

# Arizona Western College

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Report to  
The Higher Learning  
Commission  
in Preparation for  
Focused Visit on  
Student Learning  
Outcomes  
Assessment



## MISSION STATEMENT

Arizona Western College offers educational, career and lifelong learning opportunities through innovative partnerships which enhance the lives of people in Yuma and La Paz counties.

March 2004

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Arizona Western College is celebrating its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year of providing educational, career, and lifelong learning opportunities through innovative partnerships to enhance the lives of people in Yuma and La Paz counties. Through our 6-E model of decision-making i.e. considering Excellence, Equity, Efficiency, Effort, Effectiveness, and Ethics, we seek to live our commitment that learning must be paramount. The assessment of student learning outcomes has high priority at our college; we are engaged in becoming excellent at assessing outcomes.

### **Background for Our Focused Visit**

The Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association conducted a comprehensive visit at Arizona Western College in March 1999. The College received ten-year accreditation. The team recommended a Monitoring Report for one area of concern. The following is quoted from the report.

“... One of the concerns, however, the team believes, warrants a monitoring report. This report should be submitted by December 2001 and should include evidence of the College’s full implementation and institutionalization of its plan and program for the assessment of student academic achievement in all its academic programs. Furthermore it needs to document, ‘proficiency in skills and competencies essential for all college-educated adults, completion of an identifiable general education component and mastery of the level of knowledge appropriate to the degree attained.’ In addition, the College should be prepared to provide evidence that it has established measurable outcomes; that evaluation of these outcomes had led to improvement in the instructional process as well as in student academic achievement; and that the data is being used on an ongoing basis in the budgeting and planning process for programmatic and institutional improvement. If within the next three years the College cannot demonstrate successful implementation of an assessment program, then the Commission should conduct a focused visit.”

The College submitted a Monitoring Report in December 2001. Staff analysis stated in part that the report demonstrates that assessment is organized and focused with good direction, but that the Assessment Program is limited in number of general education skills being assessed and measures used. The Commission accepted the staff action and recommendation stated below.

“... Accept the report that focused on Assessment of student academic achievement to include the institution’s philosophy of general education and how that relates to student learning outcomes. A visit, focused on Assessment is scheduled for 2003-04. The institution’s next comprehensive evaluation is scheduled for 2008-09.”

### **Organization of the Report**

We organized this report to document Arizona Western College’s institutionalization of our Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Program and to provide evidence of how data are being used on an ongoing basis in planning, budgeting, and learning activities to improve student academic achievement.

In this document, we provide the concern statements from the 1999 comprehensive team report and from the staff analysis of the December 2001 Monitoring Report. We provide evidence of progress for each statement. We describe improvements and future plans. We provide supporting detail in the Enclosures. The team members will find additional detail and documentation in the documentation collection in the Center for Teaching Effectiveness during their April 19-20, 2004 visit.

### **Process by which this report has been prepared**

In preparation for this report, we developed a timeline from 1998-99 through 2003-04 with columns for each year labeled “Fall” and “Spring.” We asked individuals, departments, and committees the questions, “How is AWC different as a result of our Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Program?” and “What evidence of student learning can we show anyone who asks?.” From the dialogue prompted by the questions and review of Assessment Committee minutes, we identified important institutional benchmarks. This visual helped us see a longitudinal “big picture” of assessment progress. As members of the campus community looked at the timeline, they often mentioned additional improvements in student achievement and operations that might not be widely known outside their departments. Thus, the effort of preparing the report served as an excellent internal communication process. A copy of the timeline is enclosed.

The Vice President for Learning Services prepared an initial draft of the report. To promote continued integration and communication about the college’s assessment program, the Vice President for Learning services provided the draft to the Assessment Committee members, Learning Services Council, Faculty Senate Officers, President, and President’s Cabinet. Individuals provided additional information. The report was finalized and submitted to the Visiting Team and Higher Learning Commission Liaison.

