

CRITERION THREE: *The Community College of Aurora is accomplishing its educational and other purposes.*

Chapter 6

ASSESSMENT

Strengths

The College has the following strengths in the areas discussed in this chapter:

- The College has integrated the lifelong skills across the curriculum.
- The faculty has aligned student learning outcomes, teaching methods and assessment strategies through development and widespread implementation of a model syllabus and a teaching paradigm.
- The faculty has aligned student evaluation of instruction with the lifelong skills.

Challenges

The self-study also found challenges for the future. CCA is challenged to:

- Strengthen the College's data collection, analysis, and storage infrastructure to support the work of the Instructional Assessment Committee.
- Collect program- and institutional-level data on student achievement of the lifelong skills.
- Move rapidly to develop pilot projects that use the results of assessment to improve teaching and learning and the quality of instructional programs across the institution.
- Utilize assessment outcomes in the College's annual budgeting and planning processes.

Issues for the Future

The self-study identified issues for the future. These issues include:

- Continuing to focus the College's efforts on program- and institutional-level assessment.
- Specifying the procedures and responsibilities for turning assessment results into instructional change.
- Continuing to provide regular and adjunct faculty with training on the lifelong skills to ensure their use in all College courses.
- Broadening the scope of assessment to include occupational skills and knowledge, using existing external measures (licensing exams, for example) as well as internally developed measures.

Introduction

CCA's program to assess student learning achieved early success, lost some momentum in the late 1990s, and is now reinvigorated. Over the last decade, the College's efforts have emphasized skills students need for employment and further education (the lifelong skills). Although the College has integrated the lifelong skills across the curriculum, assessment efforts have tended to focus on students who are completing transfer degree programs. More recently, CCA has recognized the importance of assessment in its occupational programs and for nondegree students. The College has begun to develop capstone courses as a major means of assessing student learning.

CCA's mission and goals drive the College's assessment efforts. These statements describe the College's commitment to student achievement, diverse teaching and learning environments, high academic standards, and the use of data-driven assessment. For example, the College mission states, in part: "The Community College of Aurora ... promotes excellence in teaching, learning, and service to our diverse community." CCA's strategic goals include the following:

- Continue to ensure high quality of instruction that is relevant and responsive to the needs of our community.
- Continue to ensure student satisfaction and success.
- Develop a systemic, integrated planning process that is data-based and outcomes-oriented.

A high level of faculty involvement also characterizes the College's assessment program. Among their many contributions, CCA faculty members have:

- conceived the program's framework and goals (lifelong skills);
- led workshops and in other ways shared knowledge with colleagues;
- developed and now use an outcomes-based model syllabi format;
- integrated the teaching of the lifelong skills into their courses;
- aligned student evaluation of instruction with the lifelong skills;
- included assessment in their annual work plans; and
- incorporated assessment elements as they developed new courses and programs. (*Resource Room documents 6.1*)

Important recent developments are the emergence of new leadership and faculty attendance at local assessment conferences and at the American Association of Higher Education Assessment Conference.

As a part of its site visit in March 1993, NCA approved CCA's Academic Achievement Assessment Plan identified in the College's Guide to Self-

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Study for Commission Evaluation, 1991-1992. (*Resource Room document 6.2*). Following this approval, the College faculty identified lifelong skills as the centerpiece of CCA's assessment efforts after extensive conversations with community employers and faculty visits to Alverno College. The process of identifying and adopting the skills included discussion at faculty forums, industry focus groups and the Faculty Council. The lifelong skills include the following:

- **Communication:** abilities to effectively express, impart or exchange feelings, thoughts, opinions and information both orally and in writing.
- **Critical Inquiry:** abilities to examine and utilize reasoning strategies in order to select, apply and evaluate evidence in multi-disciplines.
- **Personal Responsibility:** abilities to work independently or cooperatively in a group setting on situations and issues that affect the common welfare and one's own welfare in relationship to others.
- **Aesthetic Perception:** abilities to identify characteristics of and to judge qualitatively a creative work.
- **Quantitative Reasoning:** abilities to perform mathematical operations and to reason and draw conclusions from numerical information.
- **Technology:** abilities to make use of various technology-based applications.



What the College Has Accomplished

With the decision to focus on the lifelong skills, the goals of the College's assessment program became the following:

- Goal 1: Integrate lifelong skills across the curriculum.
- Goal 2: Align student learning outcomes, teaching methods and assessment strategies.
- Goal 3: Implement multiple measures to assess student learning and mastery of the lifelong skills.
- Goal 4: Utilize the results of assessment to improve teaching and learning quality.

