



Ad Hoc Report Recommendation 3

**Dawson Community College
Glendive, Montana**

**Prepared for the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities
February 22, 2024**



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Introduction

On July 25, 2022, subsequent to our Year 7 Spring 2022 Evaluation of Institutional Effectiveness, Dawson Community College received a letter reaffirming the institution’s accreditation and identifying five recommendations for the College. Recommendations 1, 2, 4, and 5 indicated four areas in which DCC is substantially in compliance but in need of improvement. These four recommendations are being actively addressed and will be reviewed during our Mid-Cycle Review in Spring 2025.

Recommendation 3, however, alerted the institution to an area that was out of compliance with the NWCCU Standards for Accreditation. As a result of this finding, DCC is required to “take appropriate action to ensure this Recommendation is addressed and resolved within a two-year period from the date of this letter.”

More specifically, regarding Recommendation 3, the Commission concluded that DCC must:

Establish a meaningful set of institutional learning outcomes that apply to all certificate and degree programs, and implement an assessment process to consistently measure student achievement of institutional learning outcomes that leads to continuous improvement in student learning across the college. (2020 Standard(s) ER 5; 1.C.6)

Furthermore, as a result of this particular recommendation, the Commission is requiring this Ad Hoc Report from Dawson Community College and will then follow up with an evaluation visit in Spring 2024, scheduled for April 4.

The following report is presented in fulfillment of these requirements.

Response to Recommendation 3

The Commission recommends that Dawson Community College:

Establish a meaningful set of institutional learning outcomes that apply to all certificate and degree programs, and implement an assessment process to consistently measure student achievement of institutional learning outcomes that leads to continuous improvement in student learning across the college. (2020 Standards ER 5; 1.C.6)

NWCCU Eligibility Requirement (ER) 5:

STUDENT LEARNING: The institution identifies and publishes the expected learning outcomes for each of its degree, certificate, or credential programs. The institution engages in regular and ongoing assessment to validate student learning and, consistent with its mission, the institution establishes and assesses student learning outcomes (or core competencies) examples of which include, but are not limited to, effective communication, global awareness, cultural sensitivity, scientific and quantitative reasoning, critical analysis and logical thinking, problem solving, and/or information literacy that are assessed across all associate and bachelor level programs or within a General Education curriculum.

NWCCU Standard 1.C.6:

Consistent with its mission, the institution establishes and assesses, across all associate and bachelor level programs or within a General Education curriculum, institutional learning outcomes and/or core competencies. Examples of such learning outcomes and competencies include, but are not limited to, effective communication skills, global awareness, cultural sensitivity, scientific and quantitative reasoning, critical analysis and logical thinking, problem solving, and/or information literacy.

In response to the Commission’s recommendation, and in order to ensure that the College re-establishes compliance in these areas, DCC has taken the following steps:

1. *Established a meaningful set of institutional learning outcomes (ILOs) that apply to all certificate and degree programs.*

From January through April of 2022, in recognition that our current assessment processes were missing the mark, and in anticipation of receiving a recommendation from NWCCU at our Year 7 Evaluation of Institutional Effectiveness, DCC faculty formed a work group to review the institution’s current process for assessing student learning. Over several weeks and many hours of collaboration, the faculty made two significant changes to the process of student learning assessment.

First, a decision was made to refocus assessment efforts at the program level. For several years prior to 2022, assessment of student learning was focused primarily on course learning outcomes and collecting quantitative data regarding student performance on course assignments. Each instructor was tasked with completing Student Learning Outcome reports for every course they taught every semester. While this process did provide some valuable feedback, faculty generally agreed that the process was burdensome and inadequately considered instructors’ qualitative feedback on instruction and student learning. Additionally, once the SLO reports were submitted, little was done with them to prompt continuous improvement at the program or institutional level. Some positive changes were made to courses, but the assessment process lacked a holistic application.

The second important change made by DCC faculty was a clarification of the College’s Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILOs) and their relationship to academic programs and courses. Using the previous model, a faculty member assessing program-level outcomes would be expected to assess student learning connected to all six ILOs and all program or concentration-level outcomes related to their academic area every single year. In many cases, this would mean assessing more than ten outcomes at a time, and in some cases, upwards of fifteen. That does not include the assessment of course learning outcomes, which can vary from three or four to more than a dozen.

Through a collaborative process involving the Dean of Academics and all full-time faculty, DCC instructors reviewed the applicability of institutional learning outcomes at the program level. They decided that four ILOs are embedded in all DCC academic programs, whether the program culminates in an AA or AS transfer degree or a career-technical degree (AAS) or certificate (CAS and CTS). Because of their applicability to all our academic offerings, these four ILOs are the College’s true institutional learning outcomes:

- ILO 1.** Critical Thinking
- ILO 2.** Effective Communication
- ILO 3.** Mathematical Proficiency
- ILO 4.** Information Literacy

In addition to the four institutional learning outcomes embedded in every academic program, at least two additional learning outcomes are present in all Associate of Arts and Associate of Science transfer programs. Due to the general education requirements of a transfer degree, students earning an AA or AS degree will also be able to demonstrate knowledge in the areas of these two Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs):

- PLO 1.** Scientific Proficiency
- PLO 2.** Cultural Competence

Finally, due to the career-technical focus of applied science programs, students earning a CAS or AAS will also be able to demonstrate knowledge attainment in the areas of Human Relations and Program Specific Proficiencies. DCC provides students with opportunities to successfully complete courses that incorporate these career-technical Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) to prepare them for entrance into the workforce.

To summarize: as a result of the faculty work group efforts, the institution was able to clarify our ILOs and PLOs across all programs. A simplified view of these changes can be seen below:

Transfer Program Learning Outcomes

- ILO1:** Critical Thinking
- ILO2:** Effective Communication
- ILO3:** Mathematical Proficiency
- ILO4:** Information Literacy
- PLO1:** Scientific Proficiency
- PLO2:** Cultural Competency

Career-Technical Program Learning Outcomes

- ILO1:** Critical Thinking
- ILO2:** Effective Communication
- ILO3:** Mathematical Proficiency
- ILO4:** Information Literacy
- PLO1:** Human Relations
- PLO2:** Program-Specific Proficiency #1
- PLO3:** Program-Specific Proficiency #2
- Etc.

Please see Appendix A (page 12) for definitions of these Institutional and Program-level learning outcomes, as determined by our DCC faculty.

2. Developed a new process for assessing student learning that includes the assessment of student achievement of institutional learning outcomes (ILOs).

From January through April of 2022, with intermittent updates or clarifications since then, our DCC faculty work group has worked diligently to develop a simplified, replicable, meaningful process for assessing student learning at DCC. This process was collaboratively developed from start to finish by all full-time College faculty across our transfer and career and technical divisions. With guidance from the Dean of Academic affairs, they designed a new assessment process that clarifies the goals of assessment, fosters creative thinking, incorporates strategic action, and prompts continuous improvement from the course level to the institutional level.

At the forefront of the assessment process are the institution's ILOs and PLOs, which were clarified as part of the new plan. Our faculty did their best to ensure that our campus terminology is consistent with that of the NWCCU and our higher education peers:

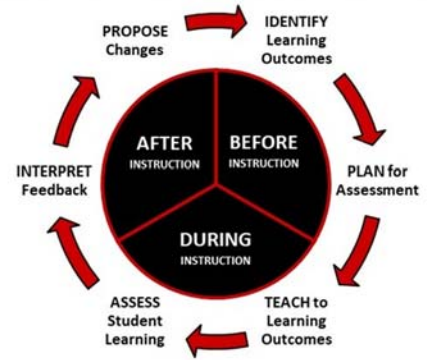
- *PROGRAM LEARNING OUTCOMES*: PLOs are the broad set of competencies, knowledge, and values a student displays at the conclusion of an academic program. DCC's Program Learning Outcomes are intended to capture the general set of skills that a student will possess after successfully completing a particular set of courses.
- *INSTITUTIONAL LEARNING OUTCOMES*: ILOs are the knowledge, skills, abilities, and attitudes that students are expected to develop because of their overall experiences with any aspect of the college, including courses, programs, and student services. DCC's Institutional Learning Outcomes are broad in their scope and are reflected in all degree and certificate requirements, whether transfer or career-technical in nature.

