

Student Learning Connections



A newsletter from the Student Learning Committee

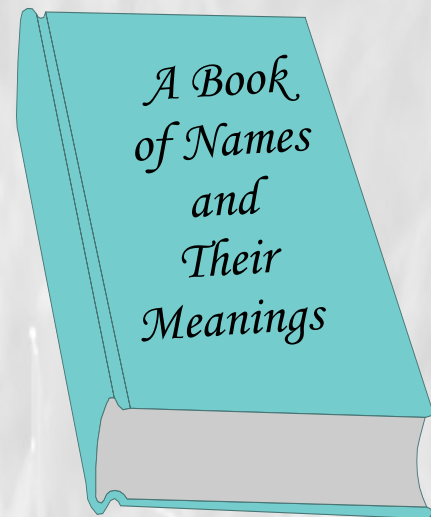


Spring 2008

What's in a name?

Last fall, the Academic Assessment Committee voted to change the committee's name to the Student Learning Committee. We all agreed that there's a lot of meaning to a name. For some reason, "assessment" brings up negative feelings and images: feelings of dread and images of being forced into changing our teaching. However, we all do, or should, care about our students' learning. And that's really what is at the heart of assessment. We constantly evaluate how well our students are learning what we are teaching them, and we also constantly change to adapt to new elements like textbooks, learning needs, and even just new generations of students.

It was in this spirit that the committee is now named the Student Learning Committee. We hope that this small change will help to foster a more positive image for our committee and the work that we all do to be the best college we can be for our students. It's a small thing, but even small changes can make a big difference.



What's new at JJC with student learning?

Some of us are well aware of what has gone on in the past with assessment of student learning. Back in the early 1990s, HLC (The Higher Learning Commission, through which we get our accreditation) started requiring assessment as part of the accreditation process. JJC formed an Assessment Committee and worked on ways to get assessment done at the department and college level. The committee has been in place since that time. Unfortunately, HLC didn't give much guidance on assessment, and learning about assessment and how to do it was left up to colleges to figure out. JJC invited speakers to come in and do training. Various faculty and administrators also

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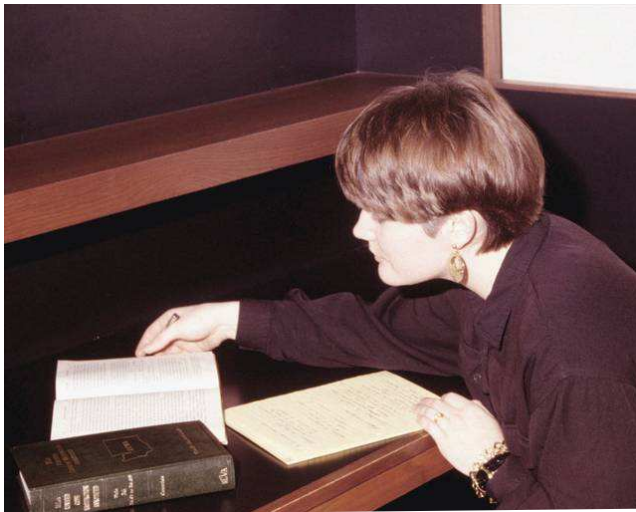
What's New Cont.

attended assessment seminars at the HLC annual meeting. A handbook was written and a process for assessment was put in place. We've been on this path for some time.

Assessment happens on many levels. As a committee, we are charged to look at our teaching and classroom work and how we impact students' learning. However, any group on campus from financial aid to a department of faculty also looks at how well it functions. In other words, we constantly assess the work we do around campus. As a committee, we've been assessing how well the committee functions, and how well we as a campus work at assessing student learning. We all needed more training, which we've fostered through reading about assessment as a committee and attending the regional Community College Assessment Fair. We know that the view of assessment can be negative, that faculty may perceive that assessment means they have to



change how they teach, or that it infringes on academic freedom. We know that some people see investigation of student learning as something we already do, but that a formal assessment makes things more complicated. Neither of these assumptions is on track. Students can come to the same learning from different teaching styles. While we all have different methods of instruction, we should have common learning goals across similar classes as outlined in course syllabi. And yes, we all already assess student learning as we teach. If a class isn't "getting it," we may immediately and informally go back and make changes to a course schedule or textbook the following semester. This type of assessment is helpful, but it isn't easily



reportable. By doing formal assessment, we can show students, administrators, HLC, and The Illinois Community College Board what great work we do in teaching students to be prepared once they leave JJC.

