value-rubrics if you wish to download VALUE rubrics. You will be prompted to place them in the Shopping Cart and go through a check-out process, but there is no cost involved for downloading one or all of the rubrics.

I prefer confidentiality - how can you ensure confidentiality?
Each institution will be responsible for ensuring confidentiality. Once the faculty member submits the student work, the institution will be asked to scrub all identifying information including student name, faculty name, and course section/id if needed. The institution will provide a random identification code or number for each piece of student work. When a scorer reviews the student work against the rubric, they will only see the random ID given by the institution. The institution may choose to keep identifying information for internal assessment purposes and/or to run demographic and institutional data in aggregate form only.

How can comparing institutions be a good thing? That sounds dangerous to me.
The project leadership has taken this concern seriously. Keeping the results aggregated by school for the entire project will protect individual institutions. Public presentations of results will be managed by the participating institutions and will use aggregated rather than individual institutional data. Results of the pilot study will not be publicly presented. The results will also be discussed in aggregate form in relation to the results of the Multi-State Collaborative and the Minnesota Collaborative Project. Discussion about investment in higher education should be a good thing for all institutions.

I am concerned that the results of the assessment may be used against faculty. Who will see the results?
Student work will be stripped of all identifying information about students and faculty members at the campus level before forwarding it for national scoring. Even though student work will be stripped of all identifying information before inclusion in the project, Institutions will have the ability to maintain demographic and institutional data which can provide trend data over time—as with any student data. All assessment data will be in aggregate form only—at the campus level.

Who are the evaluators?
The evaluators will be faculty members from participating institutions. They may or may not be the instructors who volunteered to submit student work to be evaluated; however, preference will be given to faculty who have submitted student work to the pilot project. The evaluators will not be asked to assess an assignment from students in their classes.

I am interested in being an evaluator, whom should I contact?
Each campus has a campus coordinator for the project. Expressions of interest in training/development activities, artifact submission, or becoming an evaluator (faculty scorer) should be directed to the campus coordinator. Please contact your local campus coordinator for further information.