

Project Purpose and Scope

With funding from Lumina Foundation and the Utah System of Higher Education, AAC&U engaged all public higher education institutions in Utah to examine how fundamental commitments to developing students’ civic skills are being demonstrated. Because of the nature of the Utah system, this project consisted of two strands of activities: (1) the direct assessment students’ demonstrated civic engagement utilizing samples of student work products gathered from degree-granting institutions, and (2) a separate convening to address the public purpose and integration of civic skills into technical education programs. The two sections of the following report provide a summary of activities, findings, and concluding thoughts for each of these strands.

Section I: Direct Assessment of Students Demonstrated Civic Engagement across Utah’s Degree-Granting Institutions

Activity	Date	Objective/Deliverable
Submission, scoring, and analysis of student work products for University of Utah, Salt Lake CC, and Weber State as part of national cohort of project schools	May-December 2022	Submission of artifacts and development of campus meta-datafile
Onboarding of Snow College, Southern Utah Univ., Utah State Univ., Utah Tech Univ., Utah Valley Univ.	March 2022	Project meeting on March 4, 2022 to provide overview of timeline
Recruitment of faculty and staff to participate in scorer training through the AAC&U VALURE Scoring Collaborative	Fall 2022	Campuses were provided the option to engage faculty and staff from their campus to participate in online training to understand how to use and apply VALUE rubrics as a free professional learning opportunity.
Submission, scoring, and analysis of student work products for degree-granting institutions	Spring/Summer 2023	Analyses were performed by AAC&U Research Associate, Dr. Beth Perkins, for the VALUE Scoring Collaborative
Reports to campuses	Fall 2023	Campuses received individual reports from their engagement in the VALUE Scoring Collaborative

Background on the AAC&U VALUE Rubrics and Approach to Scoring

The VALUE rubrics were designed to assess “descending” performance levels (see Figure 1). When scorers are trained to apply the VALUE rubrics, they begin at the highest performance

level of the rubric and work downward, based on the assumption that all students have the potential for achieving Capstone level work. The VALUE rubric for Civic Engagement addresses six dimensions, or criteria, against which student work samples are assessed: 1) diversity of communities and cultures, 2) analysis of knowledge, 3) civic identity and commitment, 4) civic communication, 5) civic action and reflection, and 6) civic contexts/structures (the Civic Engagement VALUE rubric is provided in Appendix A, VALUE Scoring Collaborative Report).

Figure 1. The VALUE Rubric “Scale”



The alignment of a piece of student work along any one dimension/criterion of a VALUE rubric can be given a score of “zero.” A “zero” for any one criterion is best described as an absence of evidence of student learning for a specific dimension. **The absence of evidence may indicate a students’ performance does not meet level 1 (“benchmark”), but it can *also* indicate that the assignment that generated the work product did not intentionally prompt the student to demonstrate skills or learning in a particular area.** This is an important analytic detail to understand when examining the rubric results.

Additionally, scorers are required to provide a separate score for each row of the rubric. As such, it is not only possible but quite common that a single artifact of student work will receive a range of scores across the criteria, signifying varying levels of performance across the various dimensions of a particular VALUE rubric. As such, AAC&U does not create a single, composite score by averaging across rubric rows.

Discussion of Results

As part of the project’s design, participating campuses were given only two options for rubrics that could be used to address specific civic skills – Civic Engagement or Global Learning. All Utah campuses chose Civic Engagement. Most of the fifteen institutions in the national cohort also chose this outcome.

The following results are for seven of Utah’s eight degree-granting institutions. Unfortunately, Utah Tech University was ultimately unable to submit student work products for this project. Each campus was asked to submit a standard sample of 100 student work products drawn from assignments associated with various civic learning and engagement activities. Reaching the full sample of 100 proved difficult not only for institutions in Utah, but also for the national cohort of institutions that participated in an earlier iteration of this project. The final sample size for the

Utah cohort of seven campuses was 548 work samples. Samples were scored by externally trained and certified VALUE scorers (See Appendix A for a full summary of findings)

In addition to work sample, campuses were asked to submit “metadata” along with work samples. Metadata covers a host of additional analytical variables such as: demographic variables, weight of the assignment relative to the overall course grading structure, assignment difficulty, and basic course information. For this project, we also asked campuses to tell us what type, if any, high-impact practice was associated with the assignment, such as service-learning, community-based research, etc. Because high-impact practices are routinely combined (e.g., a first-year seminar course that includes a service-learning component), we asked campuses to designate which high-impact practice was “primary” and which was “secondary,” in order to discern where the greatest levels of intentionality were around experiential design.

We have found that campuses participating in the VALUE Scoring Collaborative have persistent challenges gathering institutional level data needed to provide full reporting on metadata. Simply put, though campuses are asked to report on credit hours earned and student demographics, these data are often missing from the metadata files submitted by campuses. This was the case with the national cohort and was especially true for Utah campuses. Though campuses were asked to report on high-impact practices, we also incurred pockets of missing data for this variable, as well.

Given challenges with gathering the samples of work products and missing metadata, the following results should be considered preliminary. Because this research is the first of its kind at the state-level for Utah and nationally for the initial cohort of campuses, the nature of the findings should be considered to be exploratory and used to inform future endeavors. The implications of the exploratory nature of this work will be examined in further detail below.

Overview of Collected Student Work Samples

The results in the table below provide an overall snapshot of the number of work products that were scored per dimension (the far left column) and level of cognitive development (i.e., Capstone, Milestones, and Benchmark) of the Civic Engagement rubric. Capstone represents about where a student should be upon completion of a bachelor’s degree and Benchmark entry point to college. The table below indicates the majority of work samples scored at Milestone 2, or just above entry-level. It is important to underscore that a “2” is neither bad nor good, rather it indicates a level of cognitive development that should be commensurate with the assignment difficulty or anticipated level of progression of the student. We often associate scores on the rubric with number of credit hours earned to get a better estimate of how the rubric score aligns with students’ anticipated trajectory. Unfortunately, we were not able to gather credit hour metadata from the campuses to make this comparison. This would, however, be a valuable next step for advancing future endeavors around direct assessment of civic skills in order to understand if students are demonstrating skills at the appropriate level of cognitive development.

