

Tracking Cougar Curriculum



April 2017

National Core Assessment and Collin College: How Do We Compare?

The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) report, "On Solid Ground," shares first year results of the national core assessment project.

Communication Skills: Nationally, key findings indicate the strongest student performance was in written communication. However, students still struggle to use evidence to support their written arguments. Two-thirds of Collin College students had a strong showing in all three areas of Communication Skills measured by the Collin College rubric: development, expression and interpretation.

Critical Thinking: Nationally, students tended to explain issues well and present related evidence. However, they had more trouble "drawing conclusions or placing the issue in a meaningful context, i.e., making sense out of or explaining the importance of the issue studied." Like their national peers, Collin College students were also strongest in identifying, interpreting and summarizing the issue or problem. They were weakest in providing a cohesive conclusion and using information or new ideas and/or approaches relevant to the task.

Empirical & Quantitative Skills: Nationally, students showed strength in calculating and interpreting data. Quantitative skills were generally weaker when it came to making assumptions and applying their knowledge. Such results suggest that students are getting the mechanics of math and related skills, but not so much the "why," or when and where to use certain calculations. Students at Collin College appear to have the same challenges. Fewer than half the students met standards for organizing facts or numbers to gain a better understanding. Collin students also struggled to methodically examine numerical data or observable facts to derive meaning for an issue, and had difficulty describing informed conclusions.

What We Do With What We Learned Will Make A Difference

"In a world awash in data, Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education (VALUE) generates evidence — evidence that points to what is working well and, critically, where there is room for improvement," AAC&U asserts. "It empowers faculty as both disciplinary and pedagogical experts, yet at the same time challenges faculty to interrogate their own teaching practices and assumptions about how their students in particular come to master important knowledge, skills, and abilities within the context of their classes. If faculty are truly the owners and arbiters of the curriculum at each institution, they — in partnership with their students — must also own the learning."

By making clear connections to assignments in the classroom, Natasha Jankowski, director of the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment, said "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 and one that positions policy makers to better communicate with institutions on measures of importance to both parties."

Next Steps: Opportunity for Collin College Faculty

The Core Objectives Assessment Team (COAT) at Collin College has developed a rubric based, institution-level assessment system for the college core curriculum (see insert on left). If you are interested in participating in an Instruction by Design and Educational Action (IDEA) committee to help identify ways that Collin College can put its assessment data to use, contact Kerry Loinette (972.516.5073 or kloinette@collin.edu) or Rachel Bzostek (469.365.1834 or rbzostek@collin.edu), the 2017 Co-chairs of COAT. These are the next steps for systematic use of data to improve learning.

GENERAL EDUCATION CORE OBJECTIVES

- Critical Thinking
- Communication
- Empirical and Quantitative Skills
- Teamwork
- Personal Responsibility
- Social 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 across the components] (6)

Breaking News: The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board has approved the addition of ENGL 2311-Technical and Business Writing for Collin College's Core Curriculum.