

We Pride Ourselves

- *MCC’s outcomes assessment process is faculty-driven.*
- *MCC has made substantial progress in implementing a comprehensive outcomes assessment program.*
- *The institution provides fiscal support for the implementation of outcomes assessment such as staff development opportunities and faculty recognition through awards.*

We Challenge Ourselves

- *To increase student involvement in the outcomes assessment process.*
- *To fully implement and institutionalize the expanded outcomes assessment process through planning and budgeting.*

Chapter 10

Criterion 3–Outcomes Assessment

Introduction

MCC’s Program for Assessment of Student Learning supports the college’s mission, purposes, and strategic initiatives. The outcomes assessment process is an integral part of each academic department and program. Chapter 10 addresses the college’s outcomes assessment program, history of outcomes assessment, the college’s outcomes assessment process, and the levels of implementation achieved.

MCC Outcomes Assessment

Overview

MCC values and encourages the systematic assessment and improvement of teaching and learning. The college’s faculty-led Outcomes Assessment Committee (OAC) has coordinated the implementation of a college-wide Program for Assessment of Student Learning. OAC has stated the following purposes for the assessment of student learning:

- Improving the teaching and learning process;
- Improving programs and courses;
- Providing accountability to the community, and
- Providing data for informed decision-making.

Every degree program at the college has an assessment standards matrix that guides program faculty in the collection of data to improve curricula, teaching methodologies, and delivery methods. (All program matrices are available in the Resource Room.) This assessment program is a continuous improvement process to enhance student learning. As the implementation of the assessment program progresses throughout the college and as more data are available for improvements in the teaching and learning process, the ultimate benefactors will be MCC students.

History of MCC Outcomes Assessment

The building of a systematic process for student outcomes assessment at MCC has been continuing for more than a decade. In 1996, the college prepared *A Report on the Status of Implementation of Student Assessment at Metropolitan Community College*, which was submitted to and subsequently approved by the North Central Association (NCA). This document was required by NCA at the time of the last evaluation team visit in 1992 and provided the college's initial framework and documentation of assessment efforts.

Since 1992, the college has experienced several leadership changes in the vice president/dean position of Educational Affairs/Services. In retrospect, these leadership changes and the periods of interim structures between the departures and arrivals of incumbents caused some perturbations in the college's ability to get the assessment process fully implemented and institutionalized. However, the incumbent vice president of Education Services has served since 1999, and under his leadership, MCC regained its momentum and resolve to fully implement and institutionalize its assessment process.

More recently, the institution has continued to evolve its outcomes assessment process, enabling the culture and structure of the institution to shape this process. By continuing the work of forming a learner-centered outcomes assessment plan, areas of the institution have developed an identifiable and workable structure for improving learning and instruction. At the college, outcomes assessment is and has been a faculty-led initiative.

While faculty have gone through repeated efforts to define program outcomes over the past decade, the more difficult task has been the sound measurements of learning and improvement of instruction based upon those measurements. Recognizing this challenge, the college has provided numerous faculty development opportunities related to assessment. Effective with the 2000-01 budget, a line item for assessment was added to fund the college's growing outcomes assessment initiatives. In August 2001, MCC sought the assistance of two professional consultants, each with executive-level higher education experience and extensive knowledge of HLC outcomes assessment guidelines, to work with the faculty and deans. For the last seven years, the OAC has provided the leadership for this mission-critical effort. The chronological events of outcomes assessment activity at MCC are summarized on the following page.

MCC's Outcomes Assessment Process

After the 1992 comprehensive visit, the college began developing its first formal outcomes assessment process. Major responsibility for the development work resided with the vice president of Educational Affairs and the division chairs. What evolved was a process to assess formally each course objective.

As the college began intensive work during 1994-95 on its assessment report for NCA due at the end of 1995-96, a small faculty-driven and faculty-led Outcomes Assessment Committee was formed. The committee recognized the shortcomings of the existing assessment process and began the long road to developing a program that would focus on completers in program areas.

Table 10.1 Assessment Program Timeline to Date

Development of the Student Academic Achievement Assessment Program	
Date	Event
1993-94	– Course-level assessment process initiated.
1994-95	– Faculty-led Outcomes Assessment Committee formed. – Methodologies for program-level assessment reviewed.
1995-96	– Assessment plan prepared and submitted to NCA.
1996-97	– Assessment plan approved by NCA.
1997-98	– Program advisory committees identified skills and competencies expected of all qualified potential employees.
1998-99	– Full-time faculty identified and adopted a set of core competencies common to all graduates. – Program areas created and submitted outcomes assessment plans.
1999-00	– Plans reviewed by the Outcomes Assessment Committee. – Program areas modified/revised assessment plans.
2000-01	– Outcomes Assessment Committee produced and updated the <i>Program for Assessment of Student Academic Achievement</i> . – All programs identified two specific outcomes. – Professional consultants retained to provide guidance on assessment.
2001-02	– Program areas submitted inaugural annual report on assessment. – Faculty member designated as the outcomes assessment coordinator. – Full-time faculty completed Levels of Implementation Survey. – Methodologies for general education outcomes assessment reviewed. – All programs measured two primary outcomes.

