# Innovation and Inquiry for Student Learning:
## A Community and Technical College Consortium

# RECOMMENDATIONS TO TWO-YEAR INSTITUTIONS ON INNOVATIONS AND INQUIRY FOR STUDENT LEARNING

## IISL Consortium Cohort of New Institutions, 2009

**Butler Community College**, El Dorado, KS  •  **Central Piedmont Community College**, Charlotte, NC  •  **Edison College**, Fort Myers, FL  •  **Georgia Highlands College,** Rome, GA  •  **Georgia Perimeter College,** Decatur, GA  •  **Hocking College,** Nelsonville, OH  •  **Inver Hills Community College,** Inver Grove Heights, MN  •  **Lake Washington Technical College,** Kirkland, WA  •  **Lorain County Community College,** Elyria, OH  •  **Middlesex Community College,** Bedford, MA  •  **Minneapolis Community and Technical College,** Minneapolis, MN  •  **Prairie State College,** Chicago Heights, IL  •  **Quinebaug Valley Community College,** Danielson, CT  •  **Sinclair Community College,** Dayton, OH  •  **Skagit Valley College,** Mount Vernon, WA  •  **St. Philip's College**, San Antonio, TX  •  **Tarrant County College District,** Fort Worth, TX  •  **Valencia Community College,** Orlando, FL

**RECOMMENDATIONS TO TWO-YEAR INSTITUTIONS**
**ON INNOVATIONS AND INQUIRY**
**FOR STUDENT LEARNING**

The IISL consortium—*Innovation and Inquiry for Student Learning*—was a group project involving two groups of educators from 41 two-year institutions who collaborated to examine the development and implementation of student learning outcomes. This has been a process focused on institution-level learning outcomes that would cut across department and curriculum boundaries. The first cohort of 23 institutions—that we have referred to as the Founding Institutions—began in 2006 and participated in three Summer Workshops. The second cohort— the 18 New Institutions—began in 2008, sharing one summer with the Founding cohort, then had a follow-up Workshop in 2009. During that meeting, we as representatives of the consortium prepared a set of recommendations to other two-year institutions—and to the Lumina Foundation—based on our individual and collaborative experience through the consortium. These recommendations provide critical perspectives on the practices that best served our institutions, and we offer them as a potential foundation for further thinking and planning for educational practices in two-year institutions.

# Contents

# Process for Developing Recommendations

The recommendation activity was implemented as a group process designed to elaborate recommendations with examples anchored in the institutional experience and to help consolidate the members' learning through the consortium itself. We used worksheets with the following questions to structure the interactions:

The 2009 participants were asked to follow a process similar to the one used in the previous summer. They were using their best critical and analytic thinking to examine the substantive recommendations that address the needs of two-year institutions.

**Preparing for the Workshop**

The participants were sent a request to consider the following in preparation for the June 2008 consortium meeting:

*If you were to serve as consultants to other two-year institutions, which topic from the following list would you consider yourself most qualified to address, based on both the work of your institution and your individual expertise?*

> *Topic/Issue/Problem*
>
> - *Articulating institution-wide student learning outcomes*
> - *Building institution-wide learning outcomes into the curriculum*
> - *Implementing assessment of institution-wide student learning outcomes for individual student learning*
> - *Implementing program outcomes*
> - *Sustaining learning-centered assessment*
> - *Meeting external accountability demands while making assessment integral to how faculty think about teaching at all levels: individual student, program, institutional*
> - *Other…*

**Task-Oriented Problem-Solving Interest Sessions** (Tuesday, June 16, 2009, 1:30–4:30 p.m.)

**Session Task and Product.** For the afternoon's session, groups were arranged according to the above issues so that consortium members could work together to articulate recommendation(s) and examples of practice to implement each recommendation(s). By the end of this session each group had created a document that included the following:

- Recommendation(s) that the group would make to other institutions in addressing this issue, including a rationale for the recommendation(s)
- Examples of strategies that worked from consortium member institutions to illustrate how institutions can act on the recommendation(s)
- Supports and barriers that consortium institutions have encountered in implementing the recommendation(s)
- Examples of practice from consortium institutions that illustrate how institutions can address the supports and barriers

***Audience:** Lumina Foundation Institutions, and other 2-year institutions*

As the earlier request suggested, we asked participants to be of assistance to other two-year institutions as they address similar issues. Consortium member contributions will be printed in the final report and distributed via the IISL website. Assume that two-year institutions can benefit from recommendations that emerge from focused collaboration across institutions.

