Using Course Content
to Teach and Assess
General Education Competencies

September 21, 2018 - Rampart Range Campus
Facilitated by the PPCC Assessment Committee

Information Packet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agenda</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Content Criteria, Competencies, CLOs,…</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gt Pathways Rubric</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Essential Employability Qualities</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018 Employer Research - Key Findings</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018 Employer Research – Learning Practices</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Backward Design</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signature Assignment</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transparent Assignment Template</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement Techniques</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closing the Loop</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment and Accreditation</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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8:00 - 8:30  Breakfast (W101/102)

8:30 - 9:15  Overview (W101/102) - Josh
- Navigating the evolving Higher Education landscape
- Organizing course content to fulfill general education requirements
- Engaging students in signature work

9:15 - 10:45  Peer-to-Peer Breakouts (T Building)
- Quantitative Literacy - Jen
- Inquiry and Analysis - Andrea and Evy
- Diversity and Global Learning and Civic Engagement – Sharon and Robin
- Critical Thinking and Information Literacy - Karen
- Creative Thinking - Harley
- Oral/Presentational Communication and Written Communication - Deb

10:45 - 11:00  Break

11:00 - 11:30  Regroup, Reflect, and Plan for Next Steps (W101/W102)
- Lessons learned and Directions for Department Breakouts - Josh
- Aligning course content around SLOs - Sharon
- Strengthening signature assignments - Deb
- Planning for next steps – Harley
- Adopting new SLOs/competencies – Deb

11:30 - 12:15  Lunch (W101/W102)

12:15 - 4:15  Department Breakouts (T Building)
- Aligning course content around SLOs - Sharon
- Strengthening signature assignments – Andrea, Evy, Karen
- Planning for next steps – Harley and Patricia
- Adopting new SLOs/competencies – Deb

4:15 – 5:00  Regroup and Debrief (T Building)
When passed with a C- or higher, a GT Pathways course will always transfer and apply to GT Pathways requirements in AA, AS and most bachelor’s degrees at every public Colorado college and university.

Each GT Pathways course falls under one of the following **Content Area**

- Written Communication
- Mathematics
- Arts & Expressions
- Literature & Humanities
- Ways of Thinking
- World Languages
- History
- Economic or Political Systems
- Geography
- Human Behavior, Culture or Social Frameworks
- Natural & Physical Sciences

Within the same Content Area, all GT courses shall be designed to help students develop a common set of CDHE-approved **Content Criteria**

Are mapped to at least one of the following CDHE-approved **Competencies**

- Written Communication
- Oral/Presentational Communication
- Quantitative Literacy
- Creative Thinking
- Critical Thinking
- Information Literacy
- Civic Engagement
- Diversity & Global Learning
- Inquiry & Analysis

Each GT course shall provide students with multiple opportunities to learn and practice two types of equally important **Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)**

**CCCSE-required**

**Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs)**

- Represent the course-specific knowledge and skills students should possess upon completing a given course

- Are posted on the Colorado Common Course Numbering System (CCCNS) website

**CDHE-required**

**General Education Outcomes (GEOs)**

- Represent the general education skills students should possess upon completing a given course

- Derive from the CDHE-approved competencies (ex: “Develop Content” is one of the required GEOs associated with the “Written Communication” competency)

- Can be assessed using the associated **statewide rubric**

SLOs shall be aligned with one another to ensure that what students learn in their courses (CLOs) helps them achieve essential general education skills (GEOs).

SLOs “tell students what they should learn and faculty what they should teach and assess. They also tell employers, accreditors, colleagues, and other stakeholders what a given class should prepare students to know and do” T. W. Banta
Critical Thinking Competency

Criteria for Critical Thinking
Competency in critical thinking addresses a student’s ability to analyze information and ideas from multiple perspectives and articulate an argument or an opinion or a conclusion based on their analysis.

Students should be able to:
1. Explain an Issue
   • Use information to describe a problem or issue.
2. Utilize Context
   • Evaluate the relevance of context when presenting a position.
   • Identify assumptions.
   • Analyze one’s own and others’ assumptions.
3. Create a Personal Response
   • Identify a specific position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis) that takes into account the complexities of an issue.
   • Synthesize other points of view within their own position.
4. Incorporate Evidence (GT-HI1) *This means #4 is required of all GT Pathways history courses.
   • Including primary and secondary, to the scope and discipline. Connect evidence to claim/thesis.
   • Interpret sources to develop an analysis or synthesis.
   • Evaluate sources to develop an analysis or synthesis.
5. Understand Implications and Make Conclusions
   • Establish a conclusion that is tied to the range of information presented.
   • Reflect on implications and consequences of stated conclusion.

