Texas A&M University-Texarkana

Core Curriculum Assessment *Abbreviated Report*


July 25th, 2015
Overview of Assessment Purpose and Processes

Purpose

The purpose of this year’s Core Curriculum assessment process was to assess two of the six Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board’s (THECB) Core Objectives: Critical Thinking and Communication. Critical Thinking includes creative thinking, innovation, inquiry, evaluation, and synthesis of information. Communication includes effective development, interpretation, and expression of ideas through written, oral, and visual communication.

Processes

Collection of Student Artifacts

Faculty were instructed to submit electronic copies of all Core Objective-relevant student artifacts from all sections of all Core Curriculum courses taught during the Fall 2014 and Spring 2015 semesters. Flash drives were delivered to the Dean of each college so that each flash drive could be distributed to each department offering courses in the Core Curriculum.

Sampling of Student Artifacts

Submissions from Fall 2014 and Spring 2015 were combined into one pool to collect random samples of student work. 308 total student artifacts were randomly selected from these submissions to be included in Core Curriculum assessment.

Review of Student Artifacts

Faculty review panels met on Tuesday, May 19th, 2015, and on Wednesday, May 20th, 2015, to review student artifacts submitted for Critical Thinking assessment and Communication assessment, respectively. Each review panel session began with an introduction to the LEAP VALUE rubrics and included norming-focused exercises and discussion.

Following the completion of each LEAP VALUE rubric norming session, faculty provided completed reviews of all student artifacts in each Foundation Component Area that they reviewed. Student artifacts from each Foundation Component Area were reviewed by two faculty members. Ratings provided by faculty pairs demonstrated acceptable inter-rater reliability on both response distance-based and response pattern-based measures.

Student Performance Expectations

A Foundation Component Area met the acceptable student performance standard if the Foundation Component Area received an average score of 2 (Milestone) or higher on all rubric criteria associated with a Core objective.

A Foundation Component Area met the ideal student performance standard if (1) the Foundation Component Area received an average score of 2 (Milestone) or higher on all rubric criteria associated with a Core objective; and (2) at least 75% percent of students received a score of 2 (Milestone) or higher on all rubric criteria associated with a Core objective.
Overview Results for Texas A&M University-Texarkana

Critical Thinking Results

Overall, Texas A&M-Texarkana did not meet the acceptable standard on any of the five Critical Thinking LEAP VALUE rubric student performance criteria.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acceptable Student Performance Standard</th>
<th>Explanation of Issues</th>
<th>Evidence</th>
<th>Influence of Context and Assumptions</th>
<th>Student's Position</th>
<th>Conclusions and Related Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td>1.76</td>
<td>1.88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Communication Results

Written Communication

Overall, Texas A&M University-Texarkana: (1) met the ideal student performance standard on Control of Syntax and Mechanics; (2) met the acceptable standard on Context and Purpose for Writing, Content Development, and Genre and Disciplinary Conventions; and (3) did not meet the acceptable standard on Sources and Evidence on the Written Communication LEAP VALUE rubric.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acceptable Student Performance Standard</th>
<th>Context of and Purpose for Writing</th>
<th>Content Development</th>
<th>Genre and Disciplinary Conventions</th>
<th>Sources and Evidence</th>
<th>Control of Syntax and Mechanics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>2.21</td>
<td>2.17</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td>2.29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Oral Communication

Overall, Texas A&M-Texarkana met the ideal student performance standard on all Oral Communication LEAP VALUE rubric student performance criteria.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acceptable Student Performance Standard</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Delivery</th>
<th>Supporting Material</th>
<th>Central Message</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>2.73</td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>2.85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion and Actions for Improvement for Texas A&M University-Texarkana

Discussion

General Discussion

Although the focus of Core Curriculum assessment is on student’s demonstrated competencies, assessment of these competencies often reveals areas for improvement for the assessment process itself.

First, the representativeness of the student sample could be greatly improved by increasing the student artifact submission rate. This low submission rate was at least partially due to difficulties associated with multiple faculty trying to coordinate student artifact submissions through a shared department flash drive.

Second, although faculty review panel members were often able to infer what the assignment parameters and expectations were for some of the student artifacts, this was not the case for all student artifacts. This issue could be resolved by making it clear that assignment instructions and prompts for all student artifacts should be submitted along with those artifacts.

Third, although THECB specifies that students should express communication through Written, Oral, and Visual mediums, only the Written and Oral mediums are represented in this report. This issue can be remedied by having the Academic Assessment Committee create, revise, and finalize a visual aid rubric criterion that can be used in the next faculty review panel assessing communication.

Finally, student artifacts submitted for dual-objective assessment (e.g., assessing Critical Thinking and Communication using the same set of student artifacts) ranged from being highly suitable for this purpose to lacking “fit” for this purpose. The suitability of student artifacts submitted for Core Curriculum assessment could be improved by improving understanding of the Core Curriculum Objectives and the rubrics used to assess these Core Objectives.

