

**WASC Retreat – October 2009**

## WASC Assessment Retreat - October 2009

### Team Report

Team members:

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The retreat was held on October 22-24 in San Jose, California. The first day consisted of a plenary session, dinner, and a mentor group meeting. The second day included several mini-lectures, a “gallery walk” in which promising practices from attendee colleges were shared, meetings with mentors, and team planning time. The third day included a question and answer session, more team planning time, and a final session with the mentor group during which teams reported on their projects.

Our **goals** for the retreat were to:

- Get clarity on some things we had questions about
- Plan for the assessment of program outcomes
- Determine how to use the results of assessment to inform institutional practices.
- Determine how to accomplish our assessment goals in a way that is not overly burdensome and time consuming.

**Key things the team learned:**

We got clarity on **GE outcomes vs. Institutional outcomes**: We do not need to have both. There is no mention of Institutional Outcomes in the ACCJC standards. Since we have GE outcomes, we do not need institutional outcomes. (4-year colleges do need to have institutional outcomes in addition to outcomes for their GE program.)

To assess **program outcomes**:

Focus on degrees and certificates. Program outcomes should be comprehensive and broad. They should include all of the most important things that students should be able to do, including, if applicable, some lower level thinking.

It's fine to use course assessment results for program assessment (if it maps to the program outcomes). It's also fine to use the results from a capstone course or capstone project for the program outcomes assessment.

**We should not approach assessment from a “compliance” perspective.** We can define how we want to do it, as long as we have justification and can explain it. That way we have the power. If we're in compliance mode, “they” have the power.

We should make any assessment efforts **meaningful, manageable, and sustainable** (easy and useful). If you find that it's not meaningful, manageable, and sustainable, take a time out and re-think the process. Assessment results have to be used.

**Powerful questions:**

- What do we want students to learn by the end of the course/program/GE pattern?
- How well are they learning?
- How do we know?
- How are we using the results?
- Do the improvements we make work?

**Culture of inquiry** – everyone at Laney is an educator in some way (including classified). When we shift to a learning paradigm, we're all learners too.

**Keep asking:**

- How do you know?
- What evidence do you have?
- Ask it all the time – from the president on down. This will change the culture.

**BRIC Project**

One of the mentors, Bob Pacheco, told us about an upcoming project (BRIC) of the RP group (Research and Planning Group for California Community Colleges). Laney can apply to participate in this project.

Description from the RP group website:

The Bridging Research, Information, and Cultures (BRIC) Project aims to strengthen cultures of inquiry and evidence in the California community college system via two complementary means.

First, a technical assistance initiative will support institutions in strengthening their capacities to collaboratively analyze and act on information, thereby strengthening cultures of inquiry and evidence. Following a competitive application process in 2010, seasoned researchers and faculty will provide tailored support for up to twenty California community colleges. Additional professional development opportunities and online resources will help to articulate the value of research, data coaching, and using evidence for decision-making to the broader community.

Second, BRIC enables the RP Group to provide dedicated support to institutional researchers and planners. A central resource person has been hired to research and communicate existing resources, data tools, research strategies, and professional development opportunities as well as develop new services that will aid IRP professionals across the state. Such support is intended to streamline reporting responsibilities so that researchers and planners can spend more time engaging in meaningful conversations within their respective institutions about how to understand and use data and evidence to enhance student success.

## Program Assessment

**Advice from Mary Allen on program assessment** (sat next to her at dinner and asked her questions)

- Program outcomes will be broader than course outcomes.
- You can use results of course assessment for program assessment.
- You can use information from capstone courses for program assessment.
- Program outcomes can use some lower level verbs. Example: a physiology program involves lots of memorizing. They have to be able to define and explain and recall things. If not, that would be a large hole in their program/ program SLOs.
- Could include things like use of equipment, vocabulary, applying terms/vocabulary/concepts to everyday life.

### Program assessment steps

- Write outcomes
- Curriculum mapping and gap analysis
- What does it look like to satisfy the outcome? Describe.
- Faculty bring in student work
- Talk about where in the work do we see evidence of the outcome being met
- Create a “good enough” rubric
- Decide how to collect work
- How many samples of work needed?
- Choose a random sample
- 2 readers for each item
- Choose a popular degree
- Look at the pattern of course taking
- Focus on last semester of program

## GE Assessment

**Logistics of assessing GE outcomes** – various possible ways to go about it. (Jann Connal)

1. Have a technology system that allows us to map courses to GE outcomes along with the degree of depth the SLO is covered in that class. The system can harvest information at some point. Check to see which courses seem to be the most ready to harvest. For example, draw out data on courses that cover the critical thinking SLO.
2. Identify courses that primarily cover the SLO in question. Have the faculty teaching those courses provide you with end-of-term papers. Convene a team to develop a general/generic rubric that would work regardless of the actual assignment. Have a team score the papers. Each paper should be read by two different readers. Might need to read 300 different examples.

