

Monitoring Report to the  
Middle States Commission on Higher Education  
from  
WESTMINSTER COLLEGE  
New Wilmington, PA 16172-0001

Dr. Richard H. Dorman  
*President of the College*

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March 1, 2013

Subject of the Follow-Up Report:

To reaffirm accreditation and commend the institution for the quality of its self-study process. To request a monitoring report, due March 1, 2013, documenting evidence of (1) steps taken to promote a culture of assessment; (2) institutional support for student learning assessment activities; (3) faculty leadership in the assessment of student learning; and (4) direct evidence of student achievement of institutional, program, and course level student learning outcomes (Standard 14). A visit may follow submission of the report. The Periodic Review Report is due June 1, 2016.

June 23, 2011  
*Evaluation Date*

## Middle States Monitoring Report

March 1, 2013

Useful, cost effective, reasonably-accurate, truthful, planned, organized, systematized, sustained – these were the guiding adjectives that Westminster College (PA) used in addressing the concerns issuing from our decennial Middle States Self-Study on Standard 14, Assessment of Student Learning.

Westminster College is an independent, coeducational liberal arts college that is affiliated with the Presbyterian Church (USA). Since its founding in 1852, Westminster has been dedicated to the mission of *helping men and women develop competencies, commitments, and characteristics which distinguish human beings at their best*. The liberal arts tradition is the foundation of the curriculum continually designed to serve this mission in a rapidly changing world. Westminster offers a bachelor's degree program in 32 majors; many of these fields also offer minors. There are 7 interdisciplinary majors and 7 graduate programs.

Since the time of the Self-Study, the institution has experienced significant change in the President's Cabinet – the institutional leadership team. Three members of the 6-member team have resigned – one to retire and two to accept re-assigned responsibilities. The College has replaced one position and is currently searching for the other replacements. July 1, 2012 also began the three-year tenure of a new chair of the Board of Trustees.

As Westminster College prepared its decennial review, limitations in the area of student learning assessment began to surface, which led to the College's recognition of this area needing improvement noted in the report and addressed by the Commission in its request for a monitoring report. Prior to the team visit the campus had already begun a process to address this concern.

The Commission requested a monitoring report to demonstrate documented evidence in the following areas:

1. Steps taken to promote a culture of assessment
2. Institutional support for student learning assessment
3. Faculty leadership in the assessment of student learning
4. Direct evidence of student achievement of institutional, program, and course level student learning outcomes

Westminster College has implemented a concerted program to demonstrate that at this point we are in clear compliance with Standard 14, while continuing to focus on our ultimate goal for assessment: to improve teaching and learning.

As recommended by the Commission, Westminster College has spent a considerable amount of time taking steps to establish a culture of assessment. The table below gives a timeline of assessment activities that have occurred since the Middle States site visit in the Spring of 2011.

A key to acronyms and more complete information on the topics, agendas, and outcomes associated with these activities is located in the supporting materials.

**Westminster College's Timeline for Building a Culture of Sustainable Assessment**

<b>COMMITTEE &amp; WORK GROUP</b>	<b>WORKSHOP/MEETING</b>	<b>DATE</b>
<b><i>Spring &amp; Summer 2011</i></b>		
Spring Faculty Workshop	Organized 10 breakout sessions on best assessment practices, department discussions (50 faculty)	May 25, 2011
OAAC & FDC	Held summer meetings	May, July, August 2011
Chairs Meeting	Reviewed assessment expectations	August 2, 2011
Chairs Meeting	All Departments/Programs submitted revised Program Mission Statements	August 2011
<b><i>Fall 2011</i></b>		
Fall Faculty Workshop	Organized 9 breakout sessions on best assessment practices, department discussions	August 25, 2011
OAAC	Reviewed all Department/Program Mission Statements & Syllabi, Revised OAAC Assessment website, Plan, Do, Check, Act	Fall 2011 – Spring 2012
CDC	Evaluated General Education Assessment – Clusters	Fall 2011 – Spring 2012
Chairs Meetings	Explored self-evaluations of student learning assessment activities; funding to support faculty attendance at disciplinary conferences on assessment	Fall 2011
FDO	Organized B.A.G. (Best Assessment Guidelines) Lunches	October & November 2011
Faculty Forum	Outlined course assessment practices – Dr. Larry Miller, Chemistry	October 20, 2011
Faculty Forum	Shared assessable goals with best assessment practices thru poster displays	December 7, 2011
<b><i>Spring 2012</i></b>		
All Faculty	Submitted one syllabus with assessable goals	January 2012
COC	Reviewed spring syllabi submitted by faculty for assessable goals	Spring 2012
Faculty Forum	Presented curricular assessment practices previously presented at the AAC&U's project LEAP – Biology	February 22, 2012

