

General Education Core Assessment

Closing the Loop Review of 2019-2024 Cycle

Overview of Committee Responsibilities

The Core Curriculum Committee stewards MSU's Core Curriculum. The committee is responsible for reviewing and making recommendations regarding new Core course proposals and for overseeing the assessment of existing Core courses and learning outcomes. The committee reviews Core learning outcomes assessment and provides the strong foundation upon which Montana State University develops, identifies, and documents quality improvement plans and goals around its general education curriculum.

Committee members are made up of faculty, staff, and student representatives. As noted on the committee website, the committee is responsible for the following areas:

- Planning and making recommendations for improvement of and innovation in MSU's core curriculum.
- Communication to the students, faculty and staff about the importance and relevance of the core curriculum.
- Overseeing the review of annual program assessment documents for MSU's core curriculum.
- The review of new Core Curriculum course proposals (based on recommendations from steering committees).
- Design and development of formats and templates for assessment of core curriculum program learning outcomes (assessment plans and reports).
- Providing feedback as needed to departments/programs offering Core courses
- Institutional reporting to Deans' Council, Faculty Senate and Office of the Provost to inform strategic planning objectives.
- Two members of the Core Curriculum Committee will serve on the Core Equivalency Review Committee (CERC). CERC reviews student requests for substitution or waiver of Core requirements.

The Core Committee has been chaired by the Vice Provost of Curriculum, Assessment and Accreditation over the last 5-year cycle; however, given the transitions in leadership within this position, some of the assessment processes and reporting structures have varied over time.

5-Year Assessment Cycle

Over the last General Education Core Assessment Cycle (2019-2024), all three of the Core Qualities (Thinkers & Problem Solvers (AY 19-20), Effective Communicators (AY 20-21), and Local & Global Citizens (AY 21-22) were assessed using Core Curriculum Committee designed rubrics. Each rubric can be found on the Core Assessment website, along with the full reports.

The Core Curriculum Committee designed rubrics based on the exact language of the MSU Core Qualities. The Committee Chair reached out to faculty teaching in the respective Core Perspectives to collect student work (i.e. artifacts) that were then randomized. Artifacts were distributed to either Core Committee members, Friends of the Core Committee (as noted in the [AY 19-20 report](#)), or faculty and assessed. Data was collected via Qualtrics and analysis was conducted by the Core Committee.

During AY 22-23 an assessment of whether the Core Perspective definitions (US, IA, IN, IH, IS, CS, D, W, Q, and R) were incorporated into course syllabi was undertaken. For the final year of the 5-Year Core Assessment Cycle, an assessment of faculty perceptions of student attainment of the Core Qualities was conducted using a survey of faculty teaching capstone or research (R core) classes.

Summary of Findings & Recommendations

The following charts of information and findings were developed from the full assessment reports that can be found on the [Core Committee Assessment](#) website and are provided here for context.

AY 19-20 Thinkers and Problem Solvers

A target threshold of 85% of student work at Developing or Proficient was set. Student work was assessed across the following elements:

Element	Target (85% Developing or Proficient)
Synthesis of Information	Met
Met Creation of Meaningful Information	Met
Met Evaluation of Evidence	Met
Met Source Citation	Did not meet
Did not meet Assumptions	Met
Met Analysis	Met
Met Critique of Counter Argument	Did not meet
Did not meet Asking and Answering Questions	Did not meet
Did not meet Defining Problems and Identifying Solutions	Met
Met Demonstrates Creation of Knowledge or Art	Did not meet

Future Assessment of Thinking & Problem Solving

- We need to differentiate the assessment of courses by level so that we can disaggregate results for 100/200 vs. 300/400 level courses. We could then establish targets that differ for 100/200 vs. 300/400 level courses. We should not have the same expectations that students in lower division courses will be proficient in all of these areas yet.

- We need to randomly sample courses to collect artifacts in and then have those instructors not selected participate in assessing the artifacts. This will reduce the workload for everyone and make it more likely that we can maintain a good system of assessment that provides data that informs improving teaching and learning of the MSU Core Qualities.
- More trainings for faculty in how to teach to the new MSU Core Qualities need to be provided as the faculty really enjoyed talking with one another about how they teach and assess students in these areas in their classes. These trainings might also be an additional location to share the assessment results from the past year.

AY 20-21 Effective Communicators.

A target threshold of 80% of student work meeting a competent standard or higher was determined. Student work was assessed across the following elements:

Element	Target (80% Outstanding, Strong, or Competent)
Content development – creating meaning and expressing ideas	Met
Considers intended audience and context	Met
Engaging and utilizing feedback to improve communication	Met
Genre and conventions in communicating ideas	Met
Sources and evidence	Met
Construct persuasive arguments in ways that empower and challenge their own and other's thinking	Met

Future Assessments of Effective Communicator

In future assessments of this indicator in the Effective Communicator Core Quality, the committee suggests:

- including an assessment of artifacts that are not limited to static, written student work;
- pulling artifacts from other Core that claim to address Effective Communicator;
- assess across Core, especially at capstone; and
- assessment of placement and exemption from Core.

