



**STUDENT LEARNING  
COMMITTEE HANDBOOK**

**REVISED FALL 2007**

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## **Introduction and History of the Student Learning Committee**

The Joliet Junior College Assessment Committee was created in the Spring 1992 semester. The purpose of the Committee was to implement systematic program evaluation to help the college continue offering quality programming. It was asserted that the Assessment Committee would lead the assessment efforts at the college by providing guidance to each academic department in terms of planning and implementing program assessment. In Spring 1995, the Assessment Committee redefined its role to review of current program assessment projects.

During Summer 2002, the original Assessment Handbook was updated to reflect the AQIP accreditation process, the influx of new programs, and the flexibility of scheduling inherent to JJC's dynamic response to stakeholder needs and expectations. As a result, the updated handbook focused on the evaluation of academic programs and the use of results to continually improve those programs.

During the academic year of 2006-2007, the Assessment Committee went through a process of self-evaluation and learning. Having had high turnover in committee members and a high number of newer faculty serving on the committee, this was needed. This process led to the creation of an Assessment Coordinator, a more refined assessment process, and the goal of integrating assessment throughout campus and beyond academic assessment. The handbook was revised in the Fall 2007 semester, and will undergo further revision as assessment evolves at JJC.

## **Philosophy of the Student Learning Committee**

Assessment should be focused on student learning.

Assessment is constantly being done in the classroom as faculty attend to students' needs.

Assessment is ongoing and cyclical. Faculty constantly change and evolve as students' needs and learning change.

Assessment can move beyond the classroom as faculty gather and share concerns, goals and ideas regarding student learning.

Assessment at the department level focuses on a combination of these discussions and course outcomes as developed in curriculum with a focus on student learning.

Assessment outcomes must be shared with stakeholders who include, but are not limited to, all faculty, administration, students, district taxpayers, AQIP, ICCB.

## **Student Learning Committee Membership**

### Committee:

The membership of the Student Learning Committee will consist of at least one faculty/staff member from each of the eleven academic departments and Counseling with the addition of other areas as participation increases. These members are recommended to have served at least two years full time experience in their departments/areas as they are in a leadership role serving on this committee. The duties of a member are as follows:

- Organize groups of faculty/staff to discuss assessment planning within the department/area.
- Facilitate the discussions as needed.
- Report the plan to the Student Learning Coordinator who will make the plan available via the Student Learning Committee Website.
- Facilitate in the development of the plan as data is gathered.
- Make the data/findings available to the Coordinator in the form of a report, using assistance from the Coordinator and Office of Institutional Effectiveness as needed.
- As is possible, attend assessment conferences, fairs, and other gatherings to learn about assessment.
- Attend student learning committee meetings and report back to departments.

### Membership:

Service is for two years, but members may serve consecutive terms.

### Leadership:

A Student Learning Coordinator will lead the committee and will apply for the position through the Vice President of Institutional Advancement and Research. The contract for Coordinator is two years, and then will open for re-application and for new applications. The Coordinator will liaison between the VP of Institutional Advancement and Research and the faculty.

### Voting:

One representative from each department or area participating in assessment may cast one vote. The Coordinator has one vote for his or her department as its representative. Any administrators are non-voting members. Representatives are not prohibited from voting on the awarding of Assessment Grants or other proposals that are submitted by members of their own departments/areas.

## **Why We Assess Student Learning**

Joliet Junior College is accredited through the Higher Learning Commission, a branch of the North Central Accrediting Agency.

Through participation in the Higher Learning Commission, Joliet Junior College participates in the Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP). Assessment reports are part of the accreditation process.

In addition, every five years, academic programs are reviewed at Illinois community colleges by the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB). According to the State of Illinois, programs are required to provide evidence of student learning.

But most importantly, JJC's philosophy statement includes the following:

- Each student is unique with the potential to acquire knowledge and skills. The college will provide students with a variety of learning opportunities and academic and student support services needed to achieve success.
- The college will continuously assess and evaluate its educational programs and services for continuous improvement.

We are all here for our students, and assessing student learning guarantees that we are doing our utmost to make sure our students are learning the curriculum we set forth.