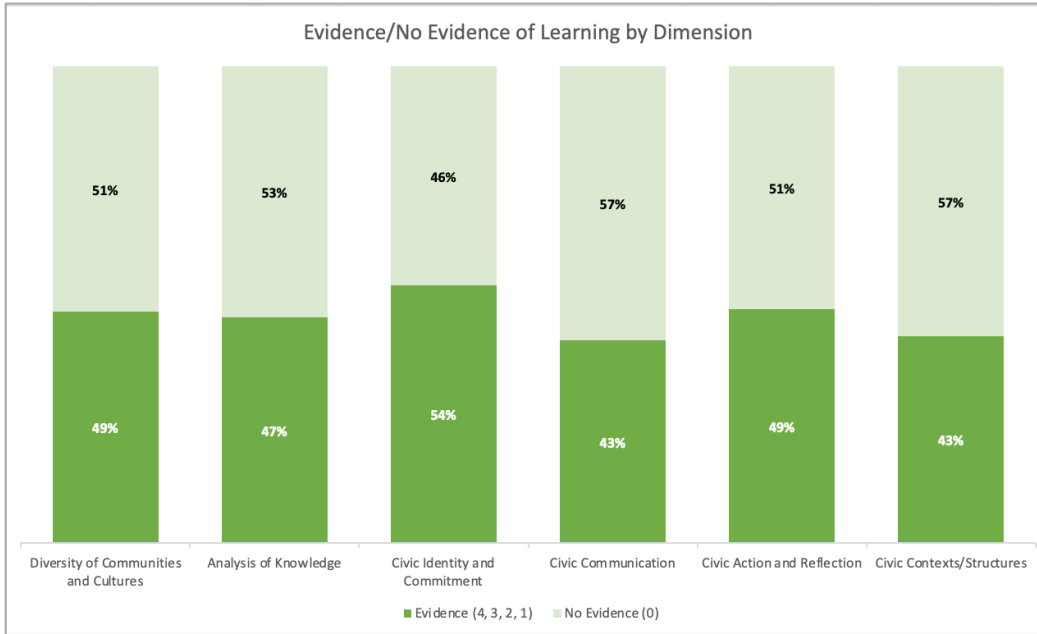
The last column of the table below, “Total with Evidence Versus No Evidence” will be addressed in the following section.

	Capstone		Milestones				Benchmark		Total with Evidence		Total with Evidence Versus No Evidence			
	4		3		2		1		(4, 3, 2, 1)		(4, 3, 2, 1)		0	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	100%	n	%	n	%
Diversity of Communities and Cultures	7	3%	25	9%	145	55%	89	33%	266	100%	266	49%	282	51%
Analysis of Knowledge	7	3%	18	7%	127	49%	108	42%	260	100%	260	47%	288	53%
Civic Identity and Commitment	4	1%	43	15%	193	65%	56	19%	296	100%	296	54%	252	46%
Civic Communication	9	4%	20	9%	114	49%	90	39%	233	100%	233	43%	315	57%
Civic Action and Reflection	5	2%	19	7%	190	71%	55	20%	269	100%	269	49%	279	51%
Civic Contexts/Structures	7	3%	24	10%	124	52%	83	35%	238	100%	238	43%	310	57%

Evidence of Learning by Rubric Dimension

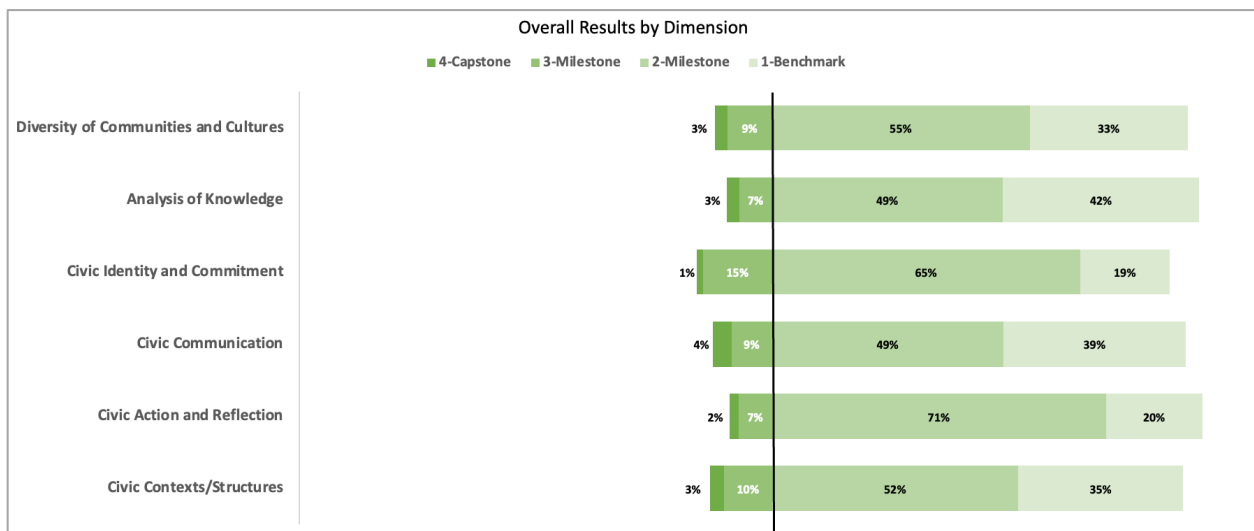
An important element of direct assessment is the degree to which scorers see *any* evidence of demonstrated ability on a particular dimension. VALUE Scoring Collaborative scorers do not have access to the assignment prompts associated with samples of student work. As such, scorers are not able to reference the assignment details to see whether the assignment directions given to students were intended to be aligned with specific rubric dimensions. This is also why scorers are not allowed to indicate “not applicable” when evaluating student work samples. Rather, scorers will assign a score of zero (0), signifying an absence of evidence, for a specific rubric dimension if the student work is not observed to meet a 1 (Benchmark) performance level.

