

Sierra College
Student Learning Outcomes and Assessment
A Workbook

First Draft
September 3, 2008

DRAFT

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Purpose of Guide

As Sierra College moves from the creation to the assessment of outcomes, prodded by the decision of the accrediting agency (ACCJC) to place the college on warning, many on campus have communicated their concerns about the process and purpose of assessment. The first part of this guide seeks to clarify the philosophy and approach of outcomes assessment, as well as to consider what assessment can and cannot offer to individuals and programs.

An accreditation warning is a wake-up call with a limited amount of snooze time. Sierra College is being asked to move quickly toward compliance in all aspects of the recommendations given by the accrediting agency, ACCJC. In order to comply with the two-year rule enforced under accreditation policy, we must design a short but reasonable process. The second part of this guide lays out the short-term timeline and long-term shifts in culture that will allow outcomes assessment to play a meaningful role in planning, especially at the program-level. **(See Appendix for information on the “Two-Year Rule”)**

Finally, this workbook is designed as a practical guide to outcomes assessment by providing examples from your colleagues of assessments and results. While all of us informally seek to assess student learning in our classes and services, many on campus have already moved toward more formal practices. The campus can build its strength and knowledge using this experience of friends and colleagues.

Philosophy and Approach

We are being tasked to take on a new level of accountability in our teaching and our students' learning. As an outside mandate, the requirement of more accountability implies that we are falling short. However, accountability as claimed by educators proudly takes responsibility for providing the environment and tools students need. As an institution, Sierra College has taken the necessary responsibility, and with a few changes in the administrative process we already use, we can show how student learning is taking place and use the information gained from assessment to improve it. There is no getting around the punitive nature of outcomes assessment as it is being introduced at Sierra College. However, it is also important to remember that we can still claim and create a faculty-led and controlled process. **(See Appendix for Article on Academic Freedom & Responsibility)**

Assessing student learning is already an important part of teaching at Sierra College. Instructors formally and informally gauge the success of individuals in their classes and regularly consider how the class as a whole has learned concepts large and small. Our change is toward keeping better track of what we assess and how. We are all being asked to consciously consider the relationship between the outcomes of the course we teach, the assessments we use to gauge student learning of these outcomes, and the results of these assessments as instructors or providers of services. Using this information, individuals and programs can identify strengths and weaknesses and consider what actions they will take to improve student learning. Assessment will provide a strategy which enables us to ask how we are doing in new ways. Student learning assessment is designed to consider not how individual students perform on learning outcomes but how classes, courses, programs, or even the institution is identifying and gathering the results of student learning outcomes. Documenting and seeking to improve student learning through assessment can provide valuable information to individuals and programs.

There is a model that generally describes the process of assessment as a wheel or circle. The assessment process is designed to answer questions about student learning and enable us to reflect on what we've learned as well as consider what, if any, changes would be beneficial. The following steps **a** through **d** are an example of this model:

a). Identifying student learning outcomes allows us to ask ourselves, "*What are we trying to do?*" b). Developing assessments to gauge student learning requires that we consider, "*How will we know if we are successful?*" c). Gathering the results of assessments allows us to ask, "*How successful were we?*" and d). As we finally interpret these results it is time to consider, "*What should we do about it?*" As individuals who share a culture of inquiry, we can approach these questions with the same spirit of learning that we hope to inspire in our students.

Just as we do not expect our students to be experts at new fields of study, as individuals and as an institution it will take time to learn how to frame projects that answer our questions. Identifying outcomes that reflect what we are trying to do is a challenging process in itself, and some early projects developed by individuals and programs may prove to be of limited use. It may take time to develop assessments that yield meaningful results. Decisions about what changes we want to make based upon results may not be easy or obvious. We can start with the

assessments we already use in classrooms and services across campus. Over time we will build our knowledge and strengthen the usefulness of outcomes assessment.

As we move through the cycle of assessment, it is also important to recognize that this process cannot (and should not) be expected to provide some magical change in teaching and learning at Sierra College. Assessment cannot (and should not) replace regular communication about broad goals, theoretical perspectives, and other intangibles that are a part of the educational process. Information from assessment cannot (and should not) replace other indicators that allow individual departments and programs, as well as the institution as a whole, to gauge their strength. Indicators such as program goals, success and retention, ARCC data, full-time/part-time ratios, productivity, and other measures used to consider program needs remain viable and important measures.

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Timeline

Sierra College already has a tradition of outcomes assessment. The Learner Outcome Institute began in _____ and the Program Outcomes Institute began in _____. In the projects developed in these institutes, outcomes assessment was piloted in classrooms and programs throughout the college. Since their beginning, together these institutes trained _____ individuals in _____ programs. A Student Learning Committee has supported the institutionalization of this process since its creation as a subcommittee of Academic Senate in _____.

In response to the accreditation warning letter in January 2008, the college needs to speed up and expand this process to develop a plan to assess all courses and programs. In the spring of 2008, the SLO Committee created a “Plan for the Implementation and Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes at Sierra College.” As a result of this plan, the Office of Instruction provided releases for a full-time Student Learning Outcomes Coordinator and six part-time “Ambassadors” to assist the college in the creation and implementation of this plan. In the late spring semester and over the summer these positions were staffed. Faculty was asked to include outcomes in their syllabi and identify one outcome in one class to assess in the fall semester. Just before the beginning of fall semester 2008, sixty-four faculty and staff gathered for a “Forum on Student Learning Outcomes and Assessment.” This conversation continues as a crucial part of the process of assessing course, program, and institutional outcomes at Sierra College.

Looking forward, current plans propose a three-semester introduction to outcomes assessment at the course, program, and institution level. In spring 2010 this introduction will shift into a cycle of assessment designed to add to current indicators already used to support program and institutional planning and resource allocation.