After clearly defining what we mean by the various learning outcomes, our faculty work group turned their attention to clarifying and visualizing the assessment cycle. We recognize that assessment is more than a series of boxes to be checked or a list of criteria to address. An assessment cycle effectively demonstrates the process of continuous improvement championed by assessment. It is an ongoing process in which the goal is to "close the loop" or ensure that assessment feedback can be used to advocate for changes, explore opportunities, and adjust priorities, at the course, program, department and institutional level. By closing the loop through our assessment process, we promote a campus-wide culture that focuses on solutions and effectiveness. DCC's assessment cycle has six stages:

- *IDENTIFY LEARNING OUTCOMES*: DCC's course learning outcomes are set by the Montana University System and must be adhered to with at least an 80% compatibility (<https://ccn.mus.edu/search/>). Faculty have more discretion in shaping program-level learning outcomes, assuming they are guided by course learning outcomes and embrace institutional learning outcomes.
- *PLAN FOR ASSESSMENT*: At the beginning of each semester, using a copy of DCC's Assessment Plan for each ILO or PLO to be assessed, instructors will take time to identify the course-level strategies, tools, and measures they will use to assess student learning.
- *TEACH TO LEARNING OUTCOMES*: Proposed changes or interventions are implemented in the classroom as instruction is intentionally directed toward helping achieve learning outcomes. All instructional activities should contribute meaningfully to learning outcomes.

- **ASSESS STUDENT LEARNING:** Assessments capture quantitative and qualitative feedback on courses and programs to ensure they contribute meaningfully to student learning. At the end of the semester, instructors will review the results and impacts of their assessment and any course or program level changes, and report their observations, conclusions, improvements, and recommendations.
- **INTERPRET FEEDBACK:** Once assessment results have been gathered and interpreted, faculty will use that information to propose and plan specific, value-adding, incremental, and continuous changes to their courses and/or programs.
- **PROPOSE CHANGES:** Once assessment feedback has been interpreted, faculty may occasionally need to adjust program-level learning outcomes to better reflect or enhance student learning. Instructors should bring proposed changes to course or program learning outcomes to the Teaching and Learning Effectiveness committee and Dean of Academics for feedback. Upon approval, changes will be noted in syllabi, the catalog, and the DCC website.

STUDENT LEARNING ASSESSMENT CYCLE



This simplified assessment process utilizes a pre-semester plan and a post-semester reflection, and ensures that each instructor is intentionally focused on adding value to students by finding creative solutions to helping students overcome common barriers to achievement. Moving forward, program-level assessment will sharpen its focus on qualitative feedback, which will mean conducting fewer assessments at a time so that more creative and reflective thinking can be incorporated into the assessment process. DCC faculty decided that regardless of the number of program-level learning outcomes a particular program may have, they should all be assessed at least twice during a seven-year accreditation cycle. The assessment process has also been simplified by mapping courses to program and institutional learning outcomes, which means that as program learning outcomes are assessed, so are the courses that are connected to achieving those PLOs. While the number of program-level assessments to conduct will not be uniform for each instructor, it is a significantly reduced load and should produce higher quality feedback that is more meaningful to the continuous improvement of student learning.

To assist faculty with the assessment process, an assessment handbook was developed that contains all of the relevant information and steps instructors need to complete these required assessments. A copy of the handbook is given to each instructor, and each step in the process is reviewed every semester at DCC’s mandatory faculty assessment day held at the beginning of each semester.

Please see Appendix B (page 13) for a blank copy of the most recent Assessment Plan template (Spring 2024) utilized by the College faculty. A sample of a completed Assessment Plan from a DCC faculty member has also been included in Appendix B following the blank template.

Please see Appendix C (page 17) for a full copy of the recently updated Assessment Handbook being utilized by the College faculty and Academic Affairs department.

3. Implemented the new assessment process in all the College’s academic programs.

After taking a few months to review the new assessment plan and work out a few implementation kinks, the College began using the new plan in January 2023. At the mandatory Faculty Assessment Day, a consultant worked with DCC instructors to help them identify some of the key elements to their assessment plan.

First, faculty decided that our implementation of the new plan should begin by assessing Institutional Learning Outcome #1 – Critical Thinking. At Dawson Community College, critical thinking is defined as the objective analysis and evaluation of a topic in order to form a judgment and/or creatively solve a problem. A student who has completed a degree or certificate program from DCC will be able to synthesize and apply critical thinking to meet academic requirements, make decisions, and/or solve problems.

Within that context of critical thinking, the faculty also identified a student learning concern that they wished to focus on through the duration of the assessment period. After valuable discussion, it was determined that the group's designed strategies and interventions should be focused on addressing the prevalent need for students to show improvement in their study habits and skills.

To dial in the assessment process even more particularly, the faculty also identified a specific cohort of students that they wished to track to determine if their classroom interventions had a positive impact. The faculty chose to track DCC students who were identified as being in need of some degree of remedial or developmental education. The Dean of Academics and the Registrar later worked together to identify this population using DCC's placement standards as a guideline. Any student who met one or more of the following criteria would be a part of this cohort:

- Enrollment in a sub-100 or co-requisite Math or Writing course, and/or
- A placement score of ≤ 50 in Math, and/or
- A placement score of ≤ 60 in Writing, and/or
- An ACT score of ≤ 20 .

In order to ensure students in the identified population were not inequitably treated, favored, or targeted to skew the data or results of the assessment interventions, the faculty were never given the specific students who were part of this cohort.

After working collaboratively to identify all of the aforementioned elements, the faculty were tasked with individually developing an assessment plan for the Spring 2023 semester. They identified the courses they would use as the "vehicle" for their assessments, proposed strategies and interventions to be implemented in their classes, and indicated the tools and techniques they'd use to measure the effectiveness of their strategies and interventions. They submitted their assessment plans at the beginning of the semester, and got to work teaching to the learning outcomes and implementing their new ideas.

In May, at the end of the Spring 2023 semester, before going off contract for the summer, DCC faculty submitted their assessment plan reflections to the Dean of Academics. The reflections first asked faculty to consider and report the results and discoveries of their strategies, then to share with their colleagues any insights or questions that were prompted by their interventions. They also proposed a number of changes and improvements ranging from the course level to the institutional level. The forms were collected and prepared for presentation to the faculty upon their return to campus in August.

When DCC faculty returned in August for the Fall 2023 Faculty Assessment Day, they began by reviewing all the assessment reflections submitted by their colleagues in May of 2023. New faculty were also engaged in this process to begin familiarizing them with the College's assessment plan. Faculty spent hours individually and collectively reflecting on their peers' assessment plans and reflections, identifying common themes, ideas, and patterns in every aspect of the group's work. These common themes were recorded by the Dean

of Academics and compiled in the 2023-2024 Faculty Assessment Report, which is included with this Ad Hoc Report as Appendix D.

We repeated this same review – report – plan process in January 2024, and will continue the same process each Fall and Spring semester for the foreseeable future. Working through the assessment cycle together, with biannual faculty assessment days and ongoing collaboration, is proving very beneficial for the faculty and for the institution. The more our faculty work through this process, the more intuitive it is becoming and the more intentional they are becoming about ensuring their instruction has an impact on students' achievement of institutional learning outcomes. This year, College faculty and department administrators will establish a clear timeline for evaluating all the Institutional and Program Learning Outcomes over a 7 year period. Beginning in Fall '24, we will move onto assessing ILO #4 (Information Literacy) and PLO#1 (Scientific Proficiency).

Please see Appendix D (page 29) for a copy of the 2023-2024 Faculty Assessment Report, which compiles the feedback provided by the faculty during our last two assessment days.

4. Gathered feedback and data from the assessment process that is being used to continuously improve student learning across the college.

After one year of implementation, the College has managed to collect a significant amount of useful feedback and data from its assessment of institutional learning outcomes. To date, most of this data is qualitative and consists of feedback generated by DCC instructors. The emphasis on gathering more qualitative data is intentional, with faculty developing an assessment plan that favors creative and reflective thinking rather than collecting mounds of quantitative data on student performance on assignments. Faculty members' assessment plans have relied on both direct and indirect measures of gathering data, with most instructors using direct measures like scores from exams, tests, papers, and projects, with others favoring more indirect measures like course evaluations and surveys. Once again, Appendix C provides a copy of the 2023-2024 Faculty Assessment Report, which compiles the qualitative feedback provided by DCC faculty.

