

**GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY  
MASON CORE ASSESSMENT REPORT:  
MASON KOREA ACADEMIC YEAR 2015**

The Mason Core (formerly General Education) program at George Mason University organizes courses of study into three main areas. *Foundation* courses build knowledge and skills to promote success in the major and in future pursuits; *core* courses introduce students to a breadth of subject matter and intellectual traditions; and *synthesis* courses encourage the integration of past learning and experiences, the development of critical thinking skills, and preparation for lifelong learning. Student learning outcomes for the Mason Core areas are created and assessed by faculty, primarily through the University Mason Core Committee. Results of assessment activities are reported to the faculty, the Mason community, and the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) by the Office of Institutional Assessment.

### **Mason Korea**

This is a report for courses taught at Mason Korea, located at the Incheon Global Campus in Songdo, South Korea. The assessment provides information about ten Mason Core courses that were taught by Mason faculty during the fall 2014 and spring 2015 semesters.

### **Data Collection and Assessment Process**

The assessment of the Mason Core courses at Mason Korea was conducted in summer 2015. Ten Mason Core courses were selected for assessment (see Appendix). These ten courses represented six Mason Core areas: Oral Communication, Written Communication (lower division), Literature, Quantitative Reasoning, Social & Behavioral Sciences, and Arts. All courses were taught by Mason faculty members in their respective disciplines.

An information session was conducted for faculty members at the Mason Korea faculty orientation in August 2014 and January 2015, followed by individual consultations by request. Each faculty member was asked to create a course portfolio that consisted of a summary sheet, course syllabus, selected course assignments, a course map, samples of student work, and a narrative essay. The portfolios were due at the end of the semester, and were submitted via Blackboard.

Portfolio reviews were conducted in August 2015. Reviewers were members of the University Mason Core Committee and subject matter faculty who participated in a training session that covered the review process and criteria. Reviewers entered ratings and text on a paper review form. Each portfolio received two sets of ratings.

- Total portfolios collected: **10** portfolios representing **10** courses
- Total number of students enrolled: **234** (sum of all 10 courses includes duplicated enrollment across courses)
- Total student work samples reviewed: **62 work samples and 1 set of exam scores**
- Total reviewers: **5**

The course portfolio review focused on how well each course addressed the respective Mason Core student learning outcomes (see Appendix for full listing of outcomes) through course instruction, assignments/activities, and samples of student work. Portfolios were assessed on how well the faculty member articulated the learning outcomes, the congruence of the learning outcomes with the course content, the appropriateness of the course material for the Mason Core curriculum, and the appropriateness of the assignments or forms of assessment in relation to the learning outcomes. In addition, raters assessed to what extent the course introduced, reinforced, or emphasized the associated learning outcomes. Finally, student work samples were assessed to determine student proficiency in the learning outcomes.

## Results

Because there were ten courses representing six different Mason Core categories, it is not possible to compare courses within each category, as is usually done in the Mason Core course portfolio assessment process. Additionally, because of the small student population, many students were enrolled in multiple Mason Core courses, presenting both challenge and opportunity to the understanding of student learning. In consideration of this unique circumstance, reviewers agreed to a holistic approach to the assessment, emphasizing qualitative elements in order to contribute to course and faculty development in this new arena. Results of the review have been aggregated across the Mason Core categories in Table 1 and split by Mason Core Category in Table 2.

Table 1 displays the frequencies for each item on the assessment rubric. As each course was reviewed twice, the total for each item sums to 20. While each pair of reviewers for each course did not come to consensus for every item, the ratings were not sufficiently divergent to require a third review. For instance, in cases in which one reviewer rated a course as “outstanding,” the second reviewer rated the course as “good.” The average rating for each item is displayed in column 6 of the table. Ratings of “not enough information” were excluded from the average ratings.

