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## Engaging Students in General Education Assessment: Anatomy of ACCELERATE's Collaborative and Co-Creative Principle

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**Abstract:** This article responds to the ACCELERATE: Assessment Principles for Best Practice (Samuga\_Gyaanam+Bheda et al., 2025) by examining how an institution applies the Collaborative and Co-Creative principle in the Students Partnership in General Education Assessment Initiative that helps transform the value of General Education and create opportunities for improvement and innovation. Building on a value co-creation conceptual framework in the context of collaboration, this study presents the design of the Initiative and the impacts on both institutional and student learning. The Initiative not only enriches the quality of assessment but also supports continuous improvement and innovation in General Education practices. The study demonstrates the need to shift from compliance-focused assessment toward methods that truly involve students by showcasing the "how to" of implementing collaboration and co-creation in student partnerships in General Education assessment.

**Keywords:** *assessment, ACCELERATE, general education, student partnership, online discussion, collaboration, co-creation*

## Introduction

Assessment activities predicated primarily on compliance (Bahous & Nabhani, 2015) often foster a brittle culture that may seem functional but can be easily disrupted by other competing institutional or professional priorities. For instance, while an institution may achieve a 100% submission rate for assessment reports with all required components included, this compliance does not necessarily reflect the substantive work necessary to sustain the assessment's value. Based on the authors' experience with higher education assessment practice, many programs continue to use established student learning outcomes and assessment measures for multiple assessment cycles, despite expectations for continuous improvement.. Blaich & Wise (2011) found that many faculty struggled to even use the data they collected. In addition, a lack of meaningful conversations can be easily compounded by leadership turnover; when the individual responsible for assessment is replaced, to prioritize administrative continuity, the successor may rely on the legacy outcomes and established measures rather than initiating a review or improvement discussions, thereby sacrificing pedagogical growth opportunity (Banta & Blaich, 2011; Jankowski & Marshall, 2023; Smith et al., 2015). Busby & Aaron (2021) also highlighted that the elevated turnover rate in student affairs poses a significant challenge to maintaining a sustainable assessment process. As assessment responsibilities are transferred to new personnel, maintaining operational continuity often becomes the immediate

priority, leaving limited opportunities to critically examine existing learning outcomes or engage stakeholders in meaningful discussions about improving assessment practices. Consequently, assessment activities may become increasingly dependent on inherited routines rather than reflective, data-informed decision-making.

Moreover, the need to overcome misconceptions of General Education while fulfilling stakeholders' requirements is one of the most challenging problems in Higher Education. In 2015, the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) conducted a national survey of 325 of its member Chief Academic Officers regarding rising priorities in learning outcomes, assessment, and General Education design. One critical result indicated that only nine percent of respondents believed students understood the desired learning outcomes. As students still ask, "Why do I need to take this course?" (Kirk-Kuwaye et al., 2015), Dr. Humphreys, the previous vice president of Strategic Engagement at AAC&U, stated that academic leaders should be worried about these findings. With limited and ambiguous General Education outcomes, disconnection from students' majors, and feelings of redundancy toward required courses (Schejbal, 2017; Verma, 2025), it is not surprising that students have not engaged in General Education courses or learned as much as they would in their degree program courses.

Faculty have played a significant role in developing and evaluating General Education courses, yet students are the ones most impacted, particularly when it comes to meeting graduation requirements. Without student input, an important gap exists in the process. As the assessment field continues to grow, people have been educated about the importance of each step in the assessment cycle, which generally includes determining learning outcomes, assessing students' work, analyzing their performance, interpreting assessment results, and developing an improvement plan (Kuh et al., 2015; Suskie, 2018), but it rarely results in convincing improvements in learning. In the Grand Challenges in Assessment project led by Singer-Freeman and Robinson (2024), one notable challenge identified pertains to continuous improvement, particularly regarding the utilization of data to foster innovation.

One of the Assessment Principles for Best Practice in ACCELERATE encourages assessment practitioners to "intentionally collaborate and co-create with diverse partners, including learners, in all parts of the assessment endeavor" (Samuga\_Gyaanam+Bheda et al., 2025, p.4). By adopting this approach, assessment moves beyond being a mere compliance-driven activity, instead incorporating multiple perspectives that foster meaningful dialogue and contribute to improvement. Therefore, by applying the Collaborative and Co-creative assessment principle and responding to the redesign request from the University System of Georgia, an initiative that would engage students in the conversation at a large Research 1 public university was launched. This study aims to describe the initiative and its processes.

## Purpose of Present Study and Research Questions

The present study examines how a student partnership initiative operationalizes the collaborative and co-creative principle within General Education assessment. Specifically, it investigates the ways in which students participate across multiple steps of the assessment cycle and how such engagement

generates value for both students and the institution. By documenting the initiative's design, implementation, and outcomes, the study offers a practice-based model for advancing General Education assessment beyond compliance and toward a more transparent, learning-centered, and partnership-oriented approach. This study was guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: How do assessment professionals or faculty collaborate with students in the conversations of various steps of the General Education assessment and co-create its value?

RQ2: What value do students create and experience through participation in General Education assessment activities?

RQ3: What institutional insights and improvement opportunities emerge from students' participation in General Education assessment?

## Literature Review

### Collaboration and Co-creation in Higher Education

Collaborative learning has been shown to enhance student learning and development (Alharbi et al., 2022; Robbins & Hoggan, 2019; Scager et al., 2016). At the organizational level, collaboration is also associated with greater institutional effectiveness and improved student outcomes, particularly when institutions intentionally redesign work around cross-functional collaboration and interdisciplinary inquiry (Jones et al., 2012; Kezar, 2005). Syno et al. (2023) further found that collaboration is strengthened when faculty and staff value collaborative work and recognize its positive influence on student success. Externally, partnerships with key stakeholders also bring innovation and competitiveness (Fitriasari et al., 2024). Partnerships help align educational pathways and community needs, improving transitions across sectors and sharing resources to meet policy and workforce goals (Amey et al., 2007). Coria-Navia and Moncrieff (2021) also found that collaboration and support networks are foundational for initiating and sustaining faculty development programs, especially when resources are limited. Together, these strands underscore collaboration's importance for strengthening institutional responsiveness, and generating knowledge across disciplinary and institutional boundaries (Abegglen et al., 2021; Amey et al., 2007; Kezar, 2005), raising an important question about the organizational conditions required to sustain meaningful collaborative practices in higher education.

Key components of effective collaboration include a shared purpose anchored in articulated values, intentional structures, and sustained relational networks. Research highlights the need to build commitment through values, leverage external drivers (accreditation, foundations, disciplinary expectations), and cultivate campus networks that diffuse ideas and distribute leadership (Kezar, 2005; Kezar & Holcombe, 2017; Michael, 2019; Regnier et al., 2022). Institutional commitment is then expressed through mission alignment and senior executive support, followed by "sustaining" elements: integrating structures (centers, institutes, cross-unit liaisons), enabling systems (accounting, scheduling, technology), and aligned rewards such as promotion and tenure criteria that recognize collaborative teaching and research (Bolden et al., 2015; Lizier et al., 2024; Kezar, 2005). These findings suggest that successful collaboration depends not only on shared goals but also on intentional processes and structures that support collaboration over time.

