

The Higher Learning Commission Action Project Directory

Colorado Mountain College

Project Details

Title	Creating an Effective Assessment Accountability System for Institutional, Program, and Course Level Assessment.	Status	COMPLETED
Category	1-Helping Students Learn	Updated	08-29-2013
Timeline		Reviewed	09-16-2013
	Planned Project Kickoff 05-01-2010	Created	03-26-2010
	Actual Completion 08-19-2014	Version	4

1: Project Goal

- A:** This action project in concert with another focused on assessing student learning will launch Colorado Mountain College into its comprehensive plan for assessing the student experience in and out of the classroom. This project will utilize an accountability management system called TaskStream to document student learning outcomes, develop appropriate assessment measures, record assessment results, develop action plans, and close the loop on continuous improvement. Within TaskStream, programs and discipline groups will be able to link their assessment work to the CMC Signature Learning Outcomes and other institutional goals. This project will utilize data from program and course level assessments. Additionally, the Community College Learning Assessment (CCLA) will be given to second-year students to determine whether we are meeting general education outcomes in four key areas. The IDEA student survey will also provide feedback on whether students feel we are successful in meeting student learning outcomes.

2: Reasons For Project

- A:** Upon the arrival of our new president in July, 2008, CMC embarked on the development of an aggressive strategic plan. One third of this strategic plan is focused on becoming "first choice in learning through maximizing student learning and success." Inherent in this aspiration and the first objective in this major goal is the development of a comprehensive system of assessment. Finally, our System's Appraisal Feedback report received in October 2009 established an imperative that we "select measures of performance, collect appropriate evidence, analyze and communicate results and make improvements where needed."

3: Organizational Areas Affected

- A:** Academic Affairs
Student Affairs
Fulltime and Adjunct Faculty
Instructional Supervisors
Institutional Effectiveness

4: Key Organizational Process(es)

- A:** College-wide systematic approach to assessment and closing the feedback loop on accountability and continuous improvement. Greater focus on direct measures of student learning and use of assessment data in curriculum decision-making.

5: Project Time Frame Rationale

- A:** While this project represents a long term endeavor, there are three primary reasons for the 36 month duration of this version. First is the amount of time necessary to effectively analyze the respective data sources, plan and execute change, measure effectiveness and incorporate recommendations into the next cycle. Second is the need to cascade this process out over seven campuses and a critical mass of programs and people in order to create a culture change. Finally, this will create a sustained focus through our next Systems Appraisal scheduled for 2012-13.

Year One:

- Familiarize campus stakeholder groups with the CMC assessment plan

- Train faculty and staff on the use of TaskStream accountability management system
- May 2010 at the two day professional development workshop on assessment faculty and staff will identify assessment goals for 2010/11 academic year. Academic disciplines will identify two core courses to assess and two student learning outcomes per course with appropriate measurements. Four CMC Signature Learning Outcomes will be defined for institutional level assessments that are directly linked to the CCLA
- July 2010 provide TaskStream assessment workspaces for all discipline groups and student affairs programs identified as participants in the assessment project
- Discipline groups (departments) and student affairs units will review assessment instruments, measures and related data
- Conduct systematic college wide assessment training for all faculty and student affairs professionals as well as additional TaskStream training as needed
- Conduct introductory data analysis sessions for faculty and staff participants
- Use appropriate assessment measures at the institutional, program, and course level; analyze formative and summative assessment data
- Document and plan for continuous improvement cycle incorporating lessons learned
- Conduct reflection sessions to assess results and incorporate findings into next iteration during the May 2011 faculty/staff in-service days
- Close the feedback loop
- Hire a Director of Assessment

Year Two:

- Update measures used for institutional, program, and course level assessment and analyze findings
- Incorporate recommendations into current programs and planning new programs
- Continue assessment training for faculty and staff as needed
- Continue TaskStream training for faculty and staff as needed
- Use appropriate assessment measures; analyze formative and summative assessment data
- Discipline groups (departments) and student affairs units review completed continuous improvement documentation from previous year's assessment cycle
- Conduct reflection sessions for new and existing programs during the May 2012 faculty in-service days
- Integrate findings into next iterations of the assessment cycle
- Close the feedback loop

