Gallagher, J. A., Resler, L. M., Taylor, J., & Hamed, M. K. (2024). Utilizing mini-grants to meaningfully engage instructors in general education assessment. *Intersection: A Journal at the Intersection of Assessment and Learning,* 5*(4)*, 35-52.

Utilizing mini-grants to meaningfully engage instructors in general education assessment.

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We have no conflicts of interest to disclose

Intersection: A Journal at the Intersection of Assessment and Learning

Vol 5, Issue 4

Abstract: Meaningfully engaging faculty in assessment presents a continual challenge for general education administrators. Faculty perceptions of assessment—including that assessment serves no purpose other than "checking a box" for accreditation and that it conveys little benefit to the instructor—often hinder instructor engagement. A low-cost assessment mini-grant program can overcome these misperceptions, increasing faculty engagement with both the assessment process and the general education program. In this article, a general education administrator describes the structure, delivery, and results of an assessment mini-grant program, and three faculty members share how their participation in the program shaped their teaching and improved their perceptions of—and engagement with—general education assessment.

Keywords: *Meaningful Assessment, Faculty Engagement, Mini-Grant Program, General Education Assessment*

Introduction

Meaningful assessment of general education programs requires investment from stakeholders across the university (Banta et al., 2014; Maki, 2010). Engaging faculty in the assessment process, however, can be difficult. Indeed, the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) found that 66% of surveyed doctoral research universities reported faculty engagement as their biggest challenge (Kuh & Ikenberry, 2009).

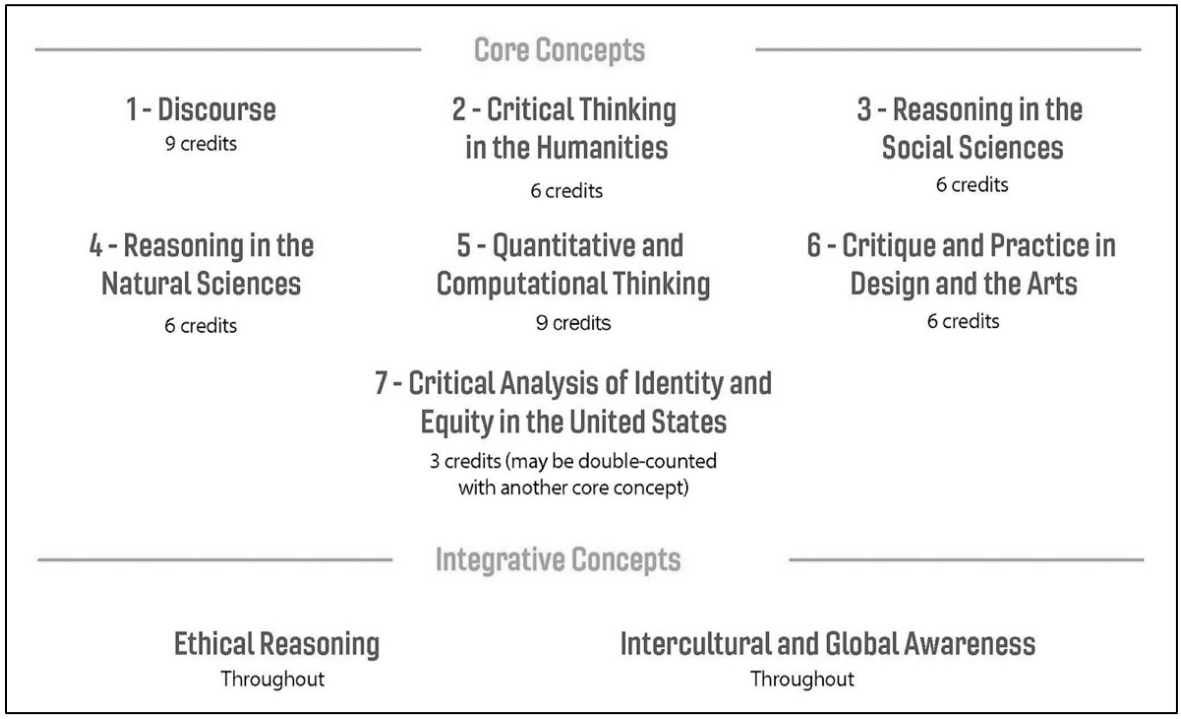
The purpose of this article is to share one institution's experience of using a mini-grant program to meaningfully engage faculty in assessment. We first briefly describe our institution, general education program, and assessment process, and discuss the obstacles we have historically faced with faculty engagement. Next, we introduce our low-cost assessment mini-grant program and describe how the program impacted three individual faculty members' perceptions and use of assessment. Finally, we offer concrete suggestions, borne out of five semesters of trial and error, for administrators at other institutions who may benefit from an assessment mini-grant program.

Background: Our General Education Program and Assessment Process

Virginia Tech, a large, public, land-grant research university, launched a new general education program for its 30,000 undergraduates in the fall of 2018. By the end of its fourth year, the program included nearly 600 courses. From this body of courses, students choose a total of 45 credit hours distributed across nine concepts to fulfill their general education requirements (see Figure 1). In keeping with the decades-long national trend toward program accountability through the measurement of student learning outcomes (Kinzie, 2019), the curriculum plan called for "robust assessment" at the course and program level to measure the program's effectiveness at delivering high-quality general education to our students. The assessment process was designed to be learner-centered and instructor-driven, relying on authentic, course-embedded direct assessments to measure student learning (Banta et al., 2014).