Across these articles, interrelated dimensions consistently emerge as essential for effective collaboration in higher education: Shared purpose, collaborative processes, and sustainability. First, successful collaborations begin with a clearly articulated shared purpose in which partners must develop a common understanding of goals, roles, and expected outcomes to avoid fragmentation and symbolic cooperation (Amey et al., 2007). Secondly, collaboration depends on relational and organizational processes that sustain engagement over time. Critical process factors such as effective leadership (Beerkens & van der Hoek, 2022; Braun et al., 2009), open communication (Virkus & Salman, 2021), and deliberate trust-building (Kosonen & Ikonen, 2022; Payne et al., 2023) are also essential, since collaboration is a dynamic process that develops over time and demands continual shared understanding among those involved. Third, long-term assessment success requires mechanisms for sustainability. Establishing structures to monitor outcomes and support ongoing partnership development helps ensure the collaboration generates lasting institutional and educational benefits rather than short-term accomplishments (Abegglen et al., 2021). Although these studies position collaboration as a dynamic, relational process that is fundamental to institutional effectiveness in contemporary higher education, less attention has been devoted to how collaborative principles can be applied to teaching, learning, and assessment practices, particularly within General Education.

This need for collaborative and sustainable approaches is especially relevant in General Education assessment, where institutions seek to engage students in learning that spans disciplines, experiences, and educational goals.

### General Education Assessment in Higher Education

General Education provides a broad base of knowledge and skills essential for career and life, and fosters a common set of civic and ethical values (Furman, 2013; Gibson, 2004). The American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) further emphasizes the integration of learning across curricular and co-curricular experiences, advocating for liberal education practices that promote holistic development and prepare students for work, citizenship, and life. Despite these aims, traditional approaches to general education assessment often rely on standardized measures and prescribed artifacts, positioning students as passive recipients rather than active contributors to their educational journeys. These practices frequently present a narrow conception of learning, lacking sensitivity to contextual and individual differences, and may inadvertently reinforce existing inequities. For instance, Dunstan and Jaeger (2015) argue that minoritized students often experience pressures to conform and fear judgment, which can suppress authentic feedback and undermine the validity of assessment outcomes. Additionally, student involvement in assessment processes remains minimal; as evidenced by low participation rates in surveys and limited representation on general education committees. Addressing these challenges requires moving beyond viewing students solely as subjects of assessment and toward recognizing them as active contributors to the assessment process, and adopting student-centered assessment practices that empower all learners and support inclusive educational environments.

## Student Partnership

Student partnership is commonly defined as “a collaborative, reciprocal process through which all participants have the opportunity to contribute equally, although not necessarily in the same ways, to curricular or pedagogical conceptualization, decision-making, implementation, investigation, or analysis” (Cook-Sather et al., 2014, pp. 6-7). Building on this definition, educators position students as co-designers or active resources who can help shape the course design through dialogue and shared decision-making (Payne et al., 2008; Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2018). When partnership is implemented, deeper engagement and better learning performance were found (Cook-Sather et al., 2014; Dollinger et al., 2018; Heston et al., 2025). This approach also enhances institutional outcomes, including student satisfaction or a stronger sense of belonging. In essence, student partnership operationalizes co-creation for education: it centers learning as the core service, positions dialogue as the primary encounter, and makes the value of higher education more transparent and meaningful by engaging students in teaching and learning. While these benefits demonstrate the promise of student partnership, realizing co-creation and collaboration requires careful attention to the conditions that support meaningful student involvement (Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017).

The literature therefore emphasizes that meaningful partnership requires more than simply including students in existing structures; it depends on supportive institutional cultures, clearly articulated values such as authenticity, reciprocity, and trust, sustained reflection, and attention to student readiness, role clarity, and confidence (Bovill & Felten, 2016; Bryson, 2016). These considerations are particularly important when evaluating whether existing forms of student representation genuinely promote partnership or merely provide symbolic opportunities for participation.

Viewed through this lens, conventional forms of student representation in higher education may offer student presence without necessarily achieving authentic partnership. Although committees often include a student representative, scheduling conflicts may limit consistent participation, and representatives are frequently drawn from student government, which may narrow the range of perspectives brought into the process. As a result, such arrangements may not fully capture the diversity of student experiences or create the conditions necessary for broader co-creation. Therefore, a framework is needed to better understand how students, faculty, and assessment professionals can engage in meaningful interactions that generate value for both students and the institution.

## Conceptual framework

As Kezar (2005) highlighted, a key component of effective collaboration is to build commitment through values. Payne et al. (2008) developed a process-based framework for value co-creation that offers a new way to reflect on customer service, now widely used in both business and non-profit sectors. In Payne’s model, three key components are involved in the process.

- (1) Customer Value-Creating Processes: These are the activities customers use to achieve their goals. In this framework, customers actively shape their experiences and outcomes. Their value creation is dynamic, interactive, and often unconscious, involving learning, adapting, and personalizing their relationship with the supplier; In this process, the experience includes

emotion, cognition, and behaviors, which positive emotions (like excitement, satisfaction, or trust) can strengthen the relationship.

- (2) **Supplier Value-Creating Processes:** These are the processes, resources, and practices that the supplier (company or organization) uses to manage its business and relationships with customers. The supplier's role is to design and deliver experiences that support customer value creation, continually learning from customer interactions to improve offerings and co-creation opportunities.
- (3) **Encounter Processes:** Encounters are the interactions and exchanges between the customer and supplier. These can be communication encounters (e.g., advertising, dialogue), usage encounters (e.g., using a product or service), or service encounters (e.g., customer support). Encounters are two-way and cross-functional, involving various departments and touchpoints.

Based on the above three processes, customers can learn and change their attitudes, preferences, and behaviors. Suppliers can also learn from their interactions with customers and then improve relationship design, create better value propositions, and adapt to changing customer needs. But the supplier will create value for the customers initially and will continue to seek opportunities to meet needs. Planning for co-creation typically begins with an understanding of the customer's value-creating processes and aims to support better co-creation of value.

This study applies the Payne et al. (2008) value co-creation framework to higher-education assessment because education is inherently service-dominant: value is realized in use as stakeholders engage with outcomes, evidence, and improvement decisions. Treating stakeholders as "customers" and assessment professionals as "suppliers" clarifies roles in a longitudinal, dialog-rich relationship where carefully designed encounters (communication, usage, service) build stakeholder cognition, emotion, and action. Institutional learning and student learning close the loop, ensuring evidence informs practice and practice reshapes measures. This approach aligns with higher-education literature on collaboration, partnerships, and students-as-partners, and with institutional experience demonstrating that equity-minded, co-designed encounters produce more meaningful improvements than compliance-only reporting. Therefore, adopting Payne's (2028) framework, this study's framework (See Figure 1) incorporates three key processes explained as follows,

