

Liberal Arts Curriculum Assessment: A Meaningful Approach

Assessment Institute

October 30, 2023

Who the Heck Are We?

- Dr. Bob Beasley, Professor of Computing
- Dr. Justin Gash, Assistant Dean and Professor of Mathematics
- Franklin College
 - Small, liberal arts institution in Franklin, IN (25 minutes south)
 - Approximately 1000 students, 19 departments/programs with 55 majors in 24 academic disciplines
 - Liberal arts curriculum
 - Liberal arts core
 - Liberal arts exploratories

Chief Learning Goals

- Share the Philosophical Pillars that ground the liberal arts assessment process at Franklin College.
- Demonstrate the power of in-house designed technology in meaningful assessment. (Note: Our “house” is small.)
- Outline the feedback (a.k.a., closing the loop) structure that is efficient and actionable.

Outline of Presentation

- I. Introduction and Curriculum Structure
- II. A Brief History of Assessment at Franklin College
- III. Philosophical Pillars
- IV. The Liberal Arts Assessment Process
- V. A Demonstration
- VI. “Closing the Loop”
- VII. Final Remarks and Questions

Introduction – Curriculum Structure

- Liberal Arts Core
 - FYS: First-Year Seminar
 - LA 101: Reading and Writing Critically
 - LA 102: The Past and Present: The World Since 1750
 - LA 103: Quantitative Reasoning
 - LA 111: Public Speaking
 - LA 201: Analyzing Literature
- Liberal Arts Exploratories: Civic Learning, Creative Arts, Diversity, Human Behavior, International, Reasoning and Values, Scientific Reasoning
- Major Courses

A Brief History

A Brief History – The Old Process

1. Artifact selection (faculty)
2. Artifact preparation
3. Solicitation of faculty volunteers for assessment
4. Random artifact selection (assessment team)
5. Assessment team review of artifacts
6. Scoring
7. Dissemination of results

A Brief History – Old Process Problems

- I. Cumbersome in Term of Overhead
 - A. Administrative Assistants had to anonymize artifacts – strip names, scan, and itemize with numbers
 - B. Teams of faculty had to be recruited and convened for on-boarding and norming
- II. Significant Ad-hoc, Uncompensated Service Time
 - A. On-Boarding and norming
 - B. Evaluation of artifacts
- III. Insufficient administrative support and feedback - no process for “closing the loop”

A Brief History – Need for a Change

- I. Faculty sought a new liberal arts curriculum assessment process
 - A. Ad-hoc faculty committee
 - B. Visits to the Assessment Institute
 - C. Center for Inquiry and Wabash College
- II. Proposal Developed
- III. Full-Faculty discussions and surveys

Philosophical Pillars

Pillars – One through Four

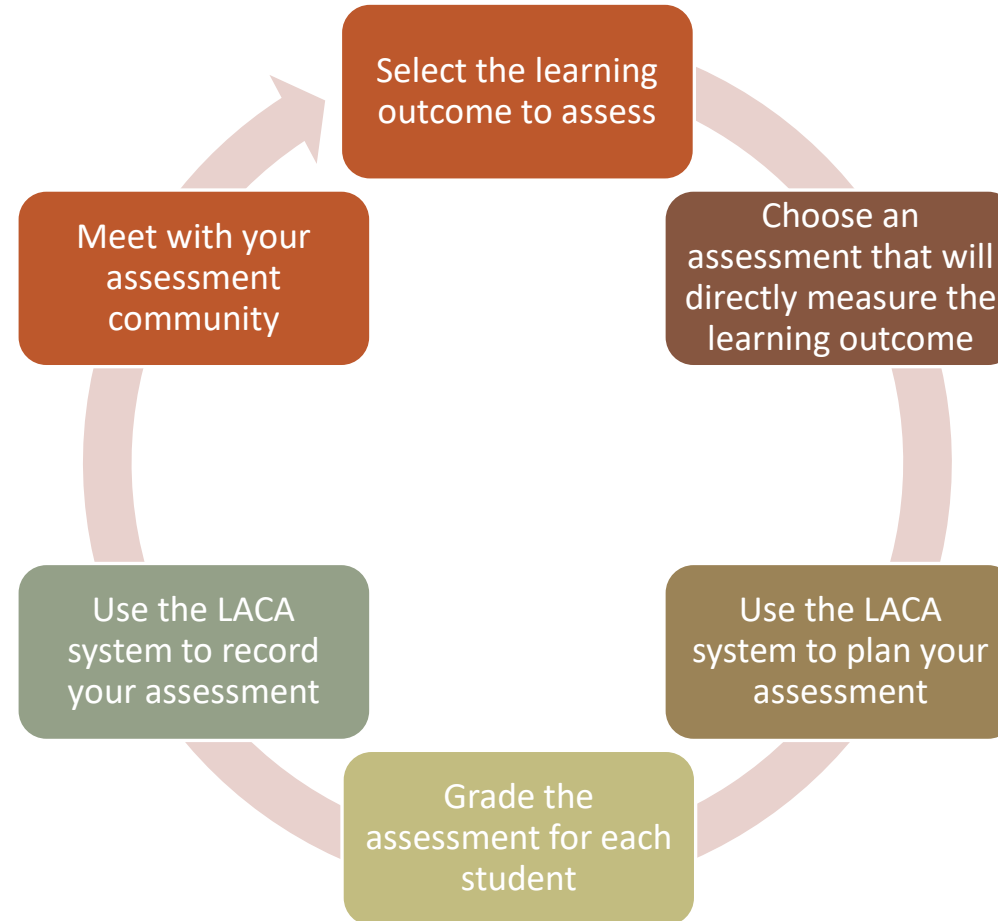
1. Assessment should not focus on compliance with the specific practices of an accrediting organization like the Higher Learning Commission.
2. Assessment should be a **faculty-owned**, internal process that focuses on the continuous improvement of **student learning**.
3. Assessment should follow a process that makes sense for our institution's curriculum and faculty.
4. Assessment should be integrated into the work the faculty is already doing.

Pillars – Five through Eight

5. Assessment should be closely aligned with faculty development.
6. Assessment should be mindful of workload as not all faculty members contribute to the Liberal Arts curriculum equally.
7. Assessment should be **simple**, transparent, manageable, and supported by the administration.
8. Assessment should support both quantitative and qualitative analysis.

The Process and the Technology

Process – The LACA Assessment Cycle



A Demo of the LACA System

Closing the Loop

Closing the Loop – Assessment Community Basics

- I. What are assessment communities?
 - A. Groups of faculty who teach courses in a particular LA Core or LA Exploratory
 - B. LA Core communities are typically from a single department
 - C. LA Exploratories and FYS are from throughout campus
- II. When do they meet?
 - A. LA Core communities can meet during regular department meetings
 - B. LA Exploratory and FYS communities meet during previously-existing meeting times

Closing the Loop – Assessment Community Goals

- III. What do assessment communities do?
 - A. Review high-level, student learning outcomes metrics
 - B. Discuss recent experiences teaching courses in the relevant LA Exploratory or LA Core course
 - C. Informally discuss action items moving forward (Sometimes)
- IV. What's the feedback?
 - A. Assessment community notes and discussion items are recorded so all faculty can see what their colleagues discussed
 - B. We trust faculty to make informed changes

The End

Any questions?