Performance Levels

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Explain an Issue(s)</td>
<td>Issue/problem/question to be critically considered is stated</td>
<td>Issue/problem/question to be critically considered is stated</td>
<td>Issue/problem/question to be critically considered is stated but</td>
<td>Issue/problem/question to be critically considered is stated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>clearly and described comprehensively, deliver all relevant</td>
<td>clearly and described, and clarified so that understanding is not</td>
<td>described but description leaves some terms undefined, ambiguous,</td>
<td>described without any clarification or description.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>information necessary for full understanding.</td>
<td>seriously impeded by omissions.</td>
<td>unexplored, boundaries undetermined, and/or connections unknown.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Utilize Context –</td>
<td>Thoroughly and carefully identifies and evaluates the relevance</td>
<td>Identifies several relevant contexts and offers a brief evaluation of their influences when presenting a position.</td>
<td>Identifies but does not evaluate relevant contexts when presenting a position.</td>
<td>Begins to identify some contexts when presenting a position.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevance of Context</td>
<td>of contexts when presenting a position.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilize Context –</td>
<td>Thoroughly analyzes and evaluates all (one’s own and others’)</td>
<td>Identifies and evaluates one’s own and others’ assumptions, but not the ones deeper in the background – the more abstract ones.</td>
<td>Identifies some of the most important assumptions, or may be more aware of others’ assumptions than one’s own (or vice versa), but does not evaluate them for plausibility or clarity.</td>
<td>Attempts to identify an assumption behind the claims and recommendations made, but overlooks other relevant assumptions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify Assumptions</td>
<td>assumptions including some of the more hidden, more abstract</td>
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Descriptors
The Essential Employability Qualities

Communicators: Graduates express ideas and information coherently and appropriately in a variety of modes appropriate to work-based settings, including in writing, orally, interpersonally, and in presentations. Graduates participate in discussions by listening actively and responding constructively. They demonstrate competence in engaging with others from cultural backgrounds different from their own.

Thinkers & Problem Solvers: Graduates exercise initiative in applying critical and creative thinking skills to identify and address complex work-related problems. Graduates accurately apply quantitative, financial, data, and technical fluency, and demonstrate cultural competence in addressing work-based situations. Graduates are system thinkers and demonstrate an ability to understand concepts and perspectives across multiple disciplines and different cultures.

Inquirers: Graduates conduct inquiry and research by reviewing, evaluating, verifying, citing, and applying multiple sources of information and perspectives to help address work-based problems or to perform tasks. Graduates generate new ideas through independent or collaborative inquiry.

Collaborators: Graduates engage in teams and groups and work effectively and willingly in collaboration with others both in person and virtually. Graduates seek a range of points of view, are willing to modify their perspectives, and they help resolve conflicts where appropriate. Graduates work effectively with colleagues from diverse backgrounds and cultures, individually or in groups. They exhibit cross-cultural competence in working with others. Graduates take initiative in leading work-based groups, and/or follow direction from others as appropriate.

Adaptable: Graduates approach new or unfamiliar work-based situations and uncertainty with agility and openness. Graduates explore, learn, and apply new roles, ideas, perspectives, approaches, tools, technologies, and strategies to support their effective work-place contributions. They understand the implications of an increasingly globally interconnected world, and can work effectively across a variety of environments, cultures, and perspectives.

Principled and Ethical: Graduates make reasoned, ethical decisions about work-based situations or problems. Graduates act equitably and with integrity and honesty, with a strong sense of fairness and respect for individuals, groups, and broadly diverse communities.

Responsible and Professional: Graduates establish priorities and manage their time to meet the obligations of work-related assignments with a minimum of external supervision or direction. Graduates carry out their responsibilities consistently, persistently, reliably, and maintain appropriate confidentiality. They take responsibility for their own actions and the consequences that accompany them.

