South Seattle Community College

A Case Study on the Institutional Dynamics and Climate for Student Assessment and Academic Innovation

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I. Institutional Context

A. South Seattle Community College

South Seattle Community College is a two-year, public institution -- one campus of a four-campus district. Located in Seattle, Washington, it is accredited by the Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges. The campus mission statement stresses preparation for life and work, involvement with the community, and its partnership with business and industry.

Principal points highlighted in the mission statement further outline South's role within the Seattle Community College District. That role prioritizes technical education, transfer functions, and serving academically and economically disadvantaged students. Student enrollment figures indicate approximately a 60 percent technical, versus a 40 percent academic transfer division of SSCC's primary institutional role. Even within SSCC's technical and professional division, however, faculty point to an emphasis on academics as relevant to work. The current president, in office for two years at the time of our case study, has placed an added emphasis on transfer function.

The scope of offerings at SSCC reflect the local presence of industries most famously represented by Microsoft and Boeing, and by extension also speak to an emerging service economy supported by new affluence in the area. Accordingly, the most prominent technical degrees offered at South include programs in computer and aeronautical technology, and in culinary arts. "Academic Transfer" degrees offered include a variety of AA and AS degrees, as well as a more specialized AS degree in PreEngineering. In addition, the institution offers Running Start – a dual enrollment program with area high schools. The program targets talented and/or under-challenged students. Thirty percent of students in the academic programs division are participants in Running Start.

South Seattle Community College is situated in an ethnically diverse southern suburb of Seattle. It serves a student population that is racially, culturally and economically diverse. Of the 6892 students enrolled at South Seattle, over 32 percent are of students of color. Refiguring this number to exclude the largely white and male participants in the off-site Duwamish apprentice program, the proportion of students of color rises to over 43 percent of students on campus. One third of SSCC students speak English as a second language – the highest concentration of ESL students in the state. Furthermore, SSCC students are attributed with the lowest socio-economic status in the district. College documents and faculty members note that SSCC students report the lowest level of parental education level as compared to other campuses in the district. The table below summarizes a demographic description of students at South Seattle (See Table 1).

Table 1: Percent Racial Composition of Students Attending South Seattle Community College (Fall, 1997)																					
	Non Resident International Students			Black on Hispanic			American Indian/Alaskan Indian			Asian/Pacific Inslander			Hispanic			White Non Hispanic			Race/Ethnicity Unknown			Total		
	%M	%F	% Total	%M	%F	% Total	%M	%F	% Total	%M	%F	% Total	%M	%F	% Total	%M	%F	% Total	%M	%F	% Total	%M	%F	% Total
% Full-Time	2.2	0.9	3.1	2.3	2.2	4.5	0.4	0.4	0.7	5.2	4.2	9.4	0.8	0.7	1.5	9.1	7.7	16.8	1.2	1.0	2.1	21.3	16.9	38.2
% Part-Time	0.5	0.2	0.7	2.4	2.2	4.6	0.6	0.3	0.9	4.2	3.0	7.2	0.7	0.8	1.4	26.1	17.3	43.4	1.8	1.7	3.5	36.2	25.6	61.8
% Total	2.7	1.1	3.8	4.7	4.4	9.1	0.9	0.7	1.6	9.4	7.2	16.6	1.5	1.5	3.0	35.2	25.0	60.2	3.0	2.7	5.7	57.5	42.5	100.0

Source: IPEDS Fall 1997

The formal administrative structure at South Seattle resembles the hierarchical character typically associated with community colleges. A district chancellor oversees the four-campus Seattle Community College district. On each campus, a president provides leadership for the institution as a whole, and direct supervision of Facilities and Operations, Development, Program Services, Diversity Initiatives, and Budget. At South, a Vice-President for Instruction is responsible for leadership of institutional planning and research, a distance learning/ teaching and learning center, the academic transfer and technical education deans and the corresponding associate deans. A Vice-President for Student Services oversees the following: Enrollment, Student Programs and Student Development, Student Success, Career and Employment Services, Upward Bound, International Student Services, Safety and Security, Community and High School Outreach, Financial Aid, an Early Childhood Center, Advising and Information, and Special Student Services.

B. Academic Programs

Through its Academic Programs division, South offers what the college terms "outcomes-based" associate's degrees which entail 90 credit hours and cover a broad range of academic fields. The division's offerings were reconfigured into three "Areas of Knowledge" in 1996. These are: Visual, Literary and Performing Arts; Individuals, Cultures and Societies; and The Natural World. More recently, the division has worked to bring course offerings in line with the college-wide Student Learning Outcomes. In the term before our study, 36 percent of SSCC's students had enrolled in the Academic Programs division.

