Assessment of (STLCC) Assessment ‘09

This year’s “Assessment of Assessment” summary and critique held on Friday, May 1 at Meramec asked and answered this vital question: “What Organizational or Personal Obstacles Make It Difficult For You To Use Assessment Data, Information, and Interpretation To Close The Loop?” Participants found that in addition to the usual systemic barriers and resistance to change, the following obstacles or “lacks” at STLCC were evident:

- Time
- Priority
- Focus
- Institutional Support
- Engagement
- Communication
- Collaboration

- Time
A number of the groups cited time constraints as persistent obstacles to closing the loop on assessment projects, for time is a crucial and limited element that must be rationed and organized according to our priorities through the usual means, through due dates and schedules. Other factors, including those listed below, affect the availability and use of time needed to study problems and implement changes necessary to improve teaching and learning.

- Priority
Establishing institutional priorities is another critical factor in persistently completing assessment projects successfully. When priorities are clearly set and communicated, assessment projects can get the attention and resources required to complete them in a timely, efficient manner.
Focus
A lack of clearly established priorities typically leads to a lack of focus or even competing foci, the result being the divided or diffused attention of those attempting to complete worthwhile assessment projects as well as the diversion of resources that can be made available.

Institutional Support
The groups offered that the lack of institutional support for assessment shows up in a variety of ways. Several cited the seeming lack of interest shown by institutional leadership, while others equated this with vague lines of authority to implement changes recommended by assessment. A few called for more help in retrieving and analyzing data in addition to more support for those participating in assessment projects.

Engagement
Lack of engagement is a chronic problem faced by assessment. Simply put, faculty (full-time and adjunct), staff, administrators and students are persistently challenged to maintain their engagement in assessment matters. While assessment at STLCC is now much more engrained in the academic culture, involving those “beyond” the assessment choir is still a considerable challenge.

Communication
Progress in any of the above and especially in the succeeding point (collaboration) obviously depends on communication. Groups pointed to STLCC’s size as a speed bump that must be negotiated no matter what the issue or initiative. None of the obstacles to assessment progress will be overcome if communication lags behind. Moreover, clearer communication of STLCC’s strategic plan will enhance the College’s ability to define and diffuse such barriers.

Collaboration
Finally, as at least one group pointed out, the change agent for as well as the result of improving all of the above is collaboration. Collaboration is the key that unlocks and opens these assessment doors.

Conclusion
Based on this Assessment of Assessment session, we recommend that the Assessment Council and the College concentrate on the following initiatives for 2009 – 2010:

1. Establish or re-establish institutional priorities and leadership support with respect to assessment;
2. Pursue the Higher Learning Commission’s AQIP approach to accreditation as both a challenge and opportunity to better align assessment and strategic planning;
3. Persist in faculty-and-staff driven assessment initiatives, particularly in Career and Technical Education, Developmental Education, and General Education during 2009 – 2010. Special attention should be directed to the development of specific student learning outcomes for each of these areas.

Campus Assessment Showcases
Last month, each campus held a session to describe 2008-2009 key division assessment activities. The sessions were coordinated by the campus Vice-Presidents for Academic Affairs.

Assessment projects directed attention toward the following issues:

- Impact of Course Prerequisites on Subsequent Course Performance
- Course & Department Student Learning Objectives
- Graduate Performance on Standardized Tests and Licensure Examinations
- Impact of Developmental Coursework on Future College Success
- Matching Actual Curriculum to Course Profiles
- Curriculum Alignment
- Using CATS to Improve Student Engagement
- Distance and Hybrid Course/Curriculum Development
- Exploration of Course Linkages Between Content Areas & Developmental Reading
- Examination of the Relationship Among Bloom’s Taxonomy, Instructional Strategies and Student Learning Outcomes

The sessions were well-attended and generated some interesting discussions. According to John Cosgrove, Director of Institutional Research, Planning & Assessment, “the successful completion of division assessment efforts is further evidence of the increased support for faculty-based inquiry as the driving force behind assessment.”
UMSL Students Return to Help Transferring Students

In April, a corps of STLCC transfer students now attending UMSL returned to act as mentors and to share their transfer experience(s) with STLCC students. In these sessions, the mentors lead current STLCC students through the transfer “ropes.”

