Trinity University Committee on the Assessment of the Common Curriculum
Details

How the assessment committees work:

• Each committee is composed of faculty members currently teaching a course in the specified area of the Common Curriculum
• Committee members review the catalog description of their area of the Common Curriculum to identify student learning outcomes
• Committee members determine a method for assessing the extent to which students are achieving the learning outcomes

Typically, committee members opt to select a piece (or several pieces) of work that students will be doing as part of the course. They each then customize a rubric, with the rubric criteria being the learning outcomes the committee has agreed on.

• Assessments are based on student work (typically from a random sample of students)
• Student work is collected and identifications removed to the extent possible
• Each committee member is given the student work and rubric from another team member’s course for review and scoring
• Scores are summarized

Other assessment methods have included a multiple choice test (information technology skills), pre-post tests, instructor scored rubrics (fitness, languages).

Once the review of the student work is completed:

• The committee writes a report on their findings and recommendations (using a template)
• The committee submits the report to the Committee on the Assessment of the Common Curriculum (CACC).
• After review of the report, members of the CACC often meet with the faculty members on the assessment committee to request clarifications.
• The CACC submits the (often revised) report to the University Curriculum Council (UCC).
• The UCC may request further information from the CACC before accepting the report.
• As needed, the UCC may bring suggested changes to the full faculty assembly for approval.
## Quantitative Reasoning Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Outcomes*</th>
<th>Student Work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>the ability to represent and solve a problem in a framework involving mathematics, statistics, computation, or symbolic logic</td>
<td>Student work that will demonstrate achievement of the learning outcome. To be selected by the assessment committee for this area of the curriculum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the ability to communicate their results</td>
<td>Student work that will demonstrate achievement of the learning outcome. To be selected by the assessment committee for this area of the curriculum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the ability to describe the significance of the quantitative approach</td>
<td>Student work that will demonstrate achievement of the learning outcome. To be selected by the assessment committee for this area of the curriculum.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Learning Outcomes*</th>
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<th>Minimum Acceptable Achievement</th>
<th>Intermediate Achievement</th>
<th>Exceptional Achievement</th>
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</thead>
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<td>the ability to represent and solve a problem in a framework involving mathematics, statistics, computation, or symbolic logic</td>
<td>Description of what would be found in the student work that would indicate insufficient achievement of the learning outcome. To be provided by the faculty member of the course.</td>
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* Learning Outcomes are from Article VII: Curricular Guidelines of the *Faculty and Contract Staff Handbook*. 
Recommendations for Report of Assessment of Common Curriculum Requirements

Committee on the Assessment of the Common Curriculum

Based on our work of the last few years, the Committee on the Assessment of the Common Curriculum (CACC) has compiled the following information to help inform subsequent rounds of assessment of the Common Curriculum (CC). Members of the CCAC and its various subcommittees have learned some lessons as we have tried to develop ways of understanding whether students are achieving the goals of the CC. We hope that this information will help us to build on the successes of the past.

One lesson we have learned is that the reports are easier to read and understand if they follow a consistent format and address the items in the outline below. We strongly urge committees to use this outline. Within this outline we have included some other tips based on the work of previous committees.

Assessment of Common Curriculum Requirement
Report Outline

I. Name of Requirement

II. Specific Competencies or Learning Outcomes Expected (Describe what students will be able to do when they complete this requirement.)
[Lessons learned:
• Are these clear to the committee members from the wording in the Courses of Study Bulletin? Do you agree with what the previous committee that assessed this area identified as the competencies or expected learning outcomes? If not, then perhaps revisions to the Courses of Study Bulletin are in order and could be recommended to the CACC for submission to the UCC.]

III. Assessment Tools (Describe what papers, assignments, etc. will be used to measure progress toward competencies or expected outcomes.)
[Lessons learned:
• Should these papers, assignments, etc. be embedded within the regular coursework or should they be separate? If they are separate, should they be required or not? If they are not required, will the students who do participate be representative of the entire class? Even if they are required in some sense, if they are not part of the regular coursework, will students give them their best effort? Some faculty groups have recommended that embedded coursework is preferable since it is required and graded, so all...
students participate and are more likely to devote a reasonable amount of effort to the paper or assignment.

