



TRUE BLUE CORE

True Blue Core Assessment Plan

Introduction

In 2018, at the direction of Provost Mark Byrnes, Middle Tennessee State University embarked on a redesign of its general education program. In Spring of 2021, the University General Education Committee (now True Blue Core Committee) unanimously approved eight new student learning outcomes (SLOs) and in spring of 2022, by the required 2/3 majority of the total voting membership, approved structural changes to the general education program under the heading True Blue Core with Explorations. In addition, the committee approved and recommended to the provost, the establishment of a Center for the True Blue Core (CTBC) to take primary responsibility for the implementation and coordination of a comprehensive assessment plan for the newly redesigned curriculum. This document provides a detailed description of the assessment plan for the True Blue Core beginning with fall semester 2024.].

Why assessment?

The purpose of assessment is to examine and reflect on student learning with the goal of continuously improving the program and advancing student learning. A strong assessment plan allows faculty to evaluate the current situation so that they can then determine how to help students learn more effectively.

The previous assessment plan was a legacy plan from the days when MTSU was a Tennessee Board of Regents school. The plan measures three competencies in three disciplines: oral communication (COMM 2200), written communication (ENGL 1010 or 1020), and mathematical sciences (MATH 1710). For the True Blue Core curriculum, assessment of student learning will expand significantly. Embedded, faculty-mediated assessment of the student learning outcomes forms the core of the assessment plan.

At the same time, the situation requires thinking more broadly to develop an assessment plan that ensures that the program meets the objectives and mission of the True Blue Core and that the True Blue Core Committee can consider revisions and adjustments to the program as student and faculty needs change over time. The True Blue Core needs an assessment plan that yields a living curriculum rather than a static program.

This assessment plan will NOT measure faculty performance. While compliance with SACSCOC (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges) requirements is a necessary part of assessment, this assessment plan, in addition to meeting the standards, is intended to move the university away from a culture of accountability and compliance and toward a culture of curiosity and reflection about how faculty can improve the learning environment for their students. [To learn more about SACSCOC standards, see appendix A.](#)

Likewise, this assessment plan will NOT measure an individual student's achievement or improvement in student learning over the general education program. MTSU does not currently have the infrastructure in place to provide pre and post testing to every MTSU student, although this goal may be achieved in the long term. Instead, the plan calls for the assessment of the student learning outcomes across the entire program, through multistage cluster sampling, at both the program and course level, to measure whether the program is providing the opportunity for students to meet the student learning outcomes and that student learning, in relation to the outcomes, is improving year to year.

Proposed [Direct Measures](#) of Student Learning

[Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes](#)

Each year, the Center for the True Blue Core will collaborate with College Assessment Coordinators to appoint a True Blue Core Assessment Committee, members of which will receive extra compensation, to assess a randomized sample of anonymized student artifacts using MTSU-specific rubrics for the True Blue Core student learning outcomes. [To review the True Blue Core Rubrics, see Appendix B.](#) The plan calls for a multistage cluster sampling method to collect the artifacts. For an explanation of the sampling methods, [see Appendix C: Multistage Cluster Sampling.](#) The artifacts can be collected via D2L, which allows for seamless and secure collection, but the Center will provide alternative means to collect and submit the artifacts for faculty who don't use D2L. Please note that there is no provision for hard copy artifacts. All artifacts must be submitted digitally to guarantee secure collection and storage.

There are two central questions addressed through assessment of the student learning outcomes: Are students acquiring the skills and knowledge that faculty have identified as essential? And what steps can faculty take to improve student learning?

CTBC Assessment Fellows

Each year the True Blue Core Director and the True Blue Core Assessment Director will select True Blue Core Fellows from among faculty who teach in the Core. CTBC Fellows will serve as outcome coordinators for that assessment cycle. For instance, during the assessment cycle for critical thinking, a faculty member who teaches in that category will be named the CTBC Fellow for Critical Thinking and assist the TBC Assessment Director and faculty generally in each phase of the assessment. CTBC Fellows will be expected to learn the basics of general education assessment through attendance at American Association of Colleges and Universities (AACU), National Institute of Student Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA), or IUIPUI's Assessment Institute in Indianapolis. They will also serve on the assessment committee, providing leadership for the norming process and, in phase 4, assist in leading the early fall retreats focused on developing strategies for improvement. Fellows will serve for at least three semesters plus one summer to prepare for fall reporting (a full assessment cycle). There will be at least three, and potentially as many as six, fellows serving in any given semester.

The True Blue Core Assessment Coordinator, in collaboration with the True Blue Core Director and the CTBC Assessment Fellows, will oversee collecting, analyzing, and reporting on the assessment findings. **Important note:** Assessment results and reports will never purposely single out an individual faculty member or student.

