

**LAGUARDIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE/CUNY**  
**Outcomes Assessment – Periodic Program Review Guidelines**  
[Updated May, 2008]

During the 2001-02 academic year, a new Outcomes Assessment Plan was approved by the College's governance bodies. Guidelines for the CUNY-mandated Periodic Program Review (PPR) process have been revised to reflect this Outcomes Assessment Plan.

**PART I: OVERVIEW OF THE OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT PLAN**

LaGuardia's outcomes assessment plan is designed to assess institutional effectiveness in terms of learning and teaching - and using the resultant data to improve our pedagogies and academic programs. The plan is designed to assess overall student achievement of the College's general education core competencies as well as each major's programmatic competencies. In line with our commitment to the academic, career, and personal growth and development of every student, the assessment system will use a variety of assessment tools to evaluate the effectiveness of learning and teaching. A central feature of the assessment plan is an emphasis on inter-disciplinary skills development, in that required core competencies are to be developed and assessed across all disciplines.

**Background:** The following excerpts from an article by Dean Paul Arcario and Professor James Wilson (English) provide some history of the development of the outcomes assessment plan – in particular the general education “core competencies” - as well as the philosophy underpinning the plan:

*At LaGuardia, we first reconsidered the definition of general education as it applies to the community college. While it is the community college “Liberal Arts” degree programs (our AA in Liberal Arts: Humanities and Social Sciences and AS in Liberal Arts: Mathematics and Science) that correspond most closely to what has been traditionally defined as general education at the senior colleges, we did not want to equate “general education” with only these Liberal Arts majors. Rather we wanted a model that would provide each and every major with a common general education experience. Could we achieve this goal through uniform general education course requirements across all majors? Although such a distributional system is the norm at 90 percent of senior colleges,<sup>i</sup> it is difficult to accomplish at a community college. Associate degrees (at least at CUNY) are generally capped at 60 credits, and each major needs to include general education courses appropriate for the discipline and these often vary by major. In fact, designating general education courses on a program-by-program basis is a typical pattern among community colleges;<sup>ii</sup> as a result, if we try to define general education at a community college as a set of specific courses that all students have to take across all majors, the number of such courses tends to be small indeed. With this difficulty in mind, we began thinking it would make more sense for us to design a comprehensive general education program around a series of competencies or proficiencies required across all majors, rather than around such a limited number of required courses – but what would be key was developing those competencies tightly*

*linked to discipline-area content, as the last thing we wanted was to work on competencies in isolation.*

*At the same time, other issues, demands, and projects were coming into play. We were grappling with designing and implementing an outcomes assessment plan as mandated by our accrediting agency; a major Title V grant enabled us to adopt electronic portfolios (ePortfolios) as the basis for the plan. A Task Force was re-examining our developmental education programs with the goal of improving student learning outcomes; simultaneously, we were designing a comprehensive first-year experience program as a collaboration between the divisions of Academic Affairs and Enrollment Management & Student Development. And we were selected as one of ten colleges nationally to participate in the “Integrative Learning: Opportunities to Connect” project sponsored by AAC&U and the Carnegie Foundation. As work on these initiatives progressed, the pieces of our general education and assessment programs began coming together. Conceiving of general education as competencies across the curriculum would allow for a relatively uniform outcomes assessment process in each major: each and every program would take responsibility for graduating students proficient in those competencies. Perhaps more importantly, an across-the-curriculum approach would support broad-based faculty exploration of how competency development could at the same time facilitate discipline-area learning, for example, through such pedagogies as “writing to learn.” Aspects of our definition of “integrative learning” thus began to emerge: writing, we told our students, was not something just done in English class, nor was making oral presentations just for speech class, but rather these skills also needed to be developed in the context of the disciplines: as LaGuardia graduates, students should be well on the path toward writing and speaking as members of their chosen field did. By the same token, faculty teaching business or computer courses, for example, would not leave writing instruction solely to the English faculty, nor speaking solely to the speech faculty. We wanted this kind of integration to extend to developmental education as well. With the majority of students at LaGuardia - and most community colleges - needing developmental education, we felt that linking skills and the disciplines should become a key element in our general education program. ...*