Fall semester 2008 introduces the process at the class level. Each instructor has been asked to identify and assess one outcome in one course and report the results through their department chair. Rather than using a top-down method, this approach is designed to start at the class level for two-reasons. First, course outcomes, developed through a well-established curriculum process, represent our strongest start for identifying goals for student learning. Second, individuals will be able to consider how their current assessment practices can be used to gather results of student learning. At the same time, departments/programs will begin to develop outcomes and the Student Learning Outcomes and Assessment Committee (SLOAC) will develop a draft of institutional outcomes. A recently purchased program (TracDat) will allow the storage and reporting of assessment information at the course and program level. The variety of assessment strategies and results are designed to begin a conversation. For this information to be meaningful in the long-run, outcomes assessment will need to be focused.

Spring semester 2009 refines the process at the department/program level. Department meetings will include a conversation on the assessments utilized and results generated during the fall semester. Departments will also consider how to focus the information they gather. Based upon high-enrollment courses (where more information can be sampled) or other criteria, programs/departments will be encouraged to limit course-based outcomes questions. Instead,

course assessments will primarily be used to gather information on program outcomes. Individual assessment projects can continue, but the focus will move to questions that will increase the evidence available for program review. At the same time, a pilot project for institutional assessment will be launched. Fall 2008-Spring 2009 will challenge departments to conduct two assessments. In the future, the assessment process will be yearly.

Fall semester 2009 continues the cycle of strengthening the questions we ask and our understanding of the answers we generate as a result of the assessment process. Department meetings will now have two sets of assessment results to explore as they identify their assessment project for the upcoming year. Through conversations within and between programs, a cycle will be established designed to accomplish two things. First, create and assess learning outcomes on a yearly basis. The results of these assessments will help inform the yearly PAR (Program Assessment and Review) document generated each spring by each department. Second, initiate an in-depth review of assessments on a regular (four to six year) basis (PAR-Plus).

Spring semester 2010 pilots the first set of PAR-Plus reviews.

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Examples:

BIOLOGY

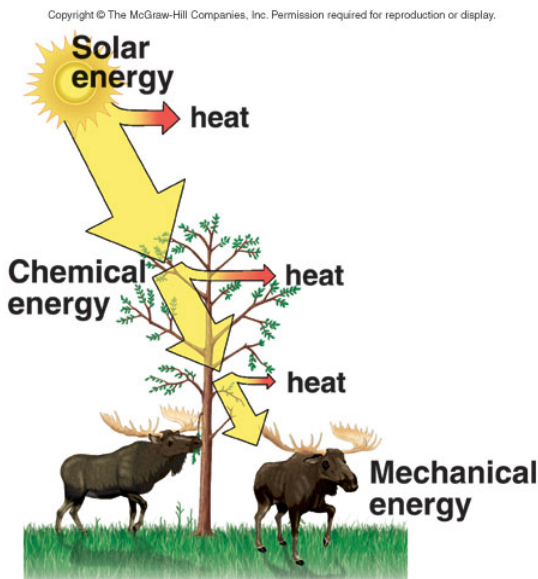
OUTCOMES:

1. Name and describe the structures of the respiratory system by tracing the path of air from the external nares to the alveoli.
2. Explain the mechanism of pulmonary ventilation by describing the structures and events involved in inspiration and expiration.

ASSESSMENT:

Complete the following questions and submit your answers through the “view/complete assignment” link in Blackboard.

1. Read “Energy in Biological Systems” starting on pg. 90 – 93 in your textbook and review Energy Concepts PowerPoint slides #1-10. Describe in your own words in a short paragraph what is happening in the diagram below. Include the specific types of energy and how the First and Second Law of Thermodynamics apply. (Act like I don’t know anything about this drawing and you are teaching me about the flow of energy ☺)



2. **Explain** how the molecule ATP is used as a source of energy for cellular processes. You can draw and describe a diagram OR use words to get your point across.
3. Write the **overall equation for cellular respiration** below.
4. I would like you to get a basic idea of what is happening during the three phases of cellular respiration. Use your cell metabolism PowerPoint slides and chapter 4 pgs. 103 – 110 to answer the following questions:
 - a. Where in the cell does **glycolysis** occur? In general, what is required for glycolysis and what are the final overall products of glycolysis? (Basically what enters into glycolysis and what do you end up with when the process is completed.)

- b. What is required for cells to enter the **Kreb's cycle** (a.k.a. Citric Acid cycle)? Where in the cell does it occur? What is produced during this phase?
- c. Where in the cell does the **electron transport chain** occur? What are the ultimate products of this phase?

Sociology

Learner Outcomes and [Assessments](#):

1. Describe, discuss and evaluate connections between public issues and private troubles. [Quiz, exam, identification and evaluation of film examples \(film, *Roger and Me*\), blackboard discussion board](#)
2. Research and evaluate social problems. [Research paper in conjunction with Social Justice Day activities](#)
3. Examine and evaluate social problems from the perspective of the key sociological theories. [Exam, in-class activities, research paper, check in, minute paper](#)
4. Discuss and analyze social problems with social institutions and conditions including but not limited to family structures, employment status, corporate and government institutions, gender identities, wealth and poverty, race and ethnicity, and the distribution of life chances. [Quiz, exam, research project, evaluation of participation with Social Justice Day, in-class group work, minute paper, blackboard discussion board](#)
5. Examine the mal-distribution of global power. [Exam, survey, TTYPA, muddy/clear, minute paper, blackboard discussion board](#)
6. Discuss, analyze and evaluate causes and solutions to these social problems. [Exam, evaluation of participation with Social Justice Day, check in, blackboard discussion board](#)
7. Examine, discuss and debate issues of social justice and the effectiveness of social movements. [Research paper, blackboard discussion board, evaluation of participation with Social Justice Day, TTYPA](#)

Course Outcome Form



Instruction Office – Student Learning Committee

5000 Rocklin Rd. Rocklin, CA 95677

Program: ESL Course Name/Number: ESL 520G

Course Outcome

Identify parts of speech: noun, verb, noun modifier, adverb, conjunction/connector, article, preposition

Method of Evaluation

A section on the final exam from Spring 2008.