AY 22-23 Local and Global Citizens

A target threshold of 80% of student work meeting a competent standard or higher was determined. Student work was assessed across the following elements:

Element	Standard underdeveloped, not addressed, or did not apply to assignment provided for assessment	Target (80% Outstanding, Strong, or Competent)
Demonstrates effective strategies to listen and respond to others, and/or to acknowledge other perspectives/points of view.	49%	Did not meet
Displays integrity in establishing respectful relationships and productively managed conflict to reach ethical outcomes.	74%	Did not meet
Evaluates sources of identities and how identities influenced civic values, assumptions, responsibilities and/or community engagement.	50%	Did not meet
Applies knowledge of diverse cultures, histories, values, or conflicts to better understand current events and/or social life.	37%	Did not meet
Acknowledges and/or reflects on the important role informed, engaged citizens play in democratic societies.	57%	Did not meet
Identifies what political and social issues, problems or policies they wish to engage with as citizens.	-	**

**Note: Anomaly found in Qualtrics survey data for this element; full data set was not generated despite reviewers confirming submissions. This element has been excluded from the assessment results.

Future Assessment of Local and Global Citizens

Based on the high percentage of course work that did not address much of the criteria within the core quality language, the Core Committee infers that curriculum developers are interpreting the Local and Global Citizenship objectives in any number of different ways and may assume that as long as they are meeting the objectives of a few of the criteria, they are meeting the learning objective overall. After discussing the results of the data, the Core Committee recommends considering the following:

- More training/workshopping with faculty and curriculum developers about creating courses that meet core objectives.
- Outreach to courses with local and global citizen to explain that this objective requires some kind of self-reflection on the part of the student to address: “establishing respectful relationships and productively manage conflict to reach ethical outcomes,” “how identities influence civic values, assumptions, responsibilities and community engagement,” “apply knowledge,” and “determine for themselves what political and social issues, problems or policies they wish to engage with as citizens.”
- Rewrite local and global citizen objectives.

- Determine if it is okay that courses don't meet all levels of the objective and adjust thresholds and percentage of competency as needed.
- Determine if written student artifacts are the best way to assess this objective given the language of "listen and respond to others."

AY 23-24 Research & Creative Experience (R) Core

Core assessments conducted since 2019 focused on work performed by students early in their college experience; however, because the Core Quality learning outcomes statements reference "MSU Graduates," the Core Committee requested an assessment of student performance at the end of their degree. During the 2023-24 academic year, the Core Curriculum Committee asked faculty who teach upper division R or capstone courses to provide feedback on whether their students have achieved the three Core Qualities and, if applicable, Core Perspectives. Data was collected during both fall and spring semesters. R Core courses are required to pick two out of the three Core Qualities to address in their course: Effective Communicators (EC), Thinkers & Problem Solvers (TPS), or Local & Global Citizens (LGC); although many address all three, especially in capstones.

Faculty Perception of Student Mastery of Core Quality Learning Outcomes

Faculty were asked to estimate the percent of their students demonstrating mastery of understanding in each of the three Core Qualities. A 4-point scale was used as follows:

- Introductory – has a basic understanding of the quality.
- Developing – has a developing understanding of the quality but may still make some mistakes.
- Achieving – has a solid understanding of the quality and can apply it effectively.
- Mastery – has a deep understanding of the quality and can use it to solve complex problems.

During the fall 2023 semester, faculty reported that Thinkers & Problem Solvers was the most addressed Core Quality with Effective Communicators coming second. This flipped in the spring 2024 semester with Effective Communicators being addressed in more courses than Thinkers & Problem Solvers (Table 1). In either semester, Local & Global Citizens was reported as the least addressed Core Quality at only 45% in the fall 2023 semester and 40% in the spring semester (Table 1.)

Table 1. Faculty self-reporting Core Qualities assessed in Core courses.

CORE Quality	Fall 2023	N	Spring 2024	N
Effective Communicators	94%	60	97%	63
Thinkers & Problem Solvers	97%	62	95%	62
Local & Global Citizens	45%	29	40%	26

Note: Data generated by Qualtrics.

Faculty perceptions of how well students are mastering the Core Qualities largely stayed at the “Achieving” level for all Core Qualities, except for in the spring 2024 semester, where Effective Communicators indicate almost 33% of their students ratings at the “Mastery” level (Table 2, highlighted).

Table 2. Faculty estimates of percent of student mastery Core Quality Learning Outcomes.

Term	Core Quality	N	Introductory	Developing	Achieving	Mastery
Fall 2023	EC	59	1.7%	18.6%	60.3%	19.0%
	TPS	58	5.2%	13.8%	55.2%	25.9%
	LGC	58	10.3%	24.6%	42.1%	22.8%
Spring 2024	EC	63	18.5%	20.0%	28.9%	32.7%
	TPS	62	8.4%	15.6%	42.6%	33.4%
	LGC	26	8.4%	20.9%	38.9%	31.8%

Note: Data imported to Excel spreadsheets, cells with missing data were removed from final output and quantification.