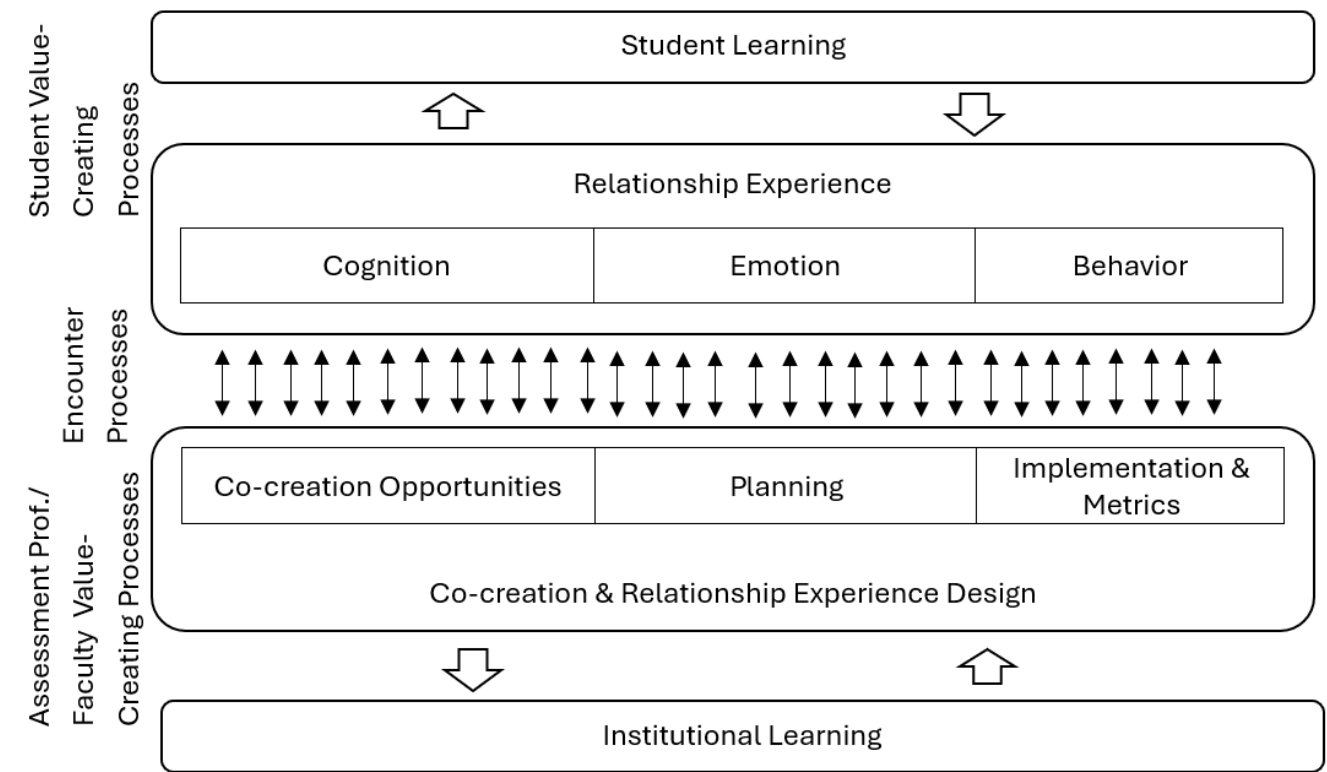
- (1) **Student Value-Creating Processes:** In this study framework, taking General Education courses and participating in the initiative where students actively shape their experiences and outcomes would be used to achieve their goals. Their value creation is dynamic, interactive, and often unconscious, involving learning, adapting, and personalizing their relationship with faculty and assessment professionals. Consistent with the customer processes in the original model, this framework attends to three dimensions of students' engagement with General Education: cognition, emotion, and behavior. Cognitively, this process includes students' understanding of the General Education curriculum and its requirements. Affectively, it encompasses their attitudes toward General Education and the value they see to General Education courses. Behaviorally, it is reflected in their final decisions about course selection and enrollment.

- (2) **Assessment Professional/Faculty Value-Creating Processes:** These are the processes, resources, and practices that the Assessment Professional or faculty can use to manage its relationships with students. To build this relationship successfully, the framework also emphasizes opportunities for co-creation. Although such opportunities may be constrained by institutional culture, the framework suggests that without creating space for co-creation, it is difficult to build meaningful relationships with students. Another critical component of this process is outside-in planning. Rather than following a make-sell-service approach, assessment professionals and faculty are encouraged to listen to students, customize practices to their needs, and create opportunities for co-creation. This strategy is especially relevant in General Education, where program requirements often remain in place for many years without sufficient adjustment to changing societal expectations or student needs. Finally, to support institutional learning, this framework calls for careful implementation and the development of metrics that help both students and faculty strengthen General Education. Faculty or assessment professional's role in this process is to design and deliver experiences that support students value creation, continually learning from students' interactions to improve offerings and co-creation opportunities.
- (3) **Encounter Processes:** Encounters refer to the interactions and exchanges between students and faculty or assessment professionals. In higher education, these encounters include any point of contact between students and the institution, such as websites, emails, promotional materials, classroom experiences, or any students feedback toward General Education enrollment. In higher education, this framework suggests educators focusing resources on positive encounter opportunities.

This study uses a conceptual framework to connect the latest scholarly work, essential concepts, the research questions of this study, and the study data. According to Maxwell (2013), a conceptual framework is critical for study design, especially in qualitative studies, arguing that they make researchers' assumptions explicit and guides decisions across all stages of a study. In this study, the value co-creation framework (Payne et al., 2008) that was widely applied within the context of business function was adopted and modified, see Figure 1, for the context of higher education to enhance analytic rigor and support analytic generalization rather than statistical generalization.

Figure 1

Study Framework



Note: Adapted from "A conceptual framework for value co-creation," by Payne et al., 2008, *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 36(1), p. 86.

## Methodology

### Institutional Context

The state system comprises a diverse range of institutions, necessitating a coherent system-wide framework to support student success. In response, the state system office established the Core IMPACTS curriculum to guide institutions in the design and refinement of course offerings that foster students' achievement of learning outcomes and career-ready competencies across each Core IMPACTS area: Institutional priority, Mathematics and quantitative Skills, Political science and U.S. history, Arts, humanities and ethics, Communicating in writing, Technology, mathematics, and sciences, and Social sciences. Under this framework, all University System of Georgia (USG) institutions are required to include 42 credit hours of Core IMPACTS coursework and 18 credit hours in a Field of Study. Students must complete both components at the institution from which they earn their degree (USG, 2025).

At this large public research university, the institution's mission centers on the development of leaders tasked with advancing technology and enhancing the human condition. This mission, mirrored in its strategic plan, emphasizes making a positive impact. To align with the System Office's new Core IMPACTS framework for General Education, the institution adopted the System Office's Core IMPACTS learning outcomes into its General Education curriculum. This alignment ensures that the institution equips students with the transferable skills necessary in an evolving workforce. General Education Assessment is managed by the Office of Academic Effectiveness (OAE). The Institute Undergraduate Curriculum Committee (IUCC) relies on its General Education and Undergraduate Policy Subcommittee (The General Education Subcommittee) for curriculum changes, policy updates, course proposals, and collaboration with OAE on assessment. The General Education Subcommittee, which includes faculty from various disciplines and one Undergraduate Student Government representative, makes recommendations to the IUCC. The General Education Subcommittee's monthly meetings include non-voting *Ex Officio* members with accreditation and assessment expertise. In 2020, the Institution began an intensive review of all General Education outcomes and its assessment and realized that there was some disconnection between the intended goals of General Education and the actual experiences of those most involved, highlighting a need for more inclusive and collaborative approaches to educational assessment and curriculum development.

