Norco College Assessment Report: 2010 – 11[1]

A Brief History of RCCD Assessment Efforts 2000 – 8

Just after its accreditation visit in 2000, Riverside Community College District (RCCD) became aware of the impending revised standards, then circulating in draft, which went into effect in 2002. We saw that the new standards would place a premium on outcomes assessment, along with program review and strategic planning, and so a decision was made to create a district-wide program review committee and a district-wide assessment committee (DAC), which met for the first time late in 2000. That committee, headed by an administrator and a faculty co-chair with reassigned time, spent a year studying assessment and reviewing various approaches to doing authentic forms of assessment. Members of the committee visited local colleges to network with assessment leaders and review methods. Members also attended national assessment conferences. Nationally known assessment theorists were invited to RCCD to give workshops. As part of its effort to develop a comprehensive assessment plan for the district, DAC made an early decision to focus on course-level assessment, requiring that all disciplines report on their assessment projects and plans in annual program review updates. It also, however, developed a list of outcomes for its general education program and made some effort to assess those outcomes indirectly, using learning gains surveys administered to all graduating students. A more detailed history of RCCD's assessment efforts between 2000 and 2006 can be found in "Assessing Student Learning Outcomes: Riverside Community College District," available at the Norco College assessment website: http://faculty.rcc.edu/norcocollege/assessment/.

Norco College Assessment Efforts 2008 – 10

In 2008, as Norco College (NC) and Moreno Valley College moved toward accreditation as separate colleges, they began to develop and implement college-specific assessment efforts. A Norco College administrator, Annebelle Nery, was asked to spearhead this effort (Dr. Nery was Title V grant coordinator and Dean of Student Success), with help from Sheryl Tschetter, a NC English instructor who had become district assessment coordinator and faculty co-chair of DAC in 2007. NC decided to continue the focus on course-based assessment, asking all faculty to complete an assessment project for each section they taught every semester between 2008 and 2010. A goal of this effort was to permit the college to report to ACCJC that ALL of its courses had been assessed at the time its 2009 accreditation self-study was written. Faculty mostly assessed their sections using learning gains surveys, with the Student Success office offering technical support in coding Scantron forms and helping to analyze data. A number of instructors opted for more direct forms of assessment, often via simple pre-and post-tests in their sections. Some collaborative forms of direct assessment, via embedded questions on exams, common final exams, or analytic evaluation of sample student artifacts, also took place during this period. The NC assessment efforts in 2008 and 2009 were robust in the sense that virtually all instructors participated, and virtually all courses were assessed. By fall, 2010, something very much like a "culture of assessment" had begun to take root at the college—fully ten years after the district overall began to work toward such a culture.

Norco College Assessment 2010-11: an Overview

---

[1] This report was written by Arend Flick, Norco assessment coordinator (and district assessment coordinator 2005 – 7). It was read and approved by members of the Norco assessment committee.

The shift from a district- to a college-based assessment model at RCCD was completed in mid-2010, with the elimination of a district assessment coordinator and a district Office of Institutional Effectiveness to oversee assessment efforts. College-based assessment coordinators were appointed for each of the three colleges beginning in fall, 2010, and new college-based assessment committees formed. At NC, assessment efforts this past year have been overseen by Greg Aycock (who has replaced Annebelle Nery as Dean of Student Success) and Arend Flick, an English professor who had been district assessment coordinator from 2004 to 2007.

The NC assessment committee (NAC) met monthly (minutes available at the website) during 2010-11. One of the central considerations of the committee from the start was the implications of the ACCJC rubric for Student Learning Outcomes, which was distributed to the colleges in 2007. The colleges are expected to be at the "Proficiency" level for assessing SLOs b fall, 2012, and NAC focused its initial efforts on identifying and addressing areas where the college was not at this level some two years before it needed to be.

From its review of the ACCJC rubric, NAC determined that while good efforts had been made to assess courses, the college needed to focus its efforts in 2010-12 on program-level assessment, including assessment of its largest program, the program in General Education. (See NAC documents on program and GE assessment at its website.) It also saw the need to direct faculty away from non-collaborative, indirect, and often section-focused assessment to more authentic efforts to assess whole courses, particularly those with multiple sections, collaboratively and using direct assessment methods. This new emphasis was introduced to faculty in a series of workshops, in faculty meetings, and through documents placed on the new Norco College assessment website. NAC also determined that comprehensive assessment reports and planning agendas needed to be developed by each discipline and included in the annual Program Review update due each May. Information from these reports, which can be found at http://www.rccdfaculty.net/pages/Annual%20Program%20Review%202008/2008_Annual_PR_index.htm , is summarized below.

