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June 10, 2014

Linnea A. Stenson, PhD
Vice President for Accreditation Relations
Higher Learning Commission
Suite 7-500
230 South LaSalle Street
Chicago, IL 60604-1411

Dear Dr. Stenson,

This letter accompanies a progress report on assessment of general education at Casper College as requested by the Higher Learning Commission.

On July 16, 2012, the Commission sent a letter acknowledging receipt of Casper College's progress report on general education dated June 2012. The letter also requested a follow-up progress report to address the assessment of general education. A detailed report on progress toward assessing general education at Casper College is attached.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of this report.

Sincerely,

Walter H. Nolte, PhD
President

Enc.

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Higher Learning Commission Progress Report

Casper College General Education Assessment

June 2014

Background

In June 2012, Casper College submitted a progress report on general education to the

Higher Learning Commission (HLC). The HLC accepted the report on July 16, 2012, at the same

time requesting another progress report on the assessment of general education by July 1, 2014.

The HLC staff recommended that Casper College reduce the number of general education

outcomes and make them more cross-disciplinary. It was also recommended that the report

include the following:

1. a narrative of the College's implementation of general education assessment;
2. a description of that assessment process;
3. a discussion of initial data from the assessment process;
4. a description of the steps taken to improve student learning as a result of the data.

Implementation of General Education Assessment

Upon receiving the HLC's letter of July 16, 2012, the new Casper College Vice President

for Academic Affairs began discussions with the President, deans, and faculty representatives

about planning to address the recommendations. A six-member ad hoc subcommittee of faculty

members from the previous, larger General Education Committee was convened in early

September 2012 to reduce the 38 relatively discipline-specific learning outcomes to fewer, more

general outcomes. This subcommittee, comprising faculty representatives from each of the five

academic schools and led by the Vice President for Academic Affairs, submitted a list of eight

learning outcomes to Faculty Senate in mid-October 2012. Faculty Senate approved these new

outcomes on November 12, 2013:

As graduates of Casper College, students will be able to

1. demonstrate effective oral and written communication
2. use the scientific method
3. solve problems using critical thinking and creativity
4. demonstrate knowledge of diverse cultures and historical perspectives
5. appreciate aesthetic and creative activities
6. use appropriate technology and information to conduct research
7. describe the value of personal, civic, and social responsibilities
8. use quantitative analytical skills to evaluate and process numerical data

As the ad hoc subcommittee worked to revise the list of learning outcomes, the Vice President for Academic Affairs tasked the English Department Chair, the Director of Assessment, and the Dean of Educational Resources to begin process planning. This three-person group attended the HLC-sponsored "Making a Difference in Student Learning: Assessment as a Core Strategy" on October 17 – 19, 2012, at the Q Center in St. Charles, IL. At this event they drafted an implementation and communication plan toward developing a general education outcomes assessment process, to be in place by the spring of 2013.

Subsequently a faculty representative from each of the five academic schools was added to this three-person group to form the General Education Assessment Team (Assessment Team). The Assessment Team requested that each school's dean submit a list of appropriate courses from which could be collected student artifacts that document achievement of the new outcomes.

The Assessment Team met initially in December 2012 to review the new outcomes and the artifact audit from the deans. They also planned for campus-wide communication at the spring semester convocation in early January 2013, producing a short presentation and a printed document to share with all employees. Each team member also spoke at his or her school's faculty meeting later in the day to further explain the overall general education assessment process, and to collect and respond to questions.

In January 2013 the Assessment Team began to meet twice monthly and, as suggested by the HLC, examined other institutions' published general education assessment plans. They concluded that, rather than trying to create new rubrics, the existing Value Assessment of Learning for Undergraduate Education (VALUE) rubrics produced by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) would be effective in analyzing student artifacts for our institution. Along with selection of the VALUE rubrics, during these initial meetings the Assessment Team decided to focus on addressing two outcomes per semester using a sample of student artifacts taken from sophomore-level courses. The intent was to capture evidence of student transference or application of skills and knowledge acquired throughout a typical two-year academic career at Casper College. This was an intentional decision to assess general education outcomes at the institutional level rather than in specific general education courses.

The General Education Assessment Process

Every semester Casper College assesses two general education outcomes. Since there are eight outcomes, the rotation for assessing all of our outcomes is on a two-year cycle, as follows:

- semester one: outcomes   1 & 6
- semester two: outcomes   2 & 8
- semester three: outcomes 3 & 7
- semester four: outcomes 4 & 5

So far, we have conducted assessment cycles for all of our general education outcomes except for outcomes 4 and 5, which are scheduled for an assessment cycle in fall of 2014. Student artifacts (i.e., individual pieces of course work) are submitted to the Director of Assessment every fall, spring and summer term by faculty from a variety of disciplines. Faculty submitters fill out a cover sheet identifying the outcome that the artifacts meet, the number of artifacts submitted, and the specifics of the assignment. During the fall and spring semesters, other faculty volunteers score the artifacts using a VALUE rubric previously chosen by the

Assessment Team as corresponding to the respective outcomes. Faculty cannot score their own students' artifacts.

