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College-Wide Assessment Q+A

The following questions were generated by the workgroups during the EAC's discussion of the college-wide assessment framework on 3-22-2018. The answers represent the current understanding of how the new system will work, pending further discussion and changes, following two years of work by the LAC, Academic Affairs, and the EAC-LAC workgroup.

Please feel free to contact me at christopher.brooks3@pcc.edu if you have further questions or comments.

Q: How will we use college-wide assessment to improve teaching and help students?

A: How we're going to use the data is to be determined, but the model discussed by the LAC is to identify areas in which students are missing benchmark levels of achievement, then devote professional development resources for faculty in addressing those areas. This is the model used at other colleges (e.g. Eastern Oregon University) who have a comparable assessment strategy.

Q: Are we aiming to broadly by lumping together many disciplines under just four outcomes?

A: The four outcomes that we are focusing on arose organically from the discipline area rubric workgroups, representing outcomes that authentically reflect work already being done in the classroom. We can consider adding more outcomes, but each and every outcome must be systematically and consistently assessed. As it stands, the only way to ensure that a given degree-earning student "gets" all of the outcomes is to tie them to the three discipline areas.

Thus, if we add more, a given discipline area will be responsible for at least two outcomes *in every class*. The LAC does not, for that reason, advocate adding additional outcomes at this time (see also my points about aspirational vs. core outcomes, below.)

Q: Will SACs with classes on the Gen Ed list have to do both kinds of assessment?

A: Yes. That said, the only time investment we anticipate for college-wide assessment is the adaptation of one assignment per class section that can be scored against the appropriate rubric. Once that's done, college-wide assessment will be mostly invisible to the faculty involved until the aggregate results are reported. There will be little if any ongoing work for a given faculty member.

In addition, SAC-led formative assessment (i.e. the kind we do right now) will have greater flexibility: instead of having to tie everything to the core outcomes, SACs can focus instead on

program or course outcomes that are specific to their disciplines. We anticipate SAC-led assessment to be easier, more streamlined, and more useful to SACs as a result.

Q: Will courses have to meet more than one outcome?

A: Not as it stands, with one exception: classes that have the Cultural Literacy designation will be responsible for both Cultural Literacy and the outcome for the appropriate discipline-area outcome (e.g. all history classes will be responsible for cultural literacy and the social science critical thinking outcome.)

Q: How will Gen Ed approval, CCOGs, etc. work?

A: This is a perhaps the biggest open question at the moment. What we know now is that, per Academic Affairs, all courses will have to reapply for Gen Ed status, and that the CCOGs will have to include new language (probably pre-written language that is simply pasted into the CCOGs) about providing artifacts for college-wide assessment. We anticipate some kind of streamlined approval process, probably led by a CC - DAC - LAC workgroup. We do not anticipate this process to be onerous for SACs (i.e. we must set it up in such a way that it *isn't* onerous.)

From my perspective, the “stickiest” question is whether or not sample assignments will need to be included in the re-approval process. The LAC has not reached a conclusion on that question, and there are good reasons both for and against the idea.

Q: What about outcomes that aren't assigned to a discipline area (e.g. environmental responsibility)? Likewise, what's the connection between outcomes and college values more broadly?

A: There is a key distinction, which derives directly from our accreditation standards, between college core outcomes and aspirational goals and college values. We must systematically and consistently assess core outcomes, whereas values and goals can and should be part of the college's mission, but do not need to be systematically assessed.

In order for an (obviously laudable!) outcome like environmental responsibility to exist as a college core outcome, some group of required classes needs to explicitly teach to it and assess it. What we've found in the last six or seven years is that SACs consistently avoid assessing some outcomes because they find doing so difficult or overly cumbersome. The purpose of the discipline area workgroups was to find out what was “really happening” in classes that faculty felt *could* be assessed in an ongoing, meaningful manner.

Thus, the LAC advocates distinguishing between values and aspirational goals, many of which fall under the umbrella of other initiatives at the college, and Gen Ed core outcomes, which are embedded in required coursework.

Q: How often will the rubrics be revised?

A: To be determined, but the important thing is that they *are* revised. The whole process must be iterative and adaptive for it to work. I'd guess that we'd be looking at rubric revisions every year or two.

Q: What if a faculty member doesn't use D2L and/or electronic assignment submission?

A: To be determined - in fact, the whole process by which assignments are submitted, collected, and sampled is a big open (logistical) question. We can't realistically expect one person, Susan Wilson, to handle everything. Thus, there are going to have to be both personnel and IT resources brought to bear in order for the system to truly be viable college-wide. We already know that the artifacts are going to vary in format, so this is something that has to be addressed going forward.

Q: Who is scoring/evaluating the artifacts?

A: Faculty members who will be brought together from each discipline area, normed to "their" rubric, and then assigned artifacts to score. We are building on the process the college developed while it took part in the Multi-State Collaborative over the last four years or so.

Q: How does college-wide assessment fit in with guided pathways?

A: To be blunt, the LAC has not been asked to take part in any guided-pathway-related discussions. In fact, my sense (I could be wrong!) is that college-wide assessment is further along in development than is the development of guided pathways at the college.

The good news is that there is a natural compatibility between the two: any guided pathway devised to help students earn a degree will necessarily include Gen Ed classes, and in turn will be tied to college-wide assessment.

Q: How will professional development, especially in terms of assignment design, work? What about PT faculty in particular?

The LAC's position is that college-wide assessment will require support by the college for it to be meaningful. To that end, *paid* professional development must be available for faculty, FT and PT alike, for assignment design (and/or other areas of teaching) each year once the system is implemented. This is related to the question above of how we will use college-wide assessment to ensure that it's meaningful to us and to our students.

There is an important connection between this work and equitable student success - we are not only ensuring that we remain accredited, but coordinating work between disciplines in a systematic way - and thus the college must fund it as part of its overarching focus as we move forward.

Q: What about professional competence?

In some ways, our existing professional competence outcome is the most problematic, because it is the most discipline-specific. To be professionally competent as a radiography tech is

radically different than to be professionally competent at aviation maintenance, for example, and as it stands our professional competence outcome also speaks to academic skills (e.g. history students must learn many facts about history - that is the basis of the History SAC's professional competence outcome.) Thus, the idea that core outcomes must be assessed broadly for them to be "core" outcomes in so many words runs into issues with professional competence.

That said, since SACs will be freed to focus their own (annual, formative) assessment work on discipline-specific outcomes going forward, professional competence will necessarily be "baked in" with that work, especially in CTE fields. For example, a given SAC could spend a year carrying out a focused assessment of a single course-level outcome that speaks directly to its field-specific version of professional competence.