Critical Thinking Discussion

Critical Thinking results suggest areas for improvement per each Critical Thinking LEAP VALUE rubric student performance criterion:

1) Explanation of Issues. Students should be challenged to demonstrate their understanding of an issue rather than merely acknowledging or identifying the issue.
2) Evidence. Students should be encouraged to use sources, and to interpret, evaluate, and synthesize sources. Students should demonstrate that they are able to utilize sources to question the viewpoints of experts.
3) Influence of Context and Assumptions. Students should be encouraged to be aware of their own assumptions as well as others’ assumptions when presenting a position. Students need to be provided with opportunities become aware of their own assumptions and of other assumptions, and to question these assumptions.
4) Student’s Position (Perspective, Thesis/Hypothesis). Student should consider and present both the complexities of an issue and the limitations of the Student’s Position. This discussion should synthesize others’ points of view within the Student’s Position. Students need to be provided with opportunities to explore, consider, and articulate different sides of an issue.
5) **Conclusions and Related Outcomes (Implications and Consequences).** Students should produce logical, informed evaluations of the implications and consequences associated with the issue(s) and position that have been discussed. Students should be encouraged to consistently tie conclusions to the information they present, and to highlight the implications and consequences of these conclusions.

**Communication Discussion**

Written communication results suggest that faculty should be encouraged to maintain student performance excellence on Control of Syntax and Mechanics, and to maintain or even increase student performance on Context and Purpose for Writing, Content Development, and Genre and Disciplinary Conventions. Furthermore, these results suggested room for improvement on one Written Communication LEAP VALUE rubric criterion:

1) **Sources and Evidence.** Students should always be encouraged to use sources, and to demonstrate their ability to select high quality, credible, and relevant sources for the purpose of conveying appropriate and fully developed ideas. Furthermore, Core Curriculum assessment faculty review panel members should be provided with enough information so that they, too, understand what is or is not considered to be a “source” within each discipline.

Oral communication results revealed that the ideal student performance standard was met on all five student performance criteria. Faculty should be encouraged to continue to maintain student performance excellence on all five Oral Communication LEAP VALUE rubric student performance criteria.

**Actions for Improvement**

**General Actions for Improvement**

The following actions will be taken to improve the general assessment process:

1) The Academic Assessment Coordinator will disseminate a 2015-2016 assessment calendar to the college Deans by early August 2015. This calendar will contain information on all academic assessment-related expectations, details, and deadlines.

2) The protocol for submitting student artifacts will be modified; faculty will submit copies of student artifacts through an online interface (e.g., Dropbox) rather than through flash drives. Instructional guides and/or training sessions will be provided for faculty who do not have experience with the online interface.

3) Faculty will be provided with a Student Artifact Checklist Form in which the instructions and prompts for all student artifacts will be included as a required Core Curriculum assessment item on a checklist. When completing the Student Artifact Checklist Form, faculty will also be asked: (1) to identify which student artifacts are being submitted to be assessed on which Core Objective; and (2) to describe what discipline-related sources or evidence students would have used to complete each assignment.

4) The 2015-2016 academic assessment calendar will highlight the requirement to complete the Student Artifact Checklist Form (and, ergo, to submit the instructions and prompts for all student artifacts). The University Assessment website will also be revised so that the Student Artifact Checklist Form is available for download from that site. Copies will also be provided within the online interface.
5) Faculty will be provided with copies of rubrics they can reference when designing their student artifacts.

**Critical Thinking and Communication Actions for Improvement**

Identification of the pedagogical and practical choices that should be made to improve students’ Critical Thinking competencies and Communication competencies is, and should be, the result of a faculty-driven decision-making process. To facilitate this process, the following actions will be taken:

1) The Associate Provost and Academic Assessment Coordinator will collaborate with the Academic Assessment Committee to identify faculty development opportunities and resources focused on Critical Thinking and Communication.

2) The Associate Provost, Academic Assessment Coordinator, and faculty will collaborate with the Library Director and other library personnel to identify, develop, and/or collect resources on information literacy. Such resources will be made available to both faculty and to students.

3) The Associate Provost and Academic Assessment Coordinator will collaborate with the Academic Assessment Committee to facilitate Foundation Component Area-Level discussions and recommendations to improve students’ Critical Thinking competencies and Communication competencies.

4) Faculty within each Foundation Component Area will be provided with the Academic Assessment Committee’s recommendations. By December 2015, faculty will provide the Academic Assessment Coordinator with information on the actions that were taken to improve students’ Critical Thinking competencies and Communication competencies.

**Conclusions**

Results suggest that students enrolled in Core Curriculum courses at Texas A&M University-Texarkana excel on some competencies (Oral Communication and some components of Written Communication) and have room to improve on other competencies (some components of Written Communication and Critical Thinking). Future planning intended to address the needs of students shall include—but will not be limited to—the recommendations and plans proposed in this report. For additional information on the Texas A&M University-Texarkana results and to access results specific to each Core Curriculum Foundation Component Area, please see the complete report posted on the University Assessment Data Sources webpage.