

Outcomes Assessment Update

A math professor in an
unheated room is cold and
calculating.

* Pun of the Day *

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Program Review

Jargons are Pointers

Some issues came to mind while reflecting on the various assessment-focused professional development opportunities and consultative services recently secured by TCC. Whether it be Douglas Eder's perspective on assessment and the input he provided for our piloted 2002-03 Program Review and Outcomes Assessment model or more recently James Anderson's notions on instructional practices in a learning-centered institution...their models and jargon point to the same proven, age-old underlying concepts.

A common thread found throughout the numerous presentations is the call for writing student outcomes and identifying appropriate assessment measures (typically "course-embedded"). Because assessment lacks a common language or vernacular, increasingly we see a disconnect between the various theories/intentions and practices/results...similar to what is commonly experienced in K-12 education.

To compound matters, there exists a dearth of specific examples of successful assessment processes and reports from comparably-sized community colleges. Therefore, it has been a top priority for SOA to help answer the question that an esteemed colleague asked: "What's a good restaurant on Granby Street?" --- ONLY KIDDING --- The real questions are "Where's the A Paper?" "Show me some real-world examples of comprehensive program review plans that incorporate faculty-driven, course-embedded data?". Our journey to find best practices and the "A Paper" has led SOA to create a clearinghouse of assessment plans published by peer institutions

(<http://www.tcc.edu/welcome/collegeadmin/OIE/SOA/review/toolkit/Samples.htm>).

In reality, the only A Paper or viable program review process is the one that is **manageable** and **meaningful**, the one that meets our need to **support planning decisions**, the one that is **easily understood and accepted**, the one that is woven into **existing procedures** for curriculum planning and not viewed as an add-on, the one that **authentically answers** the core questions listed later in this newsletter.

SOA Analogies and Acronyms

TCC has a "culture of evidence" and history of assessing and planning programs as evidenced in the Assessment Reports from 1987 to 2003 (simply visit the SOA website to view the reports). An issue that has come to the forefront in recent years, however, is **how to design** and then **implement** a **college-wide systematic process** and **annual reporting system** that's called for in the TCC Comprehensive Five-Year Curriculum Plan. Using the five-year plan as our guide, SOA's intent has always been to assist curriculum planners in understanding the underlying concepts of assessment in a simple, intuitive way.

The **TCC Comprehensive Five-Year Curriculum Plan (2003-2008)** calls for (1) "All curricula will be built and maintained on a foundation of excellence." (2) "The college will put into place a systematic process for assessing programmatic and student learning outcomes, the results from which will be used for continuous improvement of disciplines and programs." And (3) "Annual reports will be produced to account for what has been accomplished in enhancing current programs and implementing new ones, and to identify emerging developments that call for updates to the curriculum planning process."

We developed catchy words and phrases to help us more easily understand assessment's underlying concepts. Some of our favorites include:



M&M – The rule that calls for a "manageable" process that produces "meaningful" results



Baby Steps – The philosophy that calls for a flexible, multi-year phase-in that accommodates our growing understanding of assessment.



SOARR (Structured Outcomes Assessment Review and Report: "Taking assessment to the new heights") - The most recently created acronym for our automated database reporting model that's currently in development.

Although the Baby Steps philosophy clearly is going to evolve into a "**Jogger's Mentality**," the concepts of manageability and meaningfulness remain a constant. So where do we go from here? What are some other underlying concepts critical to ensuring the success of the TCC assessment system?

Soul Searching - Why Are We Doing This?

Assessment can be for "**accountability reporting**" (e.g., summative reports – required reporting to tell others [VCCS, SCHEV, SACS] what you've done) and/or for **meaningful program planning** (e.g., formative reports – gathering pertinent information to guide and back-up our planning decisions).

The difference between the two purposes is found in how we answer these **core questions**:

- (1) "What are you **really** trying to do with your program?" – both programmatic and student learning goals
- (2) "What knowledge, skills or attitudes do you expect your students to demonstrate?"
- (3) "How **well** are you doing that?" and "How do you know?"
- (4) "How do you **use** that information to guide your program?"

"The only person who is educated is the one who has learned how to learn... and change."
Carl Rogers

Help Us To Help You

To ensure that our TCC program review process is more than merely an accountability reporting tool, we need to know how you would answer the aforementioned core questions and particularly those listed below. Remember, SOA is trying to develop a reporting process that documents our curriculum planning process in ways that are MEANINGFUL for you and your faculty!!!! **Please assist us by taking a few minutes to reflect on these questions and jot down your thoughts and email them to SOA.** We want to develop a reporting template that incorporates all of the information that Deans and faculty use in curriculum planning, and we want to generate/push-out the appropriate data.

- (1) What is your curriculum planning process (e.g., timeline of key activities, key participants and decision-makers, critical data you consider...in order of importance)?
- (2) What programmatic data do you track which indicates a strong/vibrant program (e.g., FTES, new students, graduation rates, retention/persistence, FT:PT faculty ratio/budget, staff training activities, various usage rates)?
- (3) What student learning data do you track which indicates a current curriculum that produces successful graduates (e.g., success rates in required courses, capstone/portfolio grades, final exams or

other graded assignments, lab grades, survey satisfaction data, informal/anecdotal evidence from students, faculty, employers)?

