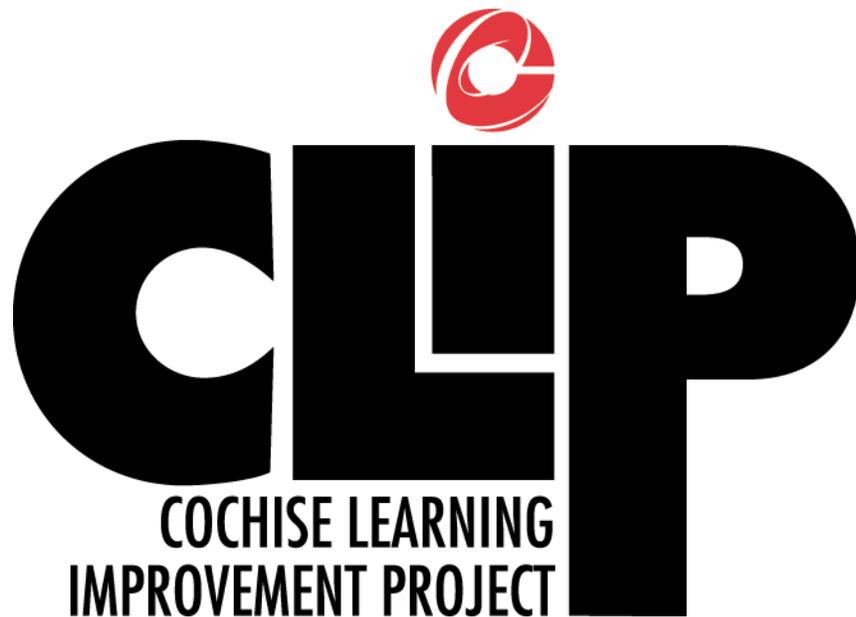


Cochise College

Learning Improvement

Handbook



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Improvement Committee
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Cochise College Learning Improvement Handbook Spring 2014

Introduction

This handbook is designed as a reference for Cochise College administrators, faculty, and staff who are responsible for conducting and coordinating efforts to improve student learning in their individual programs or disciplines. In the fall of 2013, the former Cochise College Assessment Committee changed its name to the Learning Improvement Committee to better reflect its mission. The term "assessment" does not encapsulate the full scope of this mission. The mission of the committee is not to merely facilitate the measurement of student learning but to facilitate its improvement. Nonetheless, the term is retained in portions of this handbook to refer to stages of the learning improvement process that rely upon measurement and to employ terminology still standard and commonly employed throughout higher education.

Learning Improvement Website

This handbook and additional information about assessment at Cochise College can be accessed via the Cochise College Portal by clicking on "Faculty Resources" then the **CLIP** icon.

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Assessment of Student Learning: The Underlying Principles

Assessment is a central element in the overall quality of teaching and learning in higher education. It provides the administration and faculty of educational institutions with opportunities to monitor the attainment of learning outcomes and to receive feedback for ongoing improvement of academic programs. *The overall goal of assessment is to improve student learning.*

The basic concept of assessment is simple. The six steps an institution needs to undertake are as follows:

1. Identify in broad terms what educational goals are valued. (These are normally written in terms of mission statements.)
2. Articulate measurable objectives relevant to the educational goals. (These are normally referred to as learning outcomes.)
3. Select appropriate approaches that will produce results which can be analyzed and interpreted as evidence of how well students as a whole meet the objectives. (These approaches are normally written in the form of assessment plans.)
4. Document, communicate, and analyze assessment findings.
5. Use feedback to make curricular and instructional changes and reevaluate the assessment process with the intent to continuously improve the quality of student learning.

While there are disagreements among assessment experts over some issues, the following underlying principles of assessment of student learning are widely accepted:

- A. Faculty should have primary responsibility for the development, implementation, and maintenance of instructional assessment activities.
- B. Programs need to have clear, explicitly stated purposes. Clearly defined learning outcomes are essential.
- C. Statements of intended student learning outcomes of all instructional programs/disciplines should originate with, and be approved by, the faculty in those areas.
- D. The work of individual students gathered for assessment purposes should remain confidential and be used only for the purposes of assessment (unless explicit permission is granted by the student).
- E. Assessment of student learning outcomes is about improving learning, not about evaluating faculty or staff.
- F. Assessment is systematic, ongoing, and cyclical.
- G. Assessment should be logical, attainable, and consistent with the institution's mission.

