Component IIB. Core Objective Assessment Plan: Describe the institution’s process to determine the appropriate level of attainment of each Core Objective.

A student’s performance in a course is considered acceptable if the overall numerical grade in the course is 60% or above (a letter grade of D). It represents the minimum level of accomplishment. A passing grade in a core course that demonstrates some mastery of the Foundational Component Area was set at a course grade of 60%. This is a standard that may be revised at any time following the core curriculum implementation.

The student artifacts would be assessed for the six TCC objectives using a 5-point scale in which a score of three – the equivalent of the letter grade C – represents the midlevel of performance. It was decided that in each of the six TCC objectives the operational definition of success was that 80% of all artifacts will score a 3 or higher.

Plan for assessment of each core objective

In planning the assessment of the core curriculum, UC3 drew on the best practices in assessing student learning in general education and made extensive use of the 2009-2010 Accountability Peer Group Meetings Reports and the 2009 General Education Assessment Practices Survey, available from THECB, which was conducted prior to the adoption of TCC. The Institutional portfolio model was the model of choice for core curriculum assessment. The description of the assessment model and its proposed implementation is described below. This assessment process will also provide data that is course specific so that it serves the additional purpose of course and academic program improvement.

Centralized coordination of assessing the core curriculum will be through a proposed Office of the General Education Core Curriculum (OGECC). It will be headed by a Director, a faculty member who teaches at least one core curriculum course, who will have 50% reassigned time and staff support.

The proposed institutional portfolio model of assessment uses existing student work or artifacts in courses collected in a systematic way by faculty, which are then assessed systematically by an interdisciplinary team of faculty. The questions that need to be addressed in their implementation are, therefore, three-fold:

1. How will the assessment artifacts be collected systematically?
2. How will the artifacts be assessed systematically? And
3. How will identified weaknesses be systemically addressed in order to improve curriculum quality and close the quality-improvement/feedback loop?
A. Systematic collection of artifacts

Core curriculum assessment must provide evidence of attainment of the TCC objectives by studying the work of students as they progress through the core courses. This process will rely on the sequencing of courses where the same TCC objective artifacts are collected in ‘introductory-level’ and ‘proficiency-level’ core courses. For instance, written communication skills may be ‘introduced’ in ENGL 1301 and ‘proficiency’ gains evident in GOVT 2305. Only the artifacts collected in courses identified as containing evidence of ‘proficiency’ of skills mentioned in TCC objectives will be utilized to assess whether students have gained proficiency in the required TCC competencies. Each TCC objective will be embedded, at the proficiency-level, in at least one required course or group of courses in every component area of the core curriculum.

A course will be classified as an introductory-level course for any of the following reasons: (1) It is the only course in a discipline, (2) It is a pre-requisite course for another core curriculum course, but does not have a pre-requisite, or (3) It is a course most likely taken by freshmen and sophomore students.

Similarly a course will be classified as a proficiency-level course if (1) it is a course that has one or more pre-requisite courses and is not a pre-requisite course for another core course or (2) juniors and seniors are most likely to enroll in it due to the structuring of several degree plans. The university intends to use the learning community model for the first year students and that imposes a stratification of student population in courses, with some courses dominated by freshmen-sophomores and others by juniors-seniors.

Estimating an average enrollment of 25 in an introductory or proficiency level course selected for drawing artifacts every semester, five sections of courses of each category will be selected for assessment. About 125 sets of artifacts will be collected every semester from each of the two categories of courses.

In order to complete the assessment loop in a timeframe that provides timely program improvement feedback, specific TCC objectives will be assessed each semester on a pre-determined rotation. This rotation provides for each TCC objective to be assessed every two years. In the semester following assessment, results will be reviewed and core curriculum modifications will be made to address any identified areas of weakness. Modifications will be implemented at the beginning of the next full semester (Fall or Spring).

For example, critical thinking related artifacts will be collected in Fall 2016. Those artifacts will be assessed, weaknesses identified, and modifications made at the end of Spring 2017. The changes, as needed, will be implemented in Fall 2017. Critical thinking artifacts will be collected again in Fall 2018, thus allowing for one full year of revised deployment before the next assessment period. This cycle will ‘close the loop’ on all six TCC competencies within a five-year cycle (by the end of the Spring Semester, 2021).

