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ACCELERATE principles in action: A community college case study

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Intersection: A Journal at the Intersection of Assessment and Learning
Early View

Abstract: The ACCELERATE Principles for Best Practice offer a framework to guide the practices used by all engaged in assessment work (Samuga_Gyaanam+Bheda et al., 2025). This case study is a closer look into how the principles manifest in a community college setting. An analysis of existing strategies that reflect the principles was conducted to help illustrate the applicability of the principles and indicate when, where, and how the principles appear across the College’s assessment work. What started as a simple question of “How do we know?”, in the early years, has led to a robust assessment system with custom rubrics, assessment management software, tools that align curriculum across multiple outcomes, professional development for new faculty, and hundreds of learning improvement stories. Using the lens of the ACCELERATE principles to analyze practices was a successful exercise to evaluate strengths of practices as well as opportunities for improvement.

Keywords: *assessment, general education, community college, ACCELERATE, learning improvement, program outcomes*

Introduction

Assessment as a field of inquiry has expanded over the past decades and the role of assessment practitioners, those responsible for coordinating and leading assessment, has grown in both breadth and depth (Jankowski & Slotnick, 2015). Increased pressures internally and externally can add to the already challenging task of providing evidence that the college is engaging learners in valuable experiences and students are learning at levels befitting the investment in higher education. As open access institutions, community colleges play a vital role in bridging higher educational attainment gaps. In “Resilient by Design: The Future of America’s Community Colleges” (2025), community colleges were referred to as “the indispensable architects of access, fairness, and resilience” with a historical record of helping “individuals from all backgrounds to improve their circumstances, and in the process, uplift their communities” (p. 3). The stakes are high and colleges must find a way forward that allows them to generate high quality affordable educational opportunities that secure their vitality while optimizing resources. “This reality will require innovative ways to measure success and new and better data and metrics that are published and accessible” (Resilient by Design, 2025, p. 31) to demonstrate the impact they have on their communities. While access and completion remain a focus, the conversation has moved beyond these themes to post college success (Mugglestone et al., 2025). This shift signifies community colleges need to think carefully about the extent to which work force programs lead to livable wages and to which pathways lead to successful transfer and bachelor degree completion (Mugglestone et al., 2025). In this dynamic and demanding context, college leaders, assessment

practitioners and all those involved in improving learning need a befitting framework to guide the work.

The recently published ACCELERATE Principles for Best Practice offer guidance and tips that can be used to “improve, innovate, and excel” in the opportunities of assessment (Samuga_Gyaanam+Bheda et al., 2025). In their position statement, Samuga_Gyaanam+Bheda, et al., (2025) outlined statements of explanation, questions to evaluate if the principle is present in assessment work, and the reasoning or “why” the principle is necessary. After reading the position statement, assessment practitioners may wonder how the principles apply to their institution’s assessment work. If a college aspired to embody these principles, what might they do? Samuga_Gyaanam+Bheda et al., (2025) suggest that the principles are intended for active application and “must be integrally woven into every step of the assessment process, from planning through reporting and, most importantly, use” (p. 3). To gain a better understanding of what this might look like, this case study will examine the applicability of the ACCELERATE principles by illustrating when, where, and how the principles appear across the College’s assessment work. Specifically, the study will answer the question: What existing strategies has the college applied that reflect the ACCELERATE principles? The purpose of the case study is not to suggest that the college has figured it all out. Instead, it is an attempt to humbly enter the conversation about what we can learn from each other as practitioners when we openly share about our successes and our struggles and how we might collectively advance assessment knowledge

ACCELERATE Principles in Action at The College

This case study is an attempt to contextualize the ACCELERATE principles and will demonstrate how the principles manifest in an authentic community college setting. Paradise Valley Community College is a Higher Learning Commission (HLC) singularly accredited college part of the large multi-college Maricopa Community College District, located in the Southwest. An analysis of assessment documents and reports from the College were used to determine which principles are most apparent in the College’s work including: Continuously Cultivating, Aligned Purposefully, Enduring and Evolving, and Learning-Centered (Samuga_Gyaanam+Bheda et al., 2025). Specific examples will be used to demonstrate how these four principles are applicable and the ways in which the college can be both guided and challenged by the principles.

Continuously Cultivating

The ACCELERATE principles suggest that assessment be continuously cultivating improvement, therefore assessment needs to be an ongoing process at higher education institutions (Samuga_Gyaanam+Bheda et al., 2025). While accreditation cycles or other policy mandates can prompt renewed efforts, it can be problematic if compliance is the only motivation for participation in assessment work (Kuh, 2015). Sporadic and random assessment initiatives could result in confusion, misalignment, or inconsequential impact. A pattern of start up assessment initiatives may result in increased skepticism about the value of assessment efforts (Kuh, 2015). Colleges may be better served when assessment is seen as a permanently ongoing effort and the cyclical nature of improvement is embraced as the norm (Kuh, 2015).

Philosophy and Committee for Continual Improvement

The College has attempted to be ever mindful of using assessment to continually improve. The Assessment for Learning Team (ALT) at the College has archived the history of assessment in a living document called the Assessment Chronicle (Ramírez & Macias, 2025). It dates back to the college's establishment in 1985 and is a record of all major thinking, decisions, and events related to assessment. The document offers valuable insight about how the college's assessment practices reflect the aspirations of the ACCELERATE principles and tracks the relentless pursuit to be a better institution of learning. Assessment leaders have assumed the role of assessment historians to help monitor progress over time and demonstrate that continual improvement requires commitment to long term growth. The Assessment Chronicle mentions a specific instance in the founding years of the college when leaders developed strategic plans around the philosophy of becoming "more learning centered" and determined that "The regular use of assessment results by individuals, departments, divisions, and the College is a significant indicator of being learning-centered because we answer the question, "how do we know?" (Ramírez & Macias, 2025). The College boldly declared assessment to be the "cornerstone" of its learning-centered commitment (Dale, 2007). The recognition by the College that assessment needs to be wide-spread and ongoing along with the explicit documentation of this philosophy in key reports is an indication that the College is actively striving towards the principle of Continuously Cultivating.