*LaGuardia’s recent efforts [in general education] have thus been in the domain of “common aims” (core competencies) and “experiences” (learning communities, ePortfolio, Academies and first-year activities). And we have developed a perhaps somewhat unorthodox definition of general education by including and integrating basic skills. We are striving to create common intellectual experiences for all students – acquiring basic skills and core competencies in the context of a discipline, engaging with a common reading, taking an urban studies and capstone writing intensive course, as well as becoming more self-reflective and taking ownership of the learning process through building an ePortfolio. ...*

*But what about the “what” of general education? We’ve also questioned if our approach was giving short shrift to knowledge and content – the actual courses students take. Certainly we continue to review and update our curricula - recently adding for example, a more rigorous mathematics course to several programs – but should we be spending*

more time trying to create a common set of courses for all students? We want to consider the answer in light of a few points. First, Adleman's recent data show "nearly 60 percent of undergraduates attending more than one institution;"<sup>iii</sup> thus, even if a set of general education distribution requirements is agreed upon, how many students are actually completing the entire package? Second, while Adelman states that the best indicator of college degree attainment is the "academic intensity" of the student's high school curriculum, arguing that "the principal story line leading to degrees is that of content," he also acknowledges that "counting Carnegie units in English or science is not the same as describing and validating what students have learned."<sup>iv</sup> Our contention is that "academic intensity" does not necessarily equate with specific content courses (even if one wants to grant that some subjects may be inherently more difficult than others), but has as much to do with the degree to which students are challenged and engaged in those courses. It is this kind of active learning and engagement with content that we have been most interested in stimulating through our general education and assessment efforts – agreeing with the principle that "the primary cause of genuine learning is the activity of the learner's own mind."<sup>v</sup>

Finally, it is sobering to keep in mind that even the best-constructed core curriculum or set of distribution requirements is subject to what Lee Schulman calls the "problem of amnesia," observing that "in liberal learning, one of the ubiquitous problems we face is the fragility of what is learned... Students seldom remember much of what they've read or heard beyond their last high-stakes exam on the material."<sup>vi</sup> The answer, he posits, is to promote active learning, writing, dialogue, reflection, integration, and opportunities for students to "go meta" about their learning and connect it to their goals. .... These are the aims of general education at LaGuardia – and in fact end up focusing us on content in the most important way: keeping us engaged in the hard work of empowering our students as learners, helping them to understand more deeply whatever academic content they encounter and to connect it more meaningfully to their lives.

Thus, as LaGuardia's outcomes assessment plan was being thought out, a number of goals emerged. We wanted a plan that would first and foremost help us improve student learning and that would designate common outcomes that we would strive to achieve across all programs so that all of our students would benefit. We wanted to capture the student learning and development that in our heart of hearts we knew was occurring, but that was not always well captured by measures such as graduation rates and standardized tests. We felt that the best way to "describe and validate what students have learned" and to measure the "academic intensity" of our courses was to look systematically at actual student work. And we wondered if we could design, in Lee Knefelkamp's words, assessment that would be "transformative" –

...assessment is transformative, and whether or not we're comfortable with it, assessment is about revolution. If we really listen to students and take them seriously, then our teaching and learning methodologies will change... Finely tuned assessment efforts help keep us from being self-satisfied or complacent about the workplace we love... Through assessment we challenge ourselves to rethink our ways of teaching, structuring the curriculum, working together, and even knowing itself. It provides a means for self-correcting action and for the

*continual expansion of our thinking about the idea and purpose of higher education.*<sup>vii</sup>

