Spotlight on General Education:
HACC's Assessment Dialogue Day
Jan. 9, 2014

Two hundred faculty members, both full time and adjunct, came together on January 14, 2014 to discuss General Education.   Faculty members met in focus groups and considered the findings of the General Education assessment initiatives that had been conducted throughout 2013; they talked about the ways in which the General Education Outcomes were addressed in their courses; and they talked about ways in which they could respond to the assessment findings.

Faculty at the in-service noted that HACC's General Education Outcomes are "owned" by everyone, from every academic program.   They are:

- Quantitative Literacy
- Written Communication
- Critical Thinking
- Technology Literacy
- Oral Communication
- Information Literacy

http://www.hacc.edu/Academics/CoursesAndPrograms/GeneralEducationCourses/index.cfm

The General Education Outcome assessment process takes snapshots of student performance related to each of these competencies so that faculty members, disciplines, and programs can make better-informed decisions about how best to conduct their classroom instruction and support student learning. Discussion highlights follow. Faculty members who are interested in seeing the full details related to the assessment findings may contact Erin Donovan in the Institutional Research office, at emdonova@hacc.edu

Information Literacy

Writing samples from 179 students enrolled in ENG102 were assessed, with 79% of the students demonstrating at least some proficiency across information literacy competencies. Of particular concern related to this outcome was the weakness related to the students' abilities to evaluate information; in 29% of the writing samples, students chose sources with little or no consideration to quality or the research need and they used only popular (or no) sources. In the breakout discussion, faculty members from many disciplines were discussing ways in which they could better support students in evaluating information more proficiently. Faculty members deemed it important to spend time in the classroom to identify the characteristics of popular vs. scholarly resources, and suggested that students be asked to bring in their research drafts (for scaffolding) and the accompanying sources for conferencing with faculty or with their peers. Faculty members proposed starting small by narrowly defining acceptable databases, allowing more freedom as students develop strengths. It was also seen as important that faculty members

come to consensus among themselves, their disciplines, and their programs so that the message to students across the curriculum could be consistent. Faculty deemed it important to begin revising the 335 forms to incorporate more structure and information about information literacy. Faculty proposed that discipline-specific professional development for both full time and adjunct faculty be considered, during which rubrics surrounding credible sources might be developed. The librarians determined to strengthen their practices related to their support of students in the use of credible sources, resolving to document their work with students and bring resources to faculty.

Oral Communication

This General Education Outcome was assessed in two ways. More than 60 recorded speeches were assessed by CWAC jurors, and faculty members assessed more than 100 speeches in their own classes (7 different classes were sampled). The same rubric was applied. While the classroom faculty members tended to score somewhat higher, students in both groups showed strengths in focus, organization, style, and language delivery. Students in both groups showed weakness in physical behaviors - delivering weak eye contact, few or ineffective gestures, and demonstrating a dependence upon notes. Faculty members in the breakout

session discussed ways in which they could better support their students in displaying appropriate behaviors associated with oral communication, with a chorus of ideas to provide additional formal and informal, graded and ungraded, opportunities for students to speak with one another and to get feedback regarding their effectiveness in so doing. Faculty shared techniques that they use to ease students' anxieties when speaking publicly, including the use of an "easy button," (a chance to start over) and the requirement of reciting a nursery rhyme if one came late to class. Active learning was discussed as a way of stimulating student-to-student speaking and peer evaluation. Faculty noted how important it is to be a good role model as a public speaker, with minimal dependence upon notes and text-heavy PowerPoint slides. The value of rubrics resonated with many of the faculty in attendance, with requests to see professional development addressing oral communication as it is manifest within given disciplines. Faculty noted that better ways to record student speeches are necessary, as well as access to current databases of public speeches to use as models.

Written Communication

Conducted during the spring 2013 semester, this assessment considered 113 writing samples from students enrolled in ENGL 101, SOCI201, PSYC 101, and HUM 201. More than 97% of the samples showed students having at least some proficiency across the identified competencies, with nearly 70% scoring as "proficient" or having "advanced proficiency." While HACC is pleased to celebrate this strong student performance, it was noted that nearly 4.5% of students did not show proficiency with writing a thesis statement (the weakest performance area). Faculty participating in this breakout session suggested the creation of a thesis library guide and online resources, as well as follow-up communication with the writing center. Faculty wondered about the impact of having students submit written work to Smart Thinking (an online tutoring service). There were also questions about the wisdom of using 100-level courses for this assessment, as well as suggestions to sample upper level courses for comparison in the future. Faculty members wondered if this rubric could be used in developmental courses so that students would better understand expectations.

