



Learning for Life!

Student Learning Executive Summary

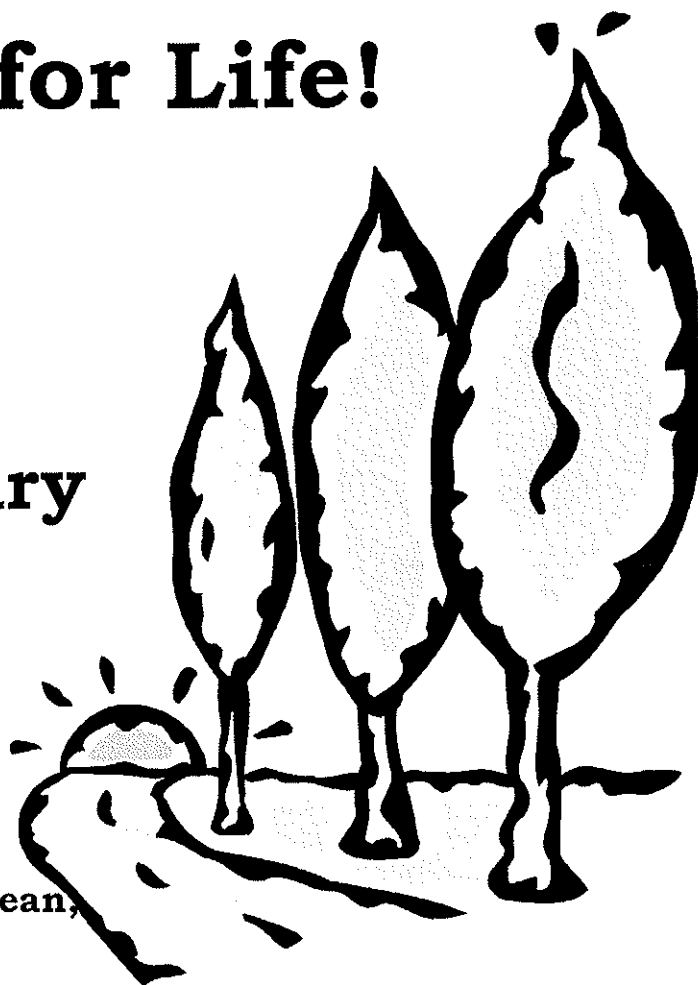
Cycle: 2008-2009

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Assessment at Black Hawk College:

Assessment is the process of gathering and discussing information from multiple and diverse sources in order to develop a deep understanding of what students know, understand, and can do with their knowledge as a result of their educational experiences.

The process culminates when assessment results are used to improve student learning.



A Brief History of Student Learning Outcomes Assessment at Black Hawk College

Black Hawk College is committed to assessing student learning. Some assessments will show gains in student learning and some will not. Nonetheless, all are valuable for informing plans for instruction and curricula. Furthermore, the Agreement between Board of Trustees Black Hawk College Community College District No. 503 and Black Hawk College of Teachers Union Illinois Federation of Teachers, Local 1836, AFL-CIO (August 2005-July 2010) notes in Part II, Article III, Section 3.4, page 2-6 that "the Union and College support a process that will encourage faculty participation in student learning assessment. The sole purpose of this process is to focus on improving student learning and enhancing learning experiences for students."

- **Prior to 1993:** The College implemented a DACUM process to describe general education.
- **1993:** The HLC awarded Black Hawk College another 10 years of accreditation, but required that the College develop a plan for the assessment of student learning by June 1, 1995. In response to this request, a small committee was appointed by the Vice President of Instruction to study outcomes assessment and develop the plan for the assessment of student learning for the college
- **1995:** The original plan for student outcomes assessment was completed in May 1995 and received NCA approval several months later. Ongoing Classroom Assessment Techniques (CATs) training for faculty was implemented.
- **July 2002/October 2002:** Members of the Student Learning Committee revised and updated the plan. Student Learning Retreat held in 2002. Outcomes: Revising generic and classroom syllabi to include measurable student learning outcomes, implementing "Syllabus Makeover" workshops, and initiating formative data collection at the course level
- **2003:** The HLC awarded the College another ten years of accreditation. However, the official Statement of Affiliation Status (SAS) dated November 21, 2003 requested that Black Hawk College submit a progress report about the assessment of student learning by June 30, 2006. This report was an opportunity for the College to share the results of its ongoing, documented process of preparing students to fulfill the goal of learning for life and to provide to the Commission with "evidence that institutional plans came to fruition as expected." (*The Higher Learning Commission Handbook of Accreditation*, Version 1:10/03, p. 9-1-2).
- **2005:** General Education Core Curriculum (Gen. Ed. Grid) was developed and approved by East Campus Senate-4/5/05 and QC Senate-3/02/05.
- **May 2006 Progress Report to the Higher Learning Commission on Improving Student Learning Cycle:** April 2003-May 2006 was submitted and accepted by the HLC. The driving questions that we were asked to provide evidence from Departments on were:
 1. What has been the impact of assessment on departmental planning and budgeting processes during this planning cycle?