Students needed to find the adjectives, adverbs, and noun modifiers of other nouns. Then they needed to identify which word in the sentence was being modified. This involved recognizing certain parts of speech that modify others (adjectives, adverbs, and nouns that modify other nouns) as well as the nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs that were being modified.

Results

- 44% of students earned 90% or higher on this section of the exam.
- 50% of students earned 80% or higher on this section of the exam.
- 67% of students earned 70% or higher on this section of the exam.
- 83% of students earned 60% or higher on this section of the exam.
- 17% of students earned 50% or lower on this section of the exam.

*Note: This section assessed various parts of speech listed in the course outcome above; however, it did not assess students' ability to identify conjunction/connectors, articles, or prepositions.

Related Documents

1. Finding the adjectives, adverbs, and nouns that describe other nouns: Underline the adjectives and circle the adverbs in each line. Draw two lines under the nouns that describe other nouns. Then draw an arrow (→) to the word they describe or tell more about. **Hint: There are 3 nouns modifying other nouns and 14 total adjectives/adverbs in the passage. (51 points)

The strawberry festival is a particularly important event in our town. The activities start early in the day. You can hear the pleasant sound of the joyful, young children playing happily in the streets while they sing and play games in the city park. During the festival, the air smells sweet from pies and cakes, and you can taste the delicious desserts made with fresh strawberries that were grown on nearby farms. You can watch a parade in which people from the community wear costumes and ride down the streets in police cars that were colorfully decorated by children. Everybody works hard to make this a special event.

Course Outcome Form



Instruction Office – Student Learning Committee

5000 Rocklin Rd. Rocklin, CA 95677

Some verbiage here on how to complete and where to submit???

Program: Accounting

Course Name/Number: Business 1

Course Outcome

Through written activities the student will analyze and journalize transactions.

Method of Evaluation

- Computerized practice set (Work4Me)
- Rubric used to evaluate student/class performance (100 points possible)

Results

Every student processed 25 journal entries on the computer. One point was given for each of the following: account, debit, credit, and business transactions amount. The following criteria was used to evaluate student/class performance:

	<u>Results</u>
Advanced : 90-100 pts.	73%
Proficient: 80-89 pts.	17%
Basic: 70-79 pts.	5%
Below Basic: 60-69 pts.	3%
Failing: 59 or less	2%

Ninety percent scored at an advanced or proficient level. Five percent of the students are still struggling with this skill and scored below or far below basic.

Related Documents

Documents of Interest

- Two-Year Rule Article from Academic Senate
- Academic Freedom and Responsibility
- 9-Principles from AAHE
- Student Learning Outcomes and Assessment Committee (SLOAC) Plan

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AAHE 9 Principles of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning

1. The assessment of student learning begins with educational values. Assessment is not an end in itself but a vehicle for educational improvement. Its effective practice, then, begins with and enacts a vision of the kinds of learning we most value for students and strive to help them achieve. Educational values should drive not only *what* we choose to assess but also *how* we do so. Where questions about educational mission and values are skipped over, assessment threatens to be an exercise in measuring what's easy, rather than a process of improving what we really care about.
2. Assessment is most effective when it reflects an understanding of learning as multidimensional, integrated, and revealed in performance over time. Learning is a complex process. It entails not only what students know but what they can do with what they know; it involves not only knowledge and abilities but values, attitudes, and habits of mind that affect both academic success and performance beyond the classroom. Assessment should reflect these understandings by employing a diverse array of methods, including those that call for actual performance, using them over time so as to reveal change, growth, and increasing degrees of integration. Such an approach aims for a more complete and accurate picture of learning, and therefore firmer bases for improving our students' educational experience.
3. Assessment works best when the programs it seeks to improve have clear, explicitly stated purposes. Assessment is a goal-oriented process. It entails comparing educational performance with educational purposes and expectations -- those derived from the institution's mission, from faculty intentions in program and course design, and from knowledge of students' own goals. Where program purposes lack specificity or agreement, assessment as a process pushes a campus toward clarity about where to aim and what standards to apply; assessment also prompts attention to where and how program goals will be taught and learned. Clear, shared, implementable goals are the cornerstone for assessment that is focused and useful.
4. Assessment requires attention to outcomes but also and equally to the experiences that lead to those outcomes. Information about outcomes is of high importance; where students "end up" matters greatly. But to improve outcomes, we need to know about student experience along the way -- about the curricula, teaching, and kind of student effort that lead to particular outcomes. Assessment can help us understand which students learn best under what conditions; with such knowledge comes the capacity to improve the whole of their learning.
5. Assessment works best when it is ongoing not episodic. Assessment is a process whose power is cumulative. Though isolated, "one-shot" assessment can be better than none, improvement is best fostered when assessment entails a linked series of activities undertaken over time. This may mean tracking the process of individual students, or of cohorts of students; it may mean collecting the same examples of student performance or using the same instrument semester after semester. The point is to monitor progress toward intended goals in a spirit of continuous improvement. Along the way, the assessment process itself should be evaluated and refined in light of emerging insights.
6. Assessment fosters wider improvement when representatives from across the educational community are involved. Student learning is a campus-wide responsibility, and assessment is a way of enacting that responsibility. Thus, while assessment efforts may start small, the aim over time is to involve people from across the educational community. Faculty play an especially important role, but assessment's questions can't be fully addressed without participation by student-affairs educators, librarians, administrators, and students. Assessment may also involve individuals from beyond the campus (alumni/ae, trustees, employers) whose experience can enrich the sense of appropriate aims and standards for learning. Thus

understood, assessment is not a task for small groups of experts but a collaborative activity; its aim is wider, better-informed attention to student learning by all parties with a stake in its improvement.

