Assessment System Gap Analysis

As Authorized 5/09
Presented to the Assessment Committee 11/14/2009
Prepared by Jane Hamilton, Core Team Chairman

The analysis was accomplished by comparing current practice against four standards:
I. The HLC Criteria pertaining to assessment specifically stated in Criterion 3
II. ***Summary of the Report of a Commissions-Mandated Focused Visit: April 10 – 11, 2006*** (sections provided by Tom Gospodarczyk)
III. The "Assessment Culture Matrix" (4/1/2003)
IV. Current Practice: SVCC Assessment Plan; Academic Assessment Handbook for Faculty (hereafter AAHF); Assessment Folder

Each section begins with a summary of findings that require "urgent" action, followed by a discussion that includes the relevant passage from the standard or the expectation; an evaluation; an assessment of whether a gap exists; and a proposed response.

I. HLC Criterion Review:

Summary of findings:

URGENT ACTION	Action to be taken:
Assessment of certificates	System to be created; documentation developed; collection begun
External Data sources	Need system to allow in-coming data to be disseminated to faculty and documented in assessment forms.

The HLC has provided specific statements about assessment expectations in the criteria for accreditation. The most specific of these expectations appears in Core Component 3 and its examples of evidence.

◆ **Core Component 3a – The organization's assessment of student learning extends to all educational offerings, including credit and non-credit certificate programs**
A gap is revealed in the specific inclusion of **certificates** as subjects of academic assessment.   During the design phase, the Core Team made the conscious decision to postpone certificate assessment until after the system for assessing general education and degree programs was firmly established. In addition, the presumption that many of the certificate programs (e.g. real estate) would be assessed primarily through a licensing exam put that assessment in the category of external assessment data, another category that was to be postponed until we were sure that the internal system of assessing classroom data was in place and satisfactory.
Significance: URGENT ACTION
At the focused visit, the Assessment Committee told the visiting team that we knew the certificates were a gap and that we would get to it "next." They told us that given what we had already developed, they were tolerant of that. The lack of certificate assessment is not mentioned in the follow-up report. Later, we used the term "by extension, the certificates" in addressing this same requirement to assess certificate holders to the ICCB.

Clearly, we are delinquent in this area and highest priority is appropriate as we begin to address system gaps.

◆**The organization integrates into its assessment of student learning the data reported for purposes of external accountability (e.g. graduation rates, passage rates on licensing exams, placement rates, transfer rates). (***From the examples of evidence for HLC Criteria 3a)*

This specific reference to external sources of data is known to Core Team and is addressed on page 8 & 9 in the Academic Assessment Handbook for Faculty (2005). Because at the time of the 2001 Accreditation Visit, we were too dependent on external sources to the exclusion of other expected internal measures, the Core Team intentionally sidelined this data source until the system of internal classroom measures was in place. We surveyed discipline and program desires for external sources in October of 2006 and set up a prototype objective in the nursing program. At that point, the progress stopped because of a gap between the data coming into the institution and providing faculty access to that data.

Significance: URGENT ACTION

Because of the presence of the external data discussion in the AAHF and because of the specificity with which HLC describes this data in its expectations for assessment, our lack of inclusion constitutes a delinquency that warrants high priority for corrective action.

◆**Assessment of student learning includes multiple direct and indirect measures of student learning.** **(***From the examples of evidence for HLC Criteria 3a)*

The potential gap that appears based on this HLC expectation is the reference to indirect measures of student learning if we expect it to be applied to the academic assessment of degree programs. The Core Team has limited such measures to Developmental (goal 4) assessment only. At the time of the 2001 Accreditation visit, academic assessment was too dependent on indirect measures to the exclusion of more direct assessment tools. As the Core Team designed the classroom assessment system, indirect measures were prohibited in order to keep faculty focused on developing the critical direct measures. The Academic Assessment Handbook for Faculty (2005) clearly states the role of indirect measures in our system. Also, the focused visit team made no mention of any deficit in this area either in interview or written follow-up. Note that indirect measures are also entirely appropriate as the support areas of the college assess their effectiveness (usually reported in the operational planning and program review process).