Commitment to the regularity of assessment is further evident in the College's decision to form a group tasked with championing assessment and developing specific assessment processes and tools. The College formed an assessment committee and for the past twenty-eight years an active team of faculty, staff, and administrative leaders have championed assessment and ensured that it remains a permanent focus for the college (Ramírez & Macias, 2025). According to the College, "The Assessment for Learning Team (ALT) strives to make assessment a sustainable collaborative process that clarifies learning expectations, promotes meaningful dialogue and transparency, uses evidence to improve learning, and facilitates organizational change" (Paradise Valley Community College, n.d.). Sustaining a dedicated group focused on making assessment meaningful in the long-term has helped the college avoid the mistake of making assessment important only during accreditation reporting years. Garnering attention and sustaining enthusiasm to participate in assessment takes constant effort and the Assessment for Learning Team (ALT) has led the charge to inspire learning improvement. The team maintains a committee charter that "outlines the college's adopted assessment theories, processes, cycles, and practices" (Paradise Valley Community College, n.d.). ALT also publishes the Learning to Assess Newsletter to communicate about assessment news, results, and continuous improvement initiatives (Paradise Valley Community College, n.d.). Additionally, the team offers regular professional development opportunities to engage faculty and staff in conversations about improving learning (Ramírez & Macias, 2025).

Faculty Development

New full-time faculty at the college are required to participate in a Peer Assisted Review (PAR) process, which includes a first-year experience to help with onboarding (Ramírez & Macias, 2025). The assessment team collaborates with a faculty developer to provide an immersive year-long assessment professional development program (Ramírez & Macias, 2025). Faculty learn about the college's approach to measuring student learning outcomes, methods for designing an assessment project, and

how to document their efforts in both the college’s system and their Individual Development Plan (IDP) for the peer review process (Ramírez & Macias, 2025). The team has had success with the tailored training specifically for first-year full-time faculty and participation in meaningful assessment work remains high for faculty who complete the first year experience (Ramírez & Macias, 2025). Reaching new faculty early to establish assessment as part of professional practice is vital to ensuring that meaningful, substantive changes are regularly made to improve learning in courses and programs across the institution.

Table1

Objectives and Strategies Related to Continuously Cultivating

Objectives	Strategies
To document the progression of assessment thinking, track improvement to assessment processes over time, and promote commitment to long-term growth.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Assessment Chronicle written by colleges’ assessment historians
To ensure that assessment activities are regularly championed as central to teaching and learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Assessment for Learning Team (ALT) ● Learning to Assess Newsletter
To support faculty in making assessment a professional habit that leads to continual improvement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● First year assessment experience for new faculty hires college-wide ● Continuing education for Dual Enrollment faculty

A more challenging group to reach has been adjunct faculty. Thus far, professional development related to assessment tailored for adjuncts has been sporadic and engagement in assessment by adjuncts tends to be stronger in specific academic departments where leadership has made adjunct inclusive assessment a priority and developed structures to support adjunct assessment work (Ramírez & Macias, 2025). Because a large number of courses are taught by part time faculty members, the college needs to find a consistent method for engaging adjuncts in assessment efforts. One group of adjuncts that the college has started to focus on specifically is Dual Enrollment Faculty. Dual Enrollment offerings are increasing at the college and the assessment team has made it a strategic goal to engage Dual Enrollment faculty in measuring and improving learning related to course learning outcomes (Ramírez & Macias, 2025). The team is still learning how to best connect with high school partners and engage Dual Enrollment faculty. Adapting to the specific teaching and learning context of Dual Enrollment and bridging the “middle space” between complex learning and organizational systems (Duncheon & Relles, 2018) will be a key part of cultivating continuous improvement. The College began offering Continuing Education Units (CEUs) for Dual Enrollment high school faculty who attend workshops hosted by the college related to assessment and learning intervention strategies (Ramírez & Macias, 2025). Integrating Dual Enrollment faculty into the College’s assessment activities

will hopefully expand and sharpen the focus on learning improvement and ultimately success in completing college level coursework and credentials. Table 1 shows a summary of the objectives and strategies applied relating to the principle of Continuously Cultivating.

Aligning Purposefully

Colleges need to be sure that assessment practices align with the institution's values, mission, and strategic goals (Samuga_Gyaanam+Bheda et al., 2025). When assessment practices are consistent with the institutional mission, values, and strategic goals there is likely to be better decision making because the faculty and staff are focused on gathering and using data that will promote improvement in the areas already agreed upon as most important.

Mission and Outcome Alignment

PVCC's mission "...is to educate the whole person and to serve our students and our community by providing learning opportunities that are designed to help them achieve their goals" (Paradise Valley Community College, 2025). One key part of the College's mission statement involves the concept of "whole person", which held special meaning when this iteration of the mission was drafted and was promoted as a means to better engage and support students. Boyer (1987), a noteworthy thinker in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) field, suggested that the objective of higher education is to "...not only prepare students for productive careers but also to enable them to live lives of dignity and purpose" (p. 119). When colleges recognize the "whole person" they may be better positioned to fulfill this objective. In their book, *Teaching the Whole Student*, Schoem, Modey, St. John, and Tatum (2017), defined teaching the whole student as, the "recognition and appreciation for the fact that students (and faculty) bring into the classroom their hearts and spirits just as they bring their minds and intellectual capacities" (p. 2). Learning is more authentic and effective when it incorporates cognitive, social, and emotional facets.

