

NM Assessment Task Force Meeting – April 28, 2006, 1-3 pm
Location: NMSU Albuquerque Center

Attending: Julie Bales (Crownpoint Institute of Technology), Wilfred Beaupre (Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute), Gary Betts (Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute), Bruno Bornet (Santa Fe Community College), Chris Burnham (New Mexico State University), Anne Campbell (Diné College), Stan R. Carlson (NMSU-Grants), Teresa Crafton (New Mexico Junior College), Joan Erben (NMSU-Grants), Paul Frank (Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute), Tonya Faulkner (NMSU-Carlsbad), Kristina Gordon (NMSU-Doña Ana), Kathy Greenwood (NMSU-Carlsbad), Robin Jones (Clovis Community College), Marsha Lichtenstein (University of New Mexico), Karen Luper (Santa Fe Community College), Cynthia E. Orozco (ENMU-Ruidoso), Samantha Ortiz (Albuquerque TVI), Chuck Paine (University of New Mexico), Anita Roasting Ear (Crownpoint Institute of Technology), Carmen Santana-Melgoza (New Mexico State University), Charlotte Schmitz (New Mexico Junior College), Pat Seitz (New Mexico Junior College), Debra Teachman (NMSU-Alamogordo), Renee Wharton (New Mexico Junior College), Susan Wood (NMSU-Doña Ana)

Co-Chair Carmen Santana-Melgoza called the meeting to order at approx. 1:10 pm.

The agenda of this meeting was to discuss how to provide accountability re: assessment of HED General Education Area 1: Communication Competencies throughout the state of New Mexico, and begin to come up with a plan for providing such accountability to HED and the state legislature.

The meeting began with introductions around the table. In addition to task force members, a number of faculty from the areas of English and Communication Studies were in attendance.

Discussion ensued about the Area I Competencies, as defined by an earlier task force. Questions about how the competencies were identified and their purpose were discussed. Two members of the earlier task force are on the present task force and provided background information. To summarize the background information, a task force of English and Communications Studies faculty members was convened to discuss the basic competencies that the general education communications area courses share at the various NM colleges and universities. The intent of the six competencies identified as necessary to satisfactory completion of this Gen Ed area is to provide a baseline for competency, not to limit any particular college or university to requiring only those competencies to be met.

Discussion arose regarding the absence of interpersonal communication skills as a definitive core competency. Members of the previous task force explained that interpersonal communication skills were discussed as a possible core competency, but upon recognition that it was not an integral part of courses that fulfill this Area of Gen Ed currently, it was seen as putting an additional burden on programs of study without sufficient time for them to adapt. Members of the Assessment Task Force indicated a desire to ask HED to look at that area of competency in future revisions of the Gen Ed core competencies, especially since insufficient interpersonal communication skills is a commonly identified deficiency for graduates entering the workforce.

A discussion of how specific institutions perform their assessment of student learning in the communication area (composition and oral communication) followed. Much of the discussion of assessment of writing competencies revolved around using student portfolios that required self-reflective evaluation of progress (strengths and weaknesses) by students, and holistic scoring using primary trait scales of random samples of student papers (based on primary trait analysis). Looking at grades students receive on writing was seen as inadequate for assessment purposes. The group also discussed the need to assure that writing assessment include a direct measure of student performance such as those provided by portfolio review. Standardized tests of writing competency, even those that advertise including a student writing sample, do not actually measure a student's writing ability and should not be considered as a feasible state-wide measure of writing competency.

The importance of making assessments of programs manageable was emphasized numerous times by various participants.

The need to have additional resources available for writing programs within institutions in order to provide assessment accountability as effectively as possible requires that the state provide funding for assessment accountability procedures. The expense of requiring faculty and administration to provide even greater reporting than is currently required should not fall on already stretched educational budgets. This task force believes that, if the state is serious about further assessment, reporting, and accountability, funds should be provided for that purpose.