Year Three:

- Expand use of TaskStream to other CMC units
- Update measures used for institutional, program, and course level assessment and analyze findings
- Incorporate recommendations into current programs and planning new programs
- Continue assessment training for faculty and staff as needed
- Continue TaskStream training for faculty and staff as needed
- Use appropriate assessment measures; analyze formative and summative assessment data
- Discipline groups (departments) and student affairs units review completed continuous improvement documentation from previous year's assessment cycle
- Conduct reflection sessions for new and existing programs during the May 2013 faculty in-service days
- Integrate findings into next iterations of the assessment cycle

6: Project Success Monitoring

- A:** Incremental milestones will be established for the annual activities outlined above and progress will be monitored by the college Assessment Committee and the Director of Assessment using the outcome measures outlined in section "I".

7: Project Outcome Measures

- A:** Indicators of success will include: numbers of persons trained in utilizing assessment system and data, number of disciplines utilizing success and engagement measures, number of continuous improvement cycles completed and improvements in student success as measured by the CCLA and through Taskstream.

1: Project Accomplishments and Status

- A:
1. Since piloting assessment for 20 courses during the 2009-10 school year, faculty increased assessed courses from 58 in 2011-12 to 86 for 2012-13 and are in the planning process to increase the number of assessed courses to 122 across the curriculum for 2013-14.
 2. The Assessment Committee assumed the work of using CMC's Taskstream rubric for workspace review with key elements of mission, Signature Learning Outcomes, Curriculum Map, Assessment Plan, and Assessment Findings, providing feedback to faculty on their assessment progress in 2013.
 3. Academic Assessment continues to fit holistically with the Strategic Plan.
 4. Assessment in the bachelor degree programs (Bachelor of Science in Business Administration [BSBA] and a Bachelor of Arts in Sustainability Studies [BASS]) continues to work on common assessments/rubrics and delivery of common curricular material, increasing the number of courses assessed from 26 courses to 54 courses and closing the loop.
 5. The Trade Adjustment Assistance Energy grant is in the final stages of the grant cycle. The project enhanced training for employment in the energy sector, strengthened the relationship between community colleges and the workforce system, and provided systemic reforms to the statewide delivery of developmental education, a system that is currently under redevelopment by the state.
 6. The initial planning stages of the shortened General Education AQIP Project, which utilizes the AAC&U [General Education: A Self-Study Guide for Review & Assessment](#), are complete through 4 of the 8 steps in the process. During this phase of the project, General Education course syllabi were collected, analyzed, and archived to determine college consistency with the CMC Course Template and level of involvement with the five areas of importance identified by the state of Colorado (Critical & Creative Thinking, Written & Oral Communication, Quantitative Literacy, Information Literacy and Technological Literacy). The college will be closing this project but will continue the final steps of this over the next three years (2013-16) to finish the last 4 steps, as recommended by authors of the above document (Step 5 – Evaluate pedagogical methods; Step 6 – Plan Assessment; Step 7 - Implement changes based upon results; Step 8 – Plan for sustainability).
 7. CMC's Assessment Committee resides as a subcommittee within the Curriculum Advisory Committee, with greater faculty representation in the membership. More faculty participants create a stronger commitment to the assessment process, with Faculty having identified three goals for the committee and putting forth two recommendations to strengthen the planned General Education Assessment.