The artifacts in proficiency-level courses will be collected one year after the introductory-level courses begin to be offered to ensure that assessment provides evidence of how skill levels change from introductory-level courses through proficiency-level courses.
Each faculty member teaching a core course will receive training on how to incorporate the TCC objectives in their courses, including creating assignments for students that would assess how well students have mastered the TCC related four intellectual and academic skills their courses are intended to advance.

In addition to the direct measures of student competency obtained from course embedded assessment artifacts two other indirect measures will be employed: survey of (1) graduating students every semester and (2) annual survey of faculty to gather their reflective comments on meeting the TCC objectives.

**B. Systematic Assessment of Artifacts**

The choice of rubrics to assess the artifacts from the courses selected for assessment was made following a review of the rubrics developed by the Association of American Colleges and Universities, University of South Carolina Office of Institutional Assessment & Compliance, and Amarillo College. Each rubric has a competency statement that states what skills students will demonstrate when they are core complete, an operational definition of competency, benchmark for competency, description of artifacts, and definitions of elements of each of the six skills.

We now address the second question that is important in the Institutional Portfolio model of core curriculum assessment, the one of systematic assessment of artifacts. This task will be undertaken by Core Assessment Teams (CATs). Each CAT will have three members and will be tasked with assessing only one of the core objectives. Different CAT teams assess different core objectives. Faculty who teach classes responsible for either introductory or proficiency level courses with the same TCC objective will serve on CATs by rotation. For example, a subset faculty who are responsible for courses where critical thinking (introductory or proficiency level) is assessed will serve on a CAT responsible for developing, deploying, assessing, and revising relevant elements of the curriculum and/or relevant artifacts. Each CAT will be responsible for developing specific categories of artifacts for faculty to select for deployment in their relevant courses. Each faculty member teaching a core course will receive training on how to incorporate the TCC objectives in their courses.

CAT will use the master rubric for the core curriculum that contains standards for rating the artifacts on a 5-point scale. CAT members will undergo training on how to assess core courses and on the use of rubrics. Each semester each CAT group will assess, for each of introductory and proficiency level courses, 100 artifacts drawn randomly from the bank of artifacts collected as previously described. Each CAT member independently assesses each of the 100 artifacts. The goals of analyses of data generated by CATs are to (1) evaluate accomplishment of required TCC objectives, (2) monitor the effect of introductory-level courses on performance in proficiency-level courses, and (3) provide a robust, flexible means of ongoing assessment associated with the core curriculum and academic program planning.

Statistical analysis of assessment data will include correlation studies to assess inter-rater reliability, consistency across class formats, and other indicators of programmatic and methodological reliability. Additional analyses may be used to identify key variables and construct models for future use. The proposed assessment plans will also ensure student rights to privacy.
Approximately one week after a semester’s schedule is published, a sample of at least five sections of introductory-level core courses associated with the core objective being studied that semester will be identified. Two additional sections will be identified as contingent sample members and will be included in the sample if (1) one of the sampled sections is cancelled for any reason or (2) if the combined census day enrollment of the core sample sections is less than 125. Future sample sizes may be increased, but will not exceed ten percent of all course sections. A similar sample of pertinent proficiency-level courses will be identified at the beginning of the semester. Sections of all formats (face-to-face, online, hybrid, etc.) will be included in the sampling population and may be oversampled for representativeness if previous analyses or administrative directives indicate the need.

Department chairs and instructors of sample and contingent sections will be notified and training for rubric use and assignment construction will be made available. Instructors in both introductory-level and proficiency-level samples will be directed to supply a copy of their syllabi and descriptions of the assignments that will generate artifacts for assessment by the first day of class. As assignments are completed, instructors will submit artifacts to OGECC. Submitted work should be ungraded and should not be anonymized. Data will be copied into the digital assessment system and originals will be returned to instructors within one business day. This will complete the assessment related responsibilities of instructors who do not serve as CAT reviewers.

