



Reports of Institutional Effectiveness Institution-Specific Learning Measures

Every student who attends James Madison University (JMU) must complete two years in our General Education (www.jmu.edu/gened/) program, regardless of their major. So, all eleven of our learning measures take place in the General Education program since this experience is common to all JMU students. We use these student learning data in three ways:

- 1) **Competency** - all JMU students must pass these measures before advancing to their sophomore year.
- 2) **Value Added or “change over time”** - these measure differences reported over two occasions: as entering first year students and after course completion.
- 3) **Course versus No Course Comparison** - sophomore level students who have completed the required courses are compared to sophomores who have not yet completed the required General Education courses.

Of our eleven measures, three are competency based: Information Seeking Skills, Basic Technology, and Writing. For the other eight, student scores are reported on a common scale similar to the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). These measures are: American History and Government, Critical Thinking, Oral Communication, Wellness and Human Development, Arts and Humanities, Quantitative Reasoning, Natural World/Science, and Global Experience. We use scores in all these areas to fine-tune sequences within the curriculum. Following are each measure in more detail.

Information-Seeking Skills Test - Competency

The Information Seeking Skills Test (ISST) assesses students' knowledge of, and skills in information retrieval, electronic databases, and the use of the Internet. To demonstrate their knowledge and skills in these areas, students must correctly answer 42 out of 53 questions—a standard that has been identified by JMU faculty as indicating proficient performance. All JMU students must pass the ISST before being able to register for their sophomore year classes.

Basic Technological Skills Tests - Competency

The Basic Technology assessment consists of three tests: word processing, presentation software, and technology knowledge. These tests represent a baseline competency of computing skills that is expected of all JMU students. For each test, JMU faculty have identified passing scores that indicate proficient performance. To demonstrate competency, students must pass all three tests prior to being allowed to register for their sophomore year classes.

Writing - Competency

Writing is assessed using a four-point holistic rating scale, in which a score of four represents excellent writing; two represents minimal competency, and one represents less than competent writing. Students submit a portfolio from their second semester writing course that includes their best two completed written works. Spring 2000 first year students scored an average of 2.4 points.

American History and Government – Value Added

The American History and Government Test evaluates students' understanding of the major themes and concepts that structure American life from history and government. Students who have completed JMU's American Experience requirement (US history or political science) score, on average, 53 points higher than they did as incoming students.

Critical Thinking Test – Valued Added

The Critical Thinking assessment is used to evaluate JMU students' skills in the areas of interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and inference and in their dispositional attitudes. Sophomores scored, on average, 81 points higher than first year students.

Oral Communication Test – Value Added

The Oral Communication assessment instrument is used to evaluate JMU students' knowledge in four areas: communication fundamentals, public speaking, interpersonal communication, and small-group communication. Students who have completed their required communication course score, on average, 208 points higher than they did as incoming first year students.

Wellness and Human Development - Value Added

The Wellness and Human Development Test assesses student learning in health, wellness, and human development. Students who have completed some or all of their health and social sciences coursework score, on average, 91 points higher than they did as incoming students.

Arts and Humanities – Course versus No Course Comparison

The Arts and Humanities Test is administered via computer and includes a number of multimedia and text-based stimuli. Students view specific artistic experiences, including watching a dramatic video, listening to recorded music, viewing artwork, and reading passages of literary and philosophical works. Sophomore students scored, on average, 27 points higher than incoming first year students.

Quantitative Reasoning Test – Course versus No Course Comparison

The Quantitative Reasoning Test measures students' mathematical, graphical, tabular, and statistical reasoning skills. Students who completed two courses scored, on average, 36 points higher than incoming first year students.

Natural World/Science Test – Course versus No Course Comparison

The Natural World/Science Test measures concepts in the natural and physical sciences and in scientific reasoning. Sophomores completing three JMU Natural World/Science courses scored, on average, 41 points higher than sophomores who had not yet taken any Natural World/Science courses.

Global Experience Test – Course versus No Course Comparison

The Global Experience assessment instrument evaluates students' understanding of global issues of importance to the human community. Students who have completed the Global Experience requirement scored an average of 44 points higher than incoming first year students.