

Six-Month Progress Report to AAC&U General Education (CLO) Assessment at Lane 2013-2014

Overview: After attending the AAC&U Workshop last spring, Christina Howard, the Assessment Team Chair, and Kate Sullivan, Core Learning Outcomes (CLO) Coordinator, conferenced with our dean of transfer, Maurice Hamington, and were assured that administration will support our 3-year assessment plan.

A brief timeline: Assessment work at LCC began in earnest in 2008, as the Assessment Team crafted and disseminated rubrics tied to our four core abilities; one outcome of this assessment work was the realization that our core abilities were both outdated and poorly conceived; thus, in the fall of 2011, we began work to craft Core Learning Objectives (CLOs) that would describe the transferable skills common to all general education courses taken by transfer and career and technical students. This work concluded in Spring, 2012. These CLOs include: Think, Engage, Create, Communicate, and Apply. A subsequent 2013 survey of faculty revealed that although respondents felt confident in an ability to assess student learning at the course level, there was far less confidence in systematic assessment at the program and discipline level. We also recognized that the generic rubrics we had created for “Communicate Effectively” and “Think Critically,” were written at a level of generality not conducive for assessment within a disciplinary context. Thus, we decided to shift our focus to promoting and funding discipline-specific rubrics for use by faculty within a program or field.

Assessment Goals post AAC&U Conference:

The goals for the first year are to **increase visibility and understanding of the strategic direction, “a liberal education approach to student learning,” and increase visibility, understanding, and ownership of our CLOs.** To date, we’ve enjoyed the following successes:

1. Increased visibility with our concurrent enrollment program, College Now: students enrolled in College Now receive folders and promotional materials with the CLOs emblazoned on them. Additionally, Howard worked with College Now Coordinators to reconsider the promotion of dual credit as a way to “get gen ed out of the way,” to presenting general education courses as an “opportunity to engage with the transferable skills that inform a college education”;
2. Howard and Sullivan have attended counseling and advising meetings, in order to shift the focus from a checklist mentality towards general education courses to an emphasis on the value of the transferable skills afforded through such courses;
3. The CLOs are now featured on the cover of our catalog; and additional 100 color posters with CLOs have been distributed to academic and student services departments
4. We have increased understanding among a segment of the faculty; Howard and Sullivan presented at fall in-service, focusing on mapping CLOs across a program’s curriculum and against course outcomes;

5. Assessment team members have also attended department and/or division meetings—Division Dean, Business, Media and Applied Arts, English, Speech, Spanish, Social Sciences— to talk about the importance of CLOs;
6. The development and refinement of a CLO mapping tool that faculty will eventually be able to use with their courses (and may then be useful for comparing various faculty perceptions about the intersection of CLOs against course objectives).

Our RFP

A second prong of goals is to increase both ownership and understanding of the CLOs, so we issued an RFP for assessment projects, with the following project parameters (reflecting the differing levels of faculty knowledge and engagement with CLOs and assessment): 1) funding to explore an assessment plan (for departments or programs that have not begun work with rubrics or mapping CLOs); 2) funding to map CLOs against a discipline-specific rubric or to create such a rubric; 3) funding for assessment of artifacts, using a fully mapped rubric.

The RFP produced five CLO mapping projects (Biology, Speech, Dental Hygiene, and Spanish), one artifact scoring group (Art), and a small program review project focused on exploring the “Apply” outcomes against a first term courses (Physical Therapist Assistant program). Additionally, French and Writing are focused on setting parameters for assessment and creating materials to supplement course outlines.

Speech, Writing, French, and Spanish are also funded to engage in CLOs and are exploring signature assignment design.

These project teams represent a shift away from assessment at the level of an instructor and a course, towards more systematic assessment work within disciplines and, if applicable, within programs, , but we are in the beginning stages of such work.

Challenges

We face a number of challenges, though, which are largely structural and financial, although faculty fatigue is also at play. First and foremost, as a community college, we have a large number of PT and peripatetic faculty who have neither the time nor the inclination/energy to engage with assessment work excepting a financial incentive (and even then, PT faculty may be overtaxed and unavailable for assessment conversations). Fully 80% of faculty in some departments or programs are contingent.

A second challenge is the lack of majors or concentrations on the transfer side of the college. While universities and career and technical programs can count on a stable cohort of students who move through the curriculum, transfer courses at community colleges do not enjoy such predictability. I.e., CLO mapping dovetails more easily with C/T programs that have set cohorts of students who move meaningfully through the curriculum. External licensing objectives and discipline-specific accreditation standards also facilitate the process. These groups are better able to design and use a CLO rubric as a developmental

tool—to help students think about their journey through the curriculum and how they’ve mastered various skills as they progress.

Faculty teaching in the transfer areas have a greater challenge—students do not enroll in courses in any predictable or meaningful pattern, and the absence of prerequisites means that a course typically has a range of students enrolled, who are at various stages of their educational path. Any given film course, for example, will enroll students new to film studies as well as students who’ve taken 3-4 other film courses and who are near the end of their Community College journey. A CLO rubric modeled on the AAC&U LEAP rubrics, which are organized to reflect a student or students’ growth, developmentally, through a field, is not functional for such departments or programs, so we need to think about rubric design differently, a situation that may reveal the necessity of wide-ranging mapping of CLOs against course objectives and then major or program sequences. We have yet to plan for or undertake such work, which will involve engaging large numbers of faculty in conversations focused on identifying where in a particular course or sequence, specific CLOs manifest.

Indeed, such a systematic approach to CLO mapping will necessarily require a concerted commitment from administration, which we have yet to receive. Lane has experienced a marked shift in leadership (personnel and structure) which has impacted work planning and process. We have been without a Vice President of Academic and Student Affairs for over a year, and our recent failed search for this position has yet to be reinitiated. Our team has hopes that our upcoming fall inservice might be focused on CLO visibility and ownership, but have yet to receive a commitment.