

MSCHE 2016 Annual Conference

# Embedding Assessment in Everyday Practices



*“Our students... are amazingly hungry for the knowledge” and know that “nothing takes the place of hard work,” explains UMBC President Freeman Hrabowski. “We are the House of Grit. Hard work makes the difference.”*

## Grit & Greatness: UMBC’s Continuity Mechanisms

### How do universities create assessment continuity?

At University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC), we rely on *continuity mechanisms*, tools and practices that embed assessment in everyday work, to foster continuity across learning assessment cycles and programs. In addition to curriculum mapping, which builds the common ground needed to discuss results across programs, we create continuity by integrating academic *processes* and *professional development*.

#### Academic Processes

Best practices in learning assessment have become part of standard operating procedures in our processes:

- Strategic Planning;
- Academic Program Review;
- General Education Course Review & Reporting;

- Biennial Assessment Reporting;
- Closing-the-Loop Reporting;
- Middle States Self-Study; and
- Council of Deans and Directors, College, Program, and other Faculty Meetings.

#### Professional Development

In addition to embedding guidance in these processes, UMBC builds assessment expertise through Faculty Development Center support, for example:

- The Provost’s Teaching & Learning Symposium;
- Programs & Workshops;
- Individual Consultations on Course-Level Assessment;
- Facilitated Program-Level Assessment Planning and Curriculum Mapping;
- Closing-the-Loop Programs, which foster cross-disciplinary discussions of learning results and interventions.

### University of Maryland, Baltimore County

UMBC is a research university located near Baltimore, Maryland and is part of the University of Maryland system. Student enrollment is 13,839 with 11,243 undergraduate and 2,594 graduate students.

Academic programs include 55 undergraduate majors, 35 minors, and 24 certificates in the arts, engineering and information technology, humanities, sciences, pre-professional studies and social sciences. Graduate programs include 41 master’s degrees, 24 doctoral degrees, and 24 certificate programs.

# Building Continuity with Curricular Alignment

## How UMBC Creates Connections Across Cycles and Programs

### Curricular Alignment

UMBC's Assessment Plan presents an authentic approach to student learning assessment that relies on faculty-crafted assessments at the course level complemented by shared data and discussion at each level. Achieving integrated learning across programs—and continuity across assessment cycles—requires aligning learning at each level as illustrated below. Alignment enables faculty to aggregate learning data across assignments, courses, and programs; discuss results with colleagues; and collaborate on closing-the-loop interventions.

