Closing the Loop: How We Better Serve Our Students through a Comprehensive Assessment Process

Paul Arcario, Bret Eynon, Marisa Klages, and Bernard A. Polnariev
LaGuardia Community College/CUNY

Abstract

Outcomes assessment is often driven by demands for accountability. LaGuardia Community College's outcomes assessment model has advanced student learning, shaped academic program development, and created an impressive culture of faculty-driven assessment. Our inquiry-based approach uses ePortfolios for collection of student work and demonstrates the importance of engaging faculty input into the outcomes assessment design to continually "close the assessment loop." This article outlines the steps, successes, and challenges involved in constructing an effective outcomes assessment model that deepens learning across the institution.

Outcomes assessment is a critical topic in contemporary American higher education. The call for greater accountability in higher education has come from many angles—from legislators, business leaders, foundations, and policy makers. But assessment should be about more than accountability and accreditation. It should be about deepening and strengthening the learning process. LaGuardia Community College has made significant progress in developing and implementing an inquiry-based outcomes assessment process that supports institutional learning, advances faculty's reflective professional practice, and most importantly, improves student learning.

LaGuardia is not alone in recognizing that outcomes assessment should advance learning. Scholars and educational leaders have pointed in this direction, arguing that outcomes assessment must have a higher goal than accountability, and to be effective, must be grounded in ongoing work of teaching and learning (Ewell 2009). But achieving this goal is challenging. In a 2009 study, widely recognized assessment leader Trudy Banta examined the assessment programs of nearly 150 colleges and found that only 6 percent provided evidence that their processes actually advanced student learning (Banta 2009). The vast majority of outcomes assessment programs fall short of "closing the loop," that is, turning assessment findings into effective educational change.

While still evolving and far from perfect, LaGuardia's outcomes assessment system has developed a set of approaches that effectively close the loop. Grounded in the classroom-generated artifacts of student learning, LaGuardia's outcomes assessment process engages faculty in a process of inquiry and reflection, which helps them identify the changes in pedagogy and curricula that would improve student learning.

And it also supports faculty and staff as they integrate specific recommendations into an action plan, change their practice, and assess the results. Preliminary evidence suggests that this process is actually making a difference for students.

This study examines LaGuardia's outcomes assessment process and identifies key factors that have enhanced its success, including:

• Sustained support and guidance from institutional leadership.

• An unwavering focus on faculty ownership of the process at multiple levels, supported by an intentional effort to build a college-wide assessment culture.

• The successful implementation of an electronic portfolio (ePortfolio) system that helps students and faculty gather and examine large numbers of authentic learning artifacts.

• The creation of a strong faculty-led assessment leadership team who are committed to an on-going process of thinking and rethinking the outcomes assessment approach.

• The development of a system of Assessment Mini-Grants, administered by the LaGuardia Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL), that provides funds and professional development support for faculty as they move from recommending educational change to effectively implementing those changes.

• Sustained attention to building a broad assessment culture, in which assessment is honored and understood as part of the intellectual work of being a faculty member.

In combination, these factors have put LaGuardia on the path to an important accomplishment: successfully using outcomes assessment as mechanism for advancing learning at all levels of the institution, from students to faculty, staff, and the institution as whole. In June 2012, LaGuardia Community College received the highest re-accreditation possible as determined by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, which highlighted the ePortfolio program, the Center for Teaching and Learning, and the successful creation of an institution-wide "culture of assessment." In July 2012, the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) spotlighted LaGuardia as one of seven colleges nationwide that have exemplary outcomes assessment programs. In this article, we seek to examine LaGuardia's approach to outcomes assessment and highlight the process of closing the loop, connecting outcomes assessment to meaningful improvements in teaching and learning.

About LaGuardia

Located in Queens, the most ethnically diverse borough in the city of New York, LaGuardia's 18,000 credit students represent 161 countries and speak 124 languages. Nearly two-thirds of LaGuardia students were born outside the Unites States, and half of

the college's incoming students have lived in the United States for less than five years (LaGuardia Community College Fast Facts website 2012). As a federally designated Hispanic-serving institution, our college was recognized in 2009 by *Excelencia in Education* for its exemplary leadership in serving the needs of Latino and nontraditional students (Provezis 2012). As many as 250 of the 300 full-time faculty members take part each year on one of the reflective professional development seminars run by the Center for Teaching and Learning; the Center works with faculty and staff to explore, develop, and support pedagogical initiatives to promote student learning.

