This document addresses the following:
I. Higher Education Assessment and Accreditation
II. Affects on PCC Faculty
III. More Information Links

I. Higher Education Assessment and Accreditation

Brief Background:
Institutions of higher education are increasingly coming under scrutiny by the federal government to be accountable for student learning. Various stakeholders (e.g., taxpayers, tuition payers, and employers) seek evidence that higher education is delivering as advertised. In turn, the government wants to be sure that financial aid and other educational supports are effective. Also, there is a concern that the US is losing its competitiveness with other countries. Much of the pressure has landed on the six regional accreditation commissions that are responsible for accrediting institutions of higher education across the nation. In an attempt to prevent federal take-over of higher education (e.g. No Child Left Behind for colleges and universities), many of the accreditation commissions have increased their emphasis on assessment of student learning outcomes in the accreditation review process. However, they are attempting to guide colleges and universities in a way that recognizes differences among diverse institutions and preserves, to the greatest degree possible, institutional autonomy.

PCC’s accreditation agency is the Northwest Commission of Colleges and Universities (NWCCU). NWCCU has recently revised their accreditation process: more frequent evaluation; some new standards; and more emphasis on some pre-existing standards. The revised process emphasizes both “assessment for improvement” and “assessment for accountability,” but this is not an easy marriage. The tendency with “assessment for accountability” is to hide the areas where the institution has weaknesses. “Assessment for improvement” requires that the institution search out areas of weaknesses in student learning, implement changes, and then re-assess (a recursive process). Also, more so than in the past, faculty members are identified as central to this aspect of accreditation (see NWCCU Standard 2.C.5). Never before has faculty played such a direct and important role in the accreditation of the college.

Higher education is in a changing landscape where direction forward is murky at best. Since it is unknown what will emerge, colleges and universities are in a precarious position and often feel caught in a web of uncertainty. Across the nation, administrators and faculty are wondering, “What do the “accreditors” want? What will they view as adequate evidence of student achievement? How do we capture the link between assessment and improvements to teaching and learning?” Interestingly, the accrediting agencies are in the same boat: “What evidence will satisfy the government and various stakeholders?” These are difficult questions with no easy answers. While it is unknown if the accreditation agencies attempt to address concerns will be adequate, failure to act will almost certainly result in federal take-over.

How is PCC meeting our accreditation agency’s revised process?
In Spring of 2009, after a year of inquiry, a council of PCC faculty recommended a faculty-driven and faculty-led peer review process with the belief that the faculty (adjunct and full-time) are critical to identifying and addressing issues around student learning. Inherent to this chosen path is the awareness that if faculty members are in charge of assessment, the work will be more meaningful. PCC administration supported this approach (and continues to do so).
Starting in 2009-2010 and under the direction of the Learning Assessment Council (LAC), PCC faculty were tasked with the difficult, but rewarding, challenge to find creative ways to improve student learning in PCC’s six core outcomes. Core Outcomes Link: http://www.pcc.edu/resources/academic/core-outcomes/index.html. It is important to note that (1) the core outcomes are also the outcomes for PCC’s transfer degrees (AS, ASOT, AAOT) and (2) the outcomes of the Career Technical Education (CTE) degrees/certificates are mapped to the core outcomes.

At the end of every school year, all PCC Subject Area Committees (SACs) describe their assessment findings in the form of a report submitted to the Learning Assessment Council. These are posted publically on PCC’s website. The reports are evaluated by faculty peers from across the college, and the (private) peer feedback is given to the SAC chair. This work is also a part of each SAC’s Program Review.

II. Affects on PCC Faculty

What do these changes mean for PCC faculty?

- **Assessment Activities**: Faculty may be asked to give their students an assessment activity that was developed/chosen by other faculty in their subject area. The activity is intended to measure student learning in one (or more) of PCC’s core outcomes. Although there is a connection between effective faculty and student learning, the assessment activities faculty may be asked to administer are NOT intended to be a measure of an individual instructor’s effectiveness; instead they are intended to be a discipline/program level snapshot of student learning. If there are concerns about the use of assessment activities, contact your department chair, your dean, your union representative, and/or the Learning Assessment Council Chair.

- **Collaboration**: Full time and adjunct faculty will need to collaborate in new ways to address concerns for student learning at the discipline/program level. Collaboration between PCC’s disciplines and programs, as well as between other education institutions (e.g. K-12, 4-year colleges/universities), will increase our collective ability to address the concerns higher education faces.

- **Data Analysis Up-skilling**: Decision-making in higher education is informed by data and data are used for multiple purposes: research (to generate new knowledge), evaluation (such as program review), or assessment (our current concern). However, many faculty members are not trained in data analysis. With respect to assessment, PCC faculty members are developing skills for deciding what to measure, how to measure it, and evaluating the results to accurately measure student achievement at the discipline/program level.

- **Understanding of Accreditation and College Resources**: Since the accreditation expectations around assessment now demand more faculty involvement, faculty will need to be aware of accreditation standards, and college resources, to effectively discuss the best ways to meet NWCCU standards to maintain accreditation.
• **Broad Awareness and Action:** Given the changing landscape of expectations of higher education, faculty need to be vigilant and proactive. Assessment and accountability are words that often trigger not-so-pleasant reactions in faculty, and rightfully so. However, if used appropriately, assessment and accountability *in faculty hands* has the power to address issues in student learning in real and meaningful ways. The question is “Can higher education faculty work collaboratively to bring about measurable increases in student learning quickly enough and convincingly enough to avoid draconian federally-mandated approaches?”

### III. More Information Links

Wish to learn more?

- **National View of Accountability of Higher Ed**
  - Types of assessment and the changing landscape of accountability in higher education (long, but very good): [http://www.learningoutcomeassessment.org/documents/PeterEwell_005.pdf](http://www.learningoutcomeassessment.org/documents/PeterEwell_005.pdf)
  - Can Assessment for Accountability Complement Assessment for Improvement? [http://www.aacu.org/peerreview/pr-sp07/pr-sp07_analysis2.cfm](http://www.aacu.org/peerreview/pr-sp07/pr-sp07_analysis2.cfm)

- **State and National Focus of College Attainment:**
  - Voluntary Framework of Accountability (VFA) is attempting to address specific concerns of community colleges by finding appropriate measures of success for community college students: [http://chronicle.com/article/Accountability-Framework-for/127088/](http://chronicle.com/article/Accountability-Framework-for/127088/)
  - VFA site: [http://www.aacc.nche.edu/Resources/aaccprograms/vfa_archive/Pages/WhyVFA.aspx](http://www.aacc.nche.edu/Resources/aaccprograms/vfa_archive/Pages/WhyVFA.aspx)

- **Miscellaneous:**