

## **2015-2016 Assessment Team Accomplishments: A Synthesis of A-Team Work along with Interpretation of Trends and Activities**

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The 2015-2016 academic year was a challenging one for the A-Team: Kate Sullivan, acting chair, had to step back into the position of composition coordinator within the English department due to the sudden departure of the Composition Coordinator; long-time advocate for assessment at LCC, Sarah Ulerick, began her transition into retirement; fortunately, we filled the vacant curriculum and assessment coordinator position by hiring Tammy Salman.

Consequently, we had a bit of fragmentation (Sullivan stepped down from the chair Winter 2016, and Ulerick and past-chair Christina Howard stepped in) and some competing visions and challenging conversations about the direction of A-Team.

Nonetheless, we accomplished a number of important goals (parsed in a table in [Addendum B](#)):

- I. Continued implementation** of our CLO Assessment Action Plan (2013-2016).
  - A. Increase visibility and understanding of the strategic direction: “a liberal education approach to student learning.”**
  - B. Increase visibility and ownership of core learning outcomes.**
  - C. Link general education curriculum to core learning outcomes.**
  - D. Assess student proficiency in core learning outcomes.**
  
- II.** On-going **involvement in key structures and work groups** across campus, including governance committees.
  
- III. Creation of systems and processes** aimed at mainstreaming assessment work on campus.
  
- IV.** Identification of **future directions and challenges to mainstreaming assessment** work on campus, as well as **parsing the roles of A-Team and administration** in moving this work forward.
  
- I. We continued with the implementation of our 2013-2016 CLO Assessment Action Plan**, which was developed at the AAC&U General Education Assessment Workshop in Burlington, VT, in the spring of 2013. To further the development of a shared understanding of the goals of assessment and how they relate to our general education outcomes (CLOs), the incoming CLO Coordinator, Sarah Lushia, participated in a number of campus conversations about the intersection of the scholarship of teaching and learning (SOTL) as it relates to assessment work. She also established weekly office hours, which were held in a lab/workspace that had been reserved for SOTL work on campus.

Lushia also oversaw the completion of **fourteen assessment projects**, undertaken by nine different departments or disciplines.<sup>1</sup> Two additional projects in Welding and Respiratory Therapy were shepherded by Sullivan during the summer of 2015; and two programs-English and Spanish-were unable to complete their proposed projects due to personnel issues. An increasing number of programs undertook the development of signature assignments or supplemental materials, which is a step towards artifact assessment. Indeed, Communication's artifact assessment in 2015-2016 was predicated upon the development of, not just shared language and understanding of the relationship of CLOs to course

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<sup>1</sup> Please see Lushia's "CLO Final Report, 2015-2016," available [here](#).

outcomes, but to the creation of a variety of supplemental documents, including a signature assignment that facilitates cohesion within a given course, taught across multiple sections.

It is this latter point that bears emphasis and explanation. Faculty at LCC have expressed their reservations that many forms of assessment are designed and implemented to satisfy external accreditation agencies and amount to busy work. They have also indicated a willingness of late to undertake meaningful assessment that is tied directly to improvements in teaching and learning. Rather than attempt to assess any of our CLOs broadly *across* disciplines,<sup>2</sup> an activity which is fraught with challenges and most likely would not impact teaching in any measurable way, faculty want to examine the outcomes and their dimensions within the context of their field.

In contrast, a number of schools have approached assessment activities by forming generic artifact scoring workgroups, despite the fact that individuals outside of a discipline are likely to lack the domain knowledge to truly evaluate if students have mastered content-area skills or knowledge. A recent article from John Slueter, "Higher Ed's Biggest Gamble" (June 7, 2016) published through *Inside Higher Ed*, discusses the generalist and specifist debate about critical thinking and ends up agreeing with the latter position: critical thinking is *always* discipline specific. Although Slueter is not focused on assessment, his conclusion that critical thinking is not generic and necessarily easily transferable has serious implications for assessment work: faculty in disparate fields understand the term differently AND faculty outside of a field will have a difficult, if not impossible, time assessing student proficiency. In our own assessment efforts on campus, we realized that faculty outside of a discipline could not accurately evaluate student work. In particular, in 2012-2013, while beta-testing our own critical thinking rubric, non-philosophy instructors were awed at a beautifully written student essay that applied key philosophical concepts in error: they simply did not have sufficient domain knowledge to determine if a student was applying concepts accurately and demonstrating critical thinking skills. Several incidents like this one pushed us away from generic assessment teams and towards discipline-specific assessment projects and groups.

