

**Foundations of Excellence  
Learning Dimension Report  
Pulaski Technical College**

Foundations Institutions deliver curricular and co-curricular learning experiences that engage new students in order to develop knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors consistent with the institutional mission, students' academic and career goals, and workplace expectations.

Both in and out of the classroom, these learning experiences promote critical thinking, ethical decision making, and the lifelong pursuit of knowledge.

**Committee Co-Chairs:**

- Brian D. Hight                      Chair of Fine Arts, Instructor of Theatre Arts & Film
- Dr. Judy J. Pile                      Site Director – Baptist Health (Resigned)

**Committee Members:**

- Vondra D. Armstrong              Instructor of Business (Resigned)
- Tracy Fox                              Secretary
- Jon Goodell                            Technology Services & Reference Librarian
- Kimberly Halpern                    Instructor of Developmental Writing (Resigned)
- Herbert Mathews                    Instructor of Biological Sciences
- Barry McVinney                    Instructor of Music

**Current Situation:**

- Even though for the purposes of the Foundations of Excellence self-study the Pulaski Technical College (PTC) definition of “new students” is fairly broad, the subcommittee found that the Mission Statement and other written policies are aimed primarily at all students, without any differentiation concerning their status as first year students or otherwise. The Mission Statement and subsequent Purposes and Vision, speak to “provid[ing] access to high quality education,” without clearly defining what exactly constitutes high quality education or defining what a student should be learning in a high quality education.
- To the question of institutionally established learning goals, while the Arkansas Department of Higher Education (ADHE) has recently gone about the task of creating uniform, core, course specific, learning Course Objectives and mandated uniform Course Content which do affect many of the courses potentially taken at PTC by a first year student, there does not appear to be any institutional mandate for learning objectives or goals across the curriculum. In other words, there may be specifically defined, and in some cases state mandated, learning objectives for specific courses, but there does not appear to be any written learning objectives or goals on an institutional level across the curriculum. However, it does appear that at least some Divisions at PTC have created Division Objectives.
- Results from the New Student survey indicate the following:
  - 1) Despite the fact that there are no clearly articulated institution-wide common learning goals, over 45% of students indicated that they understand PTC’s intended learning goals.
  - 2) In evaluating the suitability of particular courses, in most areas, at least half of the survey population seemed to think that they were appropriately placed according to writing skills (53.6%), reading skills (54.6), library research skills (51.5%), mathematical skills (48.4), and computing skills (53.3%). Interestingly, the five high enrollment courses with the highest DWFI may indicate otherwise. Two of the five courses are writing courses, and one of the five is a mathematics course. The two remaining courses have a large reading component, and in all five courses, computer skills of some sort are required.

<u>COURSE</u>	<u>DWFI Rate</u>
English Composition I	44%
Elementary Algebra	55%
Speech Communication	41%
College Seminar	35%
English Composition Fundamentals	38%

Low enrollment courses with the highest DWFI follow a similar pattern. Two of the five courses are mathematics courses, one is a writing course, and the remaining two courses are reading-intensive. Again, computer skills of some sort are required.

<u>COURSE</u>	<u>DWFI Rate</u>
Psychology	40%
Intermediate Algebra	53%
English Composition II	52%
College Algebra	36%
History of Civilization	40%

- 3) Students also reported favorably in the following areas:\*
- Seventy-eight percent (78%) of students believed that course materials were effectively organized.
  - Seventy-seven percent (77%) of students thought that instructors encouraged them to ask questions.
  - Seventy-six percent (76%) of students believed that the instructor helped them learn the course material.
  - Seventy-six percent (76%) of students felt that instructors communicated academic Expectations.
  - Seventy-five percent (75%) of students thought that instructors communicated concepts clearly.
  - Seventy-four percent (74%) of students believed that instructors used effective teaching methods.
  - Seventy-two percent (72%) of students felt that course material was valuable to them.

However, students were not as positive in the following areas:

- Only 67% of students felt that instructors provided individual attention.
- Only 65% of students felt that instructors provided prompt feedback about their progress in the course.
- Only 50% of students felt that instructors encouraged them to participate in out-of-class activities.