Significance: NO ACTION

The decision to limit indirect measures to Developmental-level assessment is logical. The risk that faculty would return to relying on student evaluations of their own learning does exist because the method appears much less time-consuming than more direct assessment. While Core Team acknowledges the potential for this to be seen as a "gap," the existence of a rationale in the system documentation and HLC's assurance that assessment systems are appropriately individualized to an institution support the conclusion that we are appropriately applying indirect measures as part of the system we designed.

II. Focused Visit Team Expectations:

URGENT ACTION	
Learning College foundation as a philosophy for assessment	Confirm and re-activate or replace "Learning college" philosophy, with appropriate follow-through in documentation
CONTINUE PROGRESS	
Move toward more standardized rubrics and instruments	Continue refinement of Area-level assessment of transfer and career programs and institution-level projects for the competencies

The following expectations for the assessment system are extracted from ***Summary of the Report of a Commissions-Mandated Focused Visit: April 10 – 11, 2006***, specifically from the Assessment Section under "Evidence that demonstrates that further organizational attention is required in the area of focus."

◆**The Commission Statement on Assessment of Student Academic Achievement states that the program to assess student learning should "provide explicit and public statements regarding the institution's expectations for student learning." SVCC has publicly documented its commitment to learning through the adoption of O'Banion's Learning College model. . . .**
Although no obligation to continue as a learning college exists, the gradual deterioration of the learning college concept as an active foundation for decision-making creates a gap between our written policy and our actual practice. The learning college concept, referenced by the Focused Visit team, which plays a prominent role in the presentation of the report we presented to them, remains embedded in our philosophy statements, but has otherwise disappeared from college conversation and practice.

Significance: URGENT ACTION
Looking back to the previous accreditation report, it is clear that the HLC visit team found us lacking in the ability to say what we do, do what we say, and document that it was done. The existence in policy language of a concept we appear to be merely ignoring, even if we were to give it some lip service, is likely to impress the next accreditation team that we are still unreliable in our ability to do what we say. We need to either re-work the philosophy statements and create documentation for the new philosophical foundation for the college or revive the learning college concept as a vital part of professional development, community discussions, and decision-making.

◆ **Create specific outcome competency expectations for general education and career programs. . . . However, the faculty has not yet come to full consensus on a common rubric for assessing the achievement of the competencies taught at the college. . . .While the current process of assessment of general education course outcomes using a variety of assessment tools and activities provides flexibility to the faculty, there appears to be a lack of consistency in the measurement of the expected levels of achievement. Without consistency of measures, it will be difficult for SVCC to determine the degree to which students across the institution are achieving institutionally agreed upon levels of expectation in general education and in the career programs and academic disciplines. The faculty reported to the team in several meetings that they have the necessary tools to move to common assessment instruments across disciplines through the leadership and support of the Area Facilitators and the Faculty Assessment Core Team. The Core Team and faculty must intensify the focus on the agreed upon expected levels of achievement in general education and for all courses and**

programs. The Core Team has committed, in their planning document, to guide the faculty toward more common assessment tools as they become more comfortable with their assessment initiatives.

Reference to the "competencies" appears to be a specific reference to the six general education competencies because that is the terminology of our assessment system. As a result of the development of the database storage for this type of assessment, our classroom assessment of these competencies is the most uniform and statistically solid of our assessment efforts, as well as the area which best demonstrates faculty participation, discussion, and action. Assessment of general education competency, especially since the Focused Visit, demonstrates the faculty's "commitment to learning" and provides a key piece of evidence that we meet HLC's expectations for direct assessment of student learning. In addition, the Core Team is able to demonstrate its leadership in the move toward more "common assessment instruments": The Reading Project (2008-09) and Technology Project (2009-10) provided workable models of standardized assessment of general education competencies.

