

PLAN FOR ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES AT MOUNT ROYAL COLLEGE

Developed by:

Faculty Curriculum Group

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ASSESSMENT OVERVIEW

Curriculum renewal has been a strategic goal at Mount Royal College since 1997 and the College has chosen outcomes-based learning as a key strategy for achieving that goal. The assessment of learning outcomes, which is part of the ongoing process of curriculum renewal outlined in the MRC Vision 2005 statement, is in the initial stages of development.

The College is explicitly committed to guiding students toward achievement in six broad-based learning outcome areas – communication, thinking, ethical reasoning, computer literacy, information retrieval, and group effectiveness. At the heart of a Mount Royal College plan for assessment of student learning is the systematic and comprehensive assessment of course, program, and College-wide learning outcomes to support ongoing curriculum renewal.

Assessing Learning: Key Stakeholders

- Students
- Faculty
- Instructional and support staff
- Administration
- Advisory groups
- Graduates
- External Constituents

Outcomes-based learning begins with the selection of desired learning outcomes and culminates in assessment. Assessment is the link that completes the feedback loop in the outcomes-based learning cycle; it helps us to know if teaching/learning is happening as we intended. This open-ended, interactive process of teaching and learning is cyclical in nature; it aims to enhance student learning and continuously improve curriculum. Outcomes-based learning and assessment strives to make this cyclical teaching/learning process more explicit. At the teacher/student level, the essence of assessment is an explicit statement of aims and methods and measures, shared openly between instructor and student. This interaction has always been at the heart of teaching and learning at MRC.

Assessment requires attention to the outcomes of learning and equally to the experiences that lead to those outcomes; it is ongoing and multi-faceted. Assessment of individual learners occurs within the context of courses, but the overall results of course assessment feeds back to program/discipline, and College-wide curriculum renewal. Programs and disciplines will develop and phase-in their assessment plans between January 2002 and September 2005 (See Appendix C).

Emphasizing assessment provides students with explicit feedback about their learning. For faculty, it presents opportunities to celebrate curricular success, as well as to fine-tune curriculum development and delivery. For College administrators, it provides useful and well-grounded information about student learning across the curricula. Overall assessment helps to put a comprehensible and trustworthy public face on the difficult, challenging, and sometimes-obscure processes of higher education.

ASSESSMENT AT MRC: BACKGROUND & PURPOSES

Background / Context

At Mount Royal College assessment is *not* intended to...

- regulate individual course design and implementation;
- prescribe assessment processes or approaches; or
- constitute a performance evaluation of individual faculty members.

In 1997, Mount Royal College joined numerous post-secondary institutions across North America that have introduced or are in the process of introducing curriculum renewal initiatives. Many of these institutions have adopted an outcomes-based approach to learning. The College introduced outcomes-based learning as part of the Curriculum Renewal Initiative identified in the Vision 2005 document. MRC's commitment to articulating and assessing learning outcomes that are College-wide, as well as program/discipline and course-specific, is outlined in *The Strategic Plan for Curriculum Renewal* (2001). The plan may be found at: <http://www.mtroyal.ab.ca/cr/>

The Faculty Curriculum Group (FCG) was established in 1997 to spearhead the implementation of an outcomes-based curriculum. The first step in this initiative was the introduction of six College-wide learning outcomes (CWOs). The intent of the outcomes-based approach at Mount Royal College is to deliberately and in a sustained manner, put curricula in place that incorporates the CWOs. By incorporating these outcomes into courses and by attending to relevant teaching/learning and assessment activities associated with them, we believe that students will develop significantly in these ability areas.

The current FCG, which has been preparing a set of guiding principles and a framework for assessing course, program and College-wide learning outcomes since the Fall of 2000, has one representative from the Students' Association of Mount Royal College, one representative from administration, one representative from Student Affairs and Campus Life and eleven faculty representatives from across the College.

Purposes of Assessment of Student Learning at MRC

The purposes of the plan for assessment of student learning outcomes are to...

- enhance student learning;
- strengthen curricula using results from the assessment of learning;
- encourage conversations about teaching and learning; and
- respond to the changing needs and expectations of internal and external stakeholders.

The intent of the assessment plan is to help the College ensure that it has an ongoing process in place to build a quality curriculum that is both current and relevant at the course and program/discipline levels. It can support faculty members, both individually and collectively, to assess student academic achievement related to the intended learning outcomes.

ASSESSMENT: DEFINITION & PRINCIPLES

What Is Assessment?