Approximately half (46-57%) of all work samples submitted by Utah degree-granting campuses were assigned a score of “zero” across any one dimension of the Civic Engagement rubric. This range of percentages was slightly higher than what was found for the national cohort of campuses, for which the percentage range of work products receiving a score of “zero”/“no evidence” was 33-40% on any particular dimension. For work submitted by Utah campuses, the dimension for which evidence was most consistently found was with regard to students’ demonstration of “civic identity and commitment.” By contrast, the dimension for which the *least* amount of evidence was found was students’ demonstration of “Civic Contexts/Structures.”



Scores by Dimension of the Civic Engagement VALUE Rubric

For the student work samples receiving a score of 4 through 1, we found low percentages of high scores (scores of 4 or 3) across all six dimensions. This finding suggests that students' demonstrated civic engagement is primarily being demonstrated at beginning, rather than advanced, stages cognitive development. Such scores are completely appropriate assuming experiences and assignments are pitched at these introductory or practicing levels. If, however, assignments are intended for illicit skill demonstration at more advanced levels cognitive development, such as at the capstone level, greater attention needs to be given to the design and execution of these assignment commensurate with students' learnings experiences.

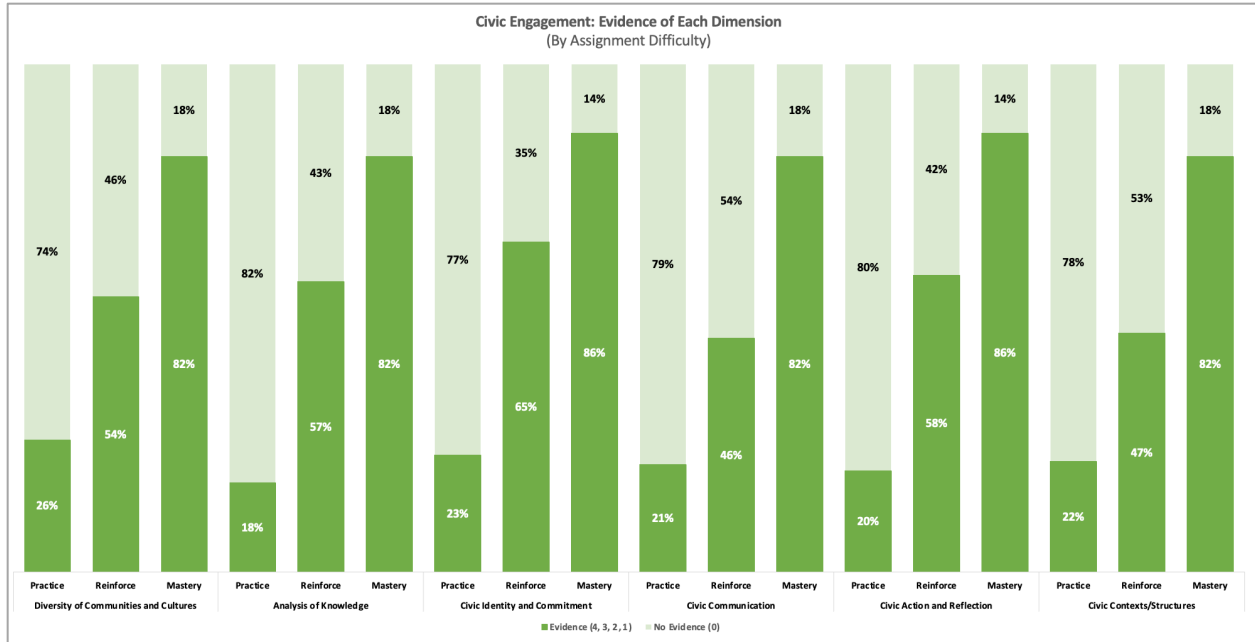


In comparison to the national civic evidence research project, there were notably lower percentages of higher scores (scores of 4 or 3) for the seven Utah schools that submitted work samples. This was the case across all six dimensions of the Civic Engagement rubric. Specifically, 58-81% of Utah students demonstrated scores at the level of “Milestone” or higher (scores of 4, 3, 2, or 1) across the six dimensions, compared to 77-90% of work samples scoring at similar levels from the national cohort of colleges and universities.

