Rio Salado College
Assessment of Student Learning
Annual Report
2011-2012

Introduction

Rio Salado College's first assessment plan was implemented in 1991. In the two decades since then, ongoing assessment initiatives aimed at increasing student learning have continued to demonstrate evidence of the College's central focus on this work. Student learning outcomes are measured at the College level, the program level (as part of Program Review) and via the continuous improvement Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle at the course level. Collectively, these efforts provide a solid infrastructure for assessing and increasing student learning at Rio Salado.

Over the years, the College's assessment plan has progressed from a static document that was reaffirmed on a periodic basis, to a dynamic, ongoing, and evolving series of activities that are integrated across the teaching and learning spectrum.

The Learning Assessment Team includes representation from Faculty Chairs, Senior Administration, Institutional Research, Student Services, and Co-Curricular Services, and has responsibility for coordinating all aspects of assessment of student learning. A Learning Assessment Steering Team has been formed to guide the efforts of the larger group going forward, and to lead the effort for meeting ongoing accreditation data requirements following the College's successful reaffirmation of accreditation in March 2012. Steering Team membership will incorporate the Vice President, Academic Affairs, the interim Dean, Academic Affairs, the Faculty Co-Chairs of the Learning Assessment Team, and a Faculty Chair who has extensive experience with assessment initiatives.

During 2011-12, the public Assessment of Student Learning website was enhanced and updated so that the College's assessment data and processes are transparent and available to all stakeholders. This site may be viewed at: http://www.riosalado.edu/about/teaching-learning/assessment/Pages/SLO.aspx

College-wide Student Learning Outcomes

Rio Salado has five College-wide student learning outcomes: Critical Thinking, Writing, Information Literacy, Reading, and Sustainability (adopted during 2011-12). These College-wide outcomes are measured through the use of standardized instruments across the student body via random sampling every other year, and were last conducted in 2010-11. They will be repeated in fiscal 2012-13 in conformance with the biennial cycle.

Course-level Student Learning Outcomes

Course-level measurement is conducted for the same five outcomes via Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycles. During 2011-12, the Learning Assessment Team determined that if baseline data collected for three successive PDCA cycles in a given discipline shows 80% of students performing at or above the College level target of 70% for one of these outcomes, it will be established that students have met the standard of competence for that outcome. At that time, the responsible assessment coordinator will discuss other options for measurement with the Faculty Chair of the department.

Critical Thinking: Course-Level Data
Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) Cycles

Faculty Chairs continued their focus on the Critical Thinking learning outcome in a series of continuous PLAN-DO-CHECK-ACT cycles at the program and department levels. All cycle progress is recorded on Rio Salado's College-Wide Assessment of Student Learning SharePoint Site, and is accessible to Assessment of Student Learning team members and Faculty Chairs.

A total of seven programs had improvement cycles during the 2011-2012 fiscal year. Five full PDCA cycles were completed. Four cycles ended after the baseline collection phase, as students met the college-wide target of 80% at or above the college level. Seven PDCA cycles are currently in process, carrying over into the 2012-13 fiscal year. The cycle progress updates, including the number of students impacted, are shown in Table I.

Table I	
Critical Thinking Cycle Progress for FY2011-12	
Cycle Progress Update	**N**
Programs that have improvement cycles*	7
PDCA cycles completed	5
PDCA cycles ended (as baseline students met college level)	4
PDCA cycles ended (for other reasons)	1
PDCA cycles in progress	7
Courses involved	14
Students impacted during PDCA cycle**	1,407
Students immediately impacted by "Act" step	1,027

Note: The General Education program has six departments each running Critical Thinking cycles.