Highlighted below are a few of the services that the college has in place in order to serve academic programs students' needs.

1. Student Success Services:

Funded through the U.S. Department of Education's Title IV TRIO grants, the Student Success Services program focuses on student retention. It provides resources to help students complete the associate's degree and transfer to four-year institutions. Its key features include acclimating students to how the college system works and introducing tools for problem solving and performance. The program also focuses on fostering a welcoming college environment.

Student Success Services also aims programs specifically at first-generation college students, low-income students, and students with disabilities. Through the CLIC (Collaborative Learning and Instruction Center) students gain access to orientation courses, transfer assistance, and information resources. The students served by this program are encouraged to participate until they complete their studies at South.

2. Distance Learning:

South Seattle Community College currently offers distance learning through three media: on-line courses, telecourses, and interactive television. Students are able to complete college credit work through these offerings.

3. Intensive English Language Program:

The IELP was designed to aid international students, visitors, summer scholars and business and technical professionals in making the transition into English speaking cultures. It was especially tailored to help prepare non-native speakers of English to enter colleges and universities. Students are placed into classes based on their English proficiency. They learn skills in speaking, listening, reading, basic writing, study skills, note-taking, academic paper writing, vocabulary, and idioms. The upper division students may earn 3-18 college transfer credits and upon completion of the program may enter many colleges or universities without the TOEFL requirement.

4. Diversity Services:

This program was developed to enhance the recruitment and retention of students of color, women, refugees, immigrants and students with disabilities. The Center for Diversity Services works with the administration to promote awareness, understanding and appreciation of cultural pluralism. The Center sponsors guest speakers and promotes multicultural programming.

5. Upward Bound:

The Upward Bound Program serves 50 high school students from disadvantaged backgrounds at two neighboring high schools. The program provides instruction in basic academic skills, science, foreign language, and arts. The program also offers personal counseling, academic advising and social and cultural activities. The goal is to help participating students graduate from high school and gain exposure to college and to help them apply for financial aid and scholarships. They spend six weeks on the South Seattle campus during the summer for intensive college preparatory programs. The program works closely with students, parents, and local high schools to help participating students develop confidence and a strong sense of self.

6. Running Start:

The Running Start program targets 11th and 12th graders whose test scores place them in college level course work. Participating students take college transfer and professional/technical courses for high school and college credit at the same time. Washington state pays SSCC tuition through the high schools where participants are enrolled. The Running Start program gives participants access to any course offered at South, including distance learning offerings.

II.   Institutional Approach to Undergraduate Student Assessment

A. History of Assessment at South

South Seattle Community College's formal involvement with student assessment began over a decade ago. In 1990, South received a federal Aid for Institutional Development "Title III" grant to support the implementation of an assessment plan at the institutional level. The drive for obtaining the grant came from a group faculty members who shared an interest in assessment. The concurrent accreditation visit provided further impetus for the implementation of student assessment on campus. SSCC's assessment efforts generally emphasize institutional effectiveness and satisfaction variables over more specific assessment of student learning. With the Title III grant, SSCC offered staff and faculty training on organizationally focussed assessment, educating both groups on key concepts derived from the James Nichols' model -- e.g. the cycle of assessment, creating a feedback loop (Nichols, 1991). Strategies that emerged from this process include: a department-driven approach, focus group discussions, alumni surveys, industry surveys, formation of advisory committees, student satisfaction surveys, an institutional climate survey, and an inventory of existing assessment strategies. After this Title III grant expired, South Seattle received a Title II grant ($140,000, 5 years) to support further faculty development on assessment issues.

More recently, efforts to assess student learning and understand institutional effectiveness have centered largely on the identification and integration of learning outcomes. In 1997, soon after his arrival at South, President David Mitchell suggested that the Curriculum and Instruction Committee produce a list of student learning outcomes. The resulting list (Figure 1) was posted very prominently in every building we visited. Curricular changes, particularly for ESL students, have resulted. Although our participants found the Student Learning Outcomes salient only to varying degrees, all official course descriptions now link learning goals to the central set of desired outcomes. The Student Learning Outcomes also play an important organizing role in South's most recent accreditation self-study (South Seattle Community College, 2000).

Figure 1: <u>Student Learning Outcomes</u>

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES are the knowledge and abilities every student graduating with a certificate or degree from South Seattle Community College will have. Students will achieve these outcomes as well as the specific curriculum outcomes for their academic or technical area of study.

