

A Party Platter of Peer-Reviewed OER Assignments

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NUTRITION INFORMATION

Many colleges and universities have adopted core competencies during the last two decades. Their adoption reflects larger national trends in outcomes assessment, teaching and learning, and regional accreditation. Faculty at LaGuardia Community College sought model assignments with reflections on their design that speak to the college's core competencies—integrative learning, inquiry and problem-solving, and global learning—and the communication abilities that students use to express them—written, oral, and digital communication abilities. In response, the college's assessment leaders looked to the assignment library created by the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) for inspiration. They developed the Learning Matters Assignment Library, a curated collection of openly licensed assignments written by LaGuardia faculty in different disciplines that aligned with the college's Core Competencies and Communication Abilities. The collection features staged and mostly high-stakes assignments for courses in all levels and subjects, including English, photography, theater, psychology, biology, mathematics, chemistry, radiologic and veterinary

technologies, and physical therapy—the many flavors of the Learning Matters Assignment Library. LaGuardia's Library Media Resources Center houses this special collection of open educational resources (OER) in the institutional repository, provides metadata, and assists with Creative Commons licensing.

PROJECT OUTCOMES

- Library collaboration with assessment or other academic areas on an assignment library will help promote awareness and use of OER, Creative Commons licensing, and one's institutional repository.
- Faculty can see models of assignments across a college's core competencies and disciplines.
- Faculty can develop model assignments for part-time and other program faculty who teach common assignments in their institution and beyond.
- Faculty, departments, and programs can utilize the assignment library when conducting program reviews and providing evidence for student learning and general education during accreditation cycles.
- Faculty can promote discipline-specific

core competency assignments for two-year institutions across the nation to complement the NILOA assignment library project.

NUMBER SERVED

The Learning Matters Assignment Library opened in late 2017 with 23 assignments that completed our peer-review process. Over the following two years, an average of 16 assignments was added to the assignment library per year, totaling 56 assignments in less than three years.

Expect to feed a crowd! The assignment library has served over 26,000 downloads from its inception in October 2017 through April 2021, with total downloads more than doubling in 2020. The pandemic and resultant shift to online learning around the globe in 2020 undoubtedly drove our downloads up over 11,000 in that single year. While the assignment library was created to provide models to LaGuardia faculty, 46 percent of our users came from outside the United States to enjoy these goodies: peer-reviewed assignments, freely available and often adaptable, in a variety of disciplinary flavors.

COOKING TIME

One year for planning and development until the first assignments come out of the oven. Allow a second year of collecting and curating for richer flavors, as any assignment library should become more fully expressive of the ways various programs and disciplines plate a college's core competencies.

DIETARY GUIDELINES

- Meal planning. An assignment library supports the educational goals of its school through its focus on an institution's core competencies and communication abilities. Each college or university should create the right general-education recipe to achieve learning goals for their knowledge-hungry student population.
- Render rubrics. Institutions should remember to prep their dish by inviting governance organizations to affirm their core competencies. Then the assessment team can mix and prepare rubrics for each competency. Good rubrics are important tools for assessing authentic student work and ensuring a rigorous and coherent general education. New cooks do not have to start from scratch. They can learn from a top chef, such as the Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U) VALUE rubrics.
- A dash of flavor. After you've prepped the rubrics, you'll get to start preparing the assignments! Remember, each assignment should address both a learning objective and a competency. Finding

the right flavor can be challenging, so it's important for any cook to experiment. One choice method to try is the Assignment Design Charrette, created by another top chef, Pat Hutchings of the Carnegie Foundation and NILOA. Ideally, a satisfying competency-driven assignment will balance the flavors of the course, program, and competency.

- Taste-testing. No matter how talented a chef, all meals should still be regularly taste-tested and reviewed. The purpose of assignments isn't to simply scarf them down but to savor them and explore how good dishes could be made great. To spread the savory menu of competencies to an entire college, chefs might consider an annual assessment period where colleagues can use the rubrics to score authentic student work from across the college. Like a customer satisfaction note from Seamless, assessment allows chefs to know if assignments across the college are working and gives faculty an opportunity to reflect in detail about how to improve student learning.
- The recipe box. Access to materials in the assignment library can come from existing online spaces such as open access institutional repositories. These repositories often perform very well with popular internet search engines, making OER materials easy to find for a broader, worldwide audience. Outreach to OER authors from grants and projects already in progress across campus can encourage instructors to meet assignment

library requirements whenever possible and to submit their assignments to help grow the recipe collection.

- Sharing favorites. To support open access to the assignments, all works in the assignment library carry a Creative Commons license. Knowledgeable librarians can explain the benefits of a CC license, what different CC licenses allow, and how they work with copyright so that assignment authors can choose the license that works best for them.