**Table 1:** Overall Course Ratings

	<b>Outstanding</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Fair</b>	<b>Poor</b>	<b>Not enough info</b>	<b>Average Rating</b>
Articulation of the Mason Core learning outcomes for students	7	5	2	5	1	<b>2.74</b>
Congruence of the Mason Core learning outcomes with the course content and goals	6	5	4	1	4	<b>3.00</b>
Appropriateness of course material for the Mason Core curriculum	7	9	2	0	2	<b>3.28</b>
Course structures and procedures that contribute to the likely achievement of the Mason Core outcomes by students	7	5	4	1	3	<b>3.06</b>
Appropriateness of the assignments or forms of assessment, in relation to the Mason Core learning outcomes	7	6	3	2	2	<b>3.00</b>
Overall effectiveness of the course in addressing Mason Core learning outcomes	7	4	4	2	3	<b>2.94</b>

Overall, most courses were rated as either “outstanding” or “good,” but there were a few lower ratings. The main issue of concern in these ratings was with the articulation of Mason Core student learning outcomes; reviewers noted that they would like to see a “more robust” syllabus for the courses generally speaking, including identification for students of how the Mason Core learning outcomes are being addressed in the course. Reviewers rated the courses highest overall for appropriateness of assignments for the Mason Core curriculum (3.28 average out of 4.00), and the course having structures and procedures that contribute to the achievement of the SLOs (3.06 average).

Table 2 displays the average course rating in each category by Mason Core category. The averages were taken across raters and courses in each category. Two categories contained only one course (Literature and Arts, respectively) while the rest of the categories represent two courses (Quantitative Reasoning, Social & Behavioral Sciences, Written Communication, and Oral Communication). Ratings of “not enough information” were excluded from the averages. When comparing course ratings across Mason Core categories, the results indicate that Written Communication, Literature, and Oral Communication were the highest rated Core areas. In general, all of the categories were rated

highly on the appropriateness of course material for the Mason Core curriculum. Generally, the courses across disciplines were also rated highly regarding the appropriateness of course materials for the Mason Core curriculum.

**Table 2:** Average Course Ratings by Mason Core Category

	<b>Overall</b>	Social & Behavioral Sciences	Written Comm.	Literature	Oral Comm.	Quantitative Reasoning	Arts
Articulation of the Mason Core learning outcomes for students	<b>2.74</b>	1.75	3.00	4.0	3.50	1.67	3.00
Congruence of the Mason Core learning outcomes with the course content and goals	<b>3.00</b>	3.00	3.00	4.0	3.67	1.67	3.00
Appropriateness of course material for the Mason Core curriculum	<b>3.28</b>	3.33	3.50	4.0	3.50	2.33	3.00
Course structures and procedures that contribute to the likely achievement of the Mason Core outcomes by students	<b>3.06</b>	2.33	3.50	4.0	3.25	2.00	3.00
Appropriateness of the assignments or forms of assessment, in relation to the Mason Core learning outcomes	<b>3.00</b>	2.00	3.50	4.0	3.50	2.00	3.00
Overall effectiveness of the course in addressing Mason Core learning outcomes	<b>2.94</b>	2.25	3.67	4.0	3.25	2.00	2.50

Scale: "outstanding" = 4; "good" = 3; "fair" = 2; "poor" = 1  
Based on average of two or more ratings

### ***Ratings of Learning Outcomes: Introduction, Reinforcement, and Emphasis***

Reviewers were also asked to rate whether each of the specific learning outcomes was introduced, reinforced, or emphasized in each course. Reviewers were also given the option to select that the course does not address the learning outcome or that there was not enough information provided to assess. Table 3 provides the results of these items by Mason Core category. The percentages represent the proportion of ratings that indicated the course "introduced" or "reinforced" the outcome. Given that the courses are introductory courses, the courses did not receive any ratings of "emphasizing" the outcomes. The full list of outcomes is provided in the appendix, as each set of outcomes is unique to the Mason Core category. The ratings of "not enough information" were excluded when calculating percentages. Overall, results show that the majority of the courses at least "introduced" or "reinforced" all of the appropriate learning outcomes.