Whole student teaching challenges students to apply content to their personal lives and challenges faculty to create learning environments that promote trust, intellectual curiosity, and supportive relationships (Schoem et al., 2017). Acknowledging the complex and unique lived experiences of students allows for real conversations across the college about necessary improvements to processes (Schoem et al., 2017). In this way whole person/student teaching encourages colleges to remove barriers to student success. "It is crucial that we create a paradigm shift from simply developing students as a commodity to treating students we are assessing as whole humans from the time that they arrive on our campus until the time that they leave" (Schoem et al., 2017, p. 228).

In an attempt to align the "whole person" approach in its mission to assessment practices, the College has included skills and dispositions representative of mind and heart in the institutional learning outcomes and the General Education Assessment (GEA) Rubrics used to measure them. For example, the College developed a Personal Development & Wellness Rubric with eight dimensions related to "Self-Direction", "Goals and Purpose", "Self-Care", "Interpersonal Communication", "Self-Awareness", "Financial Literacy", "Career Planning", and "Student Professionalism" which support both intellectual and affective self-regulation abilities needed for an individual to thrive in college and beyond (Paradise Valley Community College, 2024). The college mission to educate the "whole person" is

operationalized by these and other similar outcomes/dimensions applied across college learning environments.

The alignment between the mission to "educate the whole person" and assessment practices is further evident in the college's long time emphasis of cocurricular assessment (Dale, 2007). The college created a chart shown in Figure 1 that defines curricular, cocurricular, and extracurricular learning experiences at the college and indicates methods of assessment for each (Ramírez & Macias, 2025). The college advocates for both faculty and staff use assessment to improve learning experiences in areas such as student life, career services, honors programs, veteran services, the tutoring center, and the intercultural center (Ramírez & Macias, 2025). A great example of the college's effort to assess learning in both curricular and cocurricular contexts was the development of the "Integrative Learning" dimension of the Civic Engagement Rubric, which asks students to explain "how the activity (cocurricular, service learning, campus resource) and course content or program of study (Field of Interest, Major) are connected and...collectively impact learning, personal growth, or educational goals" (Paradise Valley Community College, 2024). There is a clear connection between the integrative learning dimension, and that which it measures, to the mission of educating the whole person. Integrative learning emphasizes "internal changes, which indicate growth as a confident, lifelong learner" (AAC&U, 2009). The integrative learning dimension prompts college faculty and staff to provide learning opportunities that help students develop holistically in order to reach their goals and by default the type of learning the college hopes will occur as stated in the mission.

Goal Attainment

The other key part of the college mission is "to serve our students and our community by providing learning opportunities that are designed to help them achieve their goals" (Paradise Valley Community College, 2025). Students who attend the college have goals to prepare to enter the workforce and/or to transfer to a university, subsequently the college offers programs that lead to associates degrees, bachelors degrees, and certificates that include either pathways for transferring to university partners or entry into industry specific careers. In order to make assessment valuable in improving programs, assessment design needs to be founded on clear alignment between curricula, including outcomes, and assessment methodologies, including instruments for measuring learning achievement. Described in other terms, we need "backwards design" that consists of first identifying the desired results; second determining the acceptable evidence; third, planning the learning experiences and instruction that will guide students toward generating the evidence to demonstrate "the extent to which the desired results are on the way to being achieved and to what extent they have been achieved" (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). As Suskie (2018) put it simply, "Assessment is deciding what we want our students to learn and making sure they learn it" (p. 2). So, a key question that needs to be answered by the college is what do we want students to be able to know and do as a result of the programs they complete?

Figure 1

Defining Curricular, Cocurricular, and Extracurricular Learning (Ramírez & Macias, 2025)

	Curricular	Cocurricular	Extracurricular
Definition	Curricular learning experiences are required activities offered within academic courses for which summative achievement is reflected on academic transcripts. In curricular class contexts, students gain an understanding of discipline specific theories and concepts, apply methods appropriate to fields of interests, and practice valuable general education skills and a mindset necessary for studies at university level, civic engagement, and professional and personal success.	Co-curricular learning experiences enhance learning and provide opportunities for further exploration, critical thinking, application of academic concepts, personal development, leadership, and/or well-being. Co-curricular learning experiences complement students' curricular work and promote positive connections among their peers and with faculty, student service specialists, program directors, and/or other college professionals. Students may exercise greater levels of self-direction and freedom since they may choose which co-curricular activities to engage in and to what extent they are involved. *The HLC defines cocurricular as "Learning activities, programs and experiences that reinforce the institution's mission and values and complement the formal curriculum."	Extracurricular experiences usually do not have specific learning outcomes. These experiences are often social or entertaining in nature and are meant to provide a sense of belonging and connectedness. These activities are voluntary and often contribute to inclusion and fellowship at the college.
Examples	All 1, 2, 3, 4, or more credit bearing academic and occupational classes offered at PVCC.	Peer Leader and Peer Mentor Programs, Library Events, Learning Success Center Activities, Festival of Tales, Honors Program co-curriculars, Field of Interest (FOI) Events, Service Learning, Career Services Activities, Financial Aid Events.	Student life game or movie events, Welcome tents, Pizza with Professors.
Method for Assessing	Curricular learning must be assessed to meet HLC criteria for accreditation and is measured with course competencies, program level student learning outcomes, and General Education Student Learning Outcomes/Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILOs) and documented in the Curricular Assessment Form in the GEA tool.	Cocurricular learning must be assessed to meet HLC criteria for accreditation and is measured with department, event, or program level student learning outcomes and General Education Student Learning Outcomes/Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILOs) and documented in the cocurricular Assessment Form in the GEA tool. Student satisfaction or level of participation may be measured in addition to learning outcomes, but it is not sufficient for cocurricular assessment on its own.	Extracurricular activities may or may not be assessed as appropriate and aspects such as sense of belonging and engagement at the college are measured by surveys including the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE), surveys developed by the college, or student focus groups.

