

A PROGRESS REPORT
ON ASSESSMENT
AT CASPER COLLEGE

SUBMITTED TO
THE HIGHER LEARNING COMMISSION
NORTH CENTRAL ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGES AND SCHOOLS
MAY 29, 2003

PREFACE

After the 1999 reaccreditation visit, Casper College was required to submit a Monitoring Report discussing progress in three areas (general education, planning, and assessment of student academic achievement). That document was submitted to the Higher Learning Commission on May 24, 2002. Analysis by the staff indicated that the College had made substantial progress in all areas. Based on staff analysis of the report, the College was required to submit a progress report focused on assessment which would "fill in the gaps" in the monitoring report as identified in the Staff Analysis. The report is due 6/1/03.

The following report is intended to comply with the Commission's actions and to address the questions raised on page two of the Staff Analysis of Institutional Report dated July 15, 2002, specifically:

- How are assessment results monitored institutionally?
- How are the results being disseminated?
- Who is generally responsible for follow-up on the results?
- How will instruments involved in direct assessment of student learning be administered?
- How are the survey results evaluated?
- Clarify capstone experiences.

ASSESSMENT UPDATE

INTRODUCTION

During the 2002-2003 academic year the College continued to work diligently to improve its assessment of student learning. Data were collected according to the established time periods and were forwarded to the Wyoming Community College Commission for all students as mandated by Wyoming State Statutes (21-18-202 [v]). Those data included information from student surveys for graduates and program completers as well as for students transferring to the University of Wyoming (the College's primary transfer institution). Additionally, surveys were conducted of the employers of all students who were found to be working in Wyoming (utilizing State wage record data). In addition to the above survey data, the College was required to provide additional data from institutional sources addressing student success and student learning.

The assessments which are provided to the legislature and governor (for accountability purposes) according to state law, provide information concerning thirteen distinct elements based on the American Association of Community College's core indicators of success:

1. Student goal attainment;
2. Persistence (fall to fall)
3. Degree and certificate completion rates;
4. Placement rate of graduates in the workforce;
5. Employer assessment of graduates;
6. Licensure and certification pass rates;

7. Client assessment of programs and services;
8. Demonstration of critical literacy skills;
9. Number and rate of students who transfer;
10. Success in subsequent related coursework;
11. Participation rate in service area; and
12. Responsiveness to community needs.

The College continues its collaboration with the Wyoming Department of Employment. Under this agreement the College provides the Department of Research and Planning (DRP) with a list of all program completers for the year and the DRP merges those data with its employment wage record data and subsequently provides the College with information about how its program completers interact with the world of work.

During the last year the College continued to institutionalize its efforts to assess student learning in general education, transfer programs, and career and technical programs for the purpose of program improvements. Those measures were outlined in the Monitoring Report that was filed with the Higher Learning Commission in June 2002.

As new faculty members were hired during the year they were clearly informed of the institution's commitment to student learning and were advised of the role that faculty would be expected to play in the assessment process of that learning. Because of the cost of annually conducting the CAAP test, the College decided to move to a biennial use of this instrument, utilizing the full CAPP test for students in even numbered years only. The exception to this decision is the

utilization of the critical thinking portion of this exam annually by some medically related departments that have incorporated it into their program assessment measures. This year the employer survey was conducted through the Wyoming Department of Employment, Research and Planning Department. This move resulted in a much higher return rate for the survey and provided better data for assessment purposes. All other measures were collected according to their normal cycle and were reported to the campus community through a Data Book that was created for the first time this year and disseminated campus-wide.

The staff analysis of the 2002 Monitoring Report indicated that the College had made substantial progress in the assessment area. That analysis did identify several areas that needed to be clarified in a follow-up progress report this year. This report addresses the gaps that were identified by staff.

HOW ARE ASSESSMENT RESULTS MONITORED INSTITUTIONALLY?

Assessment results are monitored at various times and at different organizational levels throughout the year. Institutionally, the College is working to tie assessment more concretely to the planning and budgeting cycle. All departmental plans are evolving to emphasize the improvement of student learning as a major component in those plans. The documentation of student learning will then be a major factor in future budget justification. This linkage in planning and budgeting is being undertaken to make sure that the culture of assessment permeates the institution.

The Data Book compiled by the Office of Institutional Research is comprised of student outcomes assessment information intended to assist in

making informed decisions about student learning at Casper College. This publication was distributed to all department heads, the faculty senate, members of the President's Cabinet, members of the Academic Council, and to the College Board of Trustees. Additionally, a copy of the Data Book was provided to the campus library. The dissemination of assessment data in this manner allows virtually all stakeholders on campus the opportunity to analyze it, identify any possible trends in the data, raise questions about the need to make improvements in any area, and offer any suggestions about how potential problem areas might be addressed.

Individual faculty have the responsibility of monitoring assessment data generated in their own classroom and program areas and have the authority to make changes that are warranted to address any problems that might be apparent. The other department faculty members are included in this process if the program has more than one faculty member. In either case, the division chair serves as a consultant who not only monitors assessment data but who also serves as a change agent when necessary.

The associate deans, vice presidents and the president all monitor assessment data throughout the year as it is collected. These individuals may raise questions (and often do) about not only improvement needs in those areas lacking but also concerning the best way to publicize those areas where successes are obvious.

HOW ARE THE RESULTS BEING DISSEMINATED?

Assessment data are being disseminated through a variety of means on and off campus. As previously mentioned a new method of distribution in use this year is the Data Book. It has proven to be an excellent method of compiling and advertising the various data elements as they relate to student learning. The publication also allows for benchmarking and comparison from year to year as well as program to program.