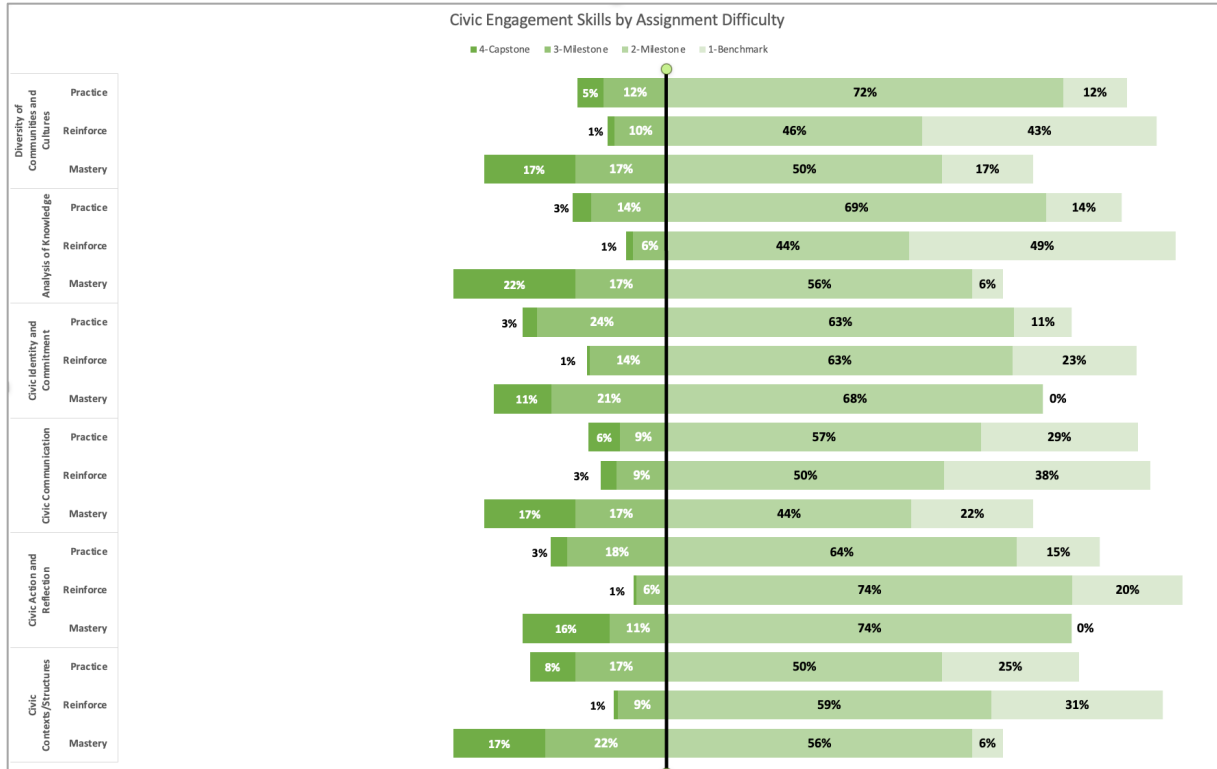
Implications of Assignment Difficulty on Rubric Scores by Rubric Dimension

When gathering samples of student work from campuses, faculty are asked to report on the relative difficulty of the assignment from which work samples are drawn. Specifically, faculty are asked to indicate if the assignment was intended to be at the level of: Practice, Reinforce, or Mastery. This information is used to understand trends in where evidence of certain rubric dimensions is observed and also the degree to which students’ demonstrated performance is commensurate with the level of intended difficulty of the assignment. For example, if an assignment is designed for senior capstone level (i.e., “mastery”), we would anticipate seeing higher percentages of scores of 3-4.

For Utah degree-granting institutions, the analysis of work products in association with assignment difficulty indicated that as the reported difficulty of the assignment increased (from practice, to reinforce, to mastery), the percentage of student work products that received a score of “zero” or “no evidence” decreased, across all six dimensions. A possible explanation for this trend is that when constructing assignments at higher levels of difficulty, faculty are more intentional about emphasizing students’ application and reflection upon civic skills in relationship to content acquisition. By contrast, assignments at lower levels of difficulty may be primarily focused on content acquisition, such as in government or political science courses where emphasis may be more heavily weighted on memorization of democratic processes and systems of government, rather than on reflection of what this information means in relationship to one’s role as a civic actor or the wider relevance to engaging in participatory democracy.



Additionally, artifacts from assignments at the “Mastery” level had notably lower percentages of scores of zero (“0”) for all dimensions of the Civic Engagement rubric, compared to other difficulty levels. Finally, across all six dimensions, there were larger percentages of scores of 4 and 3 on work products produced from assignments at the “Practice” and “Mastery” difficulty level than at the “Reinforce” level. We would expect such scores at the level of “Mastery” but not at the “Practice” level. This incongruity may suggest that faculty are pitching these assignments at a higher level of cognitive demonstration than intended.



The Effects of High-Impact Practices on Rubric Scores

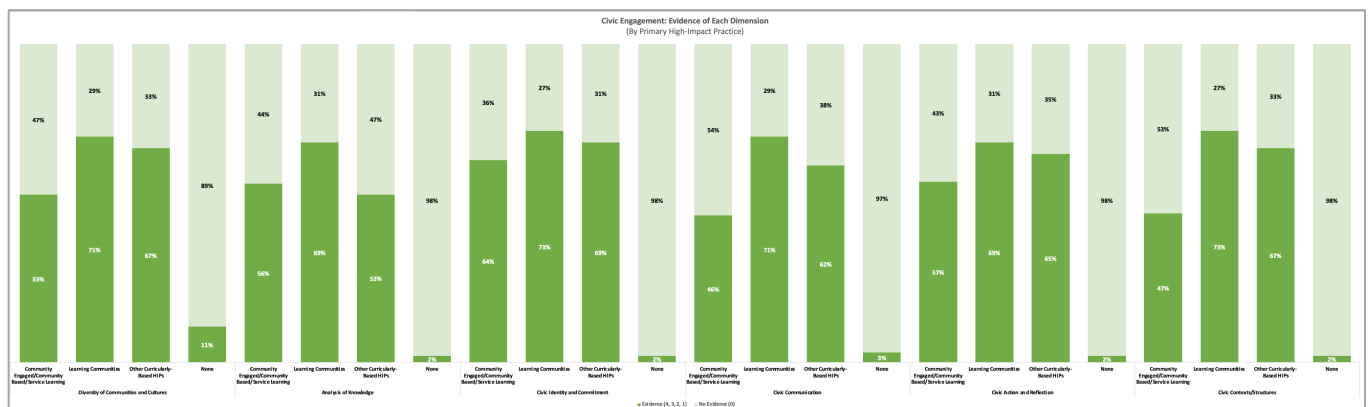
When submitting work samples, faculty were asked to identify which, if any, high-impact practices were connected to the assignment. Because high-impact practices are sometimes used in combination (e.g., a learning community that includes a service-learning dimension), faculty were asked to indicate which high-impact constituted the “primary” high-impact practice and which, if any, were “secondary,” in that the experience comprised only a portion of the overall experience or was less emphasized. The following list of high-impact practices was provided to faculty who submitted work products in order to identify practices that were primary and, if applicable, secondary.