CCA's faculty members, in collaboration with instructional administrators and other College staff, have accomplished a great deal in pursuit of three of these four goals. Among the specific accomplishments have been the following:

Goal 1: Integrate lifelong skills across the curriculum.

- Identified general education courses that emphasize a lifelong skill.
- Implemented a syllabus audit to ascertain progress toward integration of lifelong skills into the curriculum in both new and existing courses.
- Conducted professional development activities related to each of the lifelong skills.
- Revamped new-faculty orientation to emphasize lifelong skills.
- Developed a capstone course integrating lifelong skills as a graduation requirement for the AA/AS degrees and piloted the course in spring 2002.

(Resource Room documents 6.3)

Goal 2: Align student learning outcomes, teaching methods and assessment strategies.

- Devised a teaching paradigm that identified good practices and suggested teaching methods and assessment strategies connected to cognitive levels.
- Developed an outcome-based syllabi format (model syllabus) that reflects lifelong skill objectives and competencies and implemented the syllabus in all general education and occupational courses.
- Inventoried existing strategies for teaching and assessing lifelong skills and data sources for student performance information.
- Defined broad student learning expectations pertaining to each of the lifelong skills.

(Resource Room documents 6.4)

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Goal 3: Implement multiple measures of assessment to evaluate student performance.

- Conducted faculty development workshops in outcomes design, assessment theory and strategies, technology, and innovation. *(Resource Room document 6.5)*
- Revised a survey of CCA graduates and the student evaluations of instruction to include items related to the lifelong skills and collected data with these instruments.

The comparison of information collected with these two revised instruments demonstrates the College's progress to date and the potential for the future. This type of comparison can be the basis of future modifications of instructional priorities and design.

The CCA Graduate Survey provides student perspectives on the extent to which the College prepared them to pursue their future goals. Respondents rank the extent to which CCA prepared them on each of the lifelong skills on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 4 (very great extent). In the 2001 survey, graduates gave a relatively high mean rating to their preparation in critical thinking skills (3.27). They gave a somewhat lower rating to their preparation in numeracy skills (2.92). *(Resource Room document 6.6)*

Student evaluations of instruction suggest a possible explanation for the differences in graduates' ratings of their preparation in these two lifelong skills – differences in the emphasis placed on these skills across the curriculum. In the most recent evaluation of instruction (summer of 2002), 87.7 percent of students surveyed (n = 1,634) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "I was challenged to think, analyze and evaluate ideas." In contrast, 62.5 percent of students agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "I was expected to interpret numerical data for use in papers and class discussion." *(Resource Room document 6.7)*

Goal 4: Utilize the results of assessment to improve teaching and learning quality.

- Used recommendations from program advisory committees to improve instruction. For example, based on committee recommendations, management and marketing added additional lifelong skills to each course and syllabus, made several courses prerequisites for others, eliminated a business policy course, and added an ethics course.
- Used information about rates of course incompletes to switch from a series of self-paced, one-credit modules in developmental math to instructor-taught, three-credit courses. *(Resource Room document 6.8)*



What the College Still Must Accomplish

Through the process of self-study, the College has learned that much work remains to be done. Among the specific steps that need to be accomplished are the following:

- train assessment committee members, division deans, program chairs and faculty members on integration of the lifelong skills into the curriculum, data collection and analysis, and use of assessment results to improve instruction;
- continue to encourage all faculty members, including adjunct faculty members, to emphasize lifelong skills in their courses;
- collect, distribute and use more program- and institutional-level assessment data;
- develop and implement a strategy to bring Institutional Research more fully into the assessment process;
- clarify the specific responsibilities of division deans and program chairs for integrating the lifelong skills into all courses in their programs and for assessing student learning and mastery of the lifelong skills at the course, program and institutional levels;
- clarify the responsibilities of division deans, program chairs, and faculty (regular and adjunct) for using assessment results to improve instruction;
- develop and implement rubric guides to assist faculty members and institutional researchers in assessment of lifelong skills;
- develop and implement strategies to increase student understanding of lifelong skills and their involvement in assessment processes;
- design multiple assessment approaches, including those for program- and institution-level assessment of lifelong skills, as well as student academic achievement portfolios and capstone courses for transfer and occupational programs;
- devise strategies to use assessment results to enhance teaching and learning excellence;
- establish student support services that augment student academic achievement; and
- identify existing assessment tools in occupational programs and the employment fields.

Among the specific activities now under way are the construction of an assessment Web page that includes PowerPoint workshops, the use of e-mail to update faculty on assessment, and the publication of an assessment handbook.

The college must continue to develop and implement rubric guides to assist faculty members and institutional researchers in assessment of lifelong skills.

Comparison to Levels of Implementation

In the spring of 2002, CCA evaluated its assessment efforts in relation to the Levels of Implementation described in the March 2002 Addendum to the Handbook of Accreditation Second Edition. The levels from this self-evaluation and a brief summary of the College's patterns of characteristics follow. (*Resource Room document 6.9*)

Institutional Culture – Collective/Shared Values

CCA's regular faculty and administrators share an increasingly complex understanding of the purposes, advantages and limitations of assessment. Within the last several years, this understanding has become more uniform and is spreading beyond the instructional unit. However, assessment is not yet "a way of life" at CCA. Some academic programs still need to develop statements of purpose and instructional goals, as well as formal assessment plans and goals. Assessment findings are not yet the basis of institutional decision-making. College's self-evaluation: Level Two.

Institutional Culture – Mission

CCA's mission and goals clearly indicate the value the College places on student learning. Assessment program materials (available from the assistant to the vice president of instruction) reflect these values. Over the past several years, faculty and staff have renewed discussion of assessment in the context of the College's mission, vision and values. College's self-evaluation: Level Two.

Shared Responsibility – Faculty

CCA regular faculty members have been, and continue to be, the major element in the College's assessment efforts. To learn more about assessment, faculty members have attended local and national workshops and conferences. Responsibility for assessment is in their job descriptions. Faculty members also work with committees to ensure that direct and indirect measures of student learning are aligned with educational goals and measurable outcomes. These committees include the Instructional Assessment Committee, the Professional Development Committee, and the Instructional Curriculum Committee. A major challenge is to bring the College's adjunct faculty — who teach 85 percent of the College's courses — into the assessment effort. College's self-evaluation: Level Two.

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Shared Responsibility – Administration and Board

The College Advisory Council has supported lifelong skills since their origin. The president supports assessment in many ways, as do noninstruction members of the President’s Cabinet. Division deans have become more knowledgeable about assessment. College’s self-evaluation: Level Two

Shared Responsibility – Students

Students are aware of assessment within individual courses but are not able to place it in a broader context. Increased student involvement in the assessment process is an Assessment Committee priority. College’s self-evaluation: Level One

Institutional Support – Resources

Although there is no specific budget line item for assessment, resources are integrated into other budgets. Resources to attend conferences are available, for example, from the professional development budget. Some regular faculty work on assessment during their institutional service time. Assessment resources such as the teaching paradigm and the model syllabus are available online. College’s self-evaluation: Level Two.

Institutional Support – Structures

The assistant to the vice president for instruction is the primary resource person for assessment. Responsibility for maintaining successful assessment programs is in the job descriptions for division deans and department chairs. The 2002 Plan for Continuing Progress has a timeline for advancing the assessment program. The College has a strengthened Instructional Assessment Committee through which faculty coordinate assessment. The Office of Institutional Research and other College units are available to assist the Committee, but the precise roles and contributions of these units must be more clearly defined. Syllabi for all courses are written from a model syllabus and describe student learning objectives and how learning will be assessed. College’s self-evaluation: Level Two

Efficacy of Assessment

Program-level data about student and program performance are not yet readily available and, thus, assessment data are not widely used to make changes across the institution. Most AA and AS graduates receive instruction in the lifelong skills. Faculty members have developed capstone courses in several programs. College’s self-evaluation: Level One.



Plan for Continuing Progress on Assessment

In the fall of 2002, the College reviewed the implementation of its assessment plan. Based on this review, CCA began to develop a Plan for Continuing Progress on the Assessment of Academic Achievement. A summary of the plan's four goals and related action steps follows. *(Resource Room document 6.10)*

By the spring of 2003, the College will have integrated students and non-academic departments, including student services, into assessment planning and evaluation. The assessment program will be more visible in the College, and student services representatives and students will serve on committees. Collaboration with the Office of Student Life will have increased.

By the fall of 2003, all CCA instructional programs will have a written statement of purpose, educational goals with measurable objectives and an identified assessment program. All programs will have identified their data needs and resources, aligned measures of student learning with the goals and objectives, included objectives and assessment plans in all syllabi, and incorporated assessment tools into capstone courses.

By the spring of 2004, the College will have increased substantially the abilities of regular and adjunct faculty members to gather, analyze and use both quantitative and qualitative assessment. Faculty will have created rubrics for each of the lifelong skills, and the College will have developed faculty education workshops and materials.

By spring 2004, the College will have effective feedback loops, an annual assessment reporting cycle and the infrastructure necessary to collect, store, analyze and distribute information. The College will use occupational program advisory committees to help analyze data and to develop strategies to improve student learning.

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