



DARE TO DO MORE

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PHONE: 718-482-5050

FAX: 718-609-2009

August 30, 2017

Dr. Elizabeth H. Sibolski, Ph.D.
President
Middle States Commission on Higher Education
3624 Market Street, 2nd Floor West
Philadelphia, PA 19104

Dear Dr. Sibolski,

As an institution of higher learning, committed to our mission to educate and graduate students to become critical thinkers and socially responsible citizens who help to shape a rapidly evolving society, LaGuardia Community College holds in high regards the Middle States Commission on Higher Education peer review system of accreditation, meant to ensure our institution's educational quality, transparency, accountability, and continued growth. As such, we gratefully acknowledge the time spent by the reviewers in examining the institution's progress, financial health and sustainability, as well as its status of compliance with federal regulations, since the 2012 Self Study. As it pertains to the evaluators' recommendations, we accept all four recommendations. However, we would like to take the opportunity to provide further clarification for the recommendations offered. We have chosen to address Recommendations #2 and #3 under one comprehensive response.

Recommendation #1: The College should ensure effective support services aimed at student success are available in online programs.

LaGuardia's efforts to increase institutional support for students has focused on increasing the offering of online courses, based on hybrid or blended instruction. To date, the College only offers individual courses in an online environment. The College does not offer a complete degree program online. Therefore, the support services that students need are specific to those for an individual course.

As described in the narrative of the Periodic Review Report, "since fall 2015, faculty have taught, on average, 202 hybrid sections and 18 online sections per semester." The main tool used to facilitate instruction in the online course format is Blackboard, accessed through single sign-on authentication. Blackboard is an online learning management system that allows students and faculty members to access course materials (i.e. grades, assignments, syllabi), conduct

ADDRESS: 31-10 Thomson Avenue
Long Island City, NY 11101

PHONE: 718-482-7200
WEB: www.laguardia.edu



course activities (i.e. readings, submission of exams and assignments), communicate, and to collaborate via discussion board and/or email, 24 hours per day. (The range of tools and resources available for students to use as part of course instruction is primarily determined by the instructor of the course, trained in ways to use Blackboard for optimal learning and teaching conditions.) Blackboard provides a learning platform where students, with faculty support, can access support services, including to ask faculty questions, study with peers and engage in ongoing dialogue with students and faculty. In addition to having access to course specific online tools and resources, students also have access to CUNYfirst MyInfo. This online lookup tool allows for quick access to key information for the new semester. Students can use it to find class schedules, class textbooks, program plans, and information pertaining to their own biographical profile. Last, students are provided with a help link on the Blackboard webpage, which provides them with access to technical support if there is a concern or question that needs to be addressed, regarding use of the Blackboard platform and its tools. Furthermore, as most online courses are taught as hybrid sections, students can periodically engage faculty, in a classroom, or during their office hours, to receive support. Finally, LaGuardia's full array of learning support services, including the Writing and Math Centers and program-specific tutoring services, are available to students and are highlighted by the faculty, in the class syllabus and regularly throughout the class.

Recommendation #2: The College should demonstrate that assessment of general education is occurring systematically and that results are being used to improve student learning.

Recommendation #3: The College must update all program curriculum maps to include the core competencies in each program and ensure that the programs and core competencies are assessed.

For more than a decade, LaGuardia has addressed and assessed General Education student learning outcomes as identified by its General Education Core Competencies. These outcomes are embedded into the curricula of courses in General Education (the 15 credit Pathways Required Core) and into the required courses of every disciplinary major or program. Artifacts of student learning are gathered and assessed by teams of faculty and staff, generating findings and recommendations that shape action to improve student learning. LaGuardia's work in building an evidence-based assessment system that leads to concrete change has been spotlighted by the Association of American Colleges and Universities and cited by the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) as an example of best practice in assessment methodology.

Two published articles provide detailed examinations of LaGuardia's approach, spotlighting ways that LaGuardia uses assessment results to improve student learning: "LaGuardia Community College: Weaving Assessment into the Institutional Fabric -- NILOA Examples of Good Assessment Practice," (Provensis, 2012); and "Closing the Loop: How We Better Serve Our Students through a Comprehensive Assessment Process" (Arcario, et. al., 2013). These articles should have been included in the Appendices of our PRR. We have attached copies of both, in order to provide detailed and specific information on the structure and process of LaGuardia's outcomes assessment program.

It is clear that our PRR did not effectively communicate the existence and operative status of this system and provide the appropriate evidence to the Middle States team. More carefully selected information and these articles should have been presented, in order to better help the PRR team develop a more comprehensive view of LaGuardia's assessment processes. Assessment will be a

major focus of our next self-study, where the evidence will be more clearly and carefully presented.

As a result of our oversight, the Middle States team made Recommendation #2: “The College should demonstrate that assessment of general education is occurring systematically and that results are being used to improve student learning.”

Given space constraints in this response, what follows is a necessarily brief summary of our assessment approach, and concise account of recent developments. We hope that this, together with the attached articles, helps answer the questions raised by the team.

What follows also addresses Middle States Recommendation #3: “The College must update all program curriculum maps to include the core competencies in each program and ensure that the programs and core competencies are assessed.” Given the crucial role of the curriculum maps in LaGuardia’s outcomes assessment process, we are addressing both recommendations in one response.