- First-Year Seminars & Experiences
- Common Intellectual Experiences
- Learning Communities
- Global Learning and/or Study Abroad
- Service Learning
- Common Intellectual Experiences
- Capstone Courses and Projects
- Writing-Intensive Courses
- Collaborative Assignments & Projects
- Undergraduate Research
- Portfolios
- Internships
- Exploration of Diverse Perspectives

- None
- Unknown

For the purposes of analysis, the above list was consolidated into the following three categories: 1) Community Engaged/Community-Based/Service-learning, 2) Learning Communities, and 3) Other Curricular-Based High-Impact Practices (i.e., common intellectual experiences, capstone courses/projects, writing-intensive, collaborative assignments/projects, undergraduate research, portfolios, internships, exploration of diverse perspectives). Responses of “unknown” were omitted from the analysis. For the sake of simplicity, the following results reflect an analysis of only those high-impact practices identified as “primary.”

There was variability in the degree to which scorers found evidence of civic dimensions, regardless of the type of high-impact practice they had engaged in. However, if no high-impact practice was noted for the assignment (a response of “none”), nearly all artifacts received a score of “zero”/“no evidence” across rubric dimensions. Again, this suggests greater degrees of intentionality in assignment design when associated with a high-impact practice, than when the assignment is not coupled with these practices.



Finally, across all dimensions of the Civic Engagement rubric, higher percentages of scores of 4 or 3 were observed for work products linked with students’ engagement in “Community Engaged/Community-Based/Service Learning” experiences and also “Other Curriculum-Based high-impact practices,” than for learning communities. This could be because these practices elicited higher levels of cognitive development or because assignments were intentionally geared toward these levels. Discussions with faculty would help illuminate this finding.

Considerations Regarding Assignment Design on Students’ Demonstrated Civic Skills

An overarching observation from this project, both for the national cohort and for Utah’s degree-granting institutions, is that assignment design and assignment alignment with the VALUE rubric for Civic Engagement matter greatly. When assignments most closely aligned with the rubric’s criteria, we observed both higher scores on the rubric, as well as greater instances of the presence of evidence (i.e., fewer “zero” scores). When assignment alignment—from overall

purpose to specific rows of the rubric—was lacking, we saw larger percentages of lower scores, generally, and larger percentages of “zero” scores, specifically. A lack of evidence can indicate either that a student has failed to demonstrate a particular dimension, *or* that the assignment was not designed to invite students to demonstrate their learning on a particular dimension. Because of the lack of professional learning for faculty around assignment design and engagement in rubrics, we often find that the latter scenario is the more typical explanation for why scores of “zero” or no evidence are recorded by scorers.

Scorers must provide a rationale for any “zero” score assigned. These comments have informed the overall observation that despite a robust array of assignment types, misalignment occurred because it did not appear that students were intentionally invited to reflect on specific dimensions of civic engagement, as detailed within the rubric. Although we emphasized the importance of assignment alignment and encouraged all project campuses to utilize VALUE resources to assist with the selection of appropriate assignments, we know much deeper and expansive professional learning opportunities are needed for faculty to create assignments that will engage students in fully demonstrating their civic skills.

Work samples submitted from Utah campuses mirrored assignment alignment challenges observed for the national cohort. These challenges were largely caused by assignments lacking a reflective component that invited students to draw connections between their experience and intended rubric dimensions. The following types of artifacts were identified as both common, and commonly misaligned, with the VALUE Civic Engagement rubric because these artifacts generated high numbers of zero (0) scores. Some artifacts were also flagged as “un-assessable” by assigned scorers and given all zeros (0).

Artifact Type	Explanation of Issue
<i>Traditional “Civics” Papers</i>	These assignments, best described as “civics” papers, target students’ understanding of how democracy functions. For example, students might be asked to describe the branches of the US government or develop a research-based argument on how Congress asserts authority.
<i>Traditional Research and/or “Position” Papers on a Contemporary Social or Community-Oriented Issue</i>	These assignments primarily took the form of final research projects generated by undergraduate research experiences. Assignments spanned disciplines. Though it is possible these projects were generated as a component of a community-based or civic engagement experience, the submitted work did not include any accompanying student essay/reflection that would have aligned the experience with the Civic Engagement VALUE rubric.
<i>Journal Entries</i>	These submissions comprised a collection of journal entries across several weeks of participation in a community-based or civic engagement experience. The superficial nature of the content reflected that students and/or faculty mostly viewed such entries as part of a “participation grade/requirement” than a demonstration of civic engagement. Journal entries tended to lack a final reflection from

	students that synthesized their experience, which would have provided also added closer alignment with the Civic Engagement rubric.
<i>Papers from a Community-Based or Civic Engagement Experience</i>	Certain submissions appeared to be work products created as part of a student’s engagement with a community organization or as part of a civic experience, but the submitted work did not include any accompanying student essay/reflection that would have aligned with the Civic Engagement rubric.
<i>Civil Dialogue Initiatives/Dialoging Across Difference</i>	Some submissions were from assignments designed to foster students’ skills in speaking across differences, often political differences. While some of these artifacts may have scored well on the “Civic Communication” dimension of the Civic Engagement rubric, they often did not align with the other dimensions of the rubric.
<i>Reports from Clinical Experiences</i>	Submissions drawn from clinical experiences, such as student teaching or practicums, can certainly be considered as community-based experiences. However, faculty need to be more intentional about drawing out the civic skills being developed through these experiences as part of the assignment design process.

