Pursuing and Maintaining Excellence in Assessment

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Director of Institutional Research, Planning, & Academic Assessment
Mills College
Purpose of Today’s Presentation

• Tell you a little bit about Mills College
• Describe our evolution to approaching institution-wide learning across both academic and co-curricular programs
• Explain how we engaged our Assessment Committee to create and support a cohesive strategy for learning assessment
• Share how Mills uses Taskstream as a platform to centralize assessment and create a visual means of targeting institution-level assessment processes
About Mills College

Liberal arts college located in Northern California (San Francisco Bay Area)
850 Undergraduate Women-Identified/550 Graduate Men and Women

- 54% LGBQT
- 58% Students of Color
- 48% Pell Eligible
- 92 full-time faculty
- 41 undergraduate majors
- 14 graduate programs
- Accredited by WASC

U.S. News Ranked 5th Regional University in the West and 1st among colleges and universities in the West that provide high academic quality at a good price.
And, of course...

2016
Excellence in Assessment Designee
Where We Were
2007-2013(ish)

Assessment Committee
- Made up of faculty
- Co-chaired by:
  - Director of Assessment
  - Associate Provost

Process in place
- All programs developed learning goals
- Built curriculum maps to align program courses with learning goals
- Measurable criteria for learning goals defined at the course level

Goals defined
- 3-5 Learning Goals per Program
- 10 General Education Goals
- 6 “Mission” Goals
- 5 Division of Student Life Goals
**Where We Were**

2007-2013(ish)

**Assessment Schedule**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Annual</th>
<th>Every 2 Years</th>
<th>Every 5 Years</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Academic Programs</td>
<td>1 learning goal (part of Annual Report process)</td>
<td></td>
<td>All learning goals (part of Program Review process)</td>
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<tr>
<td>OIRPAA</td>
<td>2 General Education goals</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 “Mission” goal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Division of Student Life</td>
<td>1 goal</td>
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A little bit crazy... but, WASC loved it!
So Why Did We Change?

2014ish

• New Core Curriculum Proposed

• WASC’s Handbook for Accreditation was revised to include a requirement to report on the “Meaning, Quality and Integrity of the Degree (MQID)”

• Assessment Director attended the Assessment Leadership Academy (put on by WASC) and was inspired by the readings and discussions
  - Learning as central to college’s mission
    » Should be main metric for determining success, rather than metrics like retention and graduation rates
  - Focus on the learning that is essential for all students
  - Learning is supported by both curricular and co-curricular programs
Inspiration and a Sharpening of Focus
Inspiration and a Sharpening of Focus


- Paradigm shift away from a focus on teaching provided and toward a focus on the learning produced.

- “The quality of learning an institution promotes is what gives that institution meaning and value.” (John Tagg, 2003)

- “Faculty members, administrators, and staff must...take responsibility for student learning as the goal and product of our work.” (Barr and Tagg, 1995)

• Inspiration to move us in the direction of providing a lens through which the entire campus community can see what they are doing and need to continue to do to support the learning we consider essential for our students.
Inspiration and a Sharpening of Focus

2013 WASC Handbook of Accreditation added “Meaning, Quality, and Integrity of the Degree (MQID)” as one of three required self-study topics.

- **Meaning**
  - “Addressing questions about what the institution expects all its students to know and be able to do upon graduation...”
  - “Ensuring alignment among all the elements [of the educational experience]”
  - “Developing the language to communicate clearly about the degree—what it demands and what it offers—to internal and external audiences.”

- **Quality and Integrity**
  - “a rich, coherent, and challenging educational experience”
  - “assurance that students consistently meet the standards of performance that the institution has set for that experience”
Inspiration and a Sharpening of Focus


- Draws on findings from the Measuring College Learning (MCL) Project.
  - Any single measure of student learning should be a part of a larger holistic assessment plan.
  - Focused on articulating a limited number of essential concepts and competencies
- Recognition that content matters insofar as it serves as a building block for more complex forms of thinking.
  - Intersection of concepts (theoretical understandings and ways of thinking) and competencies (skills to engage effectively in the discipline)
- Importance of developing both discipline-specific and more generic competencies (e.g. LEAP and DQP)
- Connection between learning within disciplines and building skills for the workforce.
  - Importance of Career Services participation in assessment
Student Learning Assessment Began a New Phase

Assessment Committee reconfigured to include both administrative and faculty leaders:

- Assistant Director of Career Services
- Director of Library
- Director of Student Administrative Services
- Assistant Dean of Students
- Associate Provost (Faculty)
- WASC Liaison and Dean of Social Sciences (Faculty)
- Director of Center for Academic Excellence (Faculty)
- Director of Institutional Research and Academic Assessment
- Faculty representatives from remaining divisions (Fine Arts, Education)
Student Learning Assessment Began a New Phase

Focus on the students

- Our many different strands of learning goals (mission, general education, programs, co-curricular guiding principles) were very unwieldy, complex and hard for students to understand

- A more cohesive and streamlined vision of learning goals across the college will make it easier for students to access/understand their learning in and out of the classroom, and make it easier for them to articulate what they are learning through their Mills degree
Student Learning Assessment’s New Phase

The “Meaning” Project

- Define the “meaning” of a Mills degree in terms of a single set of learning objectives for, and understood by, all Mills students
- Align all curricular and co-curricular programs with these learning objectives
- Design and implement a new institutional assessment plan focused on these objectives and supported by all areas of the college in alignment with the learning goals being assessed
Defining the “Meaning” of the Degree

- New Core Curriculum used as basis
- Inclusive of graduate programs (specialized knowledge)
- Relevant to departments and programs represented on the Assessment Committee
- LEAP and DQP important resources
- WASC MQID workshop provided additional ideas
- Discussions with key faculty outside the Assessment Committee
- Tia McNair (AAC&U) on campus: supported need for single set of goals → faculty listened!
- Iteration...iteration...iteration...

2 years to complete draft document for faculty review/consensus
The “Meaning” of a Mills Degree

• Foundational Skills
  - Written & Oral Communication
  - Quantitative Literacy
  - Information Literacy
  - Critical Analysis

• Leadership, Global and Social Responsibility
  - Race, Gender, Power
  - Languages other than English
  - International Perspectives
  - Community Engagement
  - Leadership

• Specialized Knowledge
  - Specific Majors
  - Graduate Programs

• Collaborative, Innovative & Experiential Learning
  - Creativity, Innovation and Experimentation
  - Scientific Inquiry
  - Teamwork and Problem Solving
Alignment

• Responsibility of programs to continue the “Core” learning throughout the students’ educational experience
  » One class won’t fully develop students’ proficiency
  » Learning must be supported by major disciplines as well
  » Assessed at the senior level

• Connections between department/program learning goals and the institutional learning goals need to be explicit

• Each Academic and Co-curricular area asked to “map” to the new institutional learning goals in Taskstream
  » Result will be campus-wide “map” of student learning
  » Can review map for gaps in the delivery and suggest additional areas of support
Mapping in Taskstream: Overview
Mapping in Taskstream: Overview

MILLS

Organizational Area

View Participating Area
Organizational Path

Critical Analytical

Written Communication

Oral Communication

Information Literacy

Quantitative Literacy

Cultural, Gender, Power

Languages other than English

Leadership, Global and Social Responsibility

International Perspectives

Community Engagement

Mills College ARS - "Graduate Programs in Business Administration"
Mills College ARS - "Graduate Programs in Computer Science"
Mills College ARS - "Graduate Programs in Economics"
Mills College ARS - "Graduate Programs in English and Creative Writing"
Mills College ARS - "Graduate Programs in History"
Mills College ARS - "Graduate Programs in International Relations"
Mills College ARS - "Undergraduate Programs in Art History"
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<td>Critical Analysis</td>
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<td>Information Literacy</td>
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<td>Mills graduates enter a world in which an unprecedented amount of information is available at the swipe of a smartphone. In order to thrive and to make an impact in this information society, students need to develop the ability to analyze, synthesize and evaluate varied information sources skillfully and critically. At Mills, students learn to approach knowledge generated in scholarly, governmental, media, and community contexts with a critical lens. They gain the ability to ask vital questions, to interrogate their own assumptions and those of others, and to use logical reasoning and evaluative skills to detect and counter biases and unexamined societal assumptions.</td>
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<td>According to the Association of College and Research Libraries, &quot;Information literacy is the set of integrated abilities encompassing the reflective discovery of information, the understanding of how information is produced and valued, and the use of information in creating new knowledge and participating ethically in communities of learning.&quot; In a society of rapid technological change and proliferating information resources, individuals are confronted with an abundance of information in a variety of formats. Students should have the skills needed to evaluate the authenticity, validity, and reliability of information. Being information literate and being able to utilize information technologies effectively are critical components in establishing a pattern of lifelong learning, and an essential aspect of a well-rounded liberal arts education.</td>
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**Students will understand essential skills for achieving academic success**

- Students will be able to identify, apply, and evaluate different learning strategies.

- Students will display independent learning by practicing meta- and noncognitive learning processes.

**Students of all levels of academic preparedness and different disciplines will participate in CAE programs and services**

- Students will have knowledge of CAE resources and know how to access them.

- Students will demonstrate the ability to access a variety of CAE resources.
Mapping in Taskstream: Drilling Down

Assessment Measure for 3.1 Written communication

Outcome Set: Business Administration (MBJ) Program Goals

Learning Objectives: 3. Leadership and Communication
- Our graduates develop the leadership and communication skills needed to successfully manage individuals and teams in multicultural and diverse organizations.

Measurable Criteria: 3.1 Written communication
- Students communicate effectively in written format.

Set: Institutional Learning Goals (Mills College ANS)

Learning Objectives: Foundational Skills

Measurable Criteria: Written Communication
- The ability to communicate effectively in writing is integral to every aspect of a liberal arts education, and an essential competency that prepares our students to become engaged global citizens. College-level communication and literacy are rigorously and thoroughly supported at every stage of a Mills student's academic career. From the introductory first-year composition course to a capstone project in advanced courses in the student's chosen field. Students are trained to move easily and flexibly between different rhetorical expectations and formal registers. They are also encouraged to develop and refine their own voice and sense of style.

Assessment Details

2016-2017 Assessment Cycle:

Assessment Plan (Program Assessment Workspace)

- Measure: Case Analysis MGMT 290
- Program level: Direct - Student Artifact

Details/Descriptions:
- Papers are evaluated according to the rubric developed.
- Acceptable Target: 80% of students are “good enough” on all criteria listed in the rubric.
- Ideal Target: 100% of students are “good enough” on all criteria listed in the rubric.
- Findings for Case Analysis MGMT 290: No findings documented for this measure.

Key/Responsible Personnel:
- Carolyn Sherwood Call (committee chair & Associate Dean)
- Darcelle Lahr (course instructor)
- Ed Quevedo (faculty lead for SRB)
- Deborah Herlitz-Senda (Dean)
## Mapping in Taskstream: Where it Starts

### Center for Academic Excellence

| Create New Learning Objective | Reorder | Edit Set Name/Properties | Remove Set |

**Students will understand essential skills for achieving academic success**

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<td>Institutional Learning Goals: Critical Analysis</td>
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**Students of all levels of academic preparedness and different disciplines will participate in CAE programs and services**

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<tr>
<td>Students will demonstrate the ability to access a variety of CAE resources</td>
<td>Institutional Learning Goals: Information Literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students participating in CAE services will exceed non-participants in retention rates and GPA</td>
<td>No Mapping</td>
</tr>
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**Students' leadership skills will be developed through their roles as tutors and academic coaches.**

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Designing/Simplifying Institutional Assessment

• Centralized Assessment (OIRPAA and Assessment Committee) will focus on two institutional goals annually
  » All departments/programs supporting the two goals will be invited to participate
  » Samples of student work, performances, exhibitions from a cross-section of these departments/programs used to assess learning

• Department/Program Assessment
  » Departments/Programs will be responsible for assessing those aspects that are unique to them
    • Specialized knowledge
Assessment Preparation:

• Aligning classroom experience with institutional learning goals
  o Learning goals are new
    • How are faculty, etc., building them into their coursework/activities?
    • What support do they need?
  o Mapping is telling us who should be around the table
• Creating a single assessment rubric for each area
• Suggesting/creating signature assignments: at least get it on the radar
• “Align” two areas each semester and begin the assessment of these areas the next semester
• At the same time: working with programs and career services to articulate the ways in which each discipline will prepare students for the workforce
Key takeaways, learnings, or points for consideration

• Students need to be able to understand and articulate the learning they achieve

• Assessment needs to be both meaningful and manageable: big picture focus
  - Look at where learning overlaps; don’t try to measure everything
  - By sharpening our focus we will know what we need to know with less effort, time and resources

• Alignment of the learning taking place in courses with the learning goals established is an essential step

• Connecting co-curricular areas with learning assessment yields surprises: most weren’t thinking of their work in terms of student learning but were excited to see the connections; resulted in their feeling more connected with the broader campus

• Looking at the data will tell us what we need to do in terms of not only improving learning, but also our processes for assessing the learning
Key takeaways, learnings, or points for consideration (cont.)

• What seems simple takes a long time

• Vision needs to be restated often: Don’t assume constituents understand

• It’s amazing what hearing from an external perspective can do
  - Invite someone to campus to look at what you are doing (Tia McNair for us)
  - Adds new vitality and authenticity to the project
Questions?
Contact Us

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