1.Communication
Read and listen actively to learn and communicate
Speak and write effectively for personal, academic, and career purposes

2.Computation
Use arithmetic and other basic mathematical operations as required by program of study
Apply quantitative skills for personal, academic, and career purposes
Identify, interpret, and utilize higher level mathematical and cognitive skills (for those students who choose to move beyond the minimum requirements as stated above)

3.Human Relations
Use social interactive skills to work in groups effectively
Recognize the diversity of cultural influences and values

4.Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving
Think critically in evaluating information, solving problems, and makingdecisions

5.Technology
Select and use appropriate technological tools for personal, academic, and career tasks.

6.Personal Responsibility
Be motivated and able to continue learning and adapt to change
Value one's own skills, abilities, ideas, and art
Take pride in one's work
Manage personal health and safety
Be aware of civic and environmental issues

7.Information Literacy
Access and evaluate information from a variety of sources and contexts, including technology
Use information to achieve personal, academic, and career goals, as well as to participate in a democratic society

Source: *http://www.sccd.ctc.edu/south/campus/slo.htm*

B. Student Performance Data

Centralized pursuit of student assessment at South encompasses the collection of data on student satisfaction, learning outcomes, and subsequent performance at SSCC and beyond. Every 3 years, South Seattle conducts a climate study. This seems to be the most established and well-known assessment tool in place at South. Satisfaction measures similarly comprise the main vehicle for assessment efforts both in several units (e.g. Student Services) and with the climate study institution-wide.

Both formal and informal measures attempt to track assessment practice within the Academic Programs unit. The dean asks faculty to fill in an outline with goals, performance measures, and evidence in an exercise similar to the "grid" format driving President Mitchell's efforts to connect institutional goals to evidence of student and unit performance. Several departments in the Academic Programs unit conduct exit interviews with departing students. Moreover, some units also use student focus groups to collect feedback on unit performance. Tutoring programs have implemented a peer evaluation process. Academic Programs has also attempted a pre-test/post-test study using the ASSET, which is routinely used as a placement tool at South. The study relies on students' volunteering to undergo the exam a second time. Since volunteers have not yet stepped forward in sufficient numbers, despite incentives, the study has yet to be successfully undertaken.

Academic Programs also attends to data on student performance after transfer. For example, the college's most recent accreditation self-study reports that SSCC transfer students' GPA's at the University of Washington were shown to be indistinguishable from UW transfer students from community colleges state-wide(South Seattle Community College, 2000, p. 31). In a more centralized effort to track students after they leave South, the institutional planning office distributes periodic alumni surveys measuring satisfaction among other variables.

C. Nature and Source of Instruments and Reports

The initial momentum for assessment resulted from a three-year Title III grant focusing on institutional effectiveness and a subsequent four-year faculty development grant. Through these two grants a great deal of discussion took place concerning how students learn and how their learning could be measured. As a result, many faculty were trained in classroom assessment research and methodology. A small core group of faculty became particularly engaged with assessment. During these grants' duration, significant attention was paid to "closing the loop" between feedback and program planning.

Both an alumni and a student outcome survey were acquired externally through ACT. However, the student services survey was developed internally by staff and faculty. This decision stems from the belief that staff are more invested in student feedback if they are involved in creating the instrument. In addition to these instruments, focus groups are held with general groups of students as well as focussed specifically on students of color. Retention reports are generated quarterly.

While the grants provided some initial momentum for assessment, the current accreditation process has regenerated interest in student learning outcomes. Following grant completion, SSCC moved away from the assessment cycle model and is now refocusing its attention. Common in institutional assessment, people at South are inundated with survey data but haven't found formal ways to present or use their findings. Their goal is to, at minimum, write a statement identifying important findings and a plan for using this information as a campus community. The assessment committee is charged with this interpretation and planning task.

III.   Institution-wide Support Patterns Guiding & Promoting Student Assessment

A. Mission and Purpose

The institutional mission statement refers to student assessment obliquely with the following sentence: "To ensure these missions are accomplished, we commit to ongoing improvement of programs and services and professional development opportunities for our employees." (See Figure 2). The reference to 'ongoing improvement' evokes a 'continuous quality improvement' tradition which has been linked in practice and literature with general performance assessment in organizations. Likewise, neither does the highly emphasized "Student Learning Outcomes" statement address student assessment directly (See Figure 1). Historically, however, professional development at South had addressed assessment principles in a significant way. Despite the absence of any explicit reference to of assessment in either the mission or the student learning outcomes themselves, a look at institutional support patterns (practices, structures, etc.) will illuminate its role as seen by the leadership at South.

Figure 2: <u>South Seattle Community College Mission Statement</u>

South Seattle Community College is a constantly evolving educational community dedicated to providing quality learning experiences which prepare students to meet their goals for life and work.