## Assessment of Student Learning: The Underlying Principles

Assessment is a central element in the overall quality of teaching and learning in higher education. It provides the administration and faculty of educational institutions opportunities to monitor the attainment of learning outcomes and to receive feedback for ongoing improvement of academic programs. *The overall goal of assessment is to improve student learning.*

The basic concept of assessment is simple. The six steps an institution needs to undertake are as follows:

1. Identify in broad terms what educational goals are valued (institution and program mission statements).
2. Articulate measurable objectives relevant to the educational goals (learning outcomes).
3. Select appropriate approaches that will produce results which can be analyzed and interpreted as evidence of how well students overall meet the objectives (assessment process).
4. Decide upon appropriate benchmarks against which the evidence can be measured to determine the level of overall student learning (criteria for success).
5. Document, communicate, and analyze assessment findings (results and analysis).
6. Use feedback to make curricular changes and reevaluate the assessment process with the intent to continuously improve the quality of student learning (action plan).

While there are disagreements among assessment experts over some issues, the following underlying principles of assessment of student learning are widely accepted:

- A. Faculty should have primary responsibility for the development, implementation, and maintenance of assessment activities.
- B. Programs need to have clear, explicitly stated purposes. Clearly defined learning outcomes are essential. These should be stated in the curriculum approved for each course by the Curriculum Committee.
- C. Statements of intended student learning outcomes of all programs/disciplines should originate with, and be approved by, the faculty in those areas.
- D. The work of students gathered for assessment purposes should remain confidential and be used only for the purposes of assessment (unless explicit permission is granted by the student).
- E. Assessment of student learning outcomes is about improving learning, not about evaluating faculty.
- F. Assessment is systematic, ongoing, and cyclical.
- G. Assessment should be logical, attainable, and consistent with the institution's mission.

## 9 Principles of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning

1. **The assessment of student learning begins with educational values.** Assessment is not an end in itself but a vehicle for educational improvement. Its effective practice, then, begins with and enacts a vision of the kinds of learning we most value for students and strive to help them achieve. Educational values should drive not only what we choose to assess but also how we do so. Where questions about educational mission and values are skipped over, assessment threatens to be an exercise in measuring what's easy, rather than a process of improving what we really care about.
2. **Assessment is most effective when it reflects an understanding of learning as multidimensional, integrated, and revealed in performance over time.** Learning is a complex process. It entails not only what students know but what they can do with what they know; it involves not only knowledge and abilities but values, attitudes, and habits of mind that affect both academic success and performance beyond the classroom. Assessment should reflect these understandings by employing a diverse array of methods, including those that call for actual performance, using them over time so as to reveal change, growth, and increasing degrees of integration. Such an approach aims for a more complete and accurate picture of learning, and therefore firmer bases for improving our students' educational experience.
3. **Assessment works best when the programs it seeks to improve have clear, explicitly stated purposes.** Assessment is a goal-oriented process. It entails comparing educational performance with educational purposes and expectations -- those derived from the institution's mission, from faculty intentions in program and course design, and from knowledge of students' own goals. Where program purposes lack specificity or agreement, assessment as a process pushes a campus toward clarity about where to aim and what standards to apply; assessment also prompts attention to where and how program goals will be taught and learned. Clear, shared, implementable goals are the cornerstone for assessment that is focused and useful.
4. **Assessment requires attention to outcomes but also and equally to the experiences that lead to those outcomes.** Information about outcomes is of high importance; where students "end up" matters greatly. But to improve outcomes, we need to know about student experience along the way -- about the curricula, teaching, and kind of student effort that lead to particular outcomes. Assessment can help us understand which students learn best under what conditions; with such knowledge comes the capacity to improve the whole of their learning.
5. **Assessment works best when it is ongoing not episodic.** Assessment is a process whose power is cumulative. Though isolated, "one-shot" assessment can be better than none, improvement is best fostered when assessment entails a linked series of activities undertaken over time. This may mean tracking the process of individual students, or of cohorts of students; it may mean collecting the same examples of student performance or using the same instrument semester after semester. The point is to monitor progress toward intended goals in a spirit of continuous improvement. Along the way, the assessment process itself should be evaluated and refined in light of emerging insights.
6. **Assessment fosters wider improvement when representatives from across the educational community are involved.** Student learning is a campus-wide responsibility, and assessment is a way of enacting that responsibility. Thus, while assessment efforts may start small, the aim over time is to involve people from across

the educational community. Faculty play an especially important role, but assessment's questions can't be fully addressed without participation by student-affairs educators, librarians, administrators, and students. Assessment may also involve individuals from beyond the campus (alumni/ae, trustees, employers) whose experience can enrich the sense of appropriate aims and standards for learning. Thus understood, assessment is not a task for small groups of experts but a collaborative activity; its aim is wider, better-informed attention to student learning by all parties with a stake in its improvement.