**Process for Session.** Each group approached the task a little differently, but the process roughly followed this timeframe:

> ➤ Spend about 45 minutes or so discussing the issue that is the focus for your group. You may find the following questions helpful for the discussion:
>
>> 1. What topic/issue/problem are you discussing?
>> 2. What led up to it in your setting? How did it get identified?
>> 3. Who was involved?
>> 4. What did you/the group working on the problem actually do—what set of strategies did you use—to address the problem?
>> 5. What was the result of using these strategies? What worked and didn't work and why? What supported these strategies?
>> 6. What kinds of experiences did other members of Founding or New Institutions have in relation to this topic/issue/problem? What additional strategies/supports might work?
>
> ➤ Spend about an hour formulating recommendations including rationale, and examples of strategies that worked. Identify supports and barriers, and examples of addressing them.
>
> ➤ Word-process a document using the template provided.

The responses from the seven individual groups are presented below.

# Recommendations

# WHERE DO WE RECOMMEND THAT WE GO:

## Build on What You Have, Modify What You Already Do

**Statement of Recommendation**

*To colleges working on assessment. . .*

. . .Build on what you have, modify what you do already. You need to have faculty engagement, administrative support and focus on students throughout all levels of the curricula, course, program, college-wide outcomes.

**Statement of Rationale for Recommendation**

Just because you are trying this new way, don't throw everything out. That way you are more likely to get engagement.

Focus on student/learner/learning. Focusing on students means making sure those who pass have mastered outcomes. The assessment results will help orient courses and programs to student mastery, and to measuring their accomplishment.

Make the reasons for the assessment obvious? Data and reports have to have a reason. Faculty deserve prompt feedback, administrative support, time and resources to assess properly and apply results.

By aligning outcomes through all levels of the curriculum, you can do one assessment at the course level to tell you about student learning, aggregate several courses to tell you something about the program, aggregate several programs to tell you something about the college—all from one assessment tool.

**Examples/Evidence/Elaboration in Support of Recommendation**

Inver Hills has had several iterations of assessment. The ones that "stick" have been modified to suit our current needs and have been derived from what faculty already do.

At some colleges, there is strong resistance to importing what has been done at other colleges, effecting a NIH (not invented here) response. Why reinvent the wheel? A lot of this work has been done and contacting experts at other schools can give wealth of information and "institutional memory." But feel free to modify it to suit your own goals. This is key! What matters is not the frameworks—necessarily—but the LEARNING. It's hard to fall in love with a rubric.

Repeated performances throughout the curriculum improve student performance in college-wide outcomes.

**Submitted by:**
Kathy DeDeyn and Anthony Collins, Inver Hills Community College
Paulos Yohannes and Ted Wadley, Georgia Perimeter College

# WHERE DO WE RECOMMEND THAT WE GO:

## Involve Pertinent Stakeholders in Assessment for Learning

**Statement of Recommendation**

Identify, inform and involve pertinent stakeholders in assessment for learning.

**Statement of Rationale for Recommendation**

The sharing of challenges and issues in a transparent fashion creates opportunities for input on ways to improve. Making results and processes public involves stakeholders, so that they observe the centrality of student learning at the institution and have the opportunity to provide input and feedback. A broad-based support of efforts is crucial: If students share in the creation of learning outcomes and rubrics, they will have more ownership and understanding. If faculty are involved from the outset in the creation of the learning outcomes, the assessment tools and the processes for using data, they are more likely to utilize best practices because they understand how assessment is central to learning. External constituents will appreciate and support institutional efforts if they see clarity and purpose for learning, as well as evidence of learning. Linking assessment efforts to mission, culture and need for accreditation and accountability can increase buy-in, support and understanding among certain constituencies (administration, legislature, public). Involving all stakeholders throughout the process keeps everyone aware of the ongoing, iterative nature of assessment.

**Examples/Evidence/Elaborations in Support of Recommendation**

- Allowing external agents to observe student work (at, for example, capstone events) involves the broader community in student learning and creates excitement and support for programs.
- Inviting external assessors can increase perceptions of credibility of teaching and learning, for example, at a social issues symposium or a graphic design portfolio fair.
- Sharing best practices, challenges and processes to promote learning (for example, faculty committees, student focus groups, or advisory boards) creates opportunities for input, feedback, and ownership.
- Having students share with each other their work and reflections on their learning (in, for example, developmental courses or learning communities) increases learning and understanding.
- Making results public (on the web, for example, at college events or conferences) establishes the institution as one that embraces transparency and forefronts student learning.
- Making assessment efforts part of actions taken for accreditation ensures institutional support and provides avenues for external reporting.