The College values and promotes a close involvement with the community and strong partnerships with business, labor and industry.

The college commits to meeting the diverse needs of students by providing:
College transfer programs and technical and professional programs which prepare students to succeed in their careers and futher their education.

Responsive technical and professional training programs developed in collaboration with business, labor and industry.

Student-centered and community centered programs and services which value diversity, support learning, and promote student success.

Lifelong learning opportunities for the cultural, social, professional and personal development of the members of our communities.

Source*: http://www.sccd.ctc.edu/south/campus/mission.htm*

B. Regular Institution-wide Events Related to Student Assessment

Regular faculty development seminars — in particular those originally sponsored by the Title IV grant in the mid- to late-1990s – focus largely on student assessment issues. A Teaching and Learning Center provides ongoing support of faculty development in teaching, learning and assessment issues.

C. Planning and Coordination for Student Assessment

Institution-wide support patterns for student assessment simultaneously reflect and moderate the hierarchical organization of the administration at South. On the one hand, formal structures in place follow a literal hierarchy from top to bottom, relying on a nested set of committees responsible for the implementation of assessment. President Mitchell has an express interest in implementing assessment of mission-statement goals and the integration of assessment into department and unit plans. Each vice-president is responsible for connecting assessment activities in their area to the mission statement using a grid to model and report how each mission point links with practice. In turn, deans report assessment activity to their respective vice-presidents. Within the Academic Programs division, the dean involved faculty in an extension of the "grid" exercise undertaken by the vice-presidents.

Across the college's various units, a parallel hierarchy of committees oversees assessment policy at South. The Assessment Committee, a sub-entity of the Institutional Effectiveness Committee, makes the recommendations upon which the President's cabinet must act. Within the academic transfer program, the Curriculum and Instruction Committee responds to the assessment committee's recommendation and advises the vice-president for instruction. Throughout all these levels an emphasis on program review -- versus other forms of student assessment -- becomes clear. Many participants reported a perception that South was not making use of assessment data, neither in individual units, nor institution-wide.

Although some participants intimated an uncertainty that people at the institution had thoroughly "bought into how assessment drives decisions," classroom assessment at South is alive and well in the practice of individual instructors. Interest in and use of these data, however, seem to stop at the department level. Although there have been recent efforts to cultivate a more participatory climate, a somewhat hierarchical structure has persisted at South (as at many community colleges). Given that structure, the department-level concentration of the use of classroom data – while not actually unusual at any type of institution -- translates to a particularly local implementation of student assessment at SSCC. Nevertheless, faculty report that program- and institution-level administration remains supportive of these efforts. Classroom assessment is – and this is arguably quite appropriate – simply not driven by the administration at South, but rather by active faculty. It becomes apparent, therefore, that a division exists in the concept of assessment according to level.

D. Support for Student Assessment

Support for student assessment at South shows both breadth and depth. We have discussed the vertical divide in the implementation and use of assessment at institutional and departmental/classroom levels. Even if support was often qualified, faculty awareness of institutional agenda for assessment remained high. Conversely, support for institution-wide

assessment efforts emerged more evidently across the higher administrations of the vice-presidents' areas.

E. Evaluation of Student Assessment Process

Formal evaluation of assessment at South is carried out primarily within the three-year cyclical program review and in accreditation self-study for 2000. Within both these processes individual units present a battery of assessment activities in place primarily to document the extent of their efforts. No formative mechanism is in place to support the use of these evaluations for the improvement of practice. Although several participants offered additional commentary or expressed goals and directions for future assessment efforts, this kind of evaluation hovered at the informal level. Using the parlance of the James Nichols model cited in South's early assessment seminars, several participants noted that the feedback loop had not been made complete at South.

Most generally speaking, South Seattle Community College emphasizes student satisfaction, self-ratings and program review in its assessment practice. The assessment of student learning – although present in stated goals and in several examples of practice -- has not been stressed to the same degree.

IV.   External Influences

A. Washington State

A unique aspect of the statewide context for our case study, we found, was that institutions seem to an unusual level of reciprocity in developing and implementing the state mandates for student assessment in Washington higher education. While participants at multiple institutions noted an increased attention from the state legislature and the HEC Board in recent years, they also perceived (and had even grown to expect) ample opportunity to guide, shape and critique policy emerging from Olympia.

