Using the VALUE Rubrics for Improvement of Learning and Authentic Assessment

CASE STUDY: Midland College

Using AAC&U VALUE Rubrics
Submitted by Mary Braselton

Located in Midland, Texas, Midland College (MC) is a two-year community college that prepares students for transfer as well as for certificate/technology degrees. The MC Core Curriculum/General Education Committee responded to a 2010 Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) requirement for assessment of student learning. Membership on this committee of fifteen is representative of all academic and technical areas of the college instructional staff. The dean of fine arts, the dean of mathematics and sciences, and the vice president of instruction provided leadership with regard to the assessment protocols and methodology.

Protocol and Methodology
Approximately 70 percent of Midland College graduates receive associate of arts in general studies (AAGS), associate of science in general studies (ASGS), or associate of arts in teaching (AAT) transfer degrees; 30 percent receive associate of applied science (AAS) degrees. Both academic and technology tracks require a core curriculum.\(^1\) AAGS, ASGS, and AAT degrees require a forty-two credit hour core curriculum that includes course at both the freshman and sophomore levels. AAS degrees require fifteen general education course credit hours. The Core Curriculum Committee chose the rubrics’ benchmark level to assess freshman-level courses and the rubrics’ milestone (2) level to assess the sophomore-level core courses.\(^2\)

According to the published/required MC core, SACS requires that reading, writing, speaking, listening, and critical thinking be assessed; therefore, the Core Curriculum/General Education Committee appealed to the faculty to submit artifacts (student-produced assignments) that, in their opinion, represented the attainment of those skills. No specific instructions for types of assignments were given, so evaluators received essays, short-answer responses, videotaped presentations, and step-by-step problem-solving products. Many of the artifacts provided came from archived sets of assignments housed on the college server; no prompting for the assessment took place.
Although hopes were that the committee would receive artifacts from every area represented in the core, the results showed that sample work came from the following core courses: English 1301/1302, psychology 2301, history 1301/1302, political science 2301/2302, anthropology 2351, mathematics 1315, and all core courses in the sciences, technology, music, speech, and art—or approximately 60 percent of the courses represented in the core.

**Data Collection**

Data for each assessed area were collected over a period of months during the 2011–12 academic year. The college committed to an aggressive timeframe for assessment of the competencies and implemented a major portion of the assessment process in late fall 2010 and early spring 2011. Once the pool of artifacts for each area to be evaluated was collected, 70 percent of the artifacts were randomly selected from the sophomore-level courses typically taken by AAGS/ASGS/AAT graduates. The expected performance level for these artifacts is the higher milestone (2) level of each rubric. Thirty percent of the artifacts were randomly selected from freshman-level courses that are part of the AAS general education requirements. The expected performance level for these artifacts is the lower benchmark level of the appropriate rubric.

**Evaluators**

Volunteer faculty and administrative evaluators representing varied areas of academic and technological expertise were selected for each of the five areas to be assessed. Approximately 75 percent of the entire academic/technology faculty was involved in this process. An in-depth professional development workshop was scheduled for evaluators in each of the five areas to be assessed: reading, writing, speaking, listening, and critical thinking. In addition to theoretical frameworks, the workshops utilized the rubrics’ benchmark- and milestone (2)–level descriptors to ensure validity and reliability in the grading process. Each artifact was evaluated by two evaluators, and in the event of a disagreement, a third evaluator was engaged to break the tie.

Reading and writing competencies were assessed first. During the assessment process, several evaluators were concerned about the validity and reliability of using negatively stated criteria. At the end of the first assessment period, evaluators were asked to contribute feedback to the committee; the negatively stated criteria were the primary concern. Thus, the rubrics for
speaking and critical thinking were modified to reflect positive statements. Additionally, evaluators noted that some assignments lacked sufficient instructions/directions leading to an internal weakness in validity (no fault of the rubric).

**Findings**

- Scores were higher for freshman-level courses than for sophomore level courses. In-depth analysis was begun in August 2012 to determine future changes in the assessment process itself as well as to revisit the internal methods for collecting data.
- Discrepancies exist between individual course objectives and the measurement of those objectives. It appears that some departments set course learning outcomes more clearly than others. Similarly, it appears that some departments focus on internal measurement, and some do not. It may be that more professional development must occur related to the use of assessment tools.
- Graders expressed difficulty in applying the elements of the reading rubric to the artifacts; thus, changes were made to the original rubrics. The professional development did not recognize the need for the changes early in the process, however, which may have tainted the results.

**Future Plans**

Future assessment plans (see fig. 1) will occur in conjunction with realigning the core curriculum as mandated by the State of Texas, but the expectations are that the current Core Curriculum/General Education Assessment Team will remain static and that we will continue to use the VALUE rubrics.

The committee compiled the following list of suggested actions for the 2012–13 academic year:

- Systematically analyze sophomore-level courses to determine whether they reflect additional rigor above the freshman level. Discuss with faculty about how to infuse rubric content into the curriculum (Study Backwards Design).
- 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 that the content of the reading rubric is 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/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.

**Figure 1.** 2012–13 Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Semester</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2012</td>
<td>Ongoing review of necessary changes for improvement in critical thinking competency with possible modifications in syllabi and associated requirements.</td>
<td>September</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2012</td>
<td>Assess process for evaluation of college-level competencies and the extent to which graduates have attained them.</td>
<td>September</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2012</td>
<td>Analyze areas of process that need strengthening.</td>
<td>October</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2012</td>
<td>Make recommendations regarding plans for improvement in process.</td>
<td>November</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2012</td>
<td>Collect artifacts of student work for reading and writing competencies.</td>
<td>December</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2013</td>
<td>Implement a new cycle of assessment/evaluation.</td>
<td>January</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2013</td>
<td>Implement plan for improvement for the areas of speaking and listening.</td>
<td>January</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes**

1. The core includes English, psychology, history, political science, education, anthropology, mathematics, all sciences, technology, music, speech, and art.
2. Significant discussion focused on whether or not the benchmark-level requirements were too basic and required too little achievement. Serious consideration was given to using milestone 2 for freshman-level assessment and using milestone 3 at the sophomore level. In the end, the determination was made to keep the benchmark level for freshman assessment and the milestones (2) level for sophomore assessment.
3. The State of Texas has adopted six new criteria for evaluating learning in public colleges, effective in 2013. Thus, the colleges and universities are working through core curriculum issues, and some adaptation of measurement is expected as well. This work will begin in August 2012.