Assessment at LaGuardia focuses on growth, examining change in student competency from their first semester, where work is gathered in their First Year Seminar, through their courses in General Education and the major, and culminating in work gathered in their capstone courses in their major. The consistent integration of overarching Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) into both General Education and programmatic courses is foundational to LaGuardia’s ability to effectively build the higher order thinking and learning capacities identified by our Core Competencies

Artifacts of student learning related to the Competencies are assessed every year in two major venues: Periodic Program Reviews, and General Education Benchmark readings. In both, artifacts from early in the students’ careers (under 15 credits) are compared to artifact from middle stages (15-45 credits) and the final stages (45 credits plus) of the students course work. The findings of the Periodic Program Reviews (PPRs) guide program-based professional development, programmatic “closing the loop” mini-grants, and restructuring of disciplinary curricula. Findings from Benchmark Readings guide college-wide decision-making related to curriculum policy and professional development.

Operational since 2008, this system was temporarily disrupted in recent years by significant change in two key areas: 1) the CUNY Pathways initiative required LaGuardia to re-structure General Education requirements according to CUNY mandates, creating a cohesive set of courses in the Pathways Required Core. This change is now complete. Meanwhile, 2) LaGuardia undertook a major reconsideration of its Core Competencies, engaging a broad range of faculty and staff in sustained conversation that: a) identified new competencies and developed appropriate rubrics; b) developed a comprehensive set of new curriculum maps, embedding the Core Competencies and Abilities in both Pathways courses and programmatic curricula; and, c) worked to develop the assignments needed to address the new competencies.

The transitional process demanded by these two developments necessarily unfolded over a period of years, absorbing considerable energy and disrupting some working elements of LaGuardia’s assessment process. Faculty were deeply engaged in the process of identifying and defining the 3 Core Competencies and 3 Communication Abilities, and developing rubrics for each. Guided by the faculty chairs of the Assessment Leadership Team and supported by Academic Affairs, program directors and academic chairs worked with their faculty to develop,

discuss, and refine competency-related curriculum maps for every academic program and every required Pathways course. Meanwhile, PPRs continued in this period, at first using the old Competencies and gradually switching to the new ones. General Education Benchmark readings were primarily used in this period as the vehicle for testing rubrics and refining the Competencies.

Spring 2017 represented a benchmark in this process. For the first time, all PPRs conducted in this academic year fully integrated assessment of artifacts associated with the new Competencies. Following the procedures established in the previous years, these PPRs included recommendations that will be acted on in 2017-18 and beyond, through curriculum change, professional development and closing the loop mini-grants. Meanwhile, the February 2017 General Education Benchmark Readings represented a major step forward in the application of our General Education assessment system to the student learning outcomes identified by our new Core Competency framework.

The College has conducted two Benchmark Readings using the new Competency Framework: a preliminary reading in June 2016, designed primarily to test and refine the newly-developed data collection structures; and a full reading in February 2017. In the February 2017 reading, 75 faculty and staff read and used College rubrics to score a sample of 1,200 student artifacts, 200 for each Competency and Ability. To consider student growth, scores for the readings were aggregated according to students' credit accumulation level: Early (0-14 credits), Middle (15-44 credits) and Late (45 and up). They were ranked on a scale in which a mean score of 2 is labelled Novice, 4 is Developing, 6 is Proficient, and 8 is Exemplary. The College target for graduating students is a 6. Figure 1 (attached) shows the college-wide results of this reading.

Several salient points can be seen in these results, which were presented to the President and the Provost, to College governance, and to all instructional faculty and staff at a College-wide convocation in May 2017.

- One is that, for all Competencies and Abilities, the readings found a pattern of growth in student learning: the mean score for work collected in the Late (45 and up) credit bucket was in every case higher than the mean score for students in the Early (0-14) credit bucket.
- In three areas -- Inquiry and Problem Solving, Written Communication, and Oral Communication -- the mean scores in the late credit bucket approached 6, the College target. As noted at Instructional Staff, these areas are notable in that they closely resemble competencies focused on in the period 2001-13.
- The three other areas -- Integrative Learning, Global Learning, and Digital Communication -- are newer to the College faculty. The Late scores, while higher than early scores, are not yet approaching Proficiency; and the trajectory across credits is less smooth. This suggests that faculty work on developing assignments to build student learning in these areas is particularly important.
- One other data point was presented at to the College's Instructional Staff. When readers encounter artifacts that seem to have emerged from assignments that had little or nothing to do with the Competency or Ability in question, those artifacts are scored as an 88. Assessment leaders presented data that showed that the percentage of 88s declined from 35% of the artifacts in June 2016 to 25% in February 2017. This trajectory suggests that

faculty are in the process of becoming more familiar with and better able to develop assignments that address the new Competencies and Abilities.

Overall, the data emerging from the February reading represents a promising pattern of growth. In consultation with the Assessment Leadership Team, the Center for Teaching and Learning has developed a set of professional development seminars and mini-grants designed to build faculty and student learning across all Competencies and Abilities, and to focus particular attention on the areas where growth is most needed. At the same time, these findings have informed a college-wide curriculum review, by the College Senate Curriculum Committee to further ensure that Core Competencies and Curriculum Abilities are clearly identified in course proposals and syllabi for every course identified in the programmatic curriculum maps and the courses of the Pathways Required Core. Finally, in late May 2017, the College was awarded a 3-year, \$260,000 grant from the Teagle Foundation, explicitly designed to support the work of faculty in building student learning around the Learning Matters Competency framework.

LaGuardia has focused and will continue to focus sustained and productive effort on its assessment of General Education student learning outcomes. Now nearing completion, the developments of recent years have taken considerable time and energy; but they have also strengthened our ability to ensure cohesive assessment of authentic evidence and the use of assessment findings to guide change and improve learning. We look forward to reporting fully on the use and impact of our refined system in our next Self Study.