Figure 1

General Education Curriculum



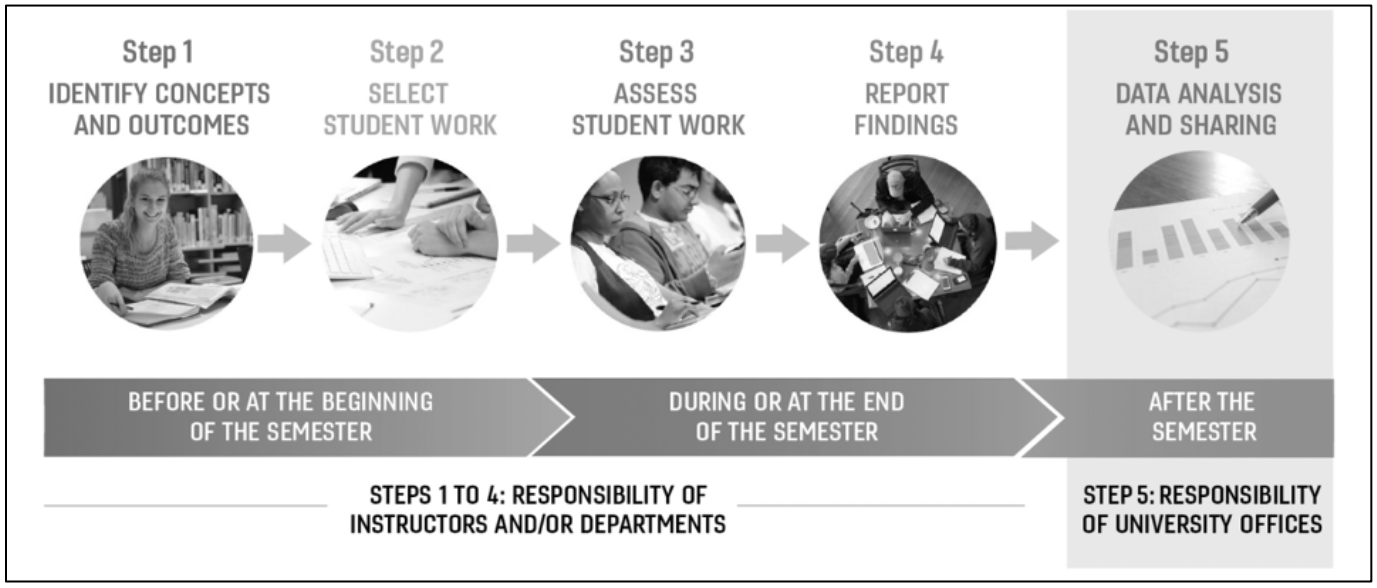
Recognizing that instructor involvement is critical to the successful delivery and assessment of any general education program (Banta & Blaich, 2010), our assessment process relies heavily on instructor participation. The process is divided into five steps, with instructors responsible for the first four steps (see Figure 2). Every semester that they teach the course, instructors (Step 1) identify which concepts and student learning outcomes (SLOs) are aligned with their course, (Step 2) choose which pieces of student work to use to assess each outcome, (Step 3) use a rubric to assess student competency in

each of them, and (Step 4) submit their data.[1] A sample of the assessment report that instructors submit can be found in Appendix A.

Although the assessment process was structured to allow maximum faculty participation under the assumption that instructors would experience greater investment in the program if they were able to create their own assessments, we have not always found this to be the case.

Figure 2

Assessment Process



Assessment Challenges

In line with the experiences of many other institutions (Banta et al., 2014), we have faced several challenges related to assessment. Foremost among these is the perception that assessment fulfills an administrative requirement, that it "checks a box," but offers no value to the instructor. Related to this belief is the presumption that once the data are collected, and the box is checked, the data are not actually used for anything. When these perceptions are combined with a third popular belief—that the assessment process is time-consuming and confusing—they, understandably, inspire little motivation for faculty to participate in the process meaningfully.

Two comments on one of our recent surveys illustrate these challenges. One instructor pointedly asked us to explain what instructors gain from assessment (the implication being: nothing), and another suggested that we use course grades to assess learning "rather than burdening faculty and staff with

[1] Our general education committee is exploring moving to an assessment cycle, but currently the program requires instructors to submit assessment data for every semester that they teach their course.

filling out unnecessary paperwork."[2] While some instructors understand that assessment is required for institutional accreditation, few appear to recognize that the data are used to inform the improvement of the general education program, and fewer still think about using the data to evaluate and improve their teaching.

Another of our assessment challenges concerns the quality of the data received. Trusted colleagues have shared anecdotes of faculty who make up their assessment data. Our colleagues share that these instructors see assessment as top-down busy work that adds no value to their students or their teaching, so they are unwilling to invest time or energy in the process. It is not clear how pervasive this practice is, but even a few occurrences call into question the overall accuracy of the data.