On the quantitative side, the College's focus has been on tracking academic performance of the aforementioned developmental education student cohort (see page 7). Appendix D provides a concise summary of the performance of these students from Fall 2022 through Fall 2023. It tracks their GPA from one semester before we implemented our assessment plan focused on ILO#1 - Critical Thinking, through the Fall 2023 semester. This means these students were exposed to a full year of classroom strategies and interventions designed to improve students' study habits and critical thinking skills. The data is encouraging, but as several of our faculty noted, inconclusive. Faculty were encouraged by the increase in overall institutional GPA (up from 2.85 to 3.22) and the decrease in the percentage of D/F/W grades issued to students in this cohort (down from 13% to 6%).

A review of the data prompted several additional questions and data requests from our faculty, which is evidence that our assessment process is promoting continuous improvement. Faculty were curious about how our rates of retention and attrition compared to peer institutions, about the impact of sophomore status on the development of study skills and habits, about how this cohort has performed in comparison to similar DCC students enrolled over a different timeframe, and about how this cohort of remedial students has performed compared to students not in that same group. After the Spring 2024 semester, faculty will review some of this additional data. There is still much to be discovered, and after one year of implementing

our new assessment plan it is becoming clear that we'll need to find additional ways to gather additional, more meaningful, data about student performance.

The assessment of student learning in Institutional Learning Outcome #1: Critical Thinking has prompted DCC instructors to consider or propose a range of changes and improvements, ranging from personal adjustments to their methodology, to the possible need for department wide policies, to proposed institutional-level investments. All of these adjustments serve the purpose of “closing the loop” of assessment – ensuring that the feedback being generated is used to continuously improve the student learning experience across all aspects of the institution.

At the course level, several instructors noted that they were going to develop more structured and intentional instructional plans to keep program and institutional goals integrated with course content. Others noted that they were going to diversify their classroom and learning activities, perhaps by giving more practice exams, conducting more reviews, adding group projects, and finding more creative ways to deliver content (including exploring different modalities). A couple of faculty said that they were going to slow their pace of instruction, give more attention to detail, and devote more time to review. Others said they would give students opportunities to practice study habits in the classroom and, in some cases, invite students to provide input or make choices regarding their assignments.

At the department level, there was a call to explore the option of developing standardized policies regarding attendance and student cell phone use. Faculty believe that inconsistent faculty policies make enforcement problematic. Other faculty noted that the DCC101 course (a college success course) would be an ideal place to introduce resources, set expectations, and reinforce the desired academic culture at DCC. Based on the recommendation regarding policies, a work group from the College's Teaching and Learning Effectiveness (TLE) committee will explore the option of instituting department-wide policies on attendance, late work, and student cell phone use. They will research other colleges' practices, weigh the benefits and drawbacks of such policies, and report their findings back to the TLE Committee for further discussion and action (if needed). Regarding the redesign of the DCC101 College Success course, a small team of faculty is actively working on a redesign of the course that better aligns it with Montana University System course learning outcomes and integrates more opportunities for students to learn and practice the study skills and habits deemed essential for academic success.

At the institutional level, instructors recommended a more robust tutoring center with longer hours, additional staff, and strategic interventions with at-risk students. Most DCC faculty believe there is a need not just for a tutoring center, but a full-fledged academic support center with several part-time tutors available to assist in all academic disciplines. This was the most common college-wide recommendation that stemmed from the Fall 2023 assessment, and represents what many faculty believe to be the primary missing piece from our attempts to provide a quality education to all our students. As a result of the feedback provided by faculty through the assessment process, College administrators will begin exploring ways to develop, fund, and staff a more complementary, dynamic, and impactful academic support center. We will seek Title III federal funding, grants, partnerships, and even unconventional means of providing the necessary resources these for services.

Additionally, the group recommended three other significant steps to continue building an academic culture supportive of continuous improvement of student learning. First, the faculty expressed their approval of and their appreciation for our new assessment process, and commented that we need to continue reviewing our assessments as a group as a way to learn from each other and collaborate on possible solutions. Secondly, a couple of instructors noted that smaller class sizes better enable faculty to engage with students and

requested that as much as possible, low student to faculty ratios be maintained. The third recommendation they had was to request that adjunct instructors are also being included in all faculty processes, evaluations, etc. It was expressed that with the institution's strong reliance on adjunct instructors, they should also be included in future assessment planning and review.

Please see Appendix D (page 29) for a copy of the 2023-2024 Faculty Assessment Report, which compiles the feedback provided by the faculty during our last two assessment days.

Please see Appendix E (page 34) for a copy of the Student Cohort Data F22-F23 report, which provides a snapshot of the academic improvements made by this particular group of students.

Conclusion

Since anticipating and receiving the out-of-compliance recommendation from NWCCU regarding the College's process of assessing Institutional Learning Outcomes, DCC faculty and academic administrators have been diligent in developing and implementing an assessment process that consistently measures student achievement of institutional learning outcomes. The goal of this response has been not only to create a process that complies with the Commission's eligibility requirements and standards, but also to establish a simplified system capable of providing meaningful feedback essential to continuous improvement.

In response to the Commission's recommendation, and in order to ensure that the College re-establishes compliance in these areas, DCC has taken the following steps:

1. Established a meaningful set of institutional learning outcomes (ILOs) that apply to all certificate and degree programs.
2. Developed a new process for assessing student learning that includes the assessment of student achievement of institutional learning outcomes (ILOs).
3. Implemented the new assessment process in all the College's academic programs.
4. Gathered feedback and data from the assessment process that is being used to continuously improve student learning across the college.

The feedback gathered from this first year's assessment process has provided some valuable insights into what should be high priorities for the institution in the coming years. Most notably is the need for the College to make investments in more robust academic support services. A small tutoring center staffed by one part-time employee and a handful of student tutors is simply not adequate for the academic needs of our students. As noted above, as a result of the feedback provided by faculty through the assessment process, the College will seek ways to develop, fund, and staff a more complementary, dynamic, and impactful academic support center. We will seek Title III federal funding, grants, partnerships, and even unconventional means of providing the necessary resources these for services.

Moving forward, College faculty and department administrators will establish a clear timeline for evaluating all the Institutional and Program Learning Outcomes over a 7 year period. Beginning in Fall '24, we will move onto assessing ILO #4 (Information Literacy) and PLO#1 (Scientific Proficiency). Assessing two comprehensive learning outcomes will require more planning and strategy from College instructors, but with a growing confidence in the process, this is certainly possible and beneficial. And though our basic, simple, assessment process will remain the same, we will continue to look for ways to improve it continuously, especially in terms of collecting, interpreting, and disaggregating meaningful data on student performance.

Faculty are still working to become more proficient at using the College's new assessment plan, and there is, of course, room for improvement. Nonetheless, Dawson Community College believes these actions satisfactorily address NWCCU Recommendation 3.

Appendix A: Institutional and Program Learning Outcomes

ILO and PLO Definitions

Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

1. **Critical Thinking:** The objective analysis and evaluation of a topic in order to form a judgment and/or creatively solve a problem. Students will be able to synthesize and apply critical thinking to meet academic requirements, make decisions, and/or solve problems.
2. **Effective Communication:** Effective written, oral, or visual communication demonstrates cultural awareness and disseminates information to a variety of audiences. Students will be able to communicate in a variety of academic and professional contexts.
3. **Mathematical Proficiency:** The ability to reason about and solve real world problems using appropriate computational and analytical skills, as well as, create and critically evaluate arguments supported by quantitative evidence. Students will be able to find reasonable answers to real world problems using appropriate mathematical skills.
4. **Information Literacy:** The ability to identify, evaluate, and apply information within a field of study. Students will be able to use reliable, scholarly resources to support their studies.

Transfer Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs)

1. **Scientific Proficiency:** The ability to use a body of knowledge and the scientific method to explain the natural world, identify questions, and draw evidence-based conclusions. Students will be able to participate in scientific practices and discourse in order to generate, evaluate, and interpret scientific evidence and explanations of the natural world.
2. **Cultural Competence:** A set of cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills and characteristics that support effective and appropriate interaction in a variety of contexts. Students will be able to understand and appreciate various belief systems and their significance in shaping culture's values and norms.

