

September 2017

Dear Environmental Studies SAC members,

This letter is meant to acknowledge your participation in the Multi-State Collaborative project, and the related college-wide assessment project, during the last academic year. We would also like to provide some information on what to expect in the coming year.

First, the SAC is to be commended for its thoughtful approach to the project. The SAC recognizes the value of quantitative literacy as an outcome and sought to use the MSC to establish the existing level of student achievement in that outcome. It is clear from the SAC's report that the assignment was designed at least in part with the project and the VALUE rubric in mind, and it seems likely that further refinement will result once the data becomes available. In addition, once the data are available and can therefore provide a benchmark of student achievement, it becomes possible to consider pedagogical changes that may result in higher levels of achievement going forward.

Information on what to expect in the coming year follows. PCC may or may not participate in the MSC in the 2017 – 2018 academic year, based both on financial commitments and the utility (for PCC) of the data generated at the national level. Whether or not the college continues with MSC, however, its internal scoring model that is based on MSC will continue – this is being referred to as “college-wide assessment.” Its goal is to generate meaningful summative data of student outcome achievement to satisfy our accreditation requirements and to provide an overview of student achievement across many programs and disciplines.

Thus, the expectation for SACs that participated in MSC during 2016 – 2017 is to proceed with a second year of data gathering and to embark on the first year of data analysis. Essentially, the SAC should proceed as it did last year, ensuring that the assignment(s) match the related VALUE rubric, gathering the corresponding artifacts, and submitting them. At this point, it is not clear if the artifacts will be scored by the national project, and it is also unclear if all of the outcomes under consideration (i.e. Quantitative Literacy, Critical Thinking, and Written Communication) will be scored by a college-wide scoring team or if only one or two of them will be. This latter determination will be dictated by the available budget. Thus, the SAC is asked to be prepared to score its artifacts using the relevant VALUE rubric – if the college does not score the SAC's chosen outcome, the SAC will be asked to do the scoring “in house.”

In addition, once last year's data becomes available, the SAC is asked to analyze the results. More information on the goals of that analysis will be forthcoming, but for now it is safe to assume that the SAC will be asked to establish benchmarks for student achievement of the outcome and to analyze the existing levels of student achievement. Finally, based on the results of the data, the SAC will be asked to start planning for any potential changes in teaching that might generate improved results in the future, thereby “closing the loop” on the assessment project, whose overarching goal is the use of assessment to improve student attainment of learning outcomes.

All of that being noted, the SAC is invited to provide feedback on the project's methodology itself in the process. Both the MSC and the closely-related college-wide assessment project are relatively new. Revision and refinement of the college-wide assessment process is to be expected, and the SAC is well positioned to contribute to the project's improvement as the college moves forward.

Please watch out for more specific information on this year's project. There will be a slightly-revised template for SACs in their second year with the project and additional relevant information from Academic Affairs on the project's logistics for the year (e.g. deadlines, etc.)

Thank you for your efforts over the past year, and all the best as we get underway in this one.

Best Regards,

Chris Brooks, LAC chair, and Nora Stevens, LAC Vice Chair