ACADEMY FOR THE ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING

RESULTS FORUM IMPACT REPORT TEMPLATE

The final institutional report preceding the Results Forum should be analytical rather than chronological; that is, it should focus on trends and implications rather than sequences of events or participants. The questions below are intended to assist in that process of analysis, but they should not be seen as restricting your right to expatiate on significant issues or trends. Institutions should use the questions to structure their responses, either by answering them fully and directly or by incorporating them in a narrative. If your institution has used the Academy to prepare for an upcoming accreditation evaluation, you may frame your responses so that they are easily transposable to a PEAQ Self-Study Report or an AQIP Systems Portfolio.

Your report should be no longer than eight to ten pages (13-15 pages if addressing follow-up recommendations) and should reflect the collective thoughts of those most closely involved in the Academy process.

1. Describe your Academy project(s) as developed at the first Roundtable in 2006-07. Be as detailed as possible about the issues it was intended to address as well as the content and strategies of the project itself. Include in your discussion your reasons for joining the Academy and the degree to which you have dealt with those reasons. If you enrolled in the Academy in response to the recommendation of a site evaluation team, explain how your Academy work addressed the issues raised in that report.

Participation in the Academy for Assessment of Student Learning served in place of a HLC focus-visit. Our entrance into the Academy was in response to a November 2003 Report of a Comprehensive Evaluation Visit, which saw the need for the following improvements in our assessment processes: (1) The college needs an updated assessment plan that is systemic, ongoing, and supported college-wide. (2) Program learning outcomes as well as general education outcomes should be identified. (3) Assessment tools and processes to measure student learning in these areas must also be identified, along with criteria for performance. (4) A process to document the assessment activities is also necessary in order to make sure the analysis of assessment results will lead to improved student learning. (5) The revised assessment plan needs to be implemented across the college and the leadership for this effort should be clearly defined. (6) The COAT Committee may need to revise its vision and goals to ensure the assessment activities meet the criteria of the HLC as well as enhance the college’s commitment to student learning. (7) Measurable performance outcomes for all programs were not available. (8) Clear procedures and deadlines for capturing/documenting academic achievement were not available. (9) There is no evidence of widespread use of assessment data to improve the teaching and learning process.
PPCC addressed these concerns through our participation in the Assessment Academy, as well as activities not inherent in our Academy project. We designed our Student Learning Project initially to help us move through the assessment cycle in AA, AS, and AAS degree programs for the general education outcomes identified by PPCC faculty. We planned to use the results to improve student learning by (1) communicating results and recommendations to faculty, administration, students, advisory boards, and the community, (2) asking faculty to share strategies for addressing recommendations, and (3) providing resources through our Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) and other professional development activities to faculty so that they can use the recommendations to improve student learning.

One area of concern of the site visit team was centered on the college's assessment plan. Since the 2003 visit, the college has maintained five-year, two-year, and one-year assessment plans. The five-year assessment plan is included in the Academic Master Plan. We publish the one- and two-year assessment plans yearly in our annual assessment report. The College Outcomes Assessment Team (COAT)/Faculty Assessment Co-coordinators in collaboration with the general education subcommittee co-chairs and COAT members are responsible for updating the assessment plans. Progress on the plans is presented to the Vice-President for Educational Services and Academic Deans regularly. Furthermore, in 2008, the college reviewed the COAT charge and made slight modifications finding that the charge was appropriate for the college's assessment program.

Another of the site team's concerns was the identification of program learning outcomes and general education outcomes. In a professional development workshop in January 2003, faculty from across the college identified the following general education outcomes: Communication (Listening, Reading, Speaking, Writing), Critical Thinking, Information Literacy, and Math Skills. In addition, Community Skills was added as a general education outcome in 2008 after discussion with COAT and faculty at large. Each outcome was further refined by COAT general education subcommittees with feedback from faculty from across the college and approval from COAT. In addition, the majority of educational programs and departments within the college have identified outcomes. These outcomes are continuing to be developed and refined.