The Assessment Office catalogs the artifacts under the outcome number, and they are filed by outcome number and placed in a locked cabinet. When it is time to select student artifacts for review, the Assessment Office randomly selects twenty student artifacts from the assigned outcomes for that semester, anonymizes the artifacts, makes copies, and creates twenty identical binders that include an AAC&U VALUE rubric for each artifact.

In the meantime, the Assessment Office schedules two scoring meetings for faculty volunteers. In the first meeting, the assessment facilitator gives an overview of the process, explains the expectations, and answers any questions. The facilitator calibrates the scoring results for inter-rated reliability by walking faculty through the rubric, and they assess at least one artifact together as a group. After the initial scoring session, the faculty scorers complete the rest of the artifact assessments individually. Approximately two weeks later the group reconvenes to discuss their findings regarding the outcome assessed. The comments are documented and formatted into a feedback report. The scores from the rubrics are then calculated, and data are generated to demonstrate process findings. This process is duplicated twice yearly for two outcomes each time, and is on a continual cycle. All feedback reports are posted on the Casper College Assessment page (http://www.caspercollege.edu/assessment/index.html).

An assessment facilitator or faculty representative shares the feedback from the reporting sessions throughout campus at the faculty and student senates, all the alliances (representative employee bodies), Deans Council, College Council, school meetings, and department meetings. When the feedback is shared, the assessment facilitator collects information from the various

groups about how the institution might improve student learning in the areas discussed, and reports it back to the entire Assessment Team.

Department chairs provide their takeaways from the process by submitting an annual assessment plan to the Assessment Office. The Director of Assessment collects these data, and when a trend or commonality is identified, the Director recommends institutional change to the Deans Council and the Vice President for Academic Affairs. Changes are then made and reported back to the Assessment Office to record and share, thereby closing the loop.

Discussion of General Education Assessment Initial Data

During the spring of 2013, fall of 2013 and spring of 2014, the faculty volunteers scored artifacts submitted for written communication, information literacy, quantitative reasoning, the scientific method, civic engagement, and problem solving. After scoring the artifacts, the faculty scorers were asked what our students did well, what they needed to improve, and what the institution, schools, departments, and individual faculty could do to help improve student learning in that area. Following is a general overview of the initial results.

Written Communication and Information Literacy, Spring 2013

What did our students do well?

- Artifacts were word-processed and students had a basic understanding of how to manipulate the document in that software

What do our students need to improve?
Students need to:

- more effectively communicate in language or style appropriate for a thesis-driven, college-level essay in terms of grammar, punctuation, spelling, or organization
- better integrate and synthesize outside sources into their own writing using an appropriate documentation style and format
- avoid using questionable or inappropriate sources in their work, and to address the source's credibility in a significant way
- understand how to avoid plagiarism as many students cut and paste (or poorly paraphrase) work from websites or other sources

What can we do to improve student learning in this area?
Faculty could:
- encourage (perhaps require) students to use the Casper College Writing Center's resources more frequently
- establish clear assignment sheets with an agreed-upon documentation style, preferably American Psychological Association (APA) or Modern Language Association (MLA)
- use a grading rubric that assigns points for the quality of the writing in addition to the content required

Schools and departments could:
- consider establishing a consistent documentation style for use in all classes in that area
- coordinate better with the library faculty to learn what databases and resources are available for their specific discipline

Institutionally, we should:
- ensure that all students are enrolling in their general education English courses at the beginning of their college careers
- respond more swiftly and consistently to plagiarism

Quantitative Reasoning and the Scientific Method, Fall 2013

What did our students do well?

- completed the calculations correctly
- included both quantitative and qualitative analysis
- considered the real world applications of the study or report
- identified patterns from their experiments
- listed the limitations of the study performed
- adequately organized their analysis

What do our students need to improve?
Students should:
- use a formal citation any time they use information from another source
- supply adequate background knowledge or research
- avoid conveying results that are anecdotal, too vague, or non-existent

What can we do to improve student learning in this area?
Faculty could:
- use more guided, layered assignments that help students build each component, receive feedback, and then move on to the next section
- ask students to provide an existing knowledge component of the project that requires credible, discipline-specific research
- collaborate with library faculty to better understand what resources are available to them and their students

- specify a documentation style and address how their discipline incorporates and cites source material
- when testing, ask students more open-ended, essay-type questions that require analysis

Schools and departments could:
- consider adopting a common assessment rubric, writing handouts, and other materials to help emphasize to students that faculty from all disciplines collaborate and have similar expectations about transferring skills from general education courses to discipline-specific courses
- work on building in better prerequisites to ensure that students enrolling in courses have the necessary skills to be successful
- develop better advisor training

Institutionally, we need to:
- showcase and support student research and ask students to be part of the Institutional Review Board