## The Initiative

This project is the first initiative where students engage in different steps of the assessment cycle for General Education at this institution. The driving force for this project is inspired by Lave and Wenger's Communities of Practice (1991), which is a framework for examining the learning that happens in a social environment, a theory known as "situated learning." Communities of Practice is characterized by three interconnected elements: a shared domain of interest that provides a common purpose, a community in which members build relationships and learn from one another, and a shared practice consisting of the knowledge, tools, experiences, and resources developed through ongoing interaction (Gijbels, 2021; Wenger, 1998). Central to this framework is the concept of *legitimate peripheral participation*, whereby newcomers gradually move from peripheral involvement to fuller participation as they gain experience and become integrated into the community (Lave & Wenger, 1991, 2001). This perspective aligns with situated learning theory, which emphasizes that learning is embedded within social contexts and everyday practice (Mercieca, 2016).

Complementing the perspective of Communities of Practice, the "value co-creation" developed by Payne et al. (2008) in the business context, which conceptualizes value not as something produced solely by an organization and delivered to customers, but as something jointly created through interactions among multiple actors. In higher education, students are not merely recipients of services; rather, they are active participants whose engagement and collaboration contribute to the co-creation of educational value.

This initiative was situated within a hybrid General Education Assessment Community hosted on Microsoft Teams and in-person gatherings, along with all data storage in a SharePoint site. This virtual community served as both the recruitment space and primary engagement platform, enabling sustained interaction with participants and facilitating data collection in a flexible, accessible

environment. The study was conducted over the academic years 2021 to 2023, with data collection occurring during the final three weeks of the fall semester in each year to capture students' reflections after completing assigned General Education assessment activities. A focus group, interview, and short survey were conducted to learn from students' experiences. All focus groups and interviews were conducted online and recorded with participant consent.

Therefore, this project will develop (1) interactive communication channels through Microsoft Teams and SharePoint sites and (2) a focus group feedback system that invites students to participate in the entire General Education assessment process, and track in-time teaching, learning, and program improvement. Both approaches will invite students to express critical aspects of General Education assessment, from outcomes wording, measurements, to interpretation. Engaging students as active partners in assessment has the potential to strengthen learning by fostering greater ownership of the learning process (Boud & Molloy, 2013; Carless & Boud, 2018). When students participate in activities such as peer assessment and self-assessment, they are encouraged to reflect on their progress which leads to develop their metacognition (Pantiwati, 2017). Adachi et al. (2018) highlighted that participating in assessment can also strengthen students' sense of belonging by positioning them as valued contributors to the learning community.

The goals for the Initiative is to transform perspectives in General Education and enhance student wellbeing and learning authentically through assessment engagement from outcomes specification, measurement identification, target discussion, results interpretation, to action plans development. At the end of all activities, the outcomes from this initiative include (1) Students can draw connections among their learning outcomes from General Education, Major, and skills expected in the workforce and evaluate their own learning journey at the end. (2) Increase in students' motivation, confidence, sense of belonging, and engagement in academic learning, and (3) Increase awareness of the value of General Education learning and promote transparency in General Education communication.

This initiative includes a research component and has been approved by the institution's IRB under protocol number H21357.

## Participants

Since the Institution's General Education encompasses six learning outcomes corresponding to six key focus areas, the author ensured that students were selected for each outcome based on completion of the respective requirements. A total of 100 undergraduate students were invited to participate in the Initiative. To obtain variation across the sample, students were selected to reflect a range of disciplines, races, gender, colleges, and grade point average (GPA) levels, including students with both higher and lower GPAs.

The selected students had learning outcome performance scores that ranged from low to high. The author utilized the Institution's Banner system to cross-reference records and select appropriate samples. A total of 66 undergraduate students agreed to participate in this Initiative. Of these participants, 34 identified as male and 32 as female. In terms of racial background, 34 students

identified as Asian, 16 as White, 10 as Black, 4 as Two or More races, and 2 as Hispanic. The distribution by class standing was as follows: 21 were first-year students, 21 were second-year students, 13 were third-year students, and 11 were fourth-year students. Based on learning outcome performance, 15 students who participated in the Initiative achieved low performance, 23 demonstrated medium performance, and 28 attained high performance. This diverse sample provided a broad representation across gender, race, and academic standing.

### Data Collection and Analysis

The author conducts both formative and summative assessments to evaluate the initiative's impact. The formative measurement includes (1) questions in Microsoft Teams channels, (2) Focus Groups (see Appendix A), and (3) a survey (see Appendix B) to gather feedback on implementation fidelity and improvement. To complement the questions in Microsoft Teams data, focus groups were conducted to provide deeper insight into participants' experiences and to contextualize survey findings. A semi-structured protocol guided the focus group discussions, allowing for consistency across sessions while also enabling participants to elaborate on topics of importance. Each focus group lasted approximately one hour and was facilitated by the author. Sessions were recorded and transcribed for analysis. All data were coded for analysis under the value co-creation framework of this study. A 4-point scale, 13-item post-survey was conducted 1 week after the end of the project. Descriptive analysis was used to assess the initiative impact. All data was collected during a three-week period at the end of the fall semester. To encourage responses to online questions, all participants were tagged in reminder posts.

Focus group interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim to ensure an accurate representation of participant's perspectives. In addition, written responses and interactions within Microsoft Teams channels throughout the project were also collected as qualitative data. These multiple data sources provided an understanding of students' experiences and perceptions of engaging in assessment process. Data was analyzed using a qualitative coding process informed by both the study's conceptual framework and the steps of the assessment cycle. The analysis began with a deductive coding approach, in which an initial coding theme was developed based on the key concepts identified in the literature and the predetermined components of the assessment cycle. This approach enabled the researcher to systematically examine how students described their experiences related to specific steps of assessment engagement. Meanwhile, the researcher recognized that students' experiences might extend beyond the boundaries of the existing framework. Therefore, an inductive coding process was incorporated to allow new themes to emerge directly from the data. These emergent codes captured unanticipated insights regarding students' perceptions, challenges, motivations, and experiences associated with participating in the initiative. Table 1 summarizes the pre-defined themes drawn from literature and the emergent themes identified through qualitative data analysis.

**Table 1**

*Thematic analysis*

| Pre-Defined Themes        | Emergent Themes                     |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Outcome Development       | Connecting Learning to Future Goals |
| Measures                  | Holistic Student Development        |
| Targets                   | Authentic Learning Experiences      |
| Result                    | Assessment Fairness and Flexibility |
| Improvement               | Transparency and Feedback           |
| Students cognition        | Student Partnership                 |
| Students emotion          | Perspective Broadening              |
| Students behavior         | Identity and Exploration            |
| Co-creation Opportunities |                                     |
| Planning                  |                                     |
| Implementation            |                                     |

**Researcher Positionality**

The author acknowledges that positionality can be an important factor influencing the interpretation of this case study. The author is an assessment professional with more than 15 years of assessment and research experience in higher education, which informed the framing of the research design. At the same time, the author recognizes that this case study may shape assumptions about effective learning practices. The author did not hold a supervisory or evaluative role over faculty and students who participated in this study, minimizing power differentials and supporting open-minded conversations. By making these positional influences explicit, the researcher aims to enhance transparency and allow readers to assess the trustworthiness and transferability of the findings.

**Results**

**Student Value-Creating Processes**

In this Initiative, the discussion is structured according to the assessment steps the Institution used for learning outcome assessment across campus, and the results presented below will follow this sequence.