An Assessment Team

A strong assessment team must be established for any effective college evaluation endeavor. At LaGuardia, we formed the Assessment Leadership Team (ALT) in 2005. Lopez (1996) recommended that colleges develop assessment committees comprised of both faculty and staff, charged with ensuring and communicating on-going assessment efforts. The ALT includes representation from Academic Affairs (faculty from varied departments and senior level administrators), CTL staff, and Institutional Research staff; this group meets bi-monthly, demonstrating the support and collaboration of faculty and administration. ALT guides and communicates the college's assessment work, oversees the development of the college's Assessment Rubrics, trains faculty on use of those rubrics, and advises on the use of our ePortfolio system to support the assessment process. ALT also helps steer departments through their program reviews—Periodic Programs Reviews (PPRs) —by affording clear structure and policies and providing outside readers to help assess student work. Each spring semester, ALT analyses the year's progress and creates a work plan and goals for the next year.
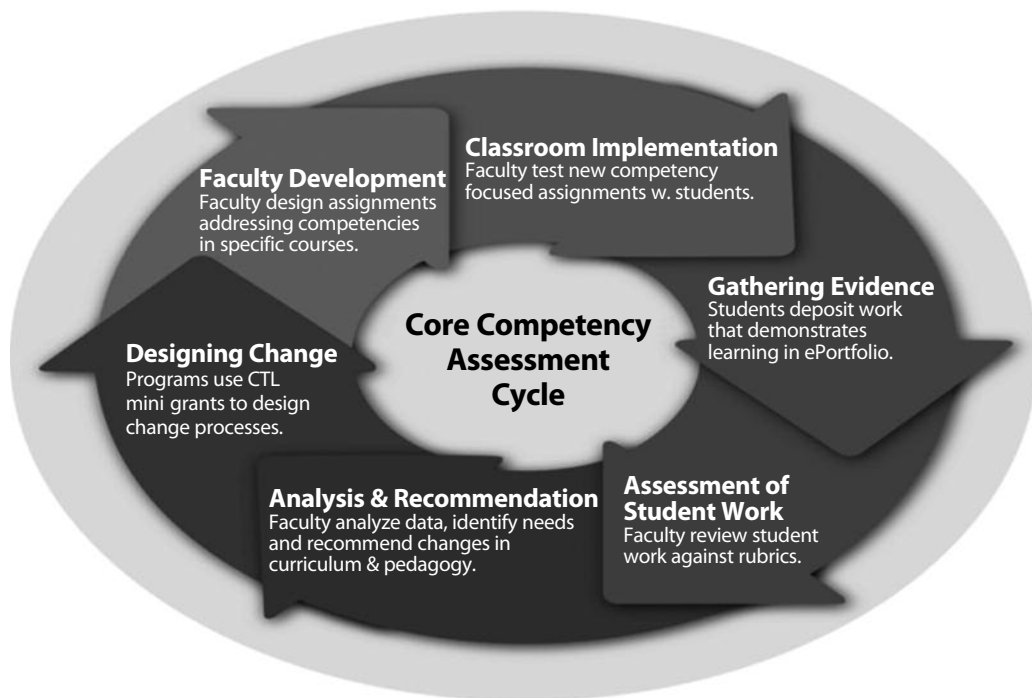
Beginning in 2011, ALT began to disseminate assessment results to the college community as well as to targeted programs (majors). This is part of a broader culture-building process (discussed below), critical to the successful integration of assessment into the institutional fabric. The college also has sought to engage in continued evaluation of the outcomes assessment process to ensure that the program evolves and effectively informs our classrooms, our programs, and the institution as a whole. Changes in the college's assessment plan also seek to ensure that the plan has sufficient simplicity, detail, and ownership to be sustainable.

LaGuardia's Assessment Plan

LaGuardia has designed its assessment plan around three key questions:

• *Defining Competencies:* What do we want our students to learn?

• *Assessing Competencies:* How do we know they are learning that?

• *Closing the Loop:* How can we improve learning?

The college's overall assessment cycle is illustrated here:

In grappling with the first key question—What do we want our students to learn?—we decided to focus the general education program on competencies or proficiencies that would be required across all of the degree requirements, rather than adding courses that went beyond already established requirements. LaGuardia thus employs an "across-the-curriculum" methodology to general education, based on a set of core competencies interwoven into the curricula of all programs: Critical Literacy (a comprehensive category for reading, writing, and critical thinking), Quantitative Reasoning, Oral Communication, and Research and Information Literacy. Guided by ALT, faculty teams developed rubrics for each competency. A survey conducted by LaGuardia's Institutional Research office as part of our Middle States Self-Study indicates that students are well-informed about our general education competencies and believe they are making meaningful headway in improving their performance in these competencies.

