

Sample Proposals

These examples provide guidance for what information to include in your proposal. These examples should not be replicated exactly and do not indicate which proposals HLC will select. HLC thanks presenters from the 2024 conference that provided their submissions as exemplars. Identifying information has been removed.

Sample Proposal 1

Proposal Description

This presentation discusses our process of re-energizing faculty and staff for assessment of student learning on our campus through a series of listening sessions with an HLC consultant and institutional reflection. We share our institution's "pain points" in assessment and how we are addressing them in our revitalized assessment plan for meaningful institutional change.

Presentation Overview

The Higher Learning Commission's (HLC) core component 4B requires that an institution engages in ongoing assessment of student learning as part of its commitment to the educational outcomes of its students. 4B continues to be one of the most frequently cited components in the peer review process, but peer reviewers, faculty, and institutional leaders often struggle to get enthusiastic engagement from faculty and staff. Many institutions have invested in institution-wide software systems as a structure, for accountability and evidence across the departments and schools, but these systems make the focus of assessment more about filling out forms than learning how to improve student learning.

Our institution found itself in this state of status quo with our assessment process. While we had an annual process of bringing assessment experts to

campus as part of our annual assessment day, we decided to try different approach triggered by a past HLC workshop on Assessing the Joys of Assessment. We engaged an assessment expert who guided us with a structured, intentional listening process that spanned key stakeholders across the campus. While we have university-wide support for the importance of assessment of student learning, we experienced the need for taking a critical look at our own assessment practices. Our consultant's visit uncovered several of our pain points: 1) professional schools have external accrediting agencies and were experiencing a lack of alignment with our assessment processes and these agencies' expectations, 2) the current assessment system has a rigid reporting structure that does not align with all programs' needs, an inconsistency across programs that frustrated support staff, 3) the university assessment committee reviews and feedback on assessment reports do not appear to be leading to meaningful change, and 4) assessment of our undergraduate core curriculum measured lots of objectives and generated mountains of data, but struggled to have a meaningful impact on faculty activities and student learning.

We found that bringing in an expert consultant to our campus who was not there just to share expertise or knowledge, but to listen faculty, administrators, and staff stories helped us to develop a roadmap on for our continued reflection and action on assessment.

In this presentation we will: 1) share the structure and process we are using to re-energize the assessment process for the campus, 2) Share the ongoing revisions and process of our assessment of the core curriculum (general education) and discuss how it is an exemplar of transformative change, 3) Based on audience interactions and reflections on our process, we will pose key questions for participants to consider for their current assessment processes.

Session Organization

Session Structure:

- Setting the stage: The joy of assessment (5 min)
- Looking in the mirror: Assessing our assessment structure and processes (10 min)
 - * Building the consultation scaffold
- Case exemplar: Igniting enthusiasm in the Core curriculum: New questions – new answers! (15 min)
- Building a consultation scaffold for your institution (15 min)
 - * If someone came to your campus – What are your key questions?

Implementation and Outcomes

The assessing the assessment process began in Fall 2022 when the university engaged a consultant. Prior to coming to campus, the consultant reviewed supporting materials from current assessment work (e.g. policies, HLC reports, examples of school and program assessment reports) and then worked with campus leaders to identify the overall goal and key objectives for the consultation. The overall goal was to get to a place where we advanced our assessment process and became more efficient while getting more meaningful information. The two-day listening session with stakeholders across the campus provided critical evidence for the consultative report. This report became the stimulus and blueprint for the development and implementation of a Provost's appointed Task Force to Advance Student Learning. As a result of the consultant's observations and recommendations and the development of a taskforce for advancing assessment of student learning across the University, five areas of focus were identified.

Workgroups are currently addressing the following areas: University Learning Outcomes, Assessment for Professional Schools/Programmatic and Specialized Accreditation, Co-Curricular Programs, Work of the University Assessment Committee, and the Core Assessment.

Plans are for each workgroup to generate a report with recommendations and action steps to university leadership by early 2024. Additionally, over the last year we piloted a new set of assessment practices for our core curriculum. These changes resulted in increased enthusiasm, rich collection and discussion of student learning, and a reimagined process for guiding changes to faculty instruction.