2. Briefly describe the processes your department has used during this cycle to ensure that students demonstrate mastery of stated program learning objectives prior to program completion.
3. Briefly describe overall how students within department's disciplines and/or programs have performed. Please provide any applicable data. What institutional resources do you need to improve student learning and assess that improvement? These questions were incorporated into the Departmental Year End Reports on Student Learning Outcomes Assessment reports for cycles 2006/2007, 2007/2008 and 2008/2009.

- **February 27, 2009: WEAVEonline:** Student learning committee adopted WEAVE online as the management system for documenting student learning activities and follow-up actions.
- **Fall 2009:** Black Hawk College applies and is accepted as an AQIP institution. As an AQIP institution, ongoing class-, course-, and program-level assessment are the foundation for the ongoing AQIP projects that focus on the assessment of student learning

Assessments and Processes

"Assessment is the process of gathering and discussing information from multiple and diverse sources in order to develop a deep understanding of what students know, understand, and can do with their knowledge as a result of their educational experiences. The process culminates when assessment results are used to improve student learning" (Revised statement, adopted by the Student Learning Committee, approved by the Faculty Senates, and endorsed by the administration fall 2001). Contexts for assessment include individual classes and courses, general education, and degree and certificate programs. See Appendix 1 - "Black Hawk College Student Learning Planning Process"

Class / Course level

Class-level assessment takes place in specific courses or in class-related activities. At this level, individual faculty members have primary responsibility for assessment of student learning. To improve student success, analysis of assessment data at this level may lead to changes in course content, delivery mode of instruction, or the learning environment. At this level, assessment strategies vary from course to course and instructor to instructor.

Course-level assessments evaluate students' achievement of the course objectives defined in the master syllabus. Examples of course-level assessments include pre- and post-testing, course portfolios, and exit examinations. Typically course-level assessment standards and tools are developed collaboratively by faculty responsible for teaching the course. Such assessments may lead to changes in courses and/or curricula.

General Education

According to the current Black Hawk College catalog, the purpose of general education "is a part of every student's formal course of study regardless of his/her technical, vocational, or professional preparation. It is intended to provide lifelong learning, develop personal values, prepare individuals to adapt to change in an interdependent world community, foster self-esteem and motivation, and attain skills in analysis, communication, quantification and synthesis. A Black Hawk College student completing the general education requirements will

be able to think critically, communicate effectively, and demonstrate multicultural and aesthetic understanding" (p. 26). The document, "Black Hawk College General Education /Core Curriculum," describes the specific elements of general education. See Appendix 2.

In academic year 2005-2006, a committee composed of College-wide representatives from all transfer disciplines as well as career and technical programs was formed to assist the College in its efforts to review the outcomes for general education. The General Education Review Team (GERT) has served as an Ad Hoc planning group to the BHC Student Learning Committee. The team has assisted in reviewing the College's general education outcomes—in the context of the student learning annual cycle. The group has offered ideas, feedback, and direction to the Student Learning Committee, the Senates and their faculty constituents, and the College administration with respect to general education. The review cycle for this group begins with the start of each academic year and continues on an as-needed basis. Elements of the GERT review process have been identified as follows:

- Each department will continue to report on assessment activities that measure learning objectives that correspond to their strand on the General Education Grid in the Student Learning Departmental Report.
- Each department will also include a plan for future assessment of other learning objectives in the corresponding strand on the General Education Grid in the Student Learning Departmental Report.
- Each year, the General Education Review Team (GERT) will review each Student Learning Departmental Report and give its findings to the Student Learning Committee. The Student Learning Committee will develop recommendations to address any gaps in general education assessment.
- Student Learning Committee members will report back to their departments. In this way, improvements based on assessment from the Student Learning Report will be fed back to each department.
- The general education review process will be assessed annually by the Student Learning Committee and will be evaluated formally every three years by the Student Learning Committee with input from invested parties. The Student Learning Committee will then make recommendations to the Faculty Senates.

Degree Programs and Certificates

Career and transfer programs and certificates began the process of collecting assessment information during academic year 2002-2003. These efforts will continue throughout this academic year. Departments will select appropriate assessment measures to determine if their students are achieving desired objectives or learning outcomes.