Career-Technical Program Learning Outcomes

1. **Human Relations:** The study of interpersonal dynamics and problems in organizations and workplace settings. Students will be able to communicate and interact with others in order to build strong group and individual relationships.
2. **Program-Specific Proficiencies:** Knowledge, skills, and abilities that are directly related to the major skillset or body of knowledge covered in each applied science program. The number of program-specific proficiencies can vary from one program to another. Students earning an AAS or CAS will be able to demonstrate workforce-ready proficiency in the skillset or body of knowledge specific to their program.

Appendix B: DCC Assessment Plan Template and Faculty Sample

DCC Assessment Plan Template

This form has been designed for use in program and course assessments. Please complete a separate plan for each course-level and program-level assessment you will conduct. You should keep a copy of the completed plans and submit (via email) a copy to the Academic Coordinator.

ASSESSMENT PLAN: This section should be completed at the beginning of the semester you will conduct the assessment, preferably before classes start. Time will be given to you to complete this section during in-service.

1. Semester and Year of Assessment:
2. Instructor Conducting Assessment:
3. Institutional and/or Program Outcome(s) Being Assessed:
4. Instructional / Student Learning Concern to be Addressed:
5. Student Group / Demographic to Track Throughout the Semester:
6. The Course(s) You Will Integrate into This Assessment:
7. **What** are your course-level strategies or interventions to assess the student learning concern related to ILO#1, and **why** are you using these methods?
8. What tools and/or measures will you use to conduct your assessment, and how will you gather data feedback?

ASSESSMENT REFLECTION: This section should be completed at the end of the semester after you have conducted the assessment, in the days immediately after classes end. You should use the time given to you on assessment day to complete this section of the assessment plan. Use the assessment plan(s) you completed at the beginning of the semester to help you reflect on and evaluate the process and feedback.

1. What were the results of your assessment? What did you discover? What did you confirm?

2. What questions or insights do you have for your faculty colleagues based on your assessment?

3. Based on the data and feedback you gathered from the assessment process, what changes will you make to your course(s) and/or program? How will these changes lead to continuous improvement in your program?

4. What changes or improvements do you recommend for the college based on the data gathered from your assessment? How would these changes lead to continuous improvement across the campus community?

When you have completed this assessment, please save a copy for yourself and submit a copy (via email) to the Academic Coordinator and Dean of Academics. These assessments will be kept on file and utilized in program review, instructor evaluations, budget review, and department and institutional planning.

Instructor's Signature

Date

Assessment Template
For use during Spring 2024 semester



DCC Assessment Plan Template

This form has been designed for use in program assessments. Please complete a separate plan for each program-level assessment you will conduct. You should keep a copy of the completed plans and submit (via email) a copy to the Academic Program Coordinator and Dean of Academics.

ASSESSMENT PLAN: This section should be completed **at the beginning of the semester** during which you will conduct the assessment, preferably before classes start. Time will be given to you to work on this plan during the pre-semester assessment day.

1. Semester and Year of Assessment:

2. Instructor Conducting Assessment:

3. Institutional and/or Program Outcome(s) Being Assessed:

4. Instructional / Student Learning Concern to be Addressed:

5. Student Group / Demographic to Track Throughout the Semester:

6. The Course(s) You Will Integrate into This Assessment:

7. **What** are your course-level strategies or interventions to assess the student learning concern related to ILO#1, and **why** are you using these methods?

8. What tools and/or measures will you use to conduct your assessment, and how will you gather feedback / data?

ASSESSMENT REFLECTION: This section should be completed at the end of the semester after you have conducted the assessment, in the days immediately after classes end. You should use the time given to you on assessment day to complete this section of the assessment plan. Use the assessment plan(s) you completed at the beginning of the semester to help you reflect on and evaluate the process and feedback.

1. What were the results of your assessment? What did you discover? What did you confirm?

For this question, I will focus on the results of my PBL assessment in EDU 201. A big part of teaching critical thinking is teaching students to take risks. For the final of this course, I had students develop a PBL for their field placements, and I encouraged them to take risks! This led to some interesting results. Some students seemed to find a natural balance as they designed their PBLs, but a few students went overboard. One student's PBL entailed turning historical research into rap battles (in a 4th grade class context). I personally loved the creativity and critical thinking that she used, but she may have gone overboard. I discovered that even when teaching a soft skill, like critical thinking, students learn best when parameters are defined for them. Does this defeat the purpose of the critical thinking? I am not sure. I discovered that encouraging risk does lead to critical thinking, and that critical thinking may lead to products that I couldn't have personally expected. So, in order to really teach critical thinking effectively, I have to be comfortable with my students going unexpected places, learning on their own, and ultimately turning in surprising products.

2. What questions or insights do you have for your faculty colleagues based on your assessment?

If you read the full details of my response to question 1, this will be pretty obvious. My main insight is this: As we push our students towards critical thinking, risk-taking, and self-regulated learning, we must be comfortable with students' thinking and learning going in new directions and unfamiliar spaces. This is, after all, the hallmark of independent learning: students learning content and skills that are not predetermined by the teacher.

3. Based on the data and feedback you gathered from the assessment process, what changes will you make to your course(s) and/or program? How will these changes lead to continuous improvement in your program?

At this current time, I can identify a few revisions to my EDU 201 course. First, I believe that my PBL assessment is a good final project for the students, as it combines the theory we discuss in class with the Praxis students are getting in their field experiences. However, during students' field experiences, they did not actually prepare any lessons for the students before the PBL; ultimately, this is what likely led to some of the far-fetched, high-risk lessons that some students prepared in the name of critical thinking. Therefore, I need to chat with our local school district's principals and see if I can get our EDU students teaching (not just observing) in EDU 201, which will in turn give students a basis of experience to base their PBL design upon. Ideally, this will lead students towards creating natural parameters for the PBL project at the end of the class. Students can then take risks and think critically in a situated context that they are familiar with.

4. What changes or improvements do you recommend for the college based on the feedback / data gathered from your assessment? How would these changes lead to continuous improvement across the campus community?

My reflections here are cliché, but valuable nonetheless: our students need to practice skills many times before they will achieve mastery. I thought that by having students practice lesson design, they would be able to critically think and create great PBLs for their classes. In actuality, my students needed to practice teaching, and that would give them the right mindsets to create great PBLs. The students cannot practice a skill enough. If we say we value something (personally or institutionally) then we need to scaffold students' learning in graduated steps.

When you have completed this assessment, please save a copy for yourself and submit a copy (via email) to the Academic Coordinator and Dean of Academics. These assessments will be kept on file and utilized in program review, instructor evaluations, budget review, and department and institutional planning.

Nicholas H. Staffileno

December 14, 2023

Instructor's Signature

Date

Assessment Template
For use during Fall 2023 semester



Appendix C: DCC Assessment Handbook

Dawson Community College Assessment Handbook



Developed by the 2021-2022 DCC Faculty with the leadership of
Matt Hull, Dean of Academics / Accreditation Liaison Officer

Updated January 2024

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An Overview of Assessment at DCC

The purpose of assessment is to evaluate the quality of learning to make continuous improvements to teaching and learning. Faculty members at Dawson Community College play a pivotal role in health, vitality, and sustainability of the College, because the quality of the instruction and academic programs at DCC have a direct impact on the effectiveness of the institution. NWCCU standard 1.C.5 clarifies that assessment should be principally entrusted to our DCC faculty: *“The institution recognizes the central role of faculty to establish curricula, assess student learning, and improve instructional programs.”* To ensure that we continue to meet the shifting and growing expectations of our students and other stakeholders, it is important for faculty to engage in ongoing assessment of student learning.

At DCC, we recognize and appreciate two key reasons to implement assessment of student learning:

COMPLIANCE: The consistent use of an effective assessment process ensures that the College complies with NWCCU accreditation standards. Accreditation standard 1.C.5 specifically directs the College to *“engage in an effective system of assessment to evaluate the quality of learning in its programs.”* Assessing for compliance is essential and can traditionally be done with minimal effort, but an assessment process primarily motivated by compliance often fails to close the loop. That is, it lacks a compelling, motivational aspect that prompts instructors and/or the institution to make meaningful, value-adding, changes to courses and programs.