In August immediately prior to the start of the semester or in the first month of the semester, the Center for the True Blue Core will host assessment retreats in collaboration with College Assessment Coordinators and the CTBC Fellows where faculty will analyze the assessment results and make specific suggestions for change and improvement so that assessment reports can be filed no later than September 30. Data will be disaggregated to allow comparison of competencies across multiple demographic groups. Since multiple colleges are represented in some categories, this phase in assessment will require cross-college collaboration.

Each of the eight general education student learning outcomes will be assessed in a three-year cycle, which ensures that courses in each of the categories in the True Blue Core will be assessed, and, hence, assessment will occur across the entire program.

Program Assessment

As noted earlier, embedded, faculty-mediated assessment of the student learning outcomes forms the core of the proposed assessment plan. But additional information may be needed to monitor the quality of the program and to ensure that the True Blue Core is creating an environment where students can learn.

MTSU's accrediting body, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC), is most interested in [direct measures](#) of student learning in relation to the student learning outcomes. Program and operational goals should not go in the report. This is especially relevant for general education/core programs because they are not credentialing programs.

That said, there are clearly things the True Blue Core Committee needs to know about the program that may not belong in a SACSCOC report but that might provide direction on how to help students learn more effectively. For example,

- Do students experience gen ed as equitable and inclusive?
- How do students make meaning of the TBC program?
- Do students value what they learn in gen ed courses? If not, why not?
- Do students understand the connections between the True Blue Core SLOs and their majors, careers, and lives?
- How much exposure are students getting to secondary outcomes?
- Does the program ensure that students have exposure to the Fine Arts/Humanities, Social & Behavioral Sciences and Natural Science/Mathematics (a SACSCOC requirement).
- How well do students do at critical thinking and what is the role of gen ed in improving critical thinking?
- How effective is peer tutoring in improving student learning in gen ed?
- What role do MTEngage and EXL play in improving student learning?
- What Blueprints do students find appealing?

Answering these questions will likely require primarily [indirect](#) measures with the exception of critical thinking. To measure critical thinking, MTSU currently offers, and will continue to offer, the CCTST (California Critical Thinking Skills Test) to graduating seniors. The new emphasis on critical thinking in the True Blue Core should contribute to better critical thinking skills and may contribute to better scores on the CCTST. As the program progresses, the Center will develop a better correlation between outcomes assessment at the course level and the exit exams, which will, in turn, lead to better direct measures of overall program success. Eventually, the Center may opt for a test other than CCTST that can be better tailored to MTSU needs or, alternatively, develop a

better alignment of the rubrics and the test. The Center may also develop similar alignments between outcomes other than critical thinking and new testing instruments. For instance, the Center could consider using an indirect measure—pre and post student self-reflection on intercultural understanding—and then test intercultural understanding as part of an exit exam. (See [AVMA Cultural Competence Self-Assessment Checklist](#)).

Proposed Indirect Measures

Indirect Measures of Student Learning

Each fall and spring semester graduating seniors complete a Graduating Senior Survey (GSS) through the office of Institutional Effectiveness, Planning, and Research (IEPR). Indirect assessment of **student** learning in True Blue Core courses will be achieved through students' perceptions reported on the GSS. The CTBC staff will add questions to the GSS specifically regarding the effectiveness of the True Blue Core and use that data to improve the program. In addition, the Center for True Blue Core (CTBC) will offer focus groups each semester to gather data on students' perceptions and experience of the program. Also, during the assessment cycle, Core faculty will be surveyed regarding their perceptions of student learning ([See description of Phase 2 of the assessment cycle](#)). Lastly, when necessary, the CTBC will review and use data from NSSE (National Survey of Student Engagement), which measures student engagement in regard to learning with peers, experiences with faculty, campus environment, and academic challenge.

Indirect Measures of the Program and the Center for True Blue Core

The following will occur annually in the CTBC:

- Review and report on the effectiveness of the rubrics and assessment instruments, as well as on the continuing relevance of the outcomes.
- Review and report on faculty support, training, incentives and professional development opportunities as well as effectiveness of communication with faculty and students.
- Review and report on staffing, including graduate students, undergraduate interns, and/or work study students.
- Monitor and report on demographics, enrollment patterns, numbers of courses in the program, the number and variety of secondary outcomes being offered, as well as their perceived effectiveness, and the number of full-time faculty that departments have committed to teaching in the True Blue Core.
- Publish annual report on the True Blue Core and Center activities.