Resistance to submitting assessment data presents a third obstacle. Although participation in assessment is technically required for all instructors teaching general education courses, there are currently no tangible benefits to submitting data or adverse consequences for instructors who do not submit. Consequently, participation varies substantially at the instructor, department, and college levels. Although many instructors do submit their assessment data every time they teach their course(s), others have yet to submit assessment data at all. Overall participation has fluctuated over the life of the program (see Table 1), and participation varies considerably across the seven colleges; for the Spring 2022 semester, college participation ranged from a low 25% of course sections participating in one college, to a high of 79% in another, with STEM fields generally participating at a much higher rate than non-STEM departments.

Table 1

Percentage of Course Sections Submitting Assessment Data

Fall 2018	Spring 2019	Fall 2019	Spring 2020*	Fall 2020*	Spring 2021	Fall 2021	Spring 2022
61%	75%	79%	–	–	70%	65%	59%

* Assessment waived due to the COVID-19 pandemic

Reflecting on these challenges, it was clear that we were falling short of the faculty engagement required to meaningfully assess student learning outcomes to improve general education for our students. When our assessment resumed after a year-long hiatus during the COVID-19 pandemic, we saw an opportunity to engage instructors in a new way.

[2] This comment also illustrates the need to better communicate the difference between grades and outcomes assessment and why the latter should be used to evaluate general education (Banta & Palomba, 2015, p. 53).

Introduction of Assessment Mini-Grant Program

In December 2020, we announced the launch of a new mini-grant program, to begin in Spring 2021. Our goals for the program were to (a) clarify the assessment process by providing scaffolded support for each step, (b) guide reflection on how the data could inform one's teaching, (c) provide a small amount of compensation for instructors' time and effort, and (d) collect stories on assessment-informed course revision to demonstrate program improvement for accreditation purposes.

To encourage participation, we kept the application requirements and process as simple as possible. Any instructor teaching a general education course in Spring 2021 was eligible to apply, including tenured and tenure-track faculty, non-tenure-track faculty, adjunct instructors, and graduate students. Applicants filled out a brief Google form providing their personal information (i.e., name, email, department, college), the identifier and name of the general education course(s) they would be teaching that semester, and their department's fiscal details so that the Office of General Education could transfer funds upon their completion of the program. If the applicants were teaching a general education course in the upcoming semester and agreed to the terms of the mini-grant, their applications were approved. For the inaugural semester, we received and approved 41 applications, with all but five of the applicants completing the program.

The mini-grant program consists of three parts (see Figure 3), with all three components demonstrating how assessment data can be used beyond just satisfying accreditation demands. The first two parts focus on collecting and using assessment data at the course level, and the third involves analyzing aggregated assessment data to make improvements at the program level. Parts I and II are designed to be completed sequentially over two semesters, and Part III can be completed before, after, or concurrent with the other parts.

In Part I, the Office of General Education scaffolds support for completing the assessment process. First, at the beginning of the semester, participants use resources provided by the office to review the five steps of the assessment process (see Figure 2). By mid-semester, they submit an assessment plan that outlines how they intend to measure each SLO. Our colleagues in Institutional Effectiveness (IE) review the plan, ensuring that it is aligned with the correct outcomes and that the assessment measures align with those outcomes. IE provides individualized feedback to the instructors and, if necessary, requests that they submit a revised plan. Grantees then review student work to determine competency and submit their finalized assessment report after the semester ends. Finally, participants submit an assessment they used to measure student competency. These assessments are shared in a database, the Assessment Collaboratory, which is accessible to all general education instructors.

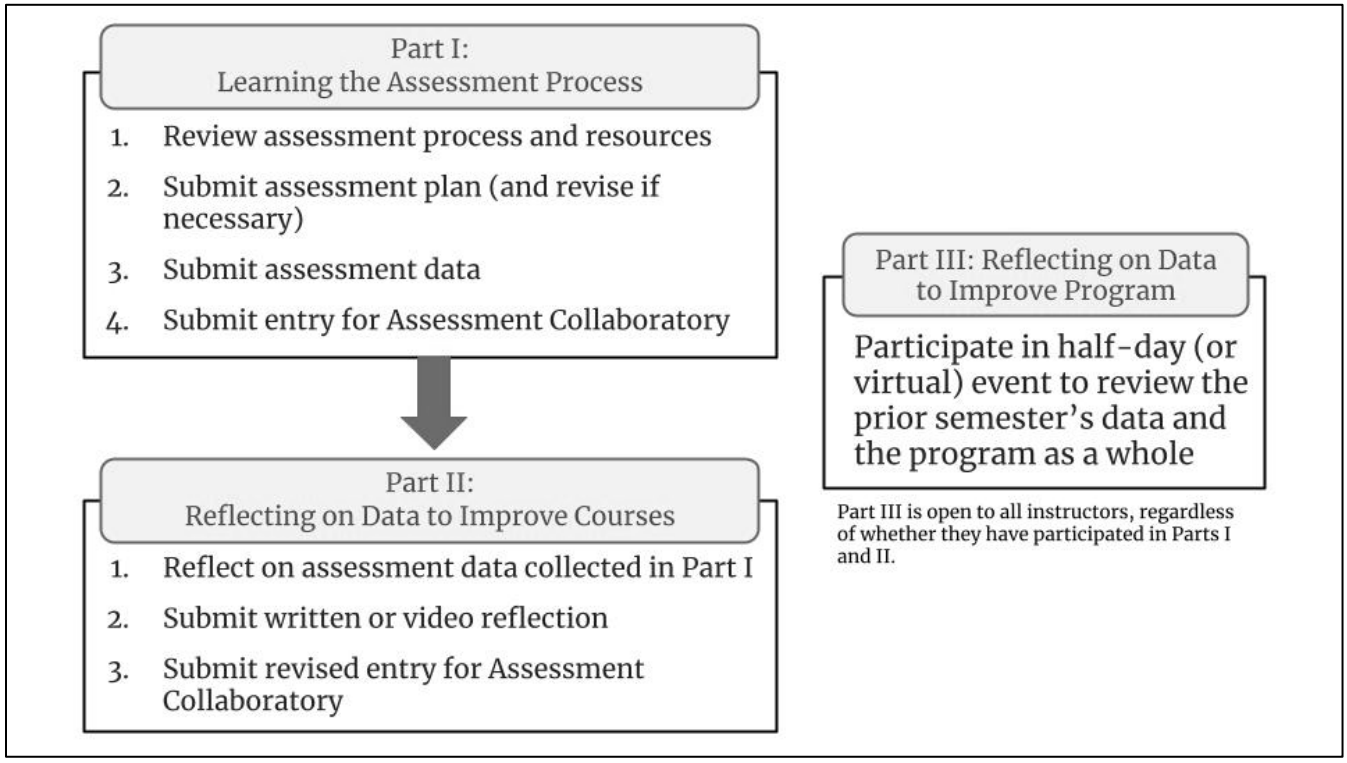
In Part II, grantees revisit the data they collected in Part I and submit a reflection on what they learned from their data and how they will use that information to improve their course. Additionally, they provide a revision of the assignment that they previously submitted to the Assessment Collaboratory in Part I or, if the data did not indicate that a revision was necessary, they share a different assignment from the course.