Three to four former STLCC students talked at Florissant Valley on April 21st, Meramec on April 23rd, and Forest Park on April 28th. In addition to the good advice and the usual snacks and refreshments, students attending also received packets of information on transfer procedures provided by each campus counseling / advising office.

CCSSE & CCFSSE Completed

The Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) survey and the Community College Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (CCFSSE) were conducted on each campus this spring. The student survey questions students at community colleges across the country to find out exactly what contributes to students feeling more engaged on campus while the faculty survey elicits information from faculty about their perceptions regarding students’ educational experiences, their teaching practices, and the ways they spend their professional time—both in and out of the classroom.

The results from each are expected from CCSSE over the summer. At that point, Institutional Research, Planning and Assessment will do some further analysis of the data provided.

For more on CCSSE and its increasingly significant role in informing the public and changing the perceptions of and about community college students, you may consult the CCSSE website at http://www.ccsse.org/.

AQIP Colloquium

John Cosgrove, Donna Dare, Larry McDoniel, and Tim Roach traveled to Chicago on April 17 – 19 to attend the AQIP Colloquium at the annual meeting of the Higher Learning
Commission. They attended a variety of sessions that demonstrated how institutions have structured AQIP programs and how those programs are working.

All of the speakers reported that continuous quality improvement quickly became a part of their “business as usual.” This seemed to result in greater communication among constituent groups as well as enhanced performance within groups.

At a lunch for attendees, representatives of various states demonstrated how they had formed statewide AQIP consortia. These bodies were said to have enhanced communication among member institutions as well as giving individual institutions the understanding that their programs were functioning just as well as the programs of their colleagues across their states.

The Missouri consortium proved to be among the newer such bodies, and members invited their sister schools to participate as soon as possible. At this point, CBHE Commissioner Robert Stein rose to announce that CBHE is in the middle of creating energy for all member institutions to become AQIP schools as soon as possible. He recognized the STLCC group and expressed happiness that STLCC was demonstrating interest in AQIP, stating that such leading institutions could present good examples for the whole state.

FYI

STLCC Assessment Publications
Recent outreach attempts can be found on the College Assessment webpage. These include the following articles that appeared in League for Innovation publications:

- “St. Louis Community College Customizes Assessment,” *iStream Project Highlight* (League for Innovation; February 2009) http://www.league.org/istreamSite/project_index.cfm?id=1041&Submit=Open+Edition
- “Creating a Culture of Action Using Mission-Based Assessment,” *Assessment Update* (forthcoming publication)
Conferences on Assessment

International Assessment & Retention Conference
New Orleans, Louisiana       June 10 - 13, 2009
The International Assessment and Retention Conference is intended to be a "big tent" conference. Like the annual conferences once run by the American Association for Higher Education, this conference deals with topics of both policy and practice, and it is aimed at higher education professionals interested in and committed to the improvement of student learning. Thus it is designed, as the AAHE conferences were, to create conversations relevant to and benefiting professionals in Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, and Institutional Research.

The International Association for Educational Assessment - 2009 Conference
Brisbane, Australia          September 13-18, 2009
The International Association for Educational Assessment offers a global forum for all those involved in all forms of educational assessment – in primary or secondary schools, colleges or the workplace. Its members include examining bodies, university departments, research organizations and government agencies from more than 50 countries on all continents.

Assessment Calendar

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<tr>
<th>2008-09 Meeting Schedule</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>STLCC Assessment Council</td>
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<td>Friday May 15 W</td>
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<td>Multipurpose Room 102, Side B</td>
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Important STLCC Assessment Links
- Assessment Resources  http://www.stlcc.edu/Faculty_and_Staff_Resources/Assessment/Assessment_Resources.html
- Assessment Public Site  http://www.stlcc.edu/Faculty_and_Staff_Resources/Assessment/