Recommendation #4: The College should continue to implement a plan to ensure that pass rates in the Dietetic Technician Program continue to rise.

LaGuardia Community College has decided to close the Dietetic Technician Program, with a sunset date of June 2019. Students are no longer being admitted into the program.

Our hope is that the responses provided above, helps to clarify how LaGuardia Community College has addressed the reviewers' concerns and highlights plans to move forward, in collaboration with the accreditation process, to support the institution's mission and strategic goals, for continued institutional improvement and success.

Sincerely,



Dr. Gail O. Mellow
President

National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment

June 2012

LaGuardia Community College: Weaving Assessment Into the Institutional Fabric

Staci Provezis

LaGuardia Community College

LaGuardia Community College, located in Long Island City, New York, is a nationally recognized associate-degree granting institution. Founded in 1971, the college now has over 50 majors in areas such as business management, accounting, fine arts, nursing, engineering, biology, psychology, environmental science, literature, and liberal arts. Among the college's 325 full-time faculty and 796 part-time faculty, 54% have doctorates.¹ The institution supports 18,623 credit-seeking students, of which 56% are working full time toward a degree while 44% are part-time students, and it also serves over 40,000 non-credit-seeking students. The institution's stated mission is as follows:

LaGuardia Community College's mission is to educate and graduate one of the most diverse student populations in the country to become critical thinkers and socially responsible citizens who help to shape a rapidly evolving society.

A federally designated Hispanic Serving Institution, LaGuardia Community College serves an overwhelmingly minority and first-generation college student population "from diverse cultures, ages, and educational and economic backgrounds."² Its students come from 160 different countries and speak more than 120 different primary languages. LaGuardia's commitment to educational excellence has been acknowledged by Excelencia in Education, the Bellwether Award for Exemplary Instructional Programs, and the Community College Excellence Award from the MetLife Foundation. Because of its reputation as a leader in learning outcomes assessment, particularly through the use of electronic portfolios (ePortfolios), LaGuardia was selected by the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) as an *Example of Best Practice*. This report features LaGuardia's commitment to assessment, the collaboration across units at the college, the ePortfolio as the foundation of the assessment efforts, and the institution's robust program review system including assessment.³

Institutional Context

A range of factors converged to establish LaGuardia Community College as a leader in student learning outcomes assessment. The creation of a general education curriculum, an accreditation mandate, a Title V grant, and the active role of its academic leaders are especially relevant. In 2001–2002, LaGuardia defined a general education approach for all students—an unusual

¹ See the 2011 Institutional Profile for information on students, faculty, and the institution at http://www.lagcc.cuny.edu/uploadedFiles/Main_Site/Content/IT/IR/docs/2011factbook.pdf

² For more information about the students, faculty, or institutional awards, see <http://www.lagcc.cuny.edu/About/Fast-Facts/>

³ The data gathered for this case study involved phone interviews with the Director of Outcomes Assessment, the Director of Institutional Research, and two faculty members as well as a systematic review of the institutional website and document analysis. Interviews took place over May 2011 and continued through May 2012.

move for community colleges, where liberal arts may not integrate well into professional or vocational curricula. Moving beyond a traditional distribution approach, LaGuardia focused general education on competencies or proficiencies required across all degree programs. (These core competencies include critical literacy, quantitative reasoning, oral communication, research and information literacy, and technical literacy.) Students are required to meet requirements for both general education as well as for their degree programs. At the same time, LaGuardia was also responding to pressure from the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (Middle States) to establish a new assessment plan and to document how it used assessment evidence to improve student learning. To support this work, the institution successfully applied for a Title V grant allowing it to plan, pilot, and scale the now nationally recognized ePortfolio system.^{4,5} Along with LaGuardia's participation in Integrative Learning: Opportunities to Connect, a project of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), these factors led LaGuardia to very closely examine student learning outcomes and how to assess them.⁶

From the beginning, the college's assessment plan focused on improving student learning on common outcomes that all students at LaGuardia could attain. According to Dean Paul Arcario and Professor James Wilson, assessment at La Guardia was to be transformative:

... 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.⁷

Dean Arcario advances assessment by participating on the campus Assessment Leadership Team, by financially supporting faculty and staff to participate in conferences, by offering a range of assessment-focused campus workshops, and by making assessment a priority for all programs. LaGuardia President Gail O. Mellow, also an advocate of assessment, often asks, "How do you know that students are learning?" She reads all of the Periodic Program Reviews (PPRs) and gives feedback based on her readings. Known as someone who believes in the importance of using evidence to make decisions, she focuses her support on projects that can show how they evaluate their impact on student success. These are among the ways that LaGuardia's academic leadership has shown commitment to assessment activity on campus.

A sustained effort by academic leadership and key faculty leaders has overcome some initial faculty concerns that assessment might be used to target individual faculty members. Over time, assessment has become a motif on campus as growing numbers of faculty assess student learning and focus programmatic decisions and discussions on ways to improve it. The engagement of these faculty and the discussions across campus have shown that assessment efforts are not focused on individual faculty performance—an initial miscon

⁴LaGuardia launched the ePortfolio with grant funds and sustains it with campus funding. It continues to attract Title V grants and FIPSE Grants to advance its work on campus, across the CUNY system, as well as internationally. See <http://www.eportfolio.lagcc.cuny.edu/about/milestones.htm> to learn about the reach of the ePortfolio system with the Making Connections National Resource Center (<http://www.lagcc.cuny.edu/connections/>). In addition, LaGuardia's ePortfolio is often mentioned in the Association for Authentic, Experiential, and Evidence-Based Learning (AAEEBL) (<http://www.aeebl.org/>) conferences and resource lists.