As one might imagine, laying the groundwork for discipline-specific assessment is laborious and involved and takes a fair amount of time. Faculty have to map course-level learning outcomes (CL-LOs) to core learning outcomes (CLOs), hold conversations about the meaning of CL-LOs as they relate to CLOs, develop contextualizing and supporting materials—signature assignments and rubrics or other metrics—collect artifacts and then score them, before turning data over to institutional research for aggregation and analysis.

The good news is that a growing number of faculty across campus understand the complexities of this assessment challenge and are willing and eager to undertake such work. In fact, nearly 50 faculty divided among eleven disciplines, applied for assessment funding. We are incrementally and consistently developing knowledge about and interest in, assessment work on campus, but the process of completing authentic projects tied to teaching is slow and unfolds over time.

Once again, however, requests for funding outstripped our funding availability, and we ended up awarding fewer hours of support to six of the eleven applicant groups (640 hours were requested; we funded 515 hours, of which, 408 were claimed).

The disparity between funding requests and hours awarded reflects the fact that faculty in many programs are stretched very thin, and even though there is interest and willingness, extenuating circumstances have interfered with aspirations. For instance, in several programs, key faculty became ill or had family responsibilities surface, and the work could not move forward. In other disciplines, faculty were hesitant

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<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2016/06/07/can-colleges-truly-teach-critical-thinking-skills-essay>

to claim hours for their work, and in still others, PT faculty were unable to participate because they lost their teaching assignments for the term and sought work elsewhere. The sheer number of PT faculty in our ranks definitively slows our assessment work.

**Center for Teaching and Learning (CFT&L):** Lushia has worked closely with Caroline Lundquist, one of our PT representatives on the A-Team and recipient of CLO funding, to identify a space for CFT&L work going forward on campus. Lundquist has secured a location on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor of the Center Building, and the A-Team has plans to establish an assessment library and faculty workspace in this location. Lushia will be holding weekly CLO Coordinator office hours in this space.

**In-service time; assessment glossary; assessment graphic:** A-Team has also secured time during fall in-service to reach out to faculty and help them with applications for CLO work and assessment fellows positions. Additionally, we have two heuristics in development: a glossary of terminology related to assessment work (e.g., defining "signature assignment," distinguishing between a course-level, student-learning outcome vs. LCC's CLOs, etc.); and a "daisy" graphic that delineates the work that A-Team can and will do for both faculty and administration. We see both of these projects as leading to a broader understanding of the value and the processes of assessment work at Lane; we are especially grateful for the input from the two PT<sup>3</sup> reps this year: Caroline Lundquist and Mara Levin.

**II.** A-Team members have continued the important work identified by past-chair Christina Howard: **participation in governance councils and key workgroups** and projects on campus. Here, the goal is raising the campus' consciousness around assessment, as well as shaping policy and conversation. A-team members actively serve on a number of committees that have worked toward increasing the visibility and value of CLOs and augmenting an understanding of the role of assessment in creating and sustaining a quality learning and professional environment. Ce Rosenow, Howard, Sullivan, and Molloy Wilson were involved in the crafting of our new "Core Themes," which include the following: Theme 1, Responsive Community Engagement; Theme 2, Accessible and Equitable Learning Opportunities; Theme 3, Quality Educational Environment; Theme 4, Individual Student Achievement.

A-Team members of our newly created Institutional Effectiveness Committee participated deeply in the development of the 2016-2021 Strategic Plan, which identifies five Strategic Directions: 1. Commitment to Student Learning and Success; 2. A Culture of Teaching, Learning and Innovation; 3. Access, Equity, and Inclusion through Social Justice; 4. Strengthened Community; and 5. Financial and Environmental Stewardship. Howard, in particular, has played a key role in helping the college articulate the relationships between our governance structure and the various work groups tasked with realizing our mission—*Transforming Lives Through Learning*—via the implementation of our goals and deployment of our values.

In particular, key strategies identified as mechanisms for fulfilling the objectives of each strategic direction, articulate the connections between assessment and student learning. Specifically, one key strategy identified under the first strategic direction, commits LCC to:

Develop and implement systematic assessment of learning and infusion of learning in academic programs, co-curricular activities and student services. Embed assessment practices in program review, provide professional development aligned with assessment goals, and use assessment goals to inform and improve curriculum and teaching practices to support student success (*LCC's 2016-2012 Strategic Plan*, 8)

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<sup>3</sup> In the past, A-Team has had to solicit involvement from PT representatives, sometimes cajoling an individual to join our efforts. 2015-2016 marked a change in that we had eleven strong applications for involvement and ended up splitting the assignment between two faculty in different departments.