(4) What other data do you currently collect and consider for curriculum planning (e.g., dean observations, faculty and student feedback, student praise/complaints, advisory committee input, FT:PT ratios, adjunct and training budgets, age of textbooks and other instructional materials)?

(5) How are these other data collected (e.g., formal documentation, informal, word-of-mouth, reflection)?

From GIGO Data to MIMO Data

GIGO is a famous computer axiom meaning that if invalid data is entered into a system, the resulting output will also be invalid. Although originally applied to computer software, the axiom holds true for all systems, including assessment. Keep in mind...regardless of the format, the KEY is in how we answer the questions! Again, SOA wants to design a template that is MEANINGFUL to curriculum planners! Help us change the acronym from GIGO to MIMO...Meaningful In Meaningful Out!

Systematic, Organized, and Documented (SOD)

To be successful (manageability, meaningfulness) this process must move from *informal, ad hoc, undocumented* methods to those that are more **Systematic**, more **Organized**, and produce better **Documentation (SOD)**.

The SOD Rule is somewhat subjective much like how we select turfgrass for our home. While some individuals prefer Palmetto St. Augustine, other homeowners plant Bitterblue, Seville or Delmar. When considering varieties of grass, we typically choose from those that grow best in our local climate and soil type...there's no sense trying to make a grass work in an environment that it wasn't designed for. Second, we look to varieties that combine the overall qualities that are most important to us; aesthetics, maintenance requirements/cost, and environmental impact.

This SOD Rule, when applied to writing outcomes and identifying measures, is quite similar to turfgrass analogy. This is where the rubber meets the road. The key is to remain authentic, meaningful. Do you base your decisions on information gathered from staff discussions, faculty meetings, phone conversations, or any other routine activity that's typically NOT documented? If so, do NOT change the activity...rather, incorporate a system to improve organization and documentation. **SOA will work with you to "plant your SOD" or to develop simple ways to document your current practices!** We can assist you in creating short, simple tracking tools/forms such as check-off lists, event logs, or other systematic rubrics.

User-Friendly Format

User-friendly refers to anything that makes it easier for novices to use a computer. Menu-driven programs, online formats, and graphical user interfaces (GUIs), for example, are considered user-friendly systems. Although the term *user-friendly* represents an important concept, it has been so overused that it has become something of a cliché.

"While you are experimenting, do not remain content with the surface of things. Don't become a mere recorder of facts, but try to penetrate the mystery of their origin."
Ivan Pavlov

With the fundamental guiding questions in mind, an intuitive, user-friendly annual curriculum planning process is needed to document our efforts at TCC. Last year a report template using MS Word was designed; however, SOA is currently developing a MS Access database with hopes of going online next year (SOARR – Structured Outcomes Assessment Review and Report). Your answers to the core questions listed above will be critical in designing the report template! Once SOA understands your curricular planning needs, we will make every effort to develop a reporting tool that utilizes as many user-friendly features as possible.

Official Course Outlines

Lead Deans were recently provided TCC's official course outline template along with two sample outlines to use as a guide. The outline contains seven sections, most of which can be completed by simply copying and pasting from the college catalog or previous outlines/syllabi. Articulating course objectives can sometimes be problematic, so some guidance is provided below.

Course Objectives

Course objectives could be stated in terms of the knowledge, skills, and/or attitudes demonstrated by students who complete a given course.

Course objectives could be limited to the fundamental, basic outcomes for a given course...regardless of the instructor...regardless of location...regardless of format.

Although professor A and professor B may have their own areas of expertise and interest, they will cover (at a minimum) the course objectives listed in the official course outline. Certainly professors retain their academic freedom to add to the course objectives or customize their assessment measures or implement different instructional pedagogies.

If we experience difficulty in reaching consensus on which objectives to include in the course outline, we could ask ourselves:

--- What would the instructors to ART 284 (Computer Graphics II) tell a freelance graphic designer who inquired about hiring a student who had completed this course? What knowledge, skills, and/or attitudes will our students bring to a prospective employer? If asked for "hard evidence," how could we prove it to the potential employer?

--- What would the instructor to PHT 247 (Alternative Photographic Processes) tell the Dean of the Department of Photography and Film at the VCU School of the Arts who wanted to draft an articulation agreement with the photography program at TCC? What knowledge, skills, and/or attitudes will our students demonstrate at VCU? What documentation do you have that can prove your case?

"A first-rate soup is more creative than a second-rate painting."
Abraham H. Maslow

"Education is the ability to listen to almost anything without losing your temper or your self-confidence."
Robert Frost

Course Content

Course content is the general or topical areas that are covered in a given course. Think of this section as chapter headings or themes or topic sentences in a textbook, for example.

Re-Opening the Assessment Toolbox



SOA attended the Virginia Assessment Group (VAG) annual spring drive-in workshop on March 18, 2005. Entitled "Re-Opening the Assessment Toolbox," the back-to-basics workshop focused on fundamental assessment principles and underlying concepts.