Problem Solving and Civic Engagement, Spring 2014

What did our students do well?
- provided good effort in critical thinking by identifying the problem and evaluating potential solutions
- considered others' beliefs, and identified civic responsibilities; they had strong opinions and were passionate about their topics

What do our students need to improve?
Students need to:
- identify and clarify process steps of problem solving by using more logic, evidence and source citation
- demonstrate active civic engagement through documentation
- justify their opinions
- improve their writing skills by developing main points, organizing, and proofreading papers

What can we do to improve student learning in this area?
Faculty could:
- provide more clearly defined assignment sheets as well as a grading rubric
- discuss learning outcomes prior to assignments
- more fully develop assignments that align with VALUE rubrics
- emphasize use of the Writing Center and suggest peer editing

Schools and departments could:
- define analysis of critical thinking through scope of department/school
- provide school meetings to discuss VALUE rubrics using past faculty scorers as facilitators

- support service learning by making connections between service learning and civic responsibility
- share ideas on ways to incorporate student peer editing
- review how to use rubrics/checklists toward more-quantifiable grading

Institutionally, we need to:
- standardize classroom equipment across campus
- update classroom computers
- have equipment available to all faculty to record students' processes and presentations
- provide professional development opportunities regarding rubrics and test writing

Response to Initial Data

In the fall of 2013, we began to report the findings from our spring 2014 scoring sessions of written communication and information literacy. We provided scoring feedback sheets and verbal reports to the Student Senate, Faculty Senate, Staff Alliance, Administrative Alliance, Deans Council, College Council, and to every academic school on campus. A campus-wide discussion was held, and the following changes were accepted based on the feedback:

Many departments and schools have begun the process of using one documentation style for all classes. For example, the Business Department has chosen to use the APA style exclusively, and to require APA on all written assignments. This improved uniformity will also help tutors in the Writing Center to direct students to the appropriate documentation style. Many faculty commented in the scoring sessions that they were not sure what was current, so they did not feel comfortable grading students on these formats. Additionally, English faculty chose to offer MLA and APA refresher courses for faculty and provided MLA and APA handbooks for anyone who attended the sessions. The School of Health Sciences asked the English department to order copies of the handbook for their entire faculty to help encourage them to use the most recent version of APA. The College has budgeted for all new faculty to be provided books that focus on how to make relevant word processing software accommodate MLA and APA formatting requirements.

One piece of feedback that we have received from all four scoring sessions is a significant problem with plagiarism. The College has adopted software called Maxient that will help "track and manage behavioral issues," including plagiarism (Maxient.com). Faculty received an update on this program at the semester convocation in January 2014, and began reporting instances of plagiarism and cheating in that semester. This will allow us to respond to repeat offenders with appropriate consequences. In addition, our two-credit study skills and personal responsibility course for at-risk students added a unit on plagiarism and how to avoid it. inally, the College has committed to an institutional subscription to Turnitin.com to help faculty more thoroughly check for plagiarism and validate plagiarism suspicion. A link to this website will be easily accessible to all faculty through our learning management system.

After seeing the feedback reports, many faculty commented that they recognized the need to put greater emphasis on the writing itself, independent of the content they wanted students to reflect on. Many faculty—for example, in Education, Agriculture and Business—have begun using writing-specific rubrics for written assignments.

In all three of the scoring sessions completed by May 2014, faculty commented that they wanted to encourage students to use the resources available in the library and at the Writing Center. Student Senate commented that the Writing Center's computers were outdated, and that they could not open their documents using the older software nor could they actually edit and revise in the Writing Center because of the lack of available computers. Consequently, new computers were purchased for the Writing Center. Additionally, the College is in the process of moving the Writing Center to a larger, more visible location on campus and of combining the supports offered in the English Center with the Writing Center, so that students may get more comprehensive assistance. The centers will cover a wide range of topics and will offer

individualized assistance to students from any discipline. Finally, the developmental English faculty will offer workshops in this space that will be required for all students in general education English classes.

The deans have added a general education assessment section to the required annual department reports toward helping to capture information about how faculty and departments are integrating the feedback from the scoring sessions. Department chairs complete these reports annually with their department peers and submit them to their respective deans and the Vice President for Academic Affairs and for review and feedback.

Summary

In response to the HLC's progress report request letter of July 16, 2012, Casper College has reduced the number of general education outcomes and made them more cross-disciplinary, developed and implemented a general education assessment process, collected data from three iterations of the process, and begun system-level changes to address the findings of this assessment system.

The students, faculty, staff and administration of Casper College have taken the general education outcomes assessment system seriously and have adopted it into the campus culture. Faculty, staff, and students now request opportunities to participate in the scoring sessions. The collection of artifacts is an accepted process for faculty during each semester. Most important, substantial changes in faculty planning and instruction, student resource offerings, and learning expectations are taking place at Casper College as a direct result of implementing and maintaining the general education outcomes assessment process.