

Overview of the Quality Initiative - Missouri State University

Title: Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes associated with the Public Affairs Mission

Missouri State University has been assessing student learning outcomes for many years. The Quality Initiative Project (QIP) will focus specifically on improving the ways in which the institution assesses learning outcomes associated with its Public Affairs mission, including an emphasis on diversity, within both academic programs and co-curricular activities. The process and rubrics were developed by a task force during the summer of 2012. The first collection of data will occur during the 2012-2013 academic year. Assessment of the evidence collected using the rubrics will be done during the summer of 2013 with reports shared during the summer and early fall of 2013.

The project consists of three parts in an annual cycle:

- **collection of evidence** from a variety of sources in academic and co-curricular program (process developed and evidentiary items selected by faculty and staff);
- **evaluation of evidence** by faculty (academic evidence) and faculty/staff (co-curricular evidence) based on faculty-developed rubrics, with assistance by the university assessment office;
- **preparation and dissemination of an annual report(s)**, with highlights of outstanding evidence, an overview of evidence collected, and recommendations for improvement in the process. Dissemination of the annual report will include administrative council (president's council), academic council (provost's council), Faculty Senate, Committee on General Education and Interdisciplinary Programs (CGEIP), Assessment Council, faculty and staff.

Two full cycles will be complete prior to our requirement to submit a report in Spring of 2015. A third cycle will be complete prior to a site visit by a team in 2015-2016. The assessment processes begun during the three-year QIP later will be incorporated into assessment of additional learning outcomes--beyond those of the Public Affairs mission--and become a part of the University's improved assessment of general education, academic programs and co-curricular student learning.

Sufficiency of the Initiative's Scope and Significance

2. Explain why the proposed initiative is relevant and significant for the institution.

Missouri State University has been continuously accredited as an institution since 1915. Following the last HLC self-study and site visit in 2005, MSU was advised to direct attention to improving the assessment of our Public Affairs mission within general education and to increasing the university's commitment to diversity. MSU has spent the last five years focusing on making sure that the public affairs mission was incorporated into all program student learning outcomes – including general education. On March 12, 2009 Faculty Senate adopted major

goals for each pillar of the Public Affairs mission. These goals have helped units across campus to define student learning outcomes in the discipline. The QIP will allow us to focus specifically on those areas, which are in keeping with the institution's mission and strategic priorities, as described below.

3. Explain how the proposed initiative aligns with the institution's mission and current operational or strategic priorities.

The university has regularly adopted long-range plans and reviewed them annually. The university's current long-range plan for 2011-2016 includes in its "strategic directions and objectives" the following statements about the Public Affairs mission: "Missouri State was granted a statewide mission in public affairs in 1995 when Senate Bill 340 was signed into law. Over the years, the public affairs mission has matured and been incorporated into many aspects of campus life. The primary objective during this five-year plan is to incorporate the mission more deeply into the academic experience of the students, from the curriculum to research." The Public Affairs mission has been articulated as consisting of three pillars: Cultural Competency, Ethical Leadership, and Community Engagement. Student Learning Outcomes associated with each of these will be assessed through the QIP. The first, Cultural Competency, overlaps with the University's long-range plan commitment to Inclusive Excellence. Inclusive Excellence is one of three overarching commitments stated in the long-range plan, along with student learning and institutional impact. The plan defines Student Learning and Inclusive Excellence in ways that clearly demonstrate its priorities are central to the QIP emphasis on assessing student learning outcomes—in co-curricular as well as academic programs--associated with the Public Affairs mission, including diversity:

Student learning is the primary goal of the University and the key indicator of our success. As a community of learners, we embrace learning outcomes that encompass liberal arts education, professional preparation and a concentration on public affairs, and we pledge to support student learning in curricular, co-curricular, extra-curricular and research contexts.

Inclusive excellence is the recognition that an educational institution's success is dependent on how well it values, engages and includes the rich diversity of faculty, staff and students with all the valuable social dimensions that they bring to the enterprise of higher education. Missouri State University shall demonstrate a comprehensive commitment to inclusive excellence, which will be reflected by policy, planning and actions throughout the institution.

The proposed QIP will provide evidence that we are meeting many aspects of the University's strategic plan by a thorough assessment of Public Affairs student learning outcomes associated with Cultural Competency, Ethical Leadership, and Community Engagement. Although many people throughout the campus—faculty and staff in general education, academic programs, co-curricular activities, the Vice President for Diversity and Inclusion, the Vice President for Economic Development and International Affairs, and the Vice President for Student Affairs, for example more—are working on various aspects of the long-range plan, the proposed assessment plan would gather evidence from all, synthesize and analyze the outcomes, and then provide feedback so that the university might build from its strengths to implement changes for future improvement.