Assessment is the process of gathering and discussing information from multiple and diverse sources in order to develop a deep understanding of what students know, understand and can do with their knowledge as a result of their educational experiences; the process culminates when assessment results are used to improve subsequent learning.

Huba, M.E. & Freed, J.E. (2000). *Learner-centered assessment on college campuses: Shifting the focus from teaching to learning.* Toronto: Allyn & Bacon.

What Is Assessment?

The definition of assessment in the box at the left will guide development of approaches and processes related to the assessment of student learning at MRC.

Principles for Assessing Student Learning at MRC

Assessing learning at Mount Royal College is meant to help ensure that graduates have the knowledge, skills, and abilities required to be successful in their careers, to be effective citizens, and to pursue lifelong learning. Assessment will occur at the course, program/discipline, and College-wide levels.

Assessment is part of the ongoing and cyclical process of reviewing and strengthening curriculum. It builds on current curricular strengths and encourages the pursuit of continued excellence in teaching and learning. Assessment of learning is based on clearly articulated principles.

The following principles will guide the assessment of student learning at Mount Royal College: (See Appendix A for a detailed description of each principle)

1. Assessment practices are designed to provide meaningful feedback that will inform and focus efforts to strengthen and improve curriculum.
 2. Assessment of learning reflects Mount Royal College's vision, values, and core purpose (Vision 2005).
 3. Assessment of learning assists the College to meet responsibilities to students and to public stakeholders.
 4. Assessment of student learning should be based on methods/approaches that give students opportunities to demonstrate knowledge, skills, and abilities related to specific course, program, or College-wide learning outcomes.
 5. Assessment requires attention to the outcomes of learning, but also and equally, to the experiences that lead to those outcomes.
 6. Assessment works best when it is ongoing rather than episodic.
 7. Assessment requires a variety of systematically reported measures in order to be comprehensive and reliable.
 8. Assessment is most effective when undertaken in a supportive environment.
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ASSESSMENT AT VARIOUS LEVELS...

Assessment within Courses

Assessment of individual student learning, related to College-wide outcomes, is the domain of faculty members who assess student learning within courses, using methods of their choice.

Assessment from a Program Perspective

The purposes of assessment at the program level are to determine program strengths and areas of concern and to decide the actions and resources required in order to address curricular issues.

Programs will articulate their intended learning outcomes. The assessment methods/approaches used by programs will help them to determine the extent to which students are achieving desired outcomes. Programs will determine the methods/approaches best suited for their areas (See Appendix B for examples). Faculty members will share results of assessment in their area with the program faculty and their respective Chair, and Dean or Director. Joint discussions about the results will guide future action.

Program assessment is currently taking place at the College using a variety of approaches (See Appendix B for examples).

Assessment from a Discipline Perspective

The purposes of assessment at the discipline level are to determine the achievement of course and College-wide learning outcomes and where appropriate and feasible, discipline level learning outcomes.* Assessment will help to determine strengths and areas of concern while it contributes to decision-making relative to the actions and resources required in addressing curricular issues.

Disciplines will articulate their course learning outcomes and the College-wide learning outcomes, as well as discipline level outcomes, where appropriate and feasible.* The assessment methods/approaches used by disciplines will help them to determine the extent to which students are achieving the desired outcomes. Disciplines will determine the methods/approaches best suited for their areas (See Appendix B for examples). Faculty members will share results of assessment in their area with the discipline faculty and their respective Chair, and Dean or Director. Joint discussions about the results will guide future action.

* Identifying discipline outcomes might be appropriate or feasible in cases where disciplines deliver a sequence of at least three structurally linked junior and senior courses. Examples might be university transfer or applied degree students seeking a major or minor in a subject area.

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ASSESSMENT AT VARIOUS LEVELS... (CONT'D)

Assessment of College-Wide Outcomes from an Institutional Perspective

The purpose of assessing College-wide learning outcomes at the institutional level is to determine the extent to which students are achieving the desired outcomes of student learning across the College curricula. It will help us to determine what we are doing well and where there is room for improvement.

Methods/approaches chosen to assess College-wide learning outcomes at the institutional level have yet to be determined (See Appendix B for examples and Appendix C: Phase III). Results of this assessment will be shared with the Vice-President, Academic and other relevant stakeholders; however, they will not be linked to individual instructors or courses. The approaches used to assess CWOs at the institutional level will be determined through a collaborative process.

FRAMEWORKS FOR ASSESSING STUDENT LEARNING AT MRC

Curricular Questions

Four Curricular Questions

1. What is to be accomplished?
2. What learning experiences will accomplish the purposes?
3. How can these learning experiences be effectively organized?
4. How can the effectiveness of the learning be evaluated?

