



Competency Assessment Plan: General Education Core Learning Outcomes of Student Learning

Northern Virginia Community College 2025-2026

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Introduction

In 2017-2018, Northern Virginia Community College (NOVA) began implementing course embedded assessment of General Education Core Competencies, which NOVA calls “Core Learning Outcomes.” Prior to 2017-2018, Virginia Community College System (VCCS) required NOVA to assess General Education Core Competencies using standardized assessments chosen by the VCCS. The State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) adopted the Policy on Student Learning Assessment and Quality in Undergraduate Education in July 2017. It mandates every Virginia public institution of higher education assess six general education competencies at least once in a six-year period. Four core competencies are mandated by SCHEV to be assessed by all institutions: Critical Thinking, Written Communication, Quantitative Literacy, and Civic Engagement. Two additional educational competencies, based upon SCHEV’s guidelines, were to be selected by the institutions themselves. NOVA selected Professional Readiness and Scientific Literacy as their two additional core competencies.

Based on Northern Virginia Community College’s Ad Hoc Committee on General Education Assessment (Spring 2016) and recommendations from SCHEV (July 2017), NOVA employs embedded course assessment, which is a direct measure using students’ course work.

While the educational programs assess student learning outcomes at the programmatic level, CLO assessment goes beyond this effort to examine NOVA’s collective success at engaging and educating students at the institutional level. Disciplines, which are non-degree granting educational units (e.g., Sociology, Chemistry, and History), provide general education at NOVA by teaching courses whose combined content prepares students with common educational knowledge and skills necessary in the 21st century. Educational programs, which offer students degrees and/or stand-alone certificates, enhance the general education curriculum by teaching the general education skills and knowledge in their degree/certificate focused courses. In both cases, NOVA requires CLO assessment to include every course delivery method (e.g., in-person, hybrid, online, and off-site dual enrolled sections) across the six campuses.

The VCCS Policy Manual indicates each general education competency/CLO to be assessed twice in a six-year period; therefore, NOVA established a three-year assessment schedule of the CLOs (Table 1).

Table 1 Core Learning Outcome Assessment Cycle

	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28
Civic Engagement			X
Critical Thinking		X	
Professional Readiness	X		
Quantitative Literacy		X	
Scientific Literacy	X		
Written Communication			X

NOVA Assesses the General Education Core Competencies

Northern Virginia Community College's (NOVA) General Education Core Competencies are determined by [VCCS General Education Policy 5.0.2](#), which defines the core competencies as:

Civic Engagement is the ability to contribute to the civic life and well-being of local, national, and global communities as both social responsibility and a life-long learning process. Degree graduates will demonstrate the knowledge and civic values necessary to become informed and contributing participants in a democratic society.

Critical Thinking is the ability to use information, ideas, and arguments from relevant perspectives to make sense of complex issues and solve problems. Degree graduates will locate, evaluate, interpret, and combine information to reach well-reasoned conclusions or solutions.

Professional Readiness is the ability to work well with others and display situationally and culturally appropriate demeanor and behavior. Degree graduates will demonstrate skills important for successful transition into the workplace and pursuit of further education.

Quantitative Literacy is the ability to perform accurate calculations, interpret quantitative information, apply and analyze relevant numerical data, and use results to support conclusions.

Degree graduates will calculate, interpret, and use numerical and quantitative information in a variety of settings.

Scientific Literacy is 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. Degree graduates will recognize and know how to use the scientific method, and to evaluate empirical information.

Written Communication is the ability to develop, convey, and exchange ideas in writing, as appropriate to a given context and audience. Degree graduates will express themselves effectively in a variety of written forms.

Operationalizing Core Learning Outcomes for Course Assessment

The definitions of VCCS's core learning outcomes are too broad to be usefully assessed using course embedded methods. To assess the core learning outcomes as set by the VCCS, program and discipline faculty operationalize them to focus on program/discipline goals. Experts in their respective disciplines, the faculty decides how a CLO translates into program/discipline-specific knowledge or skills. A subcommittee of faculty for each program/discipline discusses and drafts the operational definition of the CLO. These subcommittees ensure that their definition retains the central knowledge, skills, and competencies intended by the CLO and that it is measurable inside their courses.

At the beginning of each academic year, the Office of Planning and Assessment sends the current year's Assessment Plans template to programs and disciplines for their completion. Using this form, programs and disciplines submit their operationalized CLO for the academic year. They also provide the name and number of the courses that they will use to assess the CLO.

When possible, program and discipline faculty use their published Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) to operationalize a core learning outcome for assessment purposes as well (examples below). If they do not use a SLO, the program or discipline faculty will create a unique operational definition of the CLO for purposes of assessment in one of their courses.

Examples of student learning outcomes that were used to operationalize a CLO:

- Respiratory Therapy's SLO, "Students will appropriately interpret graphic depictions of ventilator waveforms as it applies to the patient's clinical status" was used in 2017-2018 to operationalize the quantitative literacy CLO.
- Accounting's SLO, "Describe and make distinctions between various accounting methods under U.S. GAAP and international financial reporting standards (IFRS)" was used in 2017-2018 to operationalize the critical thinking CLO.