7. **Assessment makes a difference when it begins with issues of use and illuminates questions that people really care about.** Assessment recognizes the value of information in the process of improvement. But to be useful, information must be connected to issues or questions that people really care about. This implies assessment approaches that produce evidence that relevant parties will find credible, suggestive, and applicable to decisions that need to be made. It means thinking in advance about how the information will be used, and by whom. The point of assessment is not to gather data and return "results"; it is a process that starts with the questions of decision-makers, that involves them in the gathering and interpreting of data, and that informs and helps guide continuous improvement.
8. **Assessment is most likely to lead to improvement when it is part of a larger set of conditions that promote change.** Assessment alone changes little. Its greatest contribution comes on campuses where the quality of teaching and learning is visibly valued and worked at. On such campuses, the push to improve educational performance is a visible and primary goal of leadership; improving the quality of undergraduate education is central to the institution's planning, budgeting, and personnel decisions. On such campuses, information about learning outcomes is seen as an integral part of decision making, and avidly sought.
9. **Through assessment, educators meet responsibilities to students and to the public.** There is a compelling public stake in education. As educators, we have a responsibility to the publics that support or depend on us to provide information about the ways in which our students meet goals and expectations. But that responsibility goes beyond the reporting of such information; our deeper obligation -- to ourselves, our students, and society -- is to improve. Those to whom educators are accountable have a corresponding obligation to support such attempts at improvement.

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## What Assessment of Student Learning Means at JJC

At JJC, each department or area on campus devises a plan of assessment, gathers data and findings, and uses the data and findings to make changes or keep striving for student learning. This process might be tied to department accreditation methods or to supplement the Priorities, Quality and Productivity (PQP) reports. Assessment uses a two-year calendar for planning, gathering and processing findings, but this may be started in either the spring or fall semesters, and work within department needs.

To better understand the process, it is helpful to consider what assessment of student learning is and is not.

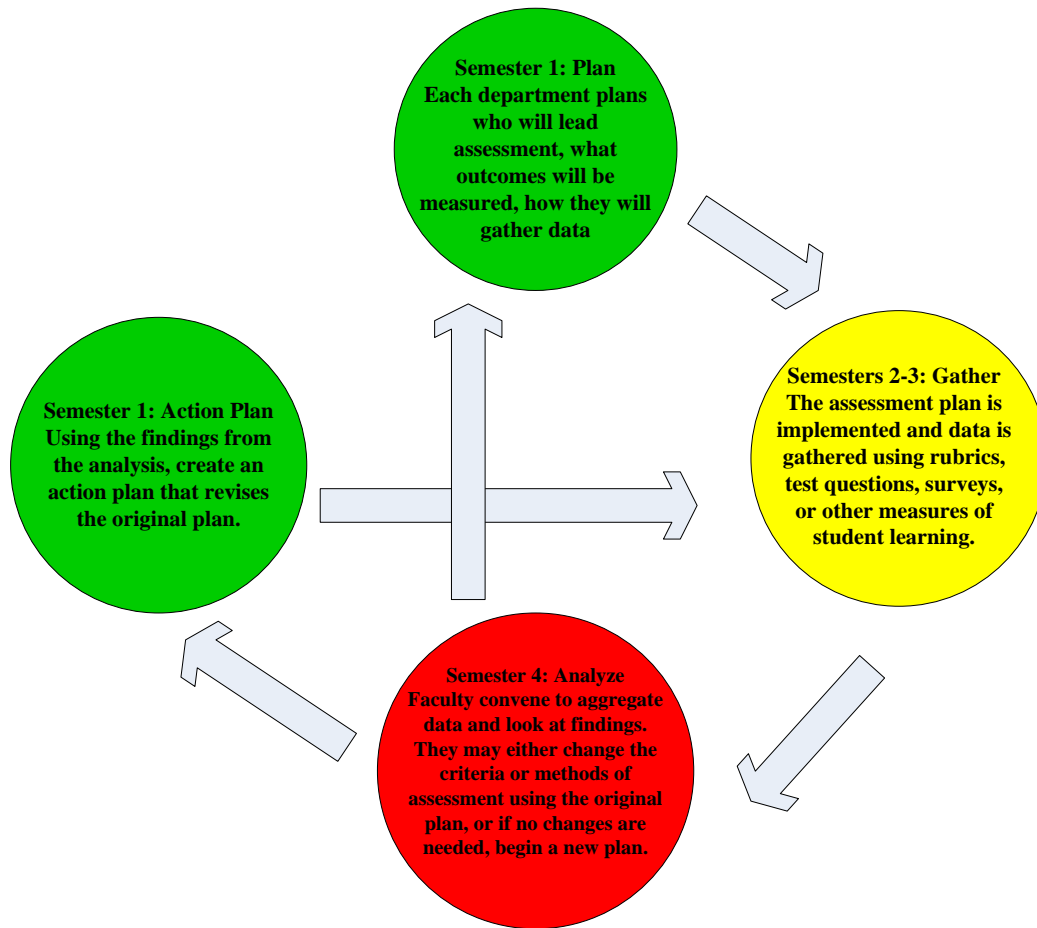
What assessment of student learning *is*:

- Assessment is an on-going, multi-campus process whose primary goal is to improve student learning.
- Assessment is faculty driven.
- Oversight of assessment is the responsibility of Assessment Committee members including the Coordinator with the help of department chairs, and the Vice President of Intuitional Advancement and Research.
- The process of assessment is facilitated by the members of the Assessment Committee and Coordinator with the support of the office of Intuitional Advancement and Research.
- Assessment requires communication among all faculty members of a department/program/discipline.

What assessment of student learning is *not*:

- It is not an assignment or test used alone by a single instructor to determine students' understanding in the classroom.
- The job of one person such as an Assessment Committee member or department chair. It is the whole department's responsibility.
- It is not program review, the ICCB's five-year reporting cycle used by administrators to plan for the college's academic needs.
- Assessment is not grading. Grades can change from teacher to teacher and department to department and are therefore not a measure of student learning. Also, final grades do not show a change in student learning over the course of a semester.
- Assessment measures only the achievement of students who successfully complete a course or program. It is not about measuring retention or how many students stay in or pass a given class or program.
- Assessment is not about evaluating individual faculty members, but about measuring the effectiveness of a class or program. It is not tied to tenure or other evaluation processes.
- Department or program assessment is not about the evaluation of individual courses. However, faculty may gather and analyze data from an individual course or courses as a means of assessing student learning in their program.

## The Assessment Process



### Semester 1: Plan

Each department or area decides how it will divide its assessment planning. A department with one overriding mission, such as nursing, may choose to do one plan for the whole department. A department with various disciplines, such as Natural and Physical Science, may divide into two or more groups with separate plans. Each group needs to meet to discuss the plan for assessment. The following questions should guide the discussion:

- What are your stated learning outcomes?
- What outcomes do students seemingly already achieve?
- What outcomes do students struggle with?

This will help groups decide what to assess. Groups should pick 1-3 outcomes to assess. Then the discussion needs to focus on the process:

- What type of measures can we use to get data (test questions, surveys, writing samples, etc)?
- What classes will we use to get data?
- What methods will we use to assess the data (correct test answers, rubrics, point systems)?

- When will the data be gathered (at the beginning and end of each semester, at the end of each semester)? Give dates or approximate assignment/test dates (i.e.: weeks 2 and 15, essays 1 and 5).

Once the plan is hammered out, a simple form can be filled out online. It will require each group to know:

1. The intended student learning outcome(s)
2. The faculty who will lead the assessment
3. The assessment process
4. The criteria for student success

### **Semesters 2-3: Gather**

The plan is implemented. The lead instructors facilitate the gathering of data and collection.