**Note: Number of students involved in "Check" phase

Critical Thinking: Assessment Results FY2011-12

Successful interventions implemented during the 2011-12 fiscal year include adding links to critical thinking resources online, Flash learning tutorials instructing students on critical thinking strategies, improvements in assignment wording and instructions, including sample assignments demonstrating college-level critical thinking skills in assignment instructions, and adjunct faculty training in providing appropriate feedback and support to students. Results of the College's Assessment of Critical Thinking for fiscal 2011-12 are shown in Tables II-VI:

Table II			
"Successful" PDCA Cycles			
Course	**% at or above college level before intervention**	**% at or above college level after intervention**	**Intervention implemented**
ASB102	84.17%	90.91%	Created sample essays for two lessons, specifically instructing students on the analysis component
ECN212	69.10%	87.86%	All ECN instructors completed AFD225 (Critical Thinking)
PHI101	37.15%	81.36%	Links explaining inductive and deductive reasoning were added to the course: — http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deductive_reasoning — http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inductive_reasoning#Strong_and_weak_induction
CRE101	84.20%	91.46%	Changed assignment instructions

Table III	
PDCA Cycles Ended After the "Plan" Phase Because the 80% Target was Met with the Baseline	
Course	**% at or above college level after baseline**
ASD110	84.89%
CHD100	97.83%
GBS221	98.63%
HES100	92.86%
PAR112	90.00%
PHY101	85.42%
SLC201	84.75%

Table IV			
"Unsuccessful" PDCA Cycles			
Course	**% at or above college level before intervention**	**% at or above college level after intervention**	**Action taken**
ENG102 (3rd cycle)	75.56%	70.97%	New cycle/different intervention
ENG102 (4th cycle)	70.97%	75.68%	New cycle/additional intervention
BIO156	52.56%	42.11%	Intervention removed. The entire lesson and assessment structure for the course will be changed and piloted in summer 2012.

Table V	
Courses that Ended PDCA Cycles After the Baseline for Other Reasons	
Course	**Reason ended**
CPD115	The "n" for the baseline was too low. The course is in redevelopment so a new cycle will begin once those changes have been made.

Table VI	
Critical Thinking PDCA Cycle Courses in Progress	
CIS259	EDU220
MAT142	PAR112
SBU200	

Writing: Course-Level Data
Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) Cycles

Course level Writing assessment cycles continued throughout the 2011-12 fiscal year. All cycle progress is recorded on Rio Salado's Assessment of Student Learning SharePoint site and is accessible to Assessment of Student Learning team members and Faculty Chairs. The cycle progress updates, including the number of students impacted, are shown in Table VII.

Table VII	
Writing Cycle Progress for FY2011-12	
Cycle Progress Update	**N**
Programs that have improvement cycles*	6
PDCA cycles completed	2
PDCA cycles ended (as baseline students met college level)	6
PDCA cycles ended (for other reasons)	1
PDCA cycles in progress	1
Courses involved	11
Students impacted during PDCA cycle**	1,031
Students immediately impacted by "Act" step	831

Note: The General Education program has three departments each running Writing cycles.

**Note: Number of students involved in "Check" phase

Writing: Assessment Results FY2011-12

Results of the College's Assessment of Writing for fiscal 2011-12 are shown in Tables VIII-XI:

Table VIII		
Cycles Ended Because Students Scored At or Above College Level at the Baseline		
Course	**Cycle progress**	**% At/Above College Level**
CFS176	2nd cycle	86.92% and 89.37% (2 assignments were tracked)
CHD100	2nd cycle	100%
COM100	2nd cycle	91.68%
EDU276	2nd cycle	98.11%
ELN102	2nd cycle	100%
GBS233	3rd cycle	92.73%

Table IX			
Successful Cycles (Completed Three Full PDCA Cycles with Successful Outcomes)			
Course	**Issue**	**Intervention**	**Post-Intervention**
CPD115	Rubrics on writing assignments were not detailed; students and faculty struggled with writing expectations	Employed the same intervention from cycle 1 (CPD102AB) and Cycle 2 (CPD150). Clarify rubric to align writing organization with college writing rubric	Intervention from previous cycles was employed before the baseline data was recorded. At baseline 100% of students were at/above college level

Table X					
Cycles in Progress **Started FY2011-12, Will Complete FY2012-13**					
Course	**Issue**	**Pre-intervention**	**Intervention**	**Post-Intervention**	**Next Steps**
SOC101 (2nd cycle)	Grade inflation	84.14% at/above college level	Updated rubrics carried over from cycle one; instructors took AFD course on scoring writing	70.54% of students at or above college level	This could indicate that papers are being scored more realistically. Recommend another cycle.