Learners: Graduates adopt new tools (technologies or strategies) for working more effectively, analyzing work-based situations, or making decisions. Graduates continually develop themselves professionally, interculturally, and personally. They assess and understand their strengths and areas for improvement in order to support their learning and professional development. Graduates seek out and engage in formal and informal professional learning opportunities on a continuing basis and actively apply learning from these opportunities to work-related assignments.
KEY FINDINGS FROM
2018 EMPLOYER RESEARCH

• A College Degree Is Important. 82% of executives and 75% of hiring managers believe that it is very important or essential to complete a college education. 88% of executives and 85% of hiring managers consider the money and time involved in getting a college degree to be worthwhile.

• Employers Have More Confidence in Colleges and Universities than Does the American Public. Among executives and hiring managers, 63% express confidence in colleges and universities, a notably higher proportion than among the American public. In a 2018 Gallup poll, 45% of adults nationwide express confidence in colleges and universities.*

Employer Priorities on Select College Learning Outcomes

**Intellectual and Practical Skills**

- Oral communication
- Teamwork skills with diverse groups
- Written communication
- Critical thinking and analytic reasoning
- Complex problem solving
- Information literacy
- Innovation and creativity
- Technological skills
- Quantitative reasoning

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Executives</th>
<th>Hiring Managers</th>
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<tr>
<td>Oral communication</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teamwork skills</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written communication</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical thinking</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complex problem solving</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information literacy</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innovation and creativity</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technological skills</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quantitative reasoning</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>55%</td>
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**Personal and Social Responsibility**

- Ethical judgment and decision making
- Work independently—set priorities, manage time/deadlines
- Self-motivated—ability to take initiative and be proactive

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<tr>
<td>Ethical judgment</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>87%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Work independently</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-motivated</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>85%</td>
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**Integrative and Applied Learning**

- Applied knowledge in real-world settings

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Executives</th>
<th>Hiring Managers</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Applied knowledge</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>79%</td>
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</table>

www.aacu.org/leap/public-opinion-research.
EMPLOYER RESEARCH SUPPORTS
INQUIRY AND ENGAGED LEARNING PRACTICES

**Employer Endorsement of Select Practices**
Seven existing and emerging educational practices were tested and employers believe that these practices have the potential to improve the education of today’s college students and prepare graduates to succeed in the workplace. These include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>More likely to hire employees with these experiences:</th>
<th>Executives</th>
<th>Hiring Managers</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Internship/apprenticeship with a company/organization</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project in community with people from diverse backgrounds</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple courses requiring significant writing assignments</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research project done collaboratively with peers</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced, comprehensive senior project/thesis</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service learning project with community organization</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study abroad program</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>47%</td>
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**Employer-Related Civic Engagement***
(Company currently does this or is considering doing it)

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Executives</th>
<th>Hiring Managers</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organize opportunities for employees to volunteer</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give employees time off to volunteer</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide in-kind donations of equipment/supplies to charitable organizations</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide pro-bono services to charitable organizations</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

www.aacu.org/leap/public-opinion-research.

Backward Design

1. Identify Desired Results.
   - Big Ideas and Skills

2. Determine acceptable evidence.
   - Culminating Assessment Task

3. Plan learning experiences and instruction.
   - Learning Events

Backward design is a method of designing educational curriculum by setting goals before choosing instructional methods and forms of assessment.

Backward design of curriculum typically involves three stages:

1. **Identify the results desired (big ideas and skills)**
   - What should the students know, understand, and be able to do?
   - Consider the goals and curriculum expectations
   - Focus on the "big ideas" (principles, theories, concepts, point of views, or themes)

2. **Determine acceptable levels of evidence that support that the desired results have occurred (culminating assessment tasks)**
   - What will teachers accept as evidence that student understanding took place?
   - Consider culminating assessment tasks and a range of assessment methods (observations, tests, projects, etc.)

3. **Design activities that will make desired results happen (learning events)**
   - What knowledge and skills will students need to achieve the desired results?
   - Consider teaching methods, sequence of lessons, and resource materials

The Anatomy of an Effective Signature Assignment

☐ Covers two or more general education learning outcomes and one or more program-level or course-level outcomes. The assignment helps students make connections, i.e., integrate learning from their major, general education courses, and even co-curricular activities. (horizontally and vertically integrated)

☐ Assignment instructions/prompts are closely linked to specific learning outcomes and evaluation criteria. The assignment is intentionally designed to collect evidence of student learning on the chosen SLOs. (purposefully designed)

☐ Asks students to apply knowledge and skills in new contexts, real-life “unscripted” situations, or problems and projects that are important to the student and the society. (authentic)