Moreover, several institutions throughout the state system had established and identified with student assessment activity several years prior to the legislature's stepping up of demands with regard to student assessment and institutional effectiveness. When proposals for policy linking budget to student assessment began to emerge, several institutions -- notably UW-Seattle and Western Washington University -- were well-heeled enough by then to respond collectively and to bring concerns and critiques to the HEC board. University players at multiple levels perceived that a true dialogue ensued; the HEC board and activist legislators, for their part, seem willingly to have taken comments and suggestions into account, and to have responded in good faith by negotiating and adjusting policy with institutional input in mind. On the other hand, a few participants who work closely with the state voiced some skepticism as to whether the data reported was seeing much use, or even was genuinely read by the state.

Somewhat contrary to this picture – as derived primarily from our conversations with participant campuses in Washington -- the formal history of policy in Washington state places the originating legislation at 1989. That would be at about the same time that some state campuses were starting to establish their assessment activity. This may mean that the original policy efforts made little impression on faculty and administrators involved in assessment at the active institutions. Possibly, later efforts to tie budget allocation were perceived by the institutions as a relatively greater move on the part of the legislature and coordinating boards.

B. Accreditation

In the process of conducting periodic accreditation self-studies, SSCC participants report discovering both gaps and success stories in the institution's multiple levels of student assessment practice. In part due to these studies, some report that South is starting to use data more thoroughly: to assess effectiveness, to inform change, and in turn to study effectiveness of change. This effect is evident, for example, in South's Accreditation 2000 self study (South Seattle Community College, 2000, p. 22, 28-29).

V.   Academic Management Policies and Practices

In the 1980's Institutional Effectiveness was a hot topic among the post-secondary institutions in the Pacific Northwest. The administration at South Seattle Community College was visionary in seeing the needs of a student assessment plan both for internal and external purposes.

In 1990 South Seattle Community College was awarded a Title III grant to develop an Institutional Assessment plan. Traditionally, SSCC's technical programs had been assessed by external evaluators, while internal evaluators had assessed the academic programs. The grant led to the creation of the Institutional Effectiveness Committee to spearhead a revision of these processes. Working directly beneath that committee, the Assessment Committee was instituted as well. In the beginning, the main goals of the Institutional Effectiveness Committee were centered on program evaluation. On the technical side, programs were asked to assess how current their equipment, training, and certifications were, and further to gather data on employer satisfaction. The academic unit was urged to gather information on student success, including transfer rates and job placement.

The move to gather information on student learning was motivated by the accreditation process several years later. Currently, the Institutional Planning Office administers a student survey for College Effectiveness on Student Learning Outcomes, a Student Climate Survey, an Alumni Survey, as well as a beginning-middle-end Survey with interviews. The Assessment Committee's role is to review the results and select the key findings to report to the Institutional Effectiveness Committee along with suggestions for change.

A. Allocation of Resources

The surveys and data collection are all conducted by the Institutional Planning Office with the aid of Student Services. The institutional planning office – maintaining only one full-time employee – struggles with understaffing issues.

B. Student Information Systems

Data collected through these means are managed by the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges.

C. Access to Student Assessment Data

The Assessment Committee is the first group to have access to the recorded and tabulated survey data. The Assessment Committee then outlines key findings and reports to the Institutional Effectiveness Committee as well as the Curriculum and Instruction Committee and the President's Cabinet. The appropriate vice presidents oversee the implementation of the changes suggested by the group. In this chain, there are faculty and students who sit on the Institutional Effectiveness Committee so that there is a filtering down of the information.

D. Distribution of Reports and Studies to Various Groups

Participating faculty and administrators noted that there was frequently no "closure of the loop" at South. That is to say that information was collected but rarely used in making informed decisions of change. Some awareness of a disconnection between concepts student assessment and institutional effectiveness also emerged. High-level administrators expressed a goal of getting the SSCC community to embrace the importance not only of gathering student assessment data but also of using it to make positive changes to the institution.

E. Student Related Policies

The students at South Seattle Community College are involved in many institutional planning committees. For example, there is always a student on the faculty tenure committees. There is always a student serving on the college council, which deals with grievances inside the institution. Moreover, the Student Services department conducts student focus groups and interviews to learn about the concerns of the students.

F. Professional Development Opportunities for Faculty and Academic Staff

The College was awarded a five-year/$140,000 Title IV grant for faculty development in the mid-1990s. Part of the grant was used to train faculty members in student assessment. Many of the faculty members now gather classroom assessment data.

In addition, the Washington State Teaching & Learning Center gives workshops and money for faculty development. South itself also offers a $1,000, one-time-per-year faculty award for curriculum development.

