



FACULTY TOOLBOX - SOMETHING TO CONSIDER

Assessment Newsletter

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- HLC OPEN PATHWAY & CLOUD COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE -



In 2012-13, Cloud County Community College became one of several institutions selected by the Higher Learning Commission to participate in the Open Pathways Project. The Pathways project is a proposed new model for continued accreditation.

According to HLC, the Open Pathway has the following goals:

- ◆ To enhance institutional value by opening the Improvement Process for stable, healthy institutions so they may choose Quality Initiatives to suit their current circumstances.
- ◆ To reduce the reporting burden on institutions by utilizing as much information and data as possible from existing reports and collecting them in electronic for as they naturally occur over time.
- ◆ To enhance rigor by using a system that checks institutional data annually, allows for additional assurance needed, and looks in depth twice in the 10-year cycle.
- ◆ To integrate as much as possible all HLC processes and Commission requests for data into the Assurance Process and continued accreditation cycle.
- ◆ To be as cost efficient as possible.

The project consists of two complementary components:

- (1) The Assurance Process
- (2) The Improvement Process



Assurance Process

The Assurance Process consists of ongoing review and monitoring. Each year, the College submits an Annual Institutional Data Update (AIDU) which allows the HLC to review financial and non-financial indicators and follow up as needed. The process also consists of a more formal review, occurring in years four and ten of the accreditation cycle. The Assurance is based on evidence that is compiled and stored electronically. The fourth-year review consists of analysis of the electronic evidence file and a telephone or video conference, if needed. The tenth-year review adds a campus visit. Because CCCC is serving as a pioneer institution, and thus the time frame is significantly shortened, the CCCC's Assurance Review does not need to be completed during 2014-2015 school year as it has been waived. However, we should prepare ourselves as if we being reviewed.

Improvement Process (Quality Initiative)

The Open Pathway requires the institution to undertake a major Quality Initiative designed to suit its present concerns or aspirations. The Quality Initiative takes place between years 5 and 9 of the 10-year Open Pathway Cycle. A Quality Initiative may be designed to begin and be completed during this time or it may continue an initiative already in progress or achieve a key milestone in the work of a longer initiative. The Quality Initiative is intended to allow institutions to take risks, aim high, and if so be it, learn from only partial success or even failure.

To complete the Improvement Process, the institution designs a Quality Initiative based on its own needs. The Quality Initiative includes a proposal that outlines the project and details the expected outcomes. The proposal is reviewed by a set of peer reviewers. Once approval occurs, the initiative is implemented. In general, initiatives may begin in years 5 or 7 and must conclude by year 9 of the 10-year accreditation cycle. For CCCC this begins in 2015 and continues through 2020.

The Quality Initiative also includes a report, prepared by the institution at the conclusion of the project. The report is reviewed, typically at a distance, by a peer review team. A campus visit may be requested by the institution. The peer review team writes a report and recommendations. It should be noted that no sanctions can arise from the Quality Initiative.

The Quality Initiative can take one of three forms:

1. The institution designs and proposes its own Quality Initiative to suit its present concerns or aspirations
 2. The institution choose an initiative from a menu of topics, such as the following examples:
 - The institution undertakes a broad based self-evaluation and reflection leading to revision or restatement of its mission, vision, and goals;
 - The institution joins with a group of peer institutions, which it identifies, to develop a benchmarking process for broad institutional self-evaluation;
 - The institution undertakes a multi-year process to create systemic, comprehensive assessment and improvement of student learning; A four-year institution joins with community colleges to create a program of dual admission, joint recruitment and coordinated curriculum and student support;
 - The institution pursues a strategic initiative to improve its financial position;
- The institution engages in a Commission-endorsed program or process offered by another agency, such as the Foundations of Excellence program offered by the Gardner Institute for Excellence in Undergraduate Education or the LEAP Initiative offered by the Association of American Colleges and Universities.

Most Common Topics of Quality Initiatives submitted to the Commission (examples):

- Student success (including Foundations of Excellence and focus on persistence & completion)
- Assessment of student learning
- Organizational planning
- Developing a quality culture
- Online/mobile Learning (including Quality Matters)
- Unit or program review
- Cultural competency

3. The institution chooses to participate in a Commission-facilitated program. Currently, the Commission has two such programs, the Academy for Assessment of Student Learning and Academy for Student Persistence and Completion. This step will occur once we have adapted our structure to reflect various aspects of those items mention in areas 1 and 2.

Pathways at CCCC

CCCC’s reaccreditation date was November of 2010. As a result, our participation as a pioneer institution in the Pathways project means our Assurance and Improvement Processes must be ready for review in 2018-2019 to allow for completion. Review takes place during 2020-2021. CCCC has made great strides toward meeting these new goals. To learn more about CCCC’s current assessment efforts and its response to the Pathways Project for Reaccreditation, see the CCCC Assessment newsletter and board meeting minutes for updates.



Community colleges are a vital part of the postsecondary education delivery system. They serve almost half of the undergraduate students in the United States, providing open access to postsecondary education, preparing students for transfer to 4-year institutions, providing workforce development and skills training, and offering noncredit programs ranging from English as a second language to skills retraining to community enrichment programs or cultural activities.

Globalization is driving changes in our economy, and the need for an educated workforce has never been greater. The majority of new jobs that will be created by 2014 will require some postsecondary education. In addition, the demographics of the workforce are changing. As a result, employers increasingly rely on the very students who currently are least likely to complete their education. Without community colleges, millions of students and adult learners would not be able to access the education they need to be prepared for further education or the workplace. Community colleges often are the access point for education in a town and a real catalyst for economic development.

- * Total number of community colleges = 1,132
- * Degrees and certificates awarded (2011–2012) Associate degrees 770,797 Certificates 436,037
- * Average Annual Tuition and Fees (2013-2014) Community colleges (public, in district) – \$3,260 / 4-year colleges (public, in state) – \$8,890
- * First generation to attend college – 36%, Single parent – 17%, Non-U.S. citizens – 7%, Veterans – 4%, and Students with disabilities – 12%

American Association of Community Colleges. (2014). AACC database [Data file]. Washington, DC: American Association of Community Colleges.