☐ Is course-embedded, i.e., integral part of the regular coursework students are required to complete to pass the course. Advantages: seamless fit with course content, opportunity for meaningful and timely feedback from the instructor, and the assignment incurs no added cost or requirements for students. (evaluative)

☐ Offers opportunities for students to “actively” demonstrate what they have learned. Active learning experiences promote deep, lasting learning and have been associated with greater success, especially among underserved students. (performance-based)

☐ Accounts for a significant portion of the final grade (at least 10%, ideally 15% - 20% or more). By giving this assignment significant weight, students are encouraged to give their best thought and effort. (substantial)

☐ Asks students to demonstrate what they have learned as they near course or program completion. (summative)

☐ Reflects the knowledge and skills students develop throughout the curriculum. As such, signature assignments provide a clear demonstration of higher-order thinking on Bloom’s taxonomy (e.g. analysis, evaluation). (culminating)

☐ Includes prompts/instructions that clearly describe the purpose of the assignment, the tasks to be performed, and the grading/evaluation criteria. (transparent)

☐ Provides robust and meaningful data that will help your department identify where students excel and where they need extra help. (informative)

☐ May be customized based on students’ interests and strengths. (unique)

☐ May include a component asking students to reflect on their own learning and development, or upon where their own strengths lie and what skills and values they would like to develop or explore further. (reflective)

Reference: The LEAP Challenge: Engaging in Capstones and Signature Work. AAC&U Peer Review (Spring 2018)
Transparent Assignment Template

© 2013 Mary-Ann Winkelmes

This template can be used as a guide for developing, explaining, and discussing class activities and out-of-class assignments. Making these aspects of each course activity or assignment explicitly clear to students has demonstrably enhanced students’ learning in a national study.¹

Assignment Name

Due date:

Purpose: Define the learning objectives, in language and terms that help students recognize how this assignment will benefit their learning. Ideally, indicate how these are connected with institutional learning outcomes, and how the specific knowledge and skills involved in this assignment will be important in students’ lives beyond the contexts of this assignment, this course, and this college.

Skills: The purpose of this assignment is to help you practice the following skills that are essential to your success in this course / in school / in this field / in professional life beyond school:

Terms from Bloom’s Taxonomy of Educational Objectives may help you explain these skills in language students will understand. Listed from cognitively simple to most complex, these skills are:

- understanding basic disciplinary knowledge and methods/tools
- applying basic disciplinary knowledge/tools to problem-solving in a similar but unfamiliar context
- analyzing
- synthesizing
- judging/evaluating and selecting best solutions
- creating/inventing a new interpretation, product, theory

Knowledge: This assignment will also help you to become familiar with the following important content knowledge in this discipline:

1.
2.

Task: Define what activities the student should do/perform. “Question cues” from this chart might be helpful: http://www.asainstitute.org/conference2013/handouts/20-Bloom-Question-Cues-Chart.pdf. List any steps or guidelines, or a recommended sequence for the students’ efforts. Specify any extraneous mistakes to be avoided.

Criteria for Success:

Define the characteristics of the finished product. Provide multiple, annotated examples of what these characteristics look like in practice, to encourage students’ creativity and reduce their incentive to copy any one example too closely. With students, collaboratively analyze examples of work before the students begin working. Explain how excellent work differs from adequate work. It is often useful to provide or compile with students a checklist of characteristics of successful work. This enables students to evaluate the effectiveness of their own efforts while they are working, and to judge the quality of their completed work. Students can also use the checklist to provide feedback on peers’ coursework. Indicate whether this task/product will be graded and/or how it factors into the student’s overall grade for the course. Later, asking students to reflect and comment on their completed, graded work allows them to focus on changes to their learning strategies that might improve their future work.

* The author developed and earlier version of this template at the the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.