## **EXAMINATION OF ISSUES**

Statements from the 1999 Comprehensive Visit Report and the Staff Analysis of the 2001 Monitoring Report are quoted below in italics. For each statement, evidence of progress is provided.

### **General Education**

#### ***Concern Statements***

***The College has not implemented a program for assessment of student academic achievement in the area of general education .... (Challenges: 1. page 36 of Report of a Visit to Arizona Western College March 22-24, 1999)***

#### **Response**

The College has implemented a program for assessment of student academic achievement in general education. The College developed a Student Learning Outcomes Program with a five-column matrix for planning and tracking the assessment of outcomes in four categories: general education, degrees, certificates, and specified course clusters. The five column headings are found below.

<u>Statement of Purpose</u>	<u>Intended Student Learning Outcomes</u>	<u>Tools for Assessment &amp; Criteria for Success</u>	<u>Summary of Data Collected</u>	<u>Use of Results</u>
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The information in the “Statement of Purpose” column succinctly describes the broad intended outcomes for the general education area, degree, certificate, or course cluster. These statements are developed in line with the College Mission and Vision/Strategic Plan. In the “Intended Student Learning Outcomes” column, faculty identify two or three of the most important outcomes expected of students for this assessment cycle. In the “Tools for Assessment & Criteria for Success” column, faculty describe how the outcomes will be assessed and the criteria for success. These three columns are completed at the beginning of the calendar year assessment cycle. Faculty complete the fourth and fifth columns at the end of the assessment cycle. The analysis and discussion of one year’s data thus set the stage for choosing the learning outcomes and measures for the next assessment cycle.

The Assessment Committee chose four outcome areas from the general education program for initial assessment. They are communication, critical thinking, quantitative analysis, and technology applications. The Assessment Committee spent a great deal of time discussing alternatives for wording for specific learning outcomes from the soaring prose of the values narrative. The student learning outcomes are below.

## **AWC General Education Outcomes**

### **General Education: Communication**

1. Learners provide writing that provides a clear, specific thesis, and awareness of audience; fully develops examples to support thesis in logical, coherent manner; demonstrates original thinking, depth of analysis, and comprehension of material used; and that shows high proficiency in standard English grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

### **General Education: Critical Thinking**

1. Learners will demonstrate the ability to take charge of their own thinking.
2. Learners will demonstrate an intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action.

### **General Education: Quantitative Analysis**

1. Identify and extract relevant data from given mathematical or contextual situations.
2. Select known models or develop appropriate models that organize the data into:
  - a. tables or spreadsheets (with or without technology); or
  - b. graphical representations (with or without technology); or
  - c. symbolic/equation format.
3. Obtain correct mathematical results and state those results with the qualifiers.
4. Use the results to:
  - a. determine whether they are realistic in terms of the original situation; or
  - b. determine whether the mathematical model/representation of data was appropriate; or
  - c. describe a trend in a table, graph, or formula and make predications based on trends; or
  - d. draw qualitative conclusions in written form.

### **General Education: Technology Applications**

1. Learners will demonstrate a working knowledge of computer basics by opening and closing a program; by creating, saving, printing, finding, renaming, copying, moving and deleting files.
2. Learners will perform basic word processing operations including document creation, editing, formatting, printing, saving and retrieving a document.
3. Learners will perform basic spreadsheet operations including creating, editing, formatting, printing, saving and retrieving a worksheet including the use of formulas, simple functions, and the copy command.
4. Learners will demonstrate the ability to use the Internet in order to access information resources, evaluate their credibility, and apply them.
5. Learners will demonstrate the ability to send and receive E-mail including attachments.