- Should a “pre” and “post” format be used? Some faculty groups have found the pre and post format to be quite useful to help them understand progress that students have made during the course. Some faculty, particularly those teaching science and mathematics courses, have felt that a pre test would be demoralizing to some students who would not be able to complete the paper or assignment without having had the class.

- At the outset, some faculty committees have some ideas about possible problems that exist within the specific area of the CC they are assessing. Perhaps a discussion of such problems would be helpful at the start. Are there ways of designing your assessment to determine if these problems really do exist?

IV. **Assessment Process** (Describe how those papers, assignments, etc. will be collected – by whom, when and how often, etc. How will the findings be compiled, analyzed, and disseminated?)

[Lessons learned:

- Should work from all students be collected or just from some students? If reading and evaluating work from all students would be onerous, perhaps assessing work from a sample of students would be more feasible. But should work from all students be gathered and only a sample selected for subsequent evaluation by the committee? If so, how should the sample be selected? Some groups have suggested that to assure that results are not biased, work should be gathered from all students and a random sample of those should be assessed in the event that assessing them all would be too time-consuming. Institutional Research would be happy to assist in the selection of a truly random sample.

- How will you assess the student work? Some previous committees have suggested that it would have been useful to have some sort of evaluation guide or rubric for scoring the student work. Some previous committees have articulated specific characteristics that they either found or failed to find in student work. Your committee may want to look at the report from the previous committee and use it to devise some sort of evaluation guide or rubric. Institutional Research would be glad to assist you if you would like to look at some examples of these tools or draft such a tool for use in your group. The advantage is that the committee will have agreed on what characteristics they are looking for, assessment of the student work is more straightforward and consistent, and summaries of findings are generally easier to construct.

- Who should assess the student work? Will all members of the committee assess all the student work? Or will the papers be divided up in some way? Should the instructor of a course assess the papers of the students in that course? Depending on the type of work and the subject matter, different faculty groups have used different models of reviewing the student work.
If you used a pre and post format, should those who are assessing the work know which two papers were written by the same student and which was the pre and which was the post? Knowing which paper is “supposed” to be the better one can bias readers’ evaluations. Ideally, readers will not know which papers were from the same student and which was the pre paper. If you have devised some sort of evaluation guide or rubric, the results of that instrument can be used to determine if indeed there has been improvement on a student by student basis over the semester. The information about which papers belong to which students and which is the pre and which the post can be maintained by someone outside the assessment process. Codes can be added to the paper that will allow for the assessments to be matched back to this information at the end of the process. Institutional Research would be happy to assist in this process.

V. Results  (Describe the conclusions you draw based on your assessment. What was learned through your analysis?)

[Lessons learned:
• Include sufficient detail so that the readers of the report could replicate your process if they so desired. Another group will be doing this in a few years and will want to learn from your work. Include details about how many sections, faculty, students participated. If samples are used, describe how they were selected. Describe how the committee evaluated the extent to which students achieved the stated expected outcomes. The CACC and UCC will want to understand the strength of the evidence you have accumulated and will have difficulty doing so without details.
• Be sure that the results and conclusions here are based on your assessments. This is the place to put conclusions for which you have accumulated evidence through the assessment process. If your committee would like to make other comments that are not based on your assessments, please put them in item VII. below.]

VI. “Closing the Loop”  (Describe recommended changes/improvements.)

[Lessons learned:
• If your committee has recommendations for changes based on the results of your assessment, be as specific as possible. The CCAC and the UCC will want to take appropriate action based on what you have learned.]