Assessment Methods

NOVA measures student learning by assessing actual student products performed or completed in courses. This method allows each program/discipline to choose their own authentic method of assessment and the course(s) that is most relevant to their students and program/discipline to assess each core competency.

First, programs and disciplines determine which core learning outcome they will assess. Next programs and disciplines determine the most relevant course(s) to assess the core competency. Finally, assessment methods (rubric/exam) and target goals are determined by programs and disciplines.

Second, NOVA assesses its effectiveness in the college-wide teaching of the CLOs using data the Office of Planning and Assessment receives from programs and disciplines in either their Student Learning Outcomes Assessment (SLOA) Report, or in their Discipline Assessment Report (DAR). This data is then compiled for each CLO into a Core Learning Outcome Assessment Report. The collegewide data compiled in these reports is analyzed in the Institutional Effectiveness Audit for each CLO to assess NOVA's continuous improvement efforts for teaching, learning, and assessing a given CLO.

The Student Learning Outcomes Assessment (SLOA) Report used by programs, includes three student learning outcomes assessments and one CLO assessment. The Core Learning Outcome (CLO) Assessment Report collects data for one SLO and one CLO. Both reports include a summarization of the assessment process, assessment results, an analysis of that data, and actions that will be taken to improve student learning. These reports are the primary

tool for capturing and reporting on programs and disciplines' annual planning and assessment process, which is aimed at promoting continuous improvement.

The program and discipline core learning outcome assessment of student learning is an annual process. This process is described in Table 2.

Schedule for Assessing Student Learning & Core Learning Outcomes and Reporting Results for NOVA Programs/Disciplines

August 2025

Program/discipline groups meet to discuss the following:

- 2023-24 assessment results.
- Determine actions, the 3 Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs), and one Core Learning Outcome (CLO) that will be assessed in the 2025-26 academic year.
- Communicate the 2025-26 assessment plan to program faculty.
- Inform instructors of the SLOs, CLO, and course sections that will be assessed.
- Distribute/discuss the assessments and procedures.
- Communicate the plan for collecting data at the end of the semester.
- Ensure that NOVA Online, synchronous Zoom, and off-site dual enrollment sections are informed of any assessments they should be conducting.

OSI provides programs/disciplines with the 2025-26 Assessment Plan form.

September & October 2025

1. Training for 2024-25 SLOA Reports & Tableau dashboards (Dates TBD)
2. Programs and disciplines submit the 2024-25 SLOA Assessment Plan form to OSI, due on **October 14, 2025**.
3. Check-in with instructors to ensure they are conducting Fall assessments.

Closing the Loop

When an Assessment Lead receives the final draft of their SLO Assessment or CLO Assessment Report, along with our comments, they meet with their discipline or program to discuss future steps. In addition, NOVA forms working groups for every CLO. Each is comprised

of academic and student services administrators and faculty. These groups review the assessment process and provide recommendations for improving student learning in each CLO. Recommendations from the working groups are published as a part of the Institutional Effectiveness Audit for each core learning competency. NOVA also publishes CLO assessment data via infographics in a variety of formats: in print, on the NOVA website, and on the TV monitors across the six campuses. NOVA shares this information to create greater awareness of the importance of the core learning competencies to students' personal and professional success.

Communication and Use of Assessment Findings

Assessment findings are communicated in several ways at NOVA. First, findings are shared at the program/discipline level once results are compiled to determine actions for improvement. Then, completed reports are submitted to the Office of Planning and Assessment, and it reviews the reports and provides feedback for any final revisions. The Office of Planning and Assessment scores the final report using a rubric. This data is then shared with program heads, discipline chairs, deans, as well as campus, provosts, and executive leadership (i.e., Administrative Council). For a detailed annual timeline, see Table 2 in the text.

The Office of Planning and Assessment then creates a compiled report that will include all assessments on each core competency assessed for a given academic year with an aggregated analysis of the report's findings for the entire institution. The first core competency reports to include course embedded assessments, Civic Engagement and Written Communication were most recently compiled.

These college-wide institutional findings on each core competency are first shared with a working group of faculty, who participated in the core learning assessment, and recommendations are developed on future assessments to share with key college committees, such as the Administrative Council and Curriculum Committee. Based on these discussions, a plan is formulated for reassessment of each core competency within a three-year period of the last assessment and shared with college and its stakeholders.

Appendix A is a sample template of the Assessment Plan for NOVA Programs that provides degree-granting programs the opportunity to identify which student learning and core learning

outcomes they intend to assess during the upcoming assessment cycle. A separate form is used for nondegree-granting programs or disciplines, as these instructional programs assess only one student learning outcome and one core learning outcome during the assessment cycle. They must also indicate which courses will be utilized to assess these competencies, along with the modalities in which the courses will be offered. Additionally, programs and disciplines must explain how they will operationalize each core learning outcome.