⁵LaGuardia's ePortfolio has been the focus of several publications, such as Eynon, B. (2009). Making connections: The LaGuardia eportfolio. In D. Cambridge, B. Cambridge, & K. B. Yancey (Eds.), *Electronic portfolios 2.0: Emergent research on implementation and impact* (pp. 59–68). Sterling, VA: Stylus; Arcario, P., Eynon, B., & Lucca, L. (2010). The power of peers: New ways for students to support students. In J. Summerfield & C. Smith (Eds.), *Making teaching and learning matter: Transformative spaces in higher education* (pp. 195–218). New York: Springer; and Enyon, B. (2009) "It helped me see a new me: ePortfolio, Learning and Change at LaGuardia Community College in Filtered the on-line journal of Academic Commons", <http://www.academiccommons.org/commons/essay/eportfolio-learning-and-change>

⁶See http://www.aacu.org/integrative_learning/index.cfm

⁷Arcario, P., & Wilson, J. (2007). *Putting it together: General education at LaGuardia Community College*. In J. Summerfield, & C. Benedicks (Eds.), *Reclaiming the public university: Conversations on general and liberal education*. New York, NY: Peter Lang.

ception—but instead on a broader evaluation of program and general institutional goals. The combination of top-down and grass-roots approaches has been effective. The 2012 Final Evaluation Team report from the visiting Middle States team praised LaGuardia for creating a broad culture of assessment on campus.⁸ Support from the president and dean has moved the institution forward and assessment now permeates all levels of the institution.

LaGuardia’s ePortfolio Initiative

A central feature of the college’s outcomes assessment process, LaGuardia’s ePortfolio initiative helps ground the college’s entire assessment cycle in the authentic work of students and faculty by providing a means for collecting large quantities of student artifacts and organizing them for faculty review in the Periodic Program Review and Benchmark Reading processes, discussed below. The ePortfolio initiative engages large numbers of faculty and students in efforts to advance learning and teaching campus wide. Launched in 2002, this initiative has grown dramatically over the years with more than 50,000 students creating portfolios in the past five years. Working recursively, students use ePortfolio to collect their academic work, to associate it with competencies, and to reflect on their learning from their first-year seminars to their capstone courses. Creating an evolving, digital representation of what they have learned, students can share their ePortfolios with anyone they choose—peers, faculty, family and friends, potential employers, and transfer institutions. As one student from Bangladesh explained to an interviewer:

If somebody asked me “What did you do in the laboratory? What did you learn in your education? What did you do?” When I go back to my country, somebody can ask me “What did you do in the US?” This is the only thing I can show them, “This is what I have done. These are my grades, these are my projects, assignments...” They can see everything. It’s me. This is the best thing that I saw through the ePortfolio....⁹

LaGuardia leaders argue that successful use of ePortfolio for outcomes assessment requires faculty and student buy-in. Ensuring that the ePortfolio directly benefits students is critical in this regard. Professional development seminars help LaGuardia faculty use the ePortfolio as a pedagogical tool to support integrative learning. Reflecting on their learning across disciplines and semesters, students are encouraged to make connections and consider their own growth and change. Creating digital self-portraits, students craft new identities as learners and take greater responsibility for their work. Data gathered in the Community College Survey of Student Engagement shows that, compared to college means, students using the ePortfolio not only demonstrate higher levels of engagement in critical thinking, writing, and other key academic behaviors, they are also more likely to see strong connections between their coursework and their personal goals and values. Over the past five years, outcomes data show a strong correlation between taking ePortfolio-intensive courses and pass rates, next-semester retention, and progress toward graduation.¹⁰

LaGuardia’s work with the ePortfolio has drawn international attention and recognition from the AAC&U, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.¹¹ Building on its success, LaGuardia has attracted two FIPSE grants for its Making Connections National Resource Center, which leads a community of practice linking 50 campuses nationwide—from Boston

⁸ “Final Evaluation Team Report” March 26–28, p. 28. http://www.lagcc.cuny.edu/uploadedFiles/T2/middlestates/PDFs/Final%20Report%20LaGuardia%20wcover_1.pdf

⁹ Eynon, B. (2009, January). *It helped me see a new me: ePortfolios, learning, and change at LaGuardia*. Academic Commons <http://www.academiccommons.org/issue/January-2009>

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ To learn more about ePortfolio, see <http://www.eportfolio.lagcc.cuny.edu/>. See also Peer Review, Fall 2011–Winter 2012, www.aacu.org/peerreview/pr-fa11wi12/MeasuringStudent.cfm; and Winter 2009, http://www.aacu.org/peerreview/pr-wi09/pr-wi09_eportfolios.cfm; *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, March 18, 2009, <http://chronicle.com/blogs/wiredcampus/electronic-portfolios-a-path-to-the-future-of-learning/4582>; and Carnegie Foundation for Advancement of Teaching Gallery of Teaching, http://gallery.carnegiefoundation.org/gallery_of_tl/ilp.html

University and Virginia Tech to Salt Lake Community College—helping them advance their own ePortfolio practice.¹² Last year, the Lumina Foundation publication *Focus*, highlighted LaGuardia’s ePortfolio initiative as an exemplary approach for measuring student learning.¹³

Cross-Campus Efforts

Assessment efforts at LaGuardia are primarily supported by the Office of Academic Affairs and the Center for Teaching and Learning. Additionally, the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment (OIRA) plays a supplemental role in the activities of student learning outcomes assessment, managing the Community College Survey of Student Engagement and providing outcomes data to programs, as requested (<https://www.laguardia.edu/IR/IR-facts/>). For example, in support of a project with the mathematics department to trace the success of students as they moved through a series of courses, OIRA analyzed course pathways and scores on placement tests to find correlations with retention and student success. This information was then used by the department for improving the curriculum. OIRA seeks to provide this type of support for units on campus in ways that can directly impact teaching and learning through the use of quantitative analysis.