Over the years the Maricopa Community College District has partnered with Az Transfer and Arizona State University to develop smooth transfer pathways (Bailey et al., 2015). College faculty collaborate with other faculty across the district through a discipline specific Instructional Council (IC) to develop curriculum and identify both course and Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs). The College must then align these outcomes across required courses and develop a plan for measuring the program specific outcomes to verify that as students progress on their selected pathways the college is actively working to ensure students gain the necessary knowledge and abilities to be successful when transferring or entering the workforce. Measuring PLOs and shifting from course to program thinking has been a recent focus of the college (Ramírez & Macias, 2025). The assessment team has developed the tools to guide program assessment, however reaching all the faculty is taking time (Ramírez & Macias, 2025). One reason may be that only a few programs at the college use a cohort model for the students enrolled, making it difficult to develop relationships with students who declare the programs in their educational plans. Even ensuring employees are using a consistent definition of a program across the college has proven to be a key part of the college's communication efforts (Ramírez & Macias, 2025). The assessment team has also tried to help faculty understand the distinction between general education outcomes, program outcomes, and course outcomes while also encouraging faculty to see the connections across the outcomes and align them strategically (Ramírez & Macias, 2025).

Measuring and working to improve learning across multiple sets of outcomes can be difficult to manage. To make the task more functional the college engages faculty in curriculum mapping and uses a Program Assessment Matrix. Faculty use the matrix to map program outcomes across the required courses in the program and align program outcomes to both course outcomes and general education outcomes where applicable (Ramírez & Macias, 2025). Faculty then develop assessment strategies and methodologies for measuring multiple outcomes simultaneously. The alignment promotes awareness of the various outcomes that faculty are responsible for measuring and makes the assessment more integrative for faculty and students. It may lead to other promising practices like transparency on how specific assignments or modules help students meet specific outcomes, enhanced connection between courses and program progression, and the identification of curriculum gaps or needs for revisions. From a practical perspective it helps faculty work more efficiently and identify clear goals for assessment work. Faculty at the college have expressed an appreciation for knowing exactly what needs to be assessed and when (Ramírez & Macias, 2025). Short term and disjointed efforts can lead to "solutionitis" (Kinzie & Kuh, 2016), but strategies that recognize the interdependence of outcomes and the complex ecosystem of assessment can lead to better integrated planning across the college (Hoshaw, et al. 2021). The college is intentionally aligning outcomes and has made completion of the program curriculum mapping a required part of the Program Review cycle (Ramírez & Macias, 2025). Program directors and faculty align outcomes and develop a clear timeline for measuring them across the four year cycle. Consequently, learning goals are integrated and appropriate relationships can be made between general education, program, and course outcomes. Table 2 shows a summary of the objectives and strategies applied relating to the principle of Aligning Purposefully.

Table 2*Cultivating Objectives and Strategies Related to Aligning Purposefully*

Objectives	Strategies
To align assessment practices to the espoused mission/value of “educating the whole person”.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Develop learning outcomes and rubrics that measure specific holistic learning abilities and dispositions. ● Define curricular, cocurricular, and extracurricular learning and identify methods for assessing each.
To apply assessment practices consistently within college structure.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Define what constitutes a “program”
To ensure functional assessment design with alignment between curriculum, outcomes, and assessment methods.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Require the use of Program Learning Outcome (PLO) Assessment Map

Enduring and Evolving

The permanence of assessment work requires that colleges select practices that can endure and evolve (Samuga_Gyaanam+Bheda et al., 2025). Knowing that assessment is here to stay, colleges can best position themselves to sustain efforts by investing in strategies that are solid enough to withstand threats but also flexible enough to respond to evolving needs. Change is an inevitable part of higher education and learning. The rise of Artificial Intelligence is just one example of the pressures and wicked problems (Corbin et al., 2025) that prompt modification to assessment work. In the recently published employer survey, the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), reported that “Three out of five employers think it is “very important” that college graduates gain skills needed to use AI tools while in college. Only about two out of five, however, are “very confident” that students are getting the preparation they need” (Finley, 2025). Curricula and learning outcomes must evolve. Correspondingly, assessment practices must evolve and “...there is an opportunity in front of educators, faculty, and staff alike to show students change is not scary. It is necessary and inevitable” (Finley, 2025). Equally important is recognizing that a single correct solution does not exist. “This means creating institutional structures that support educator decision-making rather than mandating uniform responses, recognizing divergent approaches as evidence of contextual wisdom rather than institutional inconsistency, and treating assessment iteration as professional development rather than design failure” (Corbin et al., 2025). Just as assessment practitioners and scholars advance an increased understanding of assessment through research and training (Samuga_Gyaanam+Bheda et al., 2025), educational organizations also are also called to evolve and mature in their approaches over time.