Overview of Changes and Student Learning Outcomes – 2008/2009 Cycle

With changes to the Senates' calendar for committee work, this year's coordination of program-level assessment with the program review process, challenges related to reporting in WEAVEonline, and turnover in the Dean of Instruction and Student Learning position, the formal report to faculty on the 2008-2009 cycle of assessment is occurring in the middle of the cycle for 2010-2011. This delay has afforded me, as Interim Dean of Instruction and Student Learning, the opportunity to review all of the departmental reports detailing a myriad of activities representing all levels of assessment. Faculty members have been investing their time and applying their discipline-base expertise to assess student learning. There is clear

evidence that faculty at Black Hawk College are identifying the value of data-driven continuous quality improvement. Departmental reports will be available for review pending approval by the Student Learning Committee and Faculty Senates. Approved reports will be available at <http://facweb.bhc.edu/tlc/learn/student-learning-outcomes/index.html>.

The outcomes identified in "Assessing Student Learning at Black Hawk College: An Overview" (<http://facweb.bhc.edu/tlc/learn/student-learning-outcomes/index.html>) provide a logical framework for summarizing the work faculty have completed during the 2008-2009 assessment cycle. These outcomes are identified as follows:

At the completion of the 2008-2009 academic year, instructional departments will be able to provide evidence of the following:

- Collection of data that assists the College in the assessment of general education outcomes and degree programs through direct and indirect measures;
- Changes in curriculum, methods of instruction, and/or academic activities based on the results of departmental assessment information;
- Impact of assessment on departmental planning and budgeting processes;
- Processes used to ensure that students meet stated program learning objectives prior to program completion; and
- Description of student performance within departments, disciplines, and/or programs.

Selected examples drawn from departmental reports illustrate ways departments have met these objectives.

Assessment of General Education Outcomes and Degree Programs. The GERT team has reviewed the departmental reports and noted ways in which departments are assessing general education outcomes including course objective-driven pre- and post-tests, exit testing, standardized assessments, portfolios, self-evaluation and juried performances, objective-derived matrix evaluation of assignments, analysis of students' performance on embedded questions on exams. In general, the GERT team indicated that aggregated results demonstrate that general objectives are being met in those courses identified as part of the general education core. Although there is some evidence in departmental reports of how career and technical courses support general education outcomes, most departmental commentary about general education was related to courses listed in the general education groups. Two challenges will focus attention on General Education during the 2010-2011 academic year: 1) In response to the planned three-year review cycle, it's time to assess the GERT process. 2) Additionally, General Education is slated for program review by the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) in 2011-2012.

The College's initial assessment initiatives directed toward formative and summative assessment at the class and course levels have expanded dramatically to the arena of program-level assessment, particularly in career and technical degree and certificate programs. Ways the faculty has been assessing program-level outcomes include such direct and indirect measures as advisory committee feedback, graduate surveys, standardized tests, licensure and certification examinations, portfolio analysis, capstone projects, juried performances, and feedback from accreditation teams. The 5-year cycle of program review established by the ICCB creates a logical sequence for organizing program-level assessment. Black Hawk College began the process of integrating program-level assessment into the program review process in the 2008-2009 cycle and detailed a more robust, collaborative process for approaching program review in 2009-2010. In addition to General Education, other discipline, degree, and

certificate programs in the 2011 cycle include:

- *Occupational* - Agriculture Mechanics, Engineering Technology, Child Development, Apprentice Carpenter, Apprentice Machine Repair, Auto Collision Repair, Automotive Repair Technology, Diesel Service, Diesel Technology, Truck Driving, Sign Language Interpreter, Physical Therapy Assisting, Small Business Management, International Trade.
- *Transfer* – Social & Behavioral Sciences: Anthropology-Archeology, Political Science, Psychology, Social Services, Sociology.
- *Cross-Disciplinary* - AA, AS, & AAT transfer, Agriculture Transfer, Pre-Veterinary Medicine, Horticulture transfer, Associate of Arts Teaching – Math, Associate of Arts Teaching – Early Child Education, Associate of Arts Teaching – Special Education, Business Transfer, Business Transfer International Business.

Data-Driven Curricular and Instructional Changes. Oftentimes, assessment data confirms that instructional strategies, learning activities, and the development of curricular are on target in supporting identified outcomes. However, there is also evidence that faculty have made a number of data-driven curricular and instructional changes. Generalizing from departmental reports some examples include:

- increasing the emphasis on practical applications in response to performance weaknesses on state examinations,
- fine-tuning strategies to facilitate critical thinking and applications of concepts to address issues noted in student performance,
- supplementing instruction with innovative technologies (Jing, Camtasia, Tegrity, and Twitter Widget) in response to students' expressed interest in course enhancements,
- developing remediation plans in collaboration with student services after pinpointing factors placing students at-risk of failure in programs,
- generating instructional strategies and discipline-wide approaches in response to identified issues in oral communication, writing, and/or documentation errors,
- aligning certificates and program degrees to ensure students' abilities to change majors or add certificates seamlessly, and
- revamping course content, instructional strategies, and curricula in response to identified issues and trends.

Impact of Assessment on Departmental Planning and Budgeting. There is evidence that departments are using assessment results to inform planning and budgeting. Prime examples include initiating departmental workshops to understand and respond to assessment results, identifying needs for instructional materials and equipment and prioritizing these requests, modifying sequences and rotations of classes, and augmenting modes of delivery to include online and/or hybrid sections. Many departments are also planning ways to respond to trends and changes identified through their associations with advisory groups, professional organizations, and accrediting bodies.

Processes to Ensure Students Meet Learning Objectives Prior to Program Completion.

Departmental reports provide evidence of the utilization of both formative and summative assessments for measuring progress within courses or as students advance through a sequence of courses in programs. Two examples illustrate these measures. Many instructors report incorporating CATs into their face-to-face and online classes, assessment techniques intended to provide immediate feedback as to the status of student learning. A number of Career and Technical Education (CTE) and some transfer curricula utilize third-party assessments and standardized examinations that provide detailed documentation of student performance by sub-test category. These summative assessments allow faculty to compare Black Hawk College student performance to state and national standards.

Descriptions of Student Performance at Various Levels. The departmental reports contain many detailed examples of all levels of the assessment of student learning. In sum, these assessment data benchmark student performance, explore trends from year-to-year, compare pre-and post-test performance, describe student performance on standardized examinations, analyze performance in specific content areas, compare student performance to state and national norms, incorporate students' self-evaluations, apply rubrics to appraise portfolios and juried performances, gather students' reactions to innovative pedagogies, and evaluate general education and other program outcomes.

Impressions and Opportunities for 2010-2011

The faculty's commitment to excellence in teaching and learning is evident in numerous ways throughout all of the departmental reports. This final section details my impressions as to the status of the assessment of student learning initiatives at the end of the 2008-2009 cycle and commentary about opportunities for this 2010-2011 academic year.

- *Use the Results.* Finding ways to improve instruction and curricular designs is of central importance to faculty at Black Hawk College. Compared to previous end-of-cycle reports, this review of the assessment of student learning provides stronger evidence of moving beyond simply engaging in activities to using assessment outcomes to drive change. That's good news.
- *Tailor-Make Plans.* Although unified by responding to common levels of assessment, the actual assessment strategies and applications applied by faculty are heterogeneous. This diversity underscores the strength of assessment processes at Black Hawk College. Practically speaking, one size does not fit all. Assessment is only useful if it addresses questions unique to classes, courses, the general education core, or degree and certificate programs. These questions necessarily vary by purpose, discipline, and level of assessment.
- *Be Practical.* Assessment is both satisfying and integral to quality teaching and learning when specifically honed questions shape the strategies and results inform answers to burning questions. If one approach to assessment doesn't yield valuable information that either confirms strategies or provides the impetus for instructional or curricular change, try something different.
- *Keep it Simple.* Assessment doesn't require doing everything at once or even every year for that matter. Instead, develop a plan for assessment that focuses on identified priorities. Some elements may be ongoing, while others could emerge in sequence. For example, consider how assessment activities can target selected instructional strategies or

synchronize with the 5-year cycle of program review, accreditation processes, special projects initiated by departments and/or disciplines, or areas of focus identified by the college.

- *Close the Loop.* Carefully crafted feedback loops represent the difference between assessment for the sake of activity and assessment for a purpose. Reserving time to analyze results and consider implications for instructional and curricular change closes the loop, makes assessment activities worthwhile, and offers meaningful evidence of continuous quality improvement.
- *Talk with Others.* Talking with others affords opportunities to discover cross-disciplinary connections in assessment activities. Departmental and discipline areas in which this type of exploration has already begun includes the intersections between chemistry and math, biology and nursing, and information literacy and written and oral communication (Speech, ESL, and English). The challenge is to identify additional ways to facilitate cross-disciplinary conversations within and among disciplines and departments.
- *Toot Your Own Horn.* Faculty members have expressed interest in expanding their repertoire of assessment strategies by learning what others are doing. Create ways to share with colleagues within your disciplines, hold interdisciplinary conversations, and talk with others about your successes. Once such opportunity you will hear about in the near future is an assessment conference hosted by Augustana College next spring.

Appendix

Chart: Student Learning Plan Process

Black Hawk College General Education/Core Curriculum