*Specify expected outcome*

Rather than beginning by prescribing the learning outcomes that faculty expect, the Initiative session opened with questions about students' familiarity with the institution's General Education learning outcomes and, subsequently, the outcomes they hoped to achieve in General Education courses. The majority of participating students reported no awareness that the institution articulates institutional learning outcomes. As one student said:

“I’ve never seen these learning outcomes before. I’m sure it’s formal and all, but to me as a student it’s hard to understand what the goals actually mean in terms of in the classroom and expectations when I graduate. It’s a lot of complex words”

Another student also indicated that “[The learning outcomes] are written as a policy summary, not a student-friendly interpretation of the policy.” Only one student responded on the Discussion Board that they recalled seeing learning outcomes in a course syllabus, noting that the instructor did not address them on the first day of class.

### *Identify appropriate measures*

In addition, when discussing the selected artifacts that were used as the attainment of the learning outcome, students express the feeling that when faculty choose only the final exam as the representation of their learning,

“What if someone doesn't perform well on the final exam? It could be stressed that of a lot of outside factors ...”

“three hours of your life ... twenty five percent of your grade ... very stressful.”

“I think that that's quite limiting ... professors rely too heavily on textbook-based online platforms, they don't really show an expanse of knowledge.”

### *Establish acceptable targets for performance*

When talking about the target for students' performance in their General Education courses, many students shared that a rubric is a useful tool, one student said,

“I guess I take a lot of my courses aligns most with Nature Science, Marg and Technology area. So rubrics really help out with lab reports in that section. So much. Um. I'm starting to think, just like if a rubric would help in other sections as well, mainly communication, like the English papers, because sometimes it can be a little unclear as to what a professor is looking for when you do a certain project. And it's not really until you get feedback from others, and the professors just sort of say, Oh, that's how I was supposed to do it or something like that, or I'm missing this key thing that the professor was looking for, or something like that.”

However, one student shared that rubrics may also limit what students can do,

“like what you're thinking of doing, that doesn't align exactly with the rubric. And you might be able to get to the same learning outcome or the same objective by doing something completely different. What I found to be like, sometimes successful, sometimes my professors will give like an example, especially if it's like a presentation that's kind of nebulous about how you need to get to the goal, but it gives you like something to fall back on if you're not confident on how you were like addressing the goal and moving toward it, you can fall back on what steps did they take to get to the goal? Would it be helpful for me to incorporate some of the same steps or can I mirror that without doing exactly what maybe like in a rigid rubric?”

As a result, this discussion leads to a deeper conversation among students about what subject areas might be better for the instructors provide a rubric to students, and some might not be a good idea,

and flexibility in the rubric. Although the discussion did not reach an agreement in the end, students agreed this is a great reflection opportunity on this topic.

*Collect, analyze, review, and report results*

When students were reading each outcome report, they shared that they had never seen these reports before, even though the reports were shared on the website. In addition, beyond the traditional emphasis on cognitive development in assessment, participating students also articulated affective engagement and appreciation for the subject matter. One business major enrolled in the institution-wide computing requirement reflected that, despite receiving a modest score on her final project, the experience fostered a newfound appreciation for coding that extended beyond concerns about grades:

“I love coding so much more now ... make it visually appealing ... that was my hands in that work!”

Similar to the student above, a student who took a literature class also showed how empathy is developed:

“It kind of made me feel not as alone ... other students ... were also able to sympathize ... recognize things they’ve seen in their schools ...”

For the recognition aspect, students emphasized critical learning outcomes that are important for them to grow and transferred to their degree program courses or applied to their future job. In particular, they highlighted competencies such as communication and quantitative reasoning, underscoring how these skills support progression within their degree programs and application in professional contexts.

*Use results to improve outcome*

When reflecting on students' learning experiences for improvement, various aspects were addressed. One student discussed the need to maintain a continuous connection or extension between General Education courses and their major courses in their degree programs.

I feel like I think that the gen ed is covered fairly well, that whenever it gets like aftermath applications, it seems like there's only like one class that talks about culture awareness, sort of incorporating cultural awareness, maybe into some science things is like how different cultures and different parts of the world may interpret research or a topic differently, as research in America is going to be different than research in Japan and or methods and or in Africa or whatever.

After participating in the Initiative, students had the opportunity to complete a short survey about their experiences. On the 4-point scale, students expressed that they are glad they can share their feedback on their General Education learning experience ( $n = 17$ ,  $M = 3.63$ ,  $SD = 0.5$ ) and that it is critical to have students engage in assessment conversations ( $n = 17$ ,  $M = 3.5$ ,  $SD = 0.82$ ).

## Encounter Processes

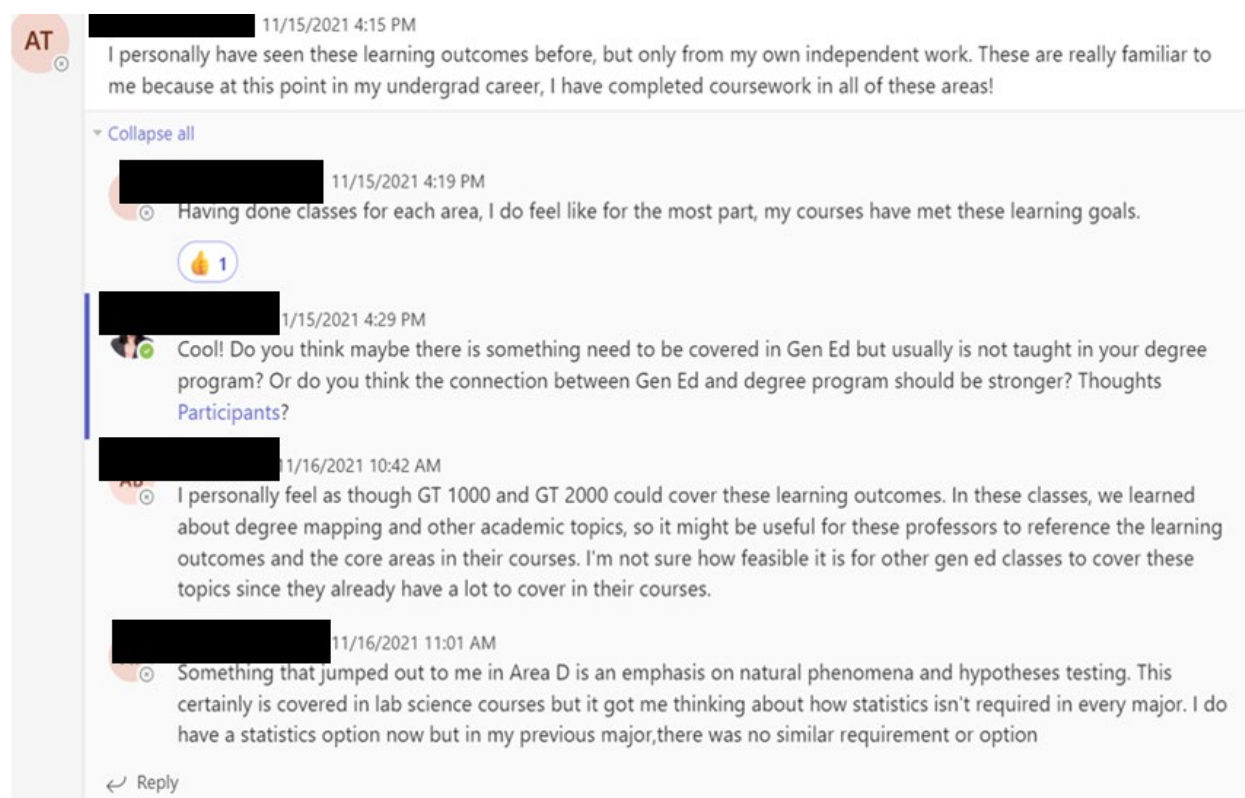
Assessment professionals in the General Education implementation can play a critical role mediating between senior administrative leadership and the realities of course-level delivery. To extend participation beyond face-to-face meetings, the initiative incorporated an asynchronous Microsoft Teams discussion space. This platform enabled the systematic collection of student perspectives unconstrained by time or location, thereby increasing access to and participation in assessment-related dialogues (see Figure 2 for example).