	Department	
OAAC/Faculty Meeting	Demonstrated sample rubrics and templates for course assessment at a meeting of the entire faculty	March 13, 2012
Spring Faculty Workshop	Reviewed course assessment materials (71 Faculty)	May 25, 2012
All Faculty	Submitted course assessment materials to department chairs	May 2012
FPC	Recommended using an on-line format for course evaluations to facilitate gathering of data	May 2012
<b>Summer 2012</b>		
Chairs	Submitted Chairs'/Coordinators' Assessment Reports to VPAA	June 30, 2012
<b>Fall 2012</b>		
Chairs Meeting	Explored "Building a Sustainable Model of Assessment" with Dr. Tom Flynn, invited speaker – Assessment Coordinator, Slippery Rock University	August 21, 2012
Fall Faculty Workshop	Explored "Building a Sustainable Model of Assessment – invited speaker Dr. Tom Flynn	August 23, 2012
VPAA/Webmaster	Reconfigured assessment website	Fall 2012
OAAC	Reviewed departmental Program Assessment Reports; approved Principles of Assessment; approved revisions to Website	Fall 2012
Faculty Meetings	Reviewed and approved Principles of Assessment; Webmaster reviews revisions to the website	Fall 2012
FDO	Explored formative assessment with new faculty at a BAG lunch	November 8, 2012
All Faculty	Submitted one syllabus with assessable goals	January 2013
COC	Reviewed spring syllabi submitted by faculty for assessable goals	Spring 2013
All Departments	Selected 1 course/1 outcome for department	Spring 2013
Chairs Meeting	Reviewed 1 course/1 outcome; review MS Monitoring Report	Spring 2013

As the broad array of campus committees and councils listed in the timeline shows, the faculty and administration have demonstrated an extremely high level of engagement and dedicated time and resources to adopt a very comprehensive approach to building a culture of assessment. The College compensated faculty with stipends of \$100.00 per day for any work that was done

outside of the academic year and served meals at meetings. As an example, a conservative estimate of the cost for the one May 2012 workshop is \$7,700.00. Clearly, the College is supporting assessment work at the institutional level.

The College has re-affirmed a PLAN, DO, CHECK, ACT cycle of teaching learning assessment that mirrors the four steps outlined in the Standard 14 teaching-learning assessment cycle. All full-time faculty members developed a model syllabus for one course during the Spring Semester 2012 with clearly written statements of key learning outcomes [PLAN]. These syllabi were then reviewed by the COC to insure that they contained appropriate and assessable outcomes. Some syllabi were returned for improvements and re-submitted. (All syllabi are available on the website.) During the semester, courses were offered and faculty created experiences that would lead to established outcomes [DO].

During the 2011-2012 academic year, departments met to develop rubrics for programmatic assessment. OAAC presented a model rubric for departments to follow – which many did – but in order to insure that assessment leads to improved teaching and learning, the College chose not to impose a standardized college-wide rubric at that time. At the end of the Spring Semester, all faculty members submitted their evaluations of assessment of key learning outcomes in their selected course according to departmental guidelines [CHECK].

Department leaders assembled and synthesized the information submitted by their faculty and provided the departments and the VPAA with comprehensive reports on student learning assessment and how departments would use this information to reinforce successful practices and make revisions to enhance teaching and learning in their programs [ACT]. During the 2012 summer months, the VPAA reviewed these reports for completeness and clarity and passed them along to OAAC in September 2012 for a thorough peer review. The direct evidence of student achievement is available on the website.