Target Audience

Leaders (including faculty, administrators, peer reviewers) interested in ways to engage others in meaningful assessment of student learning.

Track Justification

HLC's core component 4B continues to be one of the most frequently cited components in the peer review process and many institutions have invested in institution-wide software systems as a structure, for accountability and evidence across the departments and schools, but these systems can lead to a sense of status quo and some frustration for faculty and administrators. Leadership across university administration and faculty is an element in facilitating change and continued development and evolution of meaningful assessment of student learning. This proposal shares a unique approach to use of a consultant who enabled a renewed sense of enthusiasm for assessment across the campus.

Keywords

- Assessment
- Leadership
- Change Management

Sample Proposal 2

Proposal Description

Colleges and universities experienced sharp enrollment declines as the result of the pandemic, exacerbated by public division, and declining confidence in higher education. To avoid an impending fiscal crisis, we applied three primary strategies: rebuilding our campus community, establishing pedagogical innovation, and implementing adaptive restructuring. Today, the campus is experiencing enrollment growth, and a renewed sense of belonging.

Presentation Overview

Three years of pandemic resulted in sharp declines in enrollment for many small campuses across the country, particularly those in rural settings. This decline was exacerbated by divisive public rhetoric over responses to the pandemic, vaccination and masking mandates, as well as a declining public confidence in the value of higher education. Students were disengaged and discouraged by digital fatigue, resulting in educational gaps, lack of drive, and a lost sense of belonging. These outcomes disproportionality impeded the academic pathways of first-generation students and students of color. With annual declines in the double-digits, it became imperative to take intentional actions. In this panel, we will discuss strategies we used to reverse the downward trend and invite audience members to share their post-pandemic best practices to share among the group.

To address enrollment as well as an impending fiscal crisis, we applied three primary strategies: rebuilding our campus community through athletic programming, innovative learning opportunities, and restructuring.

A Sense of Community: Amid the pandemic, the Vice Chancellor proposed that [institution] begin a varsity athletics program and join the National Association of Intercollegiate athletics, as well as pursue membership in the State Conference. In the spring of 2022, [institution] was granted associate membership in the association. By the academic Year 2022-23, [institution] had a roster of 60 athletes, with increased enrollments for 2023/24, and anticipated gains for 2024/25 (for context, [institution] is a small campus, with a pre-pandemic enrollment of 1600 students falling to just above 900). The addition of athletics has almost immediately increased the

(1) total students enrolled, (2) improved retention, and (3) increased marketing and visibility for [institution]. We also believe key relationships with leading community members can be enhanced positively, through athletics.

Innovations in Teaching and Learning: Students' post-pandemic expectations have created a need for greater innovation in teaching and learning. With a plethora of online certificates and badges and employer-based trainings, students have increased frustration for time to completion of a traditional bachelor's degree program. This coupled with increased use of AI, warrant our attention in higher education. Our academic programs have begun offering new courses to meet these demands and are developing interdisciplinary certificates, examining potential badges, and other stackable credentials to meet the changing landscape of student expectations and career needs. While curricular changes take time, the potential for increased satisfaction and retention are promising.

Restructuring: In the midst of the pandemic, our campus responded to an impending fiscal crisis democratically, ultimately making the difficult decision to reduce force and restructure academic supports. By restructuring advisors' jobs to focus more on students, and returning extraneous duties to other units, advisors gained capacity and focus. Over time, restructuring led to stronger esprit d'corps, increased trust and empowerment, and systematic implementation of best practices. Collaboration and cross-unit supports have flourished, leading to innovations that significantly streamlined enrollment processes, ultimately benefiting students.

