

Assessment of Student Academic Achievement

Submitted by: Jolyne Ghanatabadi

DMACC is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC). In October 1989 the HLC stated “that assessment of student academic achievement is an essential component of every organization’s effort to evaluate overall effectiveness.” Experiences from the past fourteen years have demonstrated that it is key to improving student learning. Assessment of student academic achievement is fundamental for all organizations that place student learning at the center of their educational endeavors. As a result of this statement, all colleges accredited by the HLC whose accreditation visit was scheduled after 1995, were required to develop a plan for assessing student academic achievement and submit it to HLC for approval before 1995. DMACC was required to create a plan to assess student academic achievement.

Assessment of student academic achievement was taking place at DMACC in various ways on the four campuses at that time (Ankeny, Boone, Carroll and Urban). However, the process was not systematic and lacked documentation. Additionally, common courses offered throughout the district often had differing content and expectations. This was especially true in general education coursework. Occupational courses and programs had, in most cases, course competencies and a general outline of what was to be covered. However, it was identified that courses and program competencies were sometimes stated in ways that were not measurable. Thus, DMACC not only needed to develop a plan to assess student academic achievement that met HLC guidelines, but it needed to be faculty driven.

At the request of Kim Linduska, Vice President of Academic Affairs, a committee was created in the fall of 1992 to address the development of a plan. Dr. Jolyne Ghanatabadi, Winston Black and Connie Burge were assigned to the project on a full-time basis. Other faculty members who received partial release time to assist with the project included: Kathy Crall (Business-Urban Campus), Mike Delaney (Liberal Arts-Ankeny Campus), Kerry George (Health Sciences-Ankeny Campus), John Brockelsby (Business-Carroll Campus) and Vivian Brandmeyer (Business-Boone Campus). The committee worked for over two years with faculty, advisory committees and administrators to develop DMACC’s plan for assessment of student academic achievement and conducted several workshops for faculty.

The first task of the committee was to develop a definition of assessment of student academic achievement, along with a model for assessment at DMACC. A modification of Deming’s *Plan, Do, Act* model was developed. Next, common course descriptions, measurable course competencies and course outlines were developed for each course. Faculty from all campuses met to discuss and provide input to the plan. This was a major challenge for the committee, as some faculty felt this inhibited their academic freedom. Additionally, the creation of measureable course competencies seemed unreasonable. A discussion led to the debate of “competencies” or “outcomes”. The decision was to continue to use the word “competencies.”

Another major outcome of the project was all course descriptions, competencies and course outlines, along with program competencies, were put into an electronic database for both credit and non-credit courses.

The Student Assessment of Academic Achievement was written and approved by the HLC in 1995. The College was recognized for having an exceptional plan and members of the committee were asked to present at the HLC Annual Conference on how the plan was developed.