

Curry College Learning Outcomes Assessment Committee

Annual Report, November 2017

Submitted by
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On behalf of the Curry College Learning Outcomes Assessment Committee

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Curry College's institutional Learning Outcomes Assessment Committee was created in 2010 to develop and sustain a culture of assessment, assist departments and programs with best practices for assessing student learning outcomes, and report to the College the results of assessment activities across the campus. The goal is to create an institutional "feedback loop" to guide curriculum development, prioritize and align resources, and generally inform the College community areas we are meeting outcomes and areas that need more support and attention.

Charge of Committee:

1. Routinely review institutional progress on learning outcomes assessment to contribute to accreditation and reporting requirements.
2. Clarify and communicate the learning outcomes assessment process across the College as a continuous improvement model focused on what and how students learn at the course, program, and institutional levels.
3. Provide outreach to departments/programs and administrative/co-curricular units to serve as a resource for best practices and expertise in structuring learning outcomes, mapping outcomes in curricula, implementing assessments, and following up on results.
4. Guide, inform, and advise academic departments/programs and administrative/co-curricular/ units on making informed use of, and acting based on, what is discovered through the process of learning outcomes assessment.
5. Facilitate communication of learning outcomes, and insights about student learning, across areas of the college.
6. Make calls for resources as necessary to support routine/ongoing and new/innovative learning outcomes assessment work.
7. Stay informed on up-to-date best practices in learning outcomes assessment in Higher Education through publications, professional organizations (e.g., NEEAN), and conferences.
8. Internally evaluate the structure and charge of the Committee itself annually and recommend any changes to the Provost.

Learning Outcomes Assessment 2016-2017

In 2016- 2017 LOAC continued to build on the growing foundation of assessment, using Blackboard as a site to request, house, and share assessment work, and examples of best practices.

In general, Blackboard works well, though there is naturally some differentiation in the amount of information supplied by the various departments and their comfort in using it. Still, the transparency of the process is critical to the work of LOAC and demonstrates a best practice. Work will continue on making the Blackboard site a valuable community resources.

Summary and Institutional Findings

Some of the findings from the 2016 – 2017 cycle include:

- While fourteen majors did submit their annual reports in January, seven majors did not. This is the major negative result for the year and presents a serious issue for the College. The process of assessment needs to be continuous and ongoing, for the sake of strengthening and developing our programs. The information will also be essential when the time comes to write Curry's next accreditation self-study.
- Three majors continue to report concerns with the quantitative skills of their students. This includes Psychology, Sociology/CJ and Education. Curry's Mathematics Department is aware and is working to bridge this gap and the departments are also investigating ways in which they can address the gap.
- Writing skills also continue to be an area of concern across the College. As the enhanced writing requirements of the General Education program take hold, LOAC will monitor the progress here. Departments such as Applied Technology and the Master's in Criminal Justice are addressing the issues of writing skills with an increased emphasis on those relevant outcomes.
- Learning spaces across campus are sometimes cited as a detriment to student learning and success: Sociology/CJ, Nursing, and Applied Technology all report this concern.
- All reporting programs have outcomes established, though LOAC has provided feedback to some departments that a review would be beneficial (MACJ, CHW, Nursing). One department, Politics & History, independently came to the conclusion that their learning outcomes were in need of a review. The work to revise the Curry College web site might provide an opportunity for the learning outcomes to have a higher profile on the web site.
- Curriculum mapping is strong, though somewhat inconsistent in design. On the Blackboard site, there is a menu option for best practices, which includes some Curry examples of curriculum maps that LOAC recommends to the community.

Closing the Loop:

While the lack of participation of some departments is serious, and must be addressed by departments and LOAC, there is still a good amount of evidence of “feedback loop” within academic programs. Some of these examples include:

Research:

- **Sociology/Criminal Justice:** all courses will now have research and diversity outcomes. Students are not demonstrating mastery in these areas.
- **Communication:** based on past assessment, they will combine the Research and the Theory courses into one for Fall 2017, so that students do not miss critical elements of the discipline. Prior to this, students could take one or the other and the department assessment indicated that students would benefit from both. Psychology is also wrestling

with a similar dilemma, that of student course choice and the impact that has on their learning in the major.

- **Politics and History:** after a few years of repeated demonstration of poor student research skills, a research methods course will be developed; learning outcomes will be reviewed; course mapping to be reviewed. Post self-study work will also be on the table, after the external reviewers' report is delivered.

Writing

- **Masters in Criminal Justice:** will address the issue of being “light on artifacts” and will begin to assess more programmatically student writing skills (an identified issue). A rubric created and courses selected. Again, while not a full closing of the loop, it is a step in that direction.
- **Applied Technology** will require a reflective writing piece in their senior portfolios.
- **Education** will add a writing assignment to their ED1150 portfolio assignment.

Quantitative:

- **Education** moved Math courses to first and second year to provide additional MTEL testing opportunities and time for re-takes.

General Assessment:

- **Biology/Biochemistry:** rubrics to assess the Biology Senior Seminar Presentation were enhanced to include science knowledge and lab techniques, in addition to presentation skills.
- **Nursing:** changes made in response to NCLEX pass rates continue to be successful.
- **Education:** assessment was more focused and prioritized in departmental weekly undergraduate education meetings, reflecting best practice.
- **Psychology:** will investigate major requirements, as assessment shows that students are not learning all the appropriate areas of psychology necessary before graduation.
- **Applied Technology:** this department is using its Advisory Board in an assessment fashion to assess student readiness for the workplace.

Considerations for LOAC for the 2017-2018 cycle:

- In order to promote full participation, LOAC members will reach out to departments to ensure that assessment is prioritized and a report will be completed. It simply is not possible to maintain a documented “feedback loop,” when activity is inconsistent.
- LOAC members will also work with departments to ensure that the submissions include relevant documentation, rubrics, and artifacts.
- **General Education and Honors:** LOAC will focus on the ongoing assessment work in the Honors program and the General Education program, as new programs. Both provide considerable opportunities to build an assessment process from the ground up. Gen Ed,

in particular, is connected with myriad departments and with identified student learning issues (quantitative, writing, information literacy, critical thinking skills).

- **Co-Curriculum:** LOAC will turn its attention to co-curricular activities and programming as an important factor in student learning. The integrated assessment of learning across the programs and majors, general education, and co-curricular settings will lead to a comprehensive assessment of the student learning experience at Curry College.
- Participate in the **Chair, Director, and Coordinator training program**. This has the potential be an annual event.
- LOAC will continue to link assessment to College wide outcomes, supporting the College's mission statement and strategic plan.