The site visit team identified the need to have assessment tools and processes to measure student learning along with criteria for performance. As part of our Academy project, we have adopted a timeline to gradually assess our general education outcomes in order to not overwhelm students or faculty with assessment activities. Thus far, we have completed large scale assessments for Critical Thinking, Information Literacy, Listening, Math, Reading, and Writing. We have completed pilot assessments for Community Skills and Speaking. We have adopted a variety of assessment strategies and tools. Critical Thinking employed the Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal, and Reading used the
Nelson-Denny standardized test. Community Skills, Information Literacy, Listening, and Speaking developed measures locally and deployed them outside of the classroom. Math used a locally-developed measure given during class time, while Writing embedded an assignment into a variety of courses. Finally, as part of our Academy project, we designed a process for setting student performance targets. General education subcommittees are now expected to set performance targets after the second use of an assessment instrument. Performance targets are set through a process of the subcommittee examining national data regarding performance in the area, the type of measure, and what level of proficiency faculty expect students to graduate with. Information Literacy, Math, and Reading have set performance targets. In addition, programs and departments are encouraged to set performance targets as part of the process of documenting their assessment efforts in WEAVEonline.

The site visit team suggested the need for the documentation of assessment activities. The general education assessment tools and processes as well as program and departmental tools and processes are documented in our annual report. We distributed the first annual assessment report in the fall of 2005 which summarized assessment activities across the college for the 2004-2005 academic year. Programs and departments have continued to submit summaries of assessment activities every October for the previous academic year. These reports are combined and incorporated into the larger annual assessment report. To address accreditors’ concerns, a significant portion of our Academy project was centered on developing a plan for managing assessment information. The plan developed during our work with the Academy consisted of the purchase of an assessment management system as well as procedures for archiving digital and hard copy assessment data. Consequently, we purchased a subscription to WEAVEonline, an assessment management software system, which we use to document assessment activities. This software allows for various monitoring capabilities, not only for COAT but for individual users. In addition to the annual report, we created and maintain an online presence on the employee intranet site which includes electronic documentation of COAT activities (minutes, reports, presentations) as well as faculty resources. We have also dedicated server space on a limited access drive for the electronic storage of raw data and assessment documents as well as office space for hard copy storage of raw data and assessment supplies.

The 2003 site review team remarked about needing evidence that assessment is used to improve student learning. Building on this recommendation, we designed our Academy project to move our college forward in this regard. We initially planned to use the results to improve student learning by communicating results and recommendations to faculty, administration, students, advisory boards, and the community. We have made great strides in this by increasing e-mail communication with faculty (full-time and adjunct) as well as presenting results to the faculty at division meetings. Our focus is now moving toward communicating with students and the community. Furthermore, we moved beyond our initial
design for addressing recommendations to developing faculty education programs focused on providing opportunities for instructors to improve student learning in the recommended areas. Projects more limited in scope included our Writing to an Audience Workshop, which compensated faculty for attending a two-part workshop on designing assignments related to writing to an audience from which faculty designed lesson plans. Also, the Reading Strategies Project compensated faculty for attending a two-part workshop on teaching reading strategies in their courses after which faculty then implemented those strategies within their classrooms. The Embedded Librarian Project involved librarians pairing with instructors to provide expertise and support to students as they completed their research papers. Our newest and most encompassing project is our Critical Thinking Action Plan. This plan was developed during a faculty workshop in the spring 2010 to address the results of the first large-scale critical thinking assessment. The focus of the plan is to have faculty embed learning activities addressing inference and deduction into their classes. The college has allocated considerable resources to this action plan, including providing faculty members with professional development opportunities related to inference and deduction and paying some adjunct faculty for their participation as department resources.

2. Describe any changes that you made to the project(s)—or that had to be made to it—other than personnel changes. What were the reasons for these changes? Did the changes improve the project?

We made several changes, some as a result of feedback from Academy mentors. We had always intended to develop student performance targets but initially called those targets benchmarks. With input from our Academy mentors, we learned that the term benchmark commonly refers to an evaluation in comparisons to other schools. We realized that we wanted to adopt the term student performance targets to better reflect our goal of identifying the criteria for our students’ success. Also, we originally planned to have each general education outcome assessment on a three-year cycle. However, having assessed more outcomes, we realize that data collection can take more than one semester. Consequently, we have now adopted a more flexible cycle. In addition, in the beginning, we saw the general education outcomes as program outcomes for the AA and AS. Within the early stages of our Academy participation, we decided that the general education outcomes apply to all Associate degrees to include the AAS. Consequently, COAT undertook responsibility for assessing the general education outcomes for all educational programs. This allowed the AAS programs to focus on assessment of their specific outcomes. We also moved to a greater emphasis on transfer departments developing outcomes and assessment processes. We created the Assessment Review Committee to assist transfer and CTE faculty with program and departmental assessment, including the development of outcomes and assessment plans. This committee will become active after the full implementation of WEAVEonline. Lastly, we changed our emphasis from solely
assessing and providing results to faculty to being conduits for making connections to curricular enhancements. Initially, we created small curricular enhancement projects. However, we now have moved to implementing a wide-reaching project with our Critical Thinking Action Plan.