### **Semester 4: Analyze**

The faculty meet to analyze the data. The Director of Institutional Advancement and Research may be brought in to help with aggregating the data. Once the data is compiled, the faculty need to analyze it and interpret the results. This will give the faculty two places to go in the assessment cycle. They may choose to stick to the original outcomes and revise the types of data collected or lessons taught and analyze again. Or they may find that no changes are needed and move on to a new plan. There is no break between analyzing data and starting again with planning.

Once the data is gathered and analyze, the groups will report back on their findings. This will require reporting on:

1. A summary and analysis of the data collected
2. Action Plan based on the results

## Schedule of Plans and Results

Assessment processes can begin in either the fall or spring semester. Plans need to be turned in to the Assessment Coordinator to bring before the Student Learning Committee. Some departments or areas may need to alter this schedule for accreditation purposes or other reasons.

### Fall Track

Date	Action
Semester 1: November 1	Submit Assessment Plan to Coordinator for following Student Learning Committee meeting
Semester 2	Gather data
Semester 3	Gather data
Semester 4: April 1	Submit summary and analysis of data and action plan to Coordinator for following Student Learning Committee Meeting

### Spring Track

Date	Action
Semester 1: April 1	Submit Assessment Plan to Coordinator for following Student Learning Committee meeting
Semester 2	Gather data
Semester 3	Gather data
Semester 4: November 1	Submit summary and analysis of data and action plan to Coordinator for following Student Learning Committee Meeting

To help guarantee approval of a plan or summary and analysis report, use the following checklists:

### Program/Discipline Assessment Plan Checklist

Section	Criteria for Approval	Met Yes (√)	Met No (√)	Notes
<b>Intended Student Learning Outcomes</b>	1. Are the outcomes clearly defined? 2. Are they measurable? 3. Is it clear to which students these apply?	1. 2. 3.		
<b>Lead Instructors</b>	1. Is it clear who will lead the assessment process through the cycle?	1.		
<b>Assessment Process</b>	1. Is the rationale for selecting this/these outcome(s) clearly stated? 2. Is it clear what performance or task will be used to measure student learning? 3. Will the process lead to results that are measurable and evaluated uniformly against a designated standard? 4. Are the target dates listed and appropriate?	1. 2. 3. 4.		
<b>Criteria for Success</b>	1. Are the benchmarks realistic? That is, would meeting or exceeding the benchmarks indicate program success? 2. Does the percentage of students meeting the outcomes include only those who have successfully completed the course or program?	1. 2.		

### Program/Discipline Assessment Summary, Analysis and Action Plan Checklist

Section	Criteria for Approval	Met Yes (√)	Met No (√)	Notes
<b>Summary of Results an Anaylsis of Data Collected</b>	1. Are the listed results quantifiable? 2. Are the results analyzed and interpreted in ways consistent with the overall plan? 3. Is it clear what was learned from the assessment process?	1. 2. 3.		
<b>Action Plan on Results and Analysis</b>	1. Will the action plan close the assessment loop or continue it? That is, is it clear what steps will be taken to improve student learning? Will the same plan be undertaken with revisions?	1.		

## **Approval Process**

During the third meeting of the semester, we will meet in small groups to review assessment plans, reports and ongoing data gathering status. In order to have like groups looking at the plans, we will form the following groups:

### Group one

- Technical
- Culinary Arts
- Business
- Nursing
- Ag/Hort/Vet

### Group two

- CIOS
- Math
- Natural and Physical

### Group three

- English
- Fine Arts
- Social Beh.

### Group four:

- LRC
- Counseling

We will meet in a computer lab and each group will review the plans, status and reports for of each area. If a plan needs approval, there must be a discussion about the plan using the checklists given in the Student Learning Committee Handbook. If there are areas in the plan that need to be strengthened or clarified, the department rep will bring these comments back to the department or area, make revisions and resubmit the plan. If there is a plan approved and going through data collection, the representative can just give an update. If there is a report, then the group needs to use the checklist for Analysis, Summary, and Action Plan in the Student Learning Handbook.

It is up to each group how to run these sessions. All representatives may choose to work together, or they may work individually in turns. Thus, the English rep. would look at Fine Arts; Fine Arts would look at Soc. Beh.; and Soc. Beh. would look at English.