

ASSESSMENT HANDBOOK

Mission and Purposes

A liberal arts education is both broad and deep, including wide exploration in general education and focused study within a major. Burlington College challenges individuals to sharpen their thinking and learning skills and to gain wide knowledge in the liberal arts, so that they can develop as whole persons who think critically and creatively about the glut of information, problems, questions, and choices confronting them in a complex world. We emphasize interdisciplinary inquiry in our Core Curriculum, courses that examine crucial questions from the integrated perspective of two or more academic disciplines. We assess each student's fulfillment of these rigorous challenges through a combination of coursework, a portfolio of original work, and—in the final year—a degree project. These goals and assessment processes arise out of our educational philosophy and values and are grounded in the curriculum.

General Education Learning Goals

Fundamental Learning Skills

We stress four fundamental learning skills—written communication, oral communication, critical thinking, and research methods—that students use across the disciplines. These skills are demonstrated through coursework and the Midpoint Assessment Portfolio. See Fundamental Learning Skills below.

Liberal Arts

The college sets learning goals that embrace traditional elements of the liberal arts such as historical consciousness and scientific thought along with others that address our mission such as responsible action and creative expression. These goals are met by coursework, with three credits applied to each Liberal Arts Goal. See Liberal Arts Goals below. Courses within the curriculum are identified as adequately addressing each goal.

Assessment of Student Progress

Entry Point Assessments

Certain assessments—concerning proficiency in writing, using computers as an educational resource, and quantitative reasoning through the development of mathematical skills—are made when students enter the college. Our writing staff reviews each student's application essay, using a consistent set of standards, for placement purposes. Students may fulfill the college's requirements in academic computing and quantitative reasoning by passing competency tests. These tests are offered during New

Student Orientation week and are also made available at other times. Those students who do not pass these tests must complete coursework.

Midpoint Assessment and the Portfolio

Admission to the B.A. program is selective, based on the assessment of a portfolio of the student's work at the mid-point (45-75 credits). Students gather original work to demonstrate their proficiency in the four fundamental learning skills—written communication, oral communication, critical thinking, and research methods. The assessment process is officially triggered by enrollment in Research and Reflection. The course supports the development of this portfolio, as the student researches, drafts, and revises a major essay, accompanied by an annotated bibliography, that comprises a large portion of it. The portfolio should include:

1. the Research and Reflection paper;
2. the annotated bibliography associated with that paper;
3. the instructor's oral communication checklist from the oral presentation in Research and Reflection;
4. a critical analysis of a text, an idea, an educational experience, or a work of art;
5. an essay in which the student discusses personal experience in relation to ideas and information;
6. and a personal essay.

See Midpoint Personal Essay, below, for guidelines.

A portfolio review committee, made up of at least two regular faculty members hired and trained for this work, reviews each portfolio and assesses student progress. The assessment is intended to be both evaluative and diagnostic. Advisors relay and use the results to inform students' future academic choices. In rare instances, a student may be kept from entering the B.A. program if the college Assessment Committee, based on the portfolio results, determines that a student will be unable to complete the Degree Project. Students who are not recommended for the B.A. will be encouraged to pursue the A.A. degree. A student must complete the midpoint portfolio and fulfill the Liberal Arts goals to earn the A.A. degree.

Midpoint Personal Essay

At Burlington College, we believe that a sound education involves students in active reflection and assessment of learning. Each semester you have evaluated your learning in individual classes. At midpoint, we ask you to evaluate your learning in both broader and more personal ways. At 60 credits, AA students are completing their degrees, while BA students are making the transition into their major area of study. It is a time to look back at where you have been and to look forward to where you hope to go.

In an essay of 3-5 typed, double-spaced pages, we would like you to reflect upon your educational experience at Burlington College, thinking about both **WHAT** you learned (the courses you took and the subjects you studied) and **HOW** you learned (the styles of teaching and learning that worked for you and your interactions with instructors and

students). *What has been most meaningful to you during your time at Burlington College? Which classes and subject areas were the most important to you? Were there times you were able to make connections among different classes, or between the subjects you were studying and your personal life? What have you discovered about how you learn? What styles of teaching did you find worked best for you? What have you done that you most valued in your learning here?*

These questions should serve as a guide; you don't have to answer all of them. Be specific, give examples, and tell stories.

Steps in the Process

1. Enroll in Research and Reflection (R&R).
2. Meet with your advisor by the middle of the semester to discuss your portfolio and personal essay. Work out a schedule so that you can submit a draft of your personal essay to your advisor and discuss it. Build in time for revision. Review contents of the portfolio together.
3. Submit your portfolio, with a revised version of your personal essay, to your R&R instructor by the last day of class. You will not receive credit for this course if the portfolio is not submitted on time. No incompletes are granted in R&R. If you get no credit, you must retake the class.
4. The R&R instructor gives the portfolio to the Assessment Committee.
5. The portfolio review committee reads your material, discusses your progress, and makes its assessment.
6. Your advisor discusses the assessment results with you at check-in for the following semester

Midpoint Assessment for Transfer Students

Transfer students with more than 75 credits are exempt from Research and Reflection and the midpoint portfolio review process. Transfer students with fewer than 75 credits are required enroll in Research and Reflection and complete the midpoint assessment.

