Toolbox of Resources for Assessment Projects

Directions: The following are a list of different methods and/or resources that can be used by faculty who wish to complete an assessment of outcomes in their courses, program, or campus-wide. Each item is followed by a review of this resource/method by the Learning Outcomes Committee. It is the committee’s hope that this list can help faculty at GRCC determine an appropriate assessment resource/method for their purposes.

1. CAAP Standardized Assessment Tests

General Description of the Exams: There are six different tests that comprise the overall exam, and these can be used together or separately. There is one for Math, Science, Reading, Critical Thinking, Writing Essays, and Writing Skills. The exams cost $11 each or $17 for two or more. The results are tabulated by ACT and can be compared with COMPASS exams from the school as ACT also makes COMPASS.

Evaluation of the Exams:

a. Math: Pros This exam provided a comprehensive overview of precalculus and assessed basic skills well. Cons However, the content in the test didn’t match up with the content in the courses offered at GRCC, there were lots of algebraic approaches, it wasn’t conceptual, and it didn’t call for an interpretation of the meaning of results.

b. Writing Skills: Pros This test integrating reading into the assessment of writing by having students analyze aspects of reading in order to make assessments of how well a piece was written. The test seemed to mainly assess a student’s ability to identify in the writing of others grammar, organization, and some development issues. The design of the test did a good job of putting the content in context. It didn’t ask questions in a vacuum. Cons However, the test overly emphasizes a student’s ability to analyze the writing of others rather than produce these things in their own writing. This could cause the results of the test to be misleading because students can often identify problems in others’ writing but often not their own. There was also concern that the structure of the questions may lead to instructors having to teach to the test and that the design of the questions may cause students to answer incorrectly because they would over think their answers.

c. Reading: Pros Passage II requires critical thinking by asking students to form inferences and conclusions. Cons Some of the passages were poorly written, and many of the questions focused on discreet details of the story rather than larger issues of meaning or possible relevance to other things and
broader issues. There needed to be more of emphasis on having students apply information, synthesize information, and write about ideas gained from reading. The format of the test might also lead to teaching to the test whereby students would learn how to take multiple choice exams rather than to read deeply.

d. Writing Essays: Pros The questions were open ended. They asked the students to provide evidence and argue rhetorically. The questions were relevant to students' lives – not too academic. The questions called for a level of critical thinking including weighing conflicting issues and making a judgment. The test asks the type of questions that students often get in college classes, so there wouldn’t be such a risk of teaching to this test. Cons The criteria upon which students would be assessed was not immediately clear. There was also a fear that the criteria for assessment weren’t comprehensive enough to capture the majority of the competencies under GRCC’s Written Communication Outcome. (The test didn’t assess for process writing or using outside sources, for example.)

e. Science: Pros Excellent test of science. Cons It doesn’t really assess for critical thinking. It seems to focus mainly on quantitative and symbolic reasoning. Students may balk at the questions with content that they aren’t familiar with. For example, if you didn’t have any background with a certain area of science, you may not know what the test was describing in some of its scenarios.

f. Critical Thinking: Pros It assesses a student’s ability to evaluate an argument, and it does a good job of presenting multiple sides of an argument. It seems to be pretty consistent with the competencies GRCC established for Critical Thinking. Cons The test focuses too much on reading comprehension to the point that it seems like more of a reading comprehension test than a critical thinking test. It seems to only address some of the competencies GRCC established for its Critical Thinking outcome. There wasn’t enough emphasis on application of knowledge; it’s one thing to identify and another to apply. It’s more analytic in style as compared to evaluative.