How do you close the loop for GE?

A report gets disseminated to instructors of all courses in that GE area, with a request that they give special emphasis to \_\_\_\_\_. (Whatever was determined in the grading session.) Faculty should rise to the occasion. (Might not want faculty to be identified.)

#### **Assessing GE (Mary Allen)**

- Evaluate 50-80 products
- We want the results to be:
- Valid: the assessment actually did address outcome X.
- Reliable: you trust the results
- Actionable: you can do something about it

#### **For both program and GE outcomes:**

- Assess them, and at the same time keep track of how many units the students have taken. Presumably, if the students are being assessed at the end of their time at Laney, they will have learned more.
- Program outcomes should be assessed at the end of a program.
- Course outcomes should be assessed at the end of the course.

#### **Comprehensive assessment planning**

- It's not going to happen well without the VP of instruction and the president. They must be onboard. It's very important that the school NOT be in "compliance mode".
- Leaders must understand what assessment is and that it takes time and energy to do it well. Getting it rolling takes a lot of work. It's better to take your time to set it up well.
- Leaders need to give public, vocal support to assessment and people who are doing it. There should be gratitude, certificates, a nice lunch, public forums, mentioned in the state of the campus address, and appreciation.
- Faculty – it's in our nature to give. We like to know that we're appreciated.
- It's also important to show how results are being used.
- New faculty orientations – catch them then. Give them training. How to write a learning-centered syllabus.
- Support the dissemination of assessment findings. Could have an annual assessment forum and share ideas.
- Job descriptions should be adapted so that assessment is a priority.
- Deans should support assessment.
- Campuses should develop internal expertise. Offer confidential consulting and support on assessment.
- GE assessment requires facilitation of faculty. Need professional facilitation.
- Good idea to show examples of how other people made mistakes on assessment projects.
- Somebody must take responsibility for quality assurance.
- Outcomes must be faculty developed and they must be something that faculty are passionate about.
- We also have to make sure to teach to the outcome.

- Example assignment: You read a letter to the editor that claims X. Based on what you know about chemistry/biology/etc, how would you respond to this? (give students direction as to what we're looking for).
- Use a template signature assignment, such as use primary sources to support an argument. The actual topic is flexible.

### Closing the loop

- Question: what is a reasonable length for a complete assessment cycle? Answer: 3-5 years, depending on the number of outcomes. This means assessing everything once every 3-5 years.
- There's great value in cross-discipline discussions in campus forums.
- Pilot the rubric, share it with students, have them use it to evaluate their own or each other's work, give you feedback on what it communicates.
- Academic freedom doesn't mean that teachers can teach/do whatever they want. It's meant to be protection for politically sensitive opinions, etc.
- Move faculty from talking about "my courses" to talking about "our curriculum".
- The conversations have to be structured.
- What matters to you? What meaning do we make of it?
- Could add a course, could weave in a particular topic in several classes.
- Get results from program reviews – see if there are things that many programs mentioned. Look for trends.

### Q & A session

1. What do you do with a program that has refused to have anything to do with assessment (for 10 years!)
  - No new hires unless they engage in assessment – word will get around fast after the first refusal. Have their access to institutional rewards restricted.
  - Get other people enthusiastic about assessment and then they'll feel left out
  - Point out the language in the accreditation standards – it's an institutional responsibility to assess. The board/president won't let us lose accreditation, so the institution would have to assess without the input of that department.
  - Friday afternoon wine and cheese assessment parties – people who don't participate feel left out.
  - Make assessment more institutionalized: include it in personnel job descriptions, personnel reviews, program reviews, budget requests (ask for evidence), etc. Make it a part of how the college makes decisions.
  - Tell the department that when the visiting team comes, they can explain to the team why they are not participating.
2. How do you respond to a faculty member who says "I already assign grades. Leave me alone."
  - Student grades give you no information about strong and weak points.

- Break down their reasons for why they don't participate in assessment. Is it a knowledge gap? A motivation gap? An organizational/ don't have the time gap? Find out which it is, and address that.
  - Use interdepartmental work groups – peer pressure
3. How to involve adjuncts
    - We have to pay them for participation. It's not fair not to.
    - Give them a nice lunch, continuing education credit
    - Give standard grading rubrics to adjuncts
    - Use professional development days, since they do have a professional development obligation
    - Involving PT instructors should be a high priority in our assessment planning.
    - People doing the assessment (in the room) should be the ones whose courses are impacted by the results. That way they can contribute and agree on improvements.
    - Find out what kind of learning support faculty need (PT and FT).
  4. Are course outcomes required?
    - 2-year – yes
    - 4-year – no
  5. GE vs. institutional
    - 2-year – GE outcomes
    - 4-year – both
  6. Why more sanctions at 2-year vs. 4-year schools? (Didn't catch the complete answer.)
  7. 2012 Deadlines – proficiency level – what if not all programs are at the proficiency level?
    - Have most of them done and a definite plan for completion soon
    - Look for the set of courses that enroll the majority of students. Make those a priority.