Reference: Gaff, J.G. & Ratcliff J.L. (1977). *Handbook of the undergraduate curriculum: A comprehensive guide to purposes structures, practices, and change*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

The basic elements of a curriculum may be organized around four questions. These questions may assist faculty members to consider the major attributes of their curriculum, to identify desired outcomes, to select learning experiences, and to select evaluation or assessment methods.

The questions may be considered prior to working with the proposed frameworks described below. The frameworks suggest a process to follow in the design/construction of an assessment plan. Each framework consists of key areas to focus on when completing the plan.

Frameworks for Assessing Student Learning at MRC

The following frameworks provide a structure for the development of individual program and discipline-level assessment plans. Many other colleges and universities have used similar frameworks successfully in developing their assessment plans. These frameworks are intended as guidelines and may be adapted to accommodate the diversity of academic areas within the College.

A. Framework for Preparing Program-Level Assessment Plans

(This framework works best for applied degree, diploma and certificate programs)

- Describe the knowledge and abilities that graduates should possess - some areas refer to this as a *profile of the graduate*.
- Articulate intended program-level learning outcomes and indicate where they are assessed in the program curriculum (i.e. program outcomes may be mapped onto courses using a *matrix*).
- Identify where CWOs are incorporated and assessed in the program curriculum (i.e. CWOs may also be mapped onto courses).
- Identify assessment questions that are important to the program and make a plan for gathering data related to these questions.
- Describe methods the program will use to gather data/information about these questions.
- Describe methods that will be used to assess the extent to which students have achieved intended outcomes.
- Document the assessment findings and share them with relevant stakeholders.
- Articulate a plan for responding to assessment findings.

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FRAMEWORKS FOR ASSESSING STUDENT LEARNING AT MRC (CONT'D)

B. Framework for Preparing Discipline-Level Assessment Plans

(This framework works best for disciplines, university transfer, and areas delivering service courses)

- Articulate discipline-specific learning outcomes, where appropriate and feasible.
- Identify where course, discipline and/or CWOs are incorporated and assessed in the curriculum.
- Identify assessment questions that are important to the discipline and make a plan for gathering data related to these questions.
- Describe methods that will be used to gather data/information about these questions.
- Describe methods that will be used to assess the extent to which students have achieved intended outcomes.
- Document the assessment findings and share them with relevant stakeholders.
- Articulate a plan for responding to assessment findings.

(See Appendix B for examples of assessing learning outcomes at the course, program/discipline and College-wide level).

IMPLEMENTING ASSESSMENT AT MRC

A Phased-In Approach to Assessment

Programs and disciplines will develop their assessment plans for implementation on a phased-in basis between January 2002 and September 2005 (See Appendix C for an overview). The purposes of a phased-in approach are to identify budget and workload implications and to consider resource allocation. During this implementation phase, faculty members will have the opportunity to develop and work with assessment findings in the on-going process of curriculum renewal. The process of curriculum renewal is meant to support and enhance teaching, learning, and assessment experiences. Individual programs/disciplines will determine *when/how* they embark on the assessment process during the phase-in period, in consultation with their Dean or Director. The phased-in approach will provide academic areas with an opportunity to continue to develop and refine their assessment plans.

Resources for Developing Assessment Plans

Assessment of student learning is recognized as an institution-wide responsibility that involves faculty members, students, and administration in partnership. Assessment on this scale requires a systematic approach. While it is recognized that considerable work related to assessment of student learning at the course, program and discipline levels has been and is being done across the institution, the proposed plan is intended to enhance a coordinated and systematic approach to assessment for the College as a whole. In doing so, we hope to fulfill the stated purposes of the assessment of student learning at MRC.

In order to reach the stated purposes of assessment, faculty members may require support. Resources in the form of workshops, consultations, and Web-based and print materials are available through the Faculty Curriculum Group, the Learning Outcome Teams, and the Academic Development Centre. Additional materials will be made available as they are developed.

SUMMARY

Assessment is an ongoing process. It begins with the identification and selection of learning outcomes, relevant teaching/learning strategies, and the subsequent assessment of student learning. The assessment process involves gathering information at these various stages and using it as feedback to modify and improve student outcomes and teaching practices. Faculty members in program and discipline areas will utilize an assessment framework to identify strategies and/or approaches appropriate within the context of their curriculum and the learning requirements of their students.

The development of Mount Royal College's plan for assessment of student learning outcomes is a "work in progress." Faculty members can use assessment findings both to celebrate their curricular successes, and to identify areas for improvement in curricular design and delivery. This process is a dynamic one that promotes conversations about teaching and learning at the faculty/department and institutional levels. It will be a factor in our continuing efforts to offer relevant and quality curricula at Mount Royal College.