**Table 3:** Percentage of Ratings “Introduced” or “Reinforced” the Learning Outcomes

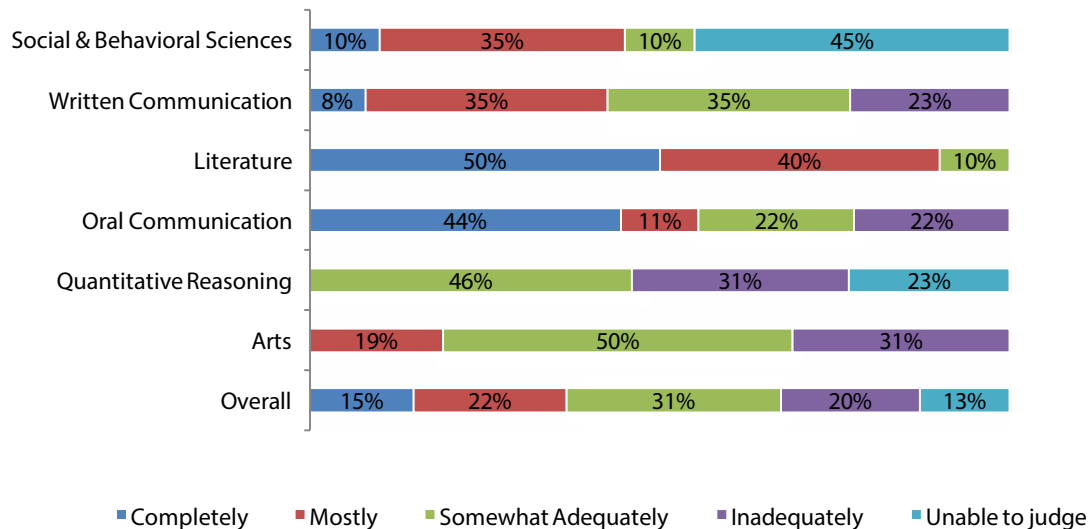
	Social & Behavioral Sciences	Written Communication	Literature	Oral Communication	Quantitative Reasoning	Arts
Learning Outcome 1	100%	100%	100%	75%	66.7%	100%
Learning Outcome 2	66.7%	100%	100%	75%	100%	100%
Learning Outcome 3	100%	100%	100%	75%	100%	100%
Learning Outcome 4	N/A	100%	100%	100%	100%	50%
Learning Outcome 5	N/A	N/A	N/A	100%	N/A	0%*

\*The two ratings for this outcome were “not enough information” and “does not address”

### Ratings of Student Work

Faculty were asked to submit work samples from assignments that allowed students to best demonstrate their proficiency on one or more of the student learning outcomes. Students were randomly selected from the enrollment lists for this purpose. Reviewers rated the extent to which each of the work samples manifested the intended outcomes on a four-point scale (“completely”, “mostly”, “somewhat adequately”, or “inadequately”). A sum of 62 individual samples were submitted, plus one report of exam scores, for a total of 63 ratings of student work. Figure 1 illustrates these ratings across all of the work samples submitted. Because of the small numbers of courses in this report and in each category, care must be taken in using the numbers to understand student performance altogether. The ratings of the courses in the Literature and Oral Communication categories were most positive, with 90% and 55% (respectively) of student work samples rated as “completely” or “mostly” proficient on the student learning outcomes. Overall, 68% of submitted student work samples were rated as adequately proficient in student learning outcomes.

**Figure 1.** Faculty Ratings of Student Work Samples, by Mason Core Category



N=62 work samples

## Summary of Faculty Narratives

A key component of the course portfolio is the narrative, in which faculty are asked to discuss their experiences in the course in regard to the student learning outcomes, student learning in the course, unexpected findings, and assessment of learning outcomes. Mason Korea faculty were asked to consider the nature of their experience at Mason Korea, and how their instructional approach did or did not differ from their previous experiences at Mason. The narrative also addressed the course context, challenges or issues, experimentation or changes that faculty implemented, and the results of those changes.

In general, the faculty members reported that they were pleased with students' academic growth and learning during the courses. In addition, the narratives revealed that students are still coming to terms with the expectations and requirements of college-level course work (in particular, reading and writing requirements) but improved in several areas during the courses (e.g., comfort speaking in front of others and adjusting to interactive learning as opposed to lecture format). In addition, instructors of the quantitative courses were generally pleased with the mathematics knowledge and abilities of the students.