Center for Teaching and Learning

LaGuardia’s Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL), founded in 2001 and led by the Assistant Dean for Teaching and Learning, Bret Eynon, plays a critical role in supporting the assessment of learning outcomes across the college and in building a campus culture focused on teaching and learning.¹⁴ The CTL coordinates the ePortfolio initiative by leading faculty seminars on ePortfolio technology and integrative learning; providing workshops on outcomes assessment; training peer mentors to support ePortfolio courses; and managing ePortfolio technology, data, and artifacts. The CTL connects these assessment-focused efforts to a broader array of programs focused on learning, teaching, and scholarship.¹⁵

Each year the CTL offers an average of 12 to 15 distinct but parallel year-long faculty seminars. And each year, an average of over 200 full-time faculty apply for and take part in one or more of these seminar programs. Beyond its ePortfolio programs, CTL seminars offered in recent years have ranged from “Designed for Learning” (exploring the role of digital technology in supporting inquiry learning) and “Project Quantum Leap” (contextualizing basic skills education in mathematics) to interdisciplinary “Learning Communities,” “New Faculty Colloquium,” and “Teaching the City,” a seminar focused on ways to use experiential learning and the resources of the city to strengthen student learning. The CTL regularly offers seminars focused on one or more of the General Education core competencies such as “Writing in the Disciplines” or “Oral Communication Across the Curriculum.” All seminars are led by faculty-staff teams and provide stipends or released time to recognize faculty participation. According to the Dean, data gathered by OIRA suggests a correlation between the seminars and improved student outcomes, including increased course completion, improved course pass rates, and higher rates of next-semester retention. In addition to the ePortfolio and the core competency seminars, two other efforts led by the CTL buttress the outcomes assessment process. Seeking to build a culture of evidence, the CTL offers a Carnegie Seminar on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning and publishes *In Transit: The LaGuardia Journal of Learning and Teaching*, both of which encourage faculty to use the tools of scholarship to analyze student learning in their classrooms. In addition, the CTL offers mini-grants of up to \$7,500 designed to help programs prepare for and follow up on their Periodic Program Reviews (PPR). As described below, many programs use these grants to “close the loop”—implementing the recommendations emerging from the PPRs—to revise curricula, develop department-based faculty development, and reach out to adjunct faculty. The LaGuardia leadership see these efforts as “critical to ensuring that the outcomes assessment process effectively guides active educational improvement.”¹⁶

¹² See <http://www.lagcc.cuny.edu/connections/> to learn more about LaGuardia’s Making Connections center.

¹³ See http://www.helios.org/uploads/docs/Focus-Winter_2011.pdf

¹⁴ The CTL was awarded a Hesburgh Certificate of Excellence for the Improvement of Undergraduate Education in 2004.

¹⁵ See <http://www.lagcc.cuny.edu/ctl/default.aspx>

¹⁶ See this site to learn more: http://www.lagcc.cuny.edu/ctl/ePortfolio-Assessment_Mini-Grants.aspx

Outcomes Assessment in the Office of Academic Affairs

While the OIRA and the CTL contribute to outcomes assessment at LaGuardia, the process is coordinated by the Office of Academic Affairs, through the Assessment Director and the Assessment Leadership Team, which consists of the Dean, Assistant Dean, several faculty members, the ePortfolio Director, and a student. The Assessment Director, Prof. Marisa Klages, is given 12 hours of release time for the position but still maintains a teaching role in addition to these administrative duties. The role of the director is to convene the Assessment Leadership Team, conduct assessment workshops, and assist departments with their Periodic Program Review process, or PPRs.¹⁷

Mandated by the City University of New York, of which LaGuardia is a member institution, the PPR process requires all programs at an institution to be reviewed within a 10-year time frame. LaGuardia programs are reviewed typically every five to seven years. LaGuardia also uses the PPR process to look at other organized but non-degree-granting systems at the college such as basic skills courses, the library, and the ESL program. General education at LaGuardia has identified five core competencies for all students. The PPRs assess the program's achievement both in these core competencies as well as in programmatic competencies established by program directors and program faculty. The program under review does a self-study report, responding to the following questions:

1. What competencies/knowledge do we want students in the program to graduate with (includes core and programmatic competencies)?
2. Are students in the program graduating with those competencies and knowledge sets? How do we know?
3. What changes do we need to make to improve student learning in these areas? What steps will we take to strengthen our curriculum and pedagogy to more effectively help students achieve these competencies?

To answer these questions, programs engaged in a PPR work with the Office of Academic Affairs to identify the issues and concerns to be examined, and they collect data with the help of the OIRA (such as graduation rates, retention rates, and enrollment trends). Both core and programmatic competencies are mapped to the curriculum, aligning with current disciplinary or industry standards when applicable. Given the importance of transfer and job placement to the community college, the program must also provide information in the PPR about the transferability of the courses and job placement.