# Use of Active Learning Techniques to Produce Assessable Artefacts

## Analysis and Critical Thinking

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Examples</th>
<th>Source</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#8 Classify – Teachers gather a collection of items (specimens, images). Then, students examine and sort the contents into categories based on shared features.</td>
<td>Art Appreciation, Animal Physiology</td>
<td>Student Engagement Techniques, pp.188-189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#10 Believing and Doubting – First, students are asked to read a text and appreciate the authors’ perspectives. Then, student reread the text and look for its weaknesses.</td>
<td>Biology</td>
<td>Student Engagement Techniques, p.196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#11 Academic Controversy – Students discuss and argue both sides of a controversy. This technique can challenge student’s existing assumptions.</td>
<td>Art History</td>
<td>Student Engagement Techniques, p. 200</td>
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## Synthesis and Creative Thinking

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<th>Description</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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<tr>
<td>#17 Variations – students create an altered version of the original, such as rewriting the ending of a story, imagining the consequences of a changed event in history, composing a different conclusion to a famous musical composition.</td>
<td>Music Theory and Composition, Christian Thought and Church history</td>
<td>Student Engagement Techniques, pp. 226-227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#18 Letters – Students assume the identity of an important or famous person in the discipline and write a letter explaining their thoughts to a person who holds a different perspective; helps develop student’s ability to draw inferences from or conclusions about material they are studying.</td>
<td>Honors Institute Seminar in Science, History of Constitutional Law</td>
<td>Student Engagement Techniques, p. 230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#20 Poster Sessions – Students create posters or exhibits that illustrate their understanding of key course topics, issues, or ideas.</td>
<td>Advanced Ceramics, Introduction to physics, Music of Multicultural America</td>
<td>Student Engagement Techniques pp. 239-240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#22 WebQuests – Using instructor-specified websites, students investigate an open-ended question and synthesize their understanding. Webquests create a bridge between what is learned in the classroom and the world outside the classroom.</td>
<td>Organic Chemistry, Advanced Spanish</td>
<td>Student Engagement Techniques pp. 247-248</td>
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## Problem Solving

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<th>Examples</th>
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<tr>
<td>#26 Proclamations – Students identify an analyze a problematic situation in the local community then write a speech for a government official to persuade others of the urgency of the problem and offer strategies for solving the problem.</td>
<td>Race and Ethnic Relations</td>
<td>Student Engagement Techniques, p. 265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#28 Case Studies – Requires analysis, problem solving, decision-making, and justification.</td>
<td>Physical Geology</td>
<td>Student Engagement Techniques, p. 273</td>
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### Application and Performance

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<th>Description</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>#29 Contemporary Issues Journal</strong> – Students look for connections between course material and recent events. This technique makes it easier for students to see the relevance of what they learn in the classroom.</td>
<td>Applied Ethics, Music Business</td>
<td>Student Engagement Techniques, p. 277</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>#32 Insights-Resources-Applications</strong> – Students complete a written assignment that includes 1) new perceptions or understandings (Insights), 2) a resource that amplifies an assigned reading (Resources), and 3) an example from the student’s personal experience (Application)</td>
<td>Survey of International Business</td>
<td>Student Engagement Techniques, p. 287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>#15 Consider This</strong> – Students are given a theory or concept and are challenged to figure out a way to apply it in a new and different context</td>
<td>Geography and Globalization, Music History</td>
<td>Learning Assessment Techniques, pp. 171 -172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>#20 Digital Projects</strong> – Students create projects that enhance and document their learning (e.g. videos, infographics, websites, podcasts)</td>
<td>Recording Studio Production Techniques</td>
<td>Learning Assessment Techniques</td>
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### Integration

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<th>Description</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>#28 Class Book</strong> – Students submit a scholarly essay or research paper that they believe represents their highest quality work from the course, and then all best papers are published together in a Class Book.</td>
<td>Composition, Critical Reading and Thinking</td>
<td>Learning Assessment Techniques, p. 251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>#29 Portfolios</strong> – Students assemble examples of work that they have created and supplement this collection of examples with commentary about their significance</td>
<td>Introduction to Biology, Introduction to the History of Art</td>
<td>Learning Assessment Techniques, pp. 257-259</td>
</tr>
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</table>

### Attitudes and Values

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<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Examples</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>#35 Autobiographical Observations</strong> – Students write an essay in response to a prompt that asks them to reflect upon their personal history in relation to the course or discipline. This technique helps students explore their beliefs, values, preferences...</td>
<td>Music of Multicultural America</td>
<td>Student Engagement Techniques, p. 302</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>#38 Ethical Dilemmas</strong> – Help students think through their values within the context of real-world and course-related situations</td>
<td>Microcontroller Programming, Statistics</td>
<td>Student Engagement Techniques</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Human Dimension