This past academic year has therefore been a year of challenge and transition for us at Norco College as we work to meet ACCJC Proficiency guidelines by fall, 2012. More detailed information on our assessment activities can best be given under a series of broad headings.

Assessing Academic Programs

Career Tech Ed

Learning outcomes for all Norco-specific CTE programs had been developed by the fall of 2010. Very little assessment of these programs had taken place, however, and some of the PLOs were problematic for one reason or another (e.g., too general, too specific, not clear enough, etc.). We also faced the problem of how to assess programs shared with one or more of the other colleges, ones that permit students to take some courses at one college and others at another. In order to make progress with these and other issues that had district-wide implications, NC assessment leaders began meeting monthly with their counterparts at Riverside and MOV. We decided to hold a CTE faculty retreat at the beginning of spring semester, on February 25, 2011. The workshop (re-)introduced instructors to direct and indirect assessment methods and gave them practice in refining their PLOs and mapping and aligning course SLOs to PLOs. NAC determined that all NC programs needed to complete a report on a mapping and aligning process by spring 2011 and develop a plan for direct assessment of PLOs that could be implemented by fall, 2011.

Progress is thus being made on the assessing of CTE program SLOs, though some programs are lagging behind others in the effort to align course outcomes with program outcomes and develop direct assessment methods for their programs. One of the most exciting developments this past year has been the effort by a number of CTE faculty, with the aid of a Perkins grant, to have students develop electronic portfolios as repositories of their achievement of program learning outcomes. Sampling eportfolios and evaluating them against a rubric should enable participating faculty to identify problem areas in the program that can then be targeted for improvement.

Non-CTE programs

One of the chief problems that has befuddled NAC was the need to determine exactly what "programs" existed at NC, who should assess each of them, and how. (See NAC document on assessment academic programs at its website.) In 2008, the district recognized that its existing Associate of Arts and Associate of Sciences degree patterns were inconsistent with California ed code, and it accordingly developed seven new areas of emphasis (AOEs), to go into effect in 2009. These new degrees were "Administration and Information Systems," Communication, Media, and Languages," Fine and Applied Arts," "Humanities, Philosophy, and Arts," "Physical Education, Health and Wellness," "Social and Behavioral Studies," and "Math and Science." Program-level learning outcomes were defined for each of the AOEs and are published in the NC catalog (pp. 36 – 40). However, the passage of SB 1440 has led to the probable development of many more discipline-specific degree programs and seems likely to make RCCD's seven new AOEs obsolete before they even come fully into existence. NAC decided to focus its energies elsewhere on CTE programs and general education during the 2010 – 11 academic year, hoping the degree situation would clarify itself in time for the college to meet proficiency standards by 2012.

NC has made an effort to begin tracking the number of students who complete AA or AS degrees in various programs, partly to determine which programs to focus on in initial assessment efforts. For the graduating class at NC of 2010, the most recent for which we have data, students received degrees in 37 different AA or AS degrees, but only seven programs graduated ten or more students:

Program	Number of graduates
Associates Degree--General	219
Biology, Physics, and Mathematics	164
Social and Behavioral Sciences	85
Math and Sciences	43
Humanities, Philosophy, and Arts	40
Administration and Information Systems	31
Communications, Media, and Language	16

The two most "popular" degrees are in programs that are being phased out with the new AOEs. "Associates Degree-General" and "Biology, Physical Sciences, and Math" appear to be primarily those students who received a non-CTE degree under previous years' catalog requirements. These numbers should virtually disappear over the next few years

As noted earlier, it remains to be seen whether the new interdisciplinary AOEs will be in existence long enough to make assessing them worthwhile, or whether we should wait for the many new SB 1440-inspired discipline-based degrees that appear to be coming. But either way, we know that the college has a number of "phantom programs"—sequences of courses or other curricular patterns

that prepare students for transfer in a particular major to CSU or UC. (See the list of "major requirements" on pp. 56 – 60 in the NC catalog.) NAC is concerned with the need to develop assessment methods for these patterns and will need to develop some system for doing so in 2011-12.

Assessing General Education

RCCD adopted SLOs for its GE program in 2006 and has made some effort in the past five years to assess them, in both indirect and direct ways. These efforts have intensified in the past year at Norco College specifically, and NAC has spent much of its time interpreting the existing data and developing new approaches to GE assessment for the coming years.