3. What challenges to the success of your project arose in your four Academy years? How did you deal with those challenges?

Several challenges have arisen while participating in the Academy. One challenge has been targeting students who are nearing completion of their degree. This has been difficult particularly in the AA and AS programs as there are no capstone courses and few courses that students take routinely near graduation. Students thus tend to be spread across many different courses in small numbers. Consequently, our assessment cycle has had to be modified to be more flexible.

We initially found it very challenging to use class time to conduct general education assessments. Moreover, we experienced the college and state instituting surveys of satisfaction and engagement and then students and faculty were also asked to complete student learning assessments. This has been problematic, especially since COAT is not able to influence the timing of surveys that originate from other areas of the college or from the state. We were able to work with the other areas of the college to have no overlap between the engagement survey and the spring Math assessment. In an effort to minimize the use of class time for assessments, we explored embedded assessments as well as other mechanisms outside of courses such as the use of the testing center and online formats to collect data. These methods have proved very viable. However, as our assessment program continues to grow, student and faculty overload will need continued monitoring.

Importantly, state funding patterns of higher education will continue to influence our work. Assessment remains a priority and has seen increased funding even through our dire budget years. However, it still has to compete with other programs and services for diminishing funds. This is going to be a long-term challenge as the budget problems within Colorado are unlikely to improve in the near future. Given these difficulties, faculty members have seen increased demands on their time with more administrative activities as well as larger classes. Furthermore, they are finding they can earn more money by teaching an overload of classes rather than serving the college through participation on COAT and departmental assessment. These challenges are not likely to diminish as the number of full-time faculty may be reduced with continuing cuts to higher education. Fortunately, we have been able to compensate faculty managing data collection and analysis during general education assessments, and we are examining other reward systems that carry minimal costs. Lastly, although the college has demonstrated its commitment to assessment by fully
subsidizing the Critical Thinking Action Plan, funding streams for the curriculum enhancement projects will become more of an issue.

On the upside, PPCC is moving into a new phase of assessment that involves the re-assessment of some outcomes on a large-scale and the development and management of faculty-created curriculum enhancement projects. A challenge will be maintaining leadership on some of the subcommittees, addressing faculty turnover due to retirement and resignation, and ensuring follow-through on the part of some faculty. Emphasis on the education of faculty on assessment-related topics will be paramount and a continuing process.

Over the duration of our project, we have found that subcommittee chairs have had to take on the bulk of the workload during data collection and data analysis because subcommittee members have sometimes been less willing to be more involved. In addition, faculty turnover due to retirement or resignations is requiring continual recruitment of new faculty to join the subcommittees. It has also been a challenge to ensure that faculty members retain data from prior assessments in electronic form and/or in hard copies. It is hoped that the storage space on the network server and in a storage room at one of the campuses will aid in this difficulty. Our implementation of WEAVEonline will play an important role in allowing the continuity of assessment processes through faculty turnover within a department because it will ensure that a record of activities is archived. It is positive to see faculty anticipating retirement actively moving their materials into WEAVEonline for their successors.

Changing leadership within the college and the realignment of academic divisions can be difficult. Fortunately, our current Interim President, Interim Vice-President of Educational Services, and Interim Vice-President of Student Services are long-time employees of the college, and we have not had to address the leadership changes yet.

Lastly, locally-developed measures are difficult to design and determine reliability and validity. Yet, published measures can be expensive and insufficient in providing information to guide curricular improvements. In addition, it has been difficult to develop useful rubrics. We have posted the AAC&U Value Rubrics on our assessment intranet site and evaluated many other rubrics; however, developing rubrics that are easy to use with good inter-rater reliability continues to be a test.