In fall 2009, the ALT harnessed the power of the Program Directors (every program [major] at the college has a program director) to function as assessment liaisons for their departments, ensuring that the work of assessment is faculty-driven, focused on the goals and outcomes of the majors, and regularly reported and discussed in department meetings. Program Directors were charged with identifying the courses and assignments most appropriate for assessing core and programmatic competencies. To do so, they developed Core Competency Grids for all programs, referencing the relevant rubrics to identify the courses in each major where core competencies are reinforced, and the courses where students use the ePortfolio assessment database to upload competency-focused educational work. Across all programs, required core

competencies are advanced and assessed at several points in a student's academic career, thus emphasizing the interdisciplinary development of key academic skills.

Following is a sample grid for the writing and literature major. All of these grids can be accessed through our outcomes assessment website. The sample grid demonstrates how the assessment of the competencies affords a developmental snapshot of student skill achievement. Across all programs, Critical Literacy assessment begins in developmental writing and/or freshman composition, occurs again at a midpoint in study in the major (that is, our Urban Studies writing intensive course), and at the Capstone level.

2011-12 General Education Competency Grid English (per submitted grid)

	Baseline	Program Courses				
	ENG103	ENG 290 291 292 293	ENG270	ENN191 ENN195 ENN198 ENN240 (Urban Studies)	ENG295 (Capstone)
Critical Literacy (Writing Intensive)[1]	ENG099/ENG 101/ESL				X	X
Quantitative Reasoning[2]	MAT096	X				
Oranl Communication[3]	CEP121 or Select a course			X		
Research and Information Literacy	ENG101		X			X
Technological Literacy						Capstone ePortfolio

[1]Two courses to deposit in ePortfolio assessment area: Urban Studies and one to be selected in the discipline (both are WI courses)
[2]Two courses to deposit in ePortfolio assessment area: MAT096 and one to be selected in the discipline (May be done as part of Research & Information Literacy competency)
[3]Two courses to deposit in ePortfolio assessment area: CEP121 and one to be selected in the discipline (if CEP121 not required, select two in discipline)

290: British Lit I; 291: British Lit II; 292: American Lit I; 293: American Lit II.
270: Intro to Poetry
295: World Lit
Urban Studies- 191: Politics; 195: Violence; 198: Creative Writing; 240: Lit of the City [note: 191 & 195 are not listed in WLM curriculum?]

In addition to general education competencies, the grids identify the disciplinary courses where programmatic competencies specific to the discipline will be addressed and assessed. While programs long had programmatic competencies, they were in diverse formats and not always easily located; some were well-articulated, others were implicit. ALT therefore asked programs to systematically articulate (and revise if appropriate) their programmatic competencies and map them to the curriculum; to spell out the assessment methods and criteria for each (with illustrative examples of student work), and regularly collect related data. Our 2012 Self-Study helped certify that these competencies are in accordance with the standards of higher education and the germane discipline; wherever appropriate, programmatic competencies reflect accrediting bodies or national standards. Core and Programmatic competencies for each major are publically available on the college's assessment website.

Once general education competencies were defined and incorporated into each program's curricula, the next key question was: How would we assess those competencies? LaGuardia believes that assessment effectiveness grows if it is based on the authentic work of students, as assigned by faculty (as opposed to assessment based solely on standardized national tests that might or might not address our curricular goals and faculty practice). Basing assessment on authentic student work strengthens the connection to teaching and makes it easier to use assessment to guide meaningful and productive change in curriculum and pedagogy. The college therefore positioned itself to systematically collect samples of student work (artifacts) through its ePortfolio system. The collected student work could then be assessed, using the rubrics for each competency. The college has experienced exponential growth in depositing student work concomitant with the increasing college-wide emphasis on regular collection of assessment data. Over 80,000 examples of student work have been collected for assessment purposes. While in 2007–2008, 3,465 artifacts were collected, by 2010–2011, the annual collection had grown to more than 21,000.

The CTL has provided key support for the collection of data in the ePortfolio assessment database for almost a decade; the CTL and the Division of Academic Affairs have made a substantial investment of resources in the ePortfolio and assessment projects, often obtained through successful grant writing. Faculty development on the use of ePortfolio to enhance learning also has supported outcomes assessment. Hundreds of faculty members have become familiar with ePortfolio through CTL programs, including seminars such as the ePortfolio in the Professions seminar and ReThinking the Capstone Experience. ePortfolio assignments are created and graded by professors. The emphasis on competencies, combined with the reflective and integrative features of the ePortfolio, builds student engagement and improves student outcomes (Eynon 2009; Arcario, Eynon, and Lucca 2011). At the same time, the ePortfolio system enables the college to collect student artifacts for assessment against programmatic and core competencies. Students enrolled in benchmark courses deposit their work into the ePortfolio assessment database. This student work is the foundation for the college's direct confirmation of student learning.