In May 1996, the college submitted its report, *A Report on the Status of Implementation of Student Assessment at Metropolitan Community College*, which was subsequently approved by NCA. In the report, MCC outlined its strategies to begin the systematic implementation of the outcomes assessment plan beginning in the 1996-1997 academic year. The initial thrust was to take place over a three-year period. Unfortunately, for a myriad of reasons including leadership changes, interim organizations, and reorganizations, the college did not implement the plan as earlier hoped. While the Outcomes Assessment Committee continued to exist, it functioned at a reduced level. To its credit, the committee was able to sponsor several assessment development activities during this period.

In 1999, the institution reorganized the Educational Services area and hired a new dean of Educational Services who is currently the vice president of Educational Services. Through his leadership, the MCC outcomes assessment process has been effectively reinvigorated. All program areas have created assessment standards matrices and have begun to collect data. For the 2001-02 academic year, each program area prepared a reflective summary of its outcomes activities and an overall executive summary covering programs. At the beginning of the 2002-03 academic year, each program area will be conducting an in-depth analysis of the data collected during the previous year and submit a second reflective summary of its outcomes activities.

To heighten awareness of the outcomes assessment process throughout the college and to acknowledge outstanding contributions in assessment by individuals and groups, the OAC developed and funded an annual outcomes assessment award program.

Each year, separate monetary awards will be available to recognize an individual and group or program for their work in student learning. A subcommittee of the OAC is currently reviewing nominations for the inaugural awards under this new program. The subcommittee's selections will be announced at the upcoming Educational Services Day meeting in August 2002.

In addition, an outcomes assessment coordinator, a full-time faculty member on release time, was appointed and reports to the vice president of Educational Services and the OAC. The new role of the coordinator has synthesized and improved college-wide efforts in assessing student learning. The position has added needed energy to the committee's efforts in moving forward.

HLC's Outcomes Assessment Criteria

The following table compares MCC's assessment process to the HLC criteria found in the *NCA Handbook of Accreditation*, pages 43-44.

Table 10.2 Outcomes Assessment Process

NCA Criteria	Metropolitan Community College Process
Strong, identifiable relationship between institutional mission and objectives and specific educational objectives of individual departments or programs.	Through its mission, purposes, and strategic initiatives, the college demonstrates the relationship.
Faculty-driven process.	Faculty in the program areas and on the Outcomes Assessment Committee participated in the development of the assessment process.
Shared authority for process.	The current Outcomes Assessment Committee has been in place since 1997.
Oversight of process by individual.	Ultimate responsibility resides with the vice president of Educational Services.
Assessment is both part of and a separate and ongoing process from the program review process.	A revised <i>Program/Department Effectiveness Review Analysis Report</i> has been developed, which considers assessment of student academic achievement as a separate component in the overall program review process.
Feedback loops in the assessment process.	Assessment is an integral part of the institutional effectiveness model that has been developed and feeds into the planning and budgeting process.
Students understand the college's assessment processes and the need for assessment.	The college includes information on outcomes assessment in the 2002-03 catalog.
Measure student learning using a variety of direct and indirect methods.	The assessment standards matrices document the methods of various assessment used by each program.

Levels of Implementation Achieved

The following table reviews MCC's progress with the implementation process. It is formatted consistent with the HLC's *Level of Implementation-Patterns of Characteristics* from the

addendum to the *Handbook of Accreditation, Second Edition*. The table focuses on the level of implementation achieved in the various HLC characteristic categories concerning its assessment program. The data was collected from 129 full-time faculty members during the February 2002 Educational Services Day department meetings.

Beginning with the 2002-03 academic year, a new *Program/Department Effectiveness Review Analysis Report* will be instituted. The OAC recognized the need to revise the process based on experiences from using the process and outside consultants' recommendations. Outcomes assessment of student learning will be a major part of the report and will require each program area to address the following five questions:

1. How are the outcomes appropriate, and how do you know if they are?
2. To what extent have program completers achieved the program outcomes?
3. How do you know the extent to which they have been reached?
4. How do these results compare to what faculty expected?
5. What action will be taken because of these results and analyses?

While some program areas already utilize capstone courses and/or portfolio reviews, other program areas are beginning to investigate their use. Additionally, the college is in the early stages of formalizing an outcomes assessment process for the general education areas.

Based on the outcomes assessment coordinator and the committee's analysis of the results, the *Levels of Implementation* self-assessment places the college in the "emerging" or Level 2 category. In just one category (Shared Responsibility: Students) did the college place in the "planning" or Level 1 category. The OAC has been aware for some time of this deficiency and will be developing some student involvement ideas during the fall 2002.

The major challenge for the OAC is to move the institution to Level 3 by the end of the 2005-06 academic year and to sustain Level 3 status in the years thereafter. The committee's timetable for assessment activities to achieve Level 3 status is located in the Resource Room.

Building on Assessment

Since 1995, MCC's assessment process has been institutionalized. Assessment of student learning and instructional programs is an increasingly systematic, continuous process that enjoys widespread support at MCC. Most faculty and administrators are knowledgeable of the systems and methods of assessing student learning, including outcomes assessment, effectiveness reviews, and the myriad of tools used in course and program assessment. Administrative support and budgetary allowances for assessment help to ensure that faculty will continue to have access to resources and professional development for the assessment of student learning.

