

Assessment of Student Learning

School of Communications, Elon University

initial plan, 2003; revised 2010, 2016, 2020, 2023

Assessment is the process of determining if students are learning what the faculty intend for them to learn. While grades represent an evaluation of student learning at an individual level, assessment is the evaluation of student learning across the breadth of a program. At its best, assessment has a transformative effect through the cyclical process of analyzing curriculum, instruction and student learning – and then using those findings to improve future student learning. This process requires gathering information from multiple sources to assess what students know, understand and can do as a result of their educational experiences.

A Distinctive Approach

The School of Communications endorses the professional values and competencies formulated by the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC).

The *Elon Eleven* is the school's distinctive way of expressing ACEJMC's values and competencies. Each goal or theme in the *Elon Eleven* has a specific learning outcome associated with it and ties directly to ACEJMC's ten values and competencies approved in August 2020. Curriculum matrices for each major identify which courses emphasize which of the values and competencies. The opening core introduces every student to at least an *awareness* of all values and competencies, and subsequent courses lead to *understanding* and *application*, where learning outcomes are reinforced and mastered.

The School's Course Handbook lists the catalog description, course goal(s) and course objectives to ensure that the values and competencies are uniformly stated in syllabi and provide sufficient consistency across multiple sections. Faculty can add additional objectives for their classes as they wish.

The *Elon Eleven* is displayed in every School of Communications classroom. The dean personally introduces the *Elon Eleven* to students in each section of the opening course (Communications in a Global Age) and explains how the curriculum and experiences such as the required internship are designed to work together to fulfill the school's mission.

Student learning outcomes for each of the *Elon Eleven* (Goals) are listed below. Learning outcomes indicate what students know or are able to do as a result of program instruction. As an ACEJMC accredited program, the School of Communications conforms to the guidelines recommended by this accrediting body. Descriptions of the ACEJMC values and competencies for each of the *Elon Eleven* are included verbatim under each goal as listed below.

School of Communications

Student Learning Outcomes (The Elon Eleven)

The Elon Eleven aligns with the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communication's (ACEJMC) professional values and competencies approved in August 2020. The numbers listed with each of the Elon Eleven are associated with the corresponding ACEJMC value and competency listed on the last page.

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The Elon Eleven

Truth, accuracy and fairness:

Learning Outcome: Students will be able to articulate the value of truth, accuracy, and fairness, and their relationship to culturally proficient communication diversity; describe the importance of access to information to ensure these values; and apply these values in the discipline and professions. (6, 3)

ACEJMC expectation: Graduates should be able to

(6) demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity;

(3) demonstrate culturally proficient communication that empowers those traditionally disenfranchised in society, especially as grounded in race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and ability, domestically and globally, across communication and media contexts;

Freedom of expression:

Learning Outcome: Students will be able to identify and state the importance of the five freedoms in the First Amendment; distinguish expression that is and is not protected; recognize differences in global contexts and apply legal principles to media issues. (1)

ACEJMC expectation: Graduates should be able to

(1) apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press, in a global context, and for the country in which the institution that invites ACEJMC is located;

Ethical ways of reasoning:

Learning Outcome: Students will be able to describe the philosophical underpinnings of ethical decision-making; recognize the symbiosis between law and ethics; and apply ethical principles to professional issues. (6)

ACEJMC expectation: Graduates should be able to

(6) demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity;

History and roles of media, communication professions and sport in society:

Learning Outcome: Students will be able to identify significant diverse individuals and describe important milestones in the multicultural history of communications and sport; and analyze the role and impact of media on U.S. society. (2)

ACEJMC expectation: Graduates should be able to

(2) demonstrate an understanding of the multicultural history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications;

Domestic and global diversity:

Learning Outcome: Students will be able to demonstrate an awareness of diverse peoples and cultures, particularly those who have been traditionally disenfranchised in the United States of America; demonstrate culturally proficient communication with diverse domestic audiences; describe ways to communicate appropriately with global audiences; to work on and advocate for diverse and inclusive teams; and understand the consequences of the digital divide. (3)

ACEJMC expectation: Graduates should be able to

(3) demonstrate culturally proficient communication that empowers those traditionally disenfranchised in society, especially as grounded in race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and ability, domestically and globally, across communication and media contexts;

Write and speak clearly and effectively:

Learning Outcome: Students will be able to demonstrate proficiency in grammar, spelling, mechanics and organization; and write and speak with accuracy and fairness, clarity, cultural proficiency and style for different audiences across media platforms. (3, 5, 9)

ACEJMC expectation: Graduates should be able to

(3) demonstrate culturally proficient communication that empowers those traditionally disenfranchised in society, especially as grounded in race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and ability, domestically and globally, across communication and media contexts;

(5) write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve;

(9) critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness;

Employ the tools of today's technology:

Learning Outcome: Students will be able to describe how technologies shape the way people interact with the world; master appropriate communication tools and technologies; and produce print, audio, video, online and mobile content. (4, 10)

ACEJMC expectation: Graduates should be able to

(4) present images and information effectively and creatively, using appropriate tools and technologies;

(10) apply tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work.