OAAC reviewed the reports as part of each program's comprehensive design and mission. Upon completion of the review, OAAC drafted several suggestions for the next round of program assessment:

1. All departments should use a unified format to make assessment more consistent, transparent, and comprehensive.
2. All departments should adopt a “1 course – 1 outcome” approach to program assessment. That is, departments should meet and select specific courses and outcomes to assess annually across their programs as the best way to effect program improvement through assessment.

OAAC representatives then met with the Council of Chairs to present their findings and to get feedback on their proposal. The outcome of the discussion was agreement and validation of the plan.

The cycle began again in January 2013 with faculty selecting another course to develop and programs deciding on the one outcome to examine. The College believes that this cycle is appropriate and sustainable and will lead us to solidify further a true culture of assessment.

The College has made significant advancements since the identification of this area of weakness during the preparation of the decennial review. The VPAA has deepened his focus and emphasis on assessment and the faculty are responding appropriately. The VPAA has also worked to insure that the President, his cabinet, and the Board of Trustees are aware of and understand these changes that are leading the campus toward a more vigorous and intentional focus on teaching and learning.

The focus for external communication of the College's assessment endeavors has shifted to the website -- <http://www.westminster.edu/acad/oaac/overview.cfm> -- which is now more comprehensive, transparent, and accessible by all campus constituents and external audiences as well. Assessment is rapidly becoming a more integral component of the Westminster College culture.

## SUPPORTING MATERIALS

### Key to Acronyms

COC – Curriculum Operations Committee (6 elected faculty; Registrar)

CDC – Curriculum Development Committee (6 elected faculty; VPAA)

FDC – Faculty Development Committee (6 elected faculty; FDO)

FDO – Faculty Development Officer

FPC – Faculty Personnel Committee (6 elected faculty; VPAA)

OAAC – Outcomes Assessment Advisory Council (6 elected faculty members, Director of Institutional Research, VP Student Affairs, Athletic Director, VPAA)

VPAA – Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean of the College

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### Further Clarifications

Chairs Meeting – a monthly meeting of all chairs of academic departments and programs

Faculty Forum – a weekly lunch (provided by the College) where faculty share their latest scholarly interests

Faculty Meeting – a monthly meeting of the entire faculty (not a representative body); refreshments are provided

Fall Faculty Workshop – a required full day activity, organized by the FDC. All faculty attend, and meals are provided

Spring Faculty Workshop – a volunteer activity, organized by the FDC.

In the Spring 2011, \_\_\_ faculty participated in a one day event.

In the Spring 2012, \_\_\_ faculty participated in a one day event.

(Faculty are compensated at the rate of \$100.00 per day and meals are provided.)

### Funding for Faculty

#### **2012-2013 Faculty Conferences with Assessment of Student Learning Sessions**

**Boerner, Jeffrey.** American Statistical Association and Mathematical Association of America Boston, MA. January 3-7, 2012.

**Camardese, Amy.** Bridges International Faculty Workshop at Western Galilee College. Akko, Israel, June 3-7, 2012.

National Council for the Social Studies Annual Conference. Seattle, WA. November 16-18, 2012.

**Camardese, Amy.** Pennsylvania Conference for Exceptional Children, Harrisburg, PA, October 17, 2012.

**Cuff, Carolyn.** American Statistical Association and Mathematical Association of America. Boston, MA. January 4-7, 2012.

**Domanski, Linda.** Educause Mid-Atlantic Regional Conference 2012, Baltimore, MD. January 11-13, 2012.

**Kennedy, Sarah.** Council on Undergraduate Research 2012 Conference, College of New Jersey, Ewing, NJ. June 23-26, 2012

22<sup>nd</sup> Biennial Conference on Chemical Education, Pennsylvania State University, State College, PA, July 29-July 31, 2012.

International Activated Carbon Conference. Pittsburgh, PA. October 4, 2012.

**Lenox, Terri.** Council on Undergraduate Research 2012 Conference, College of New Jersey, Ewing, NJ. June 23-26, 2012

**Lumbantobing, Rotua.** 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual American Economic Association Economic Education Conference. Boston, MA. May 30-June 1, 2012.

**Lynch, Sararose.** Annual Conference of the Pennsylvania Council of Teachers of Mathematics, Camp Hill, PA, October 18-19, 2012.