Faculty across disciplines faced a few common challenges working with students at Mason Korea. Faculty reported that students' oral comprehension of English was generally very good. However, some students still struggled with English writing and reading comprehension. Several faculty reported that students were not prepared for analytical writing and not aware of the correct tone to use or how to structure an essay (e.g., using topic sentences). One professor expressed concern that some students will struggle with reading and writing during their semesters at the Fairfax campus. Faculty responded to student weaknesses in writing/reading by providing detailed feedback on written assignments, having students work in groups to summarize readings, and suggesting language support courses/tutors.

A few instructors also noted that there were some issues with student engagement in the classroom. For example, student absences in some courses became a common issue towards the end of the semester. Professors indicated that they planned to require attendance or include a grade for class participation in future semesters. In addition, faculty members noticed that students were often hesitant to speak in front of the class. Faculty members believed that this had to do with the expectations and norms regarding the classroom in Korea. Faculty noticed that there were norms of "rules-based memorization" and "cramming" for exams rather than actively participating and continuously reading and learning throughout the semester. Most of the professors echoed this experience, stating that students were hesitant to participate and speak in front of fellow classmates. Some professors suggested that this was because students were non-native English speakers. Professors worked to create a psychologically safe environment for students to speak in class (e.g., by encouraging them to speak regarding informal topics such as their favorite television programs and by providing them with time to first prepare their answers before presenting). In addition, professors integrated "real world" examples and current events to keep students engaged and help them to realize the importance and relevance of the topic to their lives and/or academic major. With these efforts, professors noted that students had progressed into more enthusiastic and participatory learners by the end of the semester.

A difference between the Fairfax and Korea campuses that instructors noted was that there was more variance in the abilities of the Mason Korea students compared to those at the Fairfax campus. Mason Korea faculty indicated that there were some very high performing students but there were also some very low performing students and they had to tailor the course to meet the needs of both types of students. Instructors attempted to narrow the gap by giving students team projects, providing the lower-achieving students with more individualized attention, and providing detailed feedback. In addition, one instructor provided different options of texts for the students to write about in order to intellectually engage students at all levels. One professor also instituted both peer and instructor reviews so that students could learn from one another.

The faculty comments included some ideas for future course improvements. Many instructors are contemplating instituting some sort of attendance policy and/or awarding points for active class participation. Almost all of the faculty members commented on the need for continual feedback and individual attention. Faculty also noted that relating their courses to "real-world" or management settings (for those who are pre-business majors) is an effective

method to engage students in the Mason Core outcomes and that they would continue to do this to a greater extent in future semesters. Finally, a few instructors noted that they would plan to leave more flexibility in the schedule to adjust based on the knowledge and ability level of the students.

### **Summary of Reviewers' Comments**

Reviewers were given an opportunity to comment on features of the courses and provide recommendations. This section provides a summary of the reviewers' comments.

Overall, the reviewers praised the courses for being well-designed and noted that the professors provided clear instructions regarding expectations, grading, and assignments. Reviewers also were impressed with the use of self, peer, and instructor feedback to build student self-awareness and growth. For example, one reviewer thought that providing feedback on low stakes tasks was a useful way to build self-awareness and understanding regarding expectations for future assignments. Some reviewers thought that the variety of assignments and individual and interactive work was an excellent way to address and reinforce the SLOs in different ways (e.g., group presentations, scholarly readings, and focus on reading responses). One reviewer commended a professor's recognition of culture and readiness to adapt to cultural differences in the course.

Generally, the courses were strongly tied to SLOs. However, for some courses, reviewers noted that some SLOs were emphasized to a greater degree than others. Reviewers provided suggestions to incorporate these SLOs into the syllabus and explicitly link them to assignments. Minor changes could easily strengthen courses to improve the links to SLOs. A few reviewers also noted general areas for improvement regarding students' English written communication (such as teaching students to identify appropriate sources, summarize/paraphrase these sources, and communicate results in an appropriate way) and these areas could certainly be addressed in assignments across disciplines.

### **Follow-Up Actions**

This report will be shared with participating faculty, course coordinators, and the Mason Korea Institutional Effectiveness Committee to address the issues and concerns that were revealed in the assessment process. Course development resources will be made available to support faculty in their efforts to better align their courses with the Mason Core outcomes. Exemplars will be made available to participating faculty with faculty consent.