4. Explain the intended impact of the initiative on the institution and its academic core.

Throughout the campus community, faculty, staff and students have stated that we emphasize the Public Affairs mission through all we do; however, many also note that we do not collect, synthesize and report our learning associated with Public Affairs in a comprehensive way, so that the results may be used more thoroughly for continuous improvement in student learning. The refined assessment process related to the Public Affairs mission, including diversity, will enable us to gather and analyze evidence of student learning in a way that will allow clearer feedback of strengths and opportunities for improvement. Once we are able to see what we are doing well and where we need to improve, we will be able to implement changes in teaching and learning strategies.

In addition, the university is in the midst of revising its general education curriculum. A task force worked for the past eighteen months and now the process is in the hands of the Faculty Senate. An important part of that revision is a refinement of the assessment process. The QIP will allow us to begin a new process of assessing one part of the general education curriculum—the Public Affairs learning goals. As the process is implemented and refined, it may be adopted for use with many of the general education curriculum student learning outcomes.

Clarity of the Initiative's Purpose

5. Describe the purposes and goals for the initiative.

Purpose:

- To develop a comprehensive, university-wide assessment plan for student learning outcomes related to the public affairs mission in general education, discipline specific programs and co-curricular activities. As a result, the process (with any needed refinements) will be incorporated into the institution's broader assessment practices.

Goals:

- to allow all members of the campus community to know about the outstanding existing evidence of Missouri State student learning related to the public affairs mission in the classroom and outside the classroom.
- to provide a mechanism for measuring difficult-to-measure student learning outcomes, associated with Public Affairs, in the general education program.
- to give MSU a vehicle for collecting evidence on inclusive excellence and diversity, as it relates to learning outcomes of the public affairs mission.
- to provide feedback for improvement in all areas of student learning—in co-curricular and academic programs.
- to give the institution the opportunity to share a united story about how Missouri State University is preparing our students, faculty and staff for our global world.

6. Describe how the institution will evaluate progress, make adjustments, and determine what has been accomplished.

MSU's Assessment Office will collect and compile artifacts (any form of tangible student work) from participating courses each semester. An invitation for faculty participants will be campus-wide, with participation entirely voluntary and no penalty for non-participation. Faculty will be encouraged to consult rubrics designed to measure each of the Public Affairs and diversity goals before electing to participate; participating faculty will be solely responsible for selecting which of their course assignments will be used as artifacts. Artifact reviewers (faculty) will use the rubrics to assess de-identified random samples from those courses. The Assessment Council will compile and analyze the data, reporting college- and university-wide results to the appropriate parties as described below, and they will make recommendations to revise and improve the assessment process and the rubrics annually. Upon receipt of the results, faculty and programs will implement changes in their activities and practices as needed, with plans of improving student learning.

1.) Soliciting faculty participation

Prior to the beginning of each semester, the Provost's Office will email all course instructors of record inviting them to participate in the semester's public affairs assessment. In year one all submissions will be accepted. During the first year of collection invitations to participate will come from the provost, deans and department heads. In an attempt to obtain equal amounts of evidence for each area of public affairs after year one interested instructors will submit a simple online form as their commitment to provide artifacts and/or serve as reviewers in the assessment process. Responses will be due within the first three weeks of the semester (a firm deadline will be stated in the invitation). The invitation will include copies of the three rubrics used for assessment of selected student artifacts. Interested instructors are encouraged to review the rubrics and identify assignments that target the Public Affairs and diversity goals. Following the first year sample assignments will be provided on the Assessment Office website. The online form does not require instructors to provide a copy of the chosen assignment but will ask which Public Affairs and diversity goal(s) they intend to target, what general type of student artifact they intend to submit, and the date by which they anticipate submitting student artifacts.

2.) Artifact submission and preparation

On a date determined by the instructor, students will submit the artifact designated for assessment, typically as part of their required coursework. Before marking or scoring students' work, instructors will deliver the artifacts to the Assessment Office in one of three ways: they may bring copies to the Assessment Office (or originals for copying and return); they may scan ungraded originals into a single PDF file to be submitted via the assessment Blackboard site; or they may simply provide the Assessment Office with instructor access to the course Blackboard site. Instructors should include all artifacts submitted in response to the designated assignment rather than selecting exemplary or representative student work. A brief cover sheet, available on the Assessment Blackboard site and in the Assessment Office, will allow the instructor to indicate which Public Affairs and diversity goal(s) apply to the assignment.