Concluding Thoughts for Direct Assessment of Civic Skills

The overarching conclusion of this project, both for Utah and the national cohort of campuses, is that faculty (and staff) are greatly in need of opportunities for professional learning to help translate their excellent community and civically engaged efforts into assessable demonstrations of students’ civic abilities. The following recommendations are intended to suggest targeted areas for increased professional learning. Whenever possible, these opportunities should forefront interdisciplinary collaboration and discussion, such that faculty from across disciplines can learn from each other and gain important insights. Working across departmental and divisional siloes can also help engender a greater sense of shared ownership of civic and community-oriented outcomes for students. Given the findings from this report, a few key areas for professional learning are suggested below.

1. Assignment Design Workshops

The results presented in this report bear the caveat that it is entirely possible that certain student work products would have been better served with a rubric for a different civic outcome (e.g., intercultural knowledge and competence or global learning). For example, a review of the student work that received a score of “zero” for civic engagement showed that these were often excellent assignments for eliciting students’ attainment of skills such as teamwork, critical thinking, and working with diverse groups of people. Misalignment with the Civic Engagement VALUE rubric, therefore, does not reflect a failing of the assignment, the faculty member who created it, or the student who responded to it. Rather, it is a reminder that encouraging students to demonstrate their civic skills takes careful assignment design and iteration. The engagement in civic or community based activities does not by itself mean students will demonstrate the intended skills; intentionally crafted assignments must also explore the connections, sense-making, and feelings that emerge from these experiences.

Nevertheless, the assignments that were found to be more fully aligned with the Civic Engagement VALUE rubric provide a foundation upon which future work can be built. These assignments suggest several areas for faculty development to further the rubric's application, such as assignment (re)design and alignment workshops and the creation of assignment design tools, like the VALUE ADD (Assignment Design and Diagnostic) Tool specific to the VALUE rubric for Civic Engagement. Additionally, this project will inform the refinement of AAC&U's training protocols, as well as the refreshing and revising of the Civic Engagement VALUE rubric. This project has also exposed the potential for creation of additional rubrics, such as a rubric for civil discourse and dialogue, and/or civic knowledge.

2. Rubric Calibration Workshops

Although this project involved submitting student work products for scoring by national trained scorers, the ultimate goal of direct assessment is for faculty to own the process by serving as scorers of student work on their own campus. This promotes ownership of the assessment process by faculty, a greater inclination to use results, and better understanding among faculty of how to support students' development of complex learning outcomes. One of the best ways to engage faculty in this process is through rubric calibration workshops in which faculty, ideally in an interdisciplinary setting, score samples of student work using the appropriate rubric. A facilitator walks through the structure of the rubric and engaged participants in a dialogue around why scores were assigned and highlights areas of convergence and dissimilarity. The process is intended to provide faculty with a close read of the rubric by which they can get a sense of nuances in language, a sense of practical application to student work, and also better understand the rationale of fellow colleagues. This helps to establish standards for applying direct assessment giving faculty the ability to assess student learning as a united collective, rather than as a group of individuals.

3. Assignment Mapping

A final area for professional learning is the mapping of signature assignments to learning outcomes, in order to create a more comprehensive assessment strategy. Campuses often engage in "curriculum maps" whereby courses are mapped to outcomes, ideally with a notation of the intended level of cognitive development (e.g., beginning, intermediate, advanced). However, an important direct assessment companion to this exercise is to also map signature assignments (i.e., assignments developed with the intent of being a worthy reflection of students' demonstrated skills). Though this process is often conducted "behind the scenes," it is also a mechanism for engaging faculty reflection on where they are intentionally developing assignments for the purposes of assessment. The notion of what constitutes a "signature" assignment, rather than an assignment intended only for practice or as a step in a larger process, can also be a generative conversation for faculty to engage in. This discussion can help establish standards for signature assignments that can ultimately lead to a more valid and reliable pool of student work samples used for direct assessment.

Section II: Strategy Convening on Connecting Technical Education, Community Impact, and Higher Education's Public Purpose

Overview of Convening: Purpose and Context

Despite their unique offerings and modalities of training, many of which are profoundly community-based, technical colleges or programs are often absent from conversations around student success and learning within higher education. While this is an egregious oversight in general, it is particularly concerning with regard to conversations aimed at advancing higher education's role in supporting community thriving and fostering a sense of public purpose. The narrative around higher education's role in sustaining a healthy democracy is not only incomplete without the contributions of technical education, it is less rich. As such, the convening of leaders from each of Utah's eleven technical colleges and programs was organized to identify opportunities for leveraging institutional strengths and resources for supporting community thriving, assessing community effects, and developing strategies for greater amplification of community-based and civic efforts in technical education.

The one-day strategy convening was held on August, 17, 2023 and included representatives from each of Utah's eight technical colleges and also technical education programs at three degree-granting institutions. Each campus was encouraged to send up to five representatives to attend the convening. The focus of the day-long convening was to engage stakeholders in a discussion centered around articulating and emphasizing the fundamental role of technical educational programs in contributing to the public good through community engagement, civic purpose, and economic flourishing.

The goals for the convening were to, 1) at the campus-level: identify and articulate, and leverage connections between community engagement and technical education to make the connections between students' learning and development, community partnerships, and public purpose more explicit; 2) at the state-level: begin to envision shared goals around the public purpose of technical education programs and strategies for leveraging state resources to support campus work to advance public purposes; 3) at the national-level: create a model workshop that can be employed to facilitate expansive national conversations across states and state systems on how technical education programs serve to promote student success, community impact, and the public purposes of higher education.

