

College Core Outcome Review (CCOR) 2010 Observations and Recommendations

What we learned as a result of our Learning Assessment Activities

- **First Year of Implementation:** For a first attempt at embarking on a new system of collecting evidence of student learning, there was a *fair amount of creative participation*. 53 of the 87 PCC Subject Area Committees (SAC) presented a plan, and of those, about 40 finished it within this academic year. The others got started late and have plans to follow through in the upcoming year.
- **Positive Results:** *The bulk of the SACs found evidence that their students were learning critical thinking and problem solving to one degree or another.* This was also confirmed by a survey carried out by Institutional Effectiveness (IE), in which applicants for graduation in 2009-10 were asked questions having to do with aspects of critical thinking and problem solving. Over 500 students responded, which represented a 22% response rate. At least 85% strongly or somewhat agreed with each item, and item 15 had the highest results: “The college-level credit courses I have taken (and passed) at PCC provided me a GOOD opportunity to be open to other’s ideas. Strongly agree: 330 students, 63%; Somewhat agree: 166 students, 32%; Somewhat or strongly disagree: 30 students, 6%. The survey results may be accessed more fully on the Learning Assessment webpage.
- **Proposals for change:** Some SACs came up with proposed changes in order to better teach critical thinking and problem solving; many SACs, however, did not recommend any departmental changes based on what they found. [These can be examined by looking at the individual SAC projects on the Learning Assessment web page.] There may be two explanations for this. One is that the students really are learning what was expected and that the SAC is doing a fine job! The other is possibly that the SAC may feel the need to perform well and present a good face in a time of budget cuts. **We encourage SACs to look for areas of improvement and to see this in a positive light.**
- **Proposals to improve the assessment projects:** *Many of the recommendations for change that were voiced had more to do with changing the process of assessing student learning than changing the program or method of teaching.* This is understandable and can be seen as positive, especially since most SACs who did participate were doing it for the first time.
- **Staff Development:** As we examined each project at the College Core Outcome Review (CCOR), it became apparent that *not every SAC understood exactly what was needed in terms of presenting a project and findings.* This is a long-term educational challenge. In addition, we have already received requests for guidance throughout the first academic year of implementing this new endeavor, and as a result, we initiated a 10-week course for instructors on Learning Assessment: one in Winter term 2010, where about 18 faculty participated, and one Spring term 2010, where about 12 participated. The CCOR itself involved 18 participants, including faculty, administrators, and students, and became an educational moment for all who participated, based on the feedback we received on the session (see below). **Clearly, there needs to be ongoing staff development in order to help instructors and SACs know how to manage learning assessment.** The resulting discussions have led to a proposal for a series of classes for instructors on various aspects of teaching – learning assessment and other topics as well. As a result of these discussions, this possible program is in a formative stage through the Education Department.

- **CCOR:** The College Core Outcome Review, held for the first time on June 25, 2010, was felt ***overall to be a real success***. The participants appreciated Laura Massey's presentation on the above-mentioned IE survey of graduates; they appreciated meeting people from other walks of college life and finding out what other departments and programs are doing; the discussions were fruitful; many stated that it was a learning experience. Suggestions for improvement included training for participants prior to the evaluation session, and offering better guidance for the SACs so they know what really is a good learning assessment plan. It was suggested that next time we add a "strengths" to the feedback template so that there is a particular spot to list positives. But overall, most of the participants felt it was a positive experience – and that the format of working in small teams, looking at several different SACs' projects, and filling the feedback forms on line was a good system. We have designated four SACs that really did a fine job with their learning assessment, and these projects will be offered as models for other SACs in the next academic year.