4. What have you achieved as a result of your work in the Academy? Consider the range of these achievements, from the very specific (development of a rubric) to the more general (outcomes-based curriculum approval processes). To what degree have these achievements been institutionalized?

We have achieved an increasing commitment to assessment among a broad range of faculty as well as among administration. Assessment of student learning
is part of our strategic plan. We have slowly shifted the culture of assessment from optional participation to required participation. This has been demonstrated in our great increase in the reporting of assessment activities and the development of action planning at the program/department level for our annual assessment report. This year, we achieved a 100% response rate from departments and programs in submitting their assessment summaries. This change was gradual with increasing numbers of programs/departments submitting reports over the last few years to the expectation that all programs/departments were to submit reports this year. We have received very little “push back” from faculty on this change.

Part of this culture change can be attributed to our efforts to implement WEAVEonline. We purchased a subscription to WEAVEonline to monitor not only assessment but to serve budgeting and institutional planning and better link budgeting, strategic planning, and assessment. The institutionalization of this software with all faculty and most student services areas reporting not only on assessment but also program review is a direct result of our initial Academy project.

Evidence of the institutionalization of this culture change also includes the college’s overall increased financial commitment to assessment. For example, the purchase of WEAVEonline, release support of the faculty assessment co-coordinators, release support of HLC assessment academy team members, payment for faculty scoring and data analysis and financial support of the curriculum enhancement projects have allowed assessment efforts to be maintained and increased even in these difficult budget times. The commitment and motivation of the faculty assessment co-coordinators has served to provide leadership, energy, and direction to the assessment processes while maintaining a focus on the faculty-driven nature of assessment.

Our development of a large-scale curriculum enhancement project was in response to Academy mentor feedback. We chose critical thinking for many reasons. We had data that informed us about the strengths and areas for improvement of our students. In addition, faculty members would be unlikely to minimize its importance and programs/departments were likely to have critical thinking outcomes related to their disciplines even if these were not concretely identified. Our Critical Thinking Action Plan has a large encompassing scope. All faculty members are to embed an activity, assignment, etc. into their courses on the topic of induction and deduction. All programs/departments identified resource persons to be the content experts for their areas, develop activity/assignment examples to be shared with their faculty, and assist faculty in mastering the content. Of the resource persons, 25% are adjunct faculty who are being compensated for their time. COAT offered workshops on induction and deduction with the intent of helping faculty explore how it is manifested within their curricula. In addition, we offered drop in sessions for faculty to receive help
with their activities and assignments. All faculty members will be asked to complete a brief survey on their curriculum enhancement during spring 2011.

Our general education subcommittees have developed a measure of information literacy, math assessments, and an embedded writing assignment. In addition, we have developed rubrics to be used in our speaking, writing, and community skills assessments. The Listening Subcommittee developed a unique assessment using D2L and "cyber cafes." We have been able to offer professional development opportunities in reading strategies and writing to an audience. We identified some of our students’ strengths in such areas of reading, critical thinking, and information literacy and have shared these with faculty. In addition, we are not “resting on our laurels” with regards to meeting our reading outcomes but rather are developing new outcomes to probe more deeply and a new instrument to measure them.

Finally, we adopted a communications plan, which we have begun to implement. We worked with our Marketing department to develop a public relations campaign that includes banners, a landing page on the Internet site, and bookmarks distributed to students. We also have worked to disseminate information to faculty to increase their participation and response to various requests. We experimented with an e-newsletter and completed an evaluation of our process to learn the most effective means of conveying our message. Based on those results, we have begun making modifications to be more concise and effective in our communication.

5. What effect has your time in the Academy had on institutional commitment to the assessment of learning on campus? How broad is that commitment? How has institutional capacity for assessing student learning changed?

PPCC has worked intensely to cultivate a culture of assessment to improve student learning, and in doing so created COAT to manage its general education assessment efforts. The college demonstrates its commitment to assessment by the active involvement of faculty, staff, and higher administration, and by the financial support that COAT receives. Assessment is included in the performance goals of the President, Vice President for Education Services (VPES), and all Academic Deans. Since assessment of student learning at PPCC is faculty-driven, COAT membership consists primarily of faculty representatives from transfer, Career and Technical Education (CTE), and college-prep/developmental education programs from all academic divisions. In partnership with full-time faculty, adjunct instructors also participate in data collection and in curriculum enhancement projects. Moreover, COAT enjoys active participation by several administrative consultants from across the college.