Exceptions (Only for Students Enrolled Before January, 2006)

Adjustments may be made in the fulfillment of the Media Literacy and Responsible Action goals for those who enrolled before January, 2006. It is possible to apply Introduction to Microcomputers or the successful completion of the Computer Competency Exam to the Media Literacy goal. A student who is pursuing the A.A. degree is exempt, with a petition to the Academic Review Committee, from the Responsible Action goal.

Assessment Process

Entry Point Assessments

Writing: new students' application essays are assessed for placement purposes
Computer: competency exam
Mathematics: competency exam

Fundamental Learning Skills

Written Communication
Oral Communication
Critical Thinking
Research Methods

General Learning	Learning	Focused
in the Liberal arts		in the Major
3 credits for each goal		36 to 45 credits

Mid-Point Assessment

Enroll in Research and Reflection
Portfolio demonstrating fundamental learning skills

Fundamental Learning Skills Focused Learning in the Major

Degree Project

Enroll in Degree Project Seminar I & II
Two-semester capstone project in major area
6 credits

General Education Learning Goals

Fundamental Learning Skills

These skills are demonstrated through coursework and the Midpoint Assessment Portfolio.

Written Communication

Burlington College expects students to be able to:

- produce writing that shows control of the conventions of grammar, usage, mechanics, and spelling;
- establish and maintain a clear purpose in a variety of written forms appropriate to lifelong learning, including personal essays and research writing;
- reflect in writing on their own experience in relation to ideas and information;
- develop a distinct and individual writing voice.

Oral Communication

Burlington College expects students to be able to:

- create a concise, formal oral presentation of research and ideas;
- demonstrate skills necessary to present ideas and research orally to a group.

Critical Thinking

For the purposes of Burlington College Assessment Goals, critical thinking will be defined as reasonable and reflective thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe or do. It is dialogical (committed to an extended exchange between different points of view or frames of reference) and dialectical (conducted to test the strengths and weaknesses of opposing points of view).

Burlington College expects students to be able to:

- identify and focus questions and theses
- engage with diverse perspectives and approaches
- analyze and evaluate facts, findings and theories systematically
- synthesize perspectives, ideas, and information.

Research Methods

The ability to be a lifelong learner is critical to living in an information society. Individuals must be able to research information and evaluate its validity.

Burlington College expects students to be able to:

- use library, database, and Internet resources effectively to develop and support research;
- write correctly in the format of the discipline (APA or MLA), including citations in text and references/bibliography;
- read and evaluate research sources critically.

Liberal Arts Goals

These goals are met by coursework, with three credits applied to each Liberal Arts Goal. Courses within the curriculum are identified as adequately addressing each goal. The Interdisciplinary Study goal is met through the Core Curriculum. Classes being used to fulfill the Core Curriculum requirement may also be applied to the Liberal Arts goals.

Creative Expression

Creative expression includes practices in conventional forms in the visual arts, performing arts, creative writing, music, and film, including interdisciplinary and experimental approaches. Burlington College expects students to practice at least one art form as a means of personal discovery and expression and the cultivation of imagination. Students will gain familiarity with the basic principles of creating in that form.

Cultural Awareness

Burlington College expects students to cultivate a foundational awareness of how culture is shaped, sustained, and changed through the study of the expressive products, practices, and traditions of human communities.

Historical Consciousness

History has been defined as the study of how change takes place. Burlington College expects students to learn to think historically, to understand the connection between past and present, and to be aware of how interpretation and context affect our view of history.

Interdisciplinary Study

The academic disciplines provide illuminating frameworks for understanding the world, but can also create artificial boundaries that limit knowledge. Burlington College expects students to pursue interdisciplinary study, integrating two or more disciplines as they examine a question of subject area.

Media Literacy

Media literacy is the ability to analyze and evaluate media and their role in society. Burlington College expects students to examine how media work, how they are organized, and how they construct reality.

Quantitative Reasoning

Burlington College expects students to develop the capacity to use basic numbers and operational concepts, as well as formal and informal strategies to resolve mathematical problems.

Responsible Action

The responsible initiatives and actions of individuals build and sustain human community. Burlington College expects students to engage with their communities in productive ways and to reflect upon the meaning of their actions.

Scientific Thought

Burlington College expects students to understand the methods and practices of modern natural sciences, and to gain an awareness of the historical, social, and political effects of science on our world.

Social Awareness

Social awareness is an understanding of human behavior and human communities. Burlington College expects students to cultivate an awareness of how human beings function, either individually or in groups.