**Submitted by:**
Cheryl Neudauer, Minneapolis Community and Technical College
Maureen Pettitt, Skagit Valley College
Michael Seward, Minneapolis Community and Technical College
Linda Smith, Skagit Valley College

# WHERE DO WE RECOMMEND THAT WE GO:

## Foster an Understanding of Assessment as a Learning Process

**Statement of Recommendation**

Since assessment is a vital part of learning, colleges should foster an understanding of assessment not just as a simple evaluation of content and data collection, but as a learning process. The effective education of our students goes beyond knowing, to being able to do what one knows.

**Statement of Rationale for Recommendation**

- When all stakeholders (faculty, students, administration and employers) are aware of the learning outcomes and ultimate goals of assessment, an environment that promotes true learning is created. This will lead to a paradigm shift to 'learning how to learn'.
- When faculty takes ownership of assessment, it will not be viewed as a task, but as a process to move from assessment of learning to assessment for learning. Faculty should be involved at the very beginning of selecting student learning outcomes.
- The process of assessment is integral to learning.

Examples/Evidence/Elaborations in Support of Recommendation
- Faculty Academy—This is a series of training courses that all new full-time faculty are required to complete within the first two years of teaching. These workshops help create opportunities to share successful practices and remove barriers to learning.
- Part-time faculty training—Reaching out to part-time faculty is vital to success of any campus-wide program at a two-year college. Adjunct faculty must be introduced to the assessment concept and continually supported through the process of assessment.
- Audit process—Full time faculty representatives from each department should be charged with identifying changes and providing feedback of the student learning outcomes and assessment techniques used throughout the college.
- Student self-assessment—Students should conduct self assessments to help them understand and provide input to the process.
- Data base—Encourage faculty to use data collection as a means to improve student learning rather than an evaluation of their teaching ability.

**Submitted by:**
John Reiners, Georgia Highlands College
Leslie Johnson, Georgia Highlands College
Debbie Bouton, Central Piedmont Community College
Elvira Johnson, Central Piedmont Community College

# WHERE DO WE RECOMMEND THAT WE GO:

# Provide Institutional Support for Ongoing Authentic Assessment Initiatives that Are Facilitated by Faculty and Owned by All in the College Community

**Statement of Recommendation**

Provide institutional support for ongoing authentic assessment initiatives that are facilitated by faculty and owned by all in the college community.

**Statement of Rationale for Recommendation**

Student learning and success must be the goal of every individual within the college community.

It is everyone's job!

**Examples/Evidence/Elaborations in Support of Recommendation**

Institutional support should include allocation of financial and other resources for:

- Creating an inclusive learner-centered environment where students, faculty and staff are engaged in assessment activities
- Involve students throughout the process—from focus groups to involvement in college committees.
- dedicated assessment coordinator to coach and mentor faculty and staff to accomplish substantive data collection and documentation of assessment artifacts
- professional development for faculty and staff
- incentives offered for assessment activities (stipends, release time, recognition/awards)
- institutional researcher dedicated to the collection and analysis of assessment data to assist faculty and staff in the continued improvement of student learning outcomes

 A review of the activities of Alverno College, Terry O'Banion's work with the League for Innovation for Community Colleges, and the National Alliance for Technical and Community Colleges provide evidence in support of this recommendation. These include issues and evidence related to improved curriculum and instruction as a result of ongoing assessment activities which support and improve student learning and success.

**Submitted by:**
Bonnie Smith, Hocking College
Heidi Shepherd, Lake Washington Technical College
Jo Nelson, Lake Washington Technical College
Don Ransford, Edison State College
Gail Tracey, Edison State College

# WHERE DO WE RECOMMEND THAT WE GO:

## Faculty Should Develop Clearly Defined, Measurable, and Assessable Student Learning Outcomes in Courses That Align with Program and Institutional Outcomes

**Statement of Recommendation**

Institutional faculty should develop clearly defined, measurable, and assessable student learning outcomes in courses that align with program and institutional outcomes.

**Statement of Rationale for Recommendation**

Faculty, in collaboration, develop, implement, and drive the assessment learning process which measures student abilities in completing assignments, development of skills, completion of tasks, and processes of production at the course level where evidence of student learning can be captured and recorded. Faculty experts can effectively judge the levels of demonstrated ability based on discipline standards (using assessment tools such as rubrics). This information is gathered as qualitative description and quantitative evidence which can provide snapshots of student learning at the student, course, program, or institutional level.

**Examples/Evidence/Elaborations in Support of Recommendation:**

Two examples demonstrate how faculty driven initiatives are working towards developing outcomes-based learning processes. Coming from different perspectives, these collaborative efforts assess student abilities at the student, course, program or institutional levels.

At Lorain County Community College: A strategic plan is developed to identify goals that need to be achieved during a three-year period. Phases of implementation are determined for each goal and individuals or committees are identified to carry out the process. A tentative timeline is also created and revised, as needed, during the three-year implementation.