One of the large changes made to the Student Learning committee was the hiring of a Student Learning Coordinator. It is my job to help coordinate assessment of student learning plans and reports within departments. I am also planning learning sessions for faculty and staff on doing assessment. This being the first year of having a coordinator, I'm learning as I go, but I've already been visiting departments and groups of faculty to help with assessment planning, and I'm also planning some learning sessions for everyone. I'm also making contacts with other community colleges and their assessment leaders in our area.

If you have any questions about assessment of student learning, please feel free to call or email me at ext. 6707 or klatur@jic.edu.

A quick quiz...

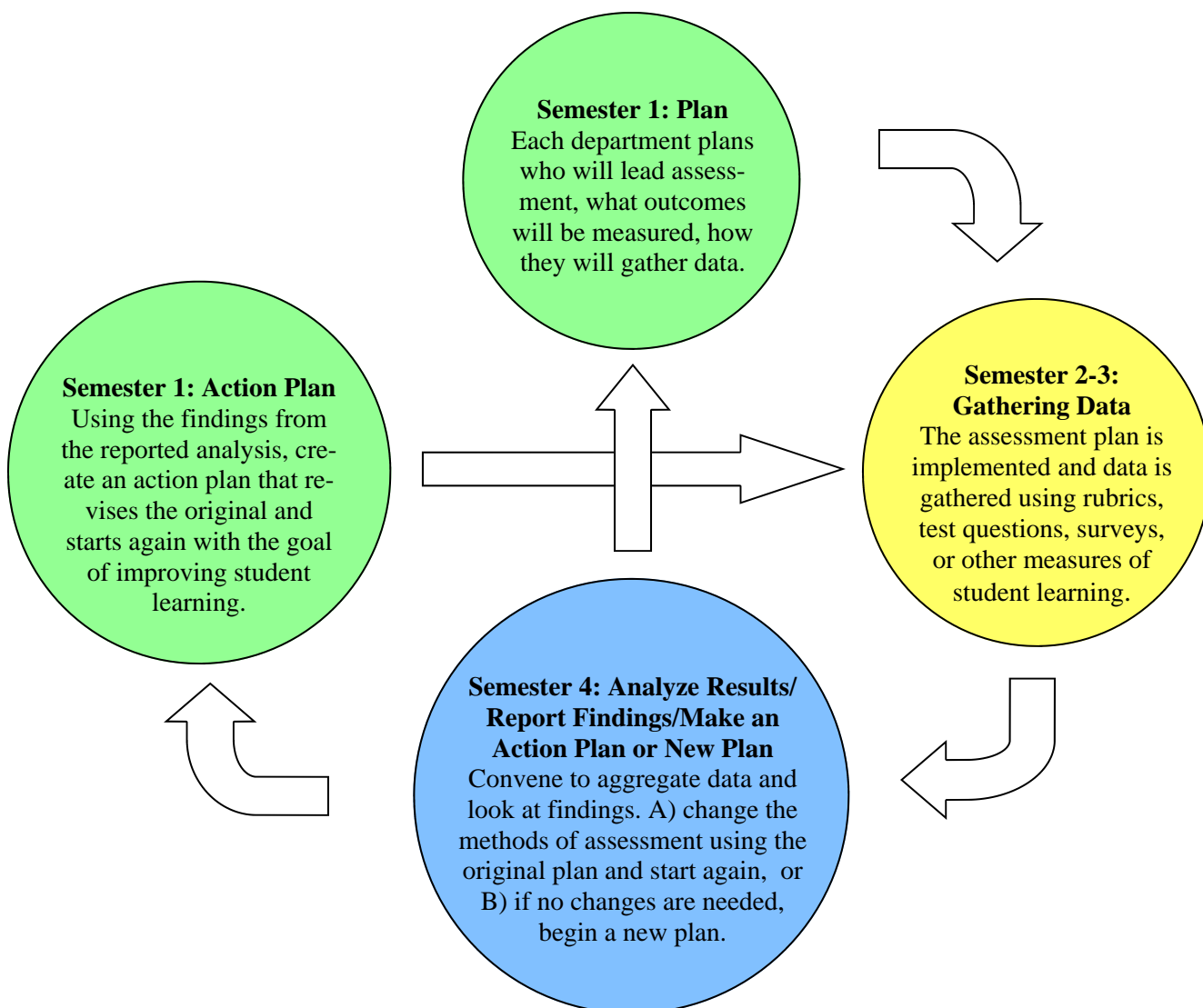
- 1) How long has the Student Learning Committee been around?
- 2) Who's in charge of assessing student learning?
- 3) Does assessment play a role in accreditation?