However, one potential gap here is if the HLC team intended us to understand "competencies" as the full gen ed component of the degree program, which would bring in the General Education Core Curriculum as defined by ICCB for our transfer students and described in the college catalog for both A.S. and A.A.S. degrees:

Communications	Fine Arts	Humanities
Mathematics	Life and Physical Sciences	Social/Behavioral Sciences

The gen eds listed above are known in our system as "area"-level assessment goals. In the case where HLC Focused Visit team intends the term "competencies" to include this set of goals, we will be able to some show progress from where we were during that visit. However, it is clear that some of our variance from expectation is embedded in the system itself: in our using the Nichols' model; in our decision to value and assess specific discipline objectives, which sometimes overlap the core curriculum; and in the order in which the original Assessment Committee/Core Team began developing objectives. A proposed change to the system described at the end of this analysis should serve to clarify definitions and make another step toward standardized tools and rubrics.

Significance: CONTINUE PROGRESS
Despite the underlying muddiness of the foundation for assessing the core curriculum, the Area Facilitators in the core curriculum areas have been, for the most part, conducting assessment projects. This evidence will show that we have continued to move forward from where we were at the point of the Focused Visit. The recent decision to increase the Area Facilitator role on the Core Team should naturally contribute to further improvements in assessment of the area goals, especially in conjunction with the proposed simplification of the system. Revisions in the Assessment Plan and the AAHF clearly define the system to outside viewers of the system when these two documents are updated.

◆ **Value of Statistics versus Discussion—an Aside:** The value placed on standard assessment tools in the visiting team's response suggests a "gap" between the SVCC assessment system and HLC expectations. The decision will have to be made whether we can better define our intentions for across-the-institution competency assessment so that our lack of common instruments is justified or whether we will have to create very specifically defined assessments to go with our competency objectives.

For purposes of this discussion, let's assume that HLC's reference to "competencies" explicitly references only the six General Education Competencies. An example may help to illuminate the situation: Our writing competency includes the objective "Exhibit a command of Standard English." The Core Team has asked only that faculty indicate *satisfactory* and *unsatisfactory* for that element, asserting that the standard is appropriate according to the discipline or program in which the specific writing assignment is being assessed and that faculty who value writing and who are assessing writing know where "the line" is. The HLC concern for "common rubric" indicates their desire either 1) that we create finer distinctions than our holistic assessment of *satisfactory* and *unsatisfactory* (e.g. a 4-point scale of specified elements of Standard English) and/or 2) that we define "the line" in a standard way that cuts across all contexts (i.e. that the English department define the standards for writing).

The real gap here may well be with HLC's understanding of our intentions in designing this particular aspect of our system. We have said—but not clearly enough, evidently—that our "standardized" data, the data which stakeholders want about the quality of our finished product, comes from our regular investment in CAAP testing. Our system, individualized for our needs as an institution--as encouraged by HLC-- recognizes that the "learning" we do from our assessment efforts comes from the discussion of our sampling. Given limited resources, varied course offerings, and a small faculty, the decision to sample "across-the-curriculum" in order to show how the general education competencies are developing in varied contexts and to allow that information to inform and effect change in courses that deliver the competencies is effective for us. Core Team would like an opportunity to make the case that abandoning our unique system for something more "traditional" would create cost, lessen faculty engagement, and reduce the usefulness of the data in creating improvements. It would, we believe, also move us toward compliance mentality and away from acting on a genuine curiosity about and involvement in improving teaching and learning.

> **The Standard English Example expanded:** The implication of the HLC concern about rubrics is that we should, for example, specify that in an academic piece of writing no more than three spelling errors is acceptable. In a technical writing setting, three may be too many. But because that discrepancy is more likely to become visible in our style of cross-curricular, discussion-based assessment about varied samples than in a standardized tool, we are more likely to make the technical writing teacher aware that direct instruction on workplace writing standards is needed. In addition, a transfer-focused faculty member might become aware that the AAS student should never be allowed a lower standard than transfer students. Tech faculty may become aware that a degree program may be short on writing instruction. The English faculty may see that more opportunity for workplace writing instruction is necessary and develop courses. The Core Team would maintain that NONE of this interaction or learning is possible if we merely have all exiting graduates write a standard assignment that only the English teachers look at.