Table XI		
Unsuccessful Cycles		
Course	**Goal**	**Results**
PAR106	**Improve writing scores on a subjective exam.**	Baseline showed only 75.61% at/above college level. Cycle closed because the chair retired.
SLG102	**Improve essay scores with the online scores by implementing professional development.**	Dual scores decreased (91.06% at or above college level in 2010, compared to 90.83% at or above college level in 2011). Intervention was not adopted.

Notable interventions for Writing cycles that concluded in FY2011-12

CHD100:
- Cycle one: New rubrics were added that spelled out the expectations for grammar and mechanics based on the college-wide writing rubric.
- Cycle two: All students scored at or above college level. This showed improvement as 83.87% scored at or above college level in cycle one, while 100% scored at or above college level in cycle two.

CPD courses:
- Cycle one focused on CPD102AB. Inter-reliability scores showed a 0.79 difference between how the CPD faculty and the ENG faculty were scoring the same piece of writing. The CPD adjuncts were scoring too high, specifically under the organization category. New rubrics were put in place when the course was redesigned. The cycle on this course was ended, and the intervention was employed in a CPD150 for cycle 2.
- CPD150: the new rubrics were employed and 85.96% of students scored at or above college level.
- CPD115: the rubrics from CPD150 were employed in this class and 100% of students scored at or above college level.

GBS233:
- Cycle one: evidence of grade inflation as English faculty scored papers as a 2.67 for organization, while business faculty scored them at 4.0. Interventions consisted of revision to the course rubrics and adjunct faculty training on how to grade for organization (they were provided sample essays, rubrics, and asked to norm them via a discussion board on the department's SharePoint).
- Cycle two: An alternative assignment was studied; cycle was closed when chair retired
- Cycle three: Under a new chair, and with the interventions complete, the class was studied again and 92.73% students scored at or above college level at the baseline.

The number of active programs decreased during the 2011-12 fiscal year, partially due to changes in departmental leadership, including retiring Chairs who did not want to begin a cycle in the midst of a leadership shift, as well as new Chairs who wanted more time to get to know their courses and problem areas. Further, some departments who had had three successful cycles, elected to opt out of additional interventions.

In fiscal 2011-12, the composition courses were updated in order to integrate an Open Textbook (*The Flat World Knowledge Handbook*) and to better address the 21st Century Literacy skills that impact writing and textual engagement. As part of these ongoing improvement efforts, the Writing assessment coordinator is focusing on how better to engage writing across the disciplines as part of ongoing assessment efforts. The goal is to have various options for global interventions that can easily be used in courses or implemented by adjunct instructors as they provide feedback to students (See Table XII).

Table XII		
Potential Writing Interventions Currently Under Development		
Intervention	**Intention**	**Implementation**
Composing and sharing QuickMark banks for use with TurnItIn.com's GradeMark feature, targeting grammar instruction with links to the *Flat World* text used throughout the composition sequence.	Referring to a standard text across the curriculum will not only make the text more familiar to students, but will convey a consistent message regarding grammar and style.	The first set of QuickMarks is complete and will be made available to all faculty as an intervention. The Reading Faculty have been provided just-in-time training for GradeMark and this intervention will be implemented in CRE101.
Revising the Rio OWL The Rio Salado OWL is currently out of date in relation to the composition courses.	Having an up-to-date (and easily shareable) set of writing resources easily available to any faculty would help convey a consistent message regarding writing instruction. Links could be added to grading tools such as GEAR or GradeMark.	Revisions are projected to begin during the fall 2012 semester. The goal would include integrating Grammarly or a similar student "self-check" as part of a virtual writing center for use across disciplines.
Building a set of course-neutral Open Educational Resources (OERs) The English department has contributed interactive content for the launch of RioCommons, an Open Educational Resources portal planned for release in fall 2012.	Having course-neutral writing instruction content will assist adjunct faculty by providing tools where students can practice and receive feedback on needed skills, as opposed to just reading about them. Links could be added to grading tools such as GEAR or GradeMark.	The launch of this content will depend on the launch date of RioCommons.