- For the past five years, the District has administered a learning gains survey to graduating students. It began to disaggregate the data by college in 2008. Students were asked to indicate the extent to which they thought they achieved various GE outcomes using a four-point scale, with 3 = significant gains, 2 = moderate gains, 1 = slight gains, and 0 = no gains. The following chart compares aggregate NC student responses in 2008 and 2009 in one particular GE SLO, critical thinking, which we break out into six component parts:

Self-reported Learning Gains in Critical Thinking, Norco College Graduates
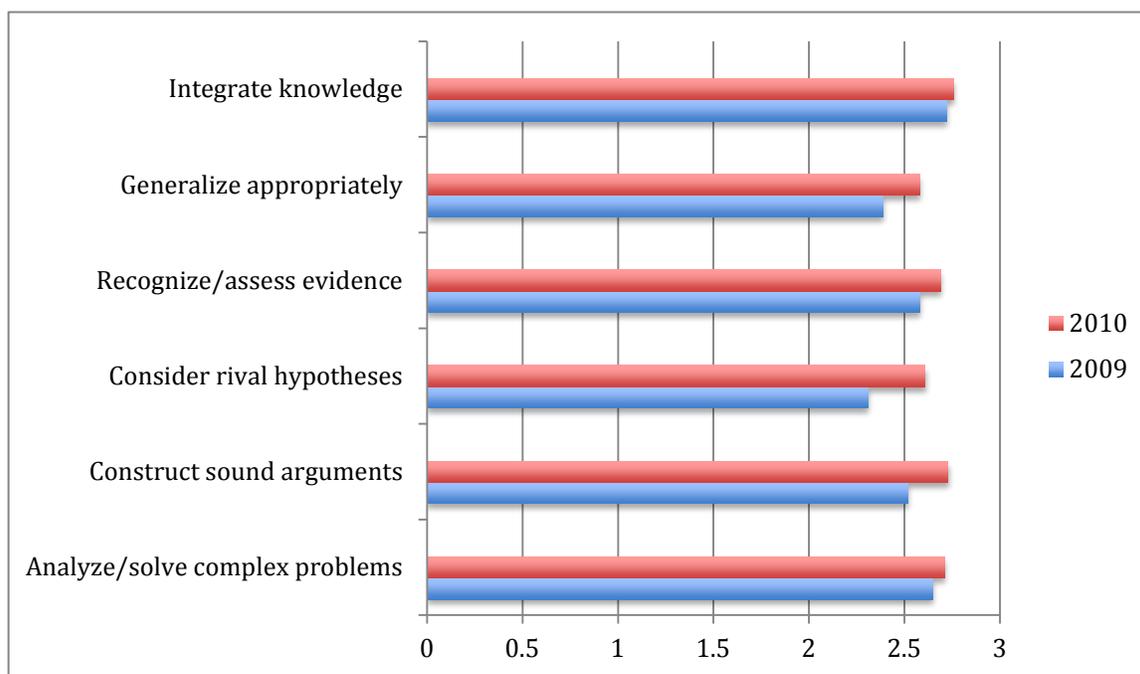
Critical thinking, information competency, response to and evaluation of artistic expression, computer literacy, and quantitative reasoning have consistently lagged behind the other GE SLOs in the learning gains surveys. NAC reached the conclusion this past year that enough evidence had been gathered through learning gains surveys to permit it to recommend modifications in the GE curriculum itself, partly to ensure that course SLOs (which had been mapped to GE SLOs several years ago) were aligned more rigorously with those same GE

learning outcomes. Accordingly, it spearheaded an effort to create a task force under the auspices of the District Academic Senate to review the existing GE program, including its SLOs, for possible modification. That task force met several times in spring, 2011 and will continue its work in 2011-12. We see this as a vitally important effort to complete an assessment loop by working to improve a program for which we have sufficient data that indicate improvement is called for.

- NC has also administered the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) in 2010 and 2011 to see to what extent students report their involvement in activities that have been shown to be consistent with student learning. CCSSE data have been widely shared and discussed at the college. Looking at questions related to critical thinking from the 2010 survey, it's possible to compare CCSSE results to the self-reported learning gains results to interesting effect. NC students (n = 925) were asked, "during the current school year, how much has your coursework at this college emphasized"

  o Memorizing facts, ideas, [etc.] so you can repeat them in pretty much the same form?
  o Analyzing the basic elements of an idea, experience, or theory?
  o Synthesizing and organizing ideas, information, or experiences?
  o Making judgments about the value or soundness of information, arguments, or methods?
  o Applying theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations?
  o Using information to perform a new skill?