Upon receipt of artifacts, the Assessment Office will randomly select and process for review a sampling from each course packet, stripping selected artifacts of identifying information, assigning each a tracking number, and noting the appropriate goals as designated by the instructor. Review teams will have access only to entirely de-identified student artifacts.

Though it will not be shared with reviewers, the following items will be retained for assessment data analysis: the course's inclusion in the General Education program or Professional Education Unit, the level of the course, and the college and department in which the course is housed. Course codes, instructors, and students will not be identifiable.

3.) Artifact review

During the spring semester faculty and staff will be encouraged to apply for reviewer positions for the assessment process. Once the faculty and staff have been chosen, they will all receive training on the use of the rubrics that were designed for the process along with the required reports necessary for the assessment council and director. During the summer, the Assessment Office will coordinate the review of all artifacts from the previous academic year. Faculty will review all general education and program artifacts. Faculty and staff will review all co-curricular artifacts. Each review team will include 2-3 team members who will assess each artifact according to the appropriate rubric, consulting a third member if they cannot quickly reach consensus. Within two weeks of receiving their packet for review, teams will report each artifact's final score to the Assessment Office.

4.) Data compilation

The Assessment Council will annually compile the data derived from the assessment artifact review teams, usually within 30 days of the teams' completed reviews, in order to provide a general picture of Missouri State University students' integration of the Public Affairs and diversity goals into their academic development. Results of the assessment will be reported annually to the MSU Faculty Senate, Administrative Council, Academic Council and others. Data will also be aggregated and reported to relevant units as follows: data specific to general education courses will be reported to the Council for General Education and Interdisciplinary Programs (CGEIP); data from professional education courses will be reported to the Professional Education Unit (PEU); and results from individual colleges will be provided to the deans of those respective colleges. Department-level data will only be supplied upon request by the deans or department heads. At no time will faculty members' names, students' names, or course codes be reattached to the assessed artifacts or compiled data. None of the data collected will be used to assess faculty members' performance or the quality of individual courses.

The Faculty Senate, CGEIP, PEU, and college deans will evaluate relevant assessment results to make informed decisions and/or recommendations to departments or colleges. The programs then may consider ways of changing activities, as needed, to improve student learning outcomes. The Assessment Council will analyze the compiled results in order to suggest recommendations to the assessment process or make recommendations about the rubrics used for review. In future years, the Assessment Office may compare collected data to the baseline established in previous years in order to contribute to the University's goal-setting or ongoing assessment initiatives.

7. Describe potential challenges and issues in implementing the initiative.

Voluntary basis: Rather than imposing a mandate on all academic programs, the project will solicit participation and data submission on a voluntary basis. Until we know who the volunteers are and what the evidence is, we cannot be sure we have evidence available for all specific learning goals. After an initial call for volunteers and evidence, we may need to solicit volunteers and evidence again. We could also be overwhelmed with data with the problem that we could not evaluate all of it in one summer.

Quantity of data: Based on preliminary conversations and planning meetings, as well as past assessment practices, we know the quantity of evidentiary data available is overwhelming. For example, the Office of Student Engagement has created a list of more than three single-spaced pages of artifacts potentially available for analysis. One challenge will be to select the best types of artifacts for providing a representative sample and thorough analysis of learning outcomes.

Assessment leadership: Because of retirements and resignations, the university currently has only one full-time staff person dedicated to assessment of academic programs, along with an Assessment Council that also oversees academic programs. A search for a new faculty leader for the Assessment Office is currently in progress and the provost hopes to have a hire before the end of 2012 – on-campus interviews are being conducted with three top candidates during the month of October. One challenge will be providing a seamless transition with the leader of the Assessment Office, perhaps new to the institution, and the ongoing assessment, which will begin prior to the hire. Likewise, in co-curricular life, although there have been many assessment activities conducted throughout the numerous offices, there has been no single go-to person or office responsible for assessment; thus, the university is considering the administrative challenge of gathering co-curricular materials for analysis.

Evidence of Commitment to and Capacity for Accomplishing the Initiative

8. Describe the level of support for the initiative by internal or external stakeholders.

Information Sessions: Plans for the QIP have been shared with the University's Administrative Council, Academic Leadership Council, the Board of Governors, the HLC Monitoring Committee, Faculty Senate, and an open forum of the faculty in April of 2012. Two "task forces" (see 9. Below) were formed to write the rubrics and develop the process. The process and rubrics were reviewed by Academic Leadership Council on August 1 and Faculty Senate Leadership on August 8. In addition the process and rubrics were shared with CGEIP and Faculty Senate at their first meetings in September (12th and 13th). These steps suggest that the plans for this QIP have met with support.