Information Literacy: Course-Level Data
Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) Cycles

Individual meetings were held with 17 Chairs to plan for the inclusion of at least one assignment in a course within each discipline area that would require students to perform research using resources from the Rio Salado library, rather than the general Web. Interventions were designed and inserted into 30 courses by the end of summer 2011, impacting approximately 1,000 students.

The effectiveness of these strategies will be measured by administering the *Research Readiness Self Assessment* instrument at the College level again in spring 2013, when these interventions will have been in place for approximately 18 months, to allow for comparison with the 2010 baseline data. Originally, this "Check" step was planned for spring 2012, but the Information Literacy Outcomes Coordinator decided to postpone it to conform to the biennial cycle of the other college-wide student learning outcomes assessments, and to allow time for additional data collection.

Reading: Course-Level Data
Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) Cycles

The pilot term for the Reading assessment cycles is almost completed. Because the Reading assessment was in a pilot phase, no new cycles have been commenced, although two cycles remain in progress. Table XIII summarizes the progress made to date:

Table XIII	
Reading Cycle Progress for FY2011-12	
Cycle Progress Update	**N**
Programs that have improvement cycles*	2
PDCA cycles completed	2
PDCA cycles ended (as baseline students met college level)	0
PDCA cycles ended (for other reasons)	0
PDCA cycles in progress	2
Courses involved	4
Students impacted during PDCA cycle**	265
Students immediately impacted by "Act" step	451

Note: The General Education program has three departments each running Reading cycles.

**Note: Number of students involved in "Check" phase*

When the reading assessment was initially planned, the team focused on comprehension, historically the lowest scoring area on the college-wide test. Within the individual courses, however, most students scored at or above college-level either on the first cycle, or with minimal intervention. It became clear that the issues students were displaying in the courses were not adequately reflected on the reading rubric.

Also in fiscal 2011-12, the Reading Instructional Council commenced deep revisions to the reading courses, including CRE101: College Critical Reading. These revisions focused on increasing 21st century literacies, including greater attention to intra-textual and mixed media elements, in recognition of the changing notion of the word "text" within the digital world. The course moved from focusing primarily on reading strategies for textbooks and print sources reading strategies across text types, including visual/textual hybrids (image/text, media/text, interactive/passive).

These changes, coupled with the observations from the assessment pilot, showed the need for change. As such, the following steps will commence starting in fall 2012:

- A RioLog assessment grant will be created to fund research and development of a new reading rubric, and to commence a new round of course-level PDCA cycles that target areas where students actively read across text types, or engage information that is presented in various formats.

- An AFD (Adjunct Faculty Development) course will be written that focuses on 21st century literacy skills, specifically encouraging active reading of hybrid/nontraditional text formats, how to assess projects that use a variety of text types, and how to use the elements of the revised reading rubric. This workshop will enable Rio Salado adjunct faculty to better understand and assess their student competence in these skills when the revised reading rubric is implemented in courses across many disciplines.

Sustainability

Sustainability was adopted by the Faculty Chairs as a College-wide learning outcome in spring 2012. The Sustainability Learning Outcome Coordinator designed a rubric to measure student competence in Sustainability, and met individually with Faculty Chairs to design and/or designate assignments or lessons related to Sustainability in their courses across multiple disciplines.

At the conclusion of the 2011-12 fiscal year, all departments had been contacted to begin the PDCA cycle. Eleven Faculty Chairs had responded with either initial ideas or implemented a plan. The remaining Chairs will develop their plans in fall 2012. The goal is to have all Departments involved by fall 2012 and baseline data collected by applying the sustainability rubric, between fall 2012 and the end of spring 2013. Thereafter, a continuous Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle will be followed at the departmental levels. Interventions to increase student knowledge and application of the Sustainability "triple-bottom line" will be implemented as indicated.

Program Review

Program Review at Rio Salado College is a systematic and comprehensive process, which is both sustainable and formal. At Rio Salado, a program is defined as *a set of college-level courses resulting in a certificate or degree,* and includes both occupational and academic programs. The types of certificates and degrees reviewed include an Associate in Applied Science, an Associate in Arts, a Certificate of Completion, and an Academic Certificate. Programs may include sets of courses that are reviewed by an outside or external accrediting body, such as the American Dental Association, or may include a set of college-level courses which results in a certificate awarded through outside agencies, such as the Arizona Department of Education (ADE). In addition, the courses required for program completion are open to the general public.

Formal Program Reviews are conducted on a three or five year cycle. A new program is reviewed initially at the conclusion of its third year, and then every five years. Existing programs are formally reviewed every five years. Exceptions to the five-year cycle occur if a program is modified significantly, or if the outcome of the previous program review calls for a Spotlight Report (within one year of the five-year review), or a three-year focused review.

Rio Salado's Program Review Model/Process contains a multi-level view of the program, which includes a comprehensive assessment of the College-level, program-level and course-level student learning outcomes. Data on the outcomes of both curricular and co-curricular services, such as Library, Advising, Financial Aid, the Helpdesks, etc. are included in each program review. In addition, every Program Review contains the same foundational components, i.e. program goals, learning outcomes, and program resources, which are addressed by utilizing a 36 foundational questions template and the data sets. Once the review is complete and the final report is written, members of the College's Learning Assessment Team examine the Program Review and provide feedback on best practices (quality assurance) and areas of improvement (relentless improvement).

Rio Salado College became a member of the Higher Learning Commission's Academy for the Assessment of Student Learning in 2007. The College's primary goal for joining the Assessment Academy was to develop and implement a formal model/process of program review, and during the past five years, the College has successfully developed, piloted, and improved upon its model and processes. In June 2012, members of the College's Learning Assessment Steering Team travelled to St. Charles, Illinois to attend the Academy's Results Forum at the conclusion of Rio's membership in the Academy. Team members shared outcomes of the College's participation in the Academy, as well as results of the College's program review model/process with other higher education institutions. A highlight of the Results Forum was the College's successful completion and graduation from the Academy for the Assessment of Student Learning.

During fiscal 2011-12, Program Reviews were conducted on the Law Enforcement Technology and Computer Technology programs. These Reviews will be examined for best practices and areas of improvement by the Learning Assessment Team during fiscal 2012-13. The Law Enforcement Technology program includes a Certificate of Completion and an Associate in Applied Science in Law

Enforcement Technology. The Computer Technology program includes an Associate in Applied Science in Computer Technology as well as several Certificates of Completion in Computer Usage and Applications; Advanced Computer Usage and Applications; Digital Design; Networking: Design and System Support; Programming, and Web Design: User Interface.

In addition to the full Program Reviews, the College has also conducted "mini" Program Reviews through an initiative known as *Transparency by Design*, which was implemented by WCET in 2007, and focused on the quality and accountability of online institutions. Although WCET has made the decision to disband the initiative at the end of 2012, Rio Salado intends to sustain the mini program review model by continuing to collect these data annually and post them on the College's website. Currently, the College has posted data for 14 Certificates of Completion and nine Associate Degrees.

RioLogs

Rio Learning Outcomes Grants (RioLogs) provide a mechanism and the resources to support Faculty Chairs in developing student learning outcomes-based initiatives, directly linked to assessment results data. The instructional initiatives or projects proposed for RioLog funding require the involvement of adjunct faculty members. Because the Faculty Chairs were focused on preparing for the College's reaffirmation of accreditation during 2011-12, no RioLog proposals were submitted for the past year.

Significant Accomplishments in Assessment of Student Learning

- Rio Salado completed and submitted its Self-Study for reaffirmation of accreditation in January 2012.
- Rio Salado underwent a successful visit from a peer-review team of the Higher Learning Commission in March 2012, and received a 10-year reaffirmation of accreditation, with its next comprehensive visit scheduled for 2021-22.
- In 2012, Rio Salado College was one of three institutions to receive the Council for Higher Education Accreditation's 2012 *CHEA Award for Outstanding Institutional Practice in Student Learning Outcomes*, which recognizes institutions that have been exceptional in developing and applying evidence of student learning outcomes as part of the ongoing accountability evaluation and improvement of college and university programs of study. Rio Salado College was recognized for its accessible, comprehensive, and systemic process for assessment, accreditation, and accountability.
- Program Reviews were completed for:
    - Law Enforcement Technology
    - Computer Technology
- The Self-Study Planning Team attended the annual HLC Conference in Chicago in April 2012, and participated in the Self-Study Fair conducted by institutions which had recently completed accreditation team visits.
- Dr. Jennifer Shantz and Hazel Davis presented two sessions at the HLC Conference on the topic: *Engaging all Employees in Self-Study: Strategies for Creating "Buzz."*
- Rio Salado graduated from the HLC Assessment Academy in June 2012.
- The 13th Annual Fall Assessment and Learning Experience was held on September 8th and 10th, 2011, with 563 adjunct faculty members attending.
- Five Outstanding Adjunct Faculty were recognized for Contributions to Assessment of Student Learning for the 2010-11 fiscal year. The Outstanding Adjunct Faculty Reception was held on August 31st, 2011.
- All Faculty Chairs have continued working on deploying the course-level Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) matrix for the College-wide student learning outcomes of Critical Thinking and Writing, Information Literacy, and Reading.
- Sustainability was added as a College-wide student learning outcome in February 2012.
- A total of 141 adjunct faculty have successfully completed the AFD (Adjunct Faculty Development) workshops AFD205, AFD225, and AFD230 which address the college-wide student learning outcomes of Information Literacy, Critical Thinking, and Writing.

- The comprehensive Rio Salado College 2011-2012 Learning Assessment Report was compiled and posted to the Learning Assessment SharePoint and Adjunct Faculty SharePoint sites for access by residential faculty, adjunct faculty, and College employees.
- The Learning Assessment Report will be distributed to all adjunct faculty during the September 2012 Fall All Faculty Assessment and Learning Experience, and posted to the College's Public Website.
- Rio Salado College was featured in a report published by CAEL (Council for Adult and Experiential Learning), entitled *Competency-Based Degree Programs in the U.S.: Postsecondary Credentials for Measurable Student Learning and Performance.* Dr. Jennifer Shantz and Hazel Davis provided information on Rio's model of assessing student learning. To read the full report, visit http://www.cael.org/pdfs/2012_CompetencyBasedPrograms.
- A Learning Assessment Steering Team, a sub-group of the larger Learning Assessment Team, is in formation to provide strategic guidance and leadership for the College's multi-pronged assessment initiatives.

Learning Assessment Team Members

Dr. Dana Offerman, Vice President, Academic Affairs

Hazel Davis, Faculty Chair, Assessment Co-Coordinator, Information Literacy Outcome Coordinator

Dr. Jennifer Shantz, Faculty Chair, Assessment Co-Coordinator, Program Review Coordinator

Dr. Jennifer Freed, Faculty Chair, Critical Thinking Outcome Coordinator

Dr. Kathleen Dunley, Faculty Chair, Writing Outcome Coordinator, Reading Outcome Coordinator

Dr. Shannon Corona, Faculty Chair, Sustainability Outcome Coordinator

Dr. Angela Felix, Faculty Chair, Faculty President

Dr. Rick Vaughn, Faculty Chair, STEM Initiatives/Honors

Kishia Brock, Vice President, Student Affairs

Nicole Albo, Interim Dean, Academic Affairs

Dr. Jo Jorgenson, Dean of Instruction

Dana Reid, Dean of Instruction

Earnestine Harrison, Associate Dean of Instruction