Procedure for Re-Certification of True Blue Core Courses

Departments seeking re-certification for inclusion in the True Blue Core will submit a course re-certification approval application similar to the course approval form. The CTBC recommends that departments include assessment of their True Blue Core course or courses and their efficacy in teaching the content and methods of the discipline as part of their regular program assessment for their major. This data can then be submitted for True Blue Core recertification.

The process for True Blue Core re-certification will be initiated by the Center for True Blue Core and/or the True Blue Core Committee. The CTBC will notify departments when their course is eligible for recertification, which will be every six years, or after two assessment cycles have been completed. Re-certification is intended to ensure that courses continue to align with the eight general education student learning outcomes. If a course is no longer meeting the outcomes or addressing the category topic or if it is no longer being taught as it was proposed, then the department will be given the opportunity to revise or withdraw the course.

Description of Assessment Cycle Phases

The following section describes the phases of the assessment cycle for the True Blue Core. An effective assessment plan will require not only the efforts of the CTBC staff, but also the involvement of faculty and administration across the university. [For a list of Assessment Administrators and College Coordinators, see Appendix D.](#) In addition, the assessment plan will require the support of specially appointed Faculty Assessment Fellows and a True Blue Core Assessment Committee.

Phase 1: Inform and Support

During the spring semester before the academic year in which an outcome will be assessed, the Center for True Blue Core staff and college assessment coordinators will select True Blue Core Fellows, announce the outcomes to be assessed, and inform faculty who will be affected about their data collection responsibilities. The Center and college assessment coordinators will also work together to identify True Blue Core Assessment Committee members for the upcoming academic year. The committee will include representation from departments that offer courses that incorporate the outcomes being assessed that year.

Simultaneously, the Center will collaborate with College Assessment Coordinators and the LT&ITC, to plan training and support for faculty who are appointed to the True Blue Core Assessment

Committee for the upcoming academic year. The CTBC, ITD, and IEPR will ensure that data collection can occur in D2L or by an alternative means and safely stored on secure servers, including student artifacts that will be collected in the fall semester.

Phase 2: Data Collection

In the fall semester of the assessment year, Center for True Blue Core will use multistage cluster sampling to develop a randomized sample of student artifacts by identifying a percentage of courses, sections, and students in stages. Faculty whose sections/students have been selected for inclusion in the randomized sampling will identify the assignment(s) for which they plan to submit student artifacts. The selected assignment should allow the students to demonstrate their ability to achieve the outcome. During fall semester, faculty with students included in the randomized sample will receive instruction about how to collect, save, digitize, anonymize, and submit student artifacts. True Blue Core Assessment Committee and CTBC Fellows will receive additional assessment training. In a typical assessment year, three outcomes are eligible for assessment. Artifacts for at least one of the outcomes will be collected in the fall and the artifacts for the remaining two outcomes collected during the spring semester.

At the end of the fall semester, the anonymized student artifacts for those included in the randomized sampling will be submitted by faculty to a designated D2L shell where they can be stored securely. Only faculty with sections/students selected for the randomized sample must submit student assignments.

Also in the fall semester, for indirect assessment of student learning, faculty who are teaching courses from which student assignments were drawn will be asked to complete a simple survey about the True Blue Core and its perceived effectiveness in relation to the outcomes.

Likewise, in fall semester, students currently enrolled in True Blue Core classes will be invited to participate in focus groups as an indirect measure of student learning and to gauge student perceptions of the program. Students will be compensated for participation.

At the end of the spring semester, another set of randomized samples of the assignments will be submitted. Only faculty with sections/students selected for the randomized sample must submit student assignments again to D2L for secure storage. Surveying of faculty and focus groups for students will also occur again in the spring.

After the end of the spring semester, the True Blue Core Assessment Committee and CTBC Fellows (who will be part of the TBC Assessment Committee) will meet in mid-May to begin by norming/calibrating the assignments and the rubrics and will assess and score the assignments using the MTSU-specific rubrics.

In addition, throughout the academic year, graduating seniors will complete the CCTST, regardless of which outcomes are being assessed that year. Finally, they will answer several short questions regarding general education in their graduating senior survey (GSS).

Data, including completed rubrics and student artifacts, will be collected and housed securely using D2L. If an alternative is requested, the data will still be securely stored in D2L.

Phase 3: Data Analysis and Reporting

During the summer of the assessment year, the True Blue Core Director, the True Blue Core Assessment Director, and the CTBC fellows will analyze the data produced by the various direct and indirect assessments of student learning and will write reports to return to colleges and departments by August. These reports will *never* purposely single out individual instructors or students and will instead be helpful in making decisions about how to ensure continuous improvement of student learning. In addition to reviewing the SLO data, the CTBC director and the assessment director will review indirect measures of program success.