Part III shifts from a course-level to a program-level focus and is open to all general education instructors, regardless of whether they have completed Parts I and II. Participants engage with one another on discussion boards, where they analyze the student learning data from the prior semester for each of the nine general education concepts. The grantees also review various aspects of the general education program, including the assessment process and resources, and offer feedback to the Office of General Education.

In addition to receiving individualized support with assessment, participants in the mini-grant program also receive a small stipend and professional development credits. Stipends of $100 are provided for Parts I and II and $200 for Part III. Grant funds are provided by the Provost's Office, and we cap enrollment at 40 participants for Parts I and II and 100 participants for Part III. All three parts convey three professional development credits.[3] Instructors who complete all three parts of the mini-grant program receive nine professional development credits, $400 in stipends, and a certificate of completion.

Figure 3

The Three Components of the Assessment Mini-Grant Program



[3] Through the university's Computer Refresh Program, full-time teaching faculty who earn 12 professional development credits can receive a new computer every four years.

Impact on Instructor Perceptions and Engagement

The mini-grant program was originally developed to help faculty reengage with assessment post-COVID; however, through informal conversations with participants, we began to realize that it was also changing some faculty's perceptions of assessment. After participating in Parts I and II, they began to appreciate how the collection of assessment data could help them evaluate their instruction. Browsing the assignments their colleagues were using to assess student learning in the Assessment Collaboratory also allowed them to conceptualize methods of assessment that they had not previously considered. And finally, through participation in Part III, they gained a deeper understanding of their roles as integral contributors to a larger program and saw how the data they provided are used for program evaluation and improvement.

To illustrate the impact of the program on individual instructors, we asked three faculty members (see Table 2) from three different departments to share their experiences with the mini-grant program in a presentation at a general education conference. We selected these three individuals because each of them had completed all three components of the program, used their assessment data to revise their instruction, demonstrated effective pedagogy, and created well-aligned assessments.

As they prepared their conference presentation, we asked them to reflect on the following questions:

1. Why did you participate in the mini-grant program?
2. What assessment challenges were you facing that you were seeking support for?
3. Choose one assignment that you used for assessment and describe what criteria you used to assess student learning, what your data revealed, and what changes you made as a result.

We then met as a group (the coordinator for general education and the three faculty members) before the conference to discuss their reflections, identify similarities and differences, and plan our presentation. During the presentation and throughout the conference, we engaged in continued dialogue with other general education professionals, prompting additional reflection on how best to support faculty engagement with assessment. After returning from the conference, we continued to meet as a group to discuss how our experience with the mini-grant program might be useful to other institutions.

In the next section, we discuss the themes that emerged from these conversations and share how they informed our understanding of faculty perceptions of assessment, both before and after participation in the mini-grant program.