Session Organization

The session will address three strategies that include rebuilding community through sports initiatives, addressing curricular strategies for course delivery and micro credentials, and restructuring for efficiency after a budget crisis driven reduction in force. Each of the three subtopics will be presented for approximately 6- 7 minutes each (using a slide deck summarizing the processes). Then, through guided questions, the audience will participate in didactic conversations for approximately 10 minutes, with an additional 14-17

minutes left for questions, comments, and sharing ideas:

- Introduction and discussion of Rebuilding Community (6-7 minutes)
- Curricular Strategies (6-7 minutes)
- Restructuring (6-7 minutes)
- IV, Didactic interaction (10 minutes)
- Q & A; idea sharing/Conclusion (14-17 minutes)

Implementation and Outcomes

In Fall of 2020, our campus experienced a drop in enrollment. Potential students spoke to mandated vaccination and masking requirements that contributed to their decision to unenroll in classes. [institution], a branch campus of [institution], is a rural campus in State with a current enrollment of approximately 940. Prior to the pandemic, our enrollments topped 1200 students. Over the 2020-21 academic year, students struggled with the online modalities that occurred abruptly in the Spring of 2020. Our retention of Sophomores into 2021-22 dropped. Many non-returning students indicated problems with digital modalities, as well as the stress of the ongoing pandemic, loss of family, lack of child care and mental health struggles. During this academic year, we experienced a reduction of force due to a budget crisis. We began exploring strategies to increase student enrollment and retention during 21-22. By 2022, we had begun implementation of these strategies. Since that time, we have improved campus culture, more efficient processes, and improved enrollment numbers. The Outcomes for this proposal include: an understanding of strategies that can be applied across a variety of institutions to increase enrollment, an opportunity to share, discuss, and question new trends in curricular development; a discussion of the rapid pace of AI technologies and how we can work with these technologies to enhance our students' experiences. A knowledge of differing structure opportunities; an increased knowledge of the process for bringing an athletic program to small campuses.

Target Audience

This proposal seeks to target several audiences, as many of the strategies discussed can be implemented on a variety of peer campus types. Campus leaders and faculty of smaller regional institutions, public or private which have faced a reduction in enrollment post pandemic (or for other reasons); leaders and faculty from rural campuses, those that are working through restructuring, those considering beginning an athletic program on their campus. Those leaders and faculty who are preparing strategic plans, or what to generate curricular changes (for example micro-credentials, or using AI in the classroom).

Track Justification

For this proposal, we selected the Leading and Managing for the Future (Leading and Decision-Making) Track. In our proposal, we address the work we began and continue to lead--much of which has resulted from the COVID-19 Pandemic. Due to a significant drop in enrollment, we specifically addressed budgeting and resource management. Additionally, after a reduction in force, we led and managed the change of a new organizational structure, as well as the addition of varsity athletics on campus. We engaged in strategic planning and academic master planning. These strategies that were led by the executive leadership with input from faculty and staff, resulted in increased enrollments, and a "higher ground" for our campus, with positive indicators for the future. These strategies are the basis for the proposal.

Keywords

- Leadership
- Credentialing
- Change Management

Sample Proposal 3

Proposal Description

[Institution] will share its experience and lessons learned with redesigning assessment processes and structures, including development of student learning and learning equity data dashboards. Participation in the HLC Assessment Academy informed the redesign, resulting in increased faculty engagement and collaboration with assessment, documented improvements in learning and equity in courses, and positive assessment culture.

Presentation Overview

The goal of the panel presentation will be to describe the assessment redesign process at [institution] from varied perspectives – faculty, academic administrator, and institutional research - each describing on how the new process improved student learning, faculty collaboration and positive assessment culture, addressing the challenges to assessment reform, and use of change management principles to guide the redesign. Developed during [institution]’s participation in the HLC Assessment Academy and as the College’s quality initiative project, the Course Assessment Process (CAP) is [institution]’s effort to improve learning and educational equity for all students in all courses, programs, and clusters. Aligned with the [institution] mission, strategic plan, and operational priorities, the CAP is the process faculty use to assess student learning outcomes at the course level and aligned to program/cluster outcomes and general education outcomes.

