Assessment Committee: 2013 – 2014 Year-End Report

SUMMER 2013

Master Syllabus Review
During the summer, I worked extensively with the chairperson of CAS, Zach Petrea, to learn more about the typical processes of AC and CAS. When learning about the review process for new and revised master syllabi, I was concerned that there were no guidelines for AC members to follow when evaluating syllabi. I created a goal of establishing clear guidelines for syllabus reviewers.

Establishing an Identity for the AC
Because the differences between AC and CAS are often not clear to faculty, I thought it was important for the AC to establish an identity separate from CAS. One way to establish an identity would be to have the AC syllabus reviewers specialize and focus on specific sections of master syllabi that relate to assessment. Zach agreed to the proposed focus, and would establish the non-assessment sections of the master syllabus as the focus for CAS. Each syllabus is now reviewed by three AC members and three CAS members. We felt that this approach would 1) reduce the workload for syllabus reviewers, 2) produce consistency in feedback, and 3) result in higher quality feedback to syllabus developers.

The decision to improve the master syllabus review process and create a specific focus on assessment would drive much of the work and discussions that took place among the AC during the fall semester.

Training
Zach and I planned a combined training session for AC and CAS for the start of the fall semester. We wanted the committee members to come together to represent the working relationship between the two committees, and then break out into separate training sessions that introduced the new focus for syllabus review for each committee.

SharePoint
Since CAS was using SharePoint almost exclusively for storing documents and reviewing master syllabi, I decided that AC would also build resources in its own SharePoint site. The site was already created, but was not very functional. I added documents, resources, external assessment links, and reorganized content sections. All master documents and resources are now located in SharePoint.

Critical Thinking 2 Assessment Project
Part of the college-wide assessment plan, which was developed at the Higher Learning Commission’s assessment conference earlier in the year, included a goal to assess General Education Outcomes across disciplines. It was decided that the Gen Ed Outcomes with the highest frequency across disciplines would become the focus of this project. Critical Thinking 2 was selected as the first outcome for this project, which would last for one year.

During the fall and spring semesters, faculty teaching a course with the Critical Thinking 2 General Education Outcome (now Essential Competency) will complete an assessment form which includes data collection for student achievement of the outcome. I revised the traditional assessment form and added the data collection page, which Zach and I developed together. We
also created a CT2 assessment rubric that could be used to determine the validity of CT2 assessment tools.

FALL 2013

AC/CAS Combined Training
Prior to the start of the fall semester, Zach and I held training for AC and CAS members. The first half hour was a combined training session with both committee members. We reviewed the responsibilities of each committee and announced the changes to the master syllabus review process, in which AC and CAS would focus on different parts of the master syllabus.

Critical Thinking 2 Assessment Project
The Critical Thinking 2 (CT2) assessment project was announced at the Fall 2013 Best Practices Kick-Off. In addition, I created a document that explained the project and distributed it to all deans, chairs, and faculty.

Deb Gentry and I provided numerous training sessions throughout the fall semester in which we discussed what the CT2 outcome meant and how it could be assessed in the context of each attendee’s course. We also provided guidance on completion of the Traffic Light Assessment form, which is the form we will use to collect student achievement data for CT2.

I also created a podcast that could be used in place of a face-to-face training session. The podcast is an audio description of the project with visual images of the documents involved. It was accessible from the AC SharePoint site.

Instructors teaching a course with the CT2 outcome during the fall or spring semester were asked to complete an assessment form in which they describe the instructional activity and method of assessment they used for assessment of CT2. They also completed a data document in which they list the number of students who demonstrated CT2 thinking qualities at various levels of achievement. During the summer of 2014, a team of instructors will examine the forms to determine if each assessment method provided a valid measure of CT2. Student achievement data from valid assessments will be compiled and analyzed to determine how well students are achieving the CT2 thinking qualities across disciplines. Results will be shared during a presentation at the Fall 2014 Best Practices Kick-Off.

Master Syllabus Template Revisions
Sarah Diel-Hunt, Debra Gentry, and I had all seen situations in which instructors struggled to figure out a way to assess a General Education Outcome in the context of a course they were teaching. One of the reasons for this could be due to the fact that the General Education Outcomes and course outcomes are listed separately in the master syllabus. The AC discussed this issue and determined that those kinds of problems could be reduced if the two types of outcomes were directly linked in the master syllabus. Linking the outcomes would also fit well with the philosophy that the General Education Outcomes being assessed in a course should be those which are naturally being assessed in the context of the course learning outcomes.

While providing a direct link between the two types of outcomes might seem prescriptive, the AC was clear in its discussions that instructors could assess the General Education Outcomes in the context of any course outcomes or course material. The link would simply be a guide or suggestion for a “logical” way to assess the General Education Outcomes. The linkage would not
only be helpful for someone teaching the course for the first time, but would also help to establish the General Education Outcomes as an important part of faculty assessment responsibilities.