Teachers Education Division of the Council for Exceptional Children Conference. Grand Rapids, Michigan. November 7-11, 2012.

**Miller, Larry.** The Center for Integrative Research on Cognition, Learning and Education, Washington University, St. Louis, MO., September 27-28, 2012.

**Morelli, Eileen.** Pennsylvania Conference for Exceptional Children, Harrisburg, PA, October 17, 2012.

**Park, Kristin.** North Central Sociological Association Annual Conference, Pittsburgh, PA. April 13, 2012.

**Richardson, Pamela.** American Statistical Association and Mathematical Association of America Boston, MA. January 3-7, 2012.

**Robertson, Katherine.** Council on Undergraduate Research 2012 Conference, College of New Jersey, Ewing, NJ. June 23-26, 2012

**Webster, Sandra.** Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association, Orlando, FL. August 2012.

Council on Undergraduate Research 2012 Conference, College of New Jersey, Ewing, NJ. June 23-26, 2012.

### **Principles of Assessment for Westminster College (2012)**

1. The purpose of assessing student learning is to improve student learning, not merely to satisfy our accrediting bodies.
2. The results of assessment should be used to improve student learning rather than to restrict academic freedom or to evaluate faculty and staff performance.
3. Assessment must be clearly linked to Westminster's mission and outcome statements, which include departmental missions and outcome statements, and the College's liberal arts heritage.
4. The results of assessment will be used to improve institutional effectiveness through strategic budgeting and curricular planning processes.
5. Assessment is an ongoing, routine function—not a one-time event or an end-point in the College's assessment cycle of Plan, Do, Check, Act.
6. Effective assessment requires shared responsibility and generous participation from all college constituents.
7. The results of assessment should be shared with college constituents and the community.
8. Trustees, the President, Cabinet, and others who lead the College must support assessment activities.
9. Assessment activities must be supported with appropriate financial and human resources.
10. Effective assessment relies on varied methods and measures, including quantitative and qualitative measures and direct and indirect evidence.
11. Effective assessment is reasonable, cost-efficient, and appropriate for Westminster and its departments.
12. Assessment activities themselves require routine assessment.

Adopted by the Westminster College Faculty, November 6, 2012

## **CURRICULUM OPERATIONS COMMITTEE**

### *Report to the Board of Trustees*

**TO:** Educational Policy Committee

**FROM:** Keith F. Corso, Committee Chair

**SUBJECT:** Spring Report

**DATE:** April 24, 2012

The main focus of the Curriculum Operations Committee (COC) for the spring 2012 semester was the evaluation of learning outcomes as stated on the various course syllabi used for the semester. COC evaluated 99 syllabi to ascertain the presence of learning outcomes and if these outcomes were worded in a way that would allow measurement and assessment. While there are differing methods to evaluate these learning outcomes, COC choose to use Bloom's Taxonomy of Learning to serve as the frame of reference for these evaluations. What follows is a quantitative summary of what COC found.

- All but one syllabus had learning outcomes present.
- Seventy-four (74.7%) of the reviewed syllabi had outcomes worded from a student perspective (i.e. started with a phrase similar to "At the end of the course the student will be able to...")
- A total of 615 learning outcomes were reviewed.
- There were 85 (13.8%) outcomes that were identified as being difficult to access primarily because of poor verb choice in the wording.

This brief quantitative study indicates that the Westminster faculty is doing a fine job by including assessable outcomes on their syllabi. COC would recommend two items to the faculty to insure better construction of future outcomes. First, all outcomes should be worded starting with the phrase, "at the end of the course the student will be able to." Second, faculty should review the verbs used in Bloom's Taxonomy and this will assist in more assessable outcomes.

After the evaluation, COC members contacted those faculty members who had issues with their learning outcomes to offer suggestions to make their outcomes measurable. In addition, COC offered to assist these faculty members in modifying problematic outcomes. The results of this study can serve as a benchmark for future studies to ascertain if the faculty is making progress toward constructing effective learning outcomes.

COC also conducted regular business during the semester including review and approval of course proposals and IP proposals. There will be no business left on the table for next year's committee.