Use theory in producing meaningful content:

Learning Outcome: Students will be able to identify and demonstrate communication theories, concepts and aesthetic principles that guide the creation of visual content and the presentation of images and information. (4)

ACEJMC expectation: Graduates should be able to

(4) present images and information effectively and creatively, using appropriate tools and technologies;

Engage in research and analysis:

Learning Outcome: Students will be able to describe qualitative and quantitative research methods; evaluate primary and secondary sources; and **apply critical thinking skills in conducting research and evaluating information**, write and present a scholarly paper appropriate for disciplinary professions. (7)

ACEJMC expectation: Graduates should be able to

(7) apply critical thinking skills in conducting research and evaluating information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work;

Apply numerical concepts:

Learning Outcome: Students will be able to perform basic numerical computations; interpret statistical data and analyze audiences; and demonstrate the ability to apply these concepts in appropriate communications professions. (8)

ACEJMC expectation: Graduates should be able to

(8) effectively and correctly apply basic numerical and statistical concepts;

Demonstrate creative and critical thinking:

Learning Outcome: Students will be able to explain the creative elements in the work they do; understand the financial aspects of content creation; and draw rational conclusions as they analyze social and communications phenomena. (9, 10)

ACEJMC expectation: Graduates should be able to

(9) critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness;

(10) apply tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work.

Undergraduate Assessment Measures

The school applies three direct measures and three indirect measures to assess student learning at the undergraduate level. Below is a summary of direct and indirect measures used to assess student learning in the School of Communications. Each description below also includes a link to the instrument, the assessment strategy, including how and when the assessment was conducted, and the benchmark for success.

Senior Examination (direct measure)

The school expects students to master the key content of a communications program, from knowing the First Amendment to demonstrating how to interpret public opinion polling. The school administers a 50-question examination to new students in the opening course (Communications in a Global Age) and to seniors in the capstone course (Great Ideas: Issues and Research) as a way of assessing student learning from the start of the program to the end. The exam seeks to measure students' grasp of knowledge and their degree of understanding of the discipline's values and competencies. This direct measure is conducted during the fall and spring semesters annually. The test is administered by the director of the Communications Core and a faculty member assigned to assessment reporting. Results are tabulated by the school assessment team and shared with deans and chairs.

Two benchmarks are applied to this measure:

Improvement Benchmark: A benchmark of a 20-point improvement between the first-year students and seniors on each of the Elon Eleven outcomes is considered successful. This ensures measurable growth in students' knowledge and skills throughout the program.

Performance Benchmark: The average overall senior score of 70% or higher on each of the student learning outcomes is required. If the average senior score falls below 70% on the assessment exam overall or within any of the Elon Eleven outcomes, it is designated as an area for improvement, necessitating a review and potential revisions within the curriculum.

Internship Evaluations (direct measure)

All students in the school complete one or more professional internships before graduation, and the Internship Office gathers systematic feedback from each professional supervisor. The school analyzes the internship evaluations on an aggregate basis to determine the level of student preparedness and performance in professional work settings. The aggregate analysis reveals strengths and weaknesses related to curriculum and instruction. This direct measure is conducted at the end of each semester, including summer semesters, annually. The evaluation is administered by the School of Communications director of internships, and results are gathered by a faculty member assigned to assessment reporting. Results are shared with the deans and chairs.

Supervisor Approval Benchmark: At least 70% of internship supervisors must respond with

"Strongly agree" or "Agree" to the corresponding questions for the Elon Eleven outcomes. This reflects the professional readiness and competence of the students.

School of Communications Exit Portfolio (e-Portfolio) Evaluations (direct measure)

Developed as a redesigned measure for the 2023-2024 academic year, the exit portfolio is a digitally curated compilation of student reflections and work samples designed to assess the *Elon Eleven* learning outcomes for seniors in their final year of study. Students in the communications core curriculum capstone course Great Ideas: Issues and Research (COM 4970) are required to submit the following:

- Six written reflections (500-word max) to assess their understanding and knowledge of the following *Elon Eleven* program outcomes: 1) truth, accuracy and fairness, 2) freedom of expression, 3) ethical ways of reasoning, 4) multicultural history of communications, 5) domestic and global diversity, and 6) applying numerical concepts.
- Students' COM 4970 research paper to assess the following Elon 11 program outcomes: 1) ability to write effectively, 2) ability to engage in research and analysis, and 3) ability to demonstrate critical thinking.
- 2-3 signature projects showcasing knowledge and skills acquired in their major - to assess the following Elon 11 program outcomes: 1) ability to employ the tools of today's technologies, and 2) ability to use theory in producing meaningful content.