7. Assessment makes a difference when it begins with issues of use and illuminates questions that people really care about. Assessment recognizes the value of information in the process of improvement. But to be useful, information must be connected to issues or questions that people really care about. This implies assessment approaches that produce evidence that relevant parties will find credible, suggestive, and applicable to decisions that need to be made. It means thinking in advance about how the information will be used, and by whom. The point of assessment is not to gather data and return "results"; it is a process that starts with the questions of decision-makers, that involves them in the gathering and interpreting of data, and that informs and helps guide continuous improvement.

8. Assessment is most likely to lead to improvement when it is part of a larger set of conditions that promote change. Assessment alone changes little. Its greatest contribution comes on campuses where the quality of teaching and learning is visibly valued and worked at. On such campuses, the push to improve educational performance is a visible and primary goal of leadership; improving the quality of undergraduate education is central to the institution's planning, budgeting, and personnel decisions. On such campuses, information about learning outcomes is seen as an integral part of decision making, and avidly sought.

9. Through assessment, educators meet responsibilities to students and to the public. There is a compelling public stake in education. As educators, we have a responsibility to the publics that support or depend on us to provide information about the ways in which our students meet goals and expectations. But that responsibility goes beyond the reporting of such information; our deeper obligation -- to ourselves, our students, and society -- is to improve. Those to whom educators are accountable have a corresponding obligation to support such attempts at improvement.

Revision 4/8

Implementation and Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes at Sierra College.

I STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES AND ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE (SLOAC)

A. CONFIGURATION

1. Faculty - 10 -12

One to two faculty from each representative group

This group will include members who will also comprise a team of student learning outcomes assessment facilitators who will work with departments and divisions to develop and implement student learning outcomes.

Committee Chair and/or vice chairs (Committee chair will be the
Student Learning Outcomes and Assessment Coordinator)

2. Student Services - 1 representative from Non-Instructional Programs

3. Administrative support - 1

4. Deans - 4
One dean from each division
5. Researcher - 1
6. Vice Presidents

Vice President of Instruction
Vice President of Student Services

B. COMMITTEE RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Review applications for committee chair and/or chair and vice-chairs and make recommendations to VPI
2. Review applications for instructional release time and make recommendations to the Vice President of Instruction
3. Provide linkage, criteria, and rationale for budgetary decision in support of program assessment
4. Collect and report assessment data
5. Assist faculty and departments with course and program review
6. Implement and oversee a process for ongoing course, program, and institutional outcomes assessment review

C. OTHER COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

1. This committee and the existing PAR committee should be combined, and the PAR should reflect student learning outcomes assessment.
2. Committee should continue to be a standing committee under the Academic Senate.
3. A mission statement needs to be developed for this committee.
4. The administrative support member and the Vice President of Instruction and the Vice President of Student Services will be non-voting members.

II STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES AND ASSESSMENT CHAIR AND/OR VICE-CHAIR(S)

A. RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Chair Program Outcome Review Committee
2. Coordinate the training of faculty and staff in assessing student learning outcomes

assessment

3. Develop a plan to implement course, program, and institutional learning outcomes and their assessments to comply with the ACCJC requirements for accreditation
4. Work with faculty to promote, develop, and implement SLO
5. Provide direction and assistance to a team of faculty charged with facilitating students learning outcomes assessment at the department and division level.
- 6.. Prepare annual reports, ACCJC accreditation reports, and other reports as needed
7. Make presentations promoting students learning outcomes assessment to the campus community.
8. Represent student learning outcomes assessment by attending department meetings and attending meetings of the Curriculum Committee, Academic Senate, Education Requirements, Academic Standards, CTE, New Faculty Academy, etc. as necessary.
9. Facilitate the development and assessment of institutional level outcomes
10. Create and maintain a Student Learning Outcomes Assessment handbook

III REASSIGNED TIME

1. 100% release for the coordinator for the first year.
Release will be evaluated at that time.
2. The equivalent of 100% release for a team of faculty and/or faculty and classified student learning outcome facilitators who will work under the direction of the SLOAC chair to facilitate the development and implementation of student learning outcomes campus-wide

Have You Heard About the Two-Year Rule and Accreditation?

JANET FULKS, CHAIR, ACCREDITATION AND STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES COMMITTEE

At the second annual ASCCC Accreditation Institute (January 25-27, 2008), many were surprised to hear about the impact of the “two-year rule” implementation on our accreditation process. The “two-year rule” is a federally imposed mandate that requires accrediting agencies to place a two-year deadline on correction of all recommendations that relate to deficiencies. Following an accreditation visit, colleges usually receive commendations (indicating outstanding areas of quality education) and recommendations that may be either: 1) recommendations for improvement or 2) recommendations for correcting deficiencies. Since the Accreditation Standards represent the minimum qualifications for accreditation, fulfilling the standards are not something colleges must attempt to do, but rather are the minimum expected level of performance. If your college has not shown evidence that it meets this minimum expectation, the result will be a recommendation to correct this deficiency. But why haven't we heard of this short two-year timeline before?

When the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) was being reauthorized as an accrediting agency this fall, the reviewers discovered that this rule had not been enforced in the past, even though the federal government had required it for many years. The federal motivation for enacting this rule was to guarantee that students attending a deficient institution had an opportunity to see that corrected during the course of their study so that they did not receive a deficient college education. This is also why, when being accredited for the present year, the visiting team reviews the previous accreditation reports to see that recommendations have been addressed. So how will this impact your college?