*We began by deciding with the department chairpersons upon a list of general education core competencies required in each and every major: 1) written communication, 2) critical thinking, 3) critical reading, 4) quantitative reasoning, 5) oral communication, 6) research and information literacy, and 7) technological literacy. In establishing these general education core competencies, and approving them through college governance [after an extensive series of faculty forums], the faculty have taken responsibility for reinforcing these competencies within each particular discipline as part of an across-the-curriculum approach. For each competency, faculty would be supported through professional development seminars offered by our Center for Teaching and Learning. It is precisely this sort of experimenting and assessing on the part of faculty – engaging students in the kinds of writing, speaking, quantitative reasoning, or research skills necessary in their respective disciplines and exploring pedagogies that might better promote these skills – that can refine and deepen our thinking about teaching and curricula. In addition, the “productive” nature of many of these core competencies meant that faculty in all the disciplines would end up designing many more opportunities for students to actively (re-)produce knowledge whether through writing, speaking, or project-based work – potentially transformative given the so-called “generation effect,” namely, that “having to produce information leads to better learning than being presented with information.”<sup>viii</sup>*

*Using ePortfolios for assessment would allow us to achieve another of our goals – that of capturing a rich, longitudinal picture of student development and learning through systematic examination of student work. As faculty worked to enhance learning through assignments calling for more extensive writing, critical reading, quantitative reasoning and discipline-based research, we would collect and evaluate this work through electronic portfolios. We therefore specified a minimum number of “ePortfolio courses” in all curricula where student work would be put into their ePortfolios: basic skills and introductory courses to capture baseline data; the urban studies course (a requirement in all majors) as a mid-point; and a capstone course as the end-point. These ePortfolio courses require that students’ assignments be deposited in their portfolios; this work is used to assess student mastery of competencies required in the major, as well as selected general education core competencies. Thus, the urban studies ePortfolio course has been designated as an official point in the curricula where writing, critical thinking, and critical reading (we ultimately combined these into one “critical literacy” competency) is to be reinforced and assessed; all urban studies courses are therefore now running as “writing intensive” courses. The capstone ePortfolio course includes at least one assignment or project designed to reinforce and assess the critical literacy and the research and information literacy competencies (again serving as a designated writing intensive course). ... As a major comes up for program review, faculty will be able to collect a sample of student work from their portfolios, affording a record of student learning from the first semester through graduation. Assessing an actual body of student work against the faculty-developed rubrics for each core competency tells a program whether or not students are achieving the required levels and if not, where improvement*

*is needed. Recommendations from these program reviews can then become part of a program's strategic plan goals. ...*

*From: Arcario, Paul and James Wilson. "Putting It Together: General Education at LaGuardia Community College." In Reclaiming the Public University: Conversations on General and Liberal Education. Eds. Summerfield, J. and C. Benedicks. New York: Peter Lang, 2007*

### **Elements of the Plan: ePortfolios**

Electronic student portfolios are utilized as a mechanism for collecting student work, making it accessible to faculty for assessment purposes, and, critically, for involving students themselves in the process of reflection and self-assessment of their learning. Using the interactive and constructive facets of Web-based technologies, an electronic portfolio is a selective and purposeful collection of student work made available on the Web. In assembling papers, presentations, projects and performances, our students are able to reflect on their work and on their learning process while creating a record of their change and growth over the entire course of their careers at the College; indeed, the major advantage of portfolio assessment is that more than other assessment techniques, portfolios provide a detailed picture of student learning as it develops over time.

Electronic portfolios thus serve as a comprehensive mechanism that provide faculty and administrators with meaningful documentation of student learning needed to assess program effectiveness and areas needing improvement. Each program has identified a minimum of three *portfolio courses*: an introductory or 100-level course; a required urban studies course, and a senior-level (capstone) course. Required portfolio assignments in these courses enable the college to take "snapshots" of student development at various points in their academic careers. Most departments are collecting student work using ePortfolio in additional courses as well.

### **Elements of the Plan: Programmatic and Core Competencies.**

Students' growth and development throughout their academic careers at the College are assessed by evaluating achievement in two broad categories: Programmatic Competencies and General Education Core Competencies.