This direct measure is conducted annually during the spring semester. The portfolio is administered by the director of the COM Core and the chairs/directors of each program. Using a rubric that evaluates the *Elon Eleven* student learning outcomes, external reviewers and department faculty assess a sample of e-portfolios by academic major. Results are tabulated by a faculty member assigned to assessment reporting and the director of the COM core and are shared with chairs/directors.

Senior Performance Benchmark: At least 80% of students must score "Satisfactory" or "Excellent" on each program outcome in their exit portfolios. This demonstrates that students have achieved the expected outcome by the end of the program.

Senior Surveys (indirect measure)

The School of Communications conducts surveys of graduating seniors in both the fall and spring to assess the quality of their educational experience. These surveys are administered during the capstone course (COM 4970) at the end of each semester. The data collected from the two semesters are analyzed by faculty members assigned to assessment reporting and the director of the COM core. Results are shared with the deans and chairs.

Every three years, Elon seniors evaluate the quality of their educational experiences by participating in the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). The school compares and analyzes School of Communications student responses to university and national averages to examine issues or reveal trends that may need to be addressed.

Senior Perception of Learning Benchmark: At least 70% of seniors must respond with "Very much" or "Quite a bit" to the corresponding questions for the Elon Eleven outcomes. This indicates a high level of perceived engagement and learning.

Student Competitions (indirect measure)

Student success can be an external indicator of the quality of the educational experience, whether originating in classes or through student media. The school tracks student success in awards competitions such as the Hearst Journalism Awards, Broadcast Education Association's Festival of Media Arts and other national competitions in addition to communications student research accepted for presentation in campus and national research forums. The compilation, comparison and analysis of student success over time offers insight into the effectiveness of the instruction and experiences provided to students. Student competitions are tracked in each department's End of Year Report and highlighted in the School of Communications Annual Report.

Student Competition Benchmark: Students across all majors are recognized for academic and professional association awards and competitions.

Alumni Survey (indirect measure)

Alumni have the ability to assess their educational experiences with the benefit of perspective. The periodic compilation, comparison and analysis of alumni responses can show patterns over time of alumni judgment about curriculum, instruction and student learning and of the short- and long-term usefulness or relevance of what they learned. This indirect measure is conducted every three years. The test is administered by the director of student engagement and special projects. Results are tabulated by a faculty member assigned to assessment reporting and shared with the deans. Major specific findings are also shared with the chairs/directors.

Alumni Satisfaction Benchmark: At least 70% of alumni must respond favorably ("very much" or "quite a bit") to questions about the School of Communications' contribution to the values and competencies outlined in the Elon Eleven. This measures post-graduation satisfaction and perceived value of the education received.

Timeline for Assessment Measures

At least four measures are reported each year. Beginning in 2020-21, two direct measures (the Senior Exam and the Internship Supervisor Evaluation) have been conducted annually. In 2023-24, the Exit Portfolio for all ACEJMC majors was redesigned and implemented as a third direct measure. Beginning no later than 2025-2026, the exit portfolio will be conducted annually in the department capstone class. In addition to the direct measures, the school uses two indirect measures (Student Surveys and Student Awards) reported annually. A third indirect measure, an Alumni Survey, is reported every three years. Moving forward, the alumni survey will be conducted every four years. The Senior Survey will also be enhanced with data from NSSE every three years, starting in 2022. The next NSSE comparison will occur in 2025.

Assessment measures implemented by one or more of the departments since the preceding accreditation site visit and the plan moving forward for all ACEJMC accredited majors:

	Senior Exam (direct)	Internship Evaluations (direct)	e-Portfolio Evaluations (direct)	Senior Surveys (indirect)	Student Awards (indirect)	Alumni Survey (indirect)
2017-18		X	X		X	
2018-19	X	X	X	X	X	X
2019-20		X	X	X	X	
2020-21	X	X		X	X	
2021-22	X	X	X	X	X	X
2022-23	X	X	X	X	X	
2023-24	X	X	X	X	X	
2024-25	X	X	X	X	X	
2025-26	X	X	X	X	X	X
2026-27	X	X	X	X	X	
2027-28	X	X	X	X	X	
2028-29	X	X	X	X	X	
2029-30	X	X	X	X	X	X

2024-2025 and beyond are shaded grey to represent the tentative assessment plan for the School of Communications and the Communications Design, Cinema & Television Arts, Journalism, Media Analytics, and Strategic Communications majors.