Quinebaug Valley Community College: Faculty are engaging at multiple points of interrelated assessment opportunities, informed by and leading to a systems understanding of learning assessment. Shared expectations and assumptions have led to an emerging design of micro-level learning assessment that will "roll up" into course, program, and institutional assessment. This emerging process has been facilitated by faculty using a learning outcomes management system to gather descriptive evidence of actual demonstrated student learning; subsequently this evidence automatically provides further levels of analysis of course, program, and institutional effectiveness in relation to student learning.

**Submitted by:**
Janis Thompson, Lorain Community College
George Pillainayagam, Lorain Community College
Brian Donohue-Lynch, Quinebaug Valley Community College
O. Brian Kaufman, Quinebaug Valley Community College

# WHERE DO WE RECOMMEND THAT WE GO:

# Include Common Elements as Possible to Promote Alignment of Student Learning Outcomes (Coherent Outcomes, Common Instruments, and Assessment Rubrics)

**Statement of Recommendation**

We recommend that the process of enhancing student learning at two-year institutions includes as many common elements as possible to promote alignment of student learning outcomes:

- Common course, program, and institutional learning outcomes which both roll-up and roll-down.
- Common embedded assessment vehicles (tests, major papers, presentations, portfolios, etc.) evaluated using common rubrics.

**Statement of Rationale for Recommendation**

- Since assessment is integral to learning and student learning is a primary purpose of a community college, this recommendation enables a shared institutional commitment to student learning.
- The alignment of common learning outcomes across the institutional curriculum and student learning experiences promotes learning that is integrative. The shared educational assumption that multiple experiences in varied situations contribute to the transfer of an ability is also pertinent to integrative learning.
- The presence of these common elements enables and facilitates conversations about student learning within and across discipline boundaries.

**Examples/Evidence/Elaborations in Support of Recommendation**

- At one community college the discussions generated from an examination and rewrite of common course outcomes opened a door for productive dialogue and development of common program and institutional learning outcomes.
- Another college uses common assessment vehicles for common outcomes in each course. The use of these vehicles (unique to each course and administered in all sections of each course) facilitates analysis and dialogue about comparable data throughout the entire faculty.

**Submitted by:**
Phil Speary, Butler Community College
Charles Desassure, Tarrant County College District
Bobbi Stringer, Tarrant County College District

# WHERE DO WE RECOMMEND THAT WE GO:

## Employ Broad Involvement across Educators and Professional Staff in Articulating Outcomes and Implementation Plans

**Statement of Recommendation**

*Formation of Learning Outcomes Rubrics*: When developing rubrics to assess Learning Outcomes, solicit college-wide input from faculty and out of classroom educators, (i.e. admissions personnel, student services, advising staff, academic support staff, student affairs, financial aid staff, etc.) as well as students. This is important in choosing members of the rubric development committees as well as for feedback for revision. Extensive faculty and professional feedback can be achieved through Faculty Staff Association breakout sessions. Student feedback can be accessed through student government meetings, distribution in class sessions, and informal meetings with students in the college cafeteria. This process of rubric develop should be viewed as a cyclical, on-going process.

**Statement of Rationale for Recommendation**

- Participation in the process empowers all stakeholders and reduces barriers to resistance.
- Those who participate in the development of the rubric will have greater ownership of the rubric and the assessment process.
- Receptivity of faculty to the use of the rubrics for assessing institutional student learning outcomes is essential for the assessment cycle to be transformative.
- Inclusion of the out-of-classroom educators empowers important contributors to student learning as learning outcomes are reinforced outside the classroom.
- Student participation enables faculty and staff to hear student expectations and responses to the rubrics. It is also empowering for students to serve as substantive contributors to the process.

**Examples/Evidence/Elaborations in Support of Recommendation**

- While faculty Communities of Practice were formed for each Institutional Learning Outcome to develop definitions for the outcomes to allow full faculty input, after these faculty have been commended for their work, Communities of Practice or committees should be reformulated to include other stakeholders such as students and out-of-classroom educators in order to develop rubrics.
- Each time the criteria are applied, all stakeholders at college are invited to contribute feedback and input to any revision to the rubric.
- Contributors of artifacts are the first people who are given the results of the assessment.
- All contributors, whether in the development of the definitions, rubrics or contributors of artifacts, are publically acknowledged.
- The rubrics are recommended to programs and faculty and for use or adaptation as appropriate for assessment at their level.

**Submitted by:**
Irene W. Young, St Philip's College                    Diane Hester, St. Philip's College
Christine Brooms, Prairie State College           Susan Solberg, Prairie State College
Elise Martin, Middlesex Community College    Ellen Nichols, Middlesex Community College