2: Institution Involvement

- A:
1. Faculty and staff throughout the institution work together to ensure smooth processes are in place. Discipline Coordinators (Faculty who take leadership of assessment in their discipline) oversee the assessment process and are supported by Instructional Chairs, who oversee the faculty.
 2. CMC faculty drive assessment efforts with 40 faculty discipline coordinators, or "faculty leads," working for their specific disciplines. This academic year saw the addition of six new Coordinators or Lead Faculty who will be important in moving assessment out to more courses institution-wide.
 3. Institutional Research/Institutional Effectiveness (IR/IE) offer a collaborative support role this year, working closely with the Office of Assessment in gathering and analyzing essential direct and indirect information. As CMC uses this information to make improvements and changes, IR/IE will work with the President and Board of Trustees to guide long-term strategic planning.
 4. As CMC has embedded the "culture of assessment" as part of the curriculum, the Assessment Committee will implement the "Assuring Quality: An Institutional Self-Assessment Tool for Excellent Practice in Student Learning Outcomes Assessment," where everyone "owns" and becomes invested in a piece of the assessment picture. The Assessment Committee members will be instrumental in working with other faculty, staff, and administrators to facilitate the distribution of surveys and collection of data for this project throughout AY 2013-14.

3: Next Steps

- A:
1. The Assessment Committee faculty and staff members identified improvement possibilities in a collection of course syllabi. Instructional Chairs were tasked with taking action to improve the system of collecting course syllabi and to

ensure faculty were adhering to the methods and required information (i.e., course outcomes, grade plan, contact information, course content plan, etc.) agreed upon in the syllabi template. Proposed minor changes to CMC's Syllabus Template document will be discussed at the September 2013 Curriculum Advisory Committee meeting. Changes will include further clarification of the five state common core standards for General Education and the need to list which competencies the course being taught addresses.

2. As the AQIP Action Project - General Education pre-planning phase is finished (June 2013), action will be taken during the coming year to organize assessment of the five mentioned criteria (Critical & Creative Thinking, Written & Oral Communication, Quantitative Literacy, Information Literacy and Technological Literacy). The college will also be utilizing current direct assessment information from the CCLA, CLA, and local assessments to guide us toward the year of assessing General Education across the curriculum (2014-15). The third year of the assessment cycle (2015-16) will contain organizing and analyzing assessment data, identifying and planning for needed improvements, and planning for sustainability. Also in this third year, a cycle for assessing General Education courses at CMC will be developed by faculty, staff, and administrators.
3. The Assessment Committee is aware of the importance of having students involved in the process. As this project continues through this year with the planning phase of the next large three-year project, we plan to implement several strategies aimed at capturing the student voice through specific questions on the I.D.E.A. as it relates to assessment (e.g., do students think assessments are relevant and worthwhile, are faculty meeting the learning goals of the courses, favorite or memorable assessments that worked or that didn't work, etc.).
4. Since the inception of the four-year bachelor's degree, the college has become a regionally recognized entity and expert in sustainability. As a leader in the field of sustainability, college leadership wishes to understand the systematic effects across students and community members participating in this program. Also, in conjunction with General Education assessment, the Director of Assessment, faculty, staff, and the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs will work with IR/IE to assess the effects of sustainability topics through both direct and indirect measures and create a cycle of assessment for sustainability topics.
5. IR/IE are redesigning their schedule of national survey data gathering and publicized assessment efforts college-wide to align information collection and timing with the beginning and ending of new AQIP Action Projects. This realignment will serve to provide the much needed concrete 'before and after' data to ensure a sustainable continuous improvement system. CCLA will be a given in a 4 year cycle (fall 2012, fall 2016, etc.), as would CLA (spring 2013, spring 2017, etc.). SENSE is planned for fall 2014 and possibly fall 2017, with CCSSE administered in spring 2014 and spring 2017. Assessment information will be posted on the external IR Web pages and in the internal IR portal for employees to review.

4: Resulting Effective Practices

- A:**
1. Assessment continuously remains an AQIP project, with only a change in focus, keeping the momentum going for the institution and faculty.
 2. Assessment work continues to be in the faculty promotion criteria. The Faculty Evaluation rubric was revised this year to include faculty participation in assessment. This resulted in increasing the importance of faculty involvement in assessment and directly relates assessment to faculty evaluation and promotion.
 3. Training through faculty professional development opportunities and increased use of recorded information on the Assessment Website. Faculty members of the Assessment Committee, along with the Director of Assessment, have created mandatory assessment training for faculty participating in the committee. As each member fills their two-year commitment to the committee, they are cycled off and a new member from CAC joins, and training is repeated.
 4. Faculty teaching General Education courses will be involved in working on the collection of assessment information for the General Education AQIP Project, documenting results and needed improvement within CMC's TaskStream space. Instructional Chairs will remind faculty of the importance of following the standardized syllabus template.