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT: The second reason to utilize assessment of student learning is to inform and ensure continuous improvement to instructional activities. A culture of continuous improvement keeps things running smoothly and performing optimally by engaging all employees, setting clear expectations, celebrating creativity, and encouraging positive changes. Assessing for continuous improvement requires more intentionality, planning, and reflection. If done consistently well, it will provide more useful, relevant feedback to campus-wide teaching, learning and student support services.

From 2016-2021, assessment was focused primarily on assessing course learning outcomes. The College discovered that, though valuable, this was an incomplete approach to assessment. While the 1.C.5 standard (see above) focuses on program-level assessment, NWCCU accreditation standard 1.C.6 reads, *“Consistent with its mission, the institution establishes and assesses, across all associate...level programs or within a General Education curriculum, institutional learning outcomes and/or core competencies.”* So the assessment process should also include a regular review of each academic program’s contribution to institutional learning outcomes.

Furthermore, as the quality of instruction at DCC improves, it adds value to other institutional endeavors and the College as a whole. Once again, this contributes to continuous improvement of institutional effectiveness and addresses another accreditation standard (1.C.7): *“The institution uses the results of its assessment efforts to inform academic and learning-support planning and practices to continuously improve student learning outcomes.”* Using data gleaned from regular, meaningful, assessment can make a positive impact on students’ experiences at DCC. Effective assessment improves courses, programs, and the institution. And as we get better at what we do, our students reap the benefits.

Definitions

Different higher education institutions use different terms for the work they do in assessment, so it is critical that all faculty members and academic department staff understand the terms Dawson Community College uses across the campus and throughout this handbook. We have done our best to ensure that our terminology is consistent with that of the NWCCU, our accreditation body. Please take some time to familiarize yourself with this terminology relevant to assessment of student learning.

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT: Applying relevant evaluative feedback and data to ensure incremental enhancements to teaching and learning.

DATA - QUANTITATIVE vs. QUALITATIVE:

- **QUANTITATIVE DATA:** Information that can be counted, measured, and given numerical value (#, %, \$)
- **QUALITATIVE DATA:** Non-numerical information that expresses feelings, impressions, and observations

EVALUATION: Judging the value, fitness, or quality of something based on the degree to which it meets standards.

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

- **COURSE:** CLOs are specific, measurable statements that define the knowledge, skills, and attitudes learners will demonstrate by the completion of a course. DCC's Course Learning Outcomes are determined in large part by the Montana University System.
- **PROGRAM:** PLOs are the broad set of competencies, knowledge, and values a student displays at the conclusion of an academic program. DCC's Program Learning Outcomes are intended to capture the general set of skills that a student will possess after successfully completing a particular set of courses.
- **INSTITUTIONAL:** ILOs are the knowledge, skills, abilities, and attitudes that students are expected to develop because of their overall experiences with any aspect of the college, including courses, programs, and student services. DCC's Institutional Learning Outcomes are broad in their scope and are reflected in all degree and certificate requirements, whether transfer or career-technical in nature.

MEASURES: Formal, consistent, and dynamic tools used to assess a student's ability to reach course or program goals.

- **DIRECT MEASURES:** Assess actual samples of student work, including exams or tests, research papers, projects, presentations, portfolios, performances, etc.
- **INDIRECT MEASURES:** Imply student learning by using self-reported data that captures students' attitudes, feelings, values, etc.. Examples include surveys, interviews, course evaluations, and reports on retention, graduation, and placement.

PROGRAM: A group of courses that lead to a credential

- AA, AS, AAS, CAS, CTS degrees/certificates ARE programs
- AA/AS concentrations or plans of study are NOT programs

PROGRAM REVIEW: A comprehensive analysis of an academic program used to draw conclusions about its health and sustainability; incorporates enrollment trends, multi-year achievement measures, peer institution comparisons, advisory board feedback, faculty observations, and budgetary implications.

The Assessment Cycle

Assessment is more than a series of boxes to be checked or a list of criteria to address. An assessment cycle effectively demonstrates the process of continuous improvement championed by assessment. It is an ongoing process in which the goal is to “close the loop” or ensure that assessment feedback can be used to advocate for changes, explore opportunities, and adjust priorities, at the course, program, department and institutional level. By closing the loop through our assessment process, we promote a campus-wide culture that focuses on solutions and effectiveness. DCC’s assessment cycle has six stages:

IDENTIFY Learning Outcomes: A learning outcome is a statement that describes the demonstrable knowledge, skills, abilities, or attitudes students should acquire by the end of a particular assignment, class, course, or program. DCC’s course learning outcomes are set by the Montana University System and must be adhered to with at least an eighty percent compatibility (MUS Common Course Numbering guide: <https://ccn.mus.edu/search/>). Faculty have more discretion in shaping program-level learning outcomes, assuming they are guided by course learning outcomes and embrace institutional learning outcomes.

PLAN for Assessment: At the beginning of each semester, using a copy of DCC’s Assessment Plan (a sample is found at the end of this document) for each ILO or PLO to be assessed, instructors will take time to identify the course-level strategies, tools, and measures they will use to assess student learning. Course and program outcome assessments will be conducted on a scheduled rotation, rather than every outcome being assessed every semester.

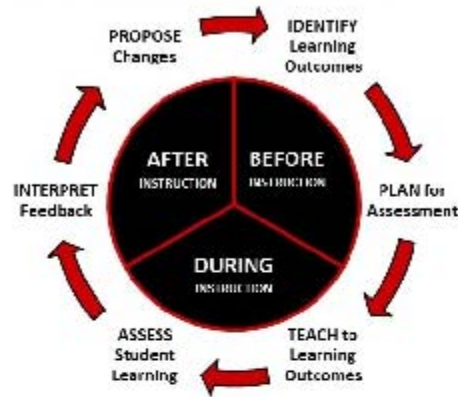
TEACH to Learning Outcomes: Proposed changes or interventions are implemented in the classroom as instruction is intentionally directed toward helping achieve learning outcomes. Instructional design, lectures, hands-on learning opportunities, tests and exams, writing assignments, research projects, class discussions, and many other classroom activities play a role in student learning. All instructional activities should contribute meaningfully to learning outcomes.

ASSESS Student Learning: Assessments capture quantitative and qualitative feedback on courses and programs to ensure they contribute meaningfully to student learning. At the end of the semester, instructors will review the results and impacts of their assessment and any course or program level changes, and report their observations, conclusions, improvements, and recommendations using the same Assessment Plan they used in the second stage of the cycle.

INTERPRET Feedback: Once assessment results have been gathered and interpreted, faculty will use that information to propose and plan specific, value-adding, incremental, and continuous changes to their courses and/or programs. Data and insights that may be useful at the institutional level should be noted on Assessment Plans. Before implementation, ideas for improvements should be brought to the TLE committee and Dean of Academics for feedback.

PROPOSE Changes: Once assessment feedback has been interpreted, faculty may occasionally need to adjust program-level learning outcomes to better reflect or enhance student learning. Due to our mandated compatibility with the MUS CCN system, course learning outcomes should be adjusted sparingly. Instructors should bring proposed changes to course or program learning outcomes to the TLE committee and Dean of Academics for feedback. Upon approval, changes will be noted in syllabi, the catalog, and the DCC website.

STUDENT LEARNING ASSESSMENT CYCLE



Learning Outcomes

In Spring 2022, in recognition that our current assessment processes were missing the mark, DCC faculty made two significant changes to the process of student learning assessment.

First, a decision was made to refocus assessment efforts at the program level. For several years prior to 2022, assessment of student learning was focused primarily on course learning outcomes and collecting quantitative data regarding student performance on course assignments. Each instructor was tasked with completing Student Learning Outcome reports for every course they taught every semester. While this process did provide some valuable feedback, faculty generally agreed that the process was burdensome and inadequately considered instructors' qualitative feedback on instruction and student learning. Additionally, once the SLO reports were submitted, little was done with them to prompt continuous improvement at the program or institutional level. Some positive changes were made to courses, but the assessment process lacked a holistic application.