This rich body of student work is assessed by faculty through two inquiry-focused processes: To obtain a global picture of how the college is doing in terms of students' acquisition of the general education core competencies, a yearly Benchmark Reading is done. To see how each program is doing individually, assessment readings of student work from their ePortfolios are done for each major as part of its Periodic Program Review (PPR).

The Benchmark Readings

In 2011, faculty teams examined and assessed a sample of more than 3,000 of these artifacts, using faculty-developed rubrics for each competency. Twenty-nine faculty members from over a dozen different areas were grouped into interdisciplinary teams to read student artifacts across four core competencies: critical thinking, writing, and reading (critical literacy); quantitative literacy; research and information literacy; and oral communication. The readings encompassed introductory (under twenty-five credits) and capstone level work (over forty-five credits), examining students' progress through the curriculum.

Competency-specific teams were trained on using rubrics and then read materials deposited into the assessment area of student ePortfolios. These teams received extensive training through discussion, norming, and practice scoring. Each team scored samples from both credit categories to assess student progress through the core competencies. Every artifact was scored on a 1–4 or 1–6 scale (depending on the rubric) by two readers, yielding a combined score for each student ranging from 2–12. Ideally, students at or near community college completion should receive a score of 10 (a 5 from each of the two readers if using a 1–6 scale). LaGuardia's general education core competencies are detailed below along with student outcomes. Overall, the results showed that students are making educational progress—an average increase across all rubrics of 0.87. We continue to strive to improve learning and scores for students with over forty-five credits so that on average they can achieve a score of 10 (again, on the 1–6 scale).

Critical Literacy. (Critical Thinking, Reading, and Writing). 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. The 1,072 samples demonstrated a gain of 0.88 across the curriculum between lower and higher credit students.
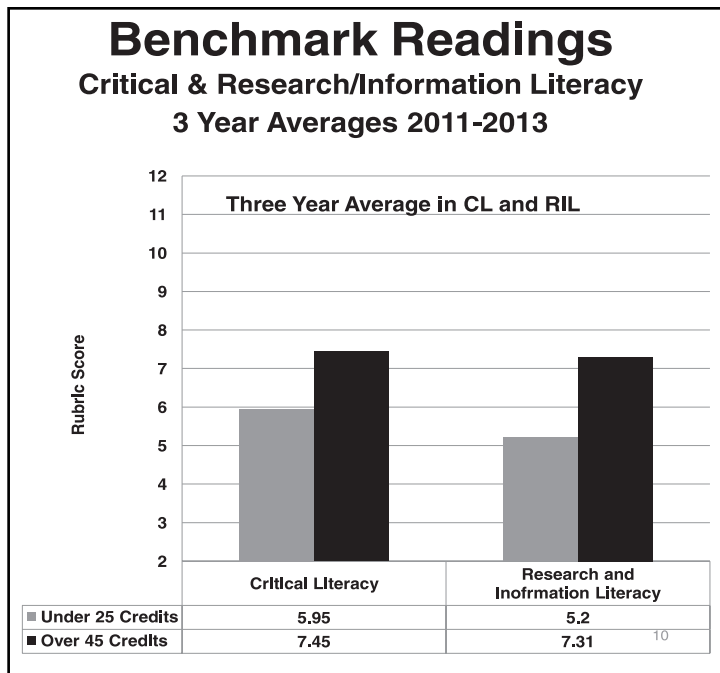
Oral Communication. Students place videos of oral presentations on their ePortfolios using video-streaming technology. Faculty members determine where the presentations will occur on a program-by-program basis; possibilities, for example, include a speech course, a Cooperative Education course (for example, 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. The 875 samples demonstrated a gain of only 0.14 across the curriculum between lower and higher credit students. Unfortunately, over one-third of the samples were not related to the rubric. Samples exhibited a wide range of quality and other technological limitations.

Quantitative Reasoning. Building upon the competencies developed in required mathematics courses, this competency promotes the reinforcement and assessment of quantitative reasoning skills (for example, measurement, graphs, and charts) across the curriculum. Assisted by a program of professional development, faculty who are teaching these courses build upon their current assignments or devise new assignments involving quantitative reasoning; student work is then placed on their ePortfolios. These 322 samples demonstrated a gain of 0.97 on a 12-point scale between lower and higher credit students. The interdisciplinary scoring team found that 30 percent of the samples were not related to the rubric, largely because the rubric was too narrow to encompass the range of assignments from courses across the curriculum.