After much discussion of the pros and cons, the AC unanimously passed an action item that requires all new and revised master syllabi to provide a specific link between a General Education Outcome and an associated course learning outcome. This went into effect at the start of the Spring 2014 semester. In addition, rather than simply listing the abbreviations for the General Education Outcomes in the master syllabus, it is now required that the full outcome statement must appear in the master syllabus so instructors will not have to look up the outcome in a separate document.

**Name Change: Essential Competencies**
There had been discussions during AC meetings about the title of General Education Outcomes being somewhat misrepresented. Because we think of the associated thinking qualities and skills sets as important across all courses, the title could imply that assessment of the outcomes was relevant only to General Education Courses. Much discussion took place during AC meetings, with various alternative titles being considered, before the AC voted to adopt the term Essential Competencies as a replacement for General Education Outcomes. The change officially went into effect at the start of the Spring 2014 semester.

**Guidelines for Master Syllabus Review**
To improve accuracy and consistency of comments in the syllabus review process, I created a set of guidelines for syllabus reviewers. The guidelines establish standards for acceptable components of the master syllabus that the AC members will examine and provide feedback on when conducting master syllabus reviews. The guidelines were reviewed and revised based on feedback from AC members. The guidelines will be used starting with the Spring 2014 semester.

Since the guidelines are fairly extensive, I also created a brief version of the guidelines that could be used once the members become familiar with the details of the original guidelines.

Since the new AC focus and guidelines have been in place, I have received several positive comments from instructors regarding the higher quality feedback they have received on their master syllabi.

**AC/CAS Newsletter**
AC and CAS published a combined newsletter during the fall semester and again during the spring semester. The newsletters describe current projects of each committee, changes that faculty need to be aware of, and resources related to assessment.

**SPRING 2014**

**CT2 Consultations**
Debra Gentry and I offered one-on-one consultations for CT2 assessment and form completion.

**Essential Competencies Linked to Bloom’s Cognitive Domain**
Most categories of the Essential Competencies are leveled from simpler cognitive tasks to more complex tasks. The master document that contains the Essential Competencies includes a list of key words associated with the Cognitive Domain of Bloom’s Taxonomy. To clarify the link
between the leveling of the Essential Competencies and Bloom’s Taxonomy, a column was added to the master document that includes the levels of the taxonomy that relate to each Essential Competency statement.

**Essential Competencies Discussions**
Since the AC has provided greater focus on learning outcomes, some AC members have noticed that some of the Essential Competencies are very similar. This is not a new revelation, but rather a topic that has arisen several times over the years. In particular, some competencies in the category of Critical Thinking are very similar to those in Problem Solving.

The AC decided to revisit this issue next year. At that time, a thorough examination of the outcomes will take place and recommendations for changes will be considered. The AC will also consider whether or not it would be good to include additional categories of competencies.

**CT2 Assessment Project Team**
The team of CT2 Assessment Form reviewers has been established. Nick Schmitt, Paul Folger, Nikki Burrmann, Anne Colloton, and Zach Petrea make up the group that will review the forms and analyze student achievement data over the summer. The group met to develop a spreadsheet for data collection, criteria for assessment tool validity, and a process by which the forms will be split up. We will use SharePoint to store the forms and collect the data on the shared spreadsheet.

**New Members**
Department leaders are responsible for holding elections for new AC members to replace those whose terms expired at the end of the Spring 2014 semester. I contacted all relevant department leaders in April to inform them of the vacancies that need to be filled.

**GENERAL ITEMS**

I wasn’t sure what to expect during my first year as Chairperson of the AC. Zach Petrea was a terrific help to me, particularly during the summer and fall semesters. Sarah Diel-Hunt provided much direction throughout the year, and her input on discussions items during AC meetings was extremely beneficial to the committee.

Upon meeting with the AC members at the start of the fall semester, I was struck by their excitement about establishing a clear identity for the AC and the renewed focus on the master syllabus review process. Throughout the entire year the members were engaged in meaningful discussions about all kinds of assessment issues. Being Chair of the AC could potentially have been a very difficult task if not for the great support and work of Zach, Sarah, and the AC members.

As Deb Gentry and I completed CT2 training sessions during the fall semester, it become clear to me that there is a need for more training on basic student learning assessment practices. It’s difficult to tell where we are overall as a college when it comes to the quality of assessment, but there is clearly some need for this training.

**GOALS FOR NEXT YEAR**
1. Begin co-curriculum mapping of ECs
2. Establish changes to discipline-wide assessment process
3. Provide training for Diversity 3 assessment across disciplines
4. Provide several training sessions to cover the basics of assessing student learning
5. Examine quality of EC statements and consider additional categories
6. Develop guidelines for writing learning outcomes and linking course outcomes with ECs. This document will be available to anyone creating or revising a master syllabus.
7. Update the AC webpage.
8. Complete other assessment-related tasks as needed.