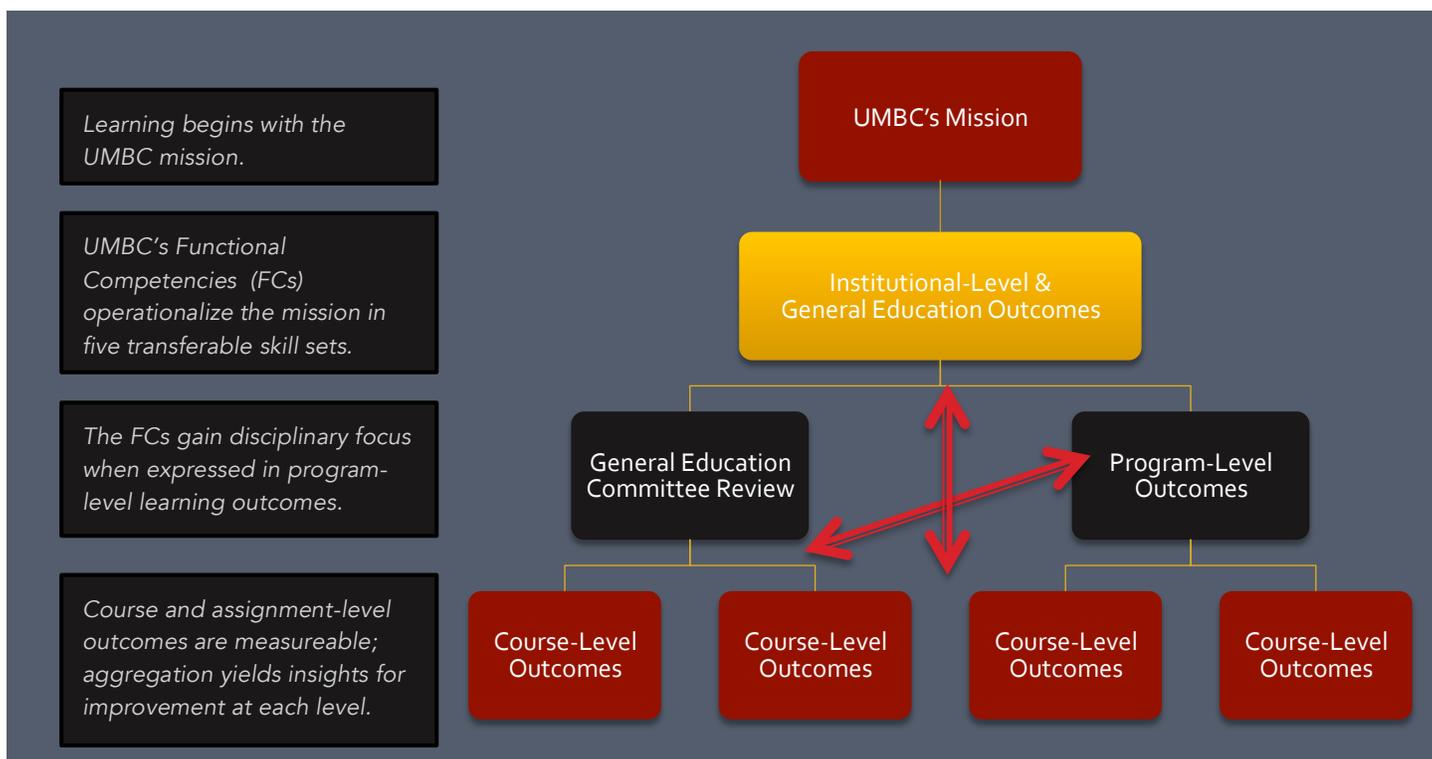
### UMBC's Mission

UMBC is a dynamic public research university integrating teaching, research and service to benefit the citizens of Maryland. As an Honors University, the campus offers academically talented students a strong undergraduate liberal arts foundation that prepares them for graduate and professional study, entry into the workforce, and community service and leadership. UMBC emphasizes science, engineering, information technology, human services and public policy at the graduate level. UMBC contributes to the economic development of the State and the region through entrepreneurial initiatives, workforce training, K-16 partnerships, and technology commercialization in collaboration with public agencies and the corporate community. UMBC is dedicated to cultural and ethnic diversity, social responsibility and lifelong learning.

### Common Ground

UMBC's mission creates common ground for learning across the curriculum. Our institutional-level learning outcomes, the Functional Competencies (FCs), express the mission in cognitive skills that students need to contribute to

society: Oral & Written Communication, Scientific & Quantitative Reasoning, Critical Analysis & Reasoning, Technological Competence, and Information Literacy. Curriculum mapping helps us visualize where and how students demonstrate the FCs.



Each level of learning outcomes nests within the level above: at the higher levels, outcomes are general, transferable skills; at the lower levels, outcomes are specific, discipline-focused iterations of these skills. The arrows denote the collaborative flow of data and applications.

# Embedding Assessment in General Education Course Review



Many general education courses ask students to work in groups to critically analyze problems—direct measures help faculty assess how well collaboration helps students learn this institutional competency.

## Building Continuity

At UMBC, we have closed the loop on our assessment processes by embedding *continuity mechanisms* into the General Education Course Approval Process. All General Education courses align to one or more of UMBC’s Functional Competencies, and faculty assess student learning in these areas with direct measures. First-Year Seminars, like FYS 102 (see rubric detail below),

are part of General Education. Faculty who teach these classes ...

- Align their courses to one or more of the UMBC Functional Competencies;
- Create direct measures to assess student learning in these competencies; and
- Report student learning results in the Biennial Report and Academic Program Review.

## Creating Connections

The General Education Committee integrates the results using *narrative aggregation* to identify shared learning challenges and interventions across the university. Program chairs connect the results to their other courses in Academic Program Review to identify program-level interventions. Deans use *narrative aggregation* to synthesize student learning in their colleges and present the results to the Provost and Assessment Committee. The results flow back to programs as deans report to chairs and chairs to faculty.

