VALUE Rubrics: Valuable Tools for Improving Teaching and Learning

Part 2: VALUE Rubrics and the Texas Core Objectives

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This project focuses on the use of VALUE Rubrics as a pedagogical tool. Part 1 in this series broadly introduced VALUE Rubrics, other components of the LEAP Project, and the contexts in which they were developed and are being used. This paper (Part 2) provides insight regarding how these rubrics can be understood and operationalized to support learning and the assessment of student learning in the inclusively-defined classroom.

Mapping the LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes, Texas Core Objectives, and VALUE Rubrics

The American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) VALUE Rubrics were developed to align with the LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes (ELOs) and to be used as tools to assess characteristics or criteria of learning for the ELOs. National ELOs informed the development of the Texas Core Objectives and the Texas Core Curriculum. The Core Objectives represent six 21st century skills that students graduating from Texas colleges and universities should have gained (critical thinking skills, communication skills, empirical and quantitative skills, teamwork, social responsibility, and personal responsibility).

While the VALUE Rubrics can be used to establish benchmarks and identify how students have achieved different levels of competency in the measured objectives, they can also be used by faculty and co-curricular staff in student activities to create strategy for increasing student learning. Table 1 shows how the VALUE Rubrics and the Core Objectives map onto one another.

Table 1 – Texas Core Objectives (THECB) and Associated VALUE Rubrics (AAC&U)

Texas Core Objectives	Associated VALUE Rubrics
1. Critical thinking skills	1. Critical thinking
2. Communication skills	2. Written communication
	3. Oral communication
3. Empirical and quantitative skills	4. Quantitative literacy
4. Teamwork	5. Teamwork
5. Social Responsibility	6. Civic engagement – local and global
	7. Intercultural knowledge and competence
6. Personal Responsibility	8. Ethical reasoning

Other VALUE Rubrics (there are sixteen total) offer additional dimensions of learning outside of and connected to the Texas Core Objectives. In the same way that student learning outcomes must be agreed upon before curriculum is formed or assignments are created, using the Core Objectives and their associated VALUE Rubrics as foundational goals of learning can effectively guide curriculum development.

As educators and administrators work to operationalize the Core Objectives and the Texas Core Curriculum, they are confronted with two key questions.

1) How are Core Objectives and disciplinary knowledge engaged in the classroom?

2) How can the VALUE Rubrics be used towards better teaching and better learning?

Using VALUE Rubrics to Align Content Knowledge Acquisition with the Core Objective Development

The Texas Core Curriculum ensures the Foundational Component Areas (communication; mathematics; life and physical sciences; language, philosophy, and culture; creative arts; American history; government/political science; social and behavioral sciences; and the component area option) are part of the requisite body of knowledge for students in higher education. The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board has offered a key document, "Table of Foundational Component Areas" that indicates which Core Objectives are required to be addressed in each Foundational Component Area. Each faculty member or curriculum committee begins planning each course in the Core Curriculum with disciplinary goals and specific core objectives.

As an example, the Foundational Component Area of American History should address the following Core Objectives: critical thinking skills, communication skills, social responsibility, and personal responsibility. Building on both disciplinary student learning outcomes and Core Objectives helps educators create classroom opportunities that meet the requirements of both their discipline and the state's charge that students should learn 21st century skills. What follows are two examples of how the responsibilities of the discipline and Core Objectives can be synthesized.

Example #1: The Written Communication VALUE Rubric is composed of five performance criteria, the second of which is Content Development. The language within the rubric that communicates the

highest level of performance in Content Development is a follows: "Uses appropriate, relevant, and compelling content to illustrate **mastery of the subject** [emphasis added], conveying the writer's understanding, and shaping of the whole work."   The highest level of Content Development necessitates that student can appropriately communicate but includes a caveat of subject mastery. In this instance, pushing students towards mastery of a Core Objective will actually lead them to content mastery.

Example #2: If a learning outcome for an American history course is that students are able to explain how Native American and First Nations cultures affected the United States' westward expansion and notions of Manifest Destiny, faculty could employ the Intercultural Knowledge and Competence VALUE Rubric and its six performance criteria, including Knowledge of Cultural Worldview Frameworks. The highest level of performance in the criteria of Knowledge of Cultural Worldview Frameworks suggests that a student "Demonstrates sophisticated understanding of the complexity of elements important to members of another culture in relation to history, values, politics, communication styles, economy, or beliefs and practices." In this example, it is the learning outcome that prescribes the appropriate VALUE Rubric.