◆ **Link assessment data to instructional improvement plans and to planning and budgeting at SVCC.**

Under the new strategic planning process, the link of assessment data to the system has changed. The revised Assessment plan will not concern itself with describing the whole process as it did in the first version. However, assessment is clearly tied to strategic planning process through the operational plans. Each addition to the operational plan that has resulted from assessment data and discussions is identified by an "A" in the appropriate column of the plan. In addition, because both systems operate at the Area level, the same group that has discussed assessment data is involved in the development of the operational plan. Once on the operational plan, the action item has entered the strategic planning system process.

Significance: NO ACTION NEEDED

III. Against the "Levels of Implementation":

URGENT ACTION	
Student awareness of assessment	Method needed to ensure that students connect various activities in which they participate with the culture of assessment.
CONTINUE PROGRESS	
Confirm levels of implementation	Conduct a systematic self-evaluation of the SVCC assessment system against the Matrix.

The April 1, 2003 version of "Assessment of Student Academic Achievement: Assessment Culture Matrix" provides a means of self-evaluating institutional assessment progress. (It is linked here if you are viewing this on-line.) Any statement in Level One that appears to be true, or even partially so, should be considered a high priority gap. We should expect to find only a few gaps in Level Two, for which action should be taken without delay, and gaps at Level Three should show continued growth opportunities that we might consult our HLC visiting team about when they arrive. Analysis has been done ONLY for the faculty-related activities within the sphere of influence of the Core Team.

Because the Matrix is a complex document, the chart below summarizes this writer's general observations of our status. The full Assessment Committee should be given opportunity for self-evaluation and discussion to confirm these findings at some future date.

	General Conclusion	**Recommendations**
I. Institutional Culture		
a. Collective Shared Values	Maturing	See note I.a. below
b. Mission	Making progress/**Maturing**	Needs review by administration
II. Shared Responsibility		
a. Faculty	**Making progress**/Maturing	
b. Administration & Board		Needs review by administration
c. Students	Beginning	See note II.c. below
III. Institutional Support		
a. Resources		Needs review by administration

b. Structures	**Making progress**/Maturing	Some aspects need review by administration
VI. Efficacy of Assessment	**Making progress**	

NOTES:

I.a. A possible gap in collective/shared values may have surfaced as we have disconnected (or perhaps more accurately "failed to develop") a sense of how Operational Planning IS assessment for the support areas of the college. Academic assessment of student learning is only one piece of HLC's assessment directive. An effort to document Operational Planning's assessment connection would provide the "coherent, widespread understanding" of this broader imperative for assessment to the groups that use operational plans.

II.c. Significance: URGENT ACTION
"Students know little or nothing about the assessment program. They do not understand how it will be carried out, their role in its success, or how it could be useful to them and future cohorts of students." An HLC visit team might decide this were true, especially if a visitor were to ask a group of students about any of these aspects. We can document that the assessment statement is in all syllabi and that the Psych 100 students receive the student assessment brochure, but some risk exists that this would not be sufficient to meet HLC expectations. Of all the segments of the Matrix, this category is of most concern:

Significance: CONTINUE PROGRESS
The whole Assessment Committee should participate in assessing our system against the Asessment Culture Matrix (perhaps at January in-service) to determine what actions might be taken to move some of the items from "making progress" to "maturing stages."