Many faculty have commented that in the process of reviewing previous accreditation reports to write their current self-study, they found that some of the same problems were still alive and well. Recommendations have often indicated that institutions failed to meet previous recommendations adequately, allowing the deficiencies to extend into the next six-year cycle (and some for two accreditation cycles). In January, the ACCJC sent out a letter explaining that the two-year rule must be enforced and that it requires recommendations be corrected within a two-year period or increasing sanctions will be placed on the institution. This means that sitting on your laurels, waiting for the midterm report, will not be an option; instead, you may receive a one year visit to check on your progress. Perhaps even more significantly, factor in the timeline. The official report is received approximately 3-4 months behind the visitation date. Suddenly you only have about a year and a half to correct a deficiency and document that improvement with evidence. So what should your college do?

Begin early and gain a good understanding of the expectations.

Create committees and action plans for the self study that can realistically address issues sooner rather than later.

The ACCJC has found that three main areas often lead to recommendations about deficiencies and sanctions. Below is a summary of what we have learned about them.

1. **Program Review**—If colleges have not completed program review, have only spotty reviews, or have a review process that lacks objective data and analyses (thus ultimately failing to evaluate the

program's effectiveness), the institution will most likely see a recommendation. The ACCJC *Rubric for Evaluating Institutional Effectiveness—Part I: Program Review* provides criteria used to evaluate the program review processes. The commission expects colleges to be on the highest level called **Sustainable Continuous Quality Improvement**, which includes data on student achievement including course completion, persistence, program completion, graduation, and if appropriate job placement and licensure pass rate (such as for the Board of Registered Nursing or BRN). The programs should show evidence that they use relevant data to make decisions and improve student learning. See the ACCJC rubric for a more complete summary of the criteria.

- 2. Institutional Planning**—If an institution lacks a substantive planning process to identify strengths and weaknesses and mechanisms to improve, they are likely to see a recommendation concerning institutional planning. These processes should have clearly documented timelines, communications, and strategies that enable the college to set priorities, allocate resources, implement improvements, and engage in continuous assessment and improvement practices. Again, the commission expects institutions to be at the highest level (**Sustainable Continuous Quality Improvement**) of the ACCJC *Rubric for Evaluating Institutional Effectiveness—Part II: Planning*. At this level there should be ongoing and systematic review cycles that inform planning

and are aimed at improving student learning. See the ACCJC rubric for a more complete summary of the criteria.

- 3. Governance**—Problems with governance (either between the governing board and the college administrative leadership and/or faculty leadership) that keep the college focused on politics rather than achieving and improving mission is another major area where deficiencies are noted. Governance problems may be the result of many different issues, but when any entity has a vested interest in preserving dysfunctional governance, rather than correcting dysfunctional governance, quality education is at risk. There is no rubric for governance, but Standard 4 states the standard very clearly:

“The institution recognizes and utilizes the contributions of leadership throughout the organization for continuous improvement of the institution. Governance roles are designed to facilitate decisions that support student learning programs and services and improve institutional effectiveness, while acknowledging the designated responsibilities of the governing board and the chief administrator.”

For a thorough discussion of these major areas of deficiency by the ACCJC President, have a look at the power point on the ACCJC website under the President's Desk tab at http://www.accjc.org/directors_desk.htm **PowerPoint Presentation “What Executives Need to Know”** by Dr. Barbara Beno, ACCJC President. ■

Upcoming Academic Senate Events

SPRING SESSION – APRIL 17-20, 2008

SFO WESTIN

FACULTY LEADERSHIP – JUNE 12-14, 2008

HYATT REGENCY, NEWPORT BEACH

CURRICULUM INSTITUTE – JULY 10-12, 2008

SOFITEL, SAN FRANCISCO BAY

(SPACE IS LIMITED)

FALL SESSION – NOVEMBER 6-8, 2008

WESTIN BONAVENTURE

Academic Freedom and Educational Responsibility

A STATEMENT FROM THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF



*Association
of American
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1818 R Street, NW, Washington, DC 20009

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Academic Freedom and Educational Responsibility was approved by the 2005 Board of Directors of the Association of American Colleges and Universities:

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Preface

On behalf of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), we are pleased to present *Academic Freedom and Educational Responsibility*. This statement, framed and approved by AAC&U's board of directors, is designed to provide the larger context missing from current public debates about intellectual diversity in undergraduate education. It addresses many of the myths and misrepresentations that have been perpetuated through the insistent external campaign to encourage political oversight of teaching and learning practices on college and university campuses. In particular, the statement clarifies the vital role of diverse perspectives in helping students develop their own knowledge and intellectual capacities.

Self-appointed political critics of the academy have presented equal representation for conservative and progressive points of views as the key to quality. But the college classroom is not a talk show. Rather, it is a dedicated context in which students and teachers seriously engage difficult and contested questions with the goal of reaching beyond differing viewpoints to a critical evaluation of the relative claims of different positions. Central to the educational aims and spirit of academic freedom, diversity of perspectives is a means to an end in higher education, not an end in itself. Including diversity is a step in the larger quest for new understanding and insight. But an overemphasis on diversity of perspectives as an end in itself threatens to distort the larger responsibilities of intellectual work in the academy.

In publishing *Academic Freedom and Educational Responsibility*, we invite college and university leaders to use it actively to inform public and campus discussions about the academy's role in both exploring the contentious issues of our time and providing contexts for civil dialogue and constructive inquiry. This statement can be used to good effect in any number of contexts, including discussions—with trustees and regents, with faculty and departments, with administrators and staff, and especially with students—about the educational principles at stake in the academic freedom debate.

Robert A. Corrigan
Chair of the Board of Directors

Carol Geary Schneider
President

Acknowledgments

The Board of Directors of the Association of American Colleges and Universities extends its warm thanks to Dr. Jerry Gaff, senior scholar at AAC&U, for his work in bringing this statement from concept to completion. The board further thanks the many colleagues from member colleges and universities and from sister organizations who responded to earlier drafts.

In framing this statement, the board has drawn on concepts that were first articulated in the 1991 publication *The Challenge of Connecting Learning*, which was crafted by members of the national advisory committee for an Association of American Colleges (now AAC&U) initiative on liberal learning and “study-in-depth.”

