Improving General Education @ Simpson: A S.L.I.C Approach to Success
2013-03-16
Project Detail

Describe the project you developed at the Roundtable. Focus particularly on the general strategies you developed. (500 words)

The project was designed to answer these questions: How should the assessment of the engaged Citizenship Curriculum be structured? What is needed to ensure the assessment program has the resources and support to be viable and sustainable? How can the quality of the assessment program be assured?

The plan is (1) to develop a manageable and affective feedback loop for assessment (Student Learning Improvement Cycle – SLIC), (2) a support structure including IS resources, personnel and budgeting, and (3) a professional develop program (Student Learning Assessment Academy – SLAAc) that would, over time, build a community of assessment experts.

(1) We are ahead of the game because we have developed SLOs for the ECC. However, the number of SLOs is unwieldy and direct assessment of each individually is daunting. The first step is to write program-level learning objectives that allow us to focus our assessment efforts on that level. We also need to decide on direct and indirect measures of the program-level learning objectives that are feasible. A procedure for collection, analysis, feedback and an action plan needs to be put in place. We plan to divide the ECC into 4 themes and roll out the assessment for one of the themes in 2013-14, and then add one area to the assessment process each year so that the entire plan for continual assessment will be in place in 4 years.

(2) We recognize that to do assessment right will take more person power than we currently have available. One barrier to effective assessment now is simply the time it takes to plan, implement and analyze. We need ongoing institutional support for assessment activities. Financial support in the form of a budget line for administrative and faculty support personal is a necessity. We need to develop job descriptions for an information services staff, administrative support staff, and an institutional review office that will work collaboratively with the already established part-time faculty Director of Academic Assessment. Working with Information Services, we also need to develop a budget for data management software or for building an in-house system.

(3) To foster commitment to improving student learning requires the community to believe that they have the ability to do it. The plan is to create a professional development program for faculty, staff and administration that create a core of experts in the first year, and then continue to widen the circle of expertise each year. An initial cohort will be the founding members of the Student Learning Assessment Academy (SLAAc). The curriculum will include best practices in assessment of general education. In the second year of SLAAc, the first cohort will be mentors for a second set, and so on. This professional development will include faculty, staff and administration so that the community will develop a common vocabulary, and there will be an understanding of the processes and value of assessment for improving student learning across the campus.

What are the desired outcomes of this project? How will you know that you have achieved each of these outcomes?

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First is to have an active, effective and sustainable feedback loop of the Student Learning Improvement Cycle (SLIC) for the Engaged Citizenship Curriculum. SLIC will exist when the structures are in place. The evidence of efficacy will be a functioning feedback loop that leads to changes in the curriculum, changes in the assessment process and focused professional development activities. Sustainability will be evidenced by the appropriate budget lines, additional personnel and operational data collection and management.

The college will have the tools and disposition to improve student learning by developing a culture of assessment. We will know we have the tools when we have developed a common vocabulary that describes our specific assessment activities. We will know that we can provide the tools when the Student Learning Assessment Academy has been through two iterations with a stable, but evolving, curriculum. A cultural change is harder to measure, but will be seen when the institutional language changes from that of compliance and serving the accreditation agency to valuing assessment and serving the needs of the students.

The college will commit to continuous rather than episodic assessment. The establishment of a budget line and supporting administration and staff positions will indicate a commitment by the administration to regular assessment activities. The commitment from the academic community will be proven when the Student Learning Improvement Cycle has been established with faculty cooperation. We will have gone beyond episodic assessment when collection is continuous and evaluation is periodic.

What serious challenges do you expect to encounter? How will you deal with them?

1. Some faculty/staff still feel threatened by assessment, do not understand it or do not value it. There is sometimes a fear of failure and/or fear of change. We plan to address this through
   a. training and professional development,
   b. implementing the program in phases,
   c. bringing in expert voices,
   d. sharing success stories of how assessment helped improve student learning at Simpson,
   e. renaming assessment to Student Learning Improvement Cycle to focus on the purpose, and
   f. including stakeholders, including trustees, to help with buy-in.

2. It has not been our tradition to commit money and human resources to support institutional research and assessment. To address these issues we will
   a. help in selecting a new president who is committed to assessment,
   b. secure funding for an institutional review office,
   c. seek grant money to support SLAAc,
   d. seek grant money to support the assessment of specific components of the ECC, and
   e. continue to work to overcome challenge 1 above to build a community that values assessment.