The task force members agreed on the importance of program assessment not being attached to particular instructors or particular students. In other words, assessment does not equal grading – of the student or the instructor.

An important element of the process to look at is how each school closes the feedback loop regarding results of their assessments and the action that should follow.

In discussions of oral communication, oral presentations evaluated by rubric were discussed as a norm for classroom assessment. Self-reflective papers by students re: what they have learned through the process are also used as evidence of student learning. Peer reviewers and/or evaluators from outside the class (other instructors, for example) responding to oral presentations by means of a common rubric are also used to assess student achievement and student learning.

At this point in the meeting, we came back to the question of what is the real purpose of this task force. The consensus seemed to be that the purpose is to create a statewide accountability for assessment process that provides evidence that a student who completes a specific core area of the HED Gen Ed Core Matrix has, in fact, met the core competencies for that area, regardless of which NM college or university the student attends.

The task force was firm in its opinion that there are no standardized tests available that can adequately measure the particular competencies included in the Communication Area (Area 1).

The suggestion was made that we establish peer groups to evaluate each institution's assessment processes and results in each General Education Core area. This process could be based on the

model of HLC-NCA accreditation peer evaluator/consultant teams, in which 3 or 4 individuals chosen for their appropriateness to the Core Area would receive the institution's assessment report that documents student outcomes using appropriate evidence. That team could then prepare a report indicating the strengths and weaknesses of the assessment process and the results of the examinations of student outcomes. Recommendations could be made to the individual institutions.

One of the many positive effects of this system of peer review would be that multiple institutions from throughout the state would be serving on teams together, which would encourage continued discussion among all campuses about issues involving quality of courses, transferability, and preferred directions for continued evolution of gen ed requirements based on statewide needs (as seen in preparation for workforce, preparation for advanced education, etc.)

This process would require that the state provide funding for these peer evaluator/consultant teams. In order for the process not to become onerous in workload or financial load, the task force suggests that the reviews occur "periodically." The definition of "periodically" was not specified at this time, due to the fact that the meeting was nearing an end. It was indicated that a clearer definition of the schedule of assessment program review would have to be developed in future meetings.

It was decided that, of the assessment suggestions listed on the Area 1: Communications Competencies sheet that was handed out at the meeting, only four are appropriate for assessment of student outcomes in this particular competency area. Those four are: rubric-based evaluation of written and oral discourse, portfolio evaluations, capstone experiences, and exit exams. The others are excellent teaching tools, but are not means of measuring student outcomes as needed for this project.

Summary statement of task force:

- 1) It is essential that qualitative criteria for the measurement of student outcomes in this general education area be developed. Standardized testing for competencies in this area do not work.
- 2) Each college and university must agree to provide evidence of a program to assess student learning in relation to the competencies identified by the previous state task force. Institutions may add additional competencies, but these must serve as the base.
- 3) Each college and university will implement its own assessment processes in relation to these competencies. Due to the wide range of student populations in the various institutions around the state, this task force does not believe that a single state-mandated assessment process could be or should be forced on institutions irrespective of their student populations. So long as an assessment process is in place that produces reports with clear evidence re: student learning in this core competency area, the peer evaluator/consultant team can determine whether the institution is demonstrating accountability in its assessment of general education.
- 4) The peer reviews should occur on an periodic basis. Having such reviews on too frequent a basis would present a budgetary burden as well as a human resource burden.
- 5) The process needs to be as transparent as possible. Once the process is well underway, each institution needs to provide both the assessment reports, including the specific

student outcomes that determine competency, that occur on an ongoing basis and the peer review team's accountability reports when they occur, on their public websites. This provides feedback regarding student outcomes in regard to this competency to students, parents, and the public, as well as to institution personnel, HED, and the NM Legislature. This would also inform schools preparing students for attending college in New Mexico of what will be expected of students in college.

The meeting adjourned at 3:00 pm