\*All numbers have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

- Results from the Faculty-Staff survey indicate the following:
  - 1) Institution-wide, faculty and staff indicated that there is room for improvement in the following areas:
    - Only 47 % of faculty/staff believed that students received individualized attention.
    - About 39% of faculty/staff believe new students experience out-of-class learning opportunities.
    - A mere 54% indicated that they understood the college's intended educational goals for new students. Interestingly, there are no clearly articulated institution-wide common learning goals, which suggests that faculty and staff are confusing learning goals for particular courses or the mission statement with institutional learning goals.
  - 2) Faculty who indicated a new-student teaching responsibility reported the following:

- Ninety-six percent believed that they communicated academic expectations to students.
- Ninety-six percent believed they encouraged student to ask questions in class.
- Ninety percent believed they effectively manage student behavior in class.
- Ninety percent believed they made themselves available to students outside of class.
- Seventy-nine percent believed they initiated communication early in the term with students who are not doing well.
  - Sixty-nine percent believed they encouraged students to participate in out-of-class activities.
  - Fifty-four percent indicated an understanding of the college's intended educational goals for new students.

Finally, 90% of faculty felt that they had developed specific learning goals for their courses, and 84% said that student learn goals were documented.

A comparison of faculty/staff responses to student responses indicates a gap between perceptions.

▫ Forty-seven percent (47%) of faculty/staff believed that students received individualized attention.
▫ Sixty-seven percent (67%) of students felt that instructors provided individual attention.
▫ Ninety-six percent (96%) of faculty believed they encouraged student to ask questions in class.
▫ Seventy-seven percent (77%) of students thought that instructors encouraged them to ask questions
▫ Ninety-six percent (96%) of faculty believed that they communicated academic expectations to students.
▫ Seventy-six percent (76%) of students felt that instructors communicated academic expectations.
▫ Sixty-nine percent (69%) of faculty believed they encouraged students to participate in out-of-class activities.
▫ Fifty percent (50%) of students felt that instructors encouraged them to participate in out-of-class activities.
▫ Seventy-nine percent (79%) of faculty believed they initiated communication early in the term with students who are not doing well.
▫ Sixty-five percent (65%) of students felt that instructors provided prompt feedback about their progress in the course
▫ Fifty-four percent (54%) indicated an understanding of the college's intended educational goals for new students.**
▫ Forty-five (45% ) of students indicated that they understand the college's intended learning goals. **
<i>**There are no clearly articulated institution-wide common learning goals.</i>

- With regard to the institutional documentation of instructional methods and the analysis of their effectiveness, currently all Full-Time Faculty and all Adjunct Faculty are evaluated by their students in some, but not all, of their classes in the Fall and Spring semesters with an instrument that includes some general questions concerning the students perception of the instructor's pedagogy and teaching methodology. As the Faculty Evaluation Plan (FEP) has not yet been implemented, there is no mechanism for Full-Time Faculty to receive directed feedback from these evaluations. Presumably, Adjunct Faculty should receive some feedback from these evaluations from either the Chairs or Deans of each respective Division, but there is no written policy concerning such.

Furthermore, while the Assessment Committee does compile data and presumably measures outcomes for each course, it is not evident that there is any detailed analysis of instructional methods or pedagogy specifically. In addition, anecdotal evidence would suggest that the

Assessment Reports written at the Departmental and Divisional levels contain no such data for the Assessment Committee to then analyze.

Accordingly, there does not appear to be any data linking the use of any specific instructional methodology or pedagogy to learning outcomes.

It is worth noting that with the impending implementation of the FEP, which requires a certain percentage of professional development, there has been an explosion of professional development opportunities on campus, many of which focus specifically on issues of instructional methodology and pedagogy.

