

TMCC Assessment Coordinator's 2009-2010 Annual Report

This report is presented to Turtle Mountain Community College on behalf of its faculty in an effort to update staff, faculty and students about ongoing faculty-driven efforts to assess student learning, and to present recommendations to the Administrative Council, responsible for the strategic plan based on the evidence of our data-collection, or on the obvious gaps thereof, in order to improve students' learning by focusing on their critical needs. All Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians and other shareholders in the college, its students, and common good are entitled to read this document.

Recent History of Assessment of Student Learning of General Education Outcomes

Like its predecessors of recent years, this report was prepared by gathering the FARM documents that each full-time faculty submits on a single course each semester; faculty then meet as departments in a focused meeting on assessment and the department chair writes a report to the assessment coordinator. In this manner, the quantitative and qualitative data gathered in each class are filtered through the intellectual merit of faculty perception, expertise, and consensus to make instructional changes in the course(s), as agreed by a majority of faculty. Faculty also discusses institutional changes to address the critical needs of our students, as determined through the analysis of multiple assessment instruments deployed throughout the campus. The assessment coordinator then prepares this document, and usually receives acceptance from the faculty before submitting to Administrative Council. In turn, our recommendations are supposed to function as the starting point of TMCC strategic plan, since our mission is to educate tribal members so they can be self-determining persons. Pedagogically speaking, the best methods for teaching people what they don't know but need to, necessarily includes assessing their needs and their talents and then coordinating faculty's efforts both to enable student learning, and to measure that learning. This is the model TMCC faculty have followed beneath Dr. Carpenter's leadership, and is what earned TMCC the opportunity to represent tribal colleges at last year's Higher Learning Commission Conference in Chicago as *par exemplar* for assessing student learning. They noted particularly the manner in which we had 'closed the loop' between data collection and actually using it to improve student learning.

Current Status

Overview

Unfortunately this model seems to be faltering, and the committee has been able to pursue our annual goals only haltingly. Due to matters beyond our control, the Higher Learning Commission is threatening another focused visit in the near future (despite the fact that we had one in 2008 and have the 10 year accreditation visit in 2013); they requested a number of documents, which in the Assessment Coordinator's opinion TMCC did not possess, that were due on March 15, 2010. The majority of TMCC employees were ignorant to the fact that a report from the college was required. It is assumed that lawyers prepared and submitted these documents under the direction of the president. The Assessment Coordinator was not involved or considered in any manner regarding that report and its accompanying documents. Our status with the Higher Learning Commission remains unstable.

In general and as required, faculty continue to assess students at the course level [pre- and post-assessing every class; quizzes, essays, homework, speeches, tests, exams, oral and PowerPoint

presentations are just a few examples], and make improvements. There are no breakdowns in this area of the assessment platform, an important feature to note because it means that there are fewer student complaints about teachers grading unfairly, and more overall student satisfaction with their perception of their learning. Sometimes, because there are no problems, people take that preventative instruction for granted. That is, every day teachers are tinkering with their instructional techniques in order to improve student learning, and much of that continuous work always shall be undocumented. It should be recognized that the average score of student satisfaction with TMCC instructors is above 4 on a 5 point scale.

There has been little progress in securing a permanent external assessment instrument of the two year degree programs and TMCC General Education Outcomes of Student Learning, or a satisfactory means of administering and tracking the data. The person charged with this responsibility for the past eighteen months, Dr. Robbins, accepted employment in the Twin Cities. A primary function of the committee is to ensure that students meet the standards of these outcomes, a duty that necessitates measuring students before and after they attend TMCC to demonstrate that students are indeed learning. Simply put, keeping track of this data is fundamental to retaining accreditation as a degree-granting tribally-controlled college. TMCC has never enjoyed, however, a satisfactory instrument, and faculty are still preparing a proposal to request formal changes to degree requirements or TMCC policy. The 2010-2012 TMCC Catalog, as a result of department chairs and curriculum committee's work, will be streamlined, but should NOT have significant changes to degree requirements advised by the Assessment Committee, such as a mandatory pre and post assessment using the MAPP. This annual report is organized according to the maintenance of the assessment committee requirement, beginning with the most pressing and specific issues with which we have been confronted and tirelessly attempting to resolve.