The second important change made by DCC faculty was a clarification of the College's Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILOs) and their relationship to academic programs and courses. Using the previous model, a faculty member assessing program-level outcomes would be expected to assess student learning connected to all six ILOs and all program or concentration-level outcomes related to their academic area every single year. In many cases, this would mean assessing more than ten outcomes at a time, and in some cases, upwards of fifteen. That does not include the assessment of course learning outcomes, which can vary from three or four to more than a dozen.

Through a collaborative process involving the Dean of Academics and all full-time faculty, DCC instructors reviewed the applicability of institutional learning outcomes at the program level. They decided that four ILOs are embedded in all DCC academic programs, whether the program culminates in an AA or AS transfer degree or a career-technical degree (AAS) or certificate (CAS and CTS). Because of their applicability to all our academic offerings, these four ILOs are the College's true institutional learning outcomes.

Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

- 1. Critical Thinking:** The objective analysis and evaluation of a topic in order to form a judgment and/or creatively solve a problem. Students will be able to synthesize, and apply critical thinking to meet academic requirements, make decisions, and/or solve problems.
- 2. Effective Communication:** Effective written, oral, or visual communication demonstrates cultural awareness and disseminates information to a variety of audiences. Students will be able to communicate in a variety of academic and professional contexts.
- 3. Mathematical Proficiency:** The ability to reason about and solve real world problems using appropriate computational and analytical skills, as well as, create and critically evaluate arguments supported by quantitative evidence. Students will be able to find reasonable answers to real world problems using appropriate mathematical skills.
- 4. Information Literacy:** The ability to identify, evaluate, and apply information within a field of study. Students will be able to use reliable, scholarly resources to support their studies.

In addition to the four institutional learning outcomes embedded in every academic program, at least two additional learning outcomes are present in all Associate of Arts and Associate of Science transfer programs. Due to the general education requirements of a transfer degree, students earning an AA or AS degree will also be able to demonstrate knowledge in the areas of Scientific Proficiency and Cultural Competency.

Transfer Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs)

1. **Scientific Proficiency:** The ability to use a body of knowledge and the scientific method to explain the natural world, identify questions, and draw evidence-based conclusions. Students will be able to participate in scientific practices and discourse in order to generate, evaluate, and interpret scientific evidence and explanations of the natural world.
2. **Cultural Competence:** A set of cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills and characteristics that support effective and appropriate interaction in a variety of contexts. Students will be able to understand and appreciate various belief systems and their significance in shaping culture’s values and norms.

Due to the career-technical focus of applied science programs, students earning a CAS or AAS will also be able to demonstrate knowledge attainment in the areas of Human Relations and Program Specific Proficiencies. DCC provides students with opportunities to successfully complete courses that incorporate these career-technical Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) to prepare them for direct entrance into the workforce.

Career-Technical Program Learning Outcomes

1. **Human Relations:** The study of interpersonal dynamics and problems in organizations and workplace settings. Students will be able to communicate and interact with others in order to build strong group and individual relationships.
2. **Program-Specific Proficiencies:** Knowledge, skills, and abilities that are directly related to the major skillset or body of knowledge covered in each applied science program. The number of program-specific proficiencies can vary from one program to another. Students earning an AAS or CAS will be able to demonstrate workforce-ready proficiency in the skillset or body of knowledge specific to their program.

Transfer Program Learning Outcomes

- ILO1: Critical Thinking
- ILO2: Effective Communication
- ILO3: Mathematical Proficiency
- ILO4: Information Literacy
- PLO1: Scientific Proficiency
- PLO2: Cultural Competency

Career-Technical Program Learning Outcomes

- ILO1: Critical Thinking
- ILO2: Effective Communication
- ILO3: Mathematical Proficiency
- ILO4: Information Literacy
- PLO1: Human Relations
- PLO2: Program-Specific Proficiency #1
- PLO3: Program-Specific Proficiency #2
- Etc.

The Assessment Plan Timeline

One of the most dramatic changes DCC faculty chose to make to the College’s process for assessing student learning is the frequency with which assessment is conducted. For the few years prior to this current plan’s adoption, DCC faculty were assessing every outcome of every course they taught every semester. And all these assessments were supposed to be completed in the day or so following final exams but before the instructors’ contracts for the term expired. This created a mountain of busy work at an inopportune time, tended to cause frustration, and often diminished the quality of the feedback being gathered. Additionally, because an inadequate amount of time would pass from one course assessment to the next, it was sometimes difficult to discern the impacts made by the changes instructors implemented in the classroom.

Moving forward, program-level assessment will sharpen its focus on qualitative feedback, which will mean conducting fewer assessments at a time so that more creative and reflective thinking can be incorporated into the assessment process. DCC faculty decided that regardless of the number of program-level learning outcomes a particular program may have, they should all be assessed at least twice during a seven-year accreditation cycle. The assessment process has also been simplified by mapping courses to program and institutional learning outcomes, which means that as program learning outcomes are assessed, so are the courses that are connected to achieving those PLOs. While the number of program-level assessments to conduct will not be uniform for each instructor, it is a significantly reduced load and should produce higher quality feedback that is more meaningful to continuous improvement of student learning.

Below are abbreviated, generic examples of the basic mapping structure and assessment timeline utilized by DCC, using fictional courses from a fictional Certificate of Applied Science program in “Learning Assessment.”

- ILO1:** *Critical Thinking* - the objective analysis and evaluation of issues, ideas, or assertions...
- ILO2:** *Effective Communication* - designed to inform, instruct, persuade through expression of a message...
- ILO3:** *Mathematical Proficiency* - develop and apply mathematical thinking to solve a range of problems...
- ILO4:** *Information Literacy* - obtain and evaluate specific information to meet a wide range of needs...
- PLO1:** *Human Relations* – skills related to collaboration, ethics, and interpersonal workplace dynamics...
- PLO2:** *Proficiency in Assessment* - apply assessment theories and practices to improve institutional effectiveness...

EXAMPLE: Course and Program Mapping for a Fictional “Learning Assessment” CAS Program

Course #	Course Title	ILO1	ILO2	ILO3	ILO4	PLO1	PLO2
ASMT101	Intro to Learning Assessment	X	X				X
ASMT102	Intro to Learning Assessment Lab	X				X	
ASMT201	Advanced Learning Assessment Techniques	X	X		X	X	
ASMT260	Data Analysis in Learning Assessment	X	X	X	X		X

EXAMPLE: Assessment Timeline for a Fictional “Learning Assessment” CAS Program

Course #	Course Title	22-23	23-24	24-25	25-26	26-27	27-28	28-29
ASMT101	Intro to Learning Assessment	ILO1	ILO2	PLO2		ILO1	ILO2	PLO2
ASMT102	Intro to Learning Assessment Lab	ILO1	PLO1			ILO1	PLO1	
ASMT201	Adv. Learning Assessment Techniques	ILO1	ILO2 PLO1		ILO4	ILO1	ILO2 PLO1	ILO4
ASMT260	Data Analysis in Learning Assessment	ILO1	ILO2	ILO3 PLO2	ILO4	ILO1	ILO2 ILO3	PLO2 ILO4

DCC Assessment Plan Template

This form has been designed for use in program and course assessments. Please complete a separate plan for each course-level and program-level assessment you will conduct. You should keep a copy of the completed plans and submit (via email) a copy to the Academic Coordinator.

ASSESSMENT PLAN: This section should be completed **at the beginning of the semester** you will conduct the assessment, preferably before classes start. Time will be given to you to complete this section during in-service.

1. Semester and Year of Assessment:
2. Instructor Conducting Assessment:
3. Institutional and/or Program Outcome(s) Being Assessed:
4. Instructional / Student Learning Concern to be Addressed:
5. Student Group / Demographic to Track Throughout the Semester:
6. The Course(s) you Will Integrate into This Assessment:
7. **What** are your course-level strategies or interventions to assess the student learning concern related to **ILO#1**, and **why** are you using these methods?
8. What tools *and/or* measures will you use to conduct your assessment, and how will you gather data feedback?

SAMPLE – please use a current Assessment Plan provided by the Dean of Academics

ASSESSMENT REFLECTION: This section should be completed **at the end of the semester** after you have conducted the assessment, in the days immediately after classes end. You should use the time given to you on assessment day to complete this section of the assessment plan. Use the assessment plan(s) you completed at the beginning of the semester to help you reflect on and evaluate the process and feedback.