Preliminary Products: The Task Forces which met during the summer of 2012 have already drafted rubrics for assessing the learning outcomes, a document providing an overview of the QIP Assessment Process, a list of Frequently Asked Questions (and accompanying answers) about the QIP, a Commitment to Participate Form, and an Artifact Submission Form -

<http://www.missouristate.edu/hlc/qip.htm>. The productivity of these summer sessions indicates the support for and understanding of the QIP. The university's new assessment director and staff along with the assessment council will be charged with implementation of the process.

Financial Support: The Provost and others have agreed to several areas of financial support (see 10. below): First, a director of assessment is being hired. This person along with others in the assessment office as well as the assessment council will be charged with administering this process. Second, it has become clear that if we are going to assess the co-curricular artifacts that we need an infrastructure and process. Although the details are not yet clear – the provost is working with the VP of Student Affairs and the VP of Diversity and Inclusion to hire additional staff for the assessment office to handle this additional workload. Third, teams of faculty and staff members who will actually assess the artifacts each spring will receive stipends for and lunches during their time of concentrated work.

9. Identify the groups and individuals that will lead or be directly involved in implementing the initiative.

This proposal has been reviewed by the HLC Steering Committee, the academic leadership council (provost and deans), and the Assessment Council. The initiative will be led by the provost and the new assessment director with the help of the assessment council. The HLC Steering Committee will monitor progress and make sure everyone has the instructions needed to write the final report as part of the Open Pathways review.

- The academic task force that met over the summer (six faculty and one staff member) have completed their work – writing the process and rubrics.
- The co-curricular task force that met over the summer decided to use the same rubrics that were developed by the academic task force for year 1. They have also identified sources for artifacts. They have not yet written a process as they do not have the infrastructure in place for a process. This is our current challenge and is being addressed.
- Implementation of the process will take place with the Director of Assessment, Assessment Office, and Assessment Council.
- The Assessment Office will identify 10-12 faculty/staff to be paid for one week during the summer of 2013 (\$500/person plus lunch for 5 five days) to review evidence (days 1-4) and write report (day 5).

10. List the human, financial, technological and other resources that the institution has committed to this initiative.

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staff for the assessment office to handle this additional workload. Third, teams of faculty and staff members who will actually assess the artifacts each spring will receive stipends for and lunches during their time of concentrated work. At this point \$12,000 is committed for each summer for the faculty teams.

11. Describe the plan for continuing the work and sustaining the results of the initiative.

Missouri State has assessed continually both general education and academic programs for many years. For example, in addition to supporting an office for Assessment and a university-wide Assessment Council, the institution was among the first cohort to participate in the HLC Academy for the Assessment of Student Learning. Our project for the Academy participation consisted of both streamlining the academic program review process and initiating assessment of co-curricular learning. In sum, these demonstrate the institution's ongoing commitment to improvement of student learning and the assessment of it. Likewise, the institution is committed to incorporating the successful aspects of the QIP into future assessment practices. In particular, following the focus on the Public Affairs learning outcomes, the additional general education student learning goals will be the focus of this new assessment process. CGEIP, the Faculty Senate, the Assessment Office and the Assessment Council will continue to be involved in the oversight of the process. In addition, academic programs and co-curricular ones may choose to implement the successful practices into their annual cycles of review.

12. Describe the primary activities of the initiative and timeline for implementing them.

Timeline:

Year 1 (2012-2013) –

Summer -- Task Forces draft rubrics for assessing learning outcomes and overview of process.

Early Fall -- CGEIP and Faculty Senate and others endorse QIP assessment process; campus is notified and invited to participate.

Fall & Spring – Artifact collection begins and continues; review teams are selected.

Summer -- Review teams meet to evaluate evidence based on rubrics and write reports.

Year 2 (2013-2014) –

Early Fall – Review teams, assessment council and others review previous annual reports & recommend changes in collection guidelines and/or rubrics by mid-October.

Assessment Director writes a report with a SWOT analysis of the process and assessment from the first year due by October 15, 2013.

Fall & Spring -- Evidence collection continues; review teams confirmed.

Summer -- Review teams meet to evaluate evidence based on rubrics and write reports.

Year 3 (2014-2015) –

Same cycle as previous year.

Early Summer -- Review entire project and write a comprehensive report of initiative: What was accomplished and learned? How might we best apply assessment process to other general education learning outcomes? How might academic and co-curricular programs incorporate the best of these practices?

Years 4 (2015-16) -

Continue the cycle. Continuously improve the process. Seek to improve student learning through the process. If successful, add rubrics of other student learning outcomes – particularly from general education.

Institutional Contact for Quality Initiative Proposal

Include the name(s) of the primary contact(s) for the Quality Initiative.

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