The college's commitment to outcomes assessment is demonstrated in its leadership, budget allocations for faculty development and personnel, support of the OAC, and an institutional effectiveness system, which incorporates outcomes assessment results. However, MCC has been challenged to reach this point of success. During the past 10 years,

numerous false starts occurred in addressing and sustaining outcomes assessment. Several changes in Educational Services leadership, along with reorganizations, diminished the division's ability to establish a strong and sustained college-wide system for implementing outcomes assessment. However, under the leadership of the vice president of Educational Services, MCC has made a concerted effort in establishing outcomes assessment as a driving force in improving student learning and making decisions. The college has demonstrated a commitment to outcomes assessment through its faculty development plan. During the last two years, a variety of faculty development sessions were offered to increase knowledge base about outcomes assessment, in designing course and program outcomes, and in improving instructional design techniques.

Table 10.3 Levels of Implementation Results

NCA Level Characteristics	MCC Response	Patterns of Evidence
Institutional Culture		
– Collective and shared values – Mission	Level 2 Level 2	Importance of learning is an integral of the mission, purposes, and strategic initiatives (create an institutional effectiveness system to provide meaningful decision-making data including outcomes assessment) of the college.
Shared Responsibility		
– Faculty	Level 2	Program-area faculty have identified appropriate outcomes and have developed assessment standards matrices. Annual outcomes assessment awards have been funded and will be used to recognize outstanding achievements in assessment activities at the college.
– Administration and Board	Level 2	The vice president of Educational Services has continuously kept the Executive Team and the Board of Governors apprised of MCC's assessment initiatives.
– Students	Level 1	More work needs to be accomplished with students to assist in their understanding of and the need for the outcomes assessment process.
Institutional Support		
– Resources	Level 2	A budget line has been established to support assessment development for faculty members.
– Structures	Level 2	The current Outcomes Assessment Committee has been in place since 1997.
	Level 2	An assessment coordinator was appointed in 2001 and reports to the Outcomes Assessment Committee and the vice president of Educational Services.
Efficacy of Assessment	Level 2	Faculty members are increasingly engaged in analyzing program area's assessment standards matrix in faculty and advisory committee meetings. Program and department representatives and deans are annually documenting how assessment information is being used to improve student learning.

Throughout the 2001-2002 academic year, external assessment consultants met twice with each program's faculty to enhance and improve the development of program outcomes. During the 2001 Educational Services fall kickoff, an instructor/consultant addressed the faculty on program outcomes design. In addition, an outcomes assessment coordinator position, held by a full-time faculty member, was created to further assist faculty in the ongoing development and implementation of outcomes assessment.

The OAC's accomplishments are viable demonstrations of the college's commitment to sustaining outcomes assessment. Faculty-driven, the committee's purpose is to review all program outcomes and to provide assistance for improvement where needed; to develop a system of support for all faculty in sustaining assessment; and to assure that the assessment implementation is successful.

Even though the committee has been in place since 1994, significant progress in the last four years has been made. The committee coordinated, with members facilitating, a variety of outcomes development sessions for faculty. It developed a system for outcomes assessment implementation and is currently overseeing the system. At the same time, it is also making modifications to the system, based on external consultant recommendations. The OAC will continue to be the college's nucleus of assessment implementation and improvement.

As part of MCC's institutional effectiveness process, in its initial phase, outcomes assessment results have been identified as the major indicator of student learning. These results, along with other data from yearly educational program reviews, will drive improvements and modifications in Educational Services.

Budgetary Implications

MCC has budgeted appropriate funding to implement outcomes assessment strategies during the last few years. However, in order to continue enhancing the college's outcomes assessment process, budget needs for implementation will increase. Currently, the college allocates funding for the assessment of student learning and dedicates funding for an outcomes assessment coordinator. As the college continues to improve its process of assessment, Educational Services will need to increase dedicated funding for the program's success.

Conclusion

Since 1992, MCC has built momentum in its pursuit of creating an outcomes assessment process. Unfortunately, the college has also relaxed this momentum throughout the years because of leadership changes and interim gaps. The implementation of assessment activities has had unevenness in its success. However, with the leadership emerging from Educational Services and a dedicated and persistent OAC, the college is well on its way in continuing to develop a quality assessment program at MCC.

One of the strengths of MCC's assessment process is that faculty members are involved and are internalizing the process, for the most part. Assessment is evolving as part of the

learning culture at MCC. This is a major change from 10 years ago. Two important elements of the outcomes assessment process still need to be addressed. A strong relationship between outcomes assessment and the college's mission, purposes, and strategic initiatives is only implied. The college may consider making outcomes assessment more institutionally visible by directly stating its importance in the purposes or strategic initiatives.

As a commuter college with minimal avenues for participation and support, the college continues to be challenged to include students in its overall strategies of outcomes assessment. In this chapter, many reports and documents are referenced. All of these items, as well as other supporting data, are located in the Resource Room.