Appendix A: Principles of Assessment at Mount Royal College

1. Assessment practices are designed to provide meaningful feedback that will inform and focus efforts to strengthen and improve curriculum.

- Ongoing evaluation of learning outcomes helps to enhance program coherence and ensure program currency.
- Assessment of learning should be linked to course, program and College-wide learning outcomes.
- Effective assessment practices help to make the link between teaching/learning and assessment strategies clear and explicit.
- Feedback provided by assessment of learning processes helps students and faculty to achieve educational goals.

2. Assessment of learning reflects Mount Royal College's vision, values, and core purpose (Vision 2005).

- The design, delivery, and assessment of relevant curricula can contribute to the attainment of the College vision and core purpose, as outlined in the Vision 2005 statement.
- Systematic assessment of student learning can be a means of promoting progressive and innovative leadership in education.
- Effective assessment of learning can help to equip students with the knowledge, skills, and abilities required for their careers, lifelong learning, and effective citizenship.

3. Assessment of learning assists the College to meet responsibilities to students and to public stakeholders.

- We have a responsibility to address the public stake in education by providing information to students and to external stakeholders about the ways in which our students meet their educational goals and expectations.
- Assessment is driven by educational and institutional values and must be conducted in a fair, accurate, and relevant manner consistent with those values.

4. Assessment of student learning should be based on methods/approaches that give students opportunities to demonstrate knowledge, skills, and abilities related to specific course, program, or College-wide learning outcomes.

- Assessment criteria are made explicit to students prior to commencing the assessment activity.
- Assessment allows students opportunities for self- and peer-assessment, external assessment as well as instructor assessment.
- Assessment provides meaningful feedback to the student that allows...
 - time to make adjustments in order to succeed in future learning;
 - for a constructive approach that will permit students to learn from the assessment activity itself (e.g. in the cases of formative assessment where grades are not assigned).

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5. Assessment requires attention to the outcomes of learning, but also and equally, to the experiences that lead to those outcomes.

- In order to improve student learning outcomes faculty need to know what students experience "along the way" – about the curricula, teaching methods, and student effort that led to particular outcomes.
- Assessment can help faculty understand how each student learns most effectively and what factors can increase or hinder learning.

6. Assessment works best when it is ongoing rather than episodic.

- Assessment works best when it is ongoing because it is a process that has cumulative power (e.g. as in the use of normative and summative assessment methods) over the span of students' educational experiences.
- Improvement is fostered best when assessment is a set of linked activities undertaken and documented over time.
- It is important to document progress toward intended goals in a spirit of continuous improvement.

7. Assessment requires a variety of systematically reported measures in order to be comprehensive and reliable.

- Students should be exposed to a variety of assessment strategies and multiple opportunities to demonstrate their acquisition of learning outcomes.
- Measures used in the assessment process should provide regular, timely, and specific feedback about learning to both students and faculty.
- The purpose of assessment of learning is to find patterns of evidence by which different measures reinforce the validity of conclusions or judgements, drawn by faculty, about student learning.

8. Assessment is most effective when undertaken in a supportive environment.

- Assessment works best when institutional dialogue about the beliefs and values associated with teaching/learning and assessment are encouraged and sustained.
- Ongoing assessment at the course and program level is effective when there is collaboration and communication between instructors and students about assessment practices.
- Effective assessment requires effective leadership and administrative commitment, as well as adequate resources (human and financial), and professional development opportunities.
- Assessment is most effective when the entire College community is informed and supportive in their efforts around curriculum and assessment.

APPENDIX B: Assessing Learning Outcomes at MRC

The tables below suggest possible methods for assessing outcomes at the course, program, discipline and institutional levels.

Course Level Learning Outcomes	
A variety of course assessment methods are noted below.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mid-term exams ▪ Final exams ▪ Reflective journals ▪ Essays ▪ Learning logs ▪ Group assignments/presentations ▪ Classroom participation ▪ CATs (Classroom Assessment Techniques) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Research projects ▪ A-V projects ▪ Interview/observations ▪ Panel discussions/debates ▪ Simulations ▪ Self and peer assessment ▪ Poster presentations
Program Level Learning Outcomes	
Program level outcomes are generally assessed in two ways: incorporated into assessments that take place at the course level (see course level outcomes above); and through the use of end-of- program assessments as shown below.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Capstone assignments/projects ▪ Learning portfolios ▪ Senior assignments ▪ Report on work terms/practicum/DFS ▪ External professional assessment of student work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Self and peer assessment ▪ Advisory committee input ▪ Research projects ▪ Exit interviews with students ▪ Focus groups ▪ Employer surveys & focus groups
Discipline Level Learning Outcomes	
Disciplines typically assess learning outcomes at the course level. In instances where disciplines have identified discipline learning outcomes, they may consider using a variety of course and/or program assessment methods. Examples are noted below.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Research projects ▪ Learning logs ▪ Group assignments/presentations ▪ Mid-term exams ▪ Final exams 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Learning portfolios ▪ Senior assignments ▪ Major presentations ▪ External professional assessment