Future Action

Although indirect evidence, the data collected provided a snapshot of how faculty perceived student mastery of Core Quality learning outcomes. The question is whether the perception that students are understanding these Core Qualities at an Achieving level more than a Mastery level is something that warrants further investigation.

This exercise also prompts the question as to how the Core Qualities might be integrated throughout programs and whether it warrants further investigation given that the university has declared that MSU Graduates will embody the three Core Qualities.

Core Assessment Action Plan (2024-2027)

The Core Qualities will be assessed on a 3-year rotation using direct evidence in the form of student work, observations, or as fits the assessment needs for the year. The Core Committee will review the recommendations of previous assessment cycles to determine the assessment plan and structure for each assessment. Core syllabi renewal and Capstone R evaluation will be reconsidered over the coming year.

Core Assessment Schedule

General Education Core Assessment Plan								
Core Quality Direct Assessment/Indirect Assessment	Perspectives Mapped to Qualities	2024-2025	2025-2026	2026-2027	2027-2028	2028-2029	2029-2030	2030-2031
Thinking and Problem Solvers		X			X			X
Effective Communicators			X			X		
Local & Global Citizens				X			X	
Core Syllabi Renewal TBD								
Capstone/R Core TBD								

Rubric Revision & Artifact Selection

The Core Curriculum Committee will decide which courses and student artifacts will be collected for assessment. Assessment rubrics will be updated in accordance with past committee recommendations and institutional needs.

Core Assessment Artifacts & Thresholds

Threshold Values		
Core Quality	Threshold Value	Data Source(s)*
Thinking and Problem Solvers	Remain the same	Student artifacts provided by participating Core course faculty
Effective Communicators	Remain the same	Student artifacts provided by participating Core course faculty
Local & Global Citizens	Remain the same	Student artifacts provided by participating Core course faculty

Future Tasks to Consider

Faculty Outreach/Training

- Plans for 2024 – celebration, retreat, syllabus training (FLCs by perspective?)

Core Course Syllabi Renewal Schedule

- What might this look like? How often? Purpose: to support closing the loop and addressing any assessment issues we have encountered.

Appendix A

2023-2024 Core Program Assessment Assessing the Research & Creative Experience (R) Core Perspective: Survey Questions

THE ASSESSMENT:

A Qualtrics link will be emailed to you April 26 with an expectation that surveys be returned by May 17. Please fill out the assessment for each of your R or Capstone courses (sections may be combined) while the semester is still fresh in your mind. I expect you will need no more than 20-25 minutes to complete, including 5 minutes to refresh yourself on the CORE Qualities and Perspectives.

So that you have a heads up and time to observe students and reflect on the questions, below is a draft of the demographic information and questions on the survey.

Demographics: Your Course, number enrolled, CORE Qualities your course addresses (checklist)

Questions:

For questions 1-3, please estimate the degree to which the students in your R or Capstone course this semester demonstrated the following CORE Qualities and provide a few examples of evidence for each.

1. Effective Communicators (*full text of CQ will be included in Qualtrics*)
 - a. Please estimate the percentage of students demonstrating each level of the Effective Communicator quality. The sum of all levels should be 100%.
 - i. Introductory - has a basic understanding of the quality
 - ii. Developing - has a developing understanding of the quality but may still make some mistakes
 - iii. Achieving - has a solid understanding of the quality and can apply it effectively
 - iv. Mastery - has a deep understanding of the quality and can use it to solve complex problems
 - b. Please provide a few examples of evidence for your assessment. (performance on assignments, projects, exam questions, etc.)
2. Thinkers and Problem Solvers (*full text of CQ will be included in Qualtrics*)
 - a. Please estimate the percentage of students demonstrating each level of the Thinkers and Problems Solvers quality. The sum of all levels should be 100%. (introductory, developing, achieving, mastery)
 - b. Please provide a few examples of evidence for your assessment. (performance on assignments, projects, exam questions, etc.)
3. Local and Global Citizens (*full text of CQ will be included in Qualtrics*)
 - a. Please estimate the percentage of students demonstrating each level of the Local and Global Citizen quality. The sum of all levels should be 100%. (introductory, developing, achieving, mastery)
 - b. Please provide a few examples of evidence for your assessment. (performance on assignments, projects, exam questions, etc.)

4. Please estimate the degree to which the students in your R or Capstone course this semester demonstrated the applicable CORE Perspective.
 - a. Please estimate the percentage of students demonstrating each level of the Effective Communicator quality. The sum of all levels should be 100%. (introductory, developing, achieving, mastery)
 - b. If applicable, please provide examples of how Core Perspective attainment was demonstrated in your course. (*link to CP statements will be included in Qualtrics*) (performance on assignments, projects, exam questions, etc.)
5. Please provide any additional feedback you have for the Core Committee about the general education curriculum at MSU.