Table 2

Demographic, Course, and Testimonial Details of Three Participating Faculty

	Lynn Resler, PhD	**Jessica Taylor, PhD**	**Kevin Hamed, PhD**
Title	Professor	Assistant Professor	Collegiate Associate Professor
Department	Department of Geography	Department of History	Department of Fish and Wildlife Conservation
Gen Ed Course	Polar Environments	US History to 1877	Biodiversity Conservation
Associated Gen Ed Concepts	Advanced/Applied Discourse Intercultural and Global Awareness	Critical Thinking in the Humanities Critical Analysis of Identity and Equity in the U.S. Intercultural and Global Awareness	Reasoning in the Social Sciences Reasoning in the Natural Sciences Intercultural and Global Awareness
# Years Teaching	22 years (since 2001)	8 years (since 2015)	20 years (since 2003)
Goal for Participating in Mini-Grant	Gain insight into the assessment process using guidance provided via the mini-grant structure, improve course organization and student learning.	Get feedback on assessment tools from colleagues and assessment professionals, and take part in discussions about assessment concepts.	Receive guidance and feedback on the best practices for assessing student learning and identify areas for improving student proficiency in a new course.
View of Assessment Prior to Mini-Grant	• Confusing • Time-consuming • Did not benefit faculty or students	• Vague • Confusing • Arbitrary • Impersonal	• Irrelevant • Compulsory • Intimidating • Distraction from more important tasks
View of Assessment After Mini-Grant	• Beneficial to students and faculty • Not as confusing or time intensive as previously thought	• Collaborative • Concerned with faculty experience • As beneficial as you want it to be!	• Necessary • Insightful in identifying previously-missed deficiencies • Awaiting results each semester

Outcomes and Lessons Learned

Several themes emerged from the reflections provided by these three faculty members. First, each was candid about their initial perceptions of assessment: the process was confusing and time-consuming, and they felt that conducting assessment benefited only the administration—not them. Second, they all found the structure and support of the mini-grant program helpful for learning the steps of the assessment process. Third, and most importantly, they all used their assessment data to revise their instruction and/or course materials to better support student learning. By the end of the mini-grant

program, their thinking had transitioned from viewing assessment as a confusing, pointless burden to viewing it as a tool to refine their teaching.

Before discussing the experiences of these three mini-grant participants, it should be noted that we cannot yet affirm that their experience is representative of all grantees. All participants of Part II must submit a reflection on what their data tell them about their students' learning and how they might modify their instruction as a result, so we know that they are analyzing their data, but we have not systematically surveyed all participants about their initial perceptions of assessment and if/how those perceptions changed as a result of the mini-grant program. Thus, the following conclusions are based primarily on the experiences of these three faculty members.

Initial Perceptions of Assessment

The three professors we surveyed were forthright about their initial perceptions of assessment: they thought that the process was confusing and time-consuming, and they felt that conducting assessment fulfilled an administrative requirement at their expense. Dr. Resler's colleagues had shared with her their own hesitation with assessment, leading her to be skeptical of "*another top-down paperwork requirement from administration.*" Indeed, her colleagues' negative perceptions of assessment were so influential that she had been reluctant to teach a general education course.

Dr. Taylor also expressed an initial desire to avoid assessment, but hers arose more from a lack of guidance and receiving conflicting instructions from different colleagues. As a new faculty member, she developed the university's first-ever course in Native history. Seeking to include it in the general education program, she and colleagues needed to design not only the syllabus, readings, and assignments, but also figure out how to assess the general education student learning outcomes. She shared that "*all of this, plus the isolation surrounding faculty created by COVID as we transitioned to online teaching, had me feeling frustrated with the learning curve before the semester started.*"

In contrast to Dr. Taylor's and Resler's experiences, Dr. Hamed's initial perceptions of assessment were significantly colored by the assessment practices at his previous institution. Before he came to Virginia Tech, he had already experienced assessment as a compulsory task, irrelevant to his teaching, that he dreaded completing. He had never analyzed his data and was thus unable to develop strategies to improve student learning, and he felt that his efforts were not constructive and could be devoted to more pressing tasks. When he joined Virginia Tech, he had never received guidance on developing an assessment, which created an intimidating atmosphere when he was required to do so for his general education course.

Benefits of the Structure and Support of the Mini-Grant Program

Drs. Resler, Taylor, and Hamed all identified confusion with the assessment process as a motivating factor for applying to the mini-grant program. Allaying this confusion and providing structured support for learning the steps of the process were two of our main goals for the program. Their reflections indicate that the program was successful in this respect. Dr. Resler describes her experience below:

> *I participated in the mini-grant program primarily because it offered structure and support for navigating the assessment and reporting process. These benefits were especially important the first time I taught the course under the auspices of the general education curriculum. I greatly appreciated the provision of reporting deadlines throughout the semester, which made assessment reporting tasks seem manageable and more meaningful. For example, the first deadline required grantees to identify specific SLOs to be measured for the semester, the assessment measure, and the assessment criteria. The Office of General Education provided grantees with a spreadsheet (see Appendix A) and concept rubrics to make these tasks straightforward. They also had office hours and web resources, such as videos that explained procedures. Knowing that people in the administration were genuinely willing to help me alleviated a lot of my assessment mistrust.*

Dr. Hamed was familiar with assessment from his prior institution but found that the process differed considerably at Virginia Tech. Like Dr. Resler, he found it helpful to receive guidance through each step of the program, with due dates to keep him on track over the course of the semester. Dr. Taylor echoed these sentiments, noting that the mini-grant allowed her to "*add structure to the assessment process.*" In particular, she appreciated the customizable spreadsheet for data reporting and the deadlines for each step of the process, which helped front-load the first steps at the beginning of the semester, saving her time at the end of the semester.

For Dr. Hamed, the mini-grant program not only helped with learning the steps of submitting assessment, it helped him design the new course. Having to submit an assessment plan, and then receiving feedback on it, allowed him to refine the assessment before administering it to his students. Additionally, he appreciated the rubrics provided by the Office of General Education, which he found to be a valuable tool for consistently measuring student competency.