G. Faculty Evaluation and Rewards

Full-time faculty are awarded tenure by a committee whose criteria naturally emphasize teaching performance. Regardless of the tenure process, however, all faculty members are evaluated by peer instructors as well as department heads. Student evaluations are collected and reviewed each term. No other faculty awards specifically designed to reward innovative teaching emerged in the course of our case study.

H. Academic Planning and Review

The Institutional Effectiveness Committee that was set up by the original Title III grant has been charged with setting benchmarks for institutional direction. This has not yet been completed. Even while that project is progressing, each vice president is expected to connect her or his respective unit's assessment activities to the institutional mission statement, using a comprehensive grid or matrix as described earlier in this report. Each assessment activity is to measure change from a previous year to the current year. Until benchmarks are set, however, the assessment committee will find it hard to determine what kinds and degrees of change are reflected in the grid-reports.

Within the context of national debates about the what kinds of outcomes best represent student success in community colleges, the Washington legislature has proposed counting blocks of courses as an alternative to the traditional use of degree completion as a principal measure of success.

VI.   Innovative Teaching, Learning and Assessment Practice

A. Teaching, learning and assessment activity

Within the instructional units at South, some faculty perceive a substantial level of administrative support for innovative projects and faculty development. Many instructors have internalized what they see as an institutional message emphasizing their responsibility to make courses useful to students. Still others voice concerns that the large number of part-time faculty may indicate a lack of institutional commitment to teaching.

Approximately 70 percent of academic program faculty hold part-time appointments. This prevalence of part-time appointments affects faculty office hours, the number of writing assignments that faculty give, and the level of pre-planning and assessment that instructors incorporate. Moreover, faculty participants expressed concern that these constraints often overload full-time faculty, contributing to burnout and a transience within the faculty in general.

Other career structures also affect faculty work at South. Although the tenure and promotion process may be thought to play a less prominent role at SSCC and other community colleges than at other types of institutions, one participant commented to us that without tenure, he couldn't get away with most of the innovations he tries in the classroom.

Despite the clear impact of external career structures on faculty work, instructors who spoke with us cited an intrinsic commitment to students as the principal motivation driving their efforts to improve teaching and learning practice. Furthermore, many averred that assessment helps them teach better. For instance, one participant mentioned the use of quizzes at the beginning of the term to ensure that students keep up with course reading. Some participants referred to their use of multiple modalities in presenting course material, as a strategy for improving learning and retention: small groups, video, discussion, etc. Others related their attempts to motivate students and enhance their interest in learning by using alternative teaching and assessment techniques. The math department, for example, has collaborated with the Washington Center for Improving Undergraduate Education to incorporate aspects of math reform in its courses.

B. Assessment Practice

Student assessment takes shape in a number of formal and informal practices throughout the academic programs division. Some departments hold norming sessions as a group to help ensure consistency in assessing student portfolios. Another assessment policy requires that students have a 2.0 GPA and submit a passing portfolio in order to move to the next level of English courses. Also worthy of note, the computing technology program incorporates extensive pre-test and post-test assessment processes grounded in course-related student learning outcomes. By way of further example, below we include an emergent inventory of student assessment activity within South's instructional units that teach English in academic, developmental, technical and ESL contexts.

English Department Courses:

The English department uses a variety of placement tools, including ASSET and ACT scores.

Faculty expressed an awareness of institutional student learning outcomes, and described their efforts to incorporate these into syllabi and classroom practice.

Faculty report using classroom assessment techniques from Accent on Learning by Angelo & Cross, and Steve Brookfield's work on critical incidents in their teaching (Brookfield, 1990; Brookfield, 1995; Cross, Angelo, & National Center for Research to Improve Postsecondary Teaching and Learning., 1988).

Several faculty mention participating in workshops on assessment techniques.

Specifically, faculty cited using student self-assessment instruments (to collect data on students' expectations, background, etc.), introductory essays, and one-minute papers, among their classroom assessment strategies.

Some courses employ learning journals. Faculty provide students with a list of general questions about their learning, as a starting point. Students then are expected to evaluate themselves on a regular basis regarding the stated course objectives.

Some faculty also incorporate a reflective essay in which students explore their thoughts on their learning in course-related areas: reading comprehension, developing a personalized study strategy, textbook marking and note-taking

Small Group Instructional Diagnosis (SGID) provides students with an opportunity to give faculty feedback on how to improve classroom learning. A number of faculty on campus are trained as facilitators who conduct a focussed group discussion among students enrolled in a course. Subsequently, they report findings back to the course instructor. The process is confidential, optional, and not a part of tenure review. The course instructor is encouraged to respond to students about the results of the exercise.

Faculty also elicited feedback from students directly, inviting them to write in journals on the question "What can the instructor do to make the class better for you?" Responses can be submitted anonymously.

