

THREE RIVERS COLLEGE

2013

Focus on Learning

FOCUS ON LEARNING

Fall Semester, 2013

Office of Planning and Continuous Improvement

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We've Made Progress!

Congratulations to all faculty and staff for adopting continuous improvement practices within their departments. You have much to be proud of on our journey to create a culture of assessment at Three Rivers College. Our process began as a result of feedback from the Higher Learning Commission, as well as concern from our Board of Trustees. Our new administration in 2009 was diligent on three areas of opportunity: 1) developing a strategic plan to guide and sustain us, 2) creating a master plan to ensure our infrastructure and capability, and 3) establishing student learning outcomes and assessment processes to ensure the effectiveness of our academic programs. Let's reflect on our progress:

- Phase 1: SWOT Analysis; Environmental Scan; and the Development of Our VISION 2015 Strategic Plan
- Phase 2: Development of Departmental Level Goals and Objectives (College-wide)
- Phase 3: Planning Priorities and Program Outcomes (Learning Division)
- Phase 3: Course Mapping (Learning Division);
- Phase 4: Reengineering of the College Budget Processes
- Phase 5: Implementation of Strategic Planning Online (SPOL)
- Phase 6: Development of Student Learning Outcomes and Supportive Artifacts
- Phase 7: Closing the Loop, Collection and Analysis of Student Learning Outcomes, Use of Assessment Results & SPOL for Making Data Informed Decisions.

A culture of assessment is critical to the development and implementation of specific outcomes for the college that will fulfill our mission and goals. Through our planning cycle, we tie our needs directly to budget requests and justify these decisions via supportive evidence. Making data-informed decisions provides the evidence for actual improvements needed. Additionally, this is a best practice and required of organizations that govern and guide the college. A culture of assessment will help us produce valid results from our planning processes that will keep us viable over the long term. Your dedication and hard work to make these changes is commendable, and you can take great pride in your role to create a culture of assessment for Three Rivers College!

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

-Margaret Mead

Dates to remember for fall 2013

- August 12 — Convocation and Afternoon Workshops
- August 19 — Classes Begin
- August — September — Departmental Results Compiled/Student Learning Outcomes results from SP/SU Term compiled; Updated in SPOL
- September — November — Evaluation/Revision of Departmental Objectives and Student Learning Outcomes Results
- November 18-19 — Higher Learning Commission Site Visit
- April TBD, 2014 — Annual Assessment Celebration Day (All departments will showcase their actual results from planning activities, showcase successes accomplished and challenges overcome.

A Bright Future Ahead!

Over the summer, faculty representatives Dr. Kathy Prejean, Justin Hoggard, Staci Campbell, and Jeff Kropp, along with our Director of Planning & Continuous Improvement and Vice President of Learning, traveled to Chicago, IL to participate in the Academy for the Assessment of Student Learning Results Forum at the Higher Learning Commission (HLC). The purpose of the HLC Assessment Academy is to assist institutions in meeting HLC standards. The academy provides training to develop knowledge and experience with successful assessment processes colleges can use in managing the quality of learning.

The Academy Results Forum was the final phase of our development where we demonstrated planning, systems, and processes that we have created to meet HLC accreditation standards. Three Rivers College was recognized with a certificate for completing this process and received outstanding reviews for our submission.

The opportunity existed to meet with peers, mentors, and leaders to discuss the progress our college made and further define a plan for moving forward. Our plan for the 2013-14 academic year is to:

- Continue to develop policies and procedures that govern our planning and assessment processes.
- Strengthen the assessment planning process through professional development activities, i.e. providing increased focus on how to analyze and use the assessment results attained from student learning outcomes and departmental planning objectives to make data informed decisions.
- Strengthen existing departmental objectives and continue to review supportive SPOL documentation.
- Align departmental planning with Higher Learning Commission (HLC) accreditation criteria to ensure the college is planning for compliance.
- Continue the Continuous Improvement Leadership Team and Institutional Effectiveness Committee.
- Strengthen the assessment of AAS degree programs through a comprehensive program review cycle that ensures alignment with our General Education Program Outcomes.
- Conduct a survey to determine the level of understanding of assessment within the institution.
- Develop an Institutional Effectiveness/Assessment Manual to provide a resource for training and development.
- Provide a continuous improvement web presence to profile departmental/institutional results.
- Host a campus-wide assessment day to celebrate a culture focused on learning.

The goal of this newsletter is to improve understanding of assessment as a process that helps us to stay focused on continuous improvement. "Focus on Learning" is both the name of this newsletter and the impetus of our assessment processes.

We assess not to prove but to improve the learning opportunities and support services that we provide for our students!

Keeping it Real!



In Biology 101, we talk about the critical importance of the conservation of the water, air, land, and all species of life (except for ticks and chiggers, of course). We took the assignment about the Conservation of Barn Owls and utilized it for our initial assessment of the Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) for this Biology course. In this assignment, we study barn owl behavior, good farming practices for the conservation of animals and compare the efforts of Missouri to conserve barn owls versus the other states in the U.S. This artifact was initiated in the fall, and we discovered some of the students were having difficulty with a key aspect of the critical thinking part we were assessing.

After looking at our results, I spoke with the students and asked them why some of them had missed the part of the assignment that covered the concept of critical thinking. In the Biology artifact, the critical thinking part of the rubric was tied to the information about the conservation efforts by farmers and how this helped the owls flourish. It turned out that some of the students did not understand that farmers in Missouri play a key role in the conservation of barn owls by their choices in outbuildings and farming practices. Some of the students had never been on a farm or witnessed any farming (even though we live in a rural area!). So the assessment artifact itself needed to be inclusive of the information that all students needed. In other words, they could solve the problem and do the critical thinking, but they did not because they needed additional information.

Upon discovering this, we added a short video that included more information about farming and farming practices for the conservation of barn owls. In the next semester, more students were able to score better on the critical thinking aspect of their assignment. Sometimes it's just a matter of the way the information is being conveyed or the type of information provided to our students that does not fit the entire student audience well enough. We must review what we do after every semester to see how we are doing overall.

Now students love the video because they will watch the birds in action since barn owls are a bird of prey, and I think they enjoy the assignment more because they get to dissect a barn owl pellet (undigested food). So for our Biology educators, it was a great day! Any time we can get human appreciation of animals while slipping in a departmental assessment of the assignment is a win for us and our students! Naturally, the endangered barn owls will now have a better chance of survival in Missouri and that is great with the Biology folks.

Dr. Kathy Prejean, Biology Faculty

One critical development for the Social Science Department occurred due to the revamped Capstone Experience exam. After updating the Social Science exam, we analyzed our results, and the faculty realized the exam presented a validity/reliability issue. This taught us the reliability of the results we use to determine our effectiveness in student learning is only as good as the artifact.

Justin Hoggard, Department Chair Social Sciences