VII. Other Comments

[Lessons learned:
• Sometimes committees have collective wisdom based on having taught the CC courses that does not come through in the particular assessments that were conducted. Including this information here will allow future committees to consider your thoughts and perhaps devise an assessment to address concerns raised here.]
Abstraction: An Accelerated and Collaborative Approach to Curricular Design

Lisa Jasinski, Mark Brodl, and Michael Fischer, Trinity University, San Antonio, TX

ABSTRACT

Whereas a wholesale general education curricular revision can take up to a decade, the faculty at Trinity University completed the design in roughly 18 months using an innovative and accelerated process. Beginning with imaginative brainstormsing, our highly transparent structure modified familiar decision-making channels and alternated between short periods of intense work followed by time for reflection and feedback. Beginning with imaginative brainstormsing of broad and provocative concepts, through staged iteration, the faculty gradually refined the best ideas into an actionable curricular plan. Over half of Trinity’s 245 full-time faculty directly participated in the revision process and all colleagues had a voice through frequent roundtable discussions, open comment periods, and online polling. The centerpiece of our process is the Ideas Lab, a multi-day, facilitated workshop to encourage collaborative brainstormsing paired with constructive and critical real-time peer review to encourage iterative proposal development.

OBJECTIVES

To undertake the first wholesale revision of Trinity’s curriculum since 1986 and design a student-centered, forward-looking general education requirements in line with our institutional strengths and strategic plan goals. To prepare a generation of graduates who can write and speak effectively, think creatively and critically, and become leaders in a variety of disciplines and industries.

To accomplish our change using an innovative method for realizing institutional change apart from familiar approaches such as top-down, opaque administrative decision-making or appointing a slow-moving faculty committee with limited university representation and resources. Familiar approaches typically fail to entice faculty buy-in and compromise the ability to implement a new vision. In order to design a student-centered curriculum with limited departmental turf battles, we adopted the following values to enable faculty to develop mutually reinforcing and complementary ideas and avoid a winner-take-all mindset:

- Inclusivity – Invite many voices, perspectives, and strengths to the table without letting strong personalities dominate (too much)
- Transparency – Structure frequent opportunities to give and receive feedback; Document and proactively explain the rationale for all decisions; Appoint a neutral coordinating committee to maintain the integrity of the process (but not the direction of the curriculum itself)
- Pace of work – Balance the process and be attuned to the natural ebbs and flows of the academic calendar with periods of intensive work and opportunities for considered reflection; Maintain momentum and progress over time with regular milestones
- Camera-raderie – Transform participants’ perspectives through involvement; Build trust, kinship, understanding, collaboration, and buy-in
- Innovation – Create atmospheres that fluctuate between playfulness and provocation to inspire new ways of addressing old problems and realizing institutional potential; Adopt design thinking principles and practices; Use both technology solutions for information sharing and asynchronous review and efficient and equitable face-to-face protocols; Design safe spaces for faculty to explore new types of courses, pedagogical opportunities, and set the stage for future cross-disciplinary endeavors.

IDEAS LAB COMPONENTS

Participants (22) - A mix of elected (18) and appointed (4) faculty members elected/selected for their creative potential and ability to work collaboratively; Proportionate representation for the overall faculty by rank, gender, and discipline

Provocateurs / Mentors (4) – National leaders in higher education selected to share expertise and insights, but by definition they have no stake in the outcomes of the ideas lab and are there to encourage bold thinking and ask clarifying questions

Facilitators (2) – Hired professionals to guide discussion, provide structure and momentum, organize exercises, and keep the group on schedule

Stakeholders (2) – Two recent Trinity alumni to share their personal experiences as students and as young professionals

Observers (4) – Members of the coordinating committee to assist facilitators and participate in peer review, but not to draft proposals (to maintain neutrality)

PROCESS OVERVIEW

1 - Symposium Early September 2011

Goal: Engender a “fire in the belly” and mandate for change
Approach: Presentations from highly energizing keynote speakers
Deliverables: Faculty Resolution

2 - Retreat Day Mid-September 2011

Goal: Define first principles
Approach: Cancel classes and hold a retreat day for faculty, staff, and students to define endurings traditions and identify new opportunities
Deliverables: Draft Student Learning Outcomes

3 - Ideas Lab January 2012

Goal: Envision curricular plans to deliver a 21st century liberal arts education
Approach: Facilitated, three-day mind-bending framing iterative peer-review (see details below)
Deliverable: Five curricular prototypes

4 - Curricular Development Lab March 2012

Goal: To identify the most promising elements/prototypes and develop one proposal
Approach: Facilitated, two-day workshop; Periodic sounding boards
Deliverable: A single curricular proposal in outline form