In general, faculty note that attendance and participation matter. For example, in the process of assessing student learning, they might ask, "Are [students] engaged in the learning process?"

Faculty cited a departmental consensus process through which standardized English learning outcomes are identified to guide classroom practice in developmental courses in particular.

In addition, faculty elicit self- evaluations from students. Learners rate themselves at the beginning of the quarter, and then re-evaluate themselves at the term's end.

Professional/Technical Division English:

The principal course centers on five major writing assignments assessed by the course instructor and also by fellow students.

The department uses a computerized self-assessment program called "skills-bank."

Faculty frame assessment practice within the context of students' goals. The department's use of Workkeys™ templates to guide basic academic instruction within the professional/technical programs was highlighted both in the institutional self-study and in faculty narratives. The Workkeys™ system tests learners in eight applied areas and places results within the context of the identified language skill level needed for various jobs. A passing course grade is based on the skill level needed, given the students' career goals.

Courses offer computer-based assignments to match multiple learning styles. Some courses also incorporate on-line quizzes. Students report at the end of the term in a meta-cognitive essay, "How did you use the program to improve throughout the semester?".

Quizzes in grammar and spelling are often ungraded, especially early in the term when faculty engage in a more formative practice of understanding student learning than the graded activities, which they associated with "assessment." In our discussions, these faculty identified formative practice more readily with "learning" than with "assessment," per se.

Faculty link course grades to writing outcomes as outlined in the college-wide Student Learning Outcomes.

Creative Writing

Faculty report trying to assess learning by mining students' final term projects.

Some courses have incorporated a peer critique exercise. Small groups of students exchange papers among themselves and offer (non-anonymous) feedback on strengths and weaknesses.

Faculty emphasize the importance of positive, and not solely negative, feedback in the peer critiques of student papers and in their own evaluations.

It is also instructive to enumerate forms of assessment reported by students. This not only helps fill out the picture of assessment practice from a student point of view, it also helps to illuminate student awareness of teaching, learning and assessment processes at South. Below, we list an array of assessment practices named by the students who participated in our study.

Students:

Student participants cited quizzes and tests as the assessment tools they encountered most frequently

In addition, students also cited group discussion and group projects as common classroom experiences through which faculty ascertain information about students' learning.

Overall students expressed some skepticism about the availability of opportunities other than on tests to communicate what they have learned.

Two vehicles for assessment figured prominently in students' remarks about what kinds of assessment were most useful to them: feedback from faculty (especially verbal encouragement) and frequent, extended contact with faculty.

Students expressed a general agreement that there is a match between what they are taught and how they are evaluated.

C. Evaluation of Teaching

The results of our study showed multiple formal and informal avenues for assessing faculty teaching. South's tenure requirements involve a three-year evaluation process. Moreover, a post-tenure evaluation by the associate dean is also in place. Other formal structures include not only routine end-of-term and occasional mid-term student evaluations, but also formal observations of part-time faculty's classrooms by full-time faculty, and some use of teaching portfolios. Informal processes – cited as most important by several participants -- encompass weekly staff meeting discussions, intradepartmental norming processes, and other feedback from peers and students. Nevertheless, in the arena of teaching evaluation, faculty perceive that a great deal of attention is paid to student comments. Course structures have been changed and faculty have had tenure appointments delayed on the basis of student feedback.

D. Rewards/recognition for teaching

Some faculty express a perception that little emphasis has been placed on recognizing good teaching at South. In addition to the small grants available through the college, the formal rewards that faculty were aware of included the following: a Life Long Learning award offered by the District; an award for technical education instruction supported by Boeing; and the NISOD award, given out by the University of Texas in Austin.

VII. Uses and Impacts of Student Assessment

A. Uses in Academic Decisions and Internal Institutional Impacts

Both the Title III grant and the Faculty Development grant awarded to South in the 1990s generated discussion concerning assessment, teaching and student learning throughout the campus. Although institutional training and resources were initially provided, the drive for assessment and use of the data remained at the departmental and individual classroom level. The Culinary Arts and ESL programs, in particular, have made curricular changes based on assessment information. While other departments were encouraged to make changes according to assessment results, no systematic structure or accountability on this point had been developed. Recently, the assessment committee has been charged with data interpretation and the creation of written reports identifying trends, issues and suggestions for program planning.