***Programmatic Competencies.*** A statement of overall program goals (based on a synthesis of the already existing performance objectives for each course in the program) is being developed by each program; comparisons between student electronic portfolio assignments from introductory-level portfolio courses and capstone portfolio courses will be utilized to help assess student achievement of overall programmatic goals. Students may also use the program goal statement as a rubric to reflect upon how and to what extent they have fulfilled the program goals.

Introductory or 100-Level ePortfolio Course. This course is to include a minimum of one major assignment to be placed in the student's electronic portfolio. The assignment

should be designed to develop and assess program competencies; specifically, the assignment should address a substantial number of the instructional objectives listed in the course proposal.

Capstone ePortfolio Course. Every program should identify a senior-level (capstone) portfolio course. The capstone portfolio course will include one major project to be placed in the student's electronic portfolio. The project should be designed to reinforce and assess program competencies; specifically, the assignment should address a substantial number of the instructional objectives listed in the course proposal.

[Note: The capstone portfolio course will also develop and assess the core competencies of critical literacy and research & information literacy. See below under Core Competencies].

***General Education Core Competencies.*** The College has established five core competencies: 1) critical literacy (includes written communication, critical thinking, and critical reading, 2) quantitative reasoning, 3) oral communication, 4) research and information literacy, and 5) technological literacy. In approving these core competencies as part of the assessment plan, faculty have agreed to develop these competencies within each particular discipline as part of an across-the-curriculum approach. Thus, the assessment plan is designed to infuse the development and assessment of these competencies into all programs (majors), supported by professional development for faculty and organized through the use of electronic portfolios.

*Critical Literacy (written communication, critical thinking, and critical reading).* A faculty group has devised detailed definitions, standards, and a scoring rubric for this competency. Building upon the development of these competencies in English, ESL, critical thinking, and reading courses, the assessment plan is designed to promote the reinforcement and assessment of these competencies within the disciplines in a minimum of two of the designated *ePortfolio courses*: the required urban studies course and a capstone course.

Urban Studies Course. Every program currently requires an Urban Studies elective. These courses will also be run as *ePortfolio/writing intensive courses* and will include a minimum of one major assignment to be placed in the student's electronic portfolio. The assignment should be designed to develop and assess the critical literacy competency in addition to the Urban Studies course objectives.

Capstone Portfolio Course. Capstone courses will be run as *ePortfolio/writing intensive courses* and will include one major project to be placed in the student's electronic portfolio. The project should be designed to reinforce and assess program competencies and the core competencies of critical literacy and research & information literacy (see Research and Information Literacy, below).

The portfolio assignments and projects mentioned above will be developed and refined based on what faculty are already doing to promote these competencies, as well as on new approaches that will be generated through continued professional development in these areas.

Quantitative Reasoning. Building upon the competencies developed in required Mathematics courses, this plan will promote the reinforcement and assessment of quantitative reasoning skills (e.g., measurement, graphs and charts) across the curriculum. A faculty group has devised detailed definitions, standards, and a scoring rubric; this competency is being incorporated into courses in the major (to be determined by faculty). Assisted by a program of professional development, faculty teaching these courses will build upon their current assignments, or devise new assignments, that involve quantitative reasoning; student work will then be placed on their ePortfolios.

Oral Communication. A faculty group has developed detailed definitions, standards, and a scoring rubric; students will place videos of oral presentations on their electronic portfolios using video streaming technology. Faculty are determining where the presentations will occur on a program-by-program basis; possibilities, for example, include a speech course, a Cooperative Education course (e.g., simulated job interviews are part of the Cooperative Education program), a simulated transfer interview conducted by the Career and Transfer Center, or a recorded presentation of student research as part of the capstone ePortfolio course.

Research and Information Literacy. Faculty have developed detailed definitions, standards, and a scoring rubric for this competency. As noted above, the capstone portfolio course will include one major project to be placed on the student's electronic portfolio. The project, in addition to reinforcing and assessing critical literacy, will involve a research component.

Technological Literacy. This competency is demonstrated by the development of the electronic student portfolio itself, which will engage students in website development, use of software programs, and digital communication tools such as e-mail and electronic discussion boards.