5: Project Challenges

- A:**
1. The college has creatively involved adjunct faculty in more assessment efforts college-wide, with the creation of the A-Train (a mandatory, self-paced informational training module of what is expected of CMC's adjuncts, designed with their input). Under the guidance of the Director of Assessment with data provided by IR/IE, more detailed assessment spreadsheets have been provided to Discipline Coordinators and Faculty Leads, which has led to a more organized and systematic assessment process for all faculty. Instructional Chairs have been trained in the assessment process and tasked with the responsibility of assuring adjuncts participate in all assessment activities.
 2. Changing the focus of the AQIP project to General Education allowed the college to utilize the large quantity of assessment

data currently collected. Much of this secondary data and indirect measures are beneficial for benchmarking and defining continuous improvement.

3. Contact and communication with all faculty documenting the importance of the assessment process has expanded and emphasized the importance of reporting requirements. Continuous improvement efforts include more trainings, both virtual and in-person, which has led to greater accountability and closing the loop.
4. The new BA Sustainability Degree and the BS in Business Administration continue to be very popular, and course offerings are growing. With the proposal of three new bachelor degrees, the challenge will be to continue closely monitoring all new course proposals to safeguard the continued use of measurable and appropriately written student learning outcomes and ensuring that assessment and quality improvement continue to happen.
5. Embedding assessment in developmental education courses continues to be a challenge. Due to a state-wide mandated reorganization of developmental education courses, newly effective this academic year, faculty are aware of the importance of using common assessment tools, common rubrics, and quality improvements within all courses in the program. Implementation of the ASSET test is planned for the current academic year to assist in this process.

Update Review

1: Project Accomplishments and Status

- A:** The college is to be commended on the progress and accomplishments toward this project. Broad-based institutional change can be challenging but the outcome is an improved learning environment. Identification and use of the AAC&U guide is a logical and appropriate strategy, and planning for 2013-16 implementation of Steps 5-8 is a well-designed strategy for CMC. As part of a systematic review it would be beneficial to determine if there are differences in adoption of the project within or among the seven campuses within CMC. That review will be a critical aspect of continued adjustment within a quality PDSA cycle of continuous improvement. The report specifies the efforts placed on the CTE programs and the new bachelor's degrees and now the focus of general education, but does not indicate if specific focus of efforts is needed at any of the individual campus sites.

2: Institution Involvement

- A:** CMC has clearly addressed recommendations during the AQIP process and expanded the involvement of constituents including students and faculty. The report indicates there remains some faculty who are hesitant to support the initiative, which is typical, and the college is encouraged to recognize that systemic change is long-term and, therefore, requires continual reinforcement. The administration is clearly supportive of the achievements, and faculty and student involvement is evident.

The college should heed closely a previous recommendation to determine the impact of numerous assessment instruments. The initial project indicated the use of CCLA while a recent report indicates the college has added 4-5 additional instruments to the project and no indication is provided as to the justification of those additional instruments. The use of various instruments may be justified, but too often organizations change instruments to justify practices rather than utilizing an appropriate instrument to obtain clarifying data which can be used for organizational change (i.e. analysis paralysis). If sufficient justification exists for the various instruments, CMC is encouraged to clarify that information with constituents (students, faculty, staff, and public) in order to become vested in the initiative.

3: Next Steps

- A:** CMC has moved effectively to an awareness, understanding, and appreciation for assessment. The college is now facing the challenge of culturally adopting assessment as the norm for professional expectations and routine "check-up" for student learning. The project team recognizes that as the challenge, and further recognizes the need to prioritize those "next steps" which have been identified.

CMC has made significant progress in a rather short period of time especially when considering changes in senior leadership, addition of bachelor's degrees, external expectations (state outcomes), fiscal restraints, and seven campus sites. With that level of accomplishment the team could easily rest on its accomplishments; however, the team recognizes the need to focus on continuation of cultural adoption of assessment of learning.

