Day 16: Did you know about processes related to the assessment of student learning in Essential Learning courses?


CMU’s institutional student learning outcomes (SLOs) and the Assessment Roadmap have served as the framework and timeline for guiding the institution's progress in developing undergraduate assessment activities. Just as the SLOs of Critical Thinking, Communication, Quantitative Fluency, and Specialized Knowledge have shaped program assessment, so too has the development of outcomes for the above-listed intellectual skills, along with the ability to integrate learning from multiple perspectives, formed the nucleus for the assessment of Essential Learning coursework. Accomplishments to date are outlined below.

CMU faculty members have invested a significant amount of time in the identification of direct measures of student learning in EL courses as well as their review, testing for validity, and ultimate selection of rubrics. Each one - Communication (written and oral), Quantitative Literacy, and Critical Thinking - has been evaluated at least twice, with reviews beginning with the appropriate rubric from the VALUE series made available from the Association of American Colleges and Universities. Based on faculty review group discussions, expected levels of student performance for Essential Learning outcomes were established. Initial results from pilot testing were consistent, and the majority of students performed at the expected lower level (2nd of 4 levels) on rubrics for 100- or 200-level Essential Learning courses.

The most progress has been made in the assessment of Written Communication, piloted twice in AY 2014-15 using the VALUE rubric, with the conclusion by the faculty review groups to use it. A subsequent faculty group reviewing writing artifacts found the results similar to past reviews. Two reviews of a rubric for Oral Communication were conducted during AY 2015-16, with scores for the performance indicators at the expected benchmark/milestone rating of 2 or 3 on a scale of 1 - 4. Based on the results, there was agreement that the VALUE rubric was useful for assessment of both forms of communication.

Two reviews of the VALUE rubric for Quantitative Literacy were completed during AY 2014-15. By contrast, however, the review led to a faculty decision to either revise the VALUE rubric or find another method of assessment. A second review cycle took place in Fall 2016, again using the VALUE rubric but also piloting an alternative rubric for comparison of results. The results demonstrated that the performance indicators used will be appropriate for assessment of Natural Science courses, but a newly revised rubric incorporating both the VALUE and alternate rubric will be appropriate for assessment in the future.

The most challenging SLO assessment has been for Critical Thinking. Both pilot reviews in AY 2014-15 concluded with the VALUE rubric needing revision due, in part, because of inconsistencies in the definition of Critical Thinking as well as in artifact assignment. The
workshop on Critical Thinking facilitated by Linda Nilson in August 2016 was followed by faculty discussions during AY 2016-17 on an accepted definition for this purpose. The VALUE rubric and the performance indicators were modified and have become the institutional definition now in use. Further meetings with faculty to determine common critical thinking artifacts will take place in the current academic year.

Finally, to ascertain if the Maverick Milestone’s over-arching role within the integrated learning model was being achieved, a survey was administered to students enrolled in the Spring 2017 sections. Students were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the statement: “This course was helpful in developing the skills to examine an issue/idea from multiple perspectives.” Of the 241 students responding, 56.8% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. The results were encouraging in light of the newness of the integrated learning model and the Milestone as a capstone to Essential Learning.

To learn more, log into MAVzone and click on the document link found in the CMU Assurance Argument for HLC channel (top left on the Home tab) for the full text of CMU's Assurance Argument. Links to supporting evidence are identified by underlined words but are not available through the PDF version.

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