



Report of the Faculty Senate Assessment Committee

The committee is convening by e-mail and through IAV during the days of September 10, 2014, to September 19, 2014. All members will be discussing the following central issue: our “**big rock.**”

The central question that we need to address is easy to express.

Should GBC be assessing *sections* or *courses*?

While conducting an assessment of sections is much easier, it may not be what our accreditors want to see from us. Simply put, all of the sections of a single course (e.g., HIST 101) should have the same outcomes. During a five-year cycle, each course should be fully assessed at least once.

Linda Suskie, the author of *Assessing Student Learning: a Common-Sense Guide*, opines that both section-level and course-level assessment should be taking place. She writes:

“Class-level assessment is assessing learning of an entire class (section) of students, again on course learning objectives. Class-level assessments look at the same evidence used to grade students and give them feedback on their learning but aggregate results for all students in a class or section to get an overall picture of their collective strengths and weaknesses in their learning. A faculty member might tally, for example, how many students got Question 12 right and what rubric ratings students earned regarding the organization of their papers. The primary purposes are to reflect on and improve individual teaching practice.

Course-level assessment is assessing learning of all students in a (multi-section) course, again on course learning objectives. This is just like class-level assessment except that faculty teaching sections of a course identify common course objectives and common means of assessing them. They then summarize results across sections to get an overall picture of students’ collective strengths and weaknesses. Faculty might, for example, agree to use the same rubric to grade the final paper or to include the same set of five questions on the final. If they see areas of weakness across sections, they work together to identify ways to collaboratively address those weaknesses.” ([Course vs. Program vs. GenEd Assessment](#))

Nassau Community College employs this as part of their process...

“In both multi-section and single-section courses, the classroom instructor administers the measurement tools and gathers the data. The raw score results should be recorded anonymously and aggregate student performance should be indicated relative to prescribed expectations.For multi-section courses, the course coordinator gathers the data from all instructors for that course and summarizes the aggregate data. The course coordinator or instructor in the case of single-section courses, reports the data using the currently recommended template and includes the following information about the sample:

- Number and percentage of students
- Number and percentage of sections
- Number and percentage of full-time and adjunct faculty
- Number and percentage of students who are respectively exceeding, meeting, approaching, or not meeting expectations for academic performance based on the specified learning goals and learning outcomes.” ([*Concepts and Procedures for Assessment at Nassau Community College*](#), 2011, p. 18)

More simply, whenever a course is taught in more than one section, the instructors teaching that course submit all of their assessment information together to a single individual. That person collates all of the information about the *course*. The course is assessed through all of its sections. As we currently perform assessment, each section is assessed individually, without being compared to one another or aggregated into a whole.

Miller and Leskes, writing for the Association of American Colleges and Universities, agree with the above. They write (in part), “Common assignments across sections (or common requirements such as a student or course portfolio) can be sampled, averaged, compared, discussed, or otherwise reviewed by the faculty involved and/or by departments or committees to ensure consistency across sections.” (*Levels of Assessment*, p. 8)

Both the University of Georgetown and Columbia College express their priority for course-level assessment as follows: “*Course-level evidence should be examined for evidence of student learning. It must be determined whether, and when, changes to course design, assignments, or even learning goals should be made. Evidence can be used to support cross-sectional analysis of how consistently multi-section courses are achieving important learning outcomes.*” (from [CCIS.edu](#))

The University of Northern Iowa uses several strategies to assess courses. They also allow considerable flexibility, with some instructors assessing together in groups and others assessing individual sections. [Read here](#) for more.

VPAA Mike McFarlane has suggested that faculty and administration work together on an assessment policy. Obviously, the Assessment Committee will play some role in the assessment of courses. Currently, we are fulfilling the role on UNI’s handout that they describe as follows:

Faculty review/discuss course syllabi to connect course outcomes to course assignments and/or other course requirements from the syllabi.

What does the NWCCU accreditation manual say?

In a nutshell, it appears to say very little. Quotes appear below.

The institution identifies and publishes the expected learning outcomes for each of its degree and certificate programs. The institution engages in regular and ongoing assessment to validate student achievement of these learning outcomes. (Eligibility Requirement 22)

“Faculty with teaching responsibilities take collective responsibility for fostering and assessing student achievement of clearly identified learning outcomes.” (Standard 2.C.5)

The institution demonstrates that the General Education components of its baccalaureate degree programs (if offered) and transfer associate degree programs (if offered) have identifiable and assessable learning outcomes that are stated in relation to the institution’s mission and learning outcomes for those programs. (Standard 2.C.10)

The related instruction components of applied degree and certificate programs (if offered) have identifiable and assessable learning outcomes that align with and support program goals or intended outcomes. Related instruction components may be embedded within program curricula or taught in blocks of specialized instruction, but each approach must have clearly identified content and be taught or monitored by teaching faculty who are appropriately qualified in those areas. (Standard 2.C.11)

Assessment (Standard 4.A)

4.A.1 The institution engages in ongoing systematic collection and analysis of meaningful, assessable, and verifiable data—quantitative and/or qualitative, as appropriate to its indicators of achievement—as the basis for evaluating the accomplishment of its core theme objectives.