4: Resulting Effective Practices

- A: It is evident, from the report, that the college leadership and project team recognize the importance of assessment as a part of the culture of CMC. Substantial efforts have been noted regarding the focus of adopting that culture, and progress is also noted.

CMC may consider, as part of a continuous improvement PDSA cycle, practices initiated at peer institutions particularly within Colorado. The college should be proud of its accomplishments toward institutionalizing assessment and can share those accomplishments as well as to learn from other colleges for the fine tuning of practices. CMC can also use the opportunity to promote CMC as a high performing institution to those who may be seeking new employment opportunities, as well as to parents/families/advisors of prospective students.

5: Project Challenges

- A: The inclusion of adjunct faculty is necessary and CMC is commended for recognizing that need. Such a practice helps the college in sustaining faculty involvement as faculty positions change due to retirements, relocations, and resignations. Adjunct faculty who have been involved in this project and implementation of assessment will continue to support this as part of the college culture. The college recognizes the issues related to additional bachelor's degrees and the importance of continued assessment of student learning outcomes. This is an indication of awareness that assessment is an inherent aspect of the college's operations and not simply a single aspect of certain programs or disciplines.

The report indicates that CMC is establishing a new focus on the implementation of assessment within the developmental course aspect of the college. This is another indicator that the college has embraced assessment as a complete aspect of the college culture. However, the report does not indicate if ASSET is a new and additional assessment instrument or if ASSET is currently utilized for new student academic assessment. The team should be aware of the challenges of adding another instrument to the assessment process.

The college has truly made remarkable progress in addressing a difficult initiative.

Project Outcome

1: REASON FOR COMPLETION

- A: The action project "Creating an Effective Assessment Accountability System for Institutional Program and Course Level Assessment" was first opened on 5/1/2010, focusing on integration of the TaskStreamAMS assessment collection tool. Since that time, there have been five iterations of this project each with a different focus; all under the umbrella of the original project. Versions include:

- Version 1 – Creating a college-wide systematic approach to assessment and closing the feedback loop integrating TaskStreamAMS. 3 – year project (Updated 9/14/2010)
- Version 2 – Same project, end of year 1 (Updated 9/29/2011)
- Version 3 – Submitted one year planning project for General Education (Updated 9/28/2012)
- Version 4 – Submitted 3 year plan for comprehensive systematic General Education assessment (Updated 8-29-2013)
- Version 5 – End of year 4 (Last modified 4-22-2014)

All tasks have been completed and are fully integrated into the academic assessment process college wide.

2: SUCCESS FACTORS

- A: TaskStream continues to be the assessment information collection software. The number of faculty participating in assessment has increased over the life of this project. Having a standardized method incorporated into a localized collection tool has aided faculty with the creation and sharing of assessment plans, posting results and closing the loop. The advertised yearly TaskStream training calendar and increased participation in training has improved faculty's comfort level when working with this robust software. This year the college plans to further utilize an additional aspect of the TaskStream tool called the Learning Assessment Tool (LAT); a new dimension in the collection of assessment information coming directly from the students.

CMC's new comprehensive Strategic Plan institutionalizes assessment under Goal B: Teaching and Learning; one of five broad goals over the next 4 years.

The college continues to successfully utilize the Community College Learning Assessment (CCLA) as an institutional measure for

Critical Thinking, Problem Solving, Analytic Thinking and Writing across the 2-year curriculum. Additionally, CMC has committed to the implementation of the College Learning Assessment (CLA), a sister tool measuring students as they near the end of their 4-year program.

3: UNSUCCESSFUL FACTORS

- A:** There are some full-time and part-time faculty who have not fully engaged with the academic assessment process. The college respects and supports the faculty's educational freedom in teaching content and working with students in a learning environment. However, remaining clear about the "One College" approach to common assessments and rubrics and the use of TaskStream to report assessment plans and results is important to maintain the integrity of the academic assessment process. While training is inclusive and happens at every location, college leadership realizes that a change in CMC structure will be needed to provide faculty with more oversight and assessment on-boarding activities at each location.