Research and Information Literacy. As previously noted, the capstone portfolio course includes one major project to be placed on the student's ePortfolio. The project, in addition to reinforcing and assessing critical literacy, involves a research component. These 318 samples demonstrated a gain of 1.49 across the curriculum between lower and higher credit students.

While improvements in the process are still needed (such as refining rubrics and assignments to achieve greater correlation), LaGuardia now has a global snapshot of student learning outcomes in general education competencies across all majors at the institution. This is a significant achievement, particularly when viewed in the context of 2012 NILOA survey results showing that most higher education institutions did

Benchmark Readings
Critical & Research/Information Literacy
3 Year Averages 2011-2013

Three Year Average in CL and RIL

	Critical Literacy	Research and Information Literacy
Under 25 Credits	5.95	5.2
Over 45 Credits	7.45	7.31

assessment only at the departmental or individual unit level; few respondents reported using these approaches with samples to represent the entire institution. LaGuardia's effort in this regard has resulted in the college being selected by the Community

College Futures Assembly as a finalist for the *2012 Bellwether Award in Instructional Programs and Services.*

The Periodic Program Review (PPR) Process

The Benchmark Readings are flanked by the Periodic Program Review (PPR) process, where student learning outcomes assessment—including the assessment of general education core competencies—is grounded in the specific work of disciplinary programs. Given the structure of LaGuardia majors, and its stress on the integration of core competencies into each major, the PPR provides the strongest opportunity for assessment that closes the loop and brings about meaningful change.

City University of New York (CUNY) requires that each program at LaGuardia undergo a PPR approximately every five to seven years. In the past, the PPR process was limited to a single year, as programs quickly assembled data and wrote a report; once completed, some reports went into a file drawer, never to be seen again. Starting in 2010–2011, ALT began to change the parameters of the PPR; now, in each five-/seven-year cycle, a program works intensively for three years, followed by 2–4 less-intensive years focused on continued review, environmental scans, and continued implementations based on the completed PPR. The intensive three-year PPR process is composed of Year 1) a preparatory year; Year 2) an active review year; and Year 3) an implementation year. LaGuardia's assessment of academic programs is planned by the use of a project calendar that explicitly details the institution's identified PPRs over the span of the next decade. This calendar is matched by a schedule that establishes the three-year intensive project completion cycle that includes planning, execution, and follow-up, demonstrating a systematized endeavor.

The PPR process engages programs in a scaffolded community of practice, which is shaped by the principles of inquiry and reflection. In the fall of Year 1, program teams meet with teams from other programs undertaking a PPR on the same cycle to learn about the process and about outcomes assessment together. In the spring program, teams meet with ALT representatives to handle specific program questions. Extending the formal PPR from a one year process to a three-year staged process also made assessment more continuous and integral to a program's core responsibilities. The ALT also created a timeline for each program, giving due dates for draft reports so that faculty receive better guidance throughout the PPR process. The timeline includes clear goals, tasks, and expected deliverables. These enhancements of the PPR process reflect a college-wide effort to provide clear realistic guidelines and a timetable supported by appropriate investment of institutional resources.

In Year 2, the review year of the PPR cycle, programs engage in an inquiry process, gathering and examining data to prepare their PPR report. Since 2007, PPRs have included readings of student work from the ePortfolio assessment area. Assisted and guided by ALT members, program faculty evaluates student work using programmatic and core competency rubrics. Norming sessions help ensure consistency. During and after the readings, faculty reflects on what they have learned and its implications, both

for their own individual practice and the collective work of their programs. This reflective process helps them generate thoughtful and well-grounded recommendations for change in programmatic curricula and pedagogy. Recommendations are based on a broad range of evidence: curriculum reviews, external evaluators' recommendations (where applicable), board results (where applicable), evidence of students' achieving learning outcomes (that is, core competency results and programmatic competency results), and institutional data (graduation, persistence, pass rates, course attrition, for example). These evidence-based recommendations are articulated in the PPR report, along with a presentation of the data, including the findings emerging from the evaluation of student work and progress in core competencies.

As our assessment process grows more robust, these competency readings and data are increasingly well-represented in the PPR reports. The advance of outcomes assessment at LaGuardia has been incremental but determined, building on success while learning from obstacles. From 2007 to the present, we have made substantial gains in reading student work against the core competency rubrics. This is a noteworthy change from the previously established PPR assessment process that focused only on programmatic competencies. Currently, all PPR readings comprise a review of student work for both sets of competencies. LaGuardia's Middle States Self-Study (2012) confirmed that we indeed assess general education outcomes within our overall plan for measuring student learning, and that these assessment results are used for curricular enhancement.