The discussion is organized by assessment steps. The author serves as a facilitator, creating prompts and asking students to share personal experiences. Each assessment step has its channel (See Figure 3), and the discussion is collected as a main post followed by replies. Emoji reactions, such as the thumbs-up icon, were recorded as being used on the platform.

As shown in Figure 2, students were asked specifically about all learning outcome wordings in General Education. One student noted that these outcomes felt recognizable based on prior coursework and independent learning experiences. Similarly, another student indicated that his or her coursework had addressed these learning outcomes, pointing to an overall perception that the curriculum aligns with intended outcomes at a broad level. At the same time, participants raised questions about the consistency and intentionality of this alignment across general education and degree programs. In response to a prompt about potential gaps, one participant suggested that courses focused on foundational academic skills could more explicitly incorporate and reference the learning outcomes and core areas.

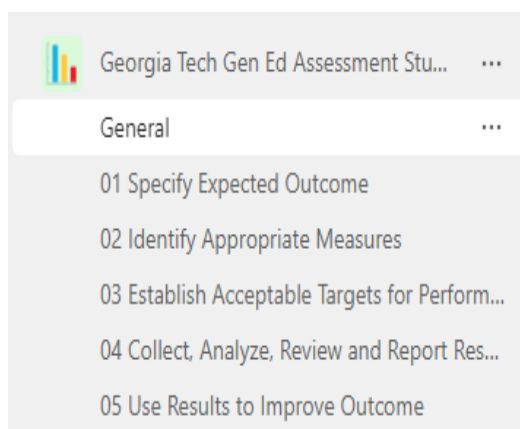
**Figure 2**

*Online discussion platform*



**Figure 3**

*Channels set up in Microsoft Teams*



For an in-person gathering, the students were asked to draw an outcome mapping among their taken courses from General Education, degree programs, and what they like to do in the future. This

approach aims to provide an opportunity to create the value of learning that connects to students' existing learning experiences and their future goals (See Figure 4 for an example).

**Figure 4**

### Alignment Activity

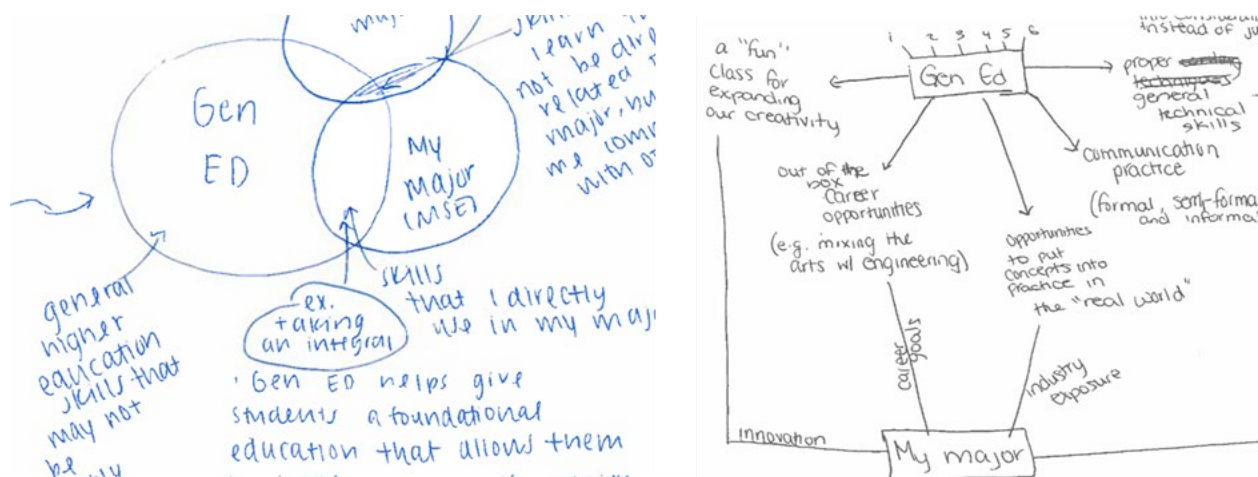


Figure 4 presents two student-generated visualizations illustrating perceived connections between General Education and their major degree coursework. The left image depicts overlapping skills, emphasizing how General Education provides foundational competencies, such as quantitative reasoning, that intersect with students' Materials Science and Engineering degree learning. Using overlapping circles, the student visually represents the relationship between General Education and their major, emphasizing that learning is not isolated within separate academic categories. Instead, the overlap symbolizes transferable knowledge and skills that connect across learning experiences. The student specifically references applying concepts such as “taking an integral” within their major, demonstrating recognition that foundational knowledge acquired through General Education courses directly contributes to disciplinary competence. The map also highlights the student’s understanding that General Education provides broader intellectual preparation beyond technical specialization.

The image on the right side demonstrates a more future-oriented understanding of learning by connecting General Education experiences with career preparation, communication skills, creativity, and professional opportunities. In the center of the map, the student positions General Education as a bridge between academic learning and future aspirations connected to their major. While communication and problem-solving were described in the drawing, this student also shared that creativity was learned from General Education, which was not listed among General Education learning outcomes, leaving an opportunity for a potential gap analysis between institutional expectations and

students' experiences. Rather than viewing General Education as separate from career preparation, the student frames it as an essential contributor to professional readiness and personal development.

This mapping activity encourages students to reflect on how different educational experiences collectively shape their identities, competencies, and long-term aspirations.

### **Assessment Professional/ Faculty Value-Creating Processes**

The conceptual framework's directional arrows underscore the ongoing need to examine students' emotion, cognition, and behavior as interconnected dimensions of learning. Within the initiative, assessment professionals function as boundary spanners, liaising between senior administrative leadership, faculty, and students to identify opportunities for co-creation rather than serving as data stewards. This initiative served as a place for students to engage in the conversations on all steps of the assessment cycle, including reviewing learning outcomes, discussing assessment measures, interpreting results, and identifying areas for improvement. Analysis of focus group discussions, online dialogue, and survey responses indicated that student participation generated actionable insights for faculty and institutional leaders. Students identified concerns regarding the clarity of learning outcomes, the appropriateness of assessment measures, variations in acceptable performance targets across courses, and the need for greater transparency in communicating assessment results. Students also expressed interest in participating more actively in assessment-related decision-making, particularly through rubric development, feedback processes, and discussions about program improvement. These findings provided faculty and assessment professionals with perspectives that are rarely captured through assessment artifacts or performance data alone. The initiative also demonstrated that students were willing and able to engage in substantive discussions about curriculum and assessment when provided structured opportunities to do so. Participation occurred through both asynchronous Microsoft Teams discussions and in-person activities, creating multiple avenues for engagement and generating feedback that informed faculty conversations during General Education Faculty Engagement Day and discussions within the General Education and Undergraduate Policy Subcommittee. A logical next step is to determine how the Initiative's activities can be scaled, both through large-cohort implementations and course-embedded delivery, to support broader, sustainable adoption.