Learning Committee Mission

Learning Improvement at Cochise College

Cochise College is committed to continuous improvement of its students' learning. The learning improvement process at Cochise College provides evidence of how well the college is meeting its objectives, helps identify areas of improvement, and allows improvements to be implemented. This is achieved by investigating current levels of learning, experimenting with ways to improve learning, and using the experimentation results to integrate successful strategies and actions for improving student learning into the college's curriculum or procedures.

Learning Improvement Committee Mission Statement

The Learning Improvement Committee promotes a culture of continuous improvement at Cochise College by facilitating learning improvement processes at the departmental, program, and institutional levels. The Learning Improvement Committee works to ensure that these processes involve self-reflection, identification of strategies for improvement of learning, and implementation of those strategies. The committee also works to connect these processes to strategic planning and institutional effectiveness.

—Approved by the Learning Improvement Committee on December 6, 2013.

Cochise College Assessment Statement

To ensure that the importance of assessment is understood across the college district, the Assessment Committee developed a statement, which was approved by the Joint Instructional Managers, to be placed in all course proposals and course procedure sheets. This statement declares the following:

Cochise College is committed to continuous improvement in order to provide the best possible service. A key part of this commitment involves assessing student learning outcomes. Assessment, which occurs apart from the regular grading of student work, is conducted by faculty using tests, research papers, projects, presentations or standardized examinations to discover how well students who have passed a course actually achieved the expected learning goals. Faculty members analyze the results so they can develop strategies to help improve student learning in future classes.

—Approved by Joint Instructional Managers, April 10, 2007

Improvement of Student Learning at Cochise College

In the fall semester of 2013, the former Cochise College Assessment Committee changed its name to the Learning Improvement Committee to better reflect the mission of the committee. To facilitate the improvement of student learning in programs and disciplines at Cochise College, the Learning Improvement Committee has revised what used to be known as the DIAL system of assessment with the CLIP system of learning improvement. CLIP stands for Cochise Learning Improvement Project.

To understand how this system works, it is first probably best to consider, in general, what improvement of student learning at Cochise College is and what it is not.

What Improvement of Student Learning at Cochise College Is

- It is an ongoing, district-wide process whose primary purpose is to improve student learning.
- The implementation of the improvement of student learning process is faculty driven
- The oversight of improvement of student learning is the responsibility of department chairs, deans, and the Vice President for Instruction/Provost.
- The process is facilitated by the Learning Improvement Committee and its subcommittee, the Assessment Review Group (ARG).
- Learning improvement requires communication among all faculty members of a program/discipline.

What Improvement of Student Learning at Cochise College Is Not

- Improvement of student learning at Cochise College transcends classroom assessment techniques (CATs), which are quick, often ungraded, classroom assignments used to provide feedback for determining student understanding of concepts introduced in a classroom.
- The process should not be confused with program review, which is the systematic, comprehensive evaluation of a program, leading to administrative planning and decision-making about personnel, resources, and program improvement matters.
- The process includes assessment, but is different from grading. Assessment measures the achievement of only those students who have successfully completed the program (or an individual course used to assess the program/discipline). Assessment focuses on the collective learning of these students rather than individual accomplishments.
- Assessment strives to measure the effectiveness of a program or discipline, not that of individual faculty or staff members. The assessment process must not be confused with the full-time and associate faculty evaluation processes or the regular staff evaluation processes.
- Assessment is not the evaluation of individual courses. However, faculty members often gather and analyze data from an individual course (or courses) as a means of assessing the level of student learning in their program.

Introduction to CLIP: Cochise Learning Improvement Project

CLIP is the next phase in the evolution of Cochise College’s efforts to improve student learning. This project builds upon the **DIAL** process used for several years at the College to engage faculty and student service staff in the program and general education assessment. **CLIP** differs from the previous assessment process in two important ways:

Unlike the previous system of filing assessment plans and reports, the **CLIP** system allows faculty and staff to file these documents online. This web-based system also allows faculty and staff to receive feedback online. These advantages, along with the automated features of the system, should help make the reporting and approval process more convenient and efficient.