The OGECC will remove student identifiers from the artifacts, print an alphanumeric identifier on the artifact that enables its identification for longitudinal studies of student skill gains, store an electronic copy of the anonymized artifact, and provide artifact access to CAT reviewers. No paper copies of artifacts will be stored and all records will be accessible only to OGECC staff and pertinent CATs. Each member of CAT will score each sampled artifact according to the required rubric. Assessments will be returned to the OGECC by CAT members for analysis within 60 days of receipt.

Department chairs may request that individual academic programs be supplied with copies of the anonymized artifacts, summaries of reviewers’ rubrics, and CAT assessment data associated with their sections for possible use in program assessments. Student artifacts may be used as examples in internal departmental reports or for internal training, but will not include any identifying information. Core curriculum assessment therefore will produce data useful to annual assessment of academic program goals.

Analysis will use data available on non-core related university platforms along with the data derived from student artifacts. Control and research variables will reflect six areas of data: artifact, student, section, instructor, course, and reviewer.

A variety of statistical tests will be used as necessary. Initial analyses will be limited to correlation studies, T-tests, Chi-squares, and identification of confidence intervals. As adequate numbers of artifacts are collected, regression and hierarchical methods will be employed to provide more detailed information about forces affecting student skill acquisition and effective programming. To maximize reliability, correlation studies will be used to measure inter-rater reliability and consistency across waves, course formats, etc. These measures will provide insight into curriculum and academic program planning in addition to the assessment of TCC objectives.

Results from introductory-level artifacts will be reviewed for potential curricular weaknesses; only proficiency-level artifacts will be used to assess TCC objectives mastery for reporting purposes.
CAT members will interview core curriculum instructors in the various disciplines to understand how each course and discipline targets the core objectives and what the peculiarities and special circumstances are about the various disciplines. CAT members will inform themselves through these interactions how 'critical thinking' differs from discipline to discipline, for example. Annual workshops and panels will be organized for faculty on best practices for incorporating TCC objectives in courses, open to all faculty irrespective of their involvement in the core curriculum.

The OGECC will provide anonymized and aggregated reports to CAT members for review, discussion, evaluation of potential weaknesses, and the development of curriculum and/or artifact modifications to address any identified weaknesses. These aggregated results will also be provided to all core faculty for review and discussion and they will also be involved in developing strategies for addressing any identified weaknesses.

Assessment data gathered over several years will be course and instructor specific and the instructors will receive feedback on the extent to which TCC objectives were met in their courses. This mechanism enables faculty to make improvements to their courses for increasing student gains in skills.

Serving on CAT is an important service contribution from faculty due to the significant time investment necessary for grading the artifacts and interfacing with instructors on assessment issues. The CAT assessors’ service assignments on other departmental and university projects and committees will be readjusted so as to not overburden them, and in cases where such readjustment is not possible or the task has to be completed during the summer term, CAT members will receive a stipend.

C. Closing the Assessment Loop

After reflecting on the TCC competency reports, the relevant CAT will recommend curriculum or artifact modifications to address identified shortcomings. They may also provide recommendations on new resource requests to improve the core curriculum. These modifications/improvements will be implemented during the following semester. Once these modifications are implemented and the TCC objective is assessed again (approximately one year later), identification of incremental improvements in the mastery of TCC competencies from the current cycle to the previous cycle(s) will close the assessment loop.

This will result in continuous improvement in the mastery of TCC objectives. Systematic efforts that faculty make to improve TCC objectives will be supported by institutional commitment for hosting workshops, faculty seminars, and presentations by higher education experts on best practices for enhanced student learning in core courses. Faculty discussion forums will be organized to highlight the important assessment findings after every cycle and explore ways of improving the core curriculum goals. Faculty will be offered workshops on how to create assignments that foster the development of skills across the curriculum. Student services will modify tutoring and writing support that target common student deficiencies in writing, quantitative, and empirical skills.

The data collected as part of the assessment process will support longitudinal studies of TCC skill gains that may possibly be attributable to the core curriculum.
A&M-SA is committed to participating in a peer review of the assessment of the six core objectives. The results of our assessment process at the end of each cycle will be subjected to peer review. In addition, SACSCOC review of the core curriculum on a periodic basis is a form of peer review. The outcomes of peer review will be used in modifications of the core program where appropriate.