Evaluation of the artifacts of student learning collected through ePortfolio plays a defining role in the PPR process. All programs designate courses—from introductory surveys to capstone courses—in which students submit a major assignment to the ePortfolio assessment area. With help from the CTL, a random sample of artifacts is prepared. A faculty team from both within and outside the program uses a scoring rubric to review these artifacts and assess the core and programmatic competencies. This faculty group offers recommendations to the program. Programs then create an action plan detailing how they will address the recommendations and improve student learning in the designated areas; this plan is built into the program's strategic work plan for the following year.¹⁸

While the process for assessing student work is well established, LaGuardia continues to consider ways to improve it. For instance, whereas the PPR process allows departments and programs to assess student progress within a program or major, providing a rich source of assessment data for the college, LaGuardia felt it also needed a more comprehensive overview of general education. To augment the findings of the PPR, LaGuardia conducted its first college-wide “Benchmark Assessment Reading” in 2011–2012. This process involved 34 faculty members in 14 programs who read samples, critiqued the rubrics, and revised them.

¹⁷ <http://www.lagcc.cuny.edu/assessment/>

¹⁸ For more information on PPRs at LaGuardia, see <http://www.lagcc.cuny.edu/uploadedFiles/T2/assessment/docs/PPR%20Guidelines.pdf>

Working in teams based on the core competencies, these faculty members read student artifacts deposited under 25 credits and over 45 credits, blindly scoring samples from both levels to assess student progress on the core competencies. These readings for the first time allowed LaGuardia a comprehensive look at student growth and learning over time. The results showed that while LaGuardia students were not yet graduating with the full level of competencies sought by the college, students across the college were making significant gains in key general education competencies.¹⁹ More broadly, these results showed that it is possible to measure student growth on a large scale, using authentic artifacts instead of standardized tests. In the era of sharp criticism such as that in *Academically Adrift* and widespread skepticism about higher education's ability to demonstrate its impact, LaGuardia's leaders find these results particularly meaningful. The Assessment Director believes this PPR readings process

deepened faculty understanding about how and why the college was doing outcomes assessment by asking faculty from across the college to come together and discuss what they valued in their programs. It engaged faculty in an evidence-based discussion of where students should be at graduation and how to ensure that the general education competencies were being taught throughout all programs at the college. This lays critical groundwork for future efforts to strengthen assessment and improve student learning.

She also believes that “The full implications of this study are still unfolding, and will be strengthened by new Benchmark Readings in 2012 and beyond.”

Another way that LaGuardia has sought to improve the assessment process has been through revising the rubrics used to assess the ePortfolio artifacts. Rather than rely on the original rubrics created to evaluate students' learning gains, the institution decided to revisit and revise them. This improved the assessment process both fundamentally and technologically because in the ten years since the original rubrics had been created, new systems developed allowing the process to be digitized. Given that the AAC&U VALUE Rubrics²⁰ have been vetted nationally, the committee used them as a foundation. According to the Assessment Director, although the VALUE Rubrics provided a good structure and measurement strategy, they did not focus on some of the unique skills taught in the community college's curriculum and, to that end, they were modified to better reflect this knowledge and skill level.

Communication Strategies

A major factor in the success of the LaGuardia assessment process has been the way the institution communicates with faculty about assessment. Assessment is regularly discussed at campus-wide faculty meetings and in CTL faculty seminars. While PPRs are not currently published, the possibility of making them more widely available is under discussion. Programs that have received CTL mini-grants are asked to present case studies of successful assessment activities and processes, “showing that assessment is doable and useful to improving student learning and program effectiveness.” The Assistant Dean for Teaching and Learning believes “these presentations nurture the grass-roots element of the process, allowing programs to learn from each other and share assessment strategies that work.”

LaGuardia is also working to make students more aware of assessment, distributing an assessment brochure at student orientation and including assessment information in the course catalogue.²¹ In a 2011 campus-wide survey, 82% of student respondents indicated they knew about the core competencies and what they were. LaGuardia leaders argue that this awareness is prompted in large part by students' work with the ePortfolio, where they actively contribute artifacts and reflections associated with the competencies.

¹⁹ https://lagcc-cuny.digication.com/outcomes_assessment/Benchmark_Reading_2010-2011

²⁰ See AAC&U Value rubrics here: http://www.aacu.org/value/rubrics/index_p.cfm?CFID=35232931&CFTOKEN=72425299

²¹ See the course catalogue here: <http://www.lagcc.cuny.edu/academics/catalog/>

Using Evidence of Student Learning

LaGuardia's assessment leadership has put significant effort into “closing the loop”—helping departments and programs learn how to use assessment evidence to improve their curriculum and pedagogy. Several recent examples stand out. The physical therapy assistant program began by looking at core competencies of critical literacy and communication and learning from the review of students' portfolios that students were lacking in these areas. The faculty reviewed assignments and the sequence of courses in the major to understand where students could more effectively develop these knowledge sets and skills. The program discovered that two main courses could be redesigned to more fully address these competencies. This analysis of their curriculum was detailed in the department's PPR, and, with the help of a CTL mini-grant, the curriculum change was completed and implemented. The program will reassess these activities and the impact of the change during its next PPR.

During the PPR process in the business program, students were found to be underachieving in oral communication. Using a CTL mini-grant, the business faculty paired with faculty from the communication area to revise introduction to business courses to incorporate activities to improve business-appropriate oral communication skills. The program has been testing this strategy for a year, and pre- and post-study results suggest its effectiveness. The Assessment Director asserts, “Already, other business-related programs are learning from their efforts and building similar oral communications activities in their business-specific courses.”