The **CLIP** process extends the cycle beyond the current **DIAL** process in an effort to better help programs and disciplines “close the loop” and ensure improvement in student learning. **CLIP** does this by engaging faculty and staff in a three-stage project:

	<p>Stage One: Investigation</p> <p>This stage is similar to the DIAL process with which many staff and faculty are already familiar: The process begins with faculty and staff designing assessment plans centered on student learning outcomes, initiating the plans, and analyzing the results of the procedures followed in the plans.</p>
	<p>Stage Two: Experimentation</p> <p>This stage begins where the current DIAL process leaves off—with an action plan to improve student learning. It is an experimental stage, for the goal is to determine whether the planned actions will achieve their intended effect. Nonetheless, the process is similar to that conducted in Stage One: staff and faculty design plans to measure, this time, the effectiveness of action plans to improve student learning, implement these plans, and analyze the results. If implementation of the action plan proves less than successful, then Stage Two begins anew, with the design of a new plan to improve student learning. If the results indicate that the actions taken to improve student learning were successful, then Stage Three commences.</p>
	<p>Stage Three: Integration</p> <p>This stage begins if and when the actions taken to improve student learning prove successful at the end of Stage Two. The goal is to integrate successful strategies and actions for improving student learning permanently into the program’s curriculum or operation. Faculty and staff devise an integration plan for doing so and confirm that the integration has been completed.</p>

How to Use the CLIP System

Every program or discipline expected to enter plans and reports into the CLIP system should receive direction from their dean. That direction should include the general education outcome needing to be included with the discipline-specific plan. The dean should also stipulate the person responsible for facilitating the learning improvement process.

After receiving direction from their dean, facilitators should proceed by following these steps:

1. Facilitators should download the "Paper CLIP" from the Learning Improvement website in the Cochise College Portal. This worksheet is found under "Faculty Resources" and by clicking on the CLIP icon. On the right side of the Learning Improvement website is the link to the CLIP system. Underneath the link to the CLIP system is a paperclip icon. Click on this icon to view and download the Paper CLIP worksheet.
2. The faculty members of each program/discipline should meet to determine how this worksheet should be completed. In most cases, the department chair should call and facilitate the meeting. The filling out of this worksheet should be the result of a faculty discussion of all of the relevant material on the worksheet.
3. Once agreement has been reached on how the worksheet should be completed, the designated CLIP facilitator should use this worksheet as preparation for entering information into CLIP software. Facilitators should use one worksheet for each Program/Discipline or General Education outcome. Since CLIP will allow attachments (such as a rubric), facilitators should note any files that they may want to attach to a given section as a reminder during entry.
4. Once the worksheets have been completed, facilitators should use them to enter information into the CLIP system, accessed via the Learning Improvement website (see #1 above).
5. Facilitators should follow the instructions in the CLIP system, clicking on the icon with a question mark (?) if needing further help. The CLIP system is designed to lead the facilitators through a step-by-step process. Plans and reports will be reviewed by the appropriate dean and the Assessment Review Group (ARG). The facilitators will be contacted by their dean concerning the status of the plans or reports and what further actions need to be taken.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is assessment of student learning?

Assessment is the systematic collection, review, and use of information about educational programs undertaken for the purpose of improving student learning. Thus, the emphasis of assessment is on programs rather than individual students (or instructors).

The assessment process begins with the formulation of statements of intended learning outcomes. That is, what students should know, understand, and be able to do with their knowledge. The second step is to design and/or select a data-gathering process to determine whether the intended learning outcomes have been achieved. The third step is to implement the process and obtain the results. Lastly, assessment results must be discussed and used to improve student learning. Assessment of student learning begins with educational values and clear, explicit purposes. Assessment reflects an understanding of learning as multidimensional, integrated, and revealed over time. Thus, assessment is ongoing, not episodic.

2. What is the learning improvement process at Cochise College?

CLIP is the next phase in the evolution of Cochise College's efforts to improve student learning. This project builds upon the DIAL process used for several years at the College to engage faculty and student service staff in the program and general education assessment. CLIP differs from the previous assessment process in two important ways:

A. Unlike the previous system of filing assessment plans and reports, the CLIP system allows faculty and staff to file these documents online. This web-based system also allows faculty and staff to receive feedback online. These advantages, along with the automated features of the system, should help make the reporting and approval process more convenient and efficient.

B. The CLIP process extends the cycle beyond the current DIAL process in an effort to better help programs and disciplines "close the loop" and ensure improvement in student learning. CLIP does this by engaging faculty and staff in a three-stage project:

1. Stage One: Investigation

This stage is similar to the DIAL process with which many staff and faculty are already familiar: The process begins with faculty and staff designing assessment plans centered on student learning outcomes, initiating the plans, and analyzing the results of the procedures followed in the plans.

