

**Notes of the New Mexico Higher Education Assessment Task Force -
September 15, 2006
NMSU Albuquerque Center**

DRAFT

1. HED forms update – Jozi de Leon

Dr. de Leon reported on the progress of the Alignment Task Force, which has a proposal before the LESC that would align high school exit criteria with college entrance requirements. The proposal would bring in a consulting group (Achieve) that has worked with other states to establish alignment, and recommends legislation that would appropriate 50-70K to fund the project. The resulting bill will address high school exit exams and college entrance/placement exams, and will further look at the entire high school curriculum to determine how it contributes to college entrance skills; it will also require that assessments of competencies at the high school level are accurate.

This fall, meetings are taking place among various groups such as the business roundtable, the high school redesign group convened by Sandia labs, and the articulation task force, which will contribute to the alignment project by working backward from the exit competencies in the five general education areas to ask: What are the *entrance* competencies in each of these areas? The HED wants to involve the discipline groups from each of the five general education areas in two tasks: to review the new course submissions due October 2, and to assist with defining the college entry-level skill requirements.

In the submission of new courses for consideration in the transfer matrix, both *competencies* and *assessment practices* must be addressed in the course syllabi. Assessment was not a primary concern in the first round of submissions, and will take on increased importance in the second round. The HED is seeking recommendations of faculty members interested in serving on the re-convened discipline groups; as before, the HED will select members for a balance of representation from 2- and 4- year institutions. CAO's should e-mail those names to Jozi ASAP (josephine.deleon@state.nm.us), as the first reviews of course submissions will occur on October 10. Jozi will meet with each discipline group to emphasize the importance of the assessment component and the process for review. Additionally, there should be a plan for the assessment task force to have a conversation with the articulation task force – perhaps this meeting could occur at the NMHEAR conference.

On the question of how we advise students with respect to the courses approved for transfer, there remains some need for clarification. At the CAO summit in June, Karen Luper had asked Bill Flores, who chaired the articulation task force, whether the approved courses were guaranteed for transfer to a degree plan at any NM institution, and his response was a qualified yes – the qualification being

that if an institution had established program-specific general education requirements (like anatomy and physiology as the science requirement for a nursing program), those requirements would hold. When general education requirements were unspecified (say, 15 credits of behavioral and social sciences), those credits could be selected freely from the list of courses approved for transfer in that area. This ran counter to Jozi's understanding. She said that the competencies were designed to equalize the courses and that any course approved for transfer could "bump" a course designated as a general education requirement in an institution's degree plans. (That could create a scenario in which astronomy could bump anatomy and physiology in a nursing degree, unless the nursing degree moved A&P to its program-specific requirements and increased the total credits required for graduation. So there is a balance to be reached here, which we haven't quite resolved and may need further guidance on.) The idea is not to increase general education requirements past a limit of 41 credits, while keeping to a minimum of 35 credits. Fall 2007 is the deadline by which institutions must trim their general education requirements to within these limits.

CAO's are meeting on October 17, following the Governor's Summit on the 16th, and will examine this question of general education transfer as well.

2. NMHEAR Conference – Susan Wood and Pierre Laroche

Discussion continued regarding HED requirements and the appropriate role of the assessment task force. The group has been consistent in wanting institutions to have the freedom to design their own mechanisms for assessment (no standardized, mandated format), and is not comfortable in a role of "assessment police". Rather, it would like to see ways to share those mechanisms, along with examples of how the assessment results are used ("one more report on the pile isn't inspiring unless we know how the results will be used") and dates so that information can be kept current. Carmen agreed to draft a template based on models presented by Carol Yee at NM Tech and Karen Luper of SFCC, whose institution is proposing to follow a model presented by Peggy Maki at last year's NMHEAR conference (attached). Institutions can decide to complete templates based on either course or program-level assessment, and should identify clearly at the top of the template exactly what they're setting out to demonstrate – from an interdisciplinary approach (communications across the curriculum) to a course-by-course examination of how the general education competencies are met. Institutional websites were seen as a convenient and effective way to share this information.

Where do artifacts fit in? Samples of student work are probably not so easy to share via the web, though some might be post-able. The group discussed how we might make use of the NMHEAR conference to communicate the task at hand and to help people continue to design their plans for accomplishing that task; a

combination panel discussion / roundtable work session was suggested as a good start. Jozi agreed to attend and to introduce or to take part in the panel. The conference could also be used as a site for a meeting of the assessment task force itself, and the summer assessment retreat was suggested as another good venue for continuing the work across the state.

While the HED has neither the staffing nor the desire to dictate exactly how institutions should be demonstrating their progress in assessment, it is in our institutions' best interests to be aware of rumblings at the national level (threats of NCLB-like accountability for higher education) and to be out front with credible, authentic, usable data on how well students meet learning objectives at course and program levels. Also, the confidence with which NM institutions accept courses in transfer will be greatly enhanced by clear demonstration of assessment practices. These efforts at the statewide level have the clear potential to contribute very efficiently to our institutional accreditation work as well.

3. Proposed recommendations of the task force - summary

- The task force will develop a template that institutions may use in reporting their student learning assessment in the communications area – the question remained as to whether institutions should adhere to a common template for purposes of comparison, or vary that template according to differences in assessment programs.
- Institutions will complete the report on a yearly basis and post it to their websites. Each institution is free to use whatever assessment mechanism it desires.
- The faculty representatives to the task force in the communications area will review the reports – the mechanism by which this occurs remains to be worked out.
- The communications task force will share its findings at the NMHEAR conference, other general education groups can benefit from its work.
- Carmen will work with Jozi to clarify the relationship of the assessment task force to the HED

Next meetings: October 20, November 17 or to coincide with the Governor's Summit on October 16-17

Notes submitted by Karen Luper, Santa Fe Community College, 9/22/06