## Glossary

- The *Assessment Cycle* has four parts: setting *student learning outcomes* (measurable goals), *offering learning opportunities*, *measuring* (direct and indirect), and *closing the loop*, applying the results to improve learning.
- *Direct Measures*, like rubrics, tests, and minute papers, look directly at demonstrations of student learning and often rely on subject-matter expertise.
- *Indirect Measures*, like student surveys and grades, look at factors related to learning.
- *Continuity Mechanisms* embed assessment work in everyday processes.
- *Curriculum Mapping* aligns outcomes, maps outcomes to learning opportunities, and illustrates how programs scaffold student learning.
- *Narrative Aggregation* gathers assessment data into cohesive views of student learning.

## Detail from a First-Year Seminar Rubric

FYS 102 Rubric Detail	Novice	Competent	Proficient	Exemplary
<b>Relationships at Service Site</b> <i>FYS 102 Course SLO 2</i> <i>Program SLO 3</i> <i>Institutional FC 3</i>	Does not describe relationships built at service site	Describes relationships at service site superficially	Describes relationships at service site in depth and with breadth	Describes relationships at service site in depth and with breadth, and discusses how these relationships impacted you personally and how they impacted the site's mission

The General Education program requires explicit outcome alignment between course and institutional outcomes, direct measures, and the resulting data. First-Year Seminars (FYS), like Vickie Williams’ FYS 102, help students gain foundational skills in the institutional outcomes. As the rubric detail shows, students must demonstrate critical reasoning skills in this essay assignment. Since the rubric aligns the assignment to course outcomes, course to program outcomes, and program to institutional outcomes, Dr. Williams can apply the results to the assignment and course. Since the rubric builds common ground between FYS 102 and other classes, the data can be aggregated with results from other courses for views of program- and institutional-level learning. For example, Dr. Williams can discuss her results with colleagues at the FYS Faculty Luncheon, a continuity mechanism that supports faculty collaboration on improving student learning. Additionally, Dr. Williams can discuss ideas for closing the loop in her courses at a Faculty Development Center Closing-the-Loop session, a continuity mechanism designed to foster cross-disciplinary discussion of student learning. Meanwhile, FYS and General Education leaders can aggregate collective course data to build comprehensive views of student learning at the program and institutional levels and close the loop by identifying interventions to improve student learning.

# Identifying and Creating Continuity Mechanisms

## A Think, Pair, Share Activity

*Let's work together to begin to identify continuity mechanisms to help your institution enhance continuity across programs and assessment cycles. What processes already exist? How can professional development offer support?*

**Instructions:** First, use this worksheet to *think* about how your institution creates continuity across assessment cycles and programs. *Pair* with a participant or participants nearby. *Share* your ideas with one another. Synthesize your discussion to *share* with the whole group as time allows. Simply identifying processes and programs already in place can help your institution move from implicit to explicit assessment support. Then you can work on embedding assessment work in key processes and programs and crafting intersections where faculty can discuss results and closing-the-loop interventions.

### Processes

*Can you identify or create continuity mechanisms for your institution?* UMBC embeds assessment work in key institutional processes, like those listed below. Choose from UMBC examples below (or add your own) and comment on how you could embed continuity mechanisms in processes at your school.

- Strategic Planning
- Academic Program Review
- General Education Course Review
- Biennial Assessment Reporting and Narrative Aggregation
- Closing-the-Loop Reports
- Middle States Self-Study Work
- Council of Deans and Directors Meetings
- College-Level Assessment Meetings, Program Meetings, and other faculty meetings
- Other ideas?

### Professional Development

*How can your institution enhance common ground and collaboration through professional development?*

At UMBC, we have found it effective to formally and informally link professional development support to processes. Additionally, our Faculty Development Center offers consultations and programs to build faculty expertise in assessment. Choose from UMBC examples below (or add your own) and comment on how professional development could enhance assessment continuity at your school.

- The Provost's Teaching & Learning Symposium
- Assessment Days (division or college wide presentations of results)
- Programs & Workshops
- Individual Consultations on Course-Level Assessment
- Facilitated Program-Level Assessment Planning and Curriculum Mapping
- Closing-the-Loop Programs
- Additional professional development staff
- Other ideas?