1. What were the results of your assessment? What did you discover? What did you confirm?

2. What questions or insights do you have for your faculty colleagues based on your assessment?

3. Based on the data and feedback you gathered from the assessment process, what changes will you make to your course(s) and/or program? How will these changes lead to continuous improvement in your program?

4. What changes or improvements do you recommend for the college based on the data gathered from your assessment? How would these changes lead to continuous improvement across the campus community?

When you have completed this assessment, please save a copy for yourself and submit a copy (via email) to the Academic Program Coordinator and Dean of Academics. These assessments will be kept on file and utilized in program review, instructor evaluations, budget review, and academic planning.

Instructor's Signature

Date

Additional Resources

This assessment plan is designed to give an overview of assessment at DCC, not to be a comprehensive resource for all things related to assessment. Please take time to visit these websites for helpful information related to assessment of student learning. As you discover other useful resources, please share them with your faculty colleagues and others who would benefit from the information. Please note that URLs can change without notice, and some of these links may no longer exist when you try to access them. Effort will be made to ensure active links are used.

ACCREDITATION

- Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU): <https://nwccu.org/>
- NWCCU Accreditation Standards: <https://nwccu.org/accreditation/standards-policies/standards/>
- Institutional Responsibilities: <https://nwccu.org/accreditation/standards-policies/institutional-responsibilities/>
- NWCCU Annual Conference: [https://nwccu.org/programs and events/annual-conference/](https://nwccu.org/programs_and_events/annual-conference/)

ASSESSMENT

- Accreditation Association for the Assessment of Learning in Higher Education (AALHE): <https://www.aalhe.org/>
- AALHE Annual Conference: <https://www.aalhe.org/annual-conference>
- AALHE Assessment Resources: <https://www.aalhe.org/assessment-resources>
- Assessment Commons (Internet Resources for Higher Ed Outcomes Assessment): <http://assessmentcommons.org/>

BLOOM'S TAXONOMY

- From Vanderbilt: <https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/blooms-taxonomy/>
- From Iowa State: <https://www.celt.iastate.edu/teaching/effective-teaching-practices/revised-blooms-taxonomy/>
- Cognitive Domains: <https://teachersupport.info/blooms-taxonomy/#cognitive>
- Measurable Verbs: <https://www.utica.edu/academic/Assessment/new/Blooms%20Taxonomy%20-%20Best.pdf>

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Learning Outcomes Review Checklist: <https://teaching.cornell.edu/resource/learning-outcomes-review-checklist>
- National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA): <https://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org/>
- Writing Learning Outcomes: <https://teaching.cornell.edu/resource/getting-started-writing-learning-outcomes>
- Video on Creating High Quality Course Learning Outcomes:
https://mediaspace.wisc.edu/media/Webinar+Creating+High+Quality+Course+Learning+Outcomes+/1_7769e9e4

MONTANA UNIVERSITY SYSTEM

- Board of Regents: <https://mus.edu/board/>
- Common Course Numbering System: <https://ccn.mus.edu/search/>
- Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education: <https://mus.edu/che/>
- Two-Year Education: <https://mus.edu/2yr/index.html>



Appendix D: 2023-2024 Faculty Assessment Report

2023 DCC Faculty Assessment Report Assessment of ILO#1: Critical Thinking

Background:

The purpose of assessment is to evaluate the quality of learning to make continuous improvements to teaching and learning. Faculty members at Dawson Community College play a pivotal role in health, vitality, and sustainability of the College, because the quality of the instruction and academic programs at DCC have a direct impact on the effectiveness of the institution. NWCCU standard 1.C.5 clarifies that assessment should be principally entrusted to our DCC faculty: *“The institution recognizes the central role of faculty to establish curricula, assess student learning, and improve instructional programs.”* To ensure that we continue to meet the shifting and growing expectations of our students and other stakeholders, it is important for faculty to engage in ongoing assessment of student learning.

At DCC, we recognize and appreciate two key reasons to implement assessment of student learning:

COMPLIANCE: The consistent use of an effective assessment process ensures that the College complies with NWCCU accreditation standards. Accreditation standard 1.C.5 specifically directs the College to *“engage in an effective system of assessment to evaluate the quality of learning in its programs.”* Assessing for compliance is essential and can traditionally be done with minimal effort, but an assessment process primarily motivated by compliance often fails to close the loop. That is, it lacks a compelling, motivational aspect that prompts instructors and/or the institution to make meaningful, value-adding, changes to courses and programs.

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT: The second reason to utilize assessment of student learning is to inform and ensure continuous improvement to instructional activities. A culture of continuous improvement keeps things running smoothly and performing optimally by engaging all employees, setting clear expectations, celebrating creativity, and encouraging positive changes. Assessing for continuous improvement requires more intentionality, planning, and reflection. If done consistently well, it will provide more useful, relevant feedback to campus-wide teaching, learning and student support services.

Assessment Focus:

In January of 2023 the faculty decided to focus the assessment process on an Institutional Learning Outcome (ILO). ILOs are the knowledge, skills, abilities, and attitudes that students are expected to develop because of their overall experiences with any aspect of the college, including courses, programs, and student services. DCC's Institutional Learning Outcomes are broad in their scope and are reflected in all degree and certificate requirements, whether transfer or career-technical in nature.

More specifically, the focus of 2023's assessment was **Institutional Learning Outcome #1: Critical Thinking**. At Dawson Community College, critical thinking is defined as the objective analysis and evaluation of a topic in order to form a judgment and/or creatively solve a problem. A student who has completed a degree or certificate program from DCC will be able to synthesize, and apply critical thinking to meet academic requirements, make decisions, and/or solve problems.

Within that context of critical thinking, the faculty also identified a **student learning concern** that they wished to focus on through the duration of the assessment period. After valuable discussion, it was determined that the group's designed strategies and interventions should be focused on addressing the prevalent need for students to show improvement in their study habits and skills.

To dial in the assessment process even more particularly, the faculty also identified a **specific cohort of students** that they wished to track to determine if their classroom interventions had a positive impact. They faculty chose to track DCC students who were identified as being in need of some degree of remedial or developmental education. The Dean of Academics and the Registrar later worked together to identify this population using DCC's placement standards as a guideline. Any student who met one or more of the following criteria would be a part of this cohort:

- Enrollment in a sub-100 or co-requisite Math or Writing course, and/or
- A placement score of ≤ 50 in Math, and/or
- A placement score of ≤ 60 in Writing, and/or
- An ACT score of ≤ 20 .

In order to ensure students in the identified population were not inequitably treated, favored, or targeted to skew the data or results of the assessment interventions, the faculty were never given the specific students who were part of this cohort.

The following feedback was gathered from faculty at the College's Fall 2023 and Spring 2024 Faculty Assessment Days. In August of 2023 the faculty reviewed their colleagues' assessment plans and reflections from the Spring 2023 semester. In January 2024 instructors gathered to review the assessment plans from the Fall 2023 semester. So all of the feedback that follows pertains to the year 2023, even though that timeframe technically spans two academic years.

Proposed Strategies and Interventions

To address the concerns related to student habits and skills, DCC faculty across all disciplines indicated that they were going to try a wide range of strategies to effect change or improvement. The most common strategy employed by faculty was a stricter enforcement of their policies related to attendance, assignments, cell phones, and due dates. A relatively equal number of faculty members incorporated instructor-guided group projects into their curriculum. Other common strategies included incorporating more comprehension checks and discussions into class time, and taking steps to make feedback more frequent and meaningful. Finally, some instructors declared their intent to provide multiple methods for students to communicate feedback on assignments, and others indicated their plan to scaffold their course lectures, lessons, and assignments in a way that helped students build on their foundational skills and develop their critical thinking.

Proposed Tools, Measures, and Techniques

To measure the effectiveness of their strategic interventions, faculty decided to employ a number of useful and common techniques. Many instructors shared that they would compare the quality of this year's student work to some standard – previous years' work, an assignment rubric, a student-developed plan, a standard of correctness or quality, grades, or a degree of completion. Other faculty members indicated their plan to incorporate more cognitive engagement (critical thinking essays and questions, etc.) as provide a way to gauge the development of (or lack of) critical thinking skills. This in turn would provide instructors a way to provide more meaningful feedback and reinforcement to

students through the learning process. In some courses, instructors used pre-tests and compared them to post-test scores to measure improvement, and others commented that they were going to be more intentional about using both quantitative (tests, deadlines, etc.) and qualitative (discussion, etc.) measures. For one particular faculty member, their technique was simply to begin integrating more language from Bloom's taxonomy (remember, understand, apply, analyze, etc.) to measure learning across a range of cognitive levels.