Assessment as a Means to Support Student Learning

Third, and most importantly, all three faculty members used their assessment data to revise their instruction and/or course materials to better support student learning. By the end of the mini-grant program, their thinking had transitioned from viewing assessment as a burden to viewing it as a tool to inform their teaching. Dr. Taylor found that the program helped her identify gaps in her students' learning, as it prompted her to analyze her assessment data and reflect on whether her students had achieved the level of competency she had hoped for (see Table 3). She described how she used this information to revise her instruction and assignments for future semesters:

> *After collecting assessment data, I found that 13% of students were still performing "below competent," and only 19% of students were "above competent" on the learning outcome "Interpret a cultural experience from both one's own and another's worldview." In my course, I want students to see that Native Nations are dynamic and different from one another, and I want them to be able to describe those differences using appropriate, antiracist language. I also want them to be able to reflect on how their own, often Western values are culturally constructed and not the "norm" for everyone. The students seemed to be comfortable*

comparing their own kinship with other students', but I found the answers which related to how kinship plays a role in politics and power in Native history to be oftentimes confused and superficial—so, with a relatively narrow understanding of kinship, they were interpreting a cultural experience from their own, but NOT another's worldview. I narrowed down the problem to the set of readings precipitating the assignment, about the connection between Pocahontas's family structure and precolonial politics in the Chesapeake. Integrating quiz questions about the readings and adding in-class recaps about Pocahontas's family structure allowed me to emphasize the centrality of kinship to identity and political organizations in non-Western societies.

By continuing to use this process to measure SLO competency in future semesters, Dr. Taylor can continue to refine instructional methods, resources, and assignments to best support her students' learning.

Table 3

Dr. Taylor's Initial Assessment Data for Intercultural and Global Awareness SLO #2

Student Learning Outcome	Below Competent	Competent	Above Competent
Interpret an intercultural experience from both one's own and another's worldview.	Superficially, simplistically, or incorrectly describes an intercultural experience from either one's own or another's worldview demonstrating a misunderstanding of elements important to a culture in relation to its history, values, politics, communication styles, economy, or beliefs and practices.	Describes an intercultural experience from both one's own and another's worldview demonstrating a basic understanding of the complexity of elements important to a culture in relation to its history, values, politics, communication styles, economy, or beliefs and practices.	Meaningfully and deliberately describes an intercultural experience from both one's own and another's worldview demonstrating a sophisticated understanding of the complexity of elements important to a culture in relation to its history, values, politics, communication styles, economy, or beliefs and practices.
Assessment Results	13%	68%	19%

Note. As a result of these assessment results, Dr. Taylor modified her instruction, adding more opportunities for students to engage with the content before completing the assignment.

Dr. Hamed's experience with using assessment to inform course revision mirrored Dr. Taylor's. Going into the mini-grant program, he was grappling with how to determine if his students were meeting the learning objectives for their capstone project. He used the rubrics provided by the Office of General

Education and realized that not all students were performing to the level he expected (see Table 4). Upon further analysis of the data, he was able to identify which students did not reach the desired level, and why, as he describes below:

> *Students worked in groups for the capstone project, and I allowed students to choose groups based on which area of biodiversity (e.g., plants, birds, amphibians) the students were most interested in. During the pilot class, I did not notice students from similar majors working together. Overall, students from more science-based majors (e.g., engineering or animal and poultry sciences), with a much greater scientific inquiry background, were assessed as "Above Competent." However, students from less science-based majors were assessed as "Competent." Without the structured assessment tools, I do not believe I would have been able to identify which students were not reaching a complete understanding of the scientific inquiry goal and that diversification within groups was vital. Based on the assessment data, I chose student groups for the 2022 course to ensure that science-based majors partnered with students with fewer science courses. I also restructured a lecture and in-class activity to reinforce scientific inquiry.*

After implementing these changes the following semester, Dr. Hamed reported that all students were assessed at the "Above Competent" level.

Table 4

Dr. Hamed's Initial Assessment Data for Reasoning in the Natural Sciences SLO #2

Student Learning Outcome	Below Competent	Competent	Above Competent
Apply principles and techniques of scientific inquiry.	Inaccurately applies principles and techniques of scientific inquiry.	Accurately applies principles and techniques of scientific inquiry.	Skillfully applies principles and techniques of scientific inquiry to synthesize reasonable and appropriate conclusions.
Assessment Results	0%	17%	83%

Note. Analyzing his initial assessment data, Dr. Hamed discovered that his STEM students were performing above competency, but his non-STEM students were not. In future semesters, he assigned mixed-major groups, ensuring that students with less of a scientific background were grouped with STEM students. After making this adjustment, all students were assessed as above competent.

In Dr. Resler's Polar Environments course, she used her assessment data to not only improve instruction in future semesters, but also to inform later instruction in the same semester. Using an ungraded, in-class activity to assess one of the learning outcomes for Discourse, "Develop effective content that is appropriate to a specific audience, context, or purpose," she discovered that 10% of the

students performed below competency and only 25% performed above competency (see Table 5). Based on this data, she realized that she needed to clarify the criteria for the upcoming graded assignment.