Appendix B is a sample template of the Student Learning Outcomes Assessment report programs and disciplines use to communicate assessment results and new actions for both the student learning and core learning outcomes. In this report, programs and disciplines explain assessment strategies and methods used for each competency, and how they will use the findings to improve student learning through new actions. Programs explain in this report whether students have learned in the course and if targets and expectations were met. All Assessment Reports will be viewable on the Office of Strategic Insight's website by August 1st annually, for the prior academic year's assessment report (previously called "Annual Planning and Evaluation Report").

Appendix A Sample Assessment Plan for Programs

- Please complete this form by Friday, October 14, 2025.
- E-mail the completed form to Dr. James L. Williams: jlwilliams@nvcc.edu
- As a reminder, programs should assess:
 - Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) – assessments can take place in Fall, Spring, or Summer semesters
 - Core Learning Outcome (CLO) – in 2025-26, the college-wide CLO schedule calls for the assessment of either Professional Readiness or Scientific Literacy. Visit the CLO website for additional resources and rubrics.
- If your program does not assess all sections of the course and/or all students in the sections, please contact the Office of Strategic Insights to request an appropriate sample size.
- Each program is expected to assess relevant NOVA Online and off-site dual enrollment sections.
- Contact Dr. James Williams, Director of Continuous Improvement, if you need assistance completing this form: jlwilliams@nvcc.edu

Program Name:	
Assessment Lead Faculty/Discipline Chair Name:	

Student Learning Outcomes

SLO: (copy your SLO here)	Semester	Spring 2025
	Course(s) to be assessed	
	# of on-campus sections offered	
	# of on-campus sections offered	
	# of NOVA Online (asynchronous) courses offered	
	# of off-site dual enrollment sections offered	
SLO: (copy your SLO here)	Semester	Summer 2026
	Course(s) to be assessed	
	# of on-campus sections offered	
	# of on-campus sections offered	
	# of NOVA Online (asynchronous) courses offered	
	# of off-site dual enrollment sections offered	
SLO: (copy your SLO here)	Semester	Fall 2026
	Course(s) to be assessed	

	# of on-campus sections offered	
	# of on-campus sections offered	
	# of NOVA Online (asynchronous) courses offered	
	# of off-site dual enrollment sections offered	

Core Learning Outcome

CLO (check one):	Semester	Spring 2025
☐ Civic Engagement ☐ Written Communication	Course(s) to be assessed	
	# of on-campus sections offered	
	# of on-campus sections offered	
	# of NOVA Online (asynchronous) courses offered	
	# of off-site dual enrollment sections offered	

How will you operationalize this CLO? (Check one and explain)

☐ Use a program SLO - Write the SLO here:

☐ Other - Please write the operational definition you will use to assess the CLO here:

Appendix B Sample Student Learning Outcome Assessment Report: 2025-26

NOVA Mission Statement: With commitment to the values of access, opportunity, student success, and excellence, the mission of Northern Virginia Community College is to deliver world-class in-person and online post-secondary teaching, learning, and workforce development to ensure our region and the Commonwealth of Virginia have an educated population and globally competitive workforce.

Program/Discipline Purpose Statement: [Insert Purpose Statement here from 2025--26 College Catalog– click on the link, choose your program, and copy the purpose statement found at the top of the webpage.]

Learning Outcome 1:

Assessment Methods

Course Name/Number:

Direct Measure Used:

SLO/Rubric Criteria or Question Concepts:

Other Method (if used):

Sample:

Campus/ Modality	Total # of Sections Offered	# Sections Assessed	# Students Assessed
AL (In-person, Synchronous Zoom, Hybrid, and Hyflex)			
AN (In-person, Synchronous Zoom, Hybrid, and Hyflex)			
MA (In-person, Synchronous Zoom, Hybrid, and Hyflex)			

ME (In-person, Synchronous Zoom, Hybrid, and Hyflex)			
LO (In-person, Synchronous Zoom, Hybrid, Hyflex)			
WO (In-person, Synchronous Zoom, Hybrid, and Hyflex)			
NOVA Online			
Off-Site Dual Enrollment			
Total			

Assessment Results

Semester/year data collected:

Target:

Results by Modality: Overall Average/Mean Scores

Results by Modality	Current Results Semester Year	Previous Results Semester Year
All students assessed (weighted average)		
On-campus average		
Synchronous hybrid (remote) average		
NOVA Online average		
Dual Enrollment average		

Continuous Improvement

1. Changes put in place since previous assessment to improve student learning:

2. Impact of changes on current results:
3. According to current results, areas needing improvement:
4. Based on current results, new actions to continuously improve student learning (What? Who? How? When? Suggestions for change and improvement):
5. How will the results of this SLO assessment and any new action(s) be shared among the program members?
6. Next assessment of this SLO: