Trends in Learning Outcomes Assessment

Key Findings from a Survey among
Administrators at AAC&U Member Institutions

Conducted on Behalf of
the Association of American Colleges & Universities

By Hart Research Associates

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Methodology

From July 15 to October 13, 2015, Hart Research conducted an online survey among 325 chief academic officers or designated representatives at AAC&U member institutions to explore how higher education institutions today are defining common learning outcomes and to document priorities and trends related to general education, equity, and emerging teaching practices.

The margin of error is ±4.4 percentage points for the entire sample, and it is larger for subgroups. The total population for the survey included 1,001 AAC&U member institutions that were invited to complete the survey, and thus the response rate for the survey is 32%. The sample is representative of AAC&U's total membership in terms of both institution type (11% associates, 30% bachelor's, 39% master's, 19% doctoral/research, and 1% other) and affiliation (46% public, 53% independent/religious, and 1% proprietary).

Select findings from the survey about trends in learning outcomes assessment are outlined in this report.

In addition, see other reports summarizing additional findings from the survey:

- *Bringing Equity and Quality Learning Together: Institutional Priorities for Tracking and Advancing Underserved Students' Success* **(released November 16, 2015)**

- *Recent Trends in General Education Design, Learning Outcomes, and Teaching Approaches* **(released January 19, 2016)**

See: http://www.aacu.org/about/2015-membersurvey

Overview of Key Findings

***Institutional Learning Outcomes*:**

- Nearly all AAC&U member institutions have a common set of learning outcomes for <u>all</u> of their undergraduate students.
- There is significant agreement across AAC&U member institutions about the learning outcomes they have adopted for all students. These outcomes apply to a broad range of skills and knowledge areas.

Approaches to Assessing Student Learning Outcomes:

- The proportion of AAC&U member institutions assessing learning outcomes both in general education and more broadly at the institutional level has increased from six years ago. Majorities say they are assessing in each of these ways, with many assessing learning outcomes at both the department level and in general education.
- AAC&U member institutions that assess outcomes in general education use a variety of tools to do so.
- Among those who assess outcomes in general education, the most commonly used approach to assessing outcomes is the use of rubrics applied to samples of student work (91% of those assessing general education outcomes) and capstone projects (78%).
- Among AAC&U member institutions that assess outcomes in general education, 42% are using AAC&U's VALUE (Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education) rubrics. Furthermore, among those who use institutionally created rubrics, well over half (58%) say the VALUE rubrics informed the development of locally created rubrics.
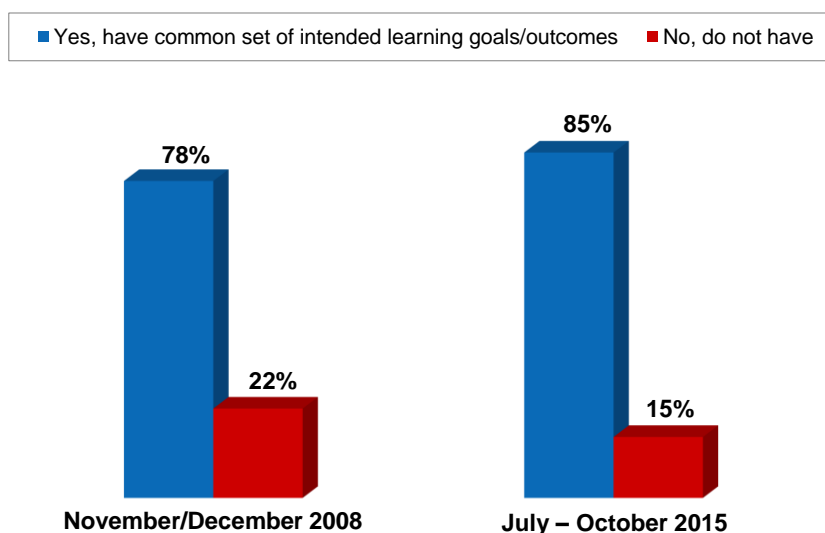
Use of E-Portfolios:

- Many institutions are using e-portfolios, but only a limited number of institutions require their use. There has been a slight uptick in the proportion of those that require the use of e-portfolios in the past seven years.

Key Findings

1 <u>**Institutional Learning Outcomes**</u>**: Most AAC&U member institutions have a common set of learning outcomes for <u>all</u> of their undergraduate students.**

Fully 85% of AAC&U member institutions report that they have a common set of intended learning outcomes for *all* undergraduate students. This is up from 78% of institutions that said they had common learning outcomes in 2008. In addition, 70% of institutions are tracking students' achievement of these learning outcomes.

Does your institution have a common set of intended learning goals or learning outcomes that apply to ALL undergraduate students?

■ Yes, have common set of intended learning goals/outcomes   ■ No, do not have

78%	85%
22%	15%
November/December 2008	July – October 2015

Baccalaureate (88%) and master's institutions (87%) are slightly more likely than doctoral/research institutions (79%) to have a common set of learning outcomes that apply to all students. Religious institutions (92%) also are slightly more likely than public (82%) and non-religious independent institutions (84%) to have them.

All AAC&U member institutions have specified intended learning outcomes in at least a few of their departments, including fully 67% who say that *all* departments have them and another 27% who say most departments do. In 2008, a comparable 65% of member institutions said they had defined outcomes in all departments. There is little difference by Carnegie Classification or Affiliation.

2 <u>**Consensus on Broad Skills and Knowledge Areas**</u>**: There is significant agreement across AAC&U member institutions about the learning outcomes they have adopted for all students. These outcomes apply to a broad range of skills and knowledge areas.**

AAC&U member institutions' common learning outcomes address a broad range of skills and knowledge areas. Across the 11 skills and 11 knowledge areas measured

in the survey, majorities of member institutions who have a common set of learning outcomes say their learning outcomes address 18 of the 22 areas.

Proportion of Institutions That Have Learning Outcomes for All Students That Address Specific Skills and Knowledge Areas *(among institutions that have a common set of learning outcomes for all students)*[1]		
	2008 %	**2015 %**
Intellectual Skills		
Writing skills	99	99
Critical thinking and analytic reasoning skills	95	98
Quantitative reasoning skills	91	94
Oral communication skills	88	82
Intercultural skills and abilities	79	79
Information literacy skills	76	76
Ethical reasoning skills	75	75
Specific Areas of Knowledge		
Knowledge of science	91	92
Knowledge of mathematics	87	92
Knowledge of humanities	92	92
Knowledge of global world cultures	87	89
Knowledge of social sciences	90	89
Knowledge of the arts	N/A	85
Knowledge of diversity in the United States	73	73
Knowledge of technology	61	49
Knowledge of languages other than English	42	48
Knowledge of American history	49	47
Knowledge of sustainability	24	27
Integration and Application of Knowledge and Skills		
Research skills and projects	65	75
Integration of learning across disciplines	63	68
Application of learning beyond the classroom	66	65
Civic engagement and competence	68	63

Among those who say their institution has a common set of intended learning outcomes, the area in which there has been the most notable decline since 2008 is in the proportion who say their learning outcomes address the area of technology (down from 61% in 2008 to 49% today). Conversely, the most notable increase has been among those who say their learning outcomes address research skills and projects (up from 65% in 2008 to 75% today).

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[1] Please see Appendix for results on learning outcomes that address each area of intellectual skill or ability among all AAC&U members.

3 **Assessment of Learning Outcomes for Undergraduate Students:** Today, more AAC&U member institutions are assessing learning outcomes across the curriculum and in general education than were six years ago. Majorities say they are assessing in each of these ways, but the share assessing learning outcomes across the curriculum (87%) continues to be larger than the share doing so in general education (67%). Today, 63% are assessing at both the department level and in general education.
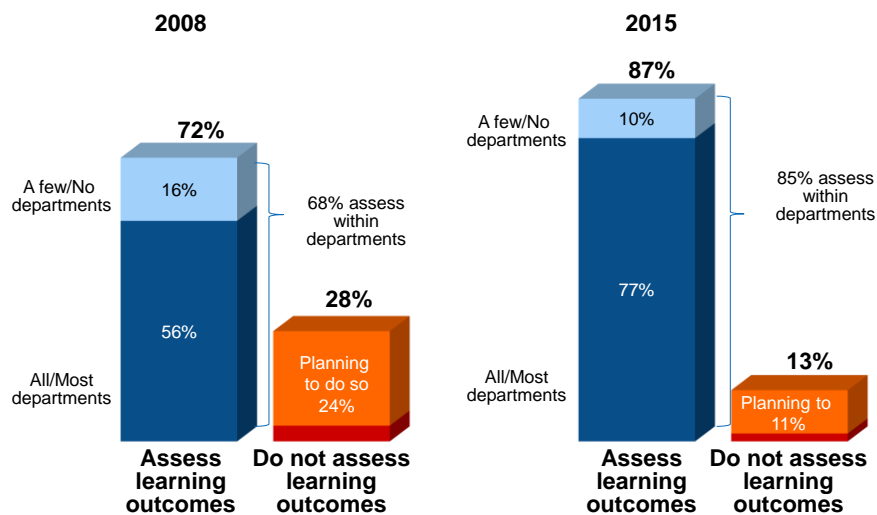
Fully 87% of AAC&U member institutions assess learning outcomes across the curriculum, which is up from the 72% who said they did so in 2009. Another 11% of administrators say their institution plans these types of assessments, while only 2% say they are not doing it now and have no plans to do so.

Fully 89% of AAC&U member institutions that have a common set of learning outcomes assess outcomes across the curriculum. The proportion is lower (75%) among institutions that do not have a common set of learning outcomes.

The large majority (85%) of member institutions say they assess students' cumulative learning outcomes in departments, including 40% who say they do so in *all* departments. This is up from 27% who said they assessed in *all* departments in 2008.

Proportions of Member Institutions that Assess Learning Outcomes in Departments

Does your institution assess learning outcomes across the curriculum? If it does, are students' cumulative learning outcomes assessed in departments?

2008

72%

A few/No departments — 16%

All/Most departments — 56%

68% assess within departments

28%

Planning to do so 24%

Assess learning outcomes | **Do not assess learning outcomes**

2015

87%

A few/No departments — 10%

All/Most departments — 77%

85% assess within departments

13%

Planning to 11%

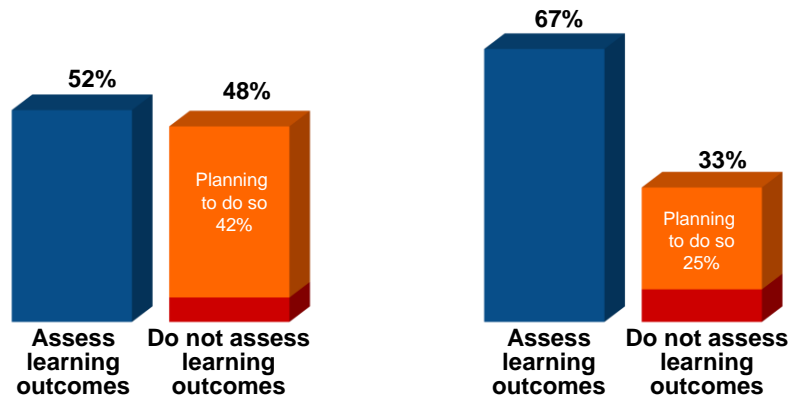**Assess learning outcomes** | **Do not assess learning outcomes**

More than two in three (67%) member institutions indicate that they are assessing cumulative learning outcomes in general education across multiple courses, which is up from 52% who said they were doing this six years ago. Of the remaining 33% who do not currently assess cumulative learning outcomes in general education, most (25%) say they are planning to do so, while only 8% do not and have no plans to do so.

Assessing Cumulative Learning Outcomes in General Education

Does your institution assess cumulative learning outcomes in general education across multiple courses?

November – December 2008   **July – October 2015**

52%   48%   67%   33%

Planning to do so 42%

Planning to do so 25%

Assess learning outcomes   **Do not assess learning outcomes**   **Assess learning outcomes**   **Do not assess learning outcomes**

4 **Approaches for Assessing Student Learning Outcomes**: **AAC&U member institutions that assess outcomes in general education use a variety of tools to do so.**

Among member institutions that report assessing outcomes in general education, the approaches they use to assess outcomes most commonly include institutionally created rubrics applied to samples of student work (87%) and capstone projects (78%). More than two in three of those assessing learning outcomes in general education do so through student surveys and self-reports (64%) and locally developed common assignments in some courses (62%). Other tools used by these member institutions include locally developed examinations (46%), AAC&U VALUE rubrics applied to samples of student work (42%), standardized national tests of general skills (38%), and standardized national tests of general knowledge (33%).

