

Citrus College Philosophy Statement on Student Learning Outcomes and Assessment

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Citrus College affirms its mission to foster a diverse educational community and cultural learning environment that supports student success in pursuit of academic excellence, economic opportunity, and personal achievement. One means of measuring student success is through the use of learning outcomes and assessment. Commitment to learning outcomes and assessment provides crucial underpinning to the mission of Citrus College. It requires that faculty and, indeed, the institution anticipate the impact of educational experiences on students, make critical choices in instruction and services in support of such impact, then assess the effectiveness of these choices and reconsider them based on outcome data.

Citrus College values the accreditation process as a “uniquely American quality assurance process through which institutions collectively set standards for good practice and conduct peer-based evaluations of institutions on a regular basis,” which includes the unifying component of student learning outcomes and assessment in accreditation standards set by the Accrediting Commission of Community and Junior Colleges (Western Association of Schools and Colleges).

Citrus College has demonstrated its commitment to the importance of learning outcomes and the assessment process through its adoption of educational core competencies and assessment of students’ ability to apply knowledge in the areas of communication; computation; creative, critical, and analytical thinking; community/global consciousness and responsibility; technology/information competency; as well as discipline/subject area specific content material.

Assessment at Citrus College targets improving student learning through appropriate outcome measures and holds as its standard the American Association of Higher Education’s (AAHE) “Nine Principles of Good Assessment” (see attached). Outcomes assessment not only monitors what and how well students learn, but it also measures the success of the institution in providing effective learning opportunities. Therefore, the on-going process of student outcomes assessment leads to improved courses, services, and programs and serves as evidence for institutional planning, resource allocation, and staff and faculty development.

While commitment to learning outcomes and assessment demonstrates an institutional value, primarily, this is a faculty-led curriculum matter. It is the role of the Academic Senate, based on the tenets of academic freedom, to oversee curricular content and standards in the development of outcomes, planning and implementation of the assessment process, and use of assessment results to help shape decisions within academic programs and respective disciplines.

The on-going process of learning outcomes and assessment serves to improve institutional effectiveness. Citrus College will base outcomes and assessment on valid, reliable, and relevant assessment procedures generated through multiple measures to collect both qualitative and quantitative information in its efforts to improve courses, services, programs, and institutional mission. Resulting data will provide evidence for curriculum reform, planning, resource allocation, organizational leadership, strategic planning, and staff and student development. The learning outcomes and assessment process is not a means to evaluate faculty; faculty evaluation is addressed in the Citrus College Faculty Association contract.

AAHE Nine Principles of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning

1. **The assessment of student learning begins with educational values.** Assessment is not an end in itself but a vehicle for educational improvement. Its effective practice, then, begins with and enacts a vision of the kinds of learning we most value for students and strive to help them achieve. Educational values should drive not only *what* we choose to assess but also *how* we do so. Where questions about educational mission and values are skipped over, assessment threatens to be an exercise in measuring what's easy, rather than a process of improving what we really care about.
2. **Assessment is most effective when it reflects an understanding of learning as multidimensional, integrated, and revealed in performance over time.** Learning is a complex process. It entails not only what students know but what they can do with what they know; it involves not only knowledge and abilities but values, attitudes, and habits of mind that affect both academic success and performance beyond the classroom. Assessment should reflect these understandings by employing a diverse array of methods, including those that call for actual performance, using them over time so as to reveal change, growth, and increasing degrees of integration. Such an approach aims for a more complete and accurate picture of learning, and therefore firmer bases for improving our students' educational experience.
3. **Assessment works best when the programs it seeks to improve have clear, explicitly stated purposes.** Assessment is a goal-oriented process. It entails comparing educational performance with educational purposes and expectations -- those derived from the institution's mission, from faculty intentions in program and course design, and from knowledge of students' own goals. Where program purposes lack specificity or agreement, assessment as a process pushes a campus toward clarity about where to aim and what standards to apply; assessment also prompts attention to where and how program goals will be taught and learned. Clear, shared, implementable goals are the cornerstone for assessment that is focused and useful.
4. **Assessment requires attention to outcomes but also and equally to the experiences that lead to those outcomes.** Information about outcomes is of high importance; where students "end up" matters greatly. But to improve outcomes, we need to know about student experience along the way -- about the curricula, teaching, and kind of student effort that lead to particular outcomes. Assessment can help us understand which students learn best under what conditions; with such knowledge comes the capacity to improve the whole of their learning.
5. **Assessment works best when it is ongoing not episodic.** Assessment is a process whose power is cumulative. Though isolated, "one-shot" assessment can be better than none, improvement is best fostered when assessment entails a linked series of activities undertaken over time. This may mean tracking the process of individual students, or of cohorts of students; it may mean collecting the same examples of student performance or using the same instrument semester after semester. The point is to monitor progress toward intended goals in a spirit of continuous improvement. Along the way, the assessment process itself should be evaluated and refined in light of emerging insights.
6. **Assessment fosters wider improvement when representatives from across the educational community are involved.** Student learning is a campus-wide responsibility, and assessment is a way of enacting that responsibility. Thus, while assessment efforts may start small, the aim over time is to involve people from across the educational community. Faculty play an especially important role, but assessment's questions can't be fully addressed without participation by student-affairs educators, librarians, administrators, and students. Assessment may also involve individuals from beyond the campus (alumni/ae, trustees, employers) whose experience can enrich the sense of appropriate aims and standards for learning. Thus understood, assessment is not a task for small groups of experts but a collaborative activity; its aim is wider, better-informed attention to student learning by all parties with a

stake in its improvement.

7. **Assessment makes a difference when it begins with issues of use and illuminates questions that people really care about.** Assessment recognizes the value of information in the process of improvement. But to be useful, information must be connected to issues or questions that people really care about. This implies assessment approaches that produce evidence that relevant parties will find credible, suggestive, and applicable to decisions that need to be made. It means thinking in advance about how the information will be used, and by whom. The point of assessment is not to gather data and return "results"; it is a process that starts with the questions of decision-makers, that involves them in the gathering and interpreting of data, and that informs and helps guide continuous improvement.
8. **Assessment is most likely to lead to improvement when it is part of a larger set of conditions that promote change.** Assessment alone changes little. Its greatest contribution comes on campuses where the quality of teaching and learning is visibly valued and worked at. On such campuses, the push to improve educational performance is a visible and primary goal of leadership; improving the quality of undergraduate education is central to the institution's planning, budgeting, and personnel decisions. On such campuses, information about learning outcomes is seen as an integral part of decision making, and avidly sought.
9. **Through assessment, educators meet responsibilities to students and to the public.** There is a compelling public stake in education. As educators, we have a responsibility to the publics that support or depend on us to provide information about the ways in which our students meet goals and expectations. But that responsibility goes beyond the reporting of such information; our deeper obligation -- to ourselves, our students, and society -- is to improve. Those to whom educators are accountable have a corresponding obligation to support such attempts at improvement.

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