As part of the Periodic Program Review process (described in detail in Part II below), a sampling of student portfolios will be reviewed each year by a faculty group (consisting of faculty both from the program and outside the program) for the purpose of assessing overall student achievement of the College's core and programmatic competencies. The ePortfolio work and other outcomes assessment data are used to generate recommendations for programmatic improvement.

## **PART II: THE PERIODIC PROGRAM REVIEW PROCESS**

### **How to Conduct Your PPR Self-Study**

The outcomes assessment process outlined above is implemented as part of a program's Periodic Program Review (PPR). PPRs are mandated by CUNY to be conducted on a regular basis. For the PPR process, each program conducts a self-study, with student learning outcomes as a primary focus – along with a review of major issues and concerns (e.g., enrollment, retention, facilities). The Self-Study report is submitted to the Vice President for Academic Affairs; a site visit by external evaluators to review the Self-Study report also occurs (see Timeline below).

In regard to student learning outcomes, the following key questions should guide your self-study:

1. What competencies/knowledge do we want students in the program to graduate with (includes core and programmatic competencies)?
2. How do we know students in the program are graduating with those competency and knowledge sets?

The report should include the following sections:

#### **Section I. Issues**

To initiate the PPR process, the department chairperson, program coordinator, and appropriate faculty meet with Academic Affairs (VP, Dean, Faculty Chair of Curriculum/Assessment) to identify concerns and issues currently facing the program that will be addressed or investigated as part of the PPR. For example, are there known particular problems, such as low enrollment? Or are there issues with facilities, staffing, etc.

At this meeting, AA will review the guidelines with you and determine if any additional assessment processes are needed beyond what is specified in this document. Since the PPR process outlined herein is designed for majors, assessment of departments without majors (e.g., Library) or special programs (e.g., Urban Studies) will be developed on an individual basis.

A timeline for the PPR will also be developed at this meeting. In general, the timeline is as follows (with exact dates to be worked out, particularly if coordinating the PPR with mandated, external accreditations):

April-May prior to PPR year: Meet with AA to determine issues and IR data needed  
May-Aug: IR data generated  
Sept-Dec: Initial Draft prepared  
Dec: Review of draft by AA  
Late Jan- Early Feb: Final Report Due

Feb: Review by External Evaluator

Mar-June: Workplans for PPR recommendations developed for inclusion in Strategic Plan for the following year

## **Section II. Key Data Elements**

Program data is to be collected and analyzed in collaboration with the Office of Institutional Research, including:

- Enrollment trends
- Retention
- Graduation
- Transfer
- Placement
- Pass rates in gateway/key courses
- Full-time/part-time faculty ratio
- CPE pass rates
- Other data as identified in collaboration with Academic Affairs administration

## **Section III. Educational Goals of the Program (i.e., What competencies/knowledge do we want students in the program to graduate with?)**

Evaluate the overall strengths/weaknesses of your program in terms of appropriateness of the curriculum, currency of the curriculum, and effectiveness in developing overall programmatic competencies as well as the general education core competencies:

A. Programmatic Competencies. A statement of overall programmatic competencies (based on a synthesis of the already existing performance objectives for each course in the major-area requirements of the program) should be clearly stated in the form of a mission statement. What are the expected outcomes for student learning, that is, competencies and knowledge sets, in the program?

1. Map the general statement of expected competencies onto the curriculum. In other words, are the overall goals of your program reflected in the curriculum? Any lack of congruency should result in either a revision of the overall goal statement and/or the curriculum itself.
2. Provide evidence that your curriculum is current with career and industry expectations, and/or national practices in the discipline. Examples of evidence include review by outside experts; review by site visit experts; point-by-point comparison to national and/or industry standards.

B. General Education Core Competencies. All five core competencies are goals for student learning in each program. If you have not done so already, specify where and how each core competency is being reinforced across the curriculum in your program.

C. Transferability, Placement, and Advisement. Evaluate the transferability of your program. How well do the courses in the program transfer? Identify any transfer issues/problems. Evaluate job placement for students in your program. Describe and evaluate how transfer and career development are promoted within the program, as well as how advisement is conducted.