Overview of Convening Structure

The convening was facilitated by Dr. Ashley Finley, Vice president of Research and Senior advisor to the President, AAC&U, and Dr. Carrie Kisker, President, Kisker Education Consulting. The convening drew a total of 35 participants. The attendees included at least one representative from each of the eleven technical education programs in Utah. The agenda was designed to engage participants in a scaffolded conversation intended to invoke reflection on the purposes of technical education, identify symmetries between desired learning objectives for individual students and community benefits, explore how to make the public purposes of technical education more explicit, and articulate sources of campus and/or programmatic action through

the leveraging of resources – both on campuses and within USHE (see Appendix B, Convening Agenda). The convening emphasized interaction in both small and large groups across stakeholders, guided by structured reflection questions and activities loosely based on principles of design thinking.

The morning session produced substantial insights into the overlap between desired learning outcomes for students and overlap with the unique role that technical education programs play in supporting communities. The primary way in which this overlap was articulated was through the provision of economic support for individuals, families, and local and regional businesses. There was wide consensus that students' engagement in technical education does more than just get students' jobs, these jobs also support the economic viability of communities in ways that lead to better livelihoods and ultimately contribute to individual and collective well-being.

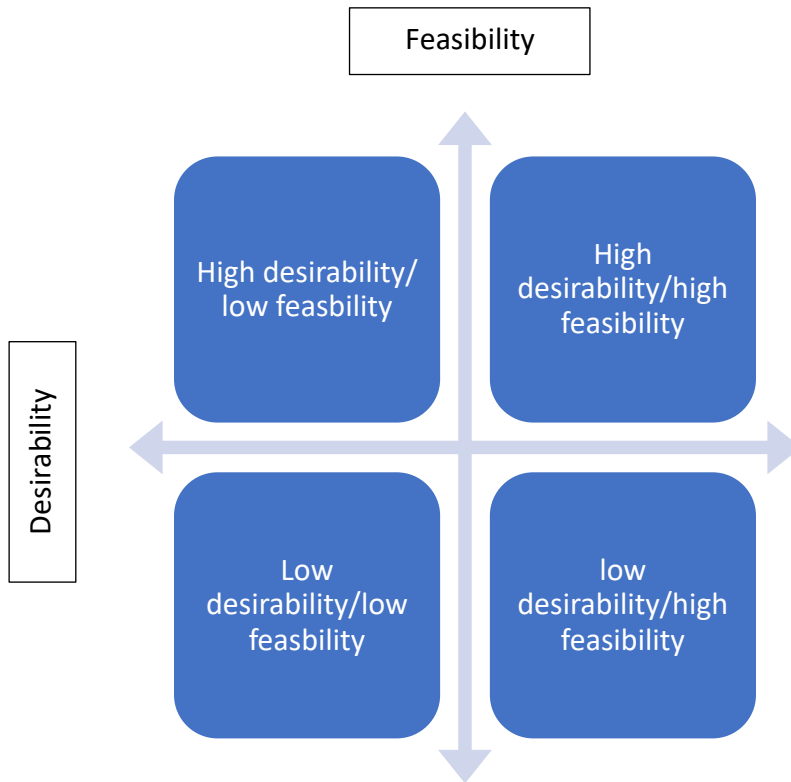
The group's discussion also revealed a host of compelling angles for elevating how community purpose intersects with desired student learning objectives. For example, participants identified the ways in which students' direct engagement with employers and businesses is more than just learning a trade, and that their efforts often also provide essential services for community members. The notion of students as citizens of the communities in which technical programs are rooted was also explored. Specifically, how can connections between their learning be more closely situated with their sense of purpose as a community member? What does it mean to embed ideas of community thriving into curricula so students can more clearly align the purpose of learning with public purposes of education? The conversation also touched on the benefits for employers and businesses in better understanding their role in supporting the collective good fostered by engagement with technical education programs.

In general, the morning discussion indicated that while asserting the public purposes of technical education alongside learning objectives is not a conversation many in the room have had in the past, there is significant shared language between campuses and across programs to pursue this endeavor. In short, those in the room found common cause in continuing to explore how and where to deepen the message of how technical education contributes to *both* individual career advancement *and* community thriving.

The afternoon discussion was aimed at drawing upon the morning's reflective discussions to identify leverage points and action opportunities for more clearly defining and aligning student learning with the public purposes of technical education. The overall tone of the afternoon discussion was not, "**Should** we be engaging in public purpose?" but, rather, "**How** can we elevate and be more explicit about the publicly engaged work we are **already** doing?"

To this end, participants were engaged first in a mapping exercise to identify the strengths, opportunities, assets, and resources (i.e., a SOAR analysis) their programs bring to aspects of promoting community thriving. Ideas generated from this discussion were then translated into a feasibility/desirability matrix to discern action next steps. Working in small groups, participants placed ideas for action steps into four quadrants according to actions that they deemed more or less desirable (e.g., aligned with mission, innovative, use of resources) and also more or less

feasible (e.g., the likelihood of success, relative ease or difficulty of implementation) (see graphic below). Several themes (discussed below) emerged from this exercise that were identified by participants as having *both high desirability and high feasibility*.



Theme 1: Storytelling through marketing and communications

There was broad consensus that even though there are significant ongoing efforts to advance community thriving and public purpose across technical education programs, there is not nearly enough narrative around the impact of those efforts. The concept of “storytelling” emerged as a major area in which campuses could, without significant investment, begin to elevate a variety of stakeholder voices, perspectives, experiences, and outcomes. As one participant commented, “60% [of our students] stay in [the] region. 80% stay in Utah.”

Specifically, participants identified the need for greater articulation of stories framed around student success, industry success, and community benefits. Outlets for storytelling included leveraging institutional webpages, in addition to paid and social media, and newsletters. Content sources for these stories focused on amplifying alumni testimonials, profiling business leaders, recognizing donors, and highlighting the experiences of current students.