According to the 2003 Self-Study, the college had collected data annually via exit questionnaires, student satisfaction surveys, and faculty evaluations. While assessment efforts did, indeed, continue through these years via such methods as
pre- and post-testing in individual departments, Work Keys testing, student goal statements, and outcome-based testing, they were limited and discipline-specific rather than systemic, organized, college-wide attempts to improve the teaching/learning experience. Since the 2003 Self-Study, the college has completed two assessments of the following general education outcomes: reading, writing, math, and information literacy. The college has completed one assessment of critical thinking and listening as well as pilot assessments of community skills and speaking. Curriculum enhancement projects developed in response to these assessment results are described under #1 of this report.

Institutional commitment can be seen in the college’s pattern of funding assessment activities. The COAT budget has grown each year and supports faculty through releases, compensation for data collection and analysis, purchase of assessment supplies, funding of professional development activities related to assessment, compensation for adjunct faculty participation, and funding of the Critical Thinking Action Plan. In addition, the college made a significant financial commitment in the purchase and ongoing subscription to WEAVEonline. This increased funding has resulted in increased capacity to assess our general education outcomes as well as support programs/departments in their assessment efforts. The progress of our general education assessments as well as the increase in departments/programs reporting assessment activities from 2006 to the present demonstrates our increased capacity for assessment.

6. What effect has your Academy work had on institutional culture, structures, and processes?

As noted above, assessment is included in our five-year master plan, which guides the facilities master plan, and it is integrated into the strategic plan, which drives budgeting. We are seeing the institutional culture surrounding assessment move from something that other people do to something that we all do. For instance, we have gradually moved from optional reporting of assessment activities for the annual report to mandated reporting this year. We made this transition over time and have seen no faculty resistance. This is the first year that we have 100% of programs/departments submitting assessment reports summarizing their activities for last year and stating their planned activities for this year. Programs are also increasingly reporting to external audiences such as their advisory boards. In addition, WEAVE training for all departments, including student services, has all departments involved in and thinking about assessment. We see an increase in faculty listing assessment activities for their annual performance evaluation goals. In addition, we are finding a greater knowledge about assessment in new faculty members and actively recruiting new faculty into the assessment process to serve on COAT, general education committees, involvement in departmental and program assessment as well as curriculum enhancement projects at the college and departmental level. Our Critical Thinking Action Plan is further serving to integrate assessment into our culture by being a project that affects all of Educational Services and focuses on improving student learning through curriculum
enhancements. It has involved the training and identification of program/departmental resource persons as well as the participation of the faculty (full-time and adjunct) as a whole. It is our largest scope curriculum enhancement project to date. We have seen communications about assessment increase as the project unfolded in division meetings, deans meetings as well as through email and the e-newsletter. As the project has progressed, we have seen funding for assessment-related activities and expenses increase as an indicator of our college’s commitment to improve student learning.

7. What effect has your Academy work had on student learning?

We have striven to link assessment activities, such as data collection, to impacting student learning. Initially, we had small curriculum enhancement projects such as the Writing to an Audience, Reading Strategies, and Embedded Librarian projects. These initiatives are described in detail in #1 above. A continuing difficulty has been documenting any changes in student learning due to these projects as they have been too small in scope to appear in the large assessments and lacked mechanisms for evaluating the success on a small scale. Consequently, we have developed the Critical Thinking Action Plan, which should impact all of Educational Services. The impact of this project has yet to be determined since it is in its early implementation phase.

We also have individual departmental and discipline assessment being used to make improvements to student learning. For example, the departments of Psychology, College Preparation Math, College Level English, CIS, and Culinary Arts have been using their assessment results to improve student learning through curriculum enhancements within the classroom as well as the piloting of new course sequences.