- The question of institutional documentation and evaluation of course outcomes for the five (5) high enrollment courses, which include English Composition I, Elementary Algebra, Speech Communication, College Seminar, and Composition Fundamentals, require some inferences on the part of the subcommittee. It is presumed that the assessment Committee has, at the very least, begun to solidify a process by which course outcomes are documented. The validity of such an inference seems to be evidenced by the very fact that a DFWI can be constructed for the above mentioned courses, as well as others for the purposes of this self-study. It is less clear, however, that there exists any serious evaluation of why the outcomes are what they are.
- As was mentioned above, the causes of high DFWI rates in various classes, regardless of relative enrollment, does not currently appear to be addressed by the institution. However on a Departmental and Divisional level, there does seem to be some attempts to grapple with the reasons for high DFWI. For instance, the Plagiarism Study, which was submitted in conjunction with the English Department’s Assessment Report, and contained within the Evidence Library, while containing many course specific issues, does address institutional issues which are both analogous and valid for application across the curriculum.

For example, one institutional issue which would appear to affect all of the high DFWI courses, English or otherwise, is the student to full-time faculty ratio. An analysis of the Top Ten Enrolling Departments and Full-Time Faculty Coverage for Fall 2006 reveals the following:

Departments	Total Enrollment	Full-Time Faculty	Total Sections	*FTE Instruction	Percentage of Coverage
ENGL	2576	5	151	30.2	16.6
PSYC	1208	2	57	11.4	17.5
SPCH	954	2	54	10.8	18.5
HIST	1954	4	99	19.8	20.2
COLL	796	2	43	8.6	23.3
DEVE	3584	11	189	37.8	29.1
BUS	1439	6	97	19.4	30.9
BIOL	1216	7	59	19.6	35.7
MATH	1195	6	65	13	46.1
CIS	1606	11	113	22.6	48.7

- The question to what degree does the institution intentionally place new students in appropriate classes, can be looked at from at least three different perspectives: the perspective of placement of students who need remedial work; the perspective of students who are prepared to begin college work; and, the perspective of students who are prepared to be challenged beyond the “typical” first year college work.

A troubling observation that has been in other reports, is the fact that a student in need of full remediation attending PTC may find it difficult to complete a schedule qualifying for financial aid

that is comprised entirely of remedial courses. It must at least be investigated what percentage of DFWI in courses without pre-requisites (Speech Communication, Psychology & History of Civilization, for instance) may be a result of ill advised student placement for the purposes of completing a “full load” for financial aid purposes. Also noted in other reports is the fact that there are virtually no pre-requisites for college courses that do not naturally follow a progression, such as math and English.

Another troubling observation, and ultimately more problematic, is the presence of three (3) developmental courses on the list of nine high and medium enrollment courses with high DFWI. If one assumes the placement tests to be accurate, then one would also assume a fairly substantial percentage of the students would be posed to succeed at that level. If that assumption is accurate then perhaps there needs to be further investigation into what happens in the classroom (who is teaching the classes, how, etc.). However, if that assumption is not accurate, then the placement tests themselves and application of the placement tests needs to be re-evaluated.

There is also an odd anomaly when one tracks the progression of high and medium enrollment courses with high DFWI. In math, the percentage goes down as the students progress to presumably more difficult courses. The DFWI for DEVE 0336 – Elementary Algebra is Fifty-Five Percent (55%). The DFWI for DEVE 0338 – Intermediate Algebra is Fifty-Three Percent (53%). And, the DFWI for Math 1302 – College Algebra is Thirty-Six Percent (36%). The exact opposite happens when tracking English courses. The DFWI for DEVE 0324 – English Comp is Thirty-Eight Percent (38%). The DFWI for English 1311 – Composition I is Forty-Four Percent (44%). And, the DFWI for English 1312 – Composition II is Fifty-Two Percent (52%). This anomaly may or may not be a by-product of placement, or it may be more directly related to, again, the full time faculty to student ratio, and the extent of training and oversight received by adjunct faculty who are teaching these courses.

And, finally with regards to placement, the subcommittee noted that there does not currently exist at PTC any type of Honors classes, much less an Honors Program, to encourage the more advanced and inquisitive student.