### ***Institutional Learning***

Institutional review of assessment practices yielded several actionable insights. First, acceptable performance targets should be redefined to reflect disciplinary context and class level, thereby acknowledging curricular variation and developmental progression. Second, targeted tutoring or academic support is warranted for students who do not meet stated goals; such supports should be aligned with course-specific outcomes and delivered early enough to influence learning trajectories. Third, the wording of learning outcomes requires refinement to enhance clarity and student comprehensibility, ensuring that expectations are precise, observable, and measurable. Finally, the institution should promote co-construction of rubrics with students and improve communication in syllabi, foregrounding outcome alignment, task purpose, and criteria for success.

Students articulated a coherent set of priorities for institutional assessment design and governance. They called for transparency across the assessment cycle so that learners understand how evidence is used and how their feedback informs improvement. Participants emphasized the need for a skills

framework that is both coherent and navigable, enabling learners to track progression across General Education and major requirements. They advocated judicious standardization where appropriate (e.g., conventions in technical writing) to promote consistency, transfer, and fairness, while preserving disciplinary nuance. Students requested explicit statements of mission and industry relevance to situate assignments within broader professional and societal contexts. They also underscored the importance of faculty coordination to reduce redundancy, prevent misalignment, and create integrative pathways across courses and programs.

### *Student Learning*

The survey results, measured using a 4-point Likert scale, revealed that students generally felt appreciated about the initiative, as reflected by a mean score of 3.47 ( $SD = 0.85$ ). Additionally, students strongly believed in the importance of their engagement in the assessment process, with this item receiving a mean score of 3.5 ( $SD = 0.82$ ). The data also demonstrated that active participation contributed to an increased focus on learning outcomes ( $M = 3.18$ ,  $SD = 0.73$ ) and fostered a greater sense of belonging among students ( $M = 3.29$ ,  $SD = 0.85$ ). These findings suggest that involvement in assessment not only enhances students' perception of being valued but also positively influences their engagement and connection within the academic community.

Student comments contextualize these quantitative patterns. Many students reported that they had not previously encountered the institution's General Education learning outcomes, and several described the language used in these outcomes as unclear. Students consistently valued opportunities to connect General Education competencies to their degree pathways and career aspirations, emphasizing relevance and applicability. However, they also identified that there are still gaps between what the institution offers and what they want to learn. For example, a student expressed that hoping have a general education course related to creation which is not currently offered at the Institution. They also expressed interest in co-creating assessment practices, particularly through contributing to rubric development and participating in peer assessment. In addition, students recommended that assessment results be shared with them and that they be included in program-level improvement discussions. Participants emphasized the need for acceptable targets that are differentiated by course type and class level, as well as a broader range of inclusive assessment activities that accommodate diverse learner profiles.

### Overall Impact

In the past, students were treated primarily as objects of assessment, with faculty evaluating student performance from a distance. In contrast, students now have opportunities to contribute to every step of the assessment process as active partners. At the Institution's bi-annually "General Education Faculty Engagement Day" event, where faculty previously focused only on reviewing student performance data, they now also consider student feedback on outcome wording, assessment measures, and the interpretation of results. This broader approach has deepened faculty conversations about what the data mean and how General Education can be improved in ways that are more transparent and relevant to students' experiences. Faculty have found this process far more meaningful than relying solely on performance data when developing improvement plans. Student

feedback was also shared with the General Education and Undergraduate Policy Subcommittee to inform broader improvement efforts.

## Discussion

The findings demonstrate that collaboration and co-creation in General Education assessment can occur when students are intentionally positioned as partners rather than subjects of assessment. Consistent with the Collaborative and Co-Creative Principle of ACCELERATE (Samuga\_Gyaanam+Bheda et al., 2025), students contributed not only to discussions about learning outcomes but also to conversations regarding assessment measures, performance targets, interpretation of results, and improvement planning. This level of engagement extends beyond traditional forms of student representation, such as serving on committees or completing surveys, by creating opportunities for students to participate directly in assessment-related dialogue. The findings further support previous research emphasizing that successful collaboration requires intentional structures, communication channels, and shared purposes (Kezar, 2005; Kezar & Holcombe, 2017). The hybrid model used in this initiative combined asynchronous and face-to-face engagement opportunities, creating multiple pathways for participation and broadening opportunities for student voice. Together, in response to the research question one, these findings suggest that meaningful collaboration in assessment requires more than simply inviting students into existing structures; it requires designing processes that support dialogue and shared meaning-making throughout the assessment cycle.

In response to the research question two, the results indicate that participation in assessment generated value in cognition and emotion dimensions. Cognitively, students developed a greater understanding of General Education learning outcomes, assessment processes, and connections among their General Education coursework, major programs, and future career aspirations. Students expressed appreciation for having their perspectives heard and reported stronger feelings of belonging, engagement, and ownership of their educational experiences. The survey findings and qualitative comments suggest that students viewed their participation as meaningful and valued by the institution. This result aligns with previous student partnership literature demonstrating that engagement in collaborative educational processes can strengthen student motivation, confidence, and sense of belonging (Cook-Sather et al., 2014; Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017). Although the conceptual framework incorporated students' cognition, emotion, and behavior dimensions, the research design and data collection methods primarily captured participants' perceptions and experiences. As a result, the coding process did not provide sufficient evidence to assess actual behavioral changes associated with participation in the initiative. Future iterations of the initiative should incorporate longitudinal measures or behavioral indicators to better track changes in student learning behaviors over time.

In response to the research question three, student participation generated important insights that may inform institutional improvement efforts. The finding that some participants had never encountered institutional learning outcomes or assessment reports raises important questions about transparency and communication. In response to similar concerns, the institution recently revised its General Education course proposal process to require instructors to clearly identify course learning outcomes and demonstrate how courses align with those outcomes. In addition, learning outcomes must now be explicitly communicated through course syllabi and the course selection process. The

General Education committee is also exploring additional strategies to improve how learning outcomes are communicated to students. Although these transparency initiatives cannot be attributed solely to this project, student feedback provided valuable confirmation of existing concerns and reinforced the need for more intentional communication of learning outcomes and assessment practices. This finding reinforces longstanding concerns regarding student perceptions of General Education relevance (Kirk-Kuwaye & Sano-Franchini, 2015; Schejbal, 2017) and suggests that institutions may benefit from more explicit communication regarding the purpose and value of General Education learning.

To sum up, this study underscores the significant impact of engaging students as active partners in the assessment process. By involving students, the project was able to enhance both the relevance and inclusivity of assessment practices, ensuring that diverse perspectives were incorporated into decision-making. This collaborative approach not only contributed to more meaningful and representative evaluations but also fostered a stronger sense of belonging and agency among students, empowering them to take ownership of their educational experiences. In addition, students in this Initiative are also learners in their classrooms. This approach also echoes the Learning-Centered Principle (Samuga\_Gyaanam+Bheda et al., 2025, p.5) that encourages engaging “learning in broad and deep, practice-based learning—for the assessment context and the assessment practice.”