Rubric Development

The college's development of General Education Assessment (GEA) rubrics is an example of how assessment strategies need to both endure and evolve. Early in the assessment committee's formation, the college identified three learning areas to systematically measure student academic achievement including: Language Manipulation, Data and Numeracy Manipulation, and Technology Manipulation and Information Access (Ramírez & Macias, 2025). However, after the initial cycle the committee found "that the results are not indicative of students' academic achievement" and made recommendations for improvement (Ramírez & Macias, 2025). The college was determined to do better. Beginning with the District's General Education statements (Dale, 2007) and aligning with general education articulation with state universities, the College constructed General Education Student Learning Outcomes that matched the "College's unique student population, mission, and learning-centered philosophy" (Ramírez & Macias, 2025). Critical Thinking was chosen as the core learning outcome with four supporting outcomes including: Communication, Information Literacy, Problem Solving, and Technology (Ramírez & Macias, 2025). In 2005, the assessment committee developed five analytic rubrics to support the measurement of the General Education Learning Outcomes across the college and made them Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILOs) (Ramírez & Macias, 2025).

Faculty across the college were engaged in the creation of the analytic rubrics which outlined clear outcomes, specific dimensions, and metrics for differentiating levels of achievement (Dale, 2007). Spending time to discuss the learning that faculty hoped students would experience and naming that learning with language consistent to the everyday activities of teaching and learning at the institution would prove to be one of the most fruitful assessment practices and a hallmark of assessment at the college. The process of building the rubric collection helped the faculty and college better understand assessment (Ramírez & Macias, 2025). By developing rubrics rather than adopting rubrics developed by others, faculty have used language that supports the colleges' specific student population. For twenty years the college has maintained its commitment to quality General Education and strengthened the GEA Rubrics. To date there are nine GEA Rubrics including: Civic Engagement, Critical Reading, Diversity and Global Awareness, Information Literacy, Personal Development and Wellness, Problem Solving, Oral Communication, Technology, and Written Communication. These rubrics support learning and assessment of vital skills that are durable, transferable, and core to general education (Hutson et al., 2023). Across the nine rubrics there are forty-nine dimensions containing specific scoring criteria (Paradise Valley Community College, 2024). As a result of this enduring strategy, the college gained methodologies for outcome/rubric development, techniques to foster interrater reliability and common course assessment projects, processes for tracking student achievement of outcomes as they progress through general education curriculum, and a skilled faculty who can implement meaningful learning intervention strategies to help students better develop key general education skills.

Meta-Assessment

While the work was progressing the college engaged in meta-assessment to determine what was working with General Education Assessment rubrics and what needed to be improved. Meta-assessment can help colleges and assessment leaders monitor progress during assessment initiatives, analyze effectiveness, and determine meaningful actions to take (Schoepp & Benson, 2016). As

documented in the college's Assessment Chronicle (Ramírez & Macias, 2025), the college created a list of agreements and issues to make visible what the college was learning about assessment and the ways in which it was attempting to respond to challenges. Two key agreements noted were that "Rubrics (except for Technology) reflect what we want our students to know" and "Results are being used to improve learning" (Ramírez & Macias, 2025). Two key issues noted were that "The Technology rubric needs to be revised" and "Should we assess other general education learning outcomes?" (Ramírez & Macias, 2025). As a result of the meta-assessment, two of the rubrics were revised. This would be the first in many modifications and additions to the GEA Rubrics over the years. Routine evaluation of rubrics has become the norm, which makes it easier to improve and add to them over time. Adoption of meta-assessment exercises that prompt the assessment team to reflect, analyze, and take action to improve assessment methodologies and tools provided the structure and process necessary to evolve.

When the college began offering Bachelor's degrees, the assessment committee was able to amend the rubrics by adding an additional score and clearly differentiating between associates and bachelors level achievement of the General Education Learning Outcomes (Ramírez & Macias, 2025). During the development of the college's first bachelor degree, faculty in the program "identified the need for a work-based experience outcome to help students, especially those in bachelor level programs, to prepare for careers" (Ramírez & Macias, 2025). Subsequently, a "Student Professionalism" dimension was added to the Personal Development and Wellness Rubric to better support program needs and student learning. The nimble nature of the GEA Rubrics allows the college to respond to new learning needs while the durability of the rubrics provides consistency in structure needed to make responding to change less disruptive to the ongoing and broader assessment work across the institution. As the assessment team looks to the future, they are preparing for the next iteration of the rubrics which will include specific outcomes or dimensions related to the use of generative artificial intelligence. The rubrics have been sewn into the institutional fabric and appear likely to endure and evolve.

Leveraging Technology

General Education Assessment and wide usage of the rubrics across the college has produced large amounts of data over the past two decades. Initially, faculty used paper worksheets to enter data that was gathered across the college by the Director of Research who entered all results into an Excel spreadsheet by hand to compile college-wide results (Ramírez & Macias, 2025). Occasionally the director was able to meet special requests for disaggregated results, but there was not time to do this routinely. To increase scalability and make assessment more pragmatic, the college invested in developing its own assessment management software. The assessment committee collaborated with information technology leaders and instructional multimedia experts at the college to develop a software application called the "GEA Online Tool" which was launched in 2010 and won an Innovation of Year award from the college's district (Ramírez & Macias, 2025). The software connects to the college's Student Information System (SIS) thereby making the work of entering data, running reports, and tracking participation more functional. Faculty no longer had to poll their students about how many General Education courses they had completed because the information was captured in the SIS and transferred to the assessment software. The tool successfully supported the expansion of General Education Assessment and the leaders reported that the "GEA administrators (division chairs and AAT

co-chairs) can now respond easily to requests to disaggregate data by any of the given fields: class, instructor, course, semester, program, and so on.” (Ramírez & Macias, 2025, p. 47).