The VALUE Rubrics do not negate content knowledge. The AAC&U respects that content will be dictated by discipline experts. The rubrics do, however, provide broad expectations for knowledge acquisition, 2) provide language describing four levels of student achievement, and most importantly, 3) link knowledge acquisition and skill/responsibility development. Students do not acquire knowledge separate from their development of skills. Pedagogical practices must therefore follow suit.

Analyzing VALUE Rubrics for Pedagogical Cues

While commonly considered an assessment tool, each VALUE Rubric is a two page document that provides information pertinent to the entire teaching-learning process. Page 1 provides a definition of the learning outcome, framing language, and a glossary. Page 2 is the rubric itself. Both pages relate to numerous pedagogical suggestions. The following is a brief pedagogical analysis of each of the items that comprise the VALUE Rubric for Written Communication (posted with all other VALUE Rubrics). This rubric was chosen because it is a component of one of the Core Objectives – Communication Skills, which is, in turn, mapped to all nine Foundational Component Areas. Furthermore, since writing samples are a common artifact used to assess student learning relative to other core objectives, a student's written communication skill, or lack thereof, is a critical factor in determining that student's ability to demonstrate learning in other core areas. The analysis of each section of the Written Communication VALUE Rubric continues below.

The VALUE Rubric's Definition of Written Communication

Written communication is a broad skill that develops iteratively through experiences across the curriculum. This definition infers that students use multiple and diverse experiences to mature as writers. While a single course cannot provide experiences in every genre or style, a course can provide one or more experiences that contribute to student development in writing. Even if written communication is not a major focus of a particular course, providing an opportunity for students to

practice writing within the context and conventions of a specific discipline and providing formative feedback contributes to student success.

The definition portion of the VALUE Rubric can be used to identify how the outcome connected to the rubric can contribute to course goals. Though skills can be inter-disciplinary, proper definitions can help pedagogues consider ways that skill acquisition can contribute to discipline-related goals.

The VALUE Rubric's <u>Framing Language</u> for Written Communication

The AAC&U's VALUE Rubric for Written Communication is adaptable to a variety of disciplines. The framing language clarifies the rubric's definition for written communication but encourages faculty to tailor their pedagogy to their course content and campus context. The rubric is designed to review several dimensions of written communication, such as the ability of a writer to meet the needs of the audience.

The framing language of each rubric helps teachers recognize how the rubric would best align with their assignments and learning goals.

The VALUE Rubric's <u>Glossary</u> for Written Communication

This glossary provides definitions specific to this rubric. The terms defined here are all related to the five performance criteria that comprise the rubric. The glossary defines for the student, the faculty member, and the evaluator the key things that writers are expected to demonstrate: content development, context and purpose, disciplinary convention, genre convention, evidence, and sources. Common language and definitions promote the teaching-learning process for students and faculty

The glossary also provides information for "teachable moments" where students and teachers can work together towards integrated understanding of an assignment and its associated outcomes.

The VALUE Rubric <u>Matrix</u> for Written Communication

The VALUE Rubric for Written Communication uses action words to describe the Benchmark, Milestone, and Capstone levels of each dimension. This language choice helps faculty employ active learning strategies to encourage practice and helps students recognize the actionable goals of the proposed assignment.

The language within the rubric also references discipline and genre. As an example, the Capstone level of achievement for the performance criterion Sources and Evidence reads: "Demonstrates skillful use of high quality, credible, relevant sources to develop ideas that are ***appropriate for the discipline and genre*** [emphasis added] of the writing." The VALUE Rubrics recognize the important connection between the content areas and the core objectives.

The matrix of the VALUE Rubrics can be used *a priori* in assignment creation, formatively as a tool for student to critique classwork, and summatively as a final assessment tool. The language of the matrix

shows progression of skills and abilities and uses action items where students demonstrate their learning.

Conclusion

The VALUE Rubrics map both the Essential Learning Outcomes and the Texas Core Objectives. The rubrics can be used across disciplines to operationalize a shared language of 21st century skills. The rubrics (definition, framing language, glossary, and matrix) can be used individually or collectively to engage in both discipline-specific and skill-specific teacher-student conversations.

What's next?

In Part 3, this series will focus on using the VALUE Rubrics to guide the design of assignments that provide students the opportunity to develop and demonstrate learning relative to the Texas Core Curriculum.

Resources

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