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Examples</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>#31 Nominations</strong> – Students research outstanding individuals in the field, write a profile of the individual, and indicate why he or she should be considered for an award</td>
<td>Introduction to Physics, Broadcast Journalism</td>
<td>Learning Assessment Techniques, pp. 279-280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>#33 Dramatic Dialogues</strong> – Students create a dialogue based on an imagined discussion between imaginary or real characters</td>
<td>History of Philanthropy in the United States</td>
<td>Learning Assessment Techniques, p. 290</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## The Anatomy of an Effective Curricular/Pedagogical Change

| Moderate to Extensive | Moderate: a new or modified unit or segment of the course curriculum  |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------------------------|---|
| Moderate to Extensive | Major: a complete redesign of an entire course, reexamine course prerequisite |---|
| Moderate to Extensive | Extensive: restructuring of the curriculum or pedagogical approaches that involved several courses within a given academic program |---|
| Note: Minor changes might not be enough to move the needle | |---|
| Large scale | The proposed changes are implemented across all sections of the same course |---|
| Repeated | Enrichment activities are repeated throughout the semester |---|
| Inescapable | All students are exposed to the change |---|
| Inescapable | Examples: |---|
| Inescapable | Requiring students to use tutoring services vs. recommending students to use tutoring services |---|
| Inescapable | Extra practice scheduled during class time vs. extra practice sheet available to students in D2L |---|
| Agreed-upon | All Faculty and Adjunct Instructors teaching the course are involved in identifying and planning the proposed changes. |---|

### Example of “Closing the Loop” Story

*Adapted from AIR Professional Files (Summer 2017) Needle in a Hay Stack: Finding Learning Improvement in Assessment Reports (Fulcher et al.)*

At the conclusion of the 1980s Pop Culture degree program, students should be able to properly cite and reference a variety of sources in a research paper. In 2014–2015 the program used a rubric to evaluate all students’ final research papers. Rubric scores revealed that students were not successful at citing or referencing sources. During a departmental discussion, program faculty confirmed that many students struggle to properly cite and reference sources.

After agreeing that the learning outcome of properly citing sources was both relevant and unmet, faculty agreed on curricular and pedagogical changes to address the issue. Before implementing new changes, faculty consulted with other instructors on campus and gathered information regarding what assignments could be effective at teaching such a specific skill set. Changes to the core courses of the 1980s Pop Culture program began in the fall of 2015. Specifically, the instructors of the two classes where writing is heavily emphasized—PCUL401 (1980s Politics and Culture) and PCUL404 (The 1980s and Today)—did the following:

1. Participated in a faculty development workshop during which the instructors found and agreed on examples of students’ citing and referencing sources in their papers. Some examples were developing papers and others were advanced papers.
2. Shared the results of the past writing assessment with students, emphasizing that citing and referencing sources is a concern.
3. Provided modified examples of a developing and advanced paper to illustrate program expectations.
4. Created more in-class assignments to measure student progress, and encouraged students to rely on their own skills, instead of on online citation software, to create references.
5. Used the writing rubric to evaluate students’ essays throughout the semester instead of using the rubric solely for the final research paper.

Results from curricular and pedagogical changes suggested that students’ ability to cite and reference sources, as measured by the writing rubric, improved over time. Specifically, seniors’ scores on the citing and sourcing element increased from 65% at “developing and competent” in 2015, the year before the curricular and pedagogical changes were implemented, to 70% in 2016 and 73% in 2017, the years after the changes were implemented.
Assessment and Accreditation

HLC Guiding Values

• **Assessment of student learning** and focus on persistence and completion are ways in which the institution improves and thus **assures the quality of its teaching and learning**.

• A process of assessment is essential to **continuous improvement** and therefore a commitment to assessment should be **deeply embedded** in an institution’s activities.

• For student learning, a commitment to assessment would mean assessment at the **program level** that proceeds from **clear goals**, **involves faculty** at all points in the process, and **analyzes the assessment results**.

• Institutions committed to improvement review their programs regularly and seek **external judgment**, advice, or benchmarks in their assessments.

• Assessment and the processes an institution learns from should be well-grounded in **evidence**.

**Third Position Statement on Student Learning, Assessment, and Accreditation (2007)**

Among the public’s many expectations of higher education, the most basic is that students will learn, and in particular that they will learn what they need to know to attain personal success and fulfill their public responsibilities in a global and diverse society. **Student learning is central to all higher education organizations**; therefore, these organizations define educational quality--one of their core purposes--by how well they achieve their declared mission relative to student learning. A focus on achieved student learning is critical not only to a higher education organization’s ability to promote and improve curricular and co-curricular learning experiences and to **provide evidence of the quality of educational experiences and programs**, but also to fulfill the most basic public expectations and needs of higher education.