5 - Curricular Packaging May - September 2012

Goal: Refine and flesh out the curricular packaging
Approach: Summer of committee meetings, discussions, and work; Periodic sounding boards
Deliverable: Semi-refined curricular proposal & rationale

6 - Final Lab November – May 2013

Goal: Develop new Course of Study Bulletin language, Student Learning Outcomes, and Course Guidelines
Approach: Final edits by Student Affairs, Curriculum Council, and Task Forces
Deliverables: Vote in Principle (May 2013) and Final Approval (January 2014)

OUTCOMES & LESSONS LEARNED

- The Faculty Assembly unanimously approved the final curriculum in January 2014 (to be implemented in Fall 2015). We attribute the strong outcome to the inclusivity and transparency of the design process. We estimate that 80 of 245 colleagues participated in one of the committees / design labs and nearly all faculty participated in an online poll, the vote, sounding boards, or one or more of the numerous roundtable discussions.

- We found value in varying the groups of colleagues working on such stages of the design, though we had to allow pre-poll time to get all groups to get “up to speed” at each stage of the process.

- Our new curriculum adopted the spirit of our active learning, interdisciplinary, and cross-disciplinary design process. Colleagues must cross and transcend traditional boundaries as we implement new Interdisciplinary Clusters and First-Year Experiences.

- We initially underestimated the time it would take the faculty to rally behind the Curricular Development Plan (March) and finalize the first Student Bulletin (June). At each stage, colleagues stated that they felt rushed and asked for more time. Yet, we tried not to stray too far from the initial timeline (it was critical to keep up the momentum by including deadlines and interim milestones). In our experience, better work didn’t result from granting “extensions” – though additional talk time helped build shared understanding and consensus.

- Our colleagues needed coaching to give a spectrum of feedback. Left to their own devices, colleagues only note “Concerns” and none on minor details, especially with early drafts. By rigorously soliciting “Positive” and “Potentials,” we found that the suggestions were most useful to shaping future iterations. This process did not feel as natural at first, but we think it had led to positive culture changes on our campus.

ELEMENTS OF THE NEW CURRICULUM

- Enhanced First-Year Experience: Take in the student’s first semester, this intensive course adopt a learning community model to support scaffolded instruction in writing and oral communication skills, as well as foundational math, science, and cultural learning experiences.

- Core Capacities: Students will develop transformative skills that enable them to succeed academically at Trinity and their post-graduate careers. The core capacities are Written, Oral, and Visual Communication; Digital Literacy and Engaged Citizenship.

- Approaches to Creation and Analysis: Students will demonstrate the ability to use approaches characteristic of (1) the humanities, (2) the arts and creative disciplines, (3) the social and behavioral sciences, (4) the natural sciences, and (5) quantitative disciplines.

- Interdisciplinary Clusters: Students will explore a complex subject of enduring or contemporary importance by completing three linked courses from a variety of departments.

- Experiential Learning: Trinity is committed to helping students learn to apply knowledge in a real-world environment. The new curriculum requires that all students complete at least one experiential learning opportunity, which might include service-learning and field-based courses, self-designed projects, internships, artistic works, study abroad, or service research.

OBSERVATIONS:

- The new curriculum includes a required major, a lifetime fitness course, three years of foreign language, and Unwalled Encounters.

- Engender a “fire in the belly” and mandate for change

- Define first principles

- Identify the most promising elements:

- A single curricular proposal in outline form

- Develop new curricular language, student learning outcomes, and course guidelines

- Refine and flesh out the curricular packaging

- Finalize the curricular plan

- Adapt this new curriculum to meet the needs of individual students

- Peer review of proposals while other people in the room anonymously respond

- Present resulting model at open forum; Electronic posts from provocateurs and academic departments for insights and IPP feedback

- Summer of committee meetings, discussions, and work; Periodic sounding boards

- Final edits by Student Affairs, Curriculum Council, and Task Forces

- Vote in Principle (May 2013) and Final Approval (January 2014)

ATRIBUTION

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Lisa Jasinski, Special Projects Coordinator
lisa.jasinski@trinity.edu (210) 999-7336

Mark Brodl, Associate VP for Academic Affairs
mbrodl@trinity.edu (210) 999-7246