INGREDIENTS & EQUIPMENT

- Open, online platform for serving. You may already have an online space that is easy to use and maintain, works well with search engines, and has manageable cost, such as an existing institutional repository, LibGuides, or website.
- Rubrics for core competencies, communication abilities, and/or program learning outcomes
- Faculty-created assignments
- A designated person or team to facilitate the movement of faculty-created assignments through the peer-review and revision processes and readying the assignments for the librarian
- Librarian to create metadata, put assignment documents into PDF format as required, upload submissions, and handle any platform issues that come up related to assignment library materials
- Creative Commons licenses, which faculty select for their intellectual property

PREPARATION

Creating an assignment library requires a big kitchen and a large labor force. Setting up such a big production should probably mean discussing the meal plan with key individuals and teams in Academic Affairs, such as a collegewide assessment committee, a Center for Teaching and Learning, and a provost who could affirm the project's place at the table.

Identify key faculty and librarian head chefs to manage and promote the assignment library. Our chefs divide up preparation and cooking more or less as follows (your division may vary depending on your kitchen staff):

1. A professor curates the assignment library, manages the submission and review process, promotes assignment library contributions and use, and collaborates with the librarian.
2. Another professor serves as liaison to the greater college assessment group.
3. A metadata librarian/professor handles Creative Commons licensing questions and training, uploads assignments to the platform, assigns metadata, and troubleshoots platform problems.

Universities or colleges with a dedicated assessment librarian may find that this person already serves as liaison to an institution-wide assessment group and could assist with coordinating the peer-review process. At schools where faculty have ample room in their schedule, one chef could combine the curation, management, and liaison duties. Or institutions whose chefs have greater capac-

ity could expend more effort on outreach and soliciting more recipes for an assignment library and tracking their use on campus.

For peer review of the assignments, identify disciplinary faculty from workshop and seminar participants, assessment leaders, and other faculty with knowledge of student learning outcomes in general education.

Select a platform that is easily accessible by users and easy to maintain by developers. LaGuardia, as part of the City University of New York (CUNY) system, had access to the university's institutional repository, CUNY Academic Works. It possessed the advantages of already being funded and implemented and managed by librarians on each campus. The LaGuardia Library lobbied to host the assignment library as one way to showcase how an institutional repository can contribute to college pedagogical goals and provide a menu that is prepared locally yet also made available for global consumption.

Create a menu of assignment pipelines, such as assignment development workshops or seminars, curriculum design and revision workshops or seminars, and professional development goals coordinated with different departments and disciplines. Develop a submission form and guidelines, and secure resources to develop and maintain the assignment library.

Finally, promote submissions to the assignment library and encourage its use on campus and across academic networks and

organizations. Make sure to communicate the value of creating unique dishes for the assignment library. Choosing to create OER for the assignment library is an important way to share institutional creativity and pedagogical innovation with the higher-education community. Assignments can also be used in professional development seminars or workshops where faculty can strategize ways of strengthening curricular cohesion. The library's collaboration with assessment projects can help organize and provide access to the OER delicacies created by the college's culinary and pedagogical wizards.

COOKING METHOD

1. Create the assignment library on the online platform. Design the landing page, including rationale for the assignment library, access to recipe preparation guidelines for the chefs, and the submission form.
2. Introduce the assignment library to different college constituents. Begin promoting it to individual departments and programs at professional development meetings and seminars and take advantage of collegewide professional development settings. Explain Creative Commons licensing and solicit an initial batch of assignments.
3. Pair faculty peer reviewers with assignments, ideally in matching disciplines, and provide clearly written guidelines to reviewers for how to compose their reports on the prepared dishes. Emphasize the importance of providing constructive feedback and collegial suggestions that

would enhance the flavors of multiple student learning outcomes. The guidelines should outline the desired characteristics of an exemplary assignment suited to the chosen platform. Provide a reasonable review period, then revise and resubmit the timeline for both peer reviewers and the chefs finalizing their contribution.

4. After receiving completed submissions from the coordinator, the librarian gives each assignment a final proofread and checks for formatting. Then the librarian assigns metadata that highlights the core competencies and communication abilities, discipline, and type of course, such as first-year seminar or capstone. At this point, the assignment is published to the repository.
5. Track assignment library activity on the platform and at the college. Metrics we regularly collect include disciplines/programs represented in the assignment library, the number of assignments representing each of our core competencies and communication abilities, the number of new works added, and the total number of assignment downloads.
6. Promote the collection and encourage its use. The college's Assessment Leadership Team, assignment library coordinator, and librarian work together throughout the academic year to present this repository of delectable dishes in different departmental and collegewide professional development seminars and assessment-related initiatives. They introduce this resource in national and international

conferences they attend and promote it across academic networks and the LaGuardia Library's social media. Every spring, the team also puts together an annual newsletter and shares it with the college community.

ALLERGY WARNINGS

Preparing and serving nutritious and flavorful assignments is a labor-intensive process for all involved. Faculty will need to understand the definitions, criteria, and dimensions of the rubrics for the competencies and consider how their existing assignments align with the rubric they select. Faculty need to be open to revising their assignments based on the constructive feedback they receive, and the peer-reviewers should also be willing to provide detailed recommendations for the assignments to become more appetizing. This process depends on access to professional development opportunities. Likewise, securing peer reviewers can be a challenge due to the expertise necessary in both the competency and the discipline.