Links to Presentations and Handout Materials

Below are links to the various presentation files and handout materials. Simply click on the link to access the information. Or go to the Consultation Services webpage on the SOA website and scroll toward the bottom for links to these documents

(<http://www.tcc.edu/welcome/collegeadmin/OIE/SOA/review/services.htm>).

Administrative Unit Assessment Track

[Administrative Assessment - Part I: The Basics, Definitions, Measures, and Objectives, Part II: Making it Work - Hints, Tips, and Tools \[Resources Handout\]](#) (Ephraim Schechter)

Academic Assessment Track

[Assessment Primer: A Review](#) (Jean Yerian)

[Writing Measurable Objectives \[Bloom's Action Verbs, Objective Builder, Objective Builder Instructions, Bibliography\]](#) (Steve Zerwas & Jim Calliotte)

[Creating Rubrics and Prompts \[Internet Resources, Rubric's Rubric, SAT Essay, SAT Essay Scoring Guide, WSU-CT Rubric \]](#) (Worth Pickering & Jean Yerian)

[Using Embedded Assessment Techniques](#) (Karen Gentemann & Ying Zhou)

[Communicating Assessment Results \[Graphing in EXCEL\]](#) (Keston Fulcher & Amy Thelk)

Administrative Unit Assessment Track

The administrative unit assessment session was highly informative. Although the track addressed administrative and support units, the underlying concepts easily lend themselves to academic units. Some of the lessons learned include:

ASSESSMENT JARGONS—Don't get lost in the jargon (e.g., outcomes vs. objectives) because they're merely pointers to the underlying concepts.

BASIC QUESTIONS—We need to ask ourselves: (1) What are we trying to do? (2) How are we doing? and (3) How do we use that knowledge?

FOCUS—When we answer the first question, "What are we trying to do?", we need to focus on REAL outcomes...What are we REALLY chasing? What do we REALLY hope to achieve?

PURPOSE—Assessment has 2 primary purposes: (1) Accountability Reporting—telling someone else how you've done [e.g., SACS, VCCS] and (2) Program Planning & Improvement—gathering information to make informed decisions. Accountability reporting is merely reporting which may not help planning and improvement (e.g., gather information for convenience or because someone asked for it), whereas program planning seeks to provide useful information to help support our planning decisions.

NOTHING NEW—Each & every day we are assessing people, places, and things; the trick to documenting it rests in the need for a little more systemization and a little more organization.

SYSTEMATIZED & ORGANIZED—For example, a dissertation committee says "The quality of dissertations written by Doctoral students has steadily worsened over the past several years." HOW DO THEY KNOW? HOW CAN THEY DOCUMENT THIS FINDING. One way is for the committee to create a SHORT rubric to document their impressions...

DISSERTATION SCORE CARD			
Assessment Areas	Very Good	Average	Very Poor
Overall Impressions	○	○	○
Fill in the circle of the assessment area(s) that were Very Poor			
<input type="radio"/> Literature Review	<input type="radio"/> Clear Findings	<input type="radio"/> Proofreading	
<input type="radio"/> Sound Methodology	<input type="radio"/> APA Format	<input type="radio"/> Spelling/Grammar	
<input type="radio"/> Appropriate Discussion	<input type="radio"/> References	<input type="radio"/> Other _____	

BRAINSTORMING ACTIVITIES PRESENTED AT WORKSHOP

Brainstorm Activity #1

Read the following outcome and measure proposed by a Dean's Office:

OUTCOME: The Dean's Office will provide high-quality professional development services.

MEASURE #1: Faculty Survey to determine perceived quality and satisfaction (TARGET: 85% satisfaction rate).

MEASURE #2: Activity Sign-in Sheets to determine # participants in training activities (TARGET: _____).

(1) What does measure #2 (# participants) tell you about the training services quality?

(2) What else could help you evaluate the services' quality?

(3) How could you gather that information?

Brainstorm Activity #2

For your unit/division, write an outcome and then answer the following questions:

- (1) Are there any hidden assumption?
- (2) How do you currently assess this outcome?
- (3) How do you set targets (e.g., how do you decide what is 'good enough')?
- (4) What changes in those methods would give you more information and more useful information?

Brainstorm Activity #3

Answer the following questions regarding the measure described in Brainstorm Activity #2:

- (1) Does the measure tell whether the action is effective (or is it simply a "to do" item where we simply check-off its completion)?
- (2) If not, then what measures would inform us about the effectiveness?

Next Issue

Debriefing on the North Carolina State University 4th Annual Assessment Symposium

SOA attended the North Carolina State University 4th Annual Assessment Symposium from April 14 – 16, 2005. Concurrent session tracks addressed 5 themes: Academic Discipline, Community College, Institutional Competency, Student Development, and Technology.

Update on the SOARR Database and

SOA will provide an update on the SOARR assessment database and description of the data reports recently generated by SOA.

Feedback received on the core questions

SOA will summarize the feedback received concerning the 4 core questions listed in the section "[Soul Searching - Why Are We Doing This?](#)" and the 5 questions listed in "[Help Us To Help You](#)".