

# Tracking Cougar Curriculum



March 2017

## LEAP Texas Fourth Annual Meeting

Texas legislators are still interested in reducing core curriculum from 42 to 36 SCHs, says Dr. Rex Peebles, THECB Assistant Commissioner, at LEAP Texas' Fourth Annual Forum in February. Peebles said such a reduction would most likely eliminate the Component Area Option. Peebles also indicated that the THECB is concerned about the lack of coherency in the core curriculum experience of students.

The development of the 2014 Texas Core Curriculum was intended to ensure strong core skills in critical thinking, communication, empirical and quantitative skills, teamwork, personal responsibility and social responsibility for degree completers. Two and a half years later, it appears that students are having a selection of course experiences with no mechanism to "connect the dots" across the coursework, component areas and objectives of the core. Peebles suggested that the way institutions are organized may be at issue, since faculty are trained and organized by discipline, and from the students' standpoint, instruction generally remains siloed.

## COAT Team Uses "Groundbreaking" Approach to Measure Student Learning

A report from the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), "[On Solid Ground](#)," includes results from the first two years of AAC&U's national Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education (VALUE) initiative. Called a "groundbreaking approach" to assessing student learning, the report provides a portrait of student performance in critical thinking, written communication and quantitative literacy.

"This project represents the first attempt to develop a large-scale model for assessing student achievement across institutions that goes beyond testing," Lynn Pasquerella, president of AAC&U, said. "A key feature of our assessment strategy is the scoring of authentic student work using a common rubric," said David Switzer, faculty fellow for assessment and associate professor of economics at St. Cloud State University. The VALUE approach evaluates student learning in ways that standardized tests can't. It "embraces" complexity instead of trying to eliminate or reject it. So rather than something "divorced from the curriculum," the report says, student assessments included in the initiative were all designed by professors in an actual college course.

While it may be groundbreaking on a national scale, the COAT Team at Collin College uses this same approach to determine the extent to which Collin students have met the Texas Core Objectives. (To view Collin rubrics, go to Teaching & Learning/COAT on Collin's intranet.) For both Collin College and AAC&U, the assignments themselves are important. "What institutions ask their students to do makes a difference for the quality of the learning," reported *On Solid Ground*. Early results in the AAC&U study confirm COAT discoveries at Collin. Assignments aligned with the assessment rubrics are important for evaluating student ability to demonstrate higher, second-order quality work.

Natasha Jankowski, director of the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment said, "By making clear connections to assignments in the classroom, policy makers are able to get a better picture of student learning, while faculty receive meaningful information that can be used to revise teaching and learning strategies in ways that benefit students. This is a win for all parties involved."

### GENERAL EDUCATION CORE OBJECTIVES

- Critical Thinking
- Communication
- Empirical and Quantitative Skills
- Teamwork
- Personal Responsibility

### FOUNDATIONAL COMPONENT AREAS (with credit hours)

- American History (6)
- Communication (6)
- Creative Arts (3)
- Government/Political Science (6)
- Language, Philosophy and Culture (3)
- Life & Physical Sciences (6)
- Mathematics (3)
- Social & Behavioral Sciences (3)
- Component Area Option [distributed]

