

Excerpts from Middle States' Final Report

Prepared after a study of the institution's self-study report
And a visit to the campus on April 3-6, 2005

Standard 12: General Education

The institution meets this standard.

CCAC has identified a set of distribution course requirements that it uses as General Education requirements. These requirements are accurately described in the catalog and on the website; yet, neither the College's mission and goals nor the College's catalog make any specific mention of a philosophy of General Education.

The General Education requirements must be clarified, owned and reviewed by the College's faculty. In order to completely satisfy the fundamental elements of this standard, CCAC should develop an explicit General Education definition, establish clear criteria for the measurement and application of essential General Education skills, and publish a clear and consistent statement in the College's catalog.

Suggestions

1. In order to ensure that transfer and career programs contain documented rigorous general education requirements, the College should clearly define its core of General Education courses.
2. The College should develop a clear and concise statement of CCAC's philosophy of general education, and it should be published in the College's catalog.
3. CCAC should define student learning outcomes for General Education and state these outcomes in a manner consistent with other programs and courses at the College.

Recommendations

1. Assess and systematically collect the learning outcomes data for the College's General Education program.
2. Track and monitor the improvements made to teaching and learning that result from the assessment of the General Education program.
3. Include college-level proficiencies as well as the essential skills of oral and written communications, scientific and quantitative reasoning, critical analysis and reasoning, technological competency and information literacy in the College's General Education program outcomes.
4. Incorporate the study of values, ethics and diverse perspectives into CCAC's General Education program.

Standard 14: Assessment of Student Learning

The institution does not meet Standard 14.

While providing higher education opportunities for both traditional and non-traditional students, the Community College of Allegheny County falls short in the appropriate assessment of its student learning outcomes. CCAC, by its own admission in the Self-Study (93), has not instituted a comprehensive assessment plan or process that measures student learning. Because of this, no learning assessment data is included as a part of the planning process. There are various assessment activities occurring on the campuses, but there are not yet overall formal, systematic plans for institutional and student learning assessment. CCAC students experience different types of student learning assessment on an individual course or program basis; however, there are no corresponding processes to ensure that assessment results are regularly used for improvement or for accountability.

The Team's interviews with faculty, staff and administration affirmed that the College does not have a comprehensive and consistent assessment methodology in place to monitor student progress and learning outcomes adequately. In interviews with senior faculty, the Team was anecdotally informed that some faculty has developed some strategies regarding student assessment; however, this assessment is not performed or collected systematically within departments or across the campuses. In addition, the Team found that there is no plan that clearly articulates the College's assessment activities and expectations. In summary, the Team could find no evidence that indicated the College could substantively and consistently demonstrate that students had knowledge, skills, and competencies consistent with institutional goals. As stated in the Characteristics' Fundamental Elements of Assessment of Student Learning (52), an accredited institution is characterized by:

- articulated expectations of student learning at various levels (institution, degree/program, course) that are consonant with the institution's mission and with the standards of higher education and of the relevant disciplines;
- a plan that describes student learning assessment activities being undertaken by the institution, including the specific methods to be used to validate articulated student learning goals/objectives;
- evidence that student learning assessment information is used to improve teaching and learning; and
- documented use of student learning assessment information as part of institutional assessment.

In a report dated June 6, 1996, the findings of a self-study document and the visitation team's report indicated the need for CCAC to assess student learning. At that time, a college-wide committee was given an assessment charge that highlighted six general objectives. Two of the six objectives were to (1) identify measures that are or can be collected systematically, recognize problems in current data collection, and remediate current collection processes; and (2) identify among these measures those that need to be provided on a regular basis to specific groups/individuals within the College. Unfortunately, these two objectives have yet to be acted upon with appropriate urgency and diligence. CCAC now finds itself still challenged by the lack of a consistent student outcomes assessment model. While the Team recognizes that some assessment work has been done in select areas of allied health and career programming, it was clear to the Team that a systematic approach to learning outcomes assessment is not evident.

Faculty, staff and administrators indicated that they believe the College understands the importance of outcomes assessment and does pay full attention to the power of assessment in its efforts to retain students. In interviews and meetings with the College's senior staff, the Team noted that strong support exists to create an institutional culture that values inquiry and evidence.

Suggestions

1. The College should identify successful student learning assessment models at appropriately benchmarked and peer community colleges in order to assist in framing CCAC's assessment plan.
2. CCAC should distribute the new Program Review Process under development by the ad hoc Program Review Committee college-wide.

Recommendations

1. Establish an official college definition of assessment of student learning.
2. Train faculty and administrators in the latest methodologies of establishing both direct and indirect measures of student learning assessment
3. Assess and systematically collect learning outcomes data for the College's academic programs, including General Education, as well as for the credit and non-credit courses.
4. Track improvements in student learning that are the result of outcomes assessment practices and monitor for the purpose of enhancing and improving student learning.
5. Ensure that assessment information is collected and distributed to the appropriate constituencies by reviewing its information distribution processes regarding assessment of student learning.