The second strategic direction identifies the following objectives related to assessment practices:

Support teaching, learning, assessment, and innovation through faculty research and scholarship;  
Provide professional development opportunities for faculty, staff, and managers that advance teaching and learning at Lane. (*LCC's 2016-2021 Strategic Plan*, 9)

In addition to the crucial work described above, A-Team members serve on the following committees and workgroups: Curriculum Committee, Academic Program Review Committee, Peace Center Committee, Learning Council, Diversity Council, Honors College, and they liaise with the newly minted SoTL work helmed by Dennis Gilbert in Physics and the CFT&L, as well as serving a key role in the Cultural Competency, Privilege, and Diversity work on campus.

**II.** Although A-Team did not adopt an official work plan for 2015-2016, the unofficial goal was to **set up systems and processes** that would facilitate our work and allow us to digitize and automate certain functions. Specifically, Lushia and Sullivan, with assistance from Lori Brenden in IT, created a number of online forms: an online application form for faculty groups applying for CLO funding; an online final report form for faculty groups that have completed their CLO work, which includes questions to assess A-Team support, as well as to identify kinds of projects funded (mapping, signature assignment creation, etc.); an online application form for PT representation on the A-Team, as well as online rubrics to assess CLO proposals, Assessment Fellows Applications, and PT rep applications. We see this sort of systemization as key for managing workflow, adhering to transparent policies for the selection of faculty selected for funding, and to create an archive/record of our work.

To wit, our online forms are shared among team members, housed in Drupal, and allow for us to generate reports that aggregate information, something that was heretofore not possible. Additionally, the A-Team also moved many of its materials to a shared googledrive, that will be accessible to the Assessment Coordinator (Salman), the A-Team Chair (Sullivan), and the CLO Coordinator (Lushia) or whoever fills these positions in the future. Again, the creation of a digital "space" to house documents (i.e., agendas and minutes, work in process, forms, etc.) means that our processes are more transparent and A-Team work "lives" beyond the chair's office. Ultimately we see this googledrive as a place to store documents as they are removed from the A-Team webpages, which are becoming increasingly crowded.

Currently, A-Team is working with IT to create two online resources for faculty: an online course outline form that will be populated with our CLOs and their dimensions; a CLO mapping database that will parse CLOs in courses across the curriculum. Both of these tools will have an auto-populate function so that the CLOs are represented, visually, as part of the course outline and our curriculum revision system. We are confident that this visibility will translate into a greater understanding of the CLOs and a shared sense of responsibility for their implementation and measurement.

We also are hopeful that a digital tool in which to enter data will help us systematize assessment practices. Over the past decade, the focus of assessment work has varied, greatly, according to whoever chaired the work, and faculty have engaged in: a-contextual rubric development aligned to CLOs; creation of rubrics geared towards assignments; CLO mapping to assignments; CLO mapping to courses; artifact collection and discussion across disciplines, within disciplines, or within courses. Given the absence of forms or reporting mechanisms to standardize reporting or data collection, we do not have any consistent accounting of what has been accomplished across the years, and the aggregation of data about CLO projects since 2013 (linked [here](#)) reveals this lack of coherency.

The CLO mapping system will be in the form of a survey (Salman and Sullivan have crafted the logic flow and questions for the survey) but will, functionally, be a database that allows us to generate a variety of reports, identifying where each CLO and dimension is represented in the curriculum, which

programs/departments/disciplines have developed shared assessment tools, and which ones have undertaken artifact assessment. We see both tools as having a heuristic value and not just functioning as reporting mechanisms.

Perhaps the work that has yielded the least tangible results but has had the most far reaching implications are the **conversations we've had this year around our current and future** work. The first accomplishment we've made is a shift from strict CD funding to an assessment fellows model, which awards substantial CD funding to an individual (100 hours) or grants the person one course reassignment to coordinate assessment efforts within a program, department, or across a series of courses. The shift to an assessment fellows model of support/funding, comes on the heels of two years of feedback from faculty involved in CLO projects. Almost to a person, faculty who received funding identified "time" as the biggest obstacle in moving forward on assessment work within a program or department, so A-Team leadership—Howard and Sullivan—approached administration in 2014-15 about the possibility of funding fewer projects but with more support. Thus, we solicited applications for assessment fellows in the fall of 2015 and awarded funding to four of our six applicants, although not at the level requested in all cases.

