

Student Learning Committee (SLC)

Minutes from Meeting on September 28, 2020

Approved on 10/29/20

Attendees: Dianna Shandy (Chair), Nancy Bostrom, Angi Faiks, Adam Johnson, Donna Maeda, Patrick Schmidt, Andrew Wells

Unable to attend: Jeff Allen, Louisa Bradtmiller, Joan Ostrove,

I. Welcome and Introductions

- Dianna welcomed committee members and thanked them for their service to the college.
- SLC members briefly introduced themselves, and it was noted that three committee members were unable to attend. In addition, a student representative has not yet been appointed.

***Action Item:** Andrew will raise the need for a student representative at the MCSG executive board meeting.*

II. Review of SLC charge and Plans for AY 2020-21

- SLC will revisit our charge next meeting when the student representative is able to join
- In general, we hope to increase visibility of SLC, e.g. Dianna recently added SLC to the official list of campus committees and arranged to include SLC in the call for people to serve on campus committees.

III. Close the Loop on the Assurance Review for Re-accreditation

A. SLC's Role (see slides for full details.)

- Nancy reviewed SLC's role in the re-accreditation process.
- As noted in the slides, most of SLC's work is now focused on evaluating college-wide student learning outcomes; reporting findings; and advising others about facilitating achievement of college-wide outcomes.
- SLC's work has both internal and external audiences.
 - Key internal audiences are students, faculty, staff, alumni and the Board, because assessment of our institutional learning outcomes is one way to evaluate how well the college is serving its mission.
 - External audiences include HLC (our accrediting body); prospective students and their families; and community members.
 - In HLC's criteria for accreditation, SLC's work is most aligned with Criterion 4: Teaching and Learning: Evaluation and Improvement.
 - In June 2020, Macalester submitted its 4-year Assurance Review. Gratitude and praise for Patrick Schmidt for his excellent work in preparing and writing the assurance argument, especially in the midst of a pandemic!

- The college is scheduled to submit its Quality Initiative proposal in 2023.

Action Item: Last year, a fifth item was added to SLC’s charge: “Collate and review documents (e.g. Task Force or Committee reports, Annual Assessment reports, minutes of meetings, etc.) that demonstrate ways the College meets the Criteria for Accreditation and Assumed Practices set forth by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC).” We need to clarify whether that charge will continue, or whether it was intended only for the year leading up to the assurance argument.

Action Item: Clarify the role SLC will play in the Quality Initiative Project.

B. HLC Peer Reviewer Feedback on Macalester’s 2020 Assurance Argument.

Patrick highlighted his take-aways and reflections on the process and feedback:

- Happy to report that Macalester received very positive feedback from HLC peer reviewers. It was easy to make our argument because there was an abundance of good evidence to draw upon. There are 75 criteria and we met all with no areas of concern. That’s important because if there are areas of concern, we’d be asked to provide interim reports and develop a response or program to prove that we’ve addressed any concerns.
 - Assessment and finances are two areas that often lead institutions into trouble; and we received positive feedback in those areas.
 - Our conservative approach to budgeting has been helpful on the financial side.
 - In terms of assessment, we had compelling evidence and we also paid attention to the little things like taking attendance at discussions or events where faculty, staff and students discuss teaching, learning and assessment. We have a systematic approach to assessing general education and institutional outcomes on a rotated basis. We use indirect assessment evidence and direct where possible.
 - It was a joy to write about co-curricular assessment because we had so many good examples, especially due to the Staff Learning Community on Program Design, Development and Assessment. This is another area in which a lot of schools struggle.
 - Peer reviewers were very impressed by the Spring 2020 report from the Council on Equity and Institutional Transformation. It connected strongly to the college’s mission, and fit very well with the section on institutional integrity—holding ourselves accountable. The report illustrated the strength of the conversation at Macalester and showed a high level of institutional commitment given the prominent co-chairs—the Dean of the Annan IGC and the Dean of Multicultural Life.
 - SLC members noted that people are curious about this report and asked whether it has been or will be broadly distributed. Donna indicated that the report was sent to President Rivera and not released more broadly at this point.
- Patrick highlighted a few areas that reviewers suggested we watch, or that were harder to make a strong argument:

- Retention, persistence and completion. 90% is great, but we need statements about goals and why they're appropriate. We must also breakdown these numbers into the demographic categories that match our goals. Last year, SLC provided feedback on an institutional statement regarding retention, completion and persistence. We can't lose sight of that document, and at the moment it doesn't have an "owner." We need to find a home for it—is it appropriate for SLC to add this to its continuing charge?
 - Adam noted that Institutional Research conducted additional, disaggregated, analysis based on the SLC feedback, and shared with SLC.
 - Dianna noted that there's a new census day report in which IR flagged issues. Adam shared that report with SLC.
- Concentrations are an area to watch. We haven't assessed them in a formal way; EPAG asks for a program review but the review doesn't address student learning outcomes.
- Department-level assessments should connect with department missions. This used to be more prominently displayed on individual websites. Conceptually, department learning outcomes should connect with department missions.
- For co-curricular assessment, the current focus is on capacity building and assessing individual programs. We need to move toward a more systematic approach, not only assessing individual programs chosen on a yearly basis.
- The President and Provost have begun to discuss the next phase in the accreditation cycle—the Quality Improvement Project—and are meeting with Patrick later this month to discuss further. Many institutions choose to focus on improving assessment, but this isn't an area of difficulty for us.

Action Item: Clarify the individual or group at the college that should be the "owner" of Retention, Completion and Persistence.

Action Item: Nancy, confirm that mission statements are still included in department assessment plans.

Action Item: Nancy and Andrew—continue plans for moving the Staff Learning Community toward direct assessment of our institutional learning outcomes.

C. Additional Suggestions for SLC

Nancy shared additional take-aways and suggestions for SLC to address:

- Overall, reviewers noted the strong connections between the college's mission and the statement of student learning, and the holistic way the college lives out its mission, e.g. through general education requirements, in the co-curriculum, and the Council on Equity and Institutional Transformation.
 - SLC should continue to promote and publicize these connections.
- Reviewers responded positively to our assessment processes, transparency, and willingness to ask hard questions for the purpose of improvement, e.g. uncovering barriers to community engagement in our Engage Community assessment.

- SLC has a clear path forward for institutional assessment and our current plans for reporting data more broadly, as well as plans for incorporating more direct assessment, are on point.
- SLC needs to ensure that we have a clear mechanism for closing the loop, e.g. facilitating conversations that lead to strong recommendations, documenting and sharing suggestions for improvement, and tracking changes that are made as a result.
- As SLC brings greater awareness to our institutional learning outcomes, Donna noted that we must also consider whether they are aligned with current expectations. For example, “Demonstrate Intercultural Knowledge and Competence” focuses on interpersonal interactions, while our General Education requirement “US Identities and Differences” focuses on systems of power and privilege. At what point should the college re-examine and revise our institutional learning outcomes to ensure they are up-to-date?

Action Item: *SLC should continue this discussion.*

IV. Preview: Request for SLC Feedback on the Report from the Engage Community Assessment

- Last year Nancy shared results of our Engage Community assessment with SLC, and as a group, SLC reviewed findings and selected key data points to include in a 4-page report for wide dissemination. Marketing and Communications designed the report based on this information and Nancy recently received the first draft. Nancy is working with Marketing and Communications on revisions and will share a revised draft with SLC as soon as it is available. Once the revised draft is available, Nancy will request feedback from SLC.
- This first 4-page report will serve as a template. Going forward, the plan is for SLC to produce such a 4-page infographic report each year, both to share the latest assessment results and as another opportunity for us to communicate the 6 learning outcomes. (Note that we had hoped to complete this first report last year, but the timeline moved back so this year we will actually have two. Ideally we can complete the next infographic, for "Make Informed Choices and Accept Responsibility," in the spring.)

Action Item: *Nancy will circulate the infographic as soon as it's available and asks for SLC feedback.*

V. Wrap up

- Dianna closed the meeting and reminded SLC members that our next meeting will focus on how we introduce students to the liberal arts.