The development of the assessment management software tool meant that faculty could input student scores for a particular class section and then immediately view a table showing averages by dimension and showing a percentage differential if both pre and post test scores were submitted allowing them to interpret these results in real time. Simplification of process increased the ability to scale assessment and use results at the institutional level. The foresight to develop the GEA Online Tool would also prove to have long-term financial benefits for the college because self-investing saved thousands of dollars each year in software subscription and service fees. The college has continued to refine and update the software over the past fifteen years, adding more advanced data tracking and reporting capabilities such as pre/post results, options for special student cohorts, and alignment with First Year Experience Student Learning Outcomes (Ramírez & Macias, 2025). Faculty who were part of the assessment committee had recommended “comparing the scores of students who have taken few, if any, general education courses to those who have taken most of the general education core curriculum to document “value added” (Ramírez & Macias, 2025). This task was nearly impossible before the development of the “GEA Online Tool”, but the software updates made the inquiry more manageable and reliable. Assessment leaders collaborated with Institutional Effectiveness to extract data from the GEA Online Tool to get a better picture of how the college’s graduates achieve general education learning outcomes. They reported three significant findings. First, disaggregation of learning outcome data was possible and meaningful for the college; second, the distribution of level of achievement of outcomes was the same across demographics for nearly all GEA Learning Outcome areas with the exception of written communication; and third, as shown in Figure 2 the “graduates’ means scores were higher than the overall college means scores for all GEA Learning Outcome areas” (Ramírez et al., 2024).

It took years for the college to reach the capability to conduct this type of inquiry. The report demonstrated the refinement of assessment practices necessary to reach breadth and depth of results. As its name suggests, the software is a tool that can be continually strengthened to enhance assessment efforts and foster innovation. The College can benefit from continued investment in a tool that offers potential to further innovation and to communicate assessment results in ways that honor the students, faculty, and the environments in which learning occurs. Table 3 shows a summary of the objectives and strategies applied relating to the principle of Enduring and Evolving.

Figure 2

Example of Graduate Mean GEA Scores from College Report (Ramírez et al. 2024)

2021-2022 GEA Rubric Mean Scores for Total College and Graduating Cohorts

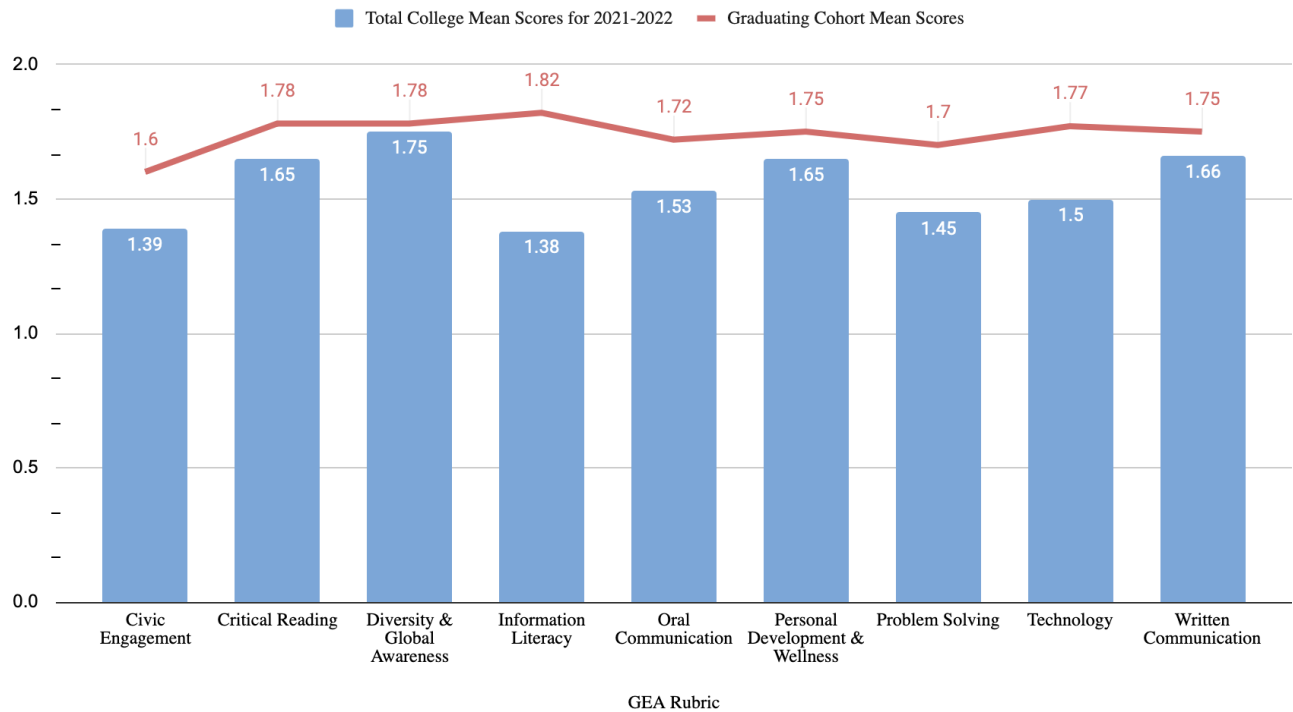


Table 3

Objectives and Strategies Related to Enduring and Evolving

Objective	Strategies
To support student development of durable and marketable skills college-wide and measure achievement of these abilities using language consistent with the everyday teaching and learning activities at the college.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● General Education Assessment Analytic Rubric Development
To create time and space for reflection and take advantage of opportunities to improve assessments practices.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Meta-Assessment exercises
To simplify assessment data collection, scale data analysis across the college, and sustain collection efforts over time.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Investment in college developed assessment management software

