

Holistic Assessment: A Working Definition for UEC

Purpose

This document provides a clear, shared definition of holistic assessment for use in course outlines, prerequisite guidelines, and curriculum conversations at UFV. It is intended to be practical, accessible, and aligned with UFV's commitments to Indigenization, equity, and student-centered learning.

Definition

Holistic assessment is a reflective and process-oriented approach to evaluating student learning. It attends to the development of the whole learner and creates opportunities for students to connect disciplinary knowledge to their lived experiences, identities, relationships, and communities.

Holistic assessment emphasizes how learning unfolds over time, not only what is produced at a single point. It is relational and strengths-based, and takes place in learning environments where meaning is co-created by students and instructors through aligned teaching, learning, and assessment practices.

Key Characteristics

Holistic assessment:

- Is developmental, recognizing growth across a term or program
- Values reflection and self-assessment as evidence of learning
- Integrates cognitive, emotional, relational, physical, and spiritual dimensions of learning
- Is contextual and relational, attending to students' social, cultural, and community contexts
- Aligns assessment methods with how learning occurs (e.g., dialogue, storytelling, experiential learning)
- Can coexist with grades while resisting narrow, deficit-based judgments

Examples in Practice

Holistic assessment may include:

- Reflective journals connecting course concepts to personal, community, or professional experiences
- Autoethnographic or positionality-based assignments
- Learning portfolios demonstrating growth over time
- Community-engaged or land-based projects with reflective components
- Creative or multimodal assessments (e.g., podcasts, photo-voice, storytelling)

- Holistic or circular rubrics that foreground strengths and integrated learning
- Assessment of learning processes and engagement

What Holistic Assessment Is Not

Holistic assessment is not the absence of academic rigor, the removal of disciplinary standards, or the grading of students' beliefs or personal identities. It is not a participation grade or a single assignment added onto traditional assessment. Rather, it is an intentional alignment between learning outcomes, teaching practices, and assessment approaches.

Why This Matters

Research and Indigenous education frameworks consistently show that holistic approaches improve student engagement and belonging, support deeper and more transferable learning, and reduce deficit-based and exclusionary assessment practices. Holistic assessment also better reflects the diverse ways students demonstrate learning.

Use in Course Outlines

In course outlines, holistic assessment may be described as:

“Assessment that emphasizes reflection, integration of learning, and connections between course content and learners’ lived experiences, evaluated through a strengths-based and developmental lens.”