Challenge was written by Jonathan Z. Smith, the Robert O. Anderson Distinguished Professor of the Humanities at the University of Chicago. The board thanks Professor Smith and the other members of the national advisory committee for their leadership and vision. AAC&U’s work on study-in-depth was supported by generous grants from the Ford Foundation and the U. S. Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education.

The board also acknowledges AAC&U’s signal debt to William S. Perry Jr. of Harvard University, whose landmark work on the study of students’ intellectual and ethical development in the college years helped illuminate the importance of these issues for a generation of faculty members, student affairs leaders, and researchers on student learning. The board thanks Dr. Lee Knefelkamp, professor of psychology and education at Teachers College, Columbia University, and senior scholar at AAC&U, for her assistance in shaping this statement and for her leadership in making students’ intellectual and ethical development a core theme in AAC&U’s work on the aims and outcomes of student learning in college.

Finally, the board thanks David Tritelli, AAC&U’s senior academic editor, and Darbi Bossman, AAC&U’s print production manager and graphic designer, for their expert assistance in bringing the statement to publication.

Academic Freedom and Educational Responsibility

Academic freedom and responsibility have long been topics for public concern and debate. Academic freedom to explore significant and controversial questions is an essential precondition to fulfill the academy's mission of educating students and advancing knowledge. Academic responsibility requires professors to submit their knowledge and claims to rigorous and public review by peers who are experts in the subject matter under consideration; to ground their arguments in the best available evidence; and to work together to foster the education of students. The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), in concert with the American Association of University Professors, helped establish the principles of academic freedom early in the twentieth century, and recently AAC&U joined with other associations to reaffirm them.*

Today, new challenges to academic freedom have arisen from both the right and the left. On the right, conservative activist David Horowitz, founder of Students for Academic Freedom, has fashioned an “academic bill of rights” that is being considered in several states ostensibly as a means of protecting “conservative” students from alleged indoctrination by the purportedly “liberal” views of faculty. This bill inappropriately invites political oversight of scholarly and educational work. On the left, anti-war protests by students have interrupted speeches by proponents of current national policies. Some protestors have sought to silence—rather than debate—positions with which they do not agree. These challenges prompt AAC&U to revisit the basic principles involved and to discuss the role of academic freedom.

There is, however, an additional dimension of academic freedom that was not well developed in the original principles, and that has to do with the responsibilities of faculty members for educational programs. Faculty are responsible for establishing goals for student learning, for designing and implementing programs of general education and specialized study that intentionally cultivate the intended learning, and for assessing students' achievement. In these matters, faculty must work collaboratively with their colleagues in their departments, schools, and institutions as well as with relevant administrators. Academic freedom is necessary not just so faculty members can conduct their individual research and teach their own courses, but so they can enable students—through whole college programs of study—to acquire the learning they need to contribute to society.

As faculty carry out this mission, it is inevitable that students will encounter ideas, books, and people that challenge their preconceived ideas and beliefs. The resulting tension between

* The Association of American Colleges (now the Association of American Colleges and Universities) began work on this issue in the early 1920s. Then, through a series of joint conferences begun in 1934, representatives of the American Association of University Professors and of the Association of American Colleges established the principles set forth in the 1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure. In 2005, the Association of American Colleges and Universities, along with twenty-eight other higher education organizations, endorsed Academic Rights and Responsibilities, the American Council on Education's statement on intellectual diversity on college and university campuses.

the faculty's freedom to teach—individually and collectively—and the students' freedom to form independent judgments opens an additional dimension of academic freedom and educational responsibility that deserves further discussion, both with the public and with students themselves.

The clash of competing ideas is an important catalyst, not only for the expansion of knowledge but also in students' development of independent critical judgment. Recognizing this dynamic, many well-intentioned observers underline the importance of "teaching all sides of the debate" in college classrooms. Teaching the debates is important but by no means sufficient. It is also essential that faculty help students learn—through their college studies—to engage differences of opinion, evaluate evidence, and form their own grounded judgments about the relative value of competing perspectives. This too is an essential part of higher education's role both in advancing knowledge and in sustaining a society that is free, diverse, and democratic.

Intellectual Diversity and the Indispensable Role of Liberal Education

In any education of quality, students encounter an abundance of intellectual diversity—new knowledge, different perspectives, competing ideas, and alternative claims of truth. This intellectual diversity is experienced by some students as exciting and challenging, while others are confused and overwhelmed by the complexity. Liberal education, the nation's signature educational tradition, helps stu-

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dents develop the skills of analysis and critical inquiry with particular emphasis on exploring and evaluating competing claims and different perspectives. With its emphasis on breadth of knowledge and sophisticated habits of mind, liberal education is the best and most powerful way to build students' capacities to

form their own judgments about complex or controversial questions. AAC&U believes that all students need and deserve this kind of education, regardless of their academic major or intended career.

Liberal education involves more than the mind. It also involves developing students' personal qualities, including a strong sense of responsibility to self and others. Liberally educated students are curious about new intellectual questions, open to alternative ways of viewing a situation or problem, disciplined to follow intellectual methods to conclusions, capable of accepting criticism from others, tolerant of ambiguity, and respectful of others with different views. They understand and accept the imperative of academic honesty. Personal development is a very real part of intellectual development.

Beyond fostering intellectual and personal development, a liberal education also enables students to develop meaning and commitments in their lives. In college they can explore different ways to relate to others, imagine alternative futures, decide on their intended careers, and consider their larger life's work of contributing to the common good.

Building such intellectual and personal capacities is the right way to warn students of the inappropriateness and dangers of indoctrination, help them see through the distortions of propaganda,

and enable them to assess judiciously the persuasiveness of powerful emotional appeals. Emphasizing the quality of analysis helps students see why unwelcome views need to be heard rather than silenced. By thoughtfully engaging diverse perspectives, liberal education leads to greater personal freedom through greater competence. Ensuring that college students are liberally educated is essential both to a deliberative democracy and to an economy dependent on innovation.