Learning Centered

The fourth ACCELERATE principle that is applicable to this case study is Learning Centered (Samuga_Gyaanam+Bheda et al., 2025). “Assessment is not research in that it is a pragmatic, authentic, and context-specific, powerful approach to getting the most useful information to inform decision-making at a given point in time” (Samuga_Gyaanam+Bheda et al., 2025, p.5). The repetitious nature of assessment means that colleges must seek meaningful ways to improve and in doing so embrace the discomfort or messiness that may accompany the “learning through doing” (Samuga_Gyaanam+Bheda et al., 2025) approach that leads to growth.

Using Evidence for Meaningful Change

At PVCC, faculty use the rubrics to determine the extent to which students demonstrate a wide range of general education knowledge and abilities with the intent to make changes that lead to improvement of these abilities (Paradise Valley Community College, 2024). Approximately 60-70% of full time faculty use the rubrics to enter scores for students in the GEA Online Tool each academic year (Ramírez & Macias, 2025). The use of rubrics can be helpful because they explicitly differentiate levels of learning that students can progress through, offer a “shared lens for making judgement” (Kuh, 2015, p. 39), and provide clearer expectations to students about how to be successful. Although the rubrics list specific criteria for each dimension and have a score range of 0 to 3, there are diverse learning contexts for scoring and there can be some variance among faculty scorers. This is an acceptable effect for the college because the result is that a majority of the full time faculty are engaged in measuring general education learning outcomes and are actively using the evidence to improve learning related to the outcomes. Suskie (2018), suggested that “If you design your assessments reasonably well and collect collaborating evidence, your evidence of student learning may be imperfect but will nonetheless give you information that you will be able to use with confidence to make decisions about teaching and learning” (p. 38). The rubric scores yield sufficient evidence for meaningful conversations and changes befitting specific learning contexts at the class, course, program, and/or institutional level. Examples of improvement include program curricular revisions, enhanced student support, and the application of active learning strategies.

The process of faculty working through teaching and learning problems in a specific learning context with genuine student groups proves to be powerful because as the faculty reflect and work to make changes they can personally experience the potential that assessment offers as a means of refining curriculum or calibrating instruction to catalyze improvement. The college seeks to demonstrate content validity or how well the assessment produces relevant evidence of the achievement of learning goals intended to be assessed and consequential validity, meaning “how well the evidence can be used to inform meaningful substantive decisions and solve problems” (Suski, 2018). The coursework assigned by faculty remains the “most meaningful and natural source of evidence for documenting student learning” (Kuh, 2015, p. 34), so keeping faculty judgment at the heart of assessment is critical. Assessment leaders coach faculty on the purpose and design of assessment as well as how to use results to make informed changes.

Documenting Learning Improvement Stories

In addition to submitting rubric scores for quantitative analysis, the college asks faculty to complete assessment forms in the GEA Online Tool for qualitative analysis. These forms represent learning improvement stories grounded in specific learning contexts related to general education, program, and course learning outcomes (Ramírez & Macias, 2025). The form follows the assess, intervene, reassess or weigh the pig, feed the pig, weigh the pig cycle of assessment (Fulcher et al., 2014). The sequence of assessment activities has been recommended as a simple learning improvement model to adopt that Fulcher, Smith, Sanchez, Ames, & Meixner (2017), suggested supported the original American Association for Higher Education (AAHE) Nine Principles of Good Assessment Practice for Assessing Student Learning (Astin et al., 1996) and would appear to support the idea of being Learning-Centered in the new ACCELERATE principles (Samuga_Gyaanam+Bheda et al., 2025). The model is based on the premise that “A change is only an improvement when one can demonstrate its positive effect on student learning” (Fulcher, Good, Coleman, & Smith, 2014, p. 4). Both the original nine and updated ten principles describe the need for understanding the context in which learning occurs. Astin, et al., (1996), suggested that “we need to know about the student experience along the way--about curricula, teaching, and kind of student experience that lead to particular outcomes ... to improve the whole of their learning” (p. 2). Similarly, Samuga_Gyaanam+Bheda et al., (2025) explained that being learning centered means “...getting the most useful information to inform decision-making at a given point in time” (p. 5). To gain a more complete understanding of the learning context and make good use of available information, the college’s assessment forms guide faculty through the Assess, Intervene, Reassess model by asking faculty to (1) identify specific learning outcomes, measure student abilities related to those outcomes, (2) make changes based on the results, (3) measure students abilities again, analyze the results, and discuss implications (Ramírez & Macias, 2025). The process is a practical one that makes the kind of authentic and iterative growth that is context specific and recommended by the Learning-Centered principle (Samuga_Gyaanam+Bheda et al., 2025).

