

# Assessment Benefits and Barriers

## Case Study 3

### Finding Sustainable Ways to Use Data for Improvement

The Community College in this case study partnered with their local University on a three-year project that focused on engaging faculty and staff in defining shared learning outcomes, developing common rubrics, and providing tools for faculty to create appropriate assignments to support and assess these learning outcomes. By helping to transform the institutional learning outcomes and the assignments faculty gave their students, this project began to transform the way students learn in the curriculum. This change effort was successful and sustainable because it embedded the work in existing efforts at each institution and at the state system level. Leadership for faculty and staff “Assessment and Curriculum Scholars” who began to change the curriculum was supported through a constructive framework of professional development workshops and institutes as well as the flexible adaptation of nationally recognized standards and rubrics, including the Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP: <http://degreeprofile.org/>) to transform teaching and learning.

This project built on the Community College’s general education revision efforts beginning in spring 2012 and resulting in new Institutional Student Learning Outcomes in fall 2014. The catalyst for this change included capitalizing on previous faculty and instructional librarians’ efforts, selecting full-time and non-tenure track faculty with disciplinary expertise in highly enrolled transfer pathways, integrating instructional librarians, transfer advisors, and administrators on the team to provide insights on improving campus policies and practices, and finally selecting experienced faculty team leaders to bring their experiences forward to their academic programs and to the college at large.

The greatest change at the community college was the development and implementation of assessment tools and practices to increase student success at the course, program, and institutional levels. As part of this ongoing work, the community college piloted and purchased an assessment management system, refined their civic engagement goals through an AAC&U Bridging Cultures grant (<http://www.aacu.org/bridgingcultures>), participated in two statewide civic learning task forces and the Multi-State Collaborative assessment project, and developed its college credit system for life experiences through a state-awarded grant.



In collaboration with their local State University, the Community College carefully selected four learning outcomes for which there was some degree of overlap across the two institutions: civic engagement (CE), information literacy (IL), quantitative reasoning (QR), and written communication (WC). This work was strengthened further by a statewide initiative to advance learning outcomes assessment that allowed the Community College to provide professional development for faculty and staff in assessing student work using LEAP VALUE rubrics for critical thinking, quantitative literacy, and written communication.

There were greater barriers between the two institutions in the areas of civic engagement and information literacy than in QR and WC. Each campus was involved in some form of civic learning assessment, but the outcome was considered “Citizenship” and was content-based at the four-year institution while at the community college the outcome was considered “Understanding Self” and involved a greater emphasis on engagement with the community. The expertise from existing efforts at the Community College as a member of the statewide Civic Learning Taskforce, helped the team to recognize civic knowledge versus engagement as an inherent source of tension in any civic learning assessment and to develop a revised, inclusive rubric. Furthermore, while the project faced the barrier that information literacy had not been formally adopted as a learning outcome at the four year institution, faculty and librarians had already been engaged in rubric-based evaluation of pilot projects to improve student information literacy, so the IL team built on this work along with the IL assessment process developed at the community college.

The community college and their partner university shared one major goal: bring as many faculty and staff members together as possible and let them drive the process. The two campuses created a diverse 32-member, cross-institutional team of engaged faculty and staff scholars, practitioners, and leaders. This work culminated in spring 2015 with a shared “Professional Day” which brought all faculty from both institutions together in disciplinary clusters. This institutional change effort was accomplished by empowering faculty to fully engage in the work of assessment. This goal was accomplished by effectively selecting and supporting faculty leadership, and engaging faculty in the scholarship of teaching and learning with tools such as the DQP and LEAP VALUE rubrics.

#### 1. *Appointing and Recognizing Team Leaders*

The two campuses appointed four team leaders to oversee each of the outcome areas: WC, IL, QR, and CE. Each eight-member team included representatives of both full and part-time faculty as well as at least one professional staff member from both institutions. Two of these team leaders were also faculty campus leads



for the overall project from each institution. The Community College found that engagement in assessment should be cross-institutional and cross-disciplinary, drawing on the leadership strengths of tenure and non-tenure track faculty in disciplines representing potential transfer pathways as well as staff members committed to student learning.

2. *Communicating, Modeling, and Scaffolding Leadership Capacity*

The project directors reshaped national and state-level activities for their own use, adapting “Protocols” developed by the National School Reform Faculty (<http://www.nsrffharmony.org>) to structure discussions, and introduced them to the team leaders who imparted these skills to their teams. As the team leadership’s capacity to use a variety of tools and practices to meet this goal grew, so did the opportunity for team leaders to replicate and adapt these activities for campus use. With the appropriate tools, faculty who had become well versed in outcomes-based assessment at the Community College led structured discussions on the merits of using sophomore-level work as a benchmark to evaluate program and institutional-level success and identify appropriate disciplinary courses and assignments for collecting student work.

3. *Harness Opportunities for Scholarship, Faculty Development, and Outreach*

The third strategy was giving faculty an external role in scholarship, professional development, and outreach. Faculty development included four faculty, two from each institution, participating in a one-day, NILOA sponsored “charrette” held in Portland, Oregon where faculty designed an assignment prompt with advice and feedback from national scholars and peers to fine-tune assignment prompts. Faculty from both institutions attended several national project meetings, presented at state-wide and regional conferences and regional NEEAN conferences and co-wrote papers on assessing learning outcomes. Faculty engagement in the work of assessment cultivated Community College faculty scholarship at the program and course levels building peer capacity, fluency, and scholarly discussions of student learning.

4. *Adapting Existing Competencies and Rubrics to Engage Faculty in Assessment*

The DQP, the LEAP ELOs, and VALUE rubrics provided a framework for establishing the potential breadth and depth of which our “Assessment Scholars” and “Curriculum Scholars” engaged in our shared student learning outcomes. The wide range of learning outcomes represented by the DQP and LEAP ELOs were not accepted as a “blueprint” for an effective liberal education, but instead provided a set of useful “construction materials” that could be selected and adapted to meet the Community College’s. This perspective was essential to



allow them to build on existing faculty work on the course, program, institutional levels, in a manner that ensured our faculty and staff adopted leadership roles that drove the process of assessment and the general education curricular revision. Faculty revised the LEAP VALUE rubrics to better serve their institutional needs, and developed DQP-like statements describing the competencies they expected students to demonstrate within a particular learning outcome. In this way, the DQP and LEAP ELOs allowed the participants to develop shared visions and language for specific student learning outcomes within the broader context of a liberal education.