Results, Discoveries, and Confirmations

By implementing a stricter adherence to their own policies, including higher or added expectations, many faculty reported that student performance improved. Instructors also noted that student learning and work quality improved by providing students with more opportunities to improve their work before submitting it. Similarly, when faculty provided their students with regular feedback, reviews, examples, opportunities to improve their work, and more frequent testing, these measures had a positive impact on their learning experience. Also noted by fewer faculty, but no less meaningful, was the observation that covering key concepts a slower pace, with more discussion, and more frequent repetition of key concepts, improved student engagement and classroom dynamics, while also leading to better comprehension and results. Overall, the faculty noted that most of their feedback was positive, which seems to be an indication that the process is working – or at least beginning to work. They reported their belief that students being challenged to use the same study skills across courses is building their competency.

During the department-wide discussion about the results of their strategies and interventions, faculty noted two additional observations worth considering. First, one instructor noted that class size and subject matter likely impacts the effectiveness of some of these interventions, and that not every strategy will work in every setting. A couple other faculty members noted that frequent feedback tends to produce deeper engagement, likely due to students' desire for instant gratification and results. If the feedback they're receiving is positive, they are eager to receive it.

One significant question that arose out of this observation was how to incentivize students to use the resources and opportunities provided to them. A couple of instructors commented that the students we are trying to motivate to improve their study skills are not the types of students who are motivated in standard ways (grades, scholarships, degrees, etc.).

Questions and Insights

DCC faculty had several questions that were prompted by their assessment reflections. All of these questions reflected the struggles instructors had with keeping their students engaged both in and out of the classroom. For example, "How do you keep your students off of cell phones?" and "What are the typical penalties for late assignments?" were common questions that stimulated a good exchange of ideas among the faculty. Additionally, "How do you increase engagement and minimize distractions?" and "How do we teach time management?" and "How do you help them learn and develop study skills?" were common, questions that led to a wide range of responses from the group.

Three more questions were of particular interest to the whole academic department because of their broad impact. First of all, one faculty member asked if instructors still have enough time in class to cover essential material after incorporating these additional learning strategies directed at improving student study skills and habits. Another important question regarded the challenge of getting students

to use their textbooks and whether the institution's decision to prioritize or recommend eBooks over traditional textbooks has had a negative impact on students' reading discipline and comprehension. The third pressing question was how to overcome the College's lack of resources to provide assistance to students.

In addition to these questions, faculty also shared several obvious but meaningful insights taken from their assessment reflections. In large part, these insights served to confirm that little adjustments or improvements can have a significant impact on student learning. Some instructors noted the critical role that faculty play in helping students develop study skills and just generally having a positive educational experience. Some noted the impacts of simple actions like consistent enforcement of policies and due dates or the added emphasis on the importance of completing homework. Other insights were more prescriptive in nature. For example, one instructor noted that faculty intentionality, diligence, and commitment to the learning process has a direct impact on student success. In other words, it's important for instructors to trust the process. This comment prompted general support and sparked a couple of other related insights. For example, another instructor noted that increased faculty engagement throughout larger assignments may help students to synthesize the learning process.

Finally, some insights pointed to the need to help students understand how each course fits into their comprehensive education. There was widespread agreement among the faculty that if students appreciated and understood the scaffolding of course content and each course's relevance to other disciplines, it would have a very positive impact on their educational experience.

Changes and Improvements

In response to their assessment results and insights, faculty proposed a number of changes and improvements, ranging from personal adjustments to their methodology, to the possible need for department wide policies, to proposed institutional-level investments.

At the personal level, several instructors noted that they were going to develop more structured and intentional instructional plans to keep program and institutional goals integrated with course content. Others noted that they were going to diversify their classroom and learning activities, perhaps by giving more practice exams, conducting more reviews, adding group projects, assisting students with note-taking, and finding more creative ways to deliver content (including exploring different modalities). Multiple faculty said that they were going to slow their pace of instruction, conduct intermediate assessments of student learning before moving on to new content, increase the speed of their feedback, give more attention to detail, and devote more time to review. Additionally, some instructors noted that they intended to move away from assigning so much online work and begin giving more paper-based assignments. Others said they would give students opportunities to practice study habits in the classroom and, in some cases, invite students to provide input or make choices regarding their assignments.

At the department level, there was a call to explore the option of developing standardized policies regarding attendance and student cell phone use. Faculty believe that inconsistent faculty policies make enforcement problematic. Additionally, instructors recommended a more robust tutoring center with longer hours, additional staff, and strategic interventions with at-risk students. Other faculty noted that the DCC101 course (a college success course) would be an ideal place to introduce resources, set expectations, and reinforce the desired academic culture at DCC.

At the institutional level, most DCC faculty believe there is a need not just for a tutoring center, but a full-fledged academic support center with several part-time tutors available to assist in all academic disciplines.

College-Wide Recommendations

As noted above, most DCC faculty believe there is a need not just for a tutoring center, but a full-fledged academic support center with several part-time tutors available to assist in all academic disciplines. This was the most common college-wide recommendation that stemmed from the 2023 assessments, and represents what many faculty believe to be the primary missing piece from our attempts to provide a quality education to all our students.

Several other recommendations should be much easier to develop and implement, such as the call for more frequent faculty interactions around pedagogy and instructional strategies, a more thorough technology orientation for new students, and a restructuring of the College's DCC101 college success course to incorporate more meaningful student success measures. Since our faculty serve as our advisors, there was also a plea to re-emphasize advising best practices to ensure that students are placed into gateway math and writing courses during their first semester on campus.

Additionally, the faculty group recommended three other significant steps to continue building an academic culture supportive of continuous improvement of student learning. First, the faculty expressed their approval of and their appreciation for our new assessment process, and commented that we need to continue reviewing our assessments as a group as a way to learn from each other and collaborate on possible solutions. Secondly, a couple of instructors noted that smaller class sizes better enable faculty to engage with students and requested that as much as possible, low student to faculty ratios be maintained. Their third recommendation was that adjunct instructors be included in all faculty processes and evaluations. It was expressed that with the institution's strong reliance on adjunct instructors, they should also be included in future assessment planning and review.

Appendix E: Student Cohort Data F22-F23

Student Cohort Data, F22-F23 Assessment of ILO#1 – Critical Thinking

Any student who meets one or more of the following criteria is considered part of this cohort:

- Enrollment in a sub-100 or co-requisite Math or Writing course, and/or
- A placement score of ≤ 50 in Math, and/or
- A placement score of ≤ 60 in Writing, and/or
- An ACT score of ≤ 20 .

For those students in the Fall 2022 semester identified as developmental, the following information has been identified:

- Term GPA = 2.84
- Cumulative Institutional GPA = 2.85
- Total number of students in the population = 136
- Total number of classes taken by these students = 686
- Grades A through C- (including "S" w/no GPA value) = 597 or 87%
- Grades D+ through F and W (including "U" w/no GPA value) = 88 or 13%

For those students who were identified in the Fall 2022 semester as developmental who returned in the Spring of 2023, the same information has been identified as follows:

- Term GPA = 3.12
- Cumulative Institutional GPA = 3.14
- Total number of students remaining in the population = 109
- Total number of classes taken by these students = 875
- Grades A through C- (including "S" w/no GPA value) = 710 or 81%
- Grades D+ through F and W (including "U" w/no GPA value) = 165 or 19%

For those students who were identified in the Fall 2022 semester as developmental who were still enrolled in the Fall of 2023, the same information has been identified as follows:

- Term GPA = 3.31
- Cumulative Institutional GPA = 3.22
- Total number of students remaining in the population = 46 (34 of the original cohort graduated)
- Total number of classes taken by these students = 269
- Grades A through C- (including "S" w/no GPA value) = 254 or 94%
- Grades D+ through F and W (including "U" w/no GPA value) = 15 or 6%