

THE ASSESSMENT CHRONICLES

OF LANEY COLLEGE

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MATH DEPARTMENT CLOSURES THEIR LOOP

by David Mitchell

I recently interviewed Kathy Williamson, the new Co-chair of the Math Department, because she organized a special, day-long department meeting just to discuss the assessment of their courses. It sounded like such a great idea that I wanted to find out more. Kathy began planning this at the beginning of the semester, and the department agreed to meet on Friday, February 20 from 10:30 to 2:30 with an hour break at noon for a potluck lunch.

I began by asking Kathy why she decided the department needed this meeting. "We always assess our courses in the Math Department, enter our data into TaskStream, write action plans about what we need to do, then we all drop it till the next semester. No one in our department ever has time to follow up on our action plans and close the assessment loop. That's why I felt we needed to have a long meeting to discuss our course assessments, what needed to be changed, and how we were going to accomplish the work needed to improve certain courses."

During the meeting, Kathy broke up the 16 teachers who attended (8 full-timers and 8 part-timers) into small groups to work on clusters of related courses. One instructor in each group had a laptop to use to take notes. Kathy provided a form with specific questions that groups had to answer, and note-takers used those questions to guide the discussion. The questions Kathy gave asked for specific "next steps" that had to be taken in both the classroom and the department to improve student learning. Then groups had to prioritize their top three to five next steps and create a timeline for each of the steps to be implemented.

I asked Kathy to give some examples of steps instructors came up with to improve courses and the Math Department as a whole. Kathy said she got some really good suggestions, such as rewriting some course SLOs that weren't capturing what students really needed to do and learn. Other participants recommended that instructors teaching the same course should meet and decide which units are the more

important ones to focus on in order to standardize the pacing of the course. With regard to departmental issues, there was an overall agreement during the meeting that part-time instructors needed major support from full-time faculty, especially during their first semester teaching at Laney. Instructors came up with the idea to begin a departmental drop box for syllabi and other handouts—a place where part-timers could go to find course syllabi, pacing schedules and other useful handouts that more experienced Laney instructors had shared with the whole department.

Kathy and the instructors who attended the day-long assessment meeting found it very successful. Instructors actually loved talking about their courses and their teaching and discovered that they could get a lot accomplished in a short period of time if they put their minds to it. Several instructors asked for **more** meetings like this to be able to make stronger connections with their Math Department colleagues. And because of this meeting, the Math Department now knows the actions it needs to take to improve in a variety of areas. Kathy concluded our interview by stating, “The people who make the effort to come to these kinds of meetings are often the people who really want to improve their courses and become better teachers for the benefit of their students”.

SUMMER WRITING INSTITUTE

As a result of our ILO #1 Communication assessment findings in the fall, the Learning Assessment Committee is sponsoring a summer writing institute for faculty (in ANY discipline) who assign writing to their students. Participants will learn about tools, strategies, and resources they can use in their classes to help students write better in a lively, interactive and supportive atmosphere. The institute will be held from June 1 through 5 for three hours per day and will be facilitated by Laney ESOL and English faculty. Instructors will be paid a \$500 stipend for participating. More information will be disseminated shortly, and faculty should contact their Department Chairs if interested in participating.

TASKSTREAM WORK SESSIONS

Then end of the semester is almost upon us, and you know what that means! Assessment work needs to be entered into TaskStream. The Learning Assessment Committee will be holding two TaskStream work sessions to assist you in entering your reports. The first one will be on Friday, May 22 from 1:00 to 3:00 in F-170. The second session will be held the week after finals week, Tuesday May 26 from 10:00 to 2:00 in G-100 with lunch included. Please RSVP to Cheli (mfoosum@peralta.edu) or David (djmitchell@peralta.edu) if you're interested in attending either or both sessions.