The college's liberal arts, social science, and humanities program prepares students for transfer with a broad-based program in liberal education. During the PPR process, faculty found they had overloaded the capstone course with responsibility for too many different competencies. The PPR team recommended that assessment instead “look at different moments” during the students' course of study. This decision means the program needs to entirely revise its curriculum to create the scaffolding needed for more effective learning and assessment.

LaGuardia's leadership states that “assessing the general education outcomes through disciplinary programs and using the ePortfolio to ground assessment in authentic classroom work energizes the faculty connection to the process.” Having focused faculty attention on a weak aspect in their students' outcomes, the “closing the loop” aspect of the PPR process calls upon faculty's disciplinary expertise and stimulates pedagogical innovation. Veterinary technology students did not score as well as needed in quantitative reasoning, for example, so veterinary technology faculty redesigned several key assignments to build and document that competency in students. Whereas previously students only read an article to learn about monitoring glucose levels in felines, the new assignment asked them to read the article, to take a reading of a cat's glucose level, and then to use both sources to write an analytical report. This curriculum redesign created a more robust and discipline-specific quantitative reasoning experience for students and a richer set of documents to be collected and examined through ePortfolio. Addressing general education requirements throughout the program, according to the veterinary technology program director, means that “programs need to decide where they are addressing general education within the curriculum,” and using student artifacts collected through the ePortfolio “brings assessment to the forefront of the classroom.”

Next Steps

Outcomes assessment at LaGuardia, while in some ways a model, is constantly being reevaluated for improvement by revising current rubrics, digitizing the process, and involving more faculty and students. The rubrics created over the past decade are now being reviewed to see if they still address the desired outcomes. In the last year, for example, the Assessment Leadership Team coordinated the reevaluation of the oral communication rubric—which originally addressed only presentations and speeches. After LaGuardia faculty reported such activities were less appropriate and necessary only for some majors, the rubric was revised and expanded to address dialogic conversations as well. For example, faculty in the physical therapy assistant program used an assignment that asked students to role-play and video a conversation between

clinicians and patients. Using the new oral communication rubric, these recorded conversations can be scored on how clearly the students communicated with the patient and how well they listened. Similarly, changes were made in the quantitative reasoning rubric to accommodate more discipline-specific activities, such as the ways nursing students chart and graph range of motion and medication. The rubrics will continue to be evaluated to ensure they capture the range of activities in the different programs.

Another change has emerged from the adoption of a new, more flexible ePortfolio platform that facilitates online review of artifacts including the involvement of large numbers of faculty in cross-disciplinary benchmark readings. As noted above, this process not only serves an assessment function, but also asks faculty to read across majors and to understand what other programs do. The Assessment Director asserts that “while skeptical voices can always be found, engaging more faculty and generating institution-wide conversation encourages faculty buy-in.” The combination of ePortfolio, PPRs, benchmark readings, mini-grants and outreach activities allows a classroom-based institutional story about assessment to emerge. By continuing to revise and update the process in ways that respond to faculty input, LaGuardia is weaving assessment into the fabric of the institution. In the Assessment Director’s words, the philosophy for assessment at LaGuardia is one of “appreciative inquiry”—where the questions asked are “What do you do well?” and “What can you do better?” This focus could explain why assessment at LaGuardia has been so successful. More than a means for evaluation it is seen as a means for improvement.

Lessons from LaGuardia Community College

1. Assessment activities may be organized across several campus offices. Having a way for the personnel from those offices to communicate regularly with others through an assessment team builds synergy and commitment.
2. Assess your assessment activities. Do not allow your assessment process to become stagnant. Regularly review your assessment materials. Allow for a broad notion of certain quality indicators so that diverse programs can be represented. Competency in oral communication, for example, may mean something different to liberal arts majors than to healthcare majors.
3. Campus leaders will foster a culture of assessment at their institution by basing their campus decisions on assessment data and by giving educational and financial support to campus assessment activities.
4. Embed assessment into other campus review systems so that assessment activities are done regularly and revisited during the next cycle.
5. Increase faculty interest and involvement in assessment by having learning opportunities in the form of seminars and by allowing units to speak about their assessment experiences during faculty meetings that cross disciplines and programs.

NILOA Examples of Good Assessment Practice

With funding from several foundations, the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment's (NILOA) mission is to examine institutional practice and help institutions productively use assessment data to inform and strengthen undergraduate education as well as to communicate with policy makers, families, and other stakeholders. Documenting what students learn and can do is of growing interest both on campus and with accrediting groups, higher education associations, families, employers, and policy makers. And yet, we know far too little about what actually happens in assessment on campuses around the country. NILOA conducted several short case studies, titled *Examples of Good Assessment Practice*, of two- and four-year institutions in order to document institutional achievements in the assessment of student learning outcomes and highlight promising practices in using assessment data for improvement and decision-making. The data collection process included a thorough examination of the websites and relevant assessment documents (accreditation self-studies, assessment reports, program reviews, etc.) for selected institutions and interviews with key institutional representatives.

About NILOA

- The National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) was established in December 2008. It is funded by Lumina Foundation for Education and The Teagle Foundation.
- NILOA is co-located at the University of Illinois and Indiana University.
- The NILOA website went live on February 11, 2009.
www.learningoutcomesassessment.org
- The NILOA research team has reviewed over 1,000 institution websites for learning outcomes assessment transparency.
- One of the co-principal NILOA investigators, George Kuh, founded the National Survey for Student Engagement (NSSE).
- The other co-principal investigator for NILOA, Stanley Ikenberry, was president of the University of Illinois from 1979 to 1995 and of the American Council of Education from 1996 to 2001. He served again as Interim President of the University of Illinois in 2010.