Participating in the mini-grant program allowed Dr. Resler to improve student learning in her courses, but on a larger scale, it also changed her perspective on assessment and general education. She describes this transformation below:

> *One unanticipated outcome of being a mini-grant grantee was a shift in mindset. Although assessment remains a 'task,' I can now appreciate its purpose. Understanding the meaning of required assessment incentivizes its completion. Most importantly, I see how conscious reflection on the assessment process can benefit students' learning. Overall, I feel more attuned to the university's general education mission, which plays a critical role at a land grant institution like ours.*

Table 5

Dr. Resler's Initial Assessment Data for Discourse SLO #3

Student Learning Outcome	Below Competent	Competent	Above Competent
Develop effective content that is appropriate to a specific content, audience, and/or purpose.	Lacks precision and specificity to a designated context, audience, and/or purpose Inconsistently contextualized content. Demonstrates minimal attention to audience, purpose, and/or context.	Demonstrates precision and specificity to a designated context, audience, and/or purpose. Consistently produces contextualized content. Analyzes audience, purpose and/or context and tailor the message accordingly.	Demonstrates a thorough understanding of a designated context, audience, and purpose that is responsive to all elements of the work. Effectively conveys contextualized content to an intended audience. Develop content that is highly appropriate and effective for varied audiences, contexts, and purposes.
Assessment Results	10%	65%	25%

Note. As a result of these assessment results, Dr. Resler concluded that she needed to modify the assignment to clarify the requirements.

Program-Level Outcomes and Lessons Learned

Faculty's participation in the mini-grant program was also extremely valuable to us as general education administrators, as their feedback in Part III allowed us to identify areas of confusion with the assessment process, as well as gaps in our resources and support. Due in part to the feedback received in Part III, our general education committee has begun exploring substantial program revisions, such as moving to an assessment cycle instead of collecting data every semester. Additionally, participants reviewed aggregated assessment data from prior semesters, helping us evaluate whether our general education program was fulfilling its commitment to our students. These discussions identified learning outcomes and rubrics for the general education committee to revisit and potentially revise.

Over the course of five semesters, we have made continual adjustments to the mini-grant program, both to improve the experience for participants and to streamline the administration of the program. From our learned experience, we offer the following suggestions to other institutions considering the creation of a mini-grant program to support faculty engagement with assessment.

1. Compensation/recognition for participating is extremely appreciated, even if it is small. If budget constraints do not allow for monetary compensation, consider professional development credits, a certificate, public acknowledgment on your website, or a thank-you lunch at the end of the program.

2. If you can provide monetary compensation but are administratively unable to pay participants directly, you may be able to transfer the funds to participants' departments for disbursement to the participants. We ask all participants and their fiscal managers to sign a Memo of Understanding (MOU) at the beginning of the semester to facilitate this process (see Appendix B).

3. Include a mechanism for faculty to engage with one another, either in person or on discussion boards, so that they can share ideas and foster a community of practice. Our faculty frequently share how much they appreciate the opportunity to interact with colleagues outside of their own disciplines.

4. Make participation as easy as possible: send reminders when a deadline is approaching, provide organized resources and examples of what they need to complete, and offer frequent opportunities for participants to ask questions and receive individualized help. For example, consider holding monthly Zoom office hours for general education faculty or let them know that you are available for a one-on-one meeting or phone call if they have questions or need support as they complete the different components of the mini-grant.

5. Consider using your learning management system to administer the mini-grant program. We add participants to a Canvas "course," through which they a) access directions and resources, b) turn in their deliverables, and c) engage with each other on discussion boards.

6. At the conclusion of the grant, email your participants to thank them for their contributions, and invite Part I and II participants to enroll in the next part the following semester.

7. Maintain a spreadsheet to track participation across all parts of the mini-grant so that you can send certificates of completion to faculty who complete the entire program.

Conclusion

The mini-grant program is by no means a panacea for all of our assessment-related challenges. Despite rolling out the program in Spring 2021, participation in assessment has continued to decline over the last several semesters (see Table 1), indicating that we have yet to crack the code on engaging those faculty who are most resistant to assessment. However, the mini-grant program has allowed us to increase engagement and foster investment among instructors with enough initial motivation to participate. For those who participate, we have found that the mini-grants can be a valuable tool for (re)orienting them to the process, compensating them for their time and effort, and demonstrating how they can use their assessment data to inform and improve their teaching. The program allows us to not only better support participating faculty, but also build personal connections with them, foster a sense of community among them, and recognize the great teaching happening within general education through the Assessment Collaboratory. We expect that our mini-grant program will evolve from semester to semester, but that it will continue to be a useful means of engaging general education instructors and improving the campus narrative surrounding assessment.