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3. We are concerned that current faculty and staff will not have the time to devote to an effective assessment plan in case we cannot overcome challenge 2 above, and adding assessment to an already burdened system will promote burn out. Faculty are concerned about how much time data collection will take and where documents will be stored. We plan to
   a. seek compensation for faculty for summer work on assessment,
   b. add computer automation wherever it is effective,
   c. simplify wherever possible without sacrificing quality and effectiveness,assigning tasks (high-level, low-level) to faculty or staff appropriately,
   d. building shared responsibility across the campus, including students, and
   e. continue to work to overcome challenge 2 above.

4. We are apprehensive about data collection and data management. Should we purchase a data management system, where will electronic documents be stored, etc.? We plan to
   a. research software data management systems,
   b. work closely with Information Services to evaluate programs,
   c. have a dry run-through this year to study the issues of data collection, and
   d. consult with available experts.

5. The Simpson Academy team is concerned with other issues such as working toward compromise when needed and working collaboratively with the larger campus community. We hope that our work with the Academy will provide us with the tools we need to succeed.

Describe the specific steps you will be taking in Year 1 to develop and implement the early stages of your project.

The communication (meetings, events, websites, memo's...etc.) we must accomplish within the next:

Key:

ALs = Assessment liaisons to the academic/student development programs

APRC = Assessment and Program Review Committee

BLC = Budget and Liaison Committee

CEO = Chief Executive Officer

CFO = Chief Financial Officer

CIO = Chief Information Officer

CAO = Chief Academic Officer

DFD = Director of Faculty Development

DAA = Director of Academic Assessment

DFY = Director of the First Year program

FDC = Faculty Development Committee

IS = Information Services

PR = Public Relations

SLAAc = Student Learning Assessment Academy (professional development for ECC assessment)

DGE = Director of General Education

SLIC = Student Learning Improvement Cycle (assessment of the Engaged Citizenship Curriculum (ECC))

Team = HLC Academy of Assessment of Student Learning Team (DAA, DGE, APRC, CAO, registrar, DFY, grant writer, DFD)

Two weeks (Nov)		Three months (Nov – Jan)		Six months (Nov – Apr)		Nine months (Nov – Jul)		One year (Nov – Oct)	
What	**Who**	**What**	**Who**	**What**	**Who**	**What**	**Who**	**What**	**Who**
Continued reports to stake-holders	DAA, APRC, CAO	Develop webpage about participation in academy	DAA, PR	IS staff assigned to assessment issues	CIO, CAO, DAA	Build SLAAc structure and curriculum	Team, DFD	Meet with new president	APRC
Report on Academy to CAO	DAA	Upload our project to HLC portal	DAA	Commitment to fund SLAAc	Trustees, CEO, CFO	Ongoing professional development	APRC, CAO, DFD	Pilot SLAAc	DAA, DFD

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						for APRC			
Meet with BLC to discuss budgeting	Team	Refine ECC categories by December 20th	DAA, DGE	Actively apply for grants	Team	Professional development for ECC teaching, learning	Team, DFD, DGE	Begin phase 1 of ECC collection	DAA, DGE, IS
		Meet w/ FDC about SLAAc	DAA	Identify SLAAc pilot group, compensation	Team, CAO	Training for ALs and division heads	APRC, DFD, DAA, ALs	Decide how we collect non-text artifacts	IS, Team, ALs
		Invite president to APRC	APRC	Publish SLIC (web and internal)	DAA, PR			Continued reports to stake-holders	DAA, APRC, CAO
		Investigate data management software	CIO, CAO, Team	Continued reports to stake- holders	DAA, APRC, CAO				
		Write/publish nomenclature for SLIC, SLAAc	Team	Hire administrative assistant to DAA	CEO, CFO, CAO, DAA				
		Job description for ALs	APRC, Team	Assessment liaisons appointments	APRC, DAA, ALs				
		Develop assessment representative to trustees	APRC, CAO, CEO						

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Other activities:
- **Work collaboratively with Northern Iowa Area Community College, Central College and other schools on assessment of general education. In particular, NIACC has already assessed critical thinking and can help us and we can in turn help them with other assessment pieces.**
- **Identify internal funds for ECC Assessment/Assessment of Programs professional development**
- **Assessment workshop day in May**

Update Questions

Please confirm that this Activity is ready for review.

This project is ready for review.