

# **Status of the SVCC Assessment System**

## ***A Report to OPIC by the Assessment Core Team***

***December 16, 2005***

***NOTE:*** *This annual report is the first of its kind. It is scheduled on the system timeline to be provided to the committee each spring. However, because the 2004-2005 academic year was the first cycle for the assessment system and because the two semesters were separated in order to test the system, the report is being forwarded to the committee in mid-year so that the findings may be included in our focused visit report. It consists of three sections: Accomplishments, Concerns, and Recommendations. Only the recommendations require any action on the part of OPIC.*

One of the most valuable aspects of the assessment plan design is that it requires a yearly evaluation of the assessment system to be conducted by the Core Team. The Core Team drew from its own observations and evaluation of the 2004-2005 plan implementation and data collection.

### ***Accomplishments:***

The system continues to take shape:

- Job descriptions for the Core Team and area facilitators were drafted and approved.
- The General Education Competencies were reviewed and streamlined after feedback gained from faculty discussion after the first data collection cycle. A new General Education Philosophy Statement was created and accepted by faculty and administration. The new system of looking at two competencies per year and having all faculty report on those competencies was established to provide better sample sizes. Checklist reporting forms were developed to reflect the faculty's objectives for each competency, which allow for agreed-upon standards for general education.
- Information sessions and workshops were provided to train faculty in the use of the Assessment folder and the digital data collection system.
- The system was organic and allowed enough freedom for faculty to design their own assessment events and instruments. This allowed faculty to move at their own pace as their understanding of assessment matured.

Faculty and staff are learning about and talking about assessment:

- The maturing assessment system has forced the institution to make philosophical changes about how the operations of the College are organized and carried out. It has reduced, to some extent, the perceived isolation of administrative decision-making, by making budgetary and staffing issues a data-driven cycle which is informed by faculty.

- To guarantee faculty have opportunities for meaningful conversations about assessment, the Wednesday Discussion Hours were created during the activity hour. The schedule ensures full faculty participation.
- Three adjunct workshops have been held in order to explain our system to adjunct faculty and solicit their help in the data collection cycle. Adjunct faculty were surveyed in order to find out what services, training, or support they required in order to complete assessment projects.
- The Assessment Resource Room was created. Materials are available for checkout.
- The assessment newsletter was created and published to keep faculty abreast of upcoming tasks and give them some resources for theory and practice.

Data are being collected and analyzed:

- 100% of full-time faculty participated in the first data collection cycle.
- CAAP data from previous years was analyzed by the full faculty, and ensuing discussion created a new testing administration procedure which tests incoming freshman and outgoing sophomores. A select population each cycle receives the same test, thus providing “value-added” data for the College.

Student engagement efforts are underway:

- The student engagement brochure was created for distribution in all classes. The brochure describes how students can take an active role in their own learning, and how our faculty is taking an active role in improving instruction.
- The Student Services department has taken an active role in introducing students to the process of assessment. In PSY 100, our orientation course, which is required for all students seeking a degree or a certificate, faculty members help students understand the role of learning in setting and achieving goals, as well as teach students strategies for getting the most from their education.

## **Concerns**

The team recognizes several weaknesses in the system and has suggestions for how these might be addressed:

- Voluntary CAAP testing for value-added studies produced a small sample. The subcommittee created a new system which tests incoming students during their orientation courses. Faculty discussion of how to improve student engagement during the second (sophomore) testing cycle was inconclusive—a capstone course experience was discussed as a viable alternative. ***This topic has been placed on the agenda of a faculty discussion hour for Spring 2006.***
- Alignment reports filed and summarized in the Spring of 2005 indicated a broad and deep plan to assess all six of the General Education Competencies; however, reports actually filed resulted in insufficient data in two areas. The Core Team, at the recommendation of the general education subcommittee, devised a data collection cycle which would focus on two competencies per year and would align standards across the faculty so that data aggregated would be statistically significant. ***The Core Team is committed to carrying this plan out through the full 3-year cycle so that all of the six competencies are assessed.***