4.A.2 The institution engages in an effective system of evaluation of its programs and services, wherever offered and however delivered, to evaluate achievement of clearly identified program goals or intended outcomes. Faculty have a primary role in the evaluation of educational programs and services.

4.A.3 The institution documents, through an effective, regular, and comprehensive system of assessment of student achievement, that students who complete its educational courses, programs, and degrees, wherever offered and however delivered, achieve identified course, program, and degree learning outcomes. Faculty with teaching responsibilities are responsible for evaluating student achievement of clearly identified learning outcomes.

4.A.4 The institution evaluates holistically the alignment, correlation, and integration of programs and services with respect to accomplishment of core theme objectives.

4.A.5 The institution evaluates holistically the alignment, correlation, and integration of planning, resources, capacity, practices, and assessment with respect to achievement of the

goals or intended outcomes of its programs or services, wherever offered and however delivered.

4.A.6 The institution regularly reviews its assessment processes to ensure they appraise authentic achievements and yield meaningful results that lead to improvement.

Standard 4.A.3 seems to imply that the colleges assess courses. The wording about course learning outcomes strengthens this implication. However, since the standard does not distinguish between courses and individual class sections, it does not *clearly require* that multi-section courses are assessed across sections.

How does GBC Policy read?

“The Assessment Committee serves to periodically review and make recommendations relevant to the standards, educational quality, implementation, oversight, and assessment of the instructional programs of the College. This committee maintains any items necessary to assess related student learning outcomes (*Faculty Senate Bylaws* description of the Assessment Committee).

The information gained from this process of assessment will help instructors, departments, and programs make necessary changes in courses and programs to improve student learning.

Procedures

1.0 Regular Faculty Responsibility

All instructors under annual contract will assess one course each semester using the Course Assessment Report Form. At a minimum, courses will be assessed on a five-year rotation; departments will be responsible for deciding on the rotation.

2.0 Adjunct Faculty Responsibility

Adjunct faculty will complete Course Assessment Report Form only for courses that are not offered by full-time regular faculty. At a minimum, courses will be assessed following their initial offering and on a five-year rotation thereafter; departments will be responsible for deciding on the rotation.”

Notice that the word “course” appears to be used in both senses. “Courses will be assessed on a five-year rotation” clearly means “courses” as distinct from “sections,” but each instructor is required to assess a section – not the course as a whole. The current wording may imply that faculty should assess both sections and courses; however, the stronger emphasis appears to be placed on course-level assessment rather than on class-level assessment.

What do the other colleges in Nevada do?

TMCC conducts course-level assessment. See, for example, [this page](#). They appear to have an assessment instrument similar to our own. The instructors teaching different sections of a

course contribute information that is collected together and written up on that form. See, for example, [this page](#).

WNC also conducts course-level assessment. Cathy Fulkerson is providing us with examples of their process.

At least in 2006, CSN was conducting assessment at both levels, although not every department was performing collaborative, multi-section course assessments. “Faculty within a department may choose to collaborate on developing and using a common tool to assess student learning at the course level, and a number of CCSN departments are currently doing so (e.g., biology, English and mathematics).” ([Accreditation Self-Study](#), CCSN, 2006)

UNLV conducts both [course-level](#) and class-level assessments. Much of the work is gathered by individual instructors at the section level, but also departments collate information about (at least certain) multi-section courses. “For example, English Composition has created very informative program-wide assessment plans that will lead to collection of information that can be evaluated by faculty to inform them about the effectiveness of their current course design and instructional approach. “

UNR conducts course-level assessments. “The role of the Provost's Office and the University Assessment Coordinator is to ensure that programs and faculty members receive the necessary guidance and information to conduct this process, and to ensure as well that institution-, program-, and course-level assessment is completed in a symbiotic and holistic fashion.” (UNR Assessment page) They contribute to the [National Survey of Student Engagement](#). Exactly how they assess student outcomes across sections is unclear from [their website](#).

Where do we go?

If we decide that GBC will assess courses and not merely sections, we should suggest policy and procedures to indicate where and how the course-level assessment will be conducted. It may be the case, for instance, that the Assessment Committee should continue to review the same sorts of documents that we currently review – the annual assessments and course syllabi. However, we may suggest something more comprehensive college-wide. Then again, we might not. For now we will study the issue.