

Creating a Culture of Assessment

Finding: Majority of Institutions Have Common Learning Outcomes

- According to a study by Hart Research Associates - members of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU), 78% of participating institutions have a common set of learning outcomes for undergraduates. The skills most commonly assessed are writing, critical thinking, quantitative reasoning, and oral communication.
- Approximately 72% of member institutions assess learning outcomes across the curriculum, and an additional one in four (24%) are planning to incorporate this type of assessment. More institutions assess at the department level (68%) than the general education level (52%).
- AACU member institutions use varied approaches and tools for assessment - 36% use assessments based on a sample of students, 24% use departmental assessments for evidence of general education outcomes, and 17% use assessments that all students complete.

Implications: The strategies used by other institutions to assess student learning outcomes are similar to many of the strategies currently in place at EMCC, and also serve as a model for future implementation. As the assessment of student learning outcomes becomes increasingly important, an understanding of how other institutions assess learning outcomes may also be of greater value.

Finding: Better Forms of Student Learning Assessment Needed

- A recent report by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching found that to improve the success rates of students who are unprepared for college-level work, community colleges must develop enhanced forms of student learning assessment, analyze the data to discover best teaching practices, and get faculty members more involved in the assessment process.

Implications: Involving faculty in the assessment of learning outcomes is key to the overall success of the process. Faculty can provide meaningful insight into the development of value-added tests, common exams across course sections, and other forms of student learning assessment.

Finding: Community College Learning Assessment Measures Institutions Value Added

- The Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) uses new assessment instruments that present complex realistic problems or performance tasks. The institution- and not the student- is the primary unit of analysis. The performance tasks require students to analyze complex material and to construct written responses that demonstrate their abilities to think critically, reason analytically, and communicate clearly. The assessment is designed to measure an institution's contribution, or value added, to the development of these competencies, including the effects of changes to curriculum and instructional methods.

Implications: Assessments, such as the CLA, represent the progress made in assessing student learning outcomes and provide some additional strategies to employ as EMCC continues to assess the degree to which students are learning.

Finding:**Congress Shows Colleges they're not off the Hook on Accountability**

- The Commission on the Future of Higher Education recommended that colleges measure and report student-learning outcomes. Congress has prepared legislation packed with new requirements for colleges to document their performance. Agenda items in the reauthorize Higher Education Act will double colleges' reporting requirement including more information on graduation rates, grant aid, and perhaps most significantly – the success of their teacher-training programs. Under the new law, colleges with teacher-training programs will be required to set “quantifiable goals” and report results in raising the number of prospective teachers in certain subjects affiliated with the nation’s teacher shortage. The new law also includes other provisions that require all colleges to report the average amount of grant aid awarded students and the average “net price” (sticker price minus financial aid) for students receiving federal financial aid.

Implications:

Arizona’s response to the state’s K-12 teacher shortages continues to engage the community colleges in providing a level of teacher preparation curricula. The MCCCDC plays an important role in helping the state meet the community needs in teacher preparation, and securing adequate student available financial aid to support these efforts. Awareness and compliance with proposed federal regulations regarding these programs holds implications for the district.

Finding:**University of Phoenix Reports Its Students' Academic Achievement**

- The largest private university in North America, University of Phoenix, released an academic report with findings indicating the effectiveness of its educational model. Results show the model's effectiveness in helping students who are underprepared to succeed in college. Standardized test results imply that Phoenix students improve "risk factor" skills in reading, writing, and mathematics at a rate greater than students at other colleges.

Implications:

Immediate reactions from some educational leaders view the “Phoenix report” as a very positive development and encourage all colleges to be open in self-reporting. The potential MCCCDC impact from results presented in this report may influence student's college attendance choices, particularly when considering the available success rates regarding at-risk factors.

Finding:**Arizona Students Struggle on First Science AIMS Test**

- The first AIMS science test, administered during spring 2008, produced less than desired results. More than 60% of high-school students failed. Student's initial science test results proved less successful than scores in math (67%), writing (68%) and reading (73%). The science portion of the exam is not currently required to earn a diploma, but the Arizona Science Teachers Association support it becoming a requirement.

Implications:

The importance of math and science education cannot be underestimated in educating a globally competitive workforce. Recent emphasis on preparing students for careers in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) areas have been encouraged at the local, state and federal level. Increased Federal Grant opportunities in STEM areas have proved financially and programmatically beneficial for many MCCCDC institutions. Increased efforts to link the community colleges with K-12 partnerships may help create an environment for improvement in teaching and learning science.

Finding:**SAT Coaching Found to Barely Boost Scores**

- Some families spend thousands of dollars on coaching to help college-bound students boost their SAT scores. A recent report by the National Association for College Admission Counseling finds that many of these test-preparation courses are not as beneficial as consumers are led to believe. The report criticizes common test-prep-industry marketing practices, including promises of big score gains with no hard data to back up such claims. The report also finds fault with the frequent use of mock SAT tests because they can be devised to inflate score gains when students take the actual SAT. Some test-prep companies acknowledge there is nothing to hold them accountable for score-gain promises. Approximately two million students spend \$2.5 billion a year on test preparation and tutoring.

Implications:

State officials are currently considering adding SAT score results, along with AIMS scores, in determining high school achievement and “college-readiness.” Arizona students should be aware that the costs for SAT coaching may not produce the results expected by student participants. MCCCDC colleges do not currently require a SAT score for admission.

Finding:**State Students' SAT Scores Decline Three Years**

- Arizona's student scores on the SAT exam have declined for a third consecutive year, with reading scores the lowest in a decade. Approximately 30 percent of Arizona high-school students take the SAT. The other popular college entrance exam, the ACT, has no mandatory writing section like the SAT. An increased number of students taking the exam, including more minorities and first-generation college students, are being attributed to the recent decrease in scores. State SAT numbers remain above national scores.

Implications:

The SAT examine is designed to measure first-year college readiness. Although not necessary for admission in MCCCDC institutions, such a trend may influence student university preparedness (acceptance) and choice of initial college enrollment.