Phase 4: Closing the Loop

At the beginning of the fall semester following the assessment year, the CTBC will make preliminary reports available to the University General Education Committee, the College Assessment Coordinators, and the CTBC Fellows. The CTBC will also sponsor an assessment retreat prior to the start of the semester or at the beginning of the semester where faculty have a voice in reviewing the reports and identifying strategies for continuous improvement that can be built into the assessment plan and reported out in Campus Labs by the Director of the True Blue Core and the TBC Assessment Director.

Chart 1. Assessment Cycle Graphic

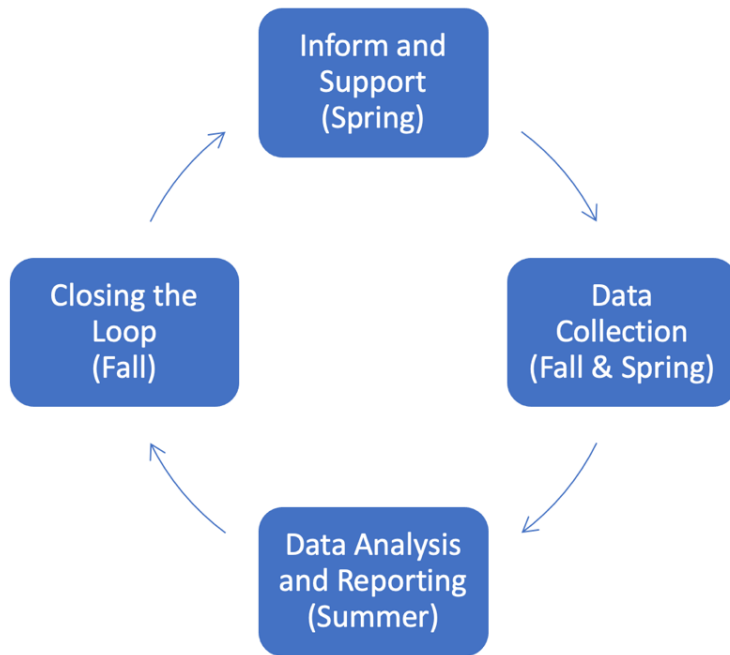


Chart 2. Outcomes Assessment Schedule

Note: A new cycle starts before a previous cycle is completed.

True Blue Core Assessment Cycle	SP 24	SU 24	FA 24	SP 25	SU 25	FA 25	SP 26	SU 26	FA 26	SP 27	SU 27	FA 27	SP 28
A1 Written Communication			Phase 2		Phase 3	Phase 4				Phase 1		Phase 2	
A2 Non-Written Communication	Phase 1		Phase 2		Phase 3	Phase 4				Phase 1		Phase 2	
D2 Information Literacy				Phase 1		Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4					Phase 1
D1 Quantitative Literacy						Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4					Phase 1
B1 Critical Thinking				Phase 1		Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4					Phase 1
B2 Inquiry & Analysis				Phase 1		Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4					Phase 1
C1 Intercultural Understanding							Phase 1		Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4		
C2 Civic Engagement							Phase 1		Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4		

Chart 3. Key to the Outcomes Assessment Schedule

Phase 1 Inform and Support	Spring before assessment year: Announce outcomes to be assessed for the upcoming AY, select CTBC assessment fellows; offer professional development training for CTBC Fellows and faculty selected for fall embedded assessment
Phase 2 Data Collection	Fall and Spring of assessment year: Develop random sample, offer professional development training for CTBC Fellows and faculty selected for embedded assessment; collect artifacts at end of each semester.
Phase 3 Data Analysis and Reporting	Summer of assessment year: CTBC Fellows and Assessment Committee begin to assess artifacts collected during fall and spring semester; analyze & report
Phase 4 Closing the Loop	Fall following assessment year: CTBC makes preliminary reports available to the University General Education Committee, the College Assessment Coordinators, and the CTBC Fellows; sponsors pre-semester assessment retreat to identify steps for continuous improvement.

Assessment Budget

Budget available upon request.

Appendices

[Appendix A SACSCOC Resources](#)

[SACSCOC, Principles of Accreditation, Sec. 8 & 9](#)

[SACSCOC, Principles of Accreditation, Interpreting 9.3; rev. 2024](#)

[List of Direct and Indirect Measures](#)

Appendix B Rubrics

[MTSU-Specific Approved Rubrics](#)

Appendix C Multistage Cluster Sampling

[Multistage Cluster Sampling Example](#)

Appendix D Administrators and College Coordinators

[Assessment Administrators and College Coordinators](#)