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Appendix A Sample Assessment Reporting Form

Student Learning Outcome	Was this student learning outcome measured in your course?	Assessment Measure	Please give more detail regarding the measure you chose and/or further specify "other" response	What criteria did you use to determine whether student performance was Below Competent, Competent, or Above Competent? For example, did you use the Pathways Rubric for this concept?	Total Number of Students Assessed	Below Competent		Competent		Above Competent		Total Percentage of Students
	Select from drop down list	Select from drop down list	Enter text description below	Enter text description below	Total Number of Students	Number of Students	Percentage of Students	Number of Students	Percentage of Students	Number of Students	Percentage of Students	Total Percentage
1. Identify fundamental concepts of the humanities.	Measured	Other	Discussion Board Post. Students identified an event/experience from VT history and the fundamental concepts addressed.	Pathways Rubric for Critical Thinking in the Humanities SLO 1 was used while grading the discussion post. Students were assigned a separate grade independent of this assessment.	32	0	0.0%	11	34.4%	21	65.6%	100.0%
2. Analyze texts and other created artifacts using theories and methods of the humanities.	Measured	Essay	Semester Project: Final Paper. Students wrote a paper on a selected event/experience from VT history. One component of the paper analyzed the event/experience utilizing multiple theories and methods of the humanities.	Pathways Rubric for Critical Thinking in the Humanities SLO 2 was used while grading the paper. Students were assigned a separate grade independent of this assessment.	30	4	13.3%	18	60.0%	8	26.7%	100.0%
3. Interpret texts and other created artifacts within multiple historical, intellectual, and cultural contexts.	Not Measured	*SELECT*					0.0%		0.0%		0.0%	0.0%
4. Synthesize multiple complex sources and create a coherent narrative or argument.	Measured	Essay	Semester Project: Final Paper. Students wrote a paper on a selected event/experience from VT history. Another component of the paper utilized multiple sources to discuss the impact the event/experience had on campus culture.	Pathways Rubric for Critical Thinking in the Humanities SLO 4 was used while grading the paper. Students were assigned a separate grade independent of this assessment.	30	9	30.0%	15	50.0%	6	20.0%	100.0%

All student learning outcomes (SLOs) for the core concept are already listed here.

In this column, use the drop down menu to select "Measured" if you assessed the corresponding SLO. If you did not assess a particular SLO, please select "Not Measured."

Use the drop down menu to select the type of student work you used to assess the corresponding SLO. Several commonly used assessment measures are listed, including an "Other" option.

In this column, provide additional information about the student work you used.

In this example, the instructor utilized a discussion board post and different components of a semester-long project to assess student competency on the required SLOs.

Pathways Rubrics have been created to help you assess each SLO independently. This column asks you to provide specific information on how you applied a Pathways Rubric or other criteria you used to determine how many students were Below Competent, Competent, and Above Competent for a particular SLO.

Use this column to report the total number of students you assessed for each corresponding SLO. This reflects *only* the number of students assessed per SLO, not the total enrollment of the course.

Pathways courses with more than 20 students must report data for a *minimum* of 20 randomly selected students.

In this example, the instructor used the Pathways Rubric developed specifically for Critical Thinking in the Humanities. Using the rubric descriptions for SLO 1, SLO 2, and SLO 4 respectively, the instructor tallied the number of students in each competency category.

When recording the number of students rated as Below Competent, Competent, or Above Competent in columns H, J, and L, the spreadsheet will automatically calculate the corresponding percentages in columns I, K, and M.

Please be sure to enter values (including 0 if appropriate) for columns H, J, and L for *each* SLO you assessed.

The total number of students you enter in the Below Competent (H), Competent (J), and Above Competent (L) columns should equal the total number of students (G) assessed for a particular SLO.

The final column automatically calculates the total percentage of students assessed per SLO.

Please ensure that this percentage is 100% for every SLO you measured and 0% for every SLO you did not measure.

Appendix B Sample MOU for Part I

Memo of Understanding (MOU)

Assessment Mini-Grant
Fall 2022, Part I

Instructions for completing this MOU:

Please review the commitments and funding provided on this form. Then sign this form using DocuSign ASAP or by **5:00 PM on Sep. 28th**.

Overview:

This Memorandum of Understanding articulates the expectations of the grantee(s), their home department(s), and the Office of Undergraduate Academic Affairs.

Commitments by Awardee and Departments:

The following **required** grant commitments must be met by the stated deadlines to receive your stipend. Details for each step will be provided in the grant's Canvas site.

1. By **Oct. 17, 2022**, review the first four steps of the assessment process.
2. By **Oct. 17**, **2022**, submit a draft Assessment Reporting Form with the first four columns completed. You will receive feedback and may be asked to submit a revised plan.
3. Collect and submit assessment data for the fall 2022 semester by **Jan. 31, 2023** (or **May 31, 2023,** if you're not teaching until spring semester).
4. Contribute content to the Assessment Collaboratory, including a brief (~3-min) video describing an assessment you use in your course and details for that assessment (e.g., assignment instructions).

Commitment by the Office of Undergraduate Academic Affairs:

Funded	FY23: $100
Purpose of funding: To compensate grantee for participation in Part I of the Assessment Mini-Grant Program for [ENTER COURSE(S)].	

In addition, 3 PDN credits will be awarded to the grantee(s) for completing this grant.

Funding Transfer Details: The home department of each grantee is responsible for all fiscal management of the grant allocation. The primary fiscal manager listed below is responsible for a)

managing the transfer of funds to the department and b) dispersing funds in the amount of $100 per grantee.

Primary Fiscal Manager Information:

Name: Email:
Org #: Operating Fund #:

For financial process questions, please contact [gen ed fiscal manager]: [fiscal manager's email].

Signatures:

Applicant:

X_____ Email: _____ Date: _____

Primary Fiscal Manager:

X_____ Email: _____ Date: _____

Office of Undergraduate Academic Affairs:

[Name], [Title] Date:

About the Authors

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