What Is Not Required in the Name of Intellectual Diversity?

There are several misconceptions about intellectual diversity and academic freedom, and we address some of them here.

- 1** In an educational community, freedom of speech, or the narrower concept of academic freedom, does not mean the freedom to say anything that one wants. For example, freedom of speech does not mean that one can say something that causes physical danger to others. In a learning context, one must both respect those who disagree with oneself and also maintain an atmosphere of civility. Anything less creates a hostile environment that limits intellectual diversity and, therefore, the quality of learning.
- 2** Students do not have a right to remain free from encountering unwelcome or “inconvenient questions,” in the words of Max Weber. Students who accept the literal truth of creation narratives do not have a right to avoid the study of the science of evolution in a biology course; anti-Semites do not have a right to a history course based on the premise that the Holocaust did not happen. Students protesting their institution’s sale of clothing made in sweatshops do not have a right to interrupt the education of others. Students do have a right to hear and examine diverse opinions, but within the frameworks that knowledgeable scholars—themselves subject to rigorous standards of peer review—have determined to be reliable and accurate. That is, in considering what range of views should be introduced and considered, the academy is guided by the best knowledge available in the community of scholars.
- 3** All competing ideas on a subject do not deserve to be included in a course or program, or to be regarded as equally valid just because they have been asserted. For example, creationism, even in its modern guise as “intelligent design,” has no standing among experts in the life sciences because its claims cannot be tested by scientific methods. However, creationism and intelligent design might well be studied in a wide range of other disciplinary contexts such as the history of ideas or the sociology of religion.
- 4** While the diversity of topics introduced in a particular area of study should illustrate the existence of debate, it is not realistic to expect that undergraduate students will have the opportunity to study every dispute relevant to a course or program. The professional judgment of teachers determines the content of courses.

Academic Freedom and Scholarly Community

A college or university is a dedicated social place where a variety of competing claims to truth can be explored and tested, free from political interference. The persons who drive the production of knowledge and the process of education are highly trained professors, and they, through an elaborate process of review by professional peers, take responsibility as a community for the quality of their scholarship, teaching, and student learning. Trustees, administrators, policy makers, and other stakeholders also have important roles to play, but the faculty and their students stand at the center of the enterprise.

The development of a body of knowledge involves scientists or other scholars in developing their best ideas and then subjecting them to empirical tests and/or searching scholarly criticism. Knowledge is not simply a matter of making an assertion but of developing the evidence for that assertion in terms that gain acceptance among those with the necessary training and expertise to evaluate the scholarly analysis. In order to contribute to knowledge, scholars require the freedom to pursue their ideas wherever they lead, unconstrained by political, religious, or other dictums. And scholars need the informed criticism of peers who represent a broad spectrum of insight and experience in order to build a body of knowledge.

One of the great strengths of higher education in the United States is the integration of scholarly research and educational communities. Students benefit enormously when their learning is guided by thoughtful and knowledgeable scholars who come from diverse backgrounds and who are trained to high levels in a variety of disciplines.

A discipline consists of a specialized community that, through intense collective effort, has formulated reliable methods for determining whether any particular claim meets accepted criteria for truth. But assertions from any single disciplinary community as to “what is the case” are themselves necessarily partial and bounded, because other disciplinary communities can and do provide different perspectives on the same topics. Economists, for example, see poverty through one set of lenses, while political scientists and historians contribute different, and sometimes directly competing, perspectives on the same issue.

Any assertion from a particular individual or a specific intellectual community is necessarily simpler than the complexity it attempts to explain and describe. This is the central reason both scholars and students must work within a communal setting that involves multiple academic disciplines, and that fosters an ethos of communication, contestation, and civility. By creating such communities of inquiry, the academy ensures that no proposal stands without alternatives or arrogates to itself the claim of possessing the sole truth. The advancement of knowledge requires that intellectual differences be engaged and explored even as individuals with different points of view are also respected.

Intellectual Diversity and the Development of Judgment

Although one often hears that faculty “impart knowledge” to students, the reality is that, in a good liberal education, substantial time is devoted to teaching students how to acquire new knowledge for themselves and how to evaluate evidence within different areas of knowledge. To do this well, professors in the classroom also need academic freedom to explore their subjects—including contested questions and real-world implications—with their students.

To help students think critically about a subject or problem, faculty members need to take seriously what students already know or believe about that topic and engage that prior understanding so new learning modifies the old—complicating, correcting, and expanding it. This process of cultivating a liberal education is a journey that transforms the minds and hearts, and frequently the starting assumptions, of those involved—both teachers and students. Because knowledge is always expanding, the eventual destination is uncertain.

To develop their own critical judgment, students also need the freedom to express their ideas publicly as well as repeated opportunities to explore a wide range of insights and perspectives. The diversity of the educational community is an important resource to this process; research shows that students are more likely to develop cognitive complexity when they frequently interact with people, views, and experiences that are different from their own.

Expressing one’s ideas and entertaining divergent perspectives—about race, gender, religion, or cultural values, for example—can be frightening for students. They require a safe environment in order to feel free to express their own views. They need confidence that they will not be subjected to ridicule by either students or professors. They have a right to be graded on the intellectual merit of their arguments, uninfluenced by the personal views of professors. And, of course, they have a right to appeal if they are not able to reach a satisfactory resolution of differences with a professor.