The faculty who received reassignment time included Karen Krumrey from Communications, and Cybele Higgins from ESL. Lisa Turnbull received 100 CD hours of funding to coordinate assessment efforts in Biology, and Jill Jones was awarded 50 hours of CD funding to work on assessment within the Dental Hygiene Program, but was unable to complete her work due to circumstances outside her control.

Krumrey, Higgins, and Turnbull all successfully completed their projects; in all three cases, assessment work within their programs had undergone a developmental process and involved a significant time investment: e.g., Krumrey had been helming assessment work for three years, first receiving funding in 2013-2014 to revise course outlines, followed by work in 2014-105 to develop signature assignments and faculty and student surveys, and, finally, artifact collection and evaluation in 2015-2016. Similarly, Higgins was involved in a multi-year course and outcomes revisions process, and her department had received funding in 2014-2015 before they were awarded an assessment fellowship position. Likewise, Turnbull has been involved in the process of linking both CLOs and national biological science outcomes to SLOs, and biology has received funding for several years.

The takeaway from this pattern is that it takes department/programs several years of preparation to position themselves to undertake artifact collection and assessment, and without the refinement of course outcomes mapped to CLOs, followed by the development of signature assignments, scoring rubrics and other tools, faculty cannot begin to evaluate student levels of proficiency in any kind of systematic, reliable, and valid manner.

**V.** A large focus of A-Team work—both internally and externally—was **identifying challenges to mainstreaming assessment** work on campus, as well as **articulating the role of A-Team** in this work. Throughout the year, A-Team members engaged in a spirited and productive discussion about our role in assessment work—what we can and cannot accomplish. Perhaps because we had three chairs involved in this discussion—Sullivan, the current chair; Howard, the most recent past chair; and Ulerick, a former chair—the conversations were challenging and far-ranging and ultimately produced a document (**Addendum A**) that parses responsibility for assessment work on campus. In part, the list below is the result of the guided conversations facilitated by Carol Schaafsma in the Spring of 2016. There were several themes that emerged during these conversations: 1. Assessment work has not been effectively scaled; 2. There is increasing faculty interest in and commitment to assessment work on campus, despite varying levels of understanding of assessment processes and practices; 3. A-Team, while comprised of committed faculty from across the college, **cannot, alone**, lead this work; 4. Administration will need to take on a larger role in assessment work on campus, providing infrastructure and support for faculty, a

situation that they are both aware of, and concur with (E-Team has identified five priorities for work this coming year, three of which focus on assessment in some way: 1. Systematic assessment of student learning; 2 establishment of a CoTL; and 3. Program review).

Other conversations about assessment involved a discussion about the necessity of an assessment presence during the summer and how to scale the assessment fellows model. The first issue—maintaining a presence during the summer—was illustrated through one of the applications for an assessment fellowship. Thomas Madison, who although a PT employee, is lead faculty of the Graphic Design Program, applied to be a 2016-2017 fellow but needed to start his work this summer, when his teaching load is lighter. Sullivan has been available for meetings/conversations with Madison throughout the summer, so that he can productively work on mapping CLOs to program and course outcomes, as well as developing rubrics and evaluation tools for the capstone project of the program: a portfolio that has, in the past, been evaluated by internship and/or Co-Op mentors. However, the results of this evaluation have not been captured before in any kind of systematized way, and Madison has used summer to develop tools to for this process. Had Sullivan not been available to answer questions and guide this work, he most likely would not have been able to apply to be a fellow.

Likewise, work with the Welding and Respiratory Care programs in the summer of 2015 underscores the need for summer leadership around assessment. Indeed, the work on creation of a digital mapping tool has been largely accomplished during the summer of 2016.

The second part of the conversation--how to scale the assessment fellows model--will be realized, ideally, this coming year, as the A-Team revises its charter and reconfigures the work of our campus-wide Faculty Coordinator of Student Learning, Assessment and Curriculum, Salman, and that of the A-Team Chair and CLO coordinator. We have spoken about the possibility of eliminating one of the positions—chair or CLO coordinator—in order to free up funding for more fellows although we have as of yet to delineate new roles. Obviously, this year will be transitional as Salman gains more facility with A-Team and LCC.