

Student Learning Committee (SLC)
Minutes from Meeting on October 7, 2014

Committee members present: Kendrick Brown (chair), Nancy Bostrom, Polly Fassinger, Terri Fishel, Diane Michelfelder, Kimerly Miller, Paul Overvoorde, Jaine Strauss

Absent: Keith Edwards, Jim Hoppe, Student representatives yet to be named by MCSG.

I. General Updates

- SLC is currently without student representatives and hopes that student representatives will soon be appointed.
- The meeting set for October 21 is cancelled. The committee will next meet on November 4.

II. The committee reviewed data available for Learning Outcome #5 of “Think Critically and Analyze Effectively” (TCAE): “Students should be able to re-evaluate their own conclusions when considering new information relevant to an issue.”

Last year, SLC conducted an “item analysis” of institutional measures connected to TCAE. Over the summer, Institutional Research gathered corresponding data and prepared information to share with the committee. Does this information help us to better understand student learning related to this outcome?

Only indirect measures are available on the institutional level for this outcome. SLC considered each available survey item in turn:

- **CSEQ:** changed opinion as a result of knowledge or arguments presented by others in conversations outside class (one question, slide 4)
 - The consensus was to keep this information, although it may not provide the best alignment with the learning outcome.
- **NSSE:** how often have you learned something that changed the way you understand an issue or concept? (one question, slides 5, 6 and 7)
 - The consensus was to keep this information.
 - **Important Note:** as we analyze the data for the report, we should take into account the macro-level influences to better understand the context or cohort effects such as age or period (e.g. Wells Fargo demonstrations, etc.)
 - For clarification, NSSE is administered in the spring, so when students are asked about the “current academic year” the question does correspond to their experiences at Macalester.

Action Item: The Assessment Office will add these items to the compilation of the items we plan to use.

III. The committee reviewed data available that generally connect to the larger goals of “Think Critically and Analyze Effectively” (TCAE), but don’t necessarily map onto a specific learning outcome: “Macalester graduates will be able to apply their critical thinking skills to analyze issues with an open mind, question their assumptions, and evaluate relevant literature, data, or other sources of information before reaching a conclusion.”

- **CIRP and CSS:** self report about critical thinking skills and growth in critical thinking skills (two questions, slides 4, 5 and 6)
 - Consensus is to keep.
- **HEDS Senior Survey:** self-reported growth in critical thinking skills (one question, slide 7)
 - Consensus is to keep.

Important Note: In our report, we may not reveal names of peers we’ve included for our comparison data. However, because the peers change with different surveys and years of implementation, it would be helpful to include a footnote indicating that the peers change.

- **HEDS Senior Survey:** self-reported growth in careful reading skills (one question, slide 8)
 - Consensus is to keep.
 - This question is broad enough to include genres like poetry. It fits well with the goal, but not necessarily a particular outcome.
- **HEDS Senior Survey:** self-reported growth in problem solving skills (one question, slide 9)
 - Consensus is to keep.
 - How might students interpret “problem solving” as opposed to “critical thinking”? (Implementing a strategy? Ruminating?)
 - Do we capture problem solving in the SSL?

- **NSSE:** self-reported growth in thinking critically and analytically (one question, slides 10, 11 and 12)
 - Consensus is to keep.
- **RPS:** self-reported challenge in developing a thesis (one question, slide 13)
 - No not keep, but perhaps consider under #2 for Demonstrate Intellectual Depth and Breadth
 - This question is problematic—it could be that students who report that it’s “very easy” to develop an argument are satisfied with an easy argument
- Many of our data points are indirect assessment, or students’ self-reports on their skills or areas of growth. This is an important part of the narrative, but will ideally be paired with more direct evidence of student learning.
 - The RPS question could possibly be connected to capstones and library consultations.
 - Assessing the Capstone requirement might be something for GERC.
 - Departments take many different approaches to their capstones. At least some departments archive their capstones, so we may be able to collect these if needed in the future.
 - Are we able to connect improvements to curricular changes? There are many confounding variables that would make that problematic.
 - Note that we’ve been reviewing relevant data within the past five years.

Action Item: Institutional Research will add a note regarding the comparison schools.

IV. A first look at data from our General Education Requirements (GER) assessments and whether and how these data connect to learning outcomes for “Think Critically and Analyze Effectively” (TCAE).

- Kendrick circulated a draft compilation of GER assessment items that SLC may find useful in analysis of TCAE:
 - Just as SLC conducted an item analysis for survey instruments and assessments available at the institutional level, the committee should now conduct an item analysis for GER assessment information.
 - This draft includes all possible relevant connections between TCAE and GER assessments. Our next step will be to review and determine which information we would like to keep as part of our analysis.

- For now, the draft includes only direct assessment evidence; however corresponding indirect evidence is also available.
- SLC members are asked to review the possible connections and indicate whether or not they think the GER assessment data is a good match for the outcome.
- Overall, SLC should be wary of attributing one item to multiple learning outcomes.
 - Our general education requirements were written before the Statement of Student Learning and will not necessarily be a “clean” match with any particular TCAE outcomes.
 - As we review the outcomes, it may become apparent that a GER item fits slightly better with one outcome over another. It may also be that it fits generally with TCAE, but not with one particular outcome.
 - SLC may want to treat the CLA data similarly (we attributed specific CLA data points to more than one TCAE outcome).

Action Item: SLC members should send their feedback to Nancy so the Assessment Office can begin to prepare data for review at the next meeting.

V. Next Steps

- For the next meeting, SLC will turn attention to results from the General Education assessments.