**Student services outcomes**

- Cognitive
- Affective
- Global perspective
- Technology
- Satisfaction outcomes
- What we want students to learn by engaging with us (but needs a short time frame)
- Quiz while they wait in line

## **ACTIONS/NEXT STEPS:**

### **Next Steps Regarding Program Assessment**

Think about three different categories:

- Programs that are furthest along in terms of SLOs, assessment
- Programs that have the most FTES
- Programs that have the worst retention
  
- Contact researcher – find the most popular degrees and certificates at Laney. Find out how many degrees and certificates offered each year for the past 4 years, and find the degrees and certificates that are awarded most often. (Include the count of frequency of each degree and certificate awarded.)
- Which programs/disciplines have the biggest problems with retention? Biggest drop rates? Which courses? (ask Mike Orkin too).
- Possibilities (popular programs): Culinary Arts and Cosmetology - pilot for CTE program assessments
- Motivational factors: Cosmetology needs more space. Culinary is in Student Center – shares space, new Bistro, etc. Assessment data will be helpful in justification in any facilities/equipment/resource requests/decisions.
- Something to consider for program outcomes: come up with a list of useful categories and examples of outcomes: teamwork, use of equipment, attitudinal outcomes, technical skills, knowledge.

Work with those departments to

- Develop program outcomes
- Program mapping (curriculum)
- Develop assessment tools
- Plan when and how to assess
- Give them reminders
- Help them with the data collection and analysis
- Promote their work, praise them, use them as an example
- In future workshops, explain what they did and use their work to help explain how to do it.

### **GE Assessment next steps:**

- Follow up with Math – progress/plan
- Enter GE outcomes in TaskStream
- Contact social sciences FT instructors – assess GE SLO next semester – prepare this semester – meet to discuss logistics, develop rubric, modify together. Meet again to finalize rubric and plans. Invite PT instructors too.
- Get commitments for those that participate. Send reminders.
- Spring 2010 – they share rubric with their students
- Find out when they will be giving and collecting the assignment.



- Try collecting work from LOTS of different instructors. Give them the rubric in advance. Collect student work from them. Get a student aide who will do the photocopying of student results.
- Schedule a grading meeting for the end of the semester. Score and analyze the results. Sample. Talk about what we learned. Talk about improvements.

### **General Actions/ Next Steps**

LAC will submit the WASC retreat Reports (Jan 09 and Oct 09) to the Faculty Senate to keep them abreast of our activities.

Book discussion group – start it by the end of the semester.

Keep track of our progress in all 3 streams of our next steps

- Communication/Dissemination of Information
- Strategies that Encourage Dialogue
- Sharing Responsibility

Making the shift to a learning paradigm college

Argument for extra release time:

- We've got to make progress on assessment
- We need more people to be able to train others.
- The only way to do that is to compensate them.
- Is assessment a priority, or isn't it?

Have members of LAC attend division department chair meetings and address assessment planning. Coordinate with the deans.

Have it become a standing agenda item at every division meeting. Need 4 people to do it. Marco and Vina for his division, David for Linda's division, Louis for Peter's division, me for Science division. (Have these people make announcements and keep bringing it up in meetings.) Ask for progress from each department!

Look for notes ("marching orders") for president regarding setting the tone and advancing our assessment agenda.

Have a meeting with VP, President, Faculty Senate President, and SLO/Assessment Coordinator to discuss our plans and what we need the administration to do.

Impressions of Team Members:

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The WASC Retreat had reminded and illuminated for me three critical points in our work as educators. First, we hold the responsibility to espouse teaching and learning that resonates with the reality of our students and their community. Second, I also realized the magnitude of work that Student Services must endure to evolve our praxis as transformative educators and not simply the practice of transactional service. Last but not least, it is imperative that we, as an institution, must grow our skills to become critical researchers that are not afraid to celebrate successes, but also own our shortcomings collectively.

While the three points appear broad, it will serve as a base in informing any "powerful" research questions that will need to be addressed through our evaluation and assessment processes. I am appreciative of the opportunity to engage in such effort to improve our capacity of institutional and educational effectiveness.

Newin Paul C. Orante  
Dean of Student Services

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