

6: Assessment of Student Learning

Assessment of student learning at the College is a new process since the last Self-Study report. The College developed a program assessment process in response to a requirement after the last Self-Study. This process has been fine-tuned in the last eight years. As a result, student learning in credit courses is assessed through a program review process and through individual course assessment. Evidence indicates the program assessment process works well; course assessment, however, is still being developed and is not implemented consistently across disciplines and campuses.

Program Assessment

Program review is done through one of several processes: a program audit, the DACUM (Developing A Curriculum) process, a modified DACUM, or through external accreditation processes. The College adopted the DACUM process in 1998 for evaluating its career programs and a modified DACUM process for evaluating transfer programs. Administrative Procedures 765 (*Assessing Institutional Effectiveness: Academic Program and Service Reviews*) and 669 (*Academic Program Review: The DACUM Process*) guide the College in assessing institutional effectiveness and program-specific courses and in directing the DACUM process, respectively.

Because the DACUM process involves participation by representatives of business and industry, as well as other institutions of higher education, the process is viewed as an internal system that seeks outside advice in developing, reviewing and revising program competencies and workforce criteria. The process includes input from professionals in the discipline or area who do not work at the College (Phase I), input from College faculty in the discipline or area (Phase II), and program recommendations and revisions (Phase III). Phase I generates a list of competencies needed for College graduates; Phase II matches competencies with current courses or proposed new courses. Documentation of the review process, along with proposed changes to the courses and programs, are submitted by the division dean for review by the Office of Academic Affairs and Enrollment Management. As a result of the review process, program faculty initiate program and course changes based on the DACUM recommendations and send those through the shared governance system. Such changes occur regularly at the College.

The DACUM process also provides benefits for outreach and community involvement in College programs. Information derived from the DACUM review process has been used to develop marketing strategies, to justify personnel changes and additions, and to indicate need for new equipment. The process also enables the College to maintain contact with business and industry people, which results in internships for students and adjunct faculty prospects for programs.

Programs are assessed by the DACUM or modified DACUM process every five years; those reviewed and certified by an outside accrediting agency typically update their

programs more frequently. Program assessment is coordinated and monitored by the Curriculum Coordinator who maintains a tracking matrix to chart when programs are due for their five-year review. This matrix is distributed to the academic deans and is available on the Academic Council network drive, so that those responsible are aware of when assessments are due. To date 95 percent of the College's programs have completed the DACUM or modified DACUM process resulting in program and course changes and revisions. Recently the College expanded the scope of the program review process to include programs such as English as a Second Language, developmental math, developmental English, and learning support services. As these reviews are continued in a systematic fashion, the College will begin to get baseline data to which subsequent reviews can be compared.

These program assessment processes are evaluated regularly by participants in the system. Interviews during the Self-Study process revealed the following benefits to the DACUM process:

1. Academic assessments are completed in a timely fashion due to management and accountability by an assigned administrator: the curriculum coordinator.
2. Programs are regularly assessed and changed based on "what students need to know" versus "what faculty want to teach."
3. New partnership opportunities have resulted within the supporting communities, workforce, and other institutions of higher education.
4. Career and transfer programs successfully prepared students either to enter the workforce with marketable skills or to transfer to other institutions.
5. Programs have been able to justify resource allocation more successfully to make important changes in program curriculum, staffing, training, and equipment.

Although seen as a faculty-driven curriculum review process, the DACUM process has raised some cautions regarding the ability of the invited practitioners and educators to impose some of their own biases and agendas. Thus, the need for update training along with additional faculty facilitators, trained in both career and transfer program DACUM processes, was seen as necessary. **Recommendation 6.1: Additional DACUM facilitators should be recruited and all DACUM facilitators should be given initial as well as ongoing professional growth opportunities in order to maintain the integrity of the process.**