The MAPP

The MAPP is Educational Testing Services assessment instrument for evaluating common general education student learning outcomes in community colleges and other 2 year degree programs. We have met about and discussed this issue at nearly every meeting for the past 2 years and other reports outline its capabilities more than this one shall so please refer to them for a more ample description. As of this moment, the consensus of the assessment committee is that it is the best instrument for our students if given in its abbreviated format. The abbreviated format takes about 40 minutes per person to complete on a computer; it takes 3 abbreviated tests to comprise 1 complete test. The MAPP does NOT test individuals or track any single student skill set. Rather, it measures group knowledge and collective student needs and skills. The MAPP has the added benefit of offering a culturally-sensitive device. We are allowed to add a bank of questions that revolve around STEM objectives and Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians and their culture, from which a predetermined number would be randomly selected and given to our students. That is to say, ETS would be willing to integrate our questions in with their general test, and it still would be a test delivered in less than an hour, on any computer anywhere, potentially at any time. While we would probably want more control over the administration dates and times, the MAPP would be deliverable to disabled students, military and other online only students. If given to all entering and all graduating with two and even four years, it could provide a simple, reliable and valid means of assessing student learning.

It would require a change in the degree requirements approved by the Board of Trustees and the cooperation and assistance of Student Services and Student Support Services.

**The next coordinator must gain the majority of faculty support for an external instrument that measures objectively and collectively TMCC student learning. The MAPP seems the best choice, but faculty must still discover a way that works for all agencies involved, and use that data for strategic planning. Without this instrument, or its like, TMCC cannot prove any student learning of the General Education Outcomes, and would likely risk the ire of HLC at the next visit in 2013.

FARM/Department Meetings

While a handful of faculty have submitted their FARM for fall semester 2009, the majority have not, and do not seem inclined to do so. There is no incentive (carrot), or punishment (stick) for completing the FARM. All hard copy files are stored in 210L. Electronic copies will be given to the next Assessment Coordinator. The Science and Math Department, Teacher Education, CTE, Social Sciences and the Arts and Humanities Department have held their semiannual meetings, and the assessment coordinator has received reports from Science/math dept. and Arts/humanities dept. Their recommendations are included below. Our recommendations, however, seem to only marginally influence the strategic plan, a document which the Assessment Committee has not seen, nor is privy to what it may contain as relates to assessment of student learning. The general consensus among faculty seems to be resistant to performing duties that they generally speaking, are not regarded or supported by the strategic plan and the president.

There are several recommendations that resulted from these meeting presented below. Reading comprehension across the curriculum is presenting a serious impediment to student learning and retention, though we have only soft data to support it. The lack of data collection on reading skills does not mean that our students can read; it merely means that TMCC chooses to remain blissfully ignorant of its students reading abilities. Faculty have been frustrated for the past three years in trying to stress to administration the absolute need for a reading specialist faculty hire. That critical lack, combined with the rampant gaps in TMCC's computer infrastructure, has challenged faculty efforts to respond to obvious student learning needs.

Communicating with the Institutional Effectiveness Director

The Assessment Coordinator has continued to meet weekly with the Institutional Effectiveness Director and other department chairs. In this meetings, Dr. Carpenter has debriefed the director about on going assessment, the history of FARM, the history of national high stakes testing, the process for data analysis, closing the loopas well as provided the raw data gathered at the course level in Science and Social Science departments. While there is no pressing need, eventually the files should be returned to 210L or conversely, all files in 210L should be stored in some central processing area of all TMCC assessment/student data. This has been both a constant recommendation of this committee, and a constant complaint from NCA about our accreditation efforts. In discussions with the director, it is clear that Terri likewise perceives a fundamental need for a central data collection area if we want to really assess student learning in a simple, valid, and reliable fashion.

** Next year's faculty assessment coordinator should be someone who is comfortable working with the administration in honest communication. I appreciated working with Terri and enjoyed our genuine conversations. The IE office should develop into a central data collection and processing unit.