### ***Concern Statement***

***Furthermore it needs to document, “proficiency in skills and competencies essential for all college educated adults, completion of an identifiable general education component and mastery of the level of knowledge appropriate to the degree attained.” (page 40 of Report of a Visit to Arizona Western College March 22-24, 1999)***

### **Response**

Our general education values and program requirements are described in the 2003-04 Catalog (pages 47-51). We have a comprehensive general education curriculum that includes a common structure for transfer among Arizona community colleges and universities. In addition to subject area requirements, the general education curriculum is designed to contribute to the development of an international perspective, an appreciation and awareness of cultural diversity, and an understanding of current human events by study of the past. These awareness areas are embedded into subject area courses. Students must complete at least one course, which advances ethnic/race/gender cultural awareness, and one course that advances global or historical awareness. The general education curriculum includes intensive writing and critical inquiry.

Regarding the level of knowledge appropriate to the degree attained, the Arizona Western College Catalog, beginning in 2002-03, provides program purpose statements for each degree major and certificate. These statements identify the mastery of the level of knowledge appropriate for each degree or certificate. These statements are written in measurable terms beginning with the phrase, “Graduates will demonstrate....” The enclosed 2003-04 Catalog contains these statements.

### ***Concern Statement***

***Only one skill is assessed with only one measure in General Education. (page 2 of Staff Analysis of Institutional Report January 3, 2002)***

### **Response**

While only one outcome area had been assessed at the time of the December 2001 Monitoring Report, Arizona Western College has subsequently assessed the four outcome areas with two measures as described in the enclosed calendar year assessment reports for 2002 and 2003. Faculty developed tools were used for communication, quantitative analysis, and technology applications. The ACT Collegiate Assessment of Academic Progress (CAAP) Critical Thinking instrument was used for assessment of critical thinking.

We are pleased with the widening influence of general education assessment across departments and divisions at the college. The Student Services division has embraced learning outcomes assessment. Beginning in the 2001-02 academic year, the Student Services division initiated discussion of how the services and support programs contribute to, and enhance, the achievement of general education student learning outcomes. Each Student Services department directly linked identified student learning outcomes to the institution’s General Education Outcomes (See the enclosed Student Services plans.) The 2003-04 academic year is the first year that student learning outcomes assessment plans are in place and the first cycle of

assessment data collected. The first reports of data analysis and plans for improvement will be completed by the end of April 2004.

### ***Concern Statement***

***Regarding the General Education: Communication Achievement Report. The report indicates the success of one measure on a class or number of students evaluated with a locally developed rubric. The faculty have used the results to make recommendations regarding teaching, training, class size, feedback to students. None of these have been implemented. (page 2 of Staff Analysis of Institutional Report January 3, 2002)***

### **Response**

Regarding the communication outcome area, the Assessment Committee standardized writing assignments for the 2003 and 2004 assessment cycles. In the realm of training for faculty, Rosanna Lhota, Professor of English and Assessment Committee Chair, presented “The Argument Synthesis: An Instrument for Assessing General Education Outcomes” at the Spring 2003 Faculty Seminar. Professor Pilar Hernandez conducted a session on “Understanding the Differences in Discourse in Anglo-American, Mexican-American (dominant English), and ESL students: A Sociolinguistic Approach” at the Spring 2004 Faculty Seminar. Professor Michelle Cashman provided an Associate Faculty Seminar entitled “What’s Writing Got to Do With It?” in February 2004 with examples of ways to incorporate and assess the general education writing component in classes. Changes have not been made in class size. Professor Amy Minervini revised *The Arizona Western College Writing Guide* Fall 2002. The revised *Guide* was distributed to faculty and is available in the bookstore.

### **General Education Learning Outcomes Improvement Areas**

From assessment of general education learning outcomes with relatively small numbers of students, we know that student performance does not meet our standard in communication. We must expand efforts to develop student competencies in thesis support, development of claims in a piece of writing, organization, grammar, spelling, and punctuation. For more information, please see the general education section of the Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Report for Calendar Year 2003.

In the general education critical thinking outcome area, we have learned that 58% of the students taking the CAAP Critical Thinking instrument score are below the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile. We need more information relating performance on the assessment instrument to the outcomes specified for critical thinking so we can better identify strategies for learning improvement. We are investigating the availability of additional analysis from ACT. We are pleased that seven students scored in the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile. In considering the results of communication and quantitative assessment along with performance on the critical thinking instrument, we have some evidence to support faculty anecdotal comments about students’ inability to think critically. For more information, please see the general education section of the Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Report for Calendar Year 2003.