  The following table gives their mean responses, as well as those of all community college students who took the survey (1 = very little, 2 = some, 3 = quite a bit, 4 = very much):

	Norco College	2011 CCSSE Cohort
Memorize	2.86	2.85
Analyze	2.85	2.89
Synthesize	2.69	2.76
Judge	2.55	2.59
Apply	2.63	2.69
Perform	2.8	2.8

  NC students indicate that they are asked to do lower order thinking (specifically memorization) more often than they are asked to do higher order thinking (e.g., making judgments and applying theories or concepts). This seems consistent with their responses on the graduating students' learning gains surveys, which suggest they do not "consider and evaluate rival hypotheses" or "generalize appropriately from specific cases" as much as we would like. It is also consistent with more direct assessment measures we've employed in the past few years.

- NAC also developed and began to implement a plan that would lead to more direct assessment of GE learning in the next 12 months. It asked the departments to assess one or more outcomes particularly appropriate to their disciplines, with reports due in winter, 2012. Our Art, Humanities, and World Languages department will assess the outcome that says students should be able to "respond to and evaluate artistic expression." Our Social and Behavioral Sciences department will assess two "Global Awareness" outcomes, one having to do with students' ability to "demonstrate understanding of ethnic, religious, and

socioeconomic diversity," the other the ability to "demonstrate alternative political, historical, and cultural viewpoints." The Mathematics and Sciences department will assess students' ability to "analyze experimental results and draw reasonable inferences from them" and "use the symbols and vocabulary of mathematics to solve problems and communicate results." Each department will focus on student learning in multi-section courses that students usually take for GE credit.

- The Communications department of NC completed an assessment project in spring, 2011 that focused on student learning in English 1A, a kind of quasi-capstone GE course (and the only course all students must take as part of their GE program). GE outcomes evaluated in this study were critical thinking, written expression, and information competency. A detailed report of this study can be found at the NC assessment website. Briefly, however, the study suggested that too many students are completing 1A without being able to demonstrate sufficient proficiency in critical thinking and information competency. The English discipline is taking a number of steps to address this deficiency, as outlined in the report. It plans another assessment of learning in English 1A in 2012 to see if learning has improved in the course.

By fall, 2012, NC will have completed direct assessment loops for all of its GE outcomes. It will also have undertaken a number of steps to improve the GE program itself. Since NC shares a curriculum with its sister colleges in the District, it made sense to work collaboratively with Riverside and Moreno Valley on curricular and programmatic issues. But pedagogy is a matter for individual colleges and, indeed, teachers. Much of our energy in faculty development during 2011-12 will be devoted to improving teaching in the GE programs, with critical thinking and written expression two of the main areas of emphasis.

Discipline efforts to assess courses

Of the 39 disciplines that submitted an annual Program Review in May, 2011, 29 reported having done some form of direct course-focused assessment in 2010-11. Six relied entirely on indirect means, and four did not include an assessment report or reported having done no assessment. Of the same 39 disciplines, 30 reported an assessment plan for 2011-12 (some plans were, not surprisingly, more robust and authentic than others) and nine did not provide a discernible plan. Several of these disciplines (e.g., Dance, Health Sciences, Psychology) are without a full-time faculty member and offered that as an explanation for their failure to develop an assessment plan. Others have done forms of assessment in the past and probably simply neglected to provide an explicit plan in this document. The co-chairs of NAC except to work aggressively with problematic disciplines in fall 2011 to ensure that plans are developed and implemented.

The co-chairs of NAC plan to meet with most if not all discipline leaders in fall, 2011 to ensure that they have developed plans for doing collaborative, direct forms of assessment in the coming academic year. We cannot be satisfied unless ALL NC disciplines are actively and systematically engaged in outcomes assessment—and report that they are. But a careful study of the annual program review documents reveals that a number of disciplines completed assessment loops in the past year, using assessment data in an effort to improve. Here are three examples from among many:

- As noted earlier, the English discipline assessed GE outcomes in English 1A this past spring by reading sample student essays against a rubric. During an all-day scoring session of 85 sample essays on June 10, the discipline discovered that only about half of the student

essays demonstrated achievement in critical thinking and information competency. It attