

## Estrella Mountain Community College

Last year, with new Student Academic Achievement Committee (SAAC) co-chairs firmly in place, Estrella Mountain Community College (EMCC) faculty, staff, and administrators put together a strategic assessment initiative leading to a successful accreditation visit in 2012. While still attending to documentation of course level assessment of student learning, we refocused our efforts on addressing Program Level Assessment with emphasis on EMCC's General Education Program.

What's New?....some of the highlights of our assessment strategic initiative;

- Expansion of the SAAC EZ form and database providing documented evidence of course level assessment of student learning, or as the Higher Learning Commission likes to say, 'closing the loop'.
- Assessment Happens Day, during Week of Accountability the second Assessment Happens Day occurred where faculty worked on documenting evidence of course level assessment and shared findings with peers and administrators.
- To better support and analyze EMCC's assessment program one of our SAAC co-chairs, Polly Miller, completed training as a Higher Learning Commission Consultant Evaluator.
- **Development of the EMCC Assessment Roadmap: Countdown to Accreditation**  
*Recommendations made from Dr. Henry Rinne, HLC CE Team Leader, during a mock accreditation visit with primary focus on Criterion 3, spring 2007*
  - One of the **first tasks** the SAAC must face is the identification of what constitutes a "Program" at EMCC. In the occupational areas individual programs are usually identifiable because of the terminal nature of most of these programs. The faculty may need to refine these definitions in some areas in order to facilitate development of outcome statements and means of assessment (Red Hat certification vs. other types of certificates).
  - It will be the responsibility of the faculty in these programs to develop appropriate outcomes at the program level asking, "What do we want our graduates (completers) to know, think, and do?" Do not ask what we want them to do in our individual classes, but rather what we want them to do as a result of the entire program (general education).
  - The transfer programs (or areas that are primarily transfer such as Math and Science and Liberal Arts) may have a more difficult task because of the ambiguity of freshman/sophomore course work for most students who intend to transfer and complete four-year degrees. Are these students taking courses in the major and can they be treated in the same manner as the students in occupational programs? In other words, does EMCC have a Psychology program or a Physics program just because we have students majoring in those disciplines. In general, we have few courses and small numbers of students in most major areas in which a bachelor's degree would be the ultimate goal. Furthermore, students take varying sets of courses to fulfill their General Education requirements. The question remains: what constitutes a program at the freshman/sophomore level for students who intend to transfer to a bachelor's program? One of the best answers is to focus on the General Education program, developing outcomes that can be assessed for all students

who intend to transfer regardless of their major field of study or the specific set of courses they take. It is recommended that EMCC begin the reshaping of its assessment program by first reshaping and rethinking its General Education program. Science faculty, for instance, will need to think not in terms of outcomes for physics or biology but must think in terms of outcomes for science in general.

- EMCC should embark on a campus wide effort to revitalize the abilities/outcomes for General Education. A task force could undertake this endeavor, but it must involve all faculty in developing the new General Education statements. **An initial question for faculty could be: “what do we want ALL EMCC graduates (program completers) to know, think, and do?”** Areas for consideration could include: **writing, speaking, quantitative reasoning, analytical/problem solving skills, scientific and technological literacy, information and computer literacy, global and cultural perspectives, aesthetic perception, and personal responsibility/ethics.** Please do not take these terms as a definitive list, but use them to start the conversation and search out different sets of outcomes from other institutions. The 12 goals listed on page 80 of the catalog offer an excellent starting point for creating clear statements of General Education abilities/outcomes that will allow for the development of assessment measures.
- Following the creation of a more comprehensive set of General Education abilities/outcomes, the **second step** in the process is to convene **interdisciplinary committees of faculty to write specific outcome statements for each ability and to select means of assessment.** The latter must be conducted on an institutional level and results must be analyzed and acted upon on an institutional level. The responsibility for a general education writing assessment, for instance, cannot fall only upon the shoulders of the English department. Faculty from all areas of the campus must be involved in the assessment of General Education.
- **Third and fourth steps** in the process will be actual execution of the planned assessments, the analysis of data, and the changes to programs in order to improve student learning.
- During the visit, a suggestion was made by members of the SAAC for the college to declare the 2007-2008 academic year the “Year of Assessment.” This appears to be an excellent idea as a means of initiating the reshaping of assessment on the EMCC campus. The basic concepts of why assessment is important and why the HLC places such a high degree of emphasis on it are clearly understood by the leadership and many of the faculty. A focused, year-long effort could jump-start the institution toward achieving its goals in the area of assessment and student learning.
- Faculty have embraced the ‘Roadmap’ model and are currently working on step two, interdisciplinary committees of faculty are writing specific outcome statements for each ability and selecting the means of assessment.
- During summer 07, for logistical purposes, a small cohort of faculty piloted the ACT CAAP assessment tool. Based on faculty feedback, we have reviewed and brought to campus three assessment tools for further investigation by our faculty; CAAP, C-Base, and MAPP. We hope to reach consensus on one tool by spring 08 so we can begin the first phase of our General Education Program Assessment of Student Learning.

- Development of a Summer Grant Assessment Proposal Process; designed to promote collaborative, program or track level assessment of student learning, to be piloted summer 2008.
- Additional Program and Track level assessment efforts; math, biology, and nursing faculty have been working collaboratively to identify common assessment components which run through their courses. Math faculty who teach 092 and 121 completed the first phase of assessment and will conduct the second in spring 2008. Biology and Nursing faculty continue to meet to develop an assessment methodology.
- Development of a 'Common Assessment Terms' document with regard to **Criterion Three: Student Learning and Effective Teaching:** *The organization provides evidence of student learning and teaching effectiveness that demonstrates it is fulfilling its educational mission;* including learning outcomes, abilities, objectives, course competencies, assessment, direct and indirect measurement.
- Expansion of the General Education Abilities Matrix; this will be voted on in spring 2008 by all faculty.

Additionally, this past year we integrated our SAAC EZ process (course level assessment documentation of student learning) into the assessment component of the FEP, adding another layer of evidence to the assessment process. Also, the SAAC co-chairs, Bronwen Steele and Polly Miller, presented the SAAC EZ form and process at the League for Innovation in Community Colleges in November 2006.

Lastly, this year we strengthened the SAAC and Institutional Research ties with the addition of Damita Kaloostian of the Office of Planning and Institutional Effectiveness Division joining our team. In the few weeks that Damita has been on board she has produced our first SAAC newsletter and helped develop and write the math track assessment document. We thank Dean Willekens, Dr. Bryan Tippet, and Dr. Lara for helping to make this happen.

As EMCC moves forward toward a learning college model, one of our goals is to have quality assessment of student learning data to help drive budgeting and pedagogical decisions regarding the under-prepared student, learner support, and programmatic changes; our biggest challenge is time.