- Faculty reported receiving mixed messages from Core Team members. The Core Team recognizes that creating an organic system has led to multiple interpretations about the parameters of the system and the physical requirements of the assessment folder. *The Core Team has made a concerted effort to assign members to certain areas so that continuity is provided for faculty and confusion is minimized.*
- Some course outlines for the College still reflect the initial objectives and assessments previously developed under the old mission statement. There is some disconnect between objectives being measured for assessment and objectives stated for course completion. *The faculty has begun addressing this concern and each successive semester should find less of this disconnect present in course outlines and syllabi.*
- Faculty reported difficulty using the Intranet system. The Core Team has provided multiple training sessions but ultimately recognizes that the interface is confusing for those used to web-based documentation or those without current technology skills. *With the help of Al Pfeifer, the Core Team is exploring commercial databases which may provide a better comfort level for faculty and a more efficient way of aggregating and reporting data.*

### **Continuing Concerns**

There are some areas of concern which do not have simple resolutions but which rather require major shifts in attitude or culture:

- There is still a lack of general understanding that the assessment process is just one step in guaranteeing a quality learning experience for students.
- Some faculty, despite assurances to the contrary, still feel that assessment is a tool for evaluating job performance.
- Some faculty believe that this is another trend which will disappear within a few years.
- Despite considerable time and effort in planning faculty development, some faculty members perceive the assessment process as an administrative hoop rather than an integral part of the formalized teaching and learning process.
- The College has not attained the level of student engagement in the process that we had hoped for. Although one member of the Core Team has been charged with coordinating student engagement, and the brochure and partnership with PSY 100 faculty have improved student engagement, there is still a lot of opportunity for improvement in this area.

### **Opportunities for Growth**

The assessment committee anticipates that the bulk of the momentum for the assessment process has been a direct result of the upcoming focused visit. There is concern that the process will stagnate after the team leaves in April. Relying on the principle that an effective and sustainable system requires the entire faculty to participate so that no one individual or committee is overburdened, the Core Team has designed the maintenance phase of the system to be largely self-sustaining, requiring less time on the part of faculty than the

intensive development phase. Collection cycles will be annual, with time for faculty aggregation and discussion built into the faculty in-service and workshop schedule. These activities will be completed as discrete steps in the yearly process, leaving participants at each phase with a sense of accomplishment and contribution without leaving them to feel as if there is an overwhelming workload they must complete in isolation.

The use of increasingly customized data reporting forms and the exploration of a commercial database means that the incredibly time-consuming process of maintaining and updating the electronic system can slowly be moved into partial automation with many functions able to be completed by faculty themselves, and many by support staff.

The final critical element of expanded purpose is creating connections for students between the processes of the College, the objectives of their courses and programs, and their own learning. We hope to further engage students in their own learning process by demonstrating to them that taking charge of their own learning means they can learn about their own learning styles, know their own strengths and weaknesses, and better approach each learning opportunity.

## **Recommendations**

The Core Team requests action by OPIC to recommend the following actions that the committee deems necessary for the maintenance of our developing assessment system:

1. Three or more hours of release time to Val Wittman (or someone in IT equally qualified) to investigate a general purpose database (like Access or Oracle) as the next step for the data collection system. **Rationale:** *Investigation of packaged assessment systems like e-lumen or Angel have so far required huge changes in our system or expensive customization in the package. Because our system allows our faculty maximum autonomy, we believe that continuing that system to develop may be best for our institution.*
2. Area Facilitators and Core Team members are an essential component of the system. Retaining them for ongoing maintenance of the system is vital. **Rationale:** *While recognizing that the remedial phase of assessment development in preparation for the visit took extraordinary investments of time and money, the Core Team believes that the success of the maintenance phase depends on continued communication and coordination of faculty assessment efforts by faculty.*

Submitted by the 2005-06 Core Team: Jane Hamilton, Kevin Megill, Steve McPherson, Karen Pinter, Amanda Vos, Roberta White