Member institutions use a variety of methods to assess student learning outcomes in general education.

Does your institution assess cumulative learning outcomes in general education across multiple courses?
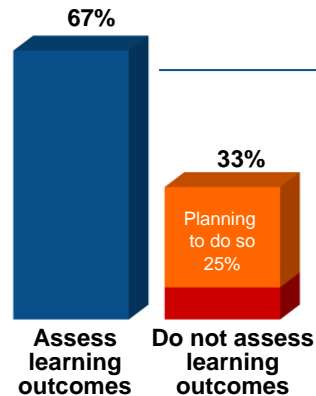
Which of these does your institution use?	
Institutionally created rubrics applied to samples of student work	87%
Culminating or capstone projects	78%
Student surveys and self-reports	64%
Locally developed common assign-ments in some courses	62%
Locally developed examinations	46%
AAC&U VALUE rubrics applied to samples of student work	42%
Standardized national tests of general skills, such as critical thinking	38%
Standardized national tests of general knowledge, such as science or humanities	33%

67%

33%

Planning to do so 25%

Assess learning outcomes

Do not assess learning outcomes

Among institutions that assess outcomes in general education, 91% use rubrics applied to examples of student work (either institutionally created rubrics or AAC&U VALUE rubrics) for this assessment today, which is up from 77% who did so in 2008. There also have been small increases in the share using capstone projects and locally developed common assignments in some courses.

Institutions' Use Of Methods to Assess Learning Outcomes in General Education *(among institutions that assess cumulative learning outcomes in general education)*[2]		
	2008 %	**2015 %**
Rubrics applied to examples of student work (Institutionally created or AAC&U VALUE rubrics)	77	91
Culminating or capstone projects	70	78
Student surveys and self-reports	67	64
Locally developed common assignments in some courses	52	62
Locally developed examinations	44	46
Standardized national tests of general skills, such as critical thinking	49	38
Standardized national tests of general knowledge, such as science or humanities	31	33

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[2] Please see Appendix for results on use of approaches to assess learning outcomes among <u>all</u> AAC&U members.

5 **AAC&U VALUE Rubrics:** Among institutions assessing general education learning outcomes, 42% use AAC&U VALUE rubrics, which represents 28% of <u>all</u> AAC&U member institutions. Those that use VALUE rubrics are using a variety of them, particularly for critical thinking, written communication, quantitative literacy, and oral communication. Nearly one-third (32%) of those assessing institution-wide outcomes use VALUE rubrics to assess outcomes at the department level, which represents 27% of all AAC&U member institutions.

AAC&U member institutions that use VALUE rubrics to assess student learning outcomes in general education are using them across a variety of areas, with rubrics for critical thinking (71%), written communication (69%), quantitative literacy (51%), and oral communication (50%) used most.

VALUE Rubrics Used by Member Institutions to Assess Student Learning Outcomes in General Education *(among institutions that use AAC&U VALUE rubrics to assess general education learning outcomes)*[3]	All Respondents %
Critical thinking	71
Written communication	69
Quantitative literacy	51
Oral communication	50
Information literacy	38
Ethical reasoning	30
Global learning	30
Intercultural knowledge and competence	30
Inquiry and analysis	29
Civic engagement	29
Problem solving	25
Integrative learning	22
Creative thinking	17
Reading	13
Foundations and skills for lifelong learning	9
Teamwork	7
I do not know which specific rubrics we are using	15

Additionally, among institutions that use rubrics created at the institutional level, more than half (58%) say that AAC&U's VALUE rubrics informed the development of their own rubrics a great deal or somewhat.
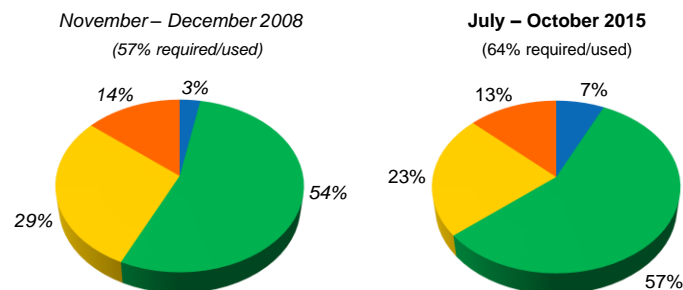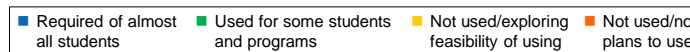
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[3] Please see Appendix for results on use of AAC&U VALUE rubrics among <u>all</u> AAC&U members.

6 E-Portfolios: Many AAC&U member institutions use electronic portfolios, but few institutions require them for all students.

Today 64% of AAC&U member institutions say they use electronic portfolios for at least some students and programs, including 7% that require them for all students and 57% who use them for some students. This is up from 54% of member institutions who were using them for at least some students in 2008. (An additional 23% of member institutions currently say they are exploring the feasibility of using e-portfolios. Only 13% say they have no plans to develop them.)

Use of Electronic Portfolios

In regard to electronic portfolios, which describes your campus?

| ■ Required of almost all students | ■ Used for some students and programs | ■ Not used/exploring feasibility of using | ■ Not used/no plans to use |

November – December 2008
(57% required/used)

July – October 2015
(64% required/used)

Doctoral/research institutions (80%) are the most likely to require at least some students to use e-portfolios, compared with 70% of master's institutions and 54% of baccalaureate institutions. For each type of institution, fewer than one in 10 says they require all students to use them.

In the 2014 survey of employers, fully 80% said that when evaluating a job candidate, it would be helpful to have access to an electronic portfolio summarizing and demonstrating the individual's accomplishments in key skill and knowledge areas, in addition to a résumé and college transcript.

Final Note

This report is the third in a series of three reports AAC&U is issuing in 2016 summarizing findings from this survey of a representative sample of chief academic officers at AAC&U member institutions. These reports build on two earlier reports issued in 2009 and document the ways in which AAC&U member institutions are working on the educational reform goals articulated in AAC&U's current strategic plan, *Big Questions, Urgent Challenges: Liberal Education and America's Global Future*.

For more information on previous surveys and the full text of AAC&U's strategic plan, see www.aacu.org.

Proportion of Institutions That Have Learning Outcomes for All Students That Address Specific Skills and Knowledge Areas *(among all institutions)*		
	2008 **%**	**2015** **%**
Intellectual Skills		
Writing skills	77	84
Critical thinking and analytic reasoning skills	74	84
Quantitative reasoning skills	71	80
Oral communication skills	69	70
Intercultural skills and abilities	62	68
Information literacy skills	59	65
Ethical reasoning skills	59	64
Specific Areas of Knowledge		
Knowledge of science	71	78
Knowledge of mathematics	68	78
Knowledge of humanities	72	78
Knowledge of global world cultures	68	76
Knowledge of social sciences	70	76
Knowledge of the arts	N/A	72
Knowledge of diversity in the United States	57	62
Knowledge of technology	48	42
Knowledge of languages other than English	33	41
Knowledge of American history	39	40
Knowledge of sustainability	18	23
Integration and Application of Knowledge and Skills		
Research skills and projects	51	64
Integration of learning across disciplines	49	57
Application of learning beyond the classroom	52	55
Civic engagement and competence	53	54

Appendix 2

Institutions' Use of Methods to Assess Learning Outcomes In General Education *(among all institutions)*		
	2008 **%**	**2015** **%**
Rubrics applied to examples of student work (Institutionally created or AAC&U VALUE rubrics)	40	61
Culminating or capstone projects	37	52
Student surveys and self-reports	35	43
Locally developed common assignments in some courses	27	42
Locally developed examinations	23	31
Standardized national tests of general skills, such as critical thinking	26	26
Standardized national tests of general knowledge, such as science or humanities	16	22

Appendix 3

VALUE Rubrics Used by Member Institutions to Assess Student Learning Outcomes in General Education *(among all institutions)*	
	All Respondents %
Critical thinking	20
Written communication	19
Quantitative literacy	14
Oral communication	14
Information literacy	11
Ethical reasoning	8
Global learning	8
Intercultural knowledge and competence	8
Inquiry and analysis	8
Civic engagement	8
Problem solving	7
Integrative learning	6
Creative thinking	5
Reading	4
Foundations and skills for lifelong learning	2
Teamwork	2
I do not know which specific rubrics we are using	4
Do not use AAC&U VALUE rubrics	*72*