Theme 2: Elevating community partnerships and alumni engagement

In addition to storytelling across stakeholders, participants also emphasized the value of elevating community partnerships and alumni engagement, in particular. One benefit of drawing greater recognition to partnerships is to highlight the diversity of partnerships held within and

across technical education programs, such as within municipal government agencies, across industry sectors, among nonprofit agencies, and with community leaders. Participants also underscored that industry and community partnerships often involve valuable collaborations with alumni who have found value in their experiences and are appreciative of the opportunity to collaborate. Thus, the elevation of partnerships can also mean spotlighting perspectives of successful alumni who have benefited from their technical education experience. A final benefit in recognizing partnerships is in helping industry leaders to get more insight into what technical education programs offer and expanding the ways in which these programs are viewed as supportive of industry needs. As one participant commented, focusing on partnerships will “help industry be more in tune with us.”

To help programs amplify and articulate the value of partnerships, participants suggested focusing on the following questions: What defines a “partnership”? What are the shared and divergent benefits for stakeholders? To what degree can the partnership be labeled as “transformative”? Which partnerships might be identified as “signature” and why? Participants felt that addressing these questions could help shape opportunities for engaging and amplifying partnerships through, for example, community events, alumni outreach and connection and partner testimonials and endorsements – all of which should be consistently and cogently communicated through marketing and other channels. Another key question raised was, “Who and how is community thriving defined?” Participants articulated the valuable role that partnerships play in coming to a shared response to that question that is rooted in reciprocity, mutual respect, and collective commitment to addressing community-based issues. In this way, as one participant noted, partners can also more fully understand that “education for employees is not just business,” it’s also about community building.

Theme 3: Center students in the work

Another highly desirable and highly feasible action strategy was in taking actions that intentionally center students and their experiences in the work of community thriving and public purpose. This entailed considering how to support the success of traditionally underserved or under-resourced students who are, for example, non-traditionally aged or bilingual students.

Participants commented on the need to “remove roadblocks” in order to promote students’ full participation. Expanding or implementing mentorship and ambassador programs were identified as effective mechanisms for helping students to communicate their needs and receive guidance in real-time. Such programs were also recognized as being valuable for highlighting the ways in which students’ learning addresses a range of key career-related skills, such as leadership development, and creating spaces for engagement and inclusion. Beyond mentoring programs, participants also noted that commitments to being student-centered need to be reinforced at the institutional level. Such strategies might include, for example, reviewing or rewriting the technical education strategic plan, providing updated information for organizations working with adult returning students (i.e., the Eligible Training Provider Lists (ETPLs), and engaging employer advisory committees to articulate their own vision for how community benefits intersect with student-centered learning goals.

Theme 4: Strategic expansion and engagement of audiences

A final theme for advancing actions for linking technical education and community thriving was expressed through the high feasibility and desirability of reaching new audiences, either as new stakeholders or expanding the existing pool of partners and collaborators. Suggestions for shaping these efforts included: expanding conference and skilled trade events to include new partners; sector specific job fairs; promoting and delivering technical educational training in underserved communities; outreach to high school students through individual and group chat channels.

Additional actions aimed at expanding audiences focused on ways to increase resources for supporting outreach efforts. For example, the ability to leverage advisory boards to increase diversity and inclusion of stakeholders, increasing efforts for external funding, and recruiting more graduate employees to help expand narratives around the value and efficacy of technical education. Participants also identified the importance of expanding connections with businesses to determine demand for programs and to gain insights on the appropriate levels of programmatic volume and structure. Participants also noted the relevance of political advocacy for ensuring innovation is attuned to public policy. A final suggestion was to strategically engage board members through an existing or created committee that is devoted to exploring community thriving and public purpose.

Concluding Thoughts for Linking Technical Education with the Public Purposes of Higher Education

1. Sustain Broad and Inclusive Dialogue

There is little question that technical education contributes significantly to community thriving. What is less evident are the ways in which these contributions have been made explicit or even foregrounded within and across programmatic outcomes or curricular emphases. The convening of technical education leaders highlighted the generative potential of bringing people together. Such spaces enable cross-fertilization of ideas, support for interrogation of community impact, and recognition of the diversity of efforts. A striking quality of the convening was the sheer range of technical education programs that contribute in deeply meaningful ways of supporting local businesses, municipal and non-profit agencies, community members, and families. Thus, there is great potential for the exploration of public purpose to be broadly inclusive across curricular efforts, creating expansive opportunities for shared messaging and resources.

2. Anchor Engagement in Shared Language and Assessment

As collaborative conversations develop, a strategic focus on definition of terms and assessment, will help ensure discussions are anchored in practical action. For example, what constitutes “public purpose” or a “public good” can be laden with assumptions and ambiguity. Taking some time to define these terms and how they are applied can provide a greater sense of shared ownership and engagement across faculty, staff, and students. Additionally, including assessment, of both intended student learning outcomes and of impact for the community, will

help to emphasize the identification of outcomes and salient evidence. Even preliminary discussions will benefit from linking a breadth of activities with connect outcomes, in part to surface the ways in which such outcomes may be shared across programmatic efforts.

3. Be Expansive in Identifying State-Level Resources to Support Efforts

A final consideration is to consider the ways in which USHE, along with wider state-level support, can assist the continuation of these. The convening concluding with a focused conversation about how USHE be engaged in sustaining the day-long dialogue. While many of the suggestions focused on monetary support, it was clear from the nature of the participants' comments and conversations throughout the day that resources are far more expansive than money alone. Participants also cited a need for greater media and marketing support, intentional spaces for continued dialogue, and professional learning opportunities for elevating curricular efforts around community impact and public purpose. Moreover, Utah's eleven technical education colleges and programs, themselves, represent perhaps the greatest shared resource. USHE might consider the ways in which spotlighting their work will help to promote collective learning and ongoing development of these efforts.