Learning to form independent judgments further requires that students demonstrate openness to the challenges their ideas may elicit and the willingness to alter their original views in light of new knowledge, evidence, and perspectives. Just as a crustacean breaks its confining shell in order to grow, so students may have to jettison narrow concepts as they expand their knowledge and develop more advanced analytical capacities. As they acquire the capacities to encounter, grasp, and evaluate diverse points of view, they also gain more nuanced, sophisticated, and mature understandings of the world. Every college student deserves to experience the intellectual excitement that comes from the capacity to extend the known to the unknown and to discern previously unsuspected relationships.

Students cannot be left with the notion that there is no legitimate way—beyond arbitrary choice—to determine the relative value of competing claims.

Students may, in the end, reaffirm the worldviews and commitments that they brought with them to college. But they should do so far more aware of the complexity of the issues at stake and far better able to ground their commitments in analysis, evidence, and careful consideration of alternatives.

Teaching Students to Form Their Own Judgments

Research shows that students tend to develop intellectual and ethical capacities through a series of predictable stages. Students frequently enter college with a “black and white” view of the world, see things as either good or bad, and expect their professors and textbooks to serve as definitive authorities. Part of the job of becoming educated involves breaking out of this dualistic mindset.

Students' growing awareness of intellectual diversity frequently leads to a second cognitive stage that may be described as naive relativism. Once students see that ideas and methods are contested, and that their teachers may differ among themselves about interpretations of truth on certain questions, students often decide that "any idea is as good as any other." While this is a predictable phase in their intellectual development, it is a phase that their teachers must recognize and challenge. Students cannot be allowed to be content with the notion that there is no legitimate way—beyond arbitrary choice—to determine the relative value of competing claims.

Thus it is vital that liberal education be organized to help students progress to a third, more mature, mental framework in which they form judgments—even in the face of continuing disagreement—about the relative merits of different views, based on careful evaluation of assumptions, arguments, and evidence. One of the central purposes of majoring in a particular discipline or academic field is to come to the understanding that different fields of endeavor provide well-grounded intellectual criteria for making decisions about alternative claims. Using these criteria, students can learn to discriminate by arguing the evidence, with the understanding that

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arguments exist for the purpose of clarifying ideas, evaluating claims, considering consequences, and making choices.

In this process, it is important that students be asked to assess competing points of view and to address them in making their own arguments. A good analysis does not simply ignore competing perspectives; rather, it takes them

thoughtfully and carefully into account. Students need to learn, through the kind of extended and direct experience afforded by study in depth as well as general education courses, to be able to state why a question or argument is significant and for whom; what the difference is between developing and justifying a position and merely asserting one; and how to develop and provide evidence for their own interpretations and judgments.

Accomplishing this kind of educational result cannot be taken for granted or left to students' unaided musings. There must be curricular space, capable guides and models, and a supportive institutional culture to encourage students as they learn to develop their own critical judgments. Freedom to learn is indispensable for both students and professors as they examine and assess disparate points of view within and across disciplinary boundaries. In the best designed college curricula and assessments, ample opportunity exists for students both to work on these intellectual skills and to demonstrate to the community their level of achievement in analyzing complex questions.

Further, this kind of intellectual journey often has the greatest impact on students when they apply their knowledge and inquiry skills to issues and problems beyond the academy. Students sometimes envision education as being removed from the "real world," but direct involvement with communities beyond the academy can illustrate the actual power and significance of their learning. In such community settings, students may encounter new forms of intellectual diversity, forms that emerge from working with people whose histories, experiences, perspectives, and values may be

decidedly different from their own—and also, perhaps, from that of the scholarly community. Service learning, community-based learning, community action research, internships, study abroad, and similar experiences all provide opportunities for authentic learning that engage students in using their critical skills to understand and to better the world.

Those outside the academy readily see the enrichment value of providing students with hands-on experience in community or organizational settings. However, they must also recognize that real-world learning may involve students with issues and problems that have been highly politicized. Indeed, some of the same experiences that enhance the knowledge, skills, and motivation of students to become more engaged in civic betterment are precisely the ones that are politically contested. As a result, faculty whose courses include community-based learning experiences often find that they must help students assess controversial topics that—at first glance—might be thought extraneous to the subject of the course. When such controversial topics emerge, faculty have to use their professional judgment in deciding whether to devote class time to them. If they do, they have a responsibility to ensure that students hear and assess diverse views on these topics.

The Ideal versus the Real

Academic freedom is sometimes confused with autonomy, thought and speech freed from all constraints. But academic freedom implies not just *freedom from* constraint but also *freedom for* faculty and students to work within a scholarly community to develop the intellectual and personal qualities required of citizens in a vibrant democracy and participants in a vigorous economy. Academic freedom is protected by society so that faculty and students can use that freedom to promote the larger good.

This document articulates an ideal that is based on historic conceptions of academic freedom and extends those precepts to include responsibilities for the holistic education of students. In reality, practice often falls short of these norms. Departments and sometimes whole institutions do not always establish widely shared goals for student learning, programs may drift away from original intentions, and assessments may be inadequate. Some departments fail to ensure that their curricula include the full diversity of legitimate intellectual perspectives appropriate to their disciplines. And individual faculty members sometimes express their personal views to students in ways that intimidate them. There are institutional means for dealing with these matters, and in all of these areas, there is room for improvement. The key to improvement is clarity about the larger purpose of academic freedom and about the educational responsibilities it is designed to advance.

About AAC&U

AAC&U is the leading national association concerned with the quality, vitality, and public standing of undergraduate liberal education. Its members are committed to extending the advantages of a liberal education to all students, regardless of academic specialization or intended career. Founded in 1915, AAC&U now comprises more than 1,000 accredited public and private colleges and universities of every type and size.

AAC&U functions as a catalyst and facilitator, forging links among presidents, administrators, and faculty members who are engaged in institutional and curricular planning. Its mission is to reinforce the collective commitment to liberal education at both the national and local levels and to help individual institutions keep the quality of student learning at the core of their work as they evolve to meet new economic and social challenges.

Information about AAC&U membership, programs, and publications can be found at www.aacu.org.



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