Results at the college vary. Some of the forms are very detailed and effectively tell the story of both student learning improvement and faculty growth or program development. In other instances the forms, and therefore stories, end up incomplete. Some struggle to make it through the entire process, some are challenged to use results to make informed changes, and some are unable to demonstrate that improvement occurred. To help faculty feel comfortable viewing assessment through a learning centered lens, the assessment team has begun to highlight successful examples through assessment awards (Ramírez & Macias, 2025). Recently the college held an Assessment Awards celebration which featured a panel of faculty sharing their experiences with assessment and learning improvement (Ramírez & Macias, 2025). The sharing of stories in writing and orally could help keep the focus on learning and demonstrate how practice-based assessment fosters growth for students and instructors alike. Table 4 shows a summary of the objectives and strategies applied relating to the principle of Learning Centered.

Table 4*Objectives and Strategies Related to Learning Centered*

Objectives	Strategies
To use available information to inform decision making in authentic learning contexts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analytic rubrics applied across the General Education Curriculum, scored, and results analyzed.
To frame assessment documentation through a learning centered lens and gather evidence for qualitative analysis.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Curricular assessment form Cocurricular assessment form
To highlight examples of assessment, reflection, and courageous growth.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessment Awards Faculty Panels

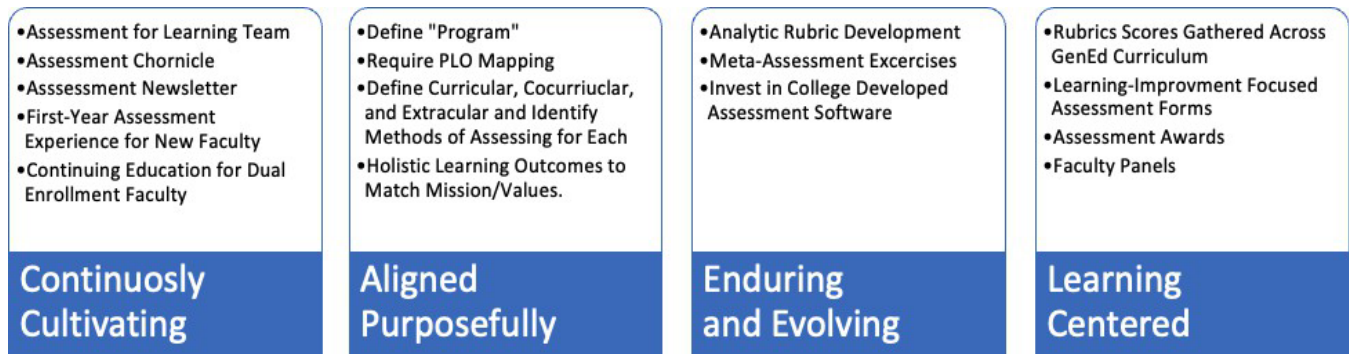
Conclusion

The ACCELERATE Principles for Best Practice (Samuga_Gyaanam+Bheda et al., 2025) offer relevant and significant guidance to colleges where assessment matters, which should be all higher education institutions. Based on the examples presented in this case study, the principles can be applied in practical and meaningful ways across the process of “...collecting, analyzing, and disseminating information and evidence to guide decision-making, change, and improvement” (Samuga_Gyaanam+Bheda et al., 2025, p. 2). Several examples were provided to show where, when, and how the principles appear in action at a community college. Figure 3 shows the existing strategies that the College has applied that reflect the ACCELERATE principles. Specific objectives and strategies related to Continuously Cultivating, Aligned Purposefully, Enduring and Evolving, and Learning-Centered were discussed in detail and the findings demonstrate that:

- **Continuously Cultivating:** The institution has woven assessment into the fabric of the College by creating an organizational assessment philosophy, structure, and training for the purposes of continual improvement.
- **Aligned Purposefully:** The institution has applied methodologies that draw clear connections between assessment practices and espoused values and types of learning it hopes to cultivate.
- **Enduring and Evolving:** The institution has invested in assessment tools that are scalable for broad use, sustainable over time, and flexible to meet changing community needs.
- **Learning-Centered:** The institution has chosen to emphasize assessment as learning improvement and uses quantitative and qualitative evidence to promote change and reward courageous growth.

Figure 3

RQ 1: What existing strategies has the college applied that reflect the ACCELERATE principles?



The results of the case study offer three key insights. First, the process of analyzing assessment practices and identifying the various ways in which specific strategies reflect the ACCELERATE principles is a constructive activity. It encourages colleges to think deeply about existing assessment practices and the reasoning behind them. Although some assessment practices are common across institutions, analyzing specific strategies and their objectives can help uncover the unique constructions of assessment practices in the context of the institution. Using the lens of the ACCELERATE principles to analyze practices further enables colleges to evaluate strengths of practices as well as opportunities for improvement.

Second, the principles are highly interconnected. It seems difficult to do one well without also exhibiting other principles. Likewise, applying a single principle to improve assessment work, will probably mean incorporating other principles to work through a challenge successfully. Although this study focused on four of the principles, it would be helpful to explore applicable strategies for all ten principles. Additionally, colleges are likely to exhibit the principles on a continuum with varying degrees of competence and success over time. Further analysis of when, where, and how the principles appear across institutions of higher learning would be beneficial.

Third, the principles create an aspirational framework worthy of our efforts. Samuga_Gyaanam+Bheda et al. (2025) proposed the ACCELERATE principles to provide assessment professionals with a framework to create an empowering environment, “ameliorate harm”, and “assure a culture of careful accountability” (p. 2). When examining existing practices it becomes clear that the “why” behind the time, energy, and resources utilized to support assessment should guide decisions about how the work is done. In the instance of the four principles reviewed in this study, the people-whether students, faculty, staff, or practitioners, were central to the strategies applied. Mindfulness of implications of assessment practices on the individuals involved will likely serve the professional field well.

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