Moreover, student partnership in assessment surfaced actionable insights that informed ongoing program improvement, demonstrating the value of student contributions in shaping curriculum and pedagogy. The project further highlighted the critical importance of transparency and effective communication throughout the assessment process, promoting trust and clarity between students and faculty.

Despite these positive outcomes, notable challenges persist. Efforts to scale up student participation, ensure equitable representation across the student body, and maintain sustained engagement over time remain ongoing obstacles. Nevertheless, the evidence suggests that even small-scale implementations of student partnership in assessment can produce meaningful and lasting change, reinforcing the potential of this approach to enrich higher education assessment practices.

## Implications and Future Directions

The findings of this study underscore the importance of value co-creation under a collaborative environment. Throughout all steps of the assessment process, beginning with the definition of outcomes and extending through the choice of measures and interpretation of results, students can serve an important role. Such integration ensures that assessment practices are not only representative of diverse student experiences but also more responsive to their evolving needs. By applying this critical principle, institutions can foster ongoing reflection, maintain transparency, and adapt effectively to the varied backgrounds and aspirations of their student populations.

This study also challenges traditional roles for faculty and assessment professionals. Although co-creation and relationship-building may require more time to plan and implement, they can lead to more meaningful encounters and ultimately enhance students’ overall experiences.

Future research should further explore how different communication channels with faculty, students, and administrators can shape meaningful assessment engagement, and investigate the impact of these practices on affective learning outcomes such as attitudes, values, and sense of belonging.

## Conclusion

This article responds to the principle of C—Collaborative and Co-Creative in the *ACCELERATE: Assessment Principles for Best Practice* (Samuga\_Gyaanam+Bheda et al., 2025) article by exploring partnership with students in General Education assessment. This study uses the value co-creation framework from Payne et al. (2008) and adapts the Customer Value-Creating Processes and Supplier Value-Creating Processes into “*Student Value-Creating Processes*” and “*Assessment Professional Value-Creating Processes*.” By doing so, the author examines how these processes impact both institutional and student learning. The case of the Institution’s initiative demonstrated the transformative opportunity as “*Encounter Processes*” in the study framework, including reviewing the wording for learning outcomes, evaluating the artifacts selected from the General Education courses, interpreting the assessment reports, and reflecting on their learning experiences that connect to their career goals and degree program learning. The results of this study indicated that the Institution should redefine performance targets by discipline and class level, provide early targeted support, clarify learning outcomes, and involve students in rubric creation and syllabus communication. Additionally, the participating students have a better understanding of the value of General Education. Being involved in assessment not only enhances students’ perception of being valued but also positively influences their engagement and connection within the academic community.

By centering collaboration, institutions can create a more meaningful learning environment that positively impacts student success. The collaborative and co-creative principle in assessment really help shift compliance-driven units to learning communities. Collaborating with students ensures that assessment reflects their lived experiences and illuminates the relevance of General Education to their academic and career goals. Through these collaborative approaches, institutions can advance transparency and learning-centered practices while energizing assessment with authentic voices. Therefore, while our study uses a microscope to examine the Collaborative and Co-creative Principle, there is no doubt that the design of the Initiative also has a strong connection to the Learning-Centered and Aligned Purposefully principles.

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## Appendix A

### General Education Assessment Study Focus Group Script

Welcome and thank you for being here today. The purpose of this gathering is to collect your thoughts about how we can better assess our General Education (Georgia Tech Core Curriculum) learning. You have a better understanding of your own learning. That is why we are talking with you.

Let me introduce myself. I am Sarah Wu, an academic assessment manager at the Office of Academic Effectiveness, and I will be the moderator in today's discussion. The format we are using is a focus group. A focus group is a conversation that focuses on specific questions in a safe and confidential environment. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions. Just be honest. If you wish, you can also respond to each other's comments, like you would in an ordinary conversation. It is my job to make sure that everyone here gets to participate in the way they feel comfortable and that we stay on track. The conversations will be recorded for research purposes. Before we get started, I want to let you know two things.

First, the information we learn today will be compiled into a final report. That report will include a summary of your comments and some recommendations.

Secondly, you do not have to answer any questions that you do not feel comfortable with. This focus group today is anonymous and confidential. "Anonymous" means that we will not be using your real names, and you will not be identified as an individual in our report of this project. "Confidential" means that what we say in this room should not be repeated outside of this room. Obviously, I cannot control what you do when you leave, but I ask each of you to respect each other's privacy and not tell anyone what was said by others here today.

Although we hope everyone here honors this confidentiality, please remember that what you say here today could be repeated by another focus group member. So please, do not say anything that you absolutely need to keep private. As you can see, we will be tape recording this focus group. The recording will only be used to make sure our notes are correct and will not be heard by anyone outside of this study.

As a token of our appreciation, we will give you GT T shirt and notebook after the focus group interview is complete.

If you do not want to participate, please feel free to leave, and we will not include your name in the research.

Are there any questions? Let's begin with introductions.

Leading Question #1.

Please share with us your name, and when you think of General Education at Georgia Tech, what was your first thought?

Leading Question #2.

Based on your college, here is a sample list of learning outcomes, are you familiar with them? Why and why not?

Leading Question #3.

Based on those outcomes, here is the assignment that the instructor assigned as major assessment activity that will align well with the learning outcome. What do you think? Any other assignment options that you feel can represent your performance better?

Leading Question #4.

Based on those outcomes and the measure for the assignment, what do you think about the acceptable performance?

Leading Question #5.

Please review the last year report, what do you think about the result interpretation? Anything we can do to better describe student learning performance?

Leading Question #6.

Based on the results, what do you think we can do to improve learning? What do you see your Gen Ed assignment connect to your major?

Leading Question #7.

The Institution strives to help students grow. How can the Institution better help you understand General Education value?

Thank you for your participation. I learned a lot, and it was a pleasure talking with all of you. Thank you for sharing your thoughts. You will receive a gift from us as a token of our appreciation.

## Appendix B

### Survey Questions

**Please respond to the following questions.**

**By participating in this General Education Assessment Study:** (4-point scale: Strongly Disagree-Disagree-Agree-Strongly Agree)

1. I feel like part of the community at [Institution] when I engage in General Education assessment conversations.
2. I feel valued by [Institution] when I engage in General Education assessment conversations.
3. I'm glad that I can share my feedback regarding my General Education learning experience.

**BEFORE participating in the Initiative:**

1. I was already very familiar with the General Education outcome
2. I already know that the outcome, assignment design, and acceptable performance can be connected strongly.
3. I already know the General Education degree program and my career/life goals can be connected.

**AFTER participating in the Initiative:**

1. I realize outcome, assignment design, and acceptable performance can be connected strongly.
2. I learned that General Education, degree program, and my career/life goals can be connected.
3. I feel I will be paying more attention to the learning outcome and my achievement at Georgia Tech.
4. After this interview, I feel I will pay more attention to what I learned and what I want to learn from General Education.
5. I feel it is critical to have students like me engage in assessment conversations.
6. After this interview, I feel I have more positive thoughts toward General Education