- To the question of institutional documentation of new student learning outcomes from out-of-class events and activities, the subcommittee found that Faculty who use out-of-class events and activities as part of student learning do not necessarily document the learning outcomes of those events. At the very least, they will encourage students to attend, provide extra credit for attendance, or require attendance through a graded assignment. At this time, there is little if no connection between college-sponsored out-of-class events and activities and curriculum.

#### **Areas of Concern:**

- Need for Definition of What Constitutes High Quality Education
- Lack of Institutionally Defined Learning Goals
- Need for Analysis of the Effectiveness of Teaching Methods and Pedagogy
- Need for Professional Development to Emphasize Effective Teaching Methods and Pedagogy
- More Guidance from Assessment Committee on Areas of Focus, such as DFWI
- More Feedback from Assessment Committee on Data Gathered
- More Feedback from Assessment Committee on Data Analysis
- Need for Serious Evaluation of the Causes of High DFWI Across the Curriculum
- Questions Concerning Placement Testing
- Lack of Remedial Courses to Constitute “Full Time” Status
- Lack of Honors Courses
- Lack of an Honors Program
- Very Low Full-Time Faculty to Student Ratio
- Progressively Higher DFWI Rate in English Courses
- No Pre-Requisites to Some High DFWI Courses
- Few Opportunities for Learning at Out of Class Events

- Lack of Connection Between Student Organized Out of Class Events and Learning

**Summary of Evidence:**

After consulting the CPI, the Evidence Library, the Faculty Survey, and the Student Survey, as well as discussing questions raised by the Performance Indicators, the subcommittee determined, in most cases, that there was no policy, study, or analysis at PTC to warrant affirmative answers to the Performance Indicator questions.

There did seem to be a possible disconnection between the perception of both Faculty and Students, as evidenced from their respective surveys, and the actual evidence such as the high DFWI rates in medium to high enrollment courses. Faculty and Student perception seems, for the most part, to be satisfied with the level of learning, whereas evidence seems to indicate a less than optimum learning outcome.

**Recommended Grade: D-**

**Recommended Action Items:**

- Develop written policies directed at both defining “high quality education,” and qualifying expected learning outcomes for not only first year students, but for the overall student population. *(High Priority)*
- Establish learning goals for the institution as a whole. *(High Priority)*
- Provide professional development in the areas of instructional methodology and pedagogy, especially with an emphasis upon technology in the classroom. *(High Priority)*
- Create an ad hoc committee specifically charged with determining the reasons for high DFWI rates in all courses, but with emphasis placed upon high enrollment, first year, courses. *(High Priority)*
- Establish a Teaching Learning Center *(High Priority)*
- Hire an Instructional Development Specialist *(High Priority)*
- Require advising in person for all students who have taken any remedial coursework in the previous semester. *(High Priority)*
- Establish pre-requisites for college courses with extensive reading and writing requirements. *(High Priority)*
- Increase number of full-time faculty, especially in areas with high DFWI, such as English and Math, in order to lower the full-time faculty to student ratio. *(High Priority)*
- Provide professional development for all adjunct faculty, especially those in areas with high DFWI. *(High Priority)*
- Require all first year students to take College Seminar, if an analysis proves that doing so actually increases the chances for success. *(High Priority)*
- Decrease class size in areas with high DFWI, especially those in Developmental English and College English, in order to promote more attention on the individual student. *(High Priority)*
- Begin institutional documentation of instructional methods across the curriculum, perhaps in conjunction with assessment. *(Medium Priority)*

- Begin institutional analysis of instructional methods across the curriculum, perhaps in conjunction with assessment. (*Medium Priority*)
- Re-evaluate the first year student placement process in conjunction with the Title III Grant, (*Medium Priority*)
- Create more Developmental Courses to ensure that a student placed in remediation doesn't have to take a college level course for the sole reason of qualifying for financial aid. (*Medium Priority*)
- Create Honors Classes and an Honors Program. (*Medium Priority*)
- Provide more on campus, out of classroom activities, focused on learning and tie those events into the curriculum. (*Medium Priority*)