#### **Section IV. Student Learning Outcomes (i.e., How do we know students in the program are graduating with the expected competency and knowledge sets?)**

A. Overall student learning and development. Collect a random sampling of student work from ePortfolios. A faculty team consisting of faculty from your program, along with faculty from the Assessment Committee, should compare portfolio assignments in the intro-level course with those in the capstone course (as well as any other courses deemed appropriate) to assess growth in programmatic as well as the core competencies across a student's entire college career. Also consider when reviewing student work: Do the assignments yield the level of work you wish students to achieve? Does the student work demonstrate mastery of the programmatic competencies that are supposed to be developed in each course and in the program as a whole? Are all the core competencies being covered in your program?

B. Individual Course Review. Assess the strengths/weaknesses of each course in the major area: success in terms of producing the desired learning outcomes, currency of teaching methods, and congruence with national practices in the discipline. For each course:

1. Review the course proposal. Are the objectives still appropriate? Revise as needed.
2. Collect a random sample of faculty syllabi. Do they match the course proposal? If not, devise a plan to ensure greater congruence between what is officially to be taught and what is actually being taught.
3. Collect outcomes data for each course (e.g., pass rates; grade distribution). Outcomes should also include an analysis of student performance on individual course objectives (to determine which areas may need improvement).

#### **Section V. Action Plan**

Based on the analyses in the prior sections – along with feedback from Academic Affairs and the external evaluator - formulate specific recommendations and actions you will

undertake to strengthen the program, particularly in regard to improving student learning outcomes. These actions should be incorporated into the Strategic Plan workplan for your department for the year following your PPR.

Recommendations for actions should be based on specific data and analysis generated by the PPR. An example follows:

Data Point: An assessment of student development in terms of critical literacy consisted of reviewing 80 student writing projects taken from their ePortfolios, comparing samples of work from intro courses vs. capstone courses. Scoring the work with the critical literacy rubric revealed that scores improved by 1.7 points on the rubric (1-6 scale); however, capstone writing scores averaged 3.2 – less than the desired 4.0 score for graduating students. A review of the nature of writing assignments in the capstone course revealed that the assignments did not require writing of a sufficiently analytical level, meaning that the writing demanded was never at a level that could potentially result in a score of 4 on the rubric.

Recommendation: Review and revise critical literacy assignments in capstone courses in the major.

Action: A team of faculty will devise model critical literacy projects for the capstone course (Sept-Dec); the projects will be incorporated into courses the following spring semester (Mar-June) as pilot. Student work will be deposited in ePortfolios and assessed using the critical literacy rubric (June); successful assignments will be incorporated into all capstone courses in the subsequent semester. [Note: Action plans include timelines and evaluations].

---

<sup>i</sup> Astin, A.W. *What Matters in College: Four Critical Years Revisited*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1993.

<sup>ii</sup> Zeszotarski, P. "Dimensions of General Education Requirements." *In New Directions for Community Colleges*. No. 108. Winter 1999.

<sup>iii</sup> Adelman, C. *The Toolbox Revisited: Paths to Degree Completion from High School Through College*. Office of Vocational and Adult Education, U.S. Department of Education, xvi.

<sup>iv</sup> Adelman, xvii

<sup>v</sup> *Paideia Principles*, 1991. The Paideia Group. [www.Paideia.org](http://www.Paideia.org)

<sup>vi</sup> Schulman, 557

<sup>vii</sup> Knefelkamp, L. Assessment as Transformation. Speech to the American Association for Higher Education Fourth National Conference on Assessment in Higher Education, June 21-24, 1989.

<sup>viii</sup> deWinstanly, P. and R. Bjork. *Successful Lecturing: Presenting Information in Ways That Engage Effective Processing*. In Halpern, D. and M. Hakel (eds). *Applying the Science of Learning to University Teaching and Beyond*. New Directions for Teaching and Learning. Number 89, Spring 2002.

---