Relating to quantitative analysis, we have learned that the students are not demonstrating the desired level of competency relating to the following outcomes: use results to draw qualitative

conclusions in written form; select known models or develop appropriate models that organize data into (a) tables or spreadsheets, (b) graphical representations, or (c) symbolic/equation format; identify and extract relevant data from given mathematical or contextual situations; obtain correct mathematical results and state those results with qualifiers; and use the results to determine whether they are realistic in terms of the original situation. For more information, please see the general education section of the Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Report for Calendar Year 2003.

We are pleased overall with student learning related to the designated outcomes for technology applications. In most areas, students demonstrate high level of competency. Students did not meet the standard for margins in word processing, using function key in spreadsheets, and attaching a file to e-mail. These three outcomes will be addressed in the coming year. For more information, please see the general education section of the Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Report for Calendar Year 2003.

We conclude we must facilitate more opportunities for faculty teaching general education courses to jointly plan learning activities for communication, critical thinking and quantitative analysis.

We will continue assessing the stated outcomes for communication, critical thinking, quantitative analysis, and technology applications for one or more cycles. We are adding the assessment of oral communication and of an outcome dealing with the ability of graduates to work effectively with partners, teams, and networks in the coming year.

### **Degree and certificate academic achievement areas**

#### ***Concern Statement***

***...nor has it fully implemented an effective assessment program in many of the technical and transfer degree programs. (Challenges: 1. page 36 Report of a Visit to Arizona Western College March 22-24, 1999)***

#### **Response**

Subsequent to these comments, written in March 1999, Arizona Western College successfully completed two cycles of assessment. Our standard was to conduct assessment for degree and certificate programs with at least ten declared majors. In calendar year 2002, we completed assessments for six degrees, seven certificates, and three course clusters. In calendar year 2003, we completed assessments for twenty-four degrees, nine certificates, and six course clusters. Please refer to the enclosed calendar year assessment reports for the analysis and discussion of assessment results.

#### ***Concern Statement***

***In the Student Learning Outcomes Report Areas, the only documentation is a matrix indicating the presence of specific items. There is no context or analysis. There is also an absence of an indicator in many areas. (page 2 of Staff Analysis of Institutional Report January 3, 2002)***

#### **Response**

The information submitted with the December 2001 Monitoring Report was primarily the plan with the first three columns of the matrix completed. In most cases data had not been collected yet. The 2002 and 2003 annual assessment reports contain context and analysis.

#### ***Concern Statement***

***The greater majority of the Reports on Achievement for other programs were incomplete. (page 2 of Staff Analysis of Institutional Report January 3, 2002)***

#### **Response**

Subsequent to these comments, written in January 2002, Arizona Western College successfully completed two cycles of assessment. The college specifies outcomes, tools for assessment, criteria for success, and documentation of analysis of results for degree, certificate, and cluster areas. Please refer to the enclosed calendar year assessment reports for the analysis and discussion of assessment results.

#### ***Concern Statement***

***There has not been the “identification of the mastery of the level of knowledge appropriate to the degree attained” as described in the team report. While some programs have begun to identify outcomes, there is little in place on measures of student learning. (page 3 of Staff Analysis of Institutional Report January 3, 2002)***

#### **Response**

The Arizona Western College Catalog, beginning in 2002-03, now provides program purpose statements for each degree major and certificate. These statements identify the mastery of the level of knowledge appropriate for each degree or certificate. These statements are written in measurable terms beginning with the phrase, “Graduates will demonstrate...” The enclosed 2003-04 Catalog contains these statements. Each year, faculty select two or three related student learning outcomes for assessment.