Faculty Evaluations

As per policy, all full-time faculty participated in evaluations of their classrooms by department chairs. These have been shared with the academic dean, but for the most part have been confidential documents between chairs and their faculty. In my opinion, these have been successful and non-judgmental means of improving faculty instruction in order to increase student learning and retention.

All full and part-time faculty participated in the evaluations of their courses and teaching methods by students that were conducted by the Institutional Effectiveness Director in the middle of fall semester, 2009 and the end of spring semester, 2010. Online courses are NOT and have never been a part of the collection of student satisfaction data. The gathered materials have been reviewed by department chairs, academic dean, individual faculty, assessment coordinator and the IE director. When and where necessary the academic dean spoke with individual faculty to address specific and confidential concerns. Since faculty have participated in the composition of this document, and are always permitted to offer revisions based on their particular course, this assessment instrument and its data appear optimal.

**The main issue that requires attention is TMCC's inability to evaluate online courses and instructors. It is hoped that the new IT Director, Chad Davis, can remedy this potentially harmful omission of data collection.

Evaluation for Assessment vs. Employee Evaluation

The Chair of the Evaluation Committee and Assessment Coordinator have discussed the lack of coordination amongst the multiple and often overlapping systems/instruments for evaluating faculty/employees. Most importantly as Dr. Carpenter has repeatedly stressed faculty want to maintain a distinction between evaluation of their instructional talents performed for the improvement of student learning; and a TMCC employee evaluation of their work performance. Furthermore, there remains no procedure for linking either evaluation process to professional development plans (IPDP): to what ends and purposes are we being evaluated? Answers are unclear. Since this conversation is part of a larger discussion on merit pay and tenure/promotion of faculty, this conversation must not be silenced. It must expand so that all TMCC employees know what we must do to perform our job and what we do that exceeds the expectations and so merits more pay. Related to this lack of coordination and supervision is the suggestion below that TMCC double its assessment budget and coordinator salary. Dr. Carpenter led the faculty for three years to an outstanding recognition from the Higher Learning Commission for the annual meager sum of \$4,700 after taxes.

**The duties of the assessment coordinator occupy more than a couple of hours a week and faculty who assume this role should be adequately compensated.

NCA/HLC

We are sending only 1 faculty to NCA this year – Les La Fountain. Kathy Henry, Larry Henry and Terri Martin-Parisien also plan to attend, using Assessment Committee funds for registration and other funds for the rest. The Assessment Coordinator did not see any reason to go. The Assessment Committee transferred Leslie Peltier's air ticket delayed from last year (for personal reasons), to fly to AIHEC on the expectation that she attend the assessment meeting there. Otherwise, we would have lost the money entirely, and that did not seem fair to either the committee or Leslie. Regardless, Les and others will attend this conference in April, 2010 and all preparations have been made, except Les' per diem/mileage/expenses.

Monthly Meetings

The Assessment Committee has met monthly this school year and electronically posted minutes, though we usually skip the month of departmental meetings. For the March 19 meeting, faculty met as a whole, but those minutes are not in the scope of this report.

Next Year Assessment Coordinator

According to TMCC policy, in March, faculty is required to nominate next year's Assessment Coordinator, and each department propose any Department Chairs (every 3 years). After 4 years serving in the position, Dr. Carpenter will no longer be doing so. Faculty met on March 19, 2010, but thus far, no individual faculty has been selected or volunteered to serve as Assessment Coordinator.

Recommendations:

- 1: Hire a Faculty with Reading degree.*
- 2: Provide for a Central Data Collection and Processing area.*
- 3: Double the Assessment budget and Coordinator salary.*
- 4: Consider what it would require TMCC internally to do in order to mandate students take MAPP and enable Student Services and IT dept. to assist faculty in administration.*
- 5: Outline the specific tangible departmental student learning outcomes that correspond with the Gen. Ed outcomes.*
- 6: Improve online assessment and registration techniques.*
- 7: Provide for the training of students by faculty in online use of Jenzabar.*