In terms of both submissions and peer review, securing a high level of faculty investment in the assignment library means that college leadership should consider ways to provide formal recognition of faculty assignment contributions, such as ensuring that contributions count toward reappointment and tenure portfolios. This means department chairs and personnel committees need to understand the value of the contributions and understand how to help faculty narrate

and contextualize that value in their reappointment documents and/or CVs.

The quarterly reports prepared by the librarian can also be employed to provide evidence for the value of the assignment library based on the number of national and international visitors wanting to taste samples from its rich menu. Chefs should regularly update their college community about the use and effectiveness of the assignment library—for example, through reports and newsletters.

Hosting platforms differ in their affordances and barriers. Assignment library chefs need to keep up with any changes to their chosen platform. Our choice of using the institutional repository did present us with a few limitations such as these:

- Our repository does not allow for versioning. A revised assignment goes into the assignment library as a new submission.
- The repository does not give us the ability to create a custom interface or include other information related to the assignment library.
- The repository does not allow us to limit access to select content, such as examples of student work.
- Due to how the assignment library had to be implemented within our larger institutional repository structure, some use data is more directly available for our greater collection of OER rather than the assignment library only, such as percent of downloads from outside the United States.

CHEF'S NOTES

LaGuardia Community College annually serves around 18,500 degree students and 15,000 continuing education students from more than 150 countries and who speak 100 different languages. Sixty percent are women and large majorities are low-income and first-generation college students. Our core competencies and abilities provide a framework for our students to build their capacities to achieve success at LaGuardia, at subsequent transfer schools, and in their jobs and future careers.

Like all tasty rubrics, LaGuardia's competencies defined shared learning goals often associated with liberal arts education, including critical thinking, problem-solving, global learning, self-reflection, and effective communication. They were designed to fit CUNY undergraduate learning goals and to advance higher-order thinking in line with expectations by employers and transfer institutions. The core competency and communication ability rubrics gave college faculty the definitions they need to address the competencies in disciplinary courses and majors, from nursing to engineering and from liberal arts to industrial design. Of course, creating a healthy diet requires students to eat their veggies regularly. All six of LaGuardia's three core competencies and three communication abilities are addressed at early, middle, and late points in each program. Faculty drew on the AAC&U VALUE rubrics to develop and test rubrics for the LaGuardia competencies and abilities.

All the assignments added to an assignment library should undergo a rigorous, internal peer-review tasting process to ensure they are as delicious as possible. In other words, they must successfully articulate the intended student learning outcomes they are designed to assess. Most assignments can be developed and revised through different professional development opportunities a college could offer. Like a good food-truck rally, these opportunities could include assignment development workshops, curriculum development and/or revision efforts, and cross-disciplinary collaborative initiatives and projects. The initial review of submissions should be conducted by the designated assignment library coordinator, who can be charged with closely reviewing all the assignments. Like any food tester, the coordinator should provide feedback with an emphasis on recommendations for aligning the assignments with the course learning objectives as well as with the college competency to which the course is aligned. The assignments should then be peer reviewed by faculty in the discipline of the assignment, who probably know the right flavor combinations in question. This crucial step ensures that the assignment not only meets the course and program learning objectives but also aligns with discipline-specific conventions and vocabulary.

To further pedagogical assessment, the LaGuardia Center for Teaching and Learning hosts collegewide charrettes as well as annual and semester-long seminars for assignment development, and it offers annual grants to

program faculty to build assignments in small teams. In addition, every year at LaGuardia, faculty and staff come together for family-style buffets called Benchmark Readings. During these two-day buffets, diverse colleagues from different disciplines and divisions are organized into competency and ability teams in order to score and read the student work that comes from the core competency assignments—including some in the assignment library! Like any family reunion, of course, folks have fun noshing on student work. After scoring, the college compiles data on how the overall menu of general education seems to be doing and shares this data with program faculty, who in turn use it to strengthen student learning—and craft more materials for the assignment library!

The assignment library kitchen can sustain its current growth rate given the workflow and available staff. All chefs cook for the assignment library in addition to their primary duties as faculty in their respective discipline or as faculty librarian. They spend a significant amount of time coordinating the peer-review process. At a teaching-intensive community college, chefs could find that a much larger number of submissions to the assignment library would strain their current resources. Chefs would then need to seek additional assistance which might—or might not—be available.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Please sample LaGuardia Community College's Learning Matters Assignment Library at <http://shortlib.org/s/assignmentlibrary>

Learn more about LaGuardia's Core Competencies and Communication Abilities at https://www.laguardia.edu/uploadedFiles/Main_Site/Content/Academics/Docs/Core-Competency-Communication-Ability-Rubrics.pdf and its General Education Student Learning Outcomes at <https://www.laguardia.edu/assessment/>

View the Assignment Library created by the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) at <https://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org/ourwork/assignment-library/>

Read an article on NILOA's Assignment Library co-authored by Pat Hutchings, Natasha A. Jankowski, and Peter T. Ewell at <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED550511.pdf>

For rubric inspiration, check out NILOA's *The Assignment Charrette Toolkit* at <https://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org/ourwork/assignment-charrette/#1549481918909-4e924c6d-3b02>