#### ***Concern Statement***

***There is no feedback to the planning and budgeting process for institutional improvement. (page 3 of Staff Analysis of Institutional Report January 3, 2002)***

#### **Response**

Feedback to the planning and budgeting process occurs in at least three different ways. One is that an individual professor may initiate a request at the departmental level during the annual budgeting cycle. For example, a new physics professor realized that it would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to provide the learning activities needed for the outcomes specified for transfer with old, incomplete laboratory equipment. He submitted a detailed plan of equipment and material needs. The first \$50,000 of the plan is in the 2004-05 budget request.

A second feedback mechanism to the planning and budgeting process is that the Assessment Committee may recommend an expenditure or process change to the Vice President for Learning Services. For example, the committee recommended that the college provide an incentive to encourage students to participate in general education assessment. We tried movie

passes and then pizza and drink coupons. Neither attracted large numbers of students. We are taking steps to have graduate assessment in general education be a structured part of the graduation application process.

A third feedback mechanism is that any employee may bring an issue to his or her Vice President who may bring it to the Executive Committee. The Executive Committee, composed of the four vice-presidents, is the clearing body for all institutional procedural changes and annual budget approval. An example of how this process works was demonstrated when the Director of Testing Services identified a need to support expansion of testing services to include general education assessment, expansion of testing services to off-campus locations, and expansion of hours. The college added a professional position in Spring 2002.

There are other changes in operations and budgeting. We are now regularly providing to faculty information about the students who have declared a major in their degree or certificate program. The Office of Institutional Research developed a program that faculty can use to analyze grades by locations, type of instructional delivery, and times of offerings. A full time nursing lab coordinator position was added as one strategy to increase learning mastery of nursing students. We have purchased software for math and English.

### **WHAT'S DIFFERENT AS A RESULT OF ASSESSMENT?**

A snap shot of some changes that are taking place is provided through faculty voices. A two-hour session was devoted to Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Program during the Faculty Seminar on February 19, 2004. Participants included full-time faculty, several part-time faculty, and many professional staff members seated at round tables. The participants discussed three questions. The time provided for each question was 15 minutes. After 15 minutes, half of the people changed tables, so for each question there was a different mix of people. We intended to put people together who do not regularly talk with each other for relationship building and to share practices and insights across departments. The 72 pages of notes from these discussions are available in the documentation room in the Center for Teaching Effectiveness; however, a small number of the responses are quoted here.

#### **1. What learning activities are being used in your classes to help your students develop general education learning outcomes in Communication, Critical Thinking, Quantitative Analysis, and Technology Applications?**

- They do group work in nursing
- Students keeping track of grades or grades needed
- Applying rubrics/notebooks
- Use of Internet resources/in-class/out-of-class research
- Role play problems, encourages adopting different perspectives
- Speaking exams and oral presentations added to curriculum
- Poster sessions
- Students work in small groups and present article reviews

**2. What specific changes at AWC have been implemented as a result of student learning outcomes assessment?**

- Acquisition of analytical instrumentation for science labs
- Discussion about assessment has improved communications
- Syllabus revisions to reflect needs
- Use of software for diagnosis of basic writing skills
- More conversation among faculty about what's important in the courses
- Exams have changed toward an emphasis on outcomes assessment
- More emphasis on pre and post testing
- We evaluate how math performance in sequential courses are interrelated and working to identify the problem areas so that solutions can be addressed
- Much more paper work
- Acquisition of more technology and more incorporation into course curriculum which improves communication between instructors and improves methods for teaching critical thinking
- Communication between programs to create clusters of courses designed to overcome barriers that our students have (example math class taught in Spanish)
- Mathematics will not sign in anybody given the fact that data accumulated during assessment demonstrated that they were not prepared for level courses (math faculty will no longer allow students in classes for which they have not met the prerequisite or achieved the placement test score)
- Increasing discussion between programs to better transfer students from one program to another, e.g. science to nursing; math to science
- Expanded hours for testing center
- More information available—websites
- Dept's are thinking & articulating/formulating expectations & actions that we (departments) want to achieve to provide continuity regarding the outcomes assessment process
- Difficulties with Datatel identified (Datatel is the student records system software)

**3. What evidence of student learning improvement can we show anyone who asks?**

- Students have been hired in field
- Portfolios in welding on manufacturing product
- Consistent improvement in pre-lab and post-lab activities
- Team of students tutoring through the AmericaReads Program which is based on student learning outcomes
- NCLEX scores have improved
- Nursing Care Plans become increasingly more complex
- Pre/post test results
- Higher level of technology usage by students in class assignments i.e. word processing, e-mail, Blackboard, power point presentations...