Faculty and administrators believed that their collective emphasis remains on teaching improvement first and foremost. South faculty told us that they were motivated most by their individual desire to teach. A large number of part-time faculty and a perceived lack of recognition for innovative teaching or assessment led some participants to question the college's commitment to teaching. Another participant believed, however, that the past chancellor demonstrated his commitment to teaching by changing the tenure process. Under the chancellor's leadership, new faculty were required to teach in front of the selection committee as part of the hiring process and student feedback on teaching was weighted more seriously than in the past. Assessment practices, however, are not a prominent component of

the tenure process. Based on the faculty we spoke with, satisfaction with the college's commitment to teaching might arguably have been affected by their tenure status: tenured faculty satisfied with direction of the college and part-time faculty feeling under-appreciated by the administration. A high level of commitment to teaching and to students, however, remained consistent for all faculty participating in the study.

Although SSCC collects data on student satisfaction, retention, grades and post-graduation performance, there is little evidence that these data have been used to understand the impact of the assessment activity itself.

B. External Impacts

Since SSCC primarily serves a local constituency, assessment seems to play a minimal role in affecting external factors such as application/acceptance rates, and institutional reputation.

Accrediting evaluations: The most recent accreditation self-study noted efforts to address the following recommendations from the 1990 NASC report: expanded tracking of students' transition from developmental to mainstream academic coursework and a general reference to a student tracking system, information from which could be used to assess program effectiveness.

Grant success: Possibly due to a change in leadership at South, the falling off of grant activity aimed at student assessment has left the effect of the assessment efforts in the 1990s on future grant-getting untested for now.

Communication with constituents: Although it is not realistic to attribute it directly to South's activity in assessment, South does communicate with constituents often and uses data in that communication. No participants noted that they had used assessment data to communicate more effectively with community , secondary school, and industry partners. However, that this communication is important to SSCC is evinced in mission statement, institutional goals and in several programs

VIII.   Assessment Culture and Climate

A. Nature and Role of Assessment in Institution

As we mention throughout this report, activity and support of assessment is present across vertical and horizontal layers at South Seattle Community College. Beyond the fairly wide use of classroom assessment techniques isolated within the instructional departments, however, and despite recent efforts to identify a core set of student learning outcomes and survey students on them, student assessment at South focuses primarily on satisfaction or self-report measures and program review. Although a great deal of data collection is established within the campus culture, relatively scant use has been made of the assessment findings so far.

B. Meaning to Faculty Role

Assessment at the institutional level seems to exert little impact on faculty and student roles. Faculty have access to faculty development opportunities regarding student assessment. Moreover, as a group,South faculty engage in student assessment activities at multiple levels – institutional efforts, discussions within departments and programs, and of course in classroom practice. Many faculty speak about assessment as an important part of teaching practice; some few share a more specialized, systematic interest in student assessment. Nevertheless, the institutional embrace of assessment seems to have only a minor intersection with the traditional and formal roles of faculty at South.

C. Assessment's Role in Shaping Academic Governance Patterns

South Seattle Community College seems to have two different spheres of student assessment practice. The process for each is separate and there is no clear evidence that the two converge. The first realm of student assessment is happening in the classrooms and is carried out by faculty members. Faculty members in the academic transfer program currently employ classroom assessment strategies such as student diaries, one-minute papers, focus groups, and peer assessment. Moreover, departments within the program hold meetings that focus on classroom assessment. The faculty is trained for classroom assessment through workshops both on and off campus. There is a general feeling among the faculty that classroom assessment is vital to the quality of teaching and learning, but those who spoke to us did not draw a direct connection to institutional effectiveness efforts. Our participants did not report any movement of the classroom assessment data upward into the campus administration, for example. Many feel that there is no incentive for them to be doing systematic classroom assessment other than personal and intra-departmental quality checks.

The second set of student assessment activities that occur includes student learning outcome surveys and exit interviews, which measure primarily self-reports and satisfaction. This information is processed through the Institutional Planning Office. The Assessment Committee is responsible for reviewing the findings and passing along the pertinent information to the Curriculum and Instruction Committee. The Curriculum and Instruction Committee is responsible for making changes suggested by the Assessment Committee and the appropriate vice-president is responsible for making sure the changes occur.

It appears as though the two sets of activities intersect rarely, if ever. Moreover, closure remains incomplete on the administrative loop. Once data are collected, the process by which the Assessment Committee reviews them and suggests changes to the Curriculum and Instruction Committee has not come into full swing. Lastly, the benchmarking that will help SSCC to measure change in institutional effectiveness has yet to be set.

South has maintained consistent engagement with student assessment both at an institutional level and in its classrooms. This practice not only reflects a strong tradition following from early grant efforts in the late 1980s and early 1990s. It also illuminates potential opportunities for connecting multiple levels of assessment practice in order to explore student learning to greater effect.

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