"Closing the Assessment Loop"— Supporting Program Improvements Designed to Improve Student Learning Outcomes

As programs move from Year 2 to Year 3 of the intensive PPR cycle, their attention increasingly focuses on closing the loop—making change based on assessment—the most challenging and yet crucial aspect of the process. Colleges nationwide have difficulty with this step. In a 2009 study, Trudy Banta found very few community colleges that demonstrated closing the loop (Banta 2009). Subsequent studies have confirmed her findings (McNeice-Stallard and Stallard 2012). Skolits and Graybeal (2007) found that many professors did not use student learning outcomes evidence to make curricula decisions because they did not think it was either relevant to their work and/or they did not understand how to use the data. A faculty member's lack of knowledge about assessment creates a powerful barrier for the effectiveness of the outcomes process. (Skolits and Graybeal 2007).

LaGuardia addresses these challenges in its work with the faculty engaged in PPRs and its broader effort to build a culture of assessment. In the PPR process, the preparatory discussions of Year 1 provide opportunities to build faculty understanding and engagement. During Year 2, the process of inquiry and reflection generates evidence-based recommendations and helps faculty take ownership of the assessment

process. Year 3 asks them to transform these insights into action, acting on recommendations and integrating changes into programmatic structures and practices.

PPR reports submitted at the end of Year 2 must now include action plans, detailing the steps the program will take to make changes needed to improve selected outcomes. These action plans are then embedded in the college-wide Strategic Plan. During Year 3, ALT members meet with program leaders to help them refine and effectively follow-up on these action plans. As part of the Strategic Plan process, programs must provide mid-year and year-end reports on what they actually did to implement their action plans. These reports then are posted on the college-wide Strategic Planning website.

While structuring the process to increase follow-up, LaGuardia provides concrete support that helps programs to effectively close the loop. Beginning in 2009, the CTL launched a mini-grant initiative specifically designed to support programs in implementing changes connected to the PPR, most frequently in relation to the core competencies. Programs have the opportunity to develop a proposal and budget, and request resources up to $7,500 per program. All programs awarded a mini-grant in a given year meet to plan implementation processes, engage in collective trouble-shooting, and share and reflect on results. In this fashion, rigorous assessment inquiry links to resource allocation (Lopez 1996) and extended work in action-oriented professional community. The mini-grants initially focused on helping programs gather student work; now, increasingly, they focus on implementing action plans, supporting recommended changes in pedagogy, curriculum, and organizational/structural issues. All programs, regardless of their participation in the mini-grant program, are expected to implement recommendations and to close the assessment loop, but this initiative provides additional targeted support for departments to improve teaching and learning based on the direct evidence collected in the PPR process. In each year since 2009–2010, LaGuardia has spent approximately $50,000 to support of this program.

The mini-grant process helps to cap the extended process of inquiry and reflection, and it prompts programs to advance an integrative change-making effort linking evidence-based recommendation to practical but sustained action general education to instruction in the major. Some examples include:

• In its 2010–2011 PPR, the Physical Therapist Assistant program reviewed work from students' portfolios and found that their scores on the general education critical literacy competency and the programmatic competency related to analyzing the health-care literature were both unacceptably low. The PTA faculty reviewed assignments and the sequence of courses in their major to discover where students could develop these knowledge sets and skills. Through this curriculum mapping activity, PTA faculty realized during that several key courses could be redesigned to more fully address these competencies. They developed a set of staged writing assignments that built both research and writing skills; and they integrated these articulated assignments into the course at several key points in the program, culminating in an evidence-based research paper in the Capstone course. In the most

recent review of student papers, 90 percent of students received the highest possible score on both critical literacy and literature-based research. (Arcario et.al 2012).

- When Business Administration and the Business Management programs assessed student work around the general education oral communication competency in 2010, they found that students did not perform well. Using a mini-grant, they partnered with faculty from Communication Studies to revise the *Introduction to Business* courses to address oral communication skills. Students gave an initial oral presentation, which was taped and deposited into the ePortfolio. Then, a faculty member from Communications Studies did a one-hour intervention about how to conduct more effective presentations. Students reviewed their presentations and redid them, taping them a second time for a pre/post comparison. Afterwards, 60 percent of students showed improvement on oral communication, and overall scores improved from 3.05 to 3.675. As a result, this intervention is mandated in all *Introduction to Business* courses, and the program plans to extend it to other courses as well, making it a more sustained and scaffolded effort. Other business-related programs are learning from their efforts and making efforts to include more oral communications assignments in their business-specific courses.