2. Stage Two: Experimentation

This stage begins where the current DIAL process leaves off—with an action plan to improve student learning. It is an experimental stage, for the goal is to determine whether the planned actions will achieve their intended effect. Nonetheless, the process is similar to that conducted in Stage One: staff and faculty design plans to measure, this time, the effectiveness of action plans to improve student learning, implement these plans, and analyze the results. If

implementation of the action plan proves less than successful, then Stage Two begins anew, with the design of a new plan to improve student learning. If the results indicate that the actions taken to improve student learning were successful, then Stage Three commences.

3. Stage Three: Integration

This stage begins if and when the actions taken to improve student learning prove successful at the end of Stage Two. The goal is to integrate successful strategies and actions for improving student learning permanently into the program's curriculum or operation. Faculty and staff devise an integration plan for doing so and confirm that the integration has been completed.

3. Which and how many faculty members of a given program should participate in the learning improvement process?

All faculty, both full time and associate, should participate in this process. All have a stake in the success of their respective program or discipline. However, one faculty member should be designated as the facilitator. This person is responsible for entering the information in the CLIP system.

4. How is the learning improvement process handled in areas that are not officially programs?

If the area of study is not a recognized program or is used primarily to fulfill AGEC general education requirements, a course that most represents the culmination of student learning in the area of study or a course that has consistently high enrollments should be selected. This may be a capstone course, a general education class, or the last in a sequence of courses.

5. For "split" departments (developmental and college-level), does each need to develop and submit a plan in the CLIP system?

Yes, these are considered separate areas. However, there may be exceptions. The deans should clearly communicate what areas are required to enter plans and which general education outcomes need to be included in these plans.

6. Does a learning improvement plan have to be prepared for each course within a program/discipline or within a sequence of courses?

No, only one plan is required for an entire program/discipline or sequence of courses. This plan should reflect the cumulative learning outcomes for the students exiting the series of courses in this discipline. Nonetheless, to achieve this goal, a particular course within a program/discipline may become the focus of the assessment plan; for example, to assess the cumulative learning outcomes for students who have completed composition courses at Cochise College, the English Department may decide to measure the achievement of students completing English 102.

7. How often does a plan need to be entered into the CLIP system?

This depends upon the time it takes for a plan initiated in the "experimentation" stage of the CLIP system to be completed in the "integration" stage. Programs/disciplines have, working with their deans, flexibility in developing timelines for the CLIP plans and reports. However, once a program/discipline has completed the "integration" stage, a new experiment plan should be developed and entered into the CLIP system.

8. How, why, or when would or should a department rotate courses to be assessed?

It is important to keep in mind that we are trying to assess programs, not individual courses. Faculty within a department may decide to assess student achievement in one or more courses as a means to gain insight into the level of success of student learning throughout the program. There is no real rule that courses need to be rotated.

9. How do faculty within a department identify learning outcomes?

Some learning outcomes can be mandated by outside agencies. Others have arisen through discussion among faculty who have tried to answer the question of what knowledge or skills their students should demonstrate upon exiting the program.

10. Who chooses facilitators?

Typically the dean and department chair would make this decision.

11. How are general education outcomes assigned?

Ideally, each program/discipline should eventually assess and attempt to improve learning in all general education areas covered by the Cochise College General Education Outcomes. The vice president for instruction, Learning Improvement Committee, and the college deans determine the rotation of the general education outcomes. Once a program/discipline has completed one CLIP cycle (by completing the "integration" stage), the dean should assign a new general education outcome to be included in the new "experimentation" stage of the CLIP system.

12. Where can one get help for developing a CLIP "experiment" plan?

The Paper CLIP worksheet found on the Learning Improvement Website is the best place to start, for it explains and specifies the information needed to be entered into the CLIP system. In addition, department chairs and the dean should be consulted when a faculty members and facilitators have questions. The Assessment Committee is also here to help. There are a number of individual members of the Assessment Committee who, through research, attending conferences, and hands-on experience, have gained significant expertise with assessment of student learning. The committee as a whole and these individuals will be glad to do what they can to help. A list of current Assessment Committee members can be found on the Membership page of the Learning Improvement Committee website.