## APPENDIX

### Mason Core Courses Assessed from Mason Korea in Fall 2014 and Spring 2015

<b>Course</b>	<b>Mason Core Category</b>	<b>Semester</b>
SOM 100: Business in American Society	Social & Behavioral Sciences	Spring 2015
ECON 104: Macroeconomic Principles	Social & Behavioral Sciences	Spring 2015
ENGH 100: Composition for Nonnative Speakers	Written Communication	Fall 2014 & Spring 2015
ENGH 201: Reading and Writing about Texts	Literature	Fall 2014
COMM 100: Public Speaking	Oral Communication	Fall 2014 & Spring 2015
MATH 108: Intro Calc: Business Applications	Quantitative Reasoning	Fall 2014
MATH 113: Analytic Geometry/Calculus I	Quantitative Reasoning	Spring 2015
MUSI 102: Popular Music in America	Arts	Spring 2015

## Mason Core Student Learning Outcomes, by Category

### Quantitative Reasoning

The quantitative reasoning learning outcomes are:

1. Students are able to interpret quantitative information (i.e., formulas, graphs, tables, models, and schematics) and draw inferences from them.
2. Given a quantitative problem, students are able to formulate the problem quantitatively and use appropriate arithmetical, algebraic, and/or statistical methods to solve the problem.
3. Students are able to evaluate logical arguments using quantitative reasoning.
4. Students are able to communicate and present quantitative results effectively.

### Social & Behavioral Sciences

The following three learning outcomes are required goals of disciplinary or interdisciplinary courses:

1. Explain how individuals, groups or institutions are influenced by contextual factors;
2. Demonstrate awareness of changes in social and cultural constructs;
3. Use appropriate methods and resources to apply social and behavioral science concepts, terminology, principles and theories in the analysis of significant human issues, past or present.

### Written Communication

Following are the overall learning outcomes for lower division Written Communication. For more detail, please see <http://composition.gmu.edu/learning-goals-100-101>.

1. Students improve their ability to write in a recursive process that includes exploration, reflection, invention, inquiry, organization, drafting, revision, peer review, and editing
2. Students demonstrate their ability to analyze and meet the needs of a range of rhetorical situations: they increase their awareness of the expectations of US academic audiences, and develop strategies for anticipating and using audience feedback as they draft, revise, and edit
3. Students gain emerging college-level proficiency in critically reading and in writing nonfiction texts in a range of genres, including (but not limited to) exposition, argumentation, and research-supported writing
4. Students understand the basic principles of and can employ strategies for conducting college-level research, for evaluating sources and for incorporating other voices into their writing

### Oral Communication

Oral communication competency at George Mason University is defined as the ability to use oral communication as a way of thinking and learning as well as sharing ideas with others. The Mason Core program identifies numerous learning goals in oral communication which are addressed specifically in two Communication courses, COMM 100, Public Speaking, and COMM 101, Interpersonal and Group Interaction. Upon completion of these courses, students will be able to:

1. Students will demonstrate understanding of and proficiency in constructing and delivering multiple message types.
2. Students will understand and practice effective elements of ethical verbal and nonverbal communication.
3. Students will develop analytical skills and critical listening skills.
4. Students will understand the influence of culture in communication and will know how to cope with cultural differences when presenting information to an audience. Students develop the ability to use oral communication as a way of thinking and learning, as well as sharing ideas.



## **Arts**

Students who successfully complete a course in the Arts category must meet the first learning outcome and a minimum of two of the remaining four learning outcomes:

1. Demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between artistic process, and a work's underlying concept, and where appropriate, contexts associated with the work.
2. Identify and analyze the formal elements of a particular art form using vocabulary and critique appropriate to that form.
3. Analyze cultural productions using standards appropriate to the form, as well as the works cultural significance and context.
4. Analyze and interpret the content of material or performance culture through its social, historical, and personal contexts.
5. Engage in generative artistic processes, including conception, creation, and ongoing critical analysis.

## **Literature**

The literature learning outcomes are:

1. Students will be able to read for comprehension, detail, and nuance.
2. Identify the specific literary qualities of language as employed in the texts they read.
3. Analyze the ways specific literary devices contribute to the meaning of a text.
4. Identify and evaluate the contribution of the social, political, historical, and cultural contexts in which a literary text is produced.
5. Evaluate a critical argument in others' writing as well as one's own.