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College-wide Learning Outcomes

College-wide learning outcomes are assessed through course and/or program and/or discipline assessment activities (see examples above). Assessment of the achievement of College-wide learning outcomes, from an institutional perspective, is a key aspect of the learning outcomes initiative. This process will be guided by a committee(s) comprised of FCG members, Outcome Team members, and faculty experts from across the College. Below are examples of ways in which learning outcomes may be assessed from an institutional perspective.

- | | |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sample portfolios from various disciplines ▪ Samples of student work related to course assignments ▪ Samples of student work presented during assessment events ▪ Celebrating and showcasing student work | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Involvement in student service activities that occur outside of courses ▪ Graduate follow-up surveys ▪ Employer surveys ▪ Focus groups |
|--|---|

Appendix C: A Phased-in Approach to Assessment

The development and implementation of program and discipline assessment plans will follow a phased-in approach. The process is now in the introductory phase (Fall 2001). Full implementation across the College is scheduled for June 2005.

A phased-in approach builds on past and current successes in curriculum renewal. It also recognizes the diversity of faculties and programs with respect to their readiness for developing and implementing area-specific assessment plans. This approach will make it possible for programs and disciplines to identify, share, and utilize findings from their initial plans with faculty colleagues and other relevant stakeholders. It will also allow them to build on their experiences in the development of subsequent plans. The phased-in approach takes into account College resources, including personnel, and recognizes other area-specific and College-wide factors that impact curriculum renewal.

The timeline for the phases follows:

Introduction Phase (Fall 2001)

- Assessment discussion document is prepared and distributed to the College community and dialogue held with faculty in departments
- Open forums College-wide; discussions with students; Academic Council
- Assessment discussion document is revised
- Participants in Phase I are identified

Phase I (January 2002 - June 2003)

- Revised discussion document is presented to Academic Council for information and/or agreement in principle
- Phase I programs and disciplines begin development of their assessment plans with support from FCG
- Phase I programs and disciplines implement their assessment plans with support from FCG
- FCG provides ongoing curriculum support across the College to assist other academic areas with various aspects of curriculum work
- College community is kept informed of Phase I activities related to assessment and curriculum renewal, including results or learning from the Phase I assessment plans

Phase II (January 2003 – June 2004)

- Phase II programs and disciplines are identified and begin to develop their assessment plans with support from FCG
- FCG provides ongoing curriculum support across the College to assist other academic areas with various aspects of curriculum work
- College community is kept informed of Phase I and II activities related to assessment and curriculum renewal, including results or learning from the Phase II assessment plans
- FCG continues to keep Academic Council informed of the progress of the assessment plans

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Phase III (January 2004 – June 2005)

- Phase III programs and disciplines are identified and begin to develop their assessment plans with support from FCG
- FCG provides ongoing curriculum support across the College to assist other academic areas with various aspects of curriculum work
- College community is kept informed of Phase I and II activities related to assessment and curriculum renewal, including results or learning from the Phase II assessment plans
- FCG continues to keep Academic Council informed of the progress of the assessment plan
- Faculty develop an action plan for assessing College-wide learning outcomes at the institutional level; academic areas from across the College will be asked to collaborate in order to determine methods/approaches for assessing student achievement of CWOs from an institutional perspective

Phase IV (September 2005)

- All College program/discipline areas have developed and are implementing assessment plans, which will be reviewed on an ongoing basis
- FCG continues to keep Academic Council informed of the progress of the assessment plan
- FCG provides ongoing curriculum support across the College to assist other academic areas with various aspects of curriculum work
- College community is informed of Phase I, II and III activities related to assessment and curriculum renewal, including results or learning from the Phase II assessment plans
- Committee(s) comprised of FCG members, Outcome Team members, and faculty experts from across the College finalize an action plan and develop a pilot plan for assessing College-wide learning outcomes at the institutional level
- FCG begins a collaborative process with other college constituents to determine the contribution of co-curricular activities to student learning outcomes.