Answers on page 4

At the department level, many of you are already experiencing some of the joys and frustrations about trying some new things. Among the most important changes are the following:

- Looking at student learning should be meaningful. We care about what our students learn and how.
- Looking at student learning should be constant and on-going. A plan should have an end report showing that learning is just fine or that changes need to be made. If everything is fine, a new learning outcome can be measured. If changes are needed, the same outcome should be reassessed after making changes. There should not be any stopping in looking at student learning.
- Since student learning should be meaningful, different areas may need different study tools and delivery methods of their findings. However, everyone needs to be clear and thorough in these reports since outside populations will be reading the plans and reports.
- Outside and inside groups need to know what is going on with student learning. Plans and reports will be provided to groups such as the board of trustees, the president, and HLC.

Another change, though not as large, is that we want everyone to take time and care in assessment. Instead of a nine-month calendar for assessment, we have moved to a four semester calendar. Planning can take one full semester, with the following two semesters used for gathering data. The final, fourth semester should be for looking at the data and making a final action report explaining if changes will be made for the same outcome to be reassessed, or if a new outcome will be assessed. Along the way, we'll be asking for input on these new methods and listening to feedback. If you ever have questions, ask your department representative or call Kristin LaTour at ext. 6707.



What's in store?

We've got big goals for student learning on JJC's campus. Traditionally assessment of student learning was kept in academic areas. However, the new models of assessment are requiring all areas to assess their impact on student learning. This means that areas like the bookstore, buildings and grounds, and registration will be asked to do assessment of student learning. "What does registration have to do with student learning?" you may well be asking. Students learn all sorts of things outside of their classrooms. They learn about office environments from our offices. Their learning is impacted by the accessibility and cleanliness of their classrooms and other spaces. Students who have jobs on campus are also learning about management and service. There are many ways to look beyond teaching to see how we all impact JJC students' learning.

Another project in store is the HLC Academy. This is a four year project that allows us to have guidance from HLC and support from other colleges on an AQIP project. We will be undertaking a project on general education student learning assessment. This is a much-needed project that will bring several departments on campus together to think of what our general education outcomes are and how to assess them.

Save the date!

In 2009 the Student Learning Committee and JJC will host the 13th Annual Assessment Fair on Personal and Professional Development Day in the spring.

Keep an eye out for further news, and please plan to attend! We will be getting a keynote speaker, advertising for presentation proposals, planning for food and rooms.

We plan to offer the keynote address to be open to faculty at JJC, and the Student Learning Committee will be able to assist with registration costs for the full fair.

This is a great opportunity for JJC to get noticed in our region for our work with assessment. We hope you'll join us in celebrating!

Quick quiz answers...

- 1) Before it was the Student Learning Committee, we were known as the Academic Assessment Committee, and before that, the Assessment Committee. And we've been working since 1992 on assessing student learning.
- 2) You are! Everyone should take part in assessment, from developing outcomes at the department and class level to creating final reports on outcomes assessment. Even if you're sitting by the wayside, you still practice assessment every time you tweak lessons to adapt to your students' needs. Have you changed a textbook because students weren't using it? You assessed their learning and helped them out. While there are "soft" or indirect methods like these that we practice all the time without thinking much about it, the "hard" data and reports are what the committee is interested in.
- 3) Yes! The HLC wants to see our student learning outcomes being assessed and they ask for reports every four years about what we've been doing. Plus, many departments must do assessment for their own accreditation. Departments like nursing, business, and culinary arts, among others, all do long term assessments to keep their accreditation in good standing.