8. What concrete evidence do you have to demonstrate the effects you described in questions 5-7?

We started the Academy in January 2007 with seven general education outcomes. Since then, we re-evaluated our outcomes and added Community Skills. At the start of the Academy, we had completed assessments for three of our general education outcomes. We now have completed assessments for six of our general education outcomes and in fact have completed second assessments for four of our general education outcomes. We also saw the assessment budget increase significantly. At the start of the Academy, the assessment budget was $26,000. This year the budget is $62,300. We have also seen great impact in the number of annual assessment reports submitted by programs and departments. At the start of the Academy, we had 29 reports submitted for individual academic programs and departments. This year we had 76 reports submitted representing 100% of our academic programs and departments. The lack of faculty resistance on mandatory reporting is good evidence of the incorporation of assessment into our college culture. Initially we
had 29 academic programs and departments submitting outcomes. This year we had 71 academic programs and departments submitting outcomes with the remaining five programs and departments having action plans to develop outcomes this academic year. Another demonstration of the impact of our project is the participation we are seeing in the Critical Thinking Action Plan. We had 67 full-time and 36 adjunct faculty members attend one of two professional development workshops on inference and deduction sponsored by COAT. In addition, all programs and departments have identified their resource faculty for the project. As part of evaluating our current public relations plan focusing on faculty, we administered a survey to full-time and adjunct faculty members during spring 2010. We found on a scale of 1-10, full-time faculty awareness averaged 6.3 with the academic divisions ranging from 5.3 to 7.5. As expected, adjunct faculty awareness was lower with an average of 4.6.

As an example of departmental assessment affecting student learning, our Psychology Department had first collected data on its introductory psychology class in spring 2006. After examining the data, the department decided to initiate a curriculum enhancement on correlation and experimentation. Before the curriculum enhancement, 43% of students responded correctly to the assessment item on the concept. After the curriculum enhancement was instituted, 58% responded correctly. The curriculum enhancement continues to be employed and in the last assessment 62% of students responded correctly.

We have several mechanisms in place for housing assessment related documentation and evidence. WEAVEonline is used for programs and departments to report their assessment efforts as well as to preserve copies of assessment instruments and rubrics for future reference. A limited access network drive is dedicated to the electronic storage of reports, minutes, raw data, and other assessment materials. In addition, physical space at our Centennial Campus is available to store hard copy data, assessment tools, marketing supplies, and other resources, including our annual reports for the HLC that further document our rationale and progress towards the assessment of student learning.

9. What do you see as the next logical steps for continuing the work you have begun in the Academy? In particular, what new student learning initiatives do you see developing from your Academy work?

We see several next steps. We will be continuing with our general education assessments. As we fully implement WEAVEonline, we will be examining program/departmental assessment efforts so that we can provide support and assistance. We have focused thus far on direct measures of student learning, however, we will need to integrate indirect measures such as retention, transfer, graduation, and job placement rates; student success at transfer institutions; student perceptions of their own learning via the Community College Survey of Student Engagement; faculty surveys on campus-wide teaching practices and
attitudes as well as students’ strengths and areas for improvement; and alumni surveys. We will continue to implement and evaluate the utility of the Critical Thinking Action Plan. We will be exploring how our general education outcomes manifest in the co-curricular and examining assessment strategies for this area. Lastly, we have thus far focused on communicating about assessment to faculty. We plan to now expand that focus to examining appropriate communications to students and external constituents. We have committed to another Academy project to start in fall 2011. Tentatively, we plan to focus the next Academy project on the Critical Thinking Action Plan, assessing general education outcomes in the co-curricular, and communicating with students and external constituents.

10. What plans have you made to sustain the energy and momentum of your Academy work?

Perhaps the most significant way to strengthen the momentum of our Academy work is to continue the link to strategic planning and budgeting. Participating in the Academy with a new project to begin in fall 2011 will allow us to continue to advance our assessment and improvement of student learning activities. Our implementation of WEAVEonline will continue to keep assessment at the forefront of faculty awareness and will greatly aid in monitoring the college’s efforts in assessment and connections to the strategic plan. The implementation of the Critical Thinking Action Plan is multi-year and will help sustain the energy of our Academy work. We will continue communication with faculty and administrators to increase and maintain awareness of assessment and improvement of student learning. As we face a significant turnover in college leadership, we will need to make sure that as these positions are filled with permanent hires, they are informed of our assessment activities and associations to strategic planning and budgeting. In addition, our work toward our re-accreditation review in 2013-2014 will prompt continued momentum for our continuing assessment efforts. More details regarding the sustainability of our project can be found in the Sustainability Report.