Technology Literacy

In assessing this outcome, student artifacts were sampled from CIS105 since the course is required by so many programs. The CWAC committee members acknowledged that this was a challenge because a "big" outcome was applied to one course. Rather than applying a rubric, the assessment utilized reports generated by software used by students (My ITLab). Approximately 80% of the students passed the exams on Word and Excel, and 85% passed the test on Access. While these pass rates were strong, there is some concern about the diminishing student participation rates. (More than 1000 students took the Word exam; 835 took the Excel exam, and only 670 took the Access exam.) Faculty members attending this breakout session addressed the ways in which other courses/disciplines addressed this General Education Outcome, noting that the outcome is sufficiently broad to be able to include a number of different technologies used in varying ways in different disciplines. Faculty in psychology, web design, architecture, Foundational Studies, exercise science, science, and computer networking all discussed ways in which this outcome or its competencies are demonstrated in their respective courses. Attending faculty members expressed interest in participating in the assessment of this outcome the next time around, volunteering to help craft discipline-specific rubrics. This discussion continued into the following department meetings where other disciplines shared the same sentiments and were looking forward to finding ways in which their discipline could contribute.

Critical Thinking

CWAC jurors assessed 207 artifacts from nine courses: ARCH 101, CHEM 101, CJ 104, COMM 110, EXSC 102, HUM 201, MA 140, MATH 202, PHIL 101, and SOCI 202. Students performed very well in critical thinking, with 75% scoring as having "proficiency" or "advanced proficiency," with 95% scoring as having at least "some proficiency." One notable weak point was that of not having considered alternate points of view, with nearly 13% of students scoring as having "no/limited proficiency." Many of the faculty participating in this breakout session reported that "they could do something like that" in their courses. This session saw a vigorous discussion about whether or not critical thinking could be judged as well from a multiple-choice question as from a written assignment. While there was no immediate answer for this, it stimulated some thoughtful exchange. Faculty recommended professional development to address ways in which to write effective critical thinking questions within the disciplines.

Quantitative Literacy

This assessment used 176 samples of student work on final exams in MATH 103 and MATH 121. Students scored highest in their abilities to

identify and explain quantitative information, with 57% of the students having "proficiency" or "advanced proficiency" in that competency. However, there were some concerns with both the assessment itself and the student performance related to this outcome. Because one question on the final exam was used for the analysis, the findings were thrown off when students elected not to answer that question. The mean scores were lower than desired on each of the traits. Out of a 4-point scoring scale, the mean scores ranged from 1.74 to 2.69, with the mean score across the Quantitative Literacy competencies being 2.07, just slightly better than showing "some proficiency." Faculty discussed ways of improving the assessment itself when this outcome is reassessed this spring semester. Participants discussed publisher-provided tests and their ability to align test questions with student learning outcomes. Collecting student work in courses from disciplines other than math was recommended. Attendees commented that in moving forward, retention and failure rates should be considered when discussing the results of any assessment.

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Now what?

It's so tempting to enjoy the stimulating discussion and then return to business as usual. HACC's own talented balloon man, Rob Dixon, illustrated the necessity to "make something out of it!" It's critical that faculty and staff consider ways in which they can make use of the assessment findings. How can faculty and staff use what they have learned to improve the teaching and learning process? HACC's faculty members have already come up with some responses to each of the general education outcome assessment findings. The following pages represent some of the actions already taken.

Information Literacy:

- The Library is undertaking a number of initiatives, including:
    - Librarians will review the course 335's in programs coming up for review to help inform and prioritize their IL outreach efforts.
    - Library resources will be shared, and librarian professional development will be reviewed and assessed.
    - Librarians are working closely with Foundational Studies faculty to strengthen some of the First Year course assignments and practices.
    - The Lancaster Campus' reference tracking process will be enhanced to include resource evaluation, and will be used as a college-wide best practice.
- In some FS 100 - College Success sections, students are now required to work with a Writing Center tutor to organize research for an oral presentation assignment. An FS 100 Faculty member also met with library faculty to clarify academic honesty and citation components of this assignment. Additionally, a department meeting was used to support faculty in consistently requiring accurate MLA citations.
- A research project is being assigned in MAT 125.
- HIS 101 is strengthening its requirements related to the use of scholarly resources.
- GTEC 104 has developed a scenario assignment which includes a research requirement related to blueprint specifications.