- In its 2011–2012 PPR, the Engineering Sciences program found that student scores in Critical Literacy and Quantitative Reasoning were below target. Program faculty took part in a CTL mini-seminar on core competencies; drawing on this experience, they designed scaffolded writing assignments for three Engineering courses, aiming to build student competencies by focusing increased attention on technical writing and the preparation of laboratory reports. The new assignments will be integrated into courses, implemented, and assessed in 2013–2014.

- In its 2012–2013 PPR, the Occupational Therapy Assistant program found that students were scoring well below the college norm in Quantitative Reasoning, which is both a general education and programmatic competency. In their PPR report, the program team has identified an action plan that involves the use of statistical analysis in assignments in two different courses, one early in the students' course of study and one in later course, transferring the skills from critical review of the OT literature around quantitative methodology to direct application of quantitative reasoning in a clinical setting. The program has applied for a mini-grant that will help it pilot this intervention in 2013–2014 and assess the results.

In each of these cases, faculty used the PPR process to identify a program's shortcoming and then addressed that weakness with the help of the CTL. Grounding the assessment process in authentic student helps faculty identify meaningful yet accessible opportunities for evidence-based change. Moving from inquiry into student learning to reflective development of recommendations and the enactment of integrative change in programmatic curricula and practice, LaGuardia faculty are slowly but steadily learning how to close the assessment loop.

While the PPR process plays the central role in the effort to close the loop, the college at the same time continues to build a broad culture of assessment. This process is incremental in nature, taking place on many different fronts. Beginning in 2008–2009, the college held several large meetings, providing hands-on opportunities to understand and work with the general education core competencies. In 2011, ALT compiled and published the aggregated 2010–2011 Benchmark Assessment Data; individual programs were supplied with a programmatic breakdown upon request. ALT members have begun meeting with key groups of stakeholders, such as the Academic Chairs and the Academic Integrity Committee, to help build understanding and follow-up on targeted issues. Engaging scores of faculty and staff in a broad effort, LaGuardia's 2010–2012 Middle State Self Study process highlighted the importance of assessment for the entire college.

In May 2013, all programs engaged in creating a 2012–2013 PPR were honored in front of all faculty at the Provost's spring 2013 Instructional Staff Meeting; each program presented the results of their PPRs to the faculty at large, spotlighting specific data points and their action plans for improvement and change. Making clear that assessment is central to the intellectual work of being a faculty member, the meeting also enabled programs to share with other faculty their advice for making their own PPR process more doable, meaningful, and effective. This was the first time we have publically celebrated the assessment work undertaken by faculty and we now plan to make this an annual event.

Conclusion: Lessons Learned and What's Next?

Several factors have converged to establish LaGuardia Community College as a leader in student learning outcomes assessment. Hadden and Davies (2002) maintained that successful institutional assessment programs have visible support and leadership from the college president. LaGuardia's president, Gail O. Mellow, is an outspoken advocate for outcomes assessment. She often asks, "How do you know that they [students] are learning?" Senior-level Academic Affairs personnel promote assessment through their active participation on our campus-based Assessment Leadership Committee (ALT), by financially supporting faculty and staff conference presentations, and by making assessment a visible priority on our campus (Banta and Kuh 1998).

Involvement of leadership does not mean that this work is being done from top-down directives. Support for and from faculty members is essential in creating and sustaining an institutional culture of assessment (Ebersole 2009). Faculty members should be given ample opportunity for genuine input regarding the assessment approach, as faculty ownership of student learning outcomes assessment is critical for its success (Baker, Provezis, and Kinze 2012; Hadden and Davies 2002). At LaGuardia, faculty determined the core competencies, devised the assessment rubrics, assessed student work against those rubrics, take the lead on their PPRs, and have a prominent role on the Assessment Leadership Team. The college has invested in extensive faculty development and support related to assessment, and has put sustained attention to building an assessment culture; as a result, assessment has become a signature theme on

our campus (Provezis 2012). The engagement and commitment on the part of faculty and the discussions across campus have revealed that it works to focus outcomes assessment not on individual faculty performance (a misconception here at first), but rather on a broader evaluation of program and general institutional goals.

A broad-based outcomes assessment plan requires a commitment of resources. We have invested extensive time, money, and talent over the past decade in developing a robust ePortfolio system to capture students' work at the beginning, middle, and end of their academic careers. Faculty and staff members have been guided in devising and refining rubrics to evaluate student work, and yearly seminars have supported faculty in developing pedagogies to facilitate student learning related to the core competencies.