National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment

For more information, please contact:

National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA)
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
340 Education Building
Champaign, IL 61820

learningoutcomesassessment.org
njankow2@illinois.edu
Fax: 217.244.3378
Phone: 217.244.2155

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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 United 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.

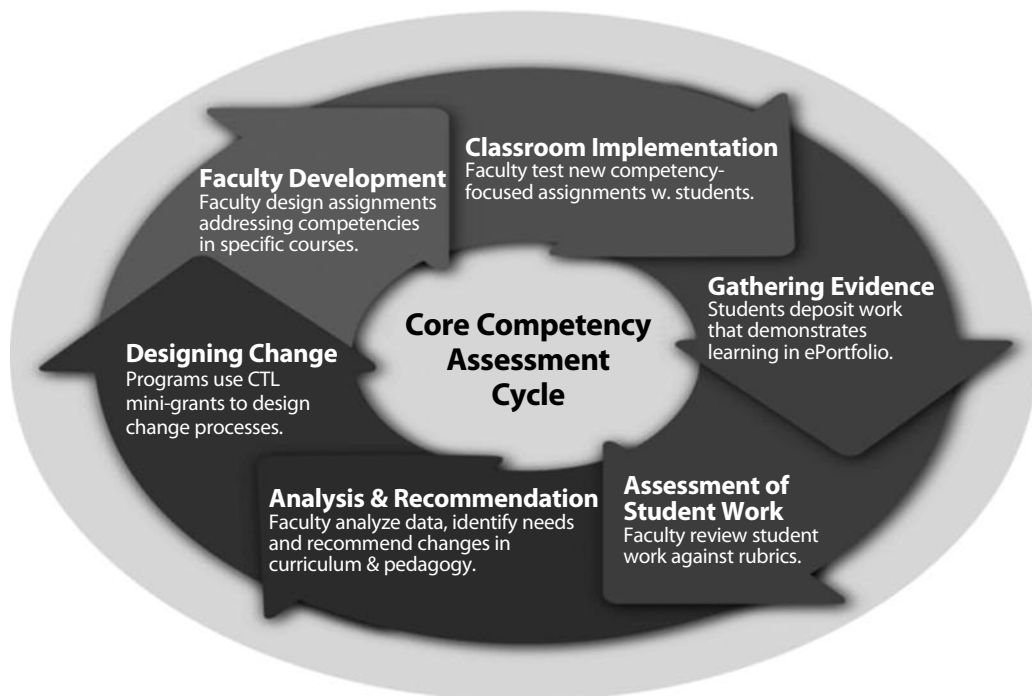
Beginning in 2011, ALT began to disseminate assessment results to the college community as well as to targeted programs (majors). This is part of a broader culture-building process (discussed below), critical to the successful integration of assessment into the institutional fabric. The college also 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 ENN198 (Urban Studies)	ENN195 ENN240	ENG295 (Capstone)
Critical Literacy (Writing Intensive) ¹	ENG099/ENG 101/ESL					X	X
Quantitative Reasoning ²	MAT096	X					
Oral Communication ³	CEP121 or Select a course			X			
Research and Information Literacy	ENG101		X				X
Technological Literacy							Capstone ePortfolio

¹Two courses to deposit in ePortfolio assessment area: Urban Studies and one to be selected in the discipline (both are WI courses)

²Two 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)

³Two 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.

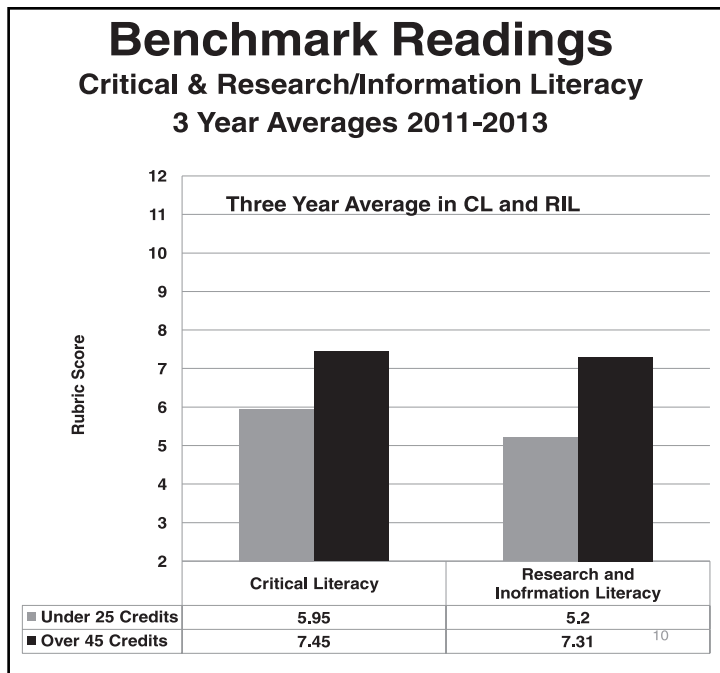
Oral Communication. Students place videos of oral presentations on their ePortfolios using video-streaming technology. Faculty members determine where the presentations will occur on a program-by-program basis; possibilities, for example, include a speech course, a Cooperative Education course (for example, 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



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 troubleshooting, 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. Polnariiev 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

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