Developed by the Student Learning Assessment Council (SLAC) in 2019-2020, piloted in 2020-2021, the CAP was fully implemented in the 2021-2022 academic year. Grounded in assessment best practices, faculty engage collaboratively to identify student learning outcomes to assess, select assessment measures, set benchmarks, collect and analyze assessment data, and make recommendations for changing teaching practices, course structures, and supports. The CAP data integrates with the [institution] academic program review process that evaluates programs on a three-year cycle. The CAP process is embedded within the Canvas learning management system and results in a Power BI-generated data visualization dashboard, allowing faculty to aggregate and disaggregate data to examine equity, consistency across modalities, and

factors impacting student learning achievement. All faculty participate in CAP training modules as part of New Faculty Orientation an on-demand offerings in Canvas. The data dashboard was developed and is maintained through across-unit collaboration

The CAP has transformed teaching and learning at [institution], allowing faculty to close the assessment loop and make targeted teaching, learning, and course changes that address equity and student success. Review of CAP data prompted the redesign of the introductory Anatomy & Physiology series. Changing to an active learning and inquiry approach resulted in documented improvements in student learning achievement, learning equity, and successful course completion, ultimately increasing the number of students eligible for entry into nursing and allied health programs. Nursing faculty used the CAP data to inform the redesign of the introductory courses. Improving onboarding and sense of belonging improved student learning achievement, successful course completion, and advancement in the nursing program.

By sharing our redesign process and experience, informed by HLC Assessment Academy participation and aligned to change management principles, we hope to inform and inspire other institutions engaging in assessment redesign focused on student learning and learning equity.

Session Organization

Using an engaged inquiry approach we will first share an overview of [institution]’s assessment redesign within the context of HLC Assessment Academy participation. A faculty member (Co-Chair of the Student Learning Assessment Council (SLAC)), accreditation and assessment administrator (Co-Chair of SLAC), and institutional researcher will each share their perspectives on the redesign process. (15 minutes)

Using E-Tool as an engagement tool, we will poll the audience to start a discussion on the barriers or challenges to effective assessment processes, and then share how we addressed issues of faculty capacity, structural barriers to collaboration, and feelings/ attitudes about assessment (10 min).

We will highlight several screens from our outcomes assessment data dashboard and discuss how it is linked to the Course Assessment Process (CAP) including curriculum mapping, CAP committees

structure, high-level of faculty engagement, closing the loop, and program review, sharing how dashboard accessibility (to all faculty and staff) has led to more frequent and more productive discussions about student learning and learning equity. (15 min)

Lastly, we will facilitate a question and answer session with participants, (5 min)

We will offer more detailed dashboard demonstrations to participants and their teams - available upon request; this offer is help other institutions develop the data dashboards that work will best for them.

Implementation and Outcomes

The CAP, developed by SLAC in 2019-2020, piloted in 2020-2021, and fully implemented in the 2021-2022, is now entering its third year of implementation. Grounded in assessment best practices, faculty engage collaboratively to identify student learning outcomes to assess, select assessment measures, set benchmarks, collect and analyze assessment data, and make recommendations for changing teaching practices, course structures, and supports. The CAP data integrates with the [institution]'s academic program review process that evaluates programs on a three-year cycle. The CAP process is embedded within the Canvas learning management system and results in a Power BI-generated data visualization dashboard, allowing faculty to aggregate and disaggregate data to examine equity, consistency across modalities, and factors impacting student learning achievement. All faculty participate in CAP training modules as part of New Faculty Orientation an on-demand offerings in Canvas.

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Target Audience

Faculty and program coordinators engaged in assessment of student learning, committed to learning equity, and interested in improving student retention, completion, and post-graduation outcomes

Academic administrators focused on program quality, innovation and viability; supporting faculty in teaching, learning and assessment; interested in improving student retention, completion, and post-graduation outcomes

Institutional Researchers who generate the institutional data and data structures focused on student learning, learning equity, and post- graduation outcomes.

Track Justification

Redesigning institutional assessment processes at [institution], including the development of data visualization dashboards, helped faculty to collaborate and communicate more effectively on assessment of student learning and learning equity, and “close the assessment loop” by making data-informed changes in key course, resulting in documented improvements in student learning and learning equity. Challenges with assessment can lead to accreditation issues; but, more importantly, a focus on student learning and learning equity can lead to improvements in successful course completion and retention rates, helping students to achieve their personal and professional goals. Additionally, improved retention, completion, and post-graduation outcomes could help to ease the downward enrollment trends observed across higher education.

Keywords

- Assessment
- Student Success
- Data Structure & Usage