- Graduation rate
- Grade distribution analysis
- For the past two years Law Enforcement Training Academy has worked with AZPOST on developing a state-wide assessment exam to evaluate cadets as they exit the program

In summary, there is continuing dialogue across departments about learning outcomes and how to achieve them. There are more explicit statements regarding college expectations for assessment and student learning in departmental documents, College Catalog, Student Handbook & Activity Planner, open lab log-on page, websites, and brochures. There are more requests to the Office of Institutional Effectiveness, Research, and Grants from faculty for data about student learning and characteristics. Since 1998-99 more people are completing courses with A, B, C, or Credit grades. The number of degree completers is up 58% from 1998-99 (253 to 401). The number of undeclared majors continues to decrease from 3109 in Spring 2002 to 1316 in Spring 2004 while enrollment increases.

### **CHALLENGES AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

Our college serves two counties encompassing 10,000 square miles. There are five off-campus centers with class locations in another seven teaching locations. We have about 100 full-time faculty and 230 to 260 associate faculty teaching during a regular semester. It is a challenge to facilitate the involvement and continuing learning of the entire faculty relative to the Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Program. We will continue to provide information about the program to new faculty during their Despeque orientation; provide time at the Saturday beginning-of-the-semester faculty meetings for Division discussions involving full and part-time faculty; include a learning outcomes assessment session in the Associate Faculty Seminars; discuss the program in the required course EDU 250 for new faculty; add more information to the learning outcomes assessment web pages; publish an assessment newsletter more frequently; and add specific learning outcomes assessment topics to monthly Learning Services Council and division meetings.

We are not satisfied with the level of understanding of learning outcomes assessment among our students. The brochure “What Students need to know about STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT at Arizona Western College” has been translated into Spanish for our students studying English as a second language. We will distribute English or Spanish copies of the brochure to new students upon admission. We will continue to have learning outcomes information on the sign-in screens on the open lab computers. We will make presentations to student groups such as the student government organization and residence hall advisors. We will encourage faculty to spend time during the first week of class talking about the student learning outcomes assessment program. We will bring students to meetings of the Assessment Committee. We are very excited about the efforts of each Student Service program to identify specific student learning outcomes it can support. We will promote discussion among faculty and student services personnel on ways to enhance student learning by connecting classroom learning with extra curricular learning.

We will encourage degree and certificate programs to focus on fewer numbers of learning outcomes while increasing the numbers of measures used for assessing those outcomes.

We had mandated assessment for any certificate or degree program with a minimum of ten declared majors. We have learned this is not effective or efficient. In areas with small numbers of graduates, more faculty are realizing the benefit of developing an assessment program for course clusters. We will change the mandate for certificate or degree assessment from a minimum of ten declared majors to thirty declared majors, and increase the number of course cluster assessments.

### **CONTINUATION**

We have advanced from spending a great deal of time talking about “What is assessment?” and “Why should we do it?” to more time discussing the question “How can we best assess for student learning improvement?.” This is significant progress, even as debate continues in some corners as to what are “direct” measures opposed to “indirect measures.” Some faculty are questioning whether the five-column matrix is the most useful tool for their program. We may be to the point where more individuality in structure may work so long as it is systematic and focused. We look forward to the visit to demonstrate the improvement in our assessment program and our utilization of these results to improve learning. We look forward to the team consultations that will help us improve our assessment program and student learning achievement.

## **Report Respectfully Submitted By:**

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