Assessing Student Learning

Student learning is assessed primarily through the individual instructor's graded materials. Course syllabi state how learning outcomes in a particular course will be assessed. Assessments typically include homework assignments, tests, quizzes, papers and projects that are evaluated against the faculty member's prescribed standards and measures. Assessment measures are consistent from instructor to instructor in some courses and some disciplines, and less so in others. Some disciplines have established standardized exams, course outlines, syllabi and textbooks for courses offered throughout the College system. In addition, the student evaluations of courses via the Student Evaluation of Educational Quality (SEEQ) provide limited feedback to individual instructors. Information on student learning, course difficulty, homework and graded

materials is gathered through student evaluations. However, consensus among faculty interviews conducted for this Self Study was that students' assessment of courses via the SEEQ has very little impact on the review and updating of courses and programs because the instrument assesses students' perceptions about the course and instructor; it does not evaluate learning outcomes.

The use of clear and consistent learning outcomes for all courses is a starting point for assuring that learning is assessed consistently across all campuses. Until recently, however, some course outlines still referred to teaching objectives instead of learning outcomes. Therefore, a comprehensive overhaul of course outlines has resulted in the re-writing of learning outcomes for nearly all courses over the last several years. The Curriculum Coordinator has been working with deans and faculty to ensure measurable outcomes are listed for each course.

Consistency is aided by the regular discipline meetings of full-time (and some part-time) faculty from all campuses to discuss learning outcomes, textbooks, and activities. Adjunct faculty at regional campuses may feel disenfranchised in this procedure as most meetings take place in Harrisburg. One attempt to address this concern has been to hold more discipline meetings via speakerphone or interactive video; however, monthly faculty discussions do not necessarily result in consistent assessment of student learning.

In addition to commonly accepted learning outcomes for each course, the College attempts to maintain consistency across all locations by having program coordinators review all course syllabi and observe and mentor new adjunct faculty. However, while this is the plan, it is not practiced consistently everywhere, partially because coordinators must oversee implementation on four campuses and the York Center. Some programs do have campus facilitators to assist with this implementation, but in others tasks may be left undone. **Recommendation 6.2: The College needs to ensure the consistent implementation of curriculum at all locations.**

Presently the College does not have a means for demonstrating a consistent method of individual course assessment. All courses are assessed at least informally every five years through the cyclical updating of the course outlines (Form 335) as mandated by the Pennsylvania Department of Education. Some courses are updated more frequently as a response to a DACUM, to industry and technology changes, textbook revisions, or on the recommendation of discipline advisory committees or related affiliated organizations. Program-specific courses associated with accredited programs are reviewed and updated regularly. While course assessment may be included as part of the DACUM process, it is important to note that the course assessment component of DACUM is incomplete and non-comprehensive. Various DACUM teams use the program assessment opportunity in different ways—some conduct detailed revision of the courses, others do not. Some general education and developmental courses have not been regularly or consistently assessed because they are not tied to a specific program. Since the College does not have specific assessment tools or procedural requirements to ascertain what students are learning in the courses, results of a discipline's review of learning outcomes can be either a discipline's "rubber stamp" of current practice or an instructor-specific assessment.

The Virtual Campus has begun to develop course assessment guidelines and is starting an implementation plan. To address concerns across all delivery systems, Faculty Council

has charged a committee with recommending a plan for implementing College-wide course assessment procedures. As a result, several College procedures are being updated (AP 711, *Credit Courses and Program Development* and AP 765, *Assessing Institutional Effectiveness: Academic Program and Service Reviews*) and the Curriculum Coordinator has been charged with tracking course assessments along with program assessments on a five-year basis. **Recommendation 6.3: The Office of Academic Affairs and Enrollment Management should continue to work with faculty to establish procedures to ensure regular and consistent assessment of learning outcomes across campuses and delivery platforms.**

6: Assessment of Student Learning Recommendations

- 6.1: Additional DACUM facilitators should be recruited and all DACUM facilitators should be given initial as well as ongoing professional growth opportunities in order to maintain the integrity of the process.
- 6.2: The College needs to ensure the consistent implementation of curriculum at all locations.
- 6.3: The Office of Academic Affairs and Enrollment Management should continue to work with faculty to establish procedures to ensure regular and consistent assessment of learning outcomes across campuses and delivery platforms.