IV. CURRENT PRACTICE: The Assessment Plan, The Academic Assessment Handbook for Faculty (AAHF) and the Assessment Folder

URGENT ACTION	
Clarify the system	Refocus data collection on the four existing goals at the degree-level instead of at the discipline level.
CONTINUE PROGRESS	
Revise Documentation	The Assessment plan needs to be revised so that it defines the process of academic assessment accurately.
Move toward more standardized rubrics and instruments	Continue refinement of Area-level assessment of transfer and career programs and institution-level projects for the competencies

◆ **The Assessment Plan and AAHF**
The Assessment Plan and its companion handbook no longer reflect current practice in assessing the general education competencies. What follows is a list of the most important of the changes to the system that are no longer accurately described in the documents:

- The general education competencies themselves have been modified several times as the result of faculty discussion of the data.
- Administration of CAAP has changed several times as the result of faculty discussion of the data and cost concerns.
- The creation of the assessment database has changed the instructions for collection of the data.
- Changes to the operational planning process and to the charge of OPIC have altered the linkage between assessment and strategic planning.
- The timeline for assessment has been changed
- The number and responsibilities of Area Facilitators and the Core Team have changed.

That said, much of the underlying structure of the documentation is solid, so revision is required rather than a complete rewriting. Many of the revision needs have been known for some time, but the Core Team delayed the rewrite while the new strategic planning system was being designed. Only recently has the Operational planning system become the clear link to Assessment, allowing the document to be effectively revised to reflect current policy.

Significance: CONTINUE PROGRESS
The need to revise has been known. Pending a decision on the proposal to redefine the discipline and program assessment aspect of the system, the revision of the Assessment Plan and then the AAHF should proceed as part of the normal maintenance of the system.

◆ **The Assessment Folder**
A review of the Assessment Folder reveals that several of the features of the Nichols model have not worked as intended:
- Multi-disciplinary nature of the faculty requires some individual faculty members to assess as many as three disciplines and three areas, but the minimum requirement is one discipline or program objective. This leaves holes.
- Several disciplines are handled entirely by adjunct faculty, whose participation is not mandated, but voluntary. These disciplines have no data for them.
- The expected flow from discipline to area-level assessment (in which a classroom instrument would also serve as both discipline and area assessment) failed to be practical.

Although much of the faculty is working very hard to comply with the requirements of the system, despite technical difficulties and regular revisions to objectives and requirements, several other holes are apparent in the data system:
- Developmental data from the exit testing for English and Reading is being collected at the course level but not routinely entered into the folder with discussion and action. (Mathematics is annually collecting, aggregating, and reviewing the MAT080 exit test.)
- **Participation:** The first two cycles of collecting data, we were able to document 100% full-time participation in classroom assessment projects. This has dropped. Having made it such a noticeable part of our focused visit description of our system, the decline needs to be explained and/or remedied. Core Team has not delved too deeply into why non-participating faculty are not providing data, but

the logical conclusion is that 1) they don't value the data; 2) they are facing technical issues with the data folder itself; and 3) they can get away with it. Core Team would prefer, as we prepare for the next accreditation visit, that we place more value on a stable system than so highly value the 100% mark.

Significance: URGENT ACTION

After nearly five years of experience with the assessment system and several adjustments in how the general education competencies are collected, the serious problems identified won't be solved easily. In order to move the system in a direction that makes our data collection more effective without completely starting over, any adjustment needs to build on what we already see as successful and eliminate duplication and wasted effort. In a separate document, such a system revision is described. It refocuses the four existing goals of the system from the discipline/program level to the area level. It requires relatively little rewriting of existing objectives, but opens the door to further adjustments that will continue to move the system toward more standard instruments and will enable us to re-examine the general education competencies in order to remove duplicate efforts.

Conclusion

The Assessment system was conceived as an organic system in which change would be a natural part of its existence. Each year, the Core Team has conducted an evaluation of the system, the Assessment Committee has considered its recommendations, and some change has occurred. The gap analysis has been conducted as a kind of periodic audit that looks beyond the day-to-day system. To extend the metaphor of an organic system, the changes recommended here represent repotting and pruning the existing system, which has been regularly fed and watered.