In October 1989, the Commission first posited that assessment of student learning is an essential component of every organization’s effort to evaluate overall organizational effectiveness. In February 2003, The Higher Learning Commission adopted a newly revised position statement on assessment of student learning to reaffirm and strengthen this position. Through the Criteria for Accreditation and multiple Core Components, the Commission makes clear the **centrality of student learning to effective higher education organizations** and extends and deepens its commitment to and expectations for assessment. Indeed, the Commission asserts that assessment is more than a response to demands for accountability, more than a means for curricular improvement. **Effective assessment is best understood as a strategy for understanding, confirming, and improving student learning**.

Six fundamental questions serve as prompts for conversations about student learning and the role of assessment in affirming and improving that learning:

1. How are your stated student learning outcomes appropriate to your mission, programs, degrees, and students?
2. **What evidence do you have that students achieve your stated learning outcomes?**
3. In what ways do you analyze and use evidence of student learning?
4. How do you ensure shared responsibility for student learning and for assessment of student learning?
5. How do you evaluate and improve the effectiveness of your efforts to assess and improve student learning?
6. In what ways do you inform the public and other stakeholders about what students are learning and how well?
In using these questions, an organization should ground its conversations in its distinct mission, context, commitments, goals and intended outcomes for student learning. In addition to informing ongoing improvement in student learning, these conversations will assist organizations and peer reviewers in discerning evidence for the Criteria and Core Components.

The fundamental questions and the conversations they prompt are intended to support a strategy of inquiry into student learning. Further, the questions are intended to support this strategy of inquiry, built on principles of good practice, as a participative and iterative process that:

- Provides information regarding student learning,
- Engages stakeholders in analyzing and using information on student learning to confirm and improve teaching and learning,
- Produces evidence that confirms achievement of intended student learning outcomes, and
- Guides broader educational and organizational improvement.

In other words, organizations assess student learning in meaningful, useful, and workable ways to evaluate how they are achieving their commitments and to act on the results in ways that advance student learning and improve educational quality. Effective assessment of student learning is a matter of commitment, not a matter of compliance.

The centrality of student learning and the fundamental nature of assessment as a strategy for understanding and improving that learning are embedded directly into the Criteria and Core Components. Thus, peer reviewers seeking evidence for the Criteria and Core Components will discern evidence of the commitment to student learning and the meaningful use of assessment to confirm and improve student learning. Neither the Criteria nor Core Components prescribe specific methods for assessing and improving student learning. It is inevitable and desirable that diverse organizations exhibit a wide variety of approaches and embed assessment of student learning in a variety of institutional forms and processes. Thus, the Commission and its peer reviewers will not approach the review with expectations for specific ways in which assessment efforts are structured and implemented, but rather with a focus on student learning and the use of assessment to confirm and improve that learning within the context and mission of the organization.

To remain focused on student learning and assessment as a strategy for confirming and improving that learning, peer reviewers may use the fundamental questions as prompts to engage faculty, staff, students, and administrators in conversations about the organization’s (a) commitment to improving student learning and educational quality; (b) sustained effort to collect, analyze, and use data and information on student learning; (c) evidence that students have achieved the learning intended; (d) shared responsibility for student learning and assessment of student learning; and (e) successes and challenges in improving student learning and educational quality through assessment. These conversations will assist peer reviewers in understanding the organization’s commitment to student learning and approaches to assessment of that learning within the organization’s context and mission. Further, the conversation will assist in discerning areas for consultation and in identifying and validating evidence related to the Criteria and Core Components. Peer reviewers will base their accreditation-related judgments and recommendations on this evidence as it relates to the Criteria and Core Components.

Finally, the Commission realizes that assessment of student learning is an ongoing, dynamic process that requires substantial time; that is often marked by fits and starts; and that takes long-term commitment and leadership. It is reasonable for organizations to use different approaches and timetables in implementing their assessment of student learning efforts. Nevertheless, the Commission expects that each organization can demonstrate a sustained effort to implement assessment processes that are workable, reasonable, meaningful, and useful in confirming and improving student learning and in assuring and advancing broader educational and organizational quality.