Assessment must be continually refined—we are always tweaking our approaches or making larger changes if called for. The process of inquiry and reflection applies not only to faculty engaged in the PPR process, but also to the work of assessment leaders in ALT. As we move forward, there are a number of steps we need to take to improve our assessment processes:

1. Reinforce the starting point for gathering entry-level data in the ePortfolio assessment database. While the college has done significant work over the past six years with capstone and advanced-level ePortfolios, the entry point of ePortfolios no longer functions as a robust collection site. The college needs to return its attention to the First Year Experience and the vital role it plays in collecting a baseline for student work to be assessed. A 2012–2013 Task Force on this topic has completed its work, and action plans are in place for 2013–2014.

2. Continue collaboration with program faculty regarding the assessment of discipline-specific (programmatic) competencies. Programs must continue their effort to more clearly spell out the evaluation criteria for all of their programmatic competencies, and to refine and revise assessment methodologies to strengthen the consistent use of direct assessment measures for programmatic competencies.

3. Strengthen faculty's ability to work with and utilize data. The PPR process demonstrates that while faculty teams are able to assess programs and make recommendations for strengthening programs, sometimes recommendations are still based on individual perceptions and anecdotes. The PPR process can be strengthened significantly by working with faculty to use data to support recommendations and conclusions about core, programmatic, and course competencies.

4. Update assessment competencies. Several developments have placed new competencies on the general education assessment agenda. Middle States mandated the college to begin assessing Technology Literacy and Ethics, Values and Diversity. CUNY has launched a major restructuring of university-wide general education, called Pathways, which incorporates new competencies. And, as part of a broader alignment process linking academic and student affairs, the FYE Task Force has recommended three cross-cutting, higher order competencies for the

FYE: Inquiry, Problem Solving, and Integration. These developments have prompted the college to launch a rethinking process to synthesize a new set of overarching competencies for general education outcomes assess.

While LaGuardia is pleased to have completed a successful (2012) self-study and reaccreditation, we are continuing to build our outcomes assessment momentum, addressing our weaknesses while building on our strengths. The process of inquiry and reflection applies not only to faculty engaged in the PPR process, but also to the work of assessment leaders. By continually evaluating and revising the college's assessment process, LaGuardia is weaving assessment into the fabric of the institution. We are focused on our outcomes assessment process as a way to advance learning at every level of the college, from students to faculty, staff, and administrative leaders. Using ePortfolio to capture and evaluate authentic student work focuses our attention on student learning and facilitates effective curricular and pedagogical improvements. The incorporation of faculty inquiry and reflective practice helps us close the loop with sustained and integrative change efforts. While our practice will always need strengthening and revision, we see this as an essential and exciting element of becoming an adaptive learning college.

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Author Information

Paul Arcario oversees all academic assessment and strategic planning as the Provost and Senior Vice President of Academic Affairs for Academic Affairs at LaGuardia Community College. He was previously the academic dean and also the ESL department chairperson at the same institution.

Historian Bret Eynon leads LaGuardia's assessment and the strategic planning committees as the Associate Dean and for Academic Affairs. He's the Founding Director of the LaGuardia Center for Teaching and Learning and oversees the development of LaGuardia's ePortfolio program.

Marisa Klages is the faculty director of Outcomes Assessment and faculty in the English Department at LaGuardia Community College. She also is the Project Director of the Global Skills for College Completion Project, a faculty professional development project for developmental educators.

Bernard A. Polnariev supports academic program assessment and ensures focused strategic plans for the college. He previously spent a decade teaching psychology courses throughout NYC colleges prior to serving as the director of a college success program, the Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) at LaGuardia.

Paul Arcario, EdD
Provost and Senior Vice President of Academic Affairs
LaGuardia Community College
31-10 Thomson Avenue
Long Island City, NY 11101
E-mail: ArcarioP@lagcc.cuny.edu
Telephone: 718-482-5400
Fax: 718-482-5443

Bret Eynon, PhD
Associate Dean for Academic Affairs
Founding Director, Making Connections National Resource Center
LaGuardia Community College
31–10 Thomson Avenue
Long Island City, NY 11101
E-mail: BEynon@lagcc.cuny.edu
Telephone: 718-482-5400
Fax: 718-482-5443

Marisa A. Klages, PhD
Faculty Director of Outcomes Assessment, Associate Professor
LaGuardia Community College
31-10 Thomson Avenue
Long Island City, NY 11101
E-mail: MKlages@lagcc.cuny.edu
Telephone: 718-482-5400
Fax: 718-482-5443

Bernard A. Polnariev, PhD
Administrative Executive Officer for Academic Affairs
LaGuardia Community College
31-10 Thomson Avenue
Long Island City, NY 11101
E-mail: BPolnariev@lagcc.cuny.edu
Telephone: 718-482-5400
Fax: 718-482-5443