Additionally, the college disseminates assessment data as agenda items at various campus meetings where discussion of the information is appropriate. It is not uncommon in these meetings for discussions to extend beyond the original meeting. The Director of Institutional Research and the Coordinator of Assessment team present summary data at the start of each semester when all academic affairs employees gather for meetings.

Also, assessment data is made available to the campus community through the media, both on campus and off campus. This method often results in news stories that usually (but not always) tell of exceptional performance by our students in various disciplines.

The college is required by law to report assessment data to the legislature and governor through the Wyoming Community College Commission, so our assessment data is also widely disseminated through reports that are required or requested at the state level. These reports are compiled by the Wyoming Community College Commission and are sent back to the College as reports to news media, legislators, interested citizens and the governor.

As we work to tie planning, budgeting and assessment more intricately together we will initially disseminate information from the departments to the administration in the budget and planning documents.

WHO IS GENERALLY RESPONSIBLE FOR FOLLOW-UP ON THE RESULTS?

The ultimate responsibility for following-up on the results of the assessment plan lies with the Academic Vice President. To insure that the assessment plans are fully implemented and changes are made in programs where required, the College is working to link assessment with the planning and budgeting process. When completed, this marriage will result in a tautological process that will consist of planning to better serve the learning needs of students, budgeting to achieve that plan, and assessment of the results of that action on student learning to identify future assets necessary to meet the learning needs of our students. This action will require conscious attention to the assessment plan and data by all parties involved prior to the allocation of budgets each year. The Academic Vice President has delegated to the associate dean and the division chairs the authority to initiate follow-up actions based on assessment results.

HOW WILL INSTRUMENTS INVOLVED IN DIRECT ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING BE ADMINISTERED?

Opportunities for self-evaluation of student learning are afforded all students at Casper College who remain in a class beyond the midpoint of the semester. Those course/instructor evaluation forms are provided to all students

in courses taught by non-tenured faculty each semester. Students taught by tenured faculty are surveyed each semester through randomly selected classes (one per semester for each instructor). These instruments are administered by the division chair or his/her designee and are transcribed by clerical staff and filed with the Academic Vice President each semester.

Graduate surveys are sent via U.S. Mail to all individuals who graduate each year. The graduates voluntarily respond to the survey and return it by U.S. Mail. One follow-up mailing is sent to those individuals who do not respond to the initial survey.

Surveys of employers of Casper College program completers are conducted by the Wyoming Department of Employment. They are able to match program completers with employers and then send each of those employers the appropriate questionnaire. Two follow-up mailings are conducted to maximize the return rate.

Pre-test/post-test exams are given to all students at the start of the course and again at the completion of the course in those departments that include this type of measure in their assessment plan. Scores are then compared to determine the learning that has occurred during the semester.

Writing samples are taken from all students in English Composition II at the beginning of the semester. At the end of the year a cohort group is randomly selected to again obtain a writing exemplar for comparison purposes. The writing samples are then team graded to identify growth in writing ability.

CAAP exams for critical thinking are given to the entire sophomore class in the nursing department. The radiologic technology program is considering the inclusion of this measure for students in its program and if adopted they will also require it of all sophomore students.

Students who are administered the other CAAP tests that are designed to assess general education learning are selected by identifying the peak enrollment times for math, English, political science, psychology, and sociology classes. The exams are given during those selected hours. Though the process is not random it allows us to measure the largest number of students with least disruption to teaching time during the spring semester. Again, this test is being offered every other year and will be administered in the Spring 2004 semester.

Surveys of entering students are conducted in a similar fashion. Classes are identified with the largest number of freshmen in them and then those classes are administered the test at specific hours of the day (10 o'clock on Wednesday; 7 o'clock on Monday nights; etc.). Again, this method of selection is nonrandom but it provides the largest sample to collect data from.

HOW ARE THE SURVEY RESULTS EVALUATED?

The surveys are tabulated based on a 4.0 scale and the results are evaluated similar to a grade point average. The immediate past year's results serve as the benchmark for the current year and subsequent results are judged in a comparative fashion. Observed trends in the data are brought forward and discussed at the department level, the division level and the unit level. Strategies

are developed by faculty and administrators and are subsequently incorporated into the planning and budgeting cycle where appropriate.

CLARIFY CAPSTONE EXPERIENCES

Capstone experiences at Casper College are associated with specific majors, primarily in the Career and Technical fields of study. They are developed collectively by the members of a department and are evaluated either jointly among members of the program faculty or are subject to a rubric developed and agreed upon by the program faculty with advisory committee input.

In some instances the capstone experience is a performance in such areas as theatre and music and again it is judged by the members of the major's department. In the case of Art students, the capstone experience is the presentation of an art portfolio that is jointly critiqued by members of the Art faculty.

In the Paralegal Department the capstone experience is participation in a mock trial that is conducted off campus in an actual courthouse. This experience is evaluated by members of the local Bar Association based on actual courtroom procedure and on the actual production of exhibits. The experience is one of application of everything that is learned in the program and comes in the final semester of study.

In some departments (primarily those in the crafts) the capstone experience is the completion of a class that is evaluated with a rubric (test) developed by a specific industry. The end product is subjected to the industry standard and the project is certified as meeting those standards.

Some of the departments utilize the passage of a certification exam as the capstone experience for their field, when certification is the industry standard. In these cases the exam is developed by the industry (external to the college) and is scored by the same industry.