- In ARCH 233, research components are being integrated into existing assignments.

Oral Communication:

- The theater and communications faculty determined to collaborate to better support students' oral presentation skills.
- ARCH 233 is requiring an oral presentation for the detailing and research assignment.
- In MAT202, a faculty member is piloting an optional oral presentation.
- In exercise science, class discussion is being integrated into the journal critique assignment.
- In meteorology, oral presentations will be required for the forecasting lab.
- Designated biology courses will require oral presentations.
- The Foundational Studies faculty and leadership have developed a common rubric for a grading the oral presentation group assignment, elevating the emphasis on physical behaviors. They are also advocating for the re-establishment of the Speech Center.

Written Communication

- The new scenario assignment created in GTEC 104 includes a memo-writing component.

- The Foundational Studies faculty members have been encouraged to increase their emphasis on thesis statements, and a handout on developing a thesis statement has been made available to all FS 100 faculty members via the D2L shell.
- In physics, a new learning outcome has been developed requiring written lab exercises.
- In chemistry, tests have been revised to include written communication.
- Rubrics have been revised in DH 101.
- Students enrolled in PBT course sections will be required to use professional writing style in their journal entries and in discussion postings.
- Assignment descriptions related to written work in HIS101 have been strengthened.

Technology Literacy:

- Faculty members in the marketing discipline are strengthening the use of technology in course projects.
- Students in MAT 202 will be required to use statistical software in producing displays.
- A number of initiatives have been put into place related to CIS 105.
  - The Technology Department and the IR office are working with Pearson (My IT Lab) to improve reporting capabilities.
  - Beginning this Spring 2014 semester, all sections of CIS105 will require the use of My IT Lab software.

  - CIS105 passing rates will be studied in comparison to overall HACC passing rates.
  - A math prerequisite for CIS105 will be considered.
- A WEB 230 assignment was revised to strengthen frame-by-frame animations which are then produced using multiple modalities.
- Welding classes will experiment with "foreman" roles requiring the use of email for information relay.
- A cross-disciplinary faculty team has been tentatively identified for the next assessment cycle.

Critical Thinking:

- In FS100, one of the options for a group project was re-written to emphasize the equal consideration of alternate points of view.
- In MAT 202, a faculty member will deliver an increased focus on deceiving statistical displays.
- An MAT 125, a faculty member will be utilizing peer sharing as part of the process of reviewing proofs, showcasing different, equally accurate approaches to problem-solving.
- DH 112 will integrate peer evaluation techniques into the student work with treatment plans.
- In chemistry, test questions are being revised.
- A pilot section of environmental science is utilizing a hands-on solar array lab, supported by special grant funding.
- In HIS101, a faculty member is altering the essay assignments to include the consideration of alternate points of view.

- A new scenario assignment in GTEC 104 related to blueprint analysis has been developed.
- Classroom assignments requiring analysis have been created in ARCH 233.

Quantitative Literacy

- The mathematics faculty members developed a number of responses to the assessment findings, including:
  - Faculty resolved to emphasize the skills related to judging the reasonableness of an answer.
  - A faculty member in MAT202 is developing an increased focus on misleading statistical displays and the required use of mathematical or statistical software.
  - An online section of MAT 010 is requiring explanations along with posted problems.
  - A faculty member teaching MAT 125 is including peer sharing as part of the process of reviewing proofs, allowing students to see different, equally accurate processes.
  - The math faculty will be working closely with CWAC to improve the process of this General Education outcome assessment during this spring semester.
- In accounting, the faculty members are making adjustments to some of the course assignments.

Broad Responses Spanning Several General Education Outcomes

- Faculty members in the sociology discipline are revising learning outcomes in four courses: 201, 202, 203, and 205.
- In biology, faculty members are making revisions to targeted test questions, revising lab manuals, and scheduling the revision of course 335's for Fall '14.
- Faculty members teaching Foundational Studies collaborated with librarians to review and revise expectations for a key assignment, and their students are being required to work with tutors to help them better organize information.
- The Business, Marketing, and Management Department is undertaking a number of broad initiatives:
  - The course 335's were analyzed to study their alignment with general education outcomes.
  - Accounting course assignments are being adjusted to better serve general education outcomes.
  - Department faculty will review and revise learning outcomes and the 335's for two key high-enrollment, high-impact courses: MKTG 201 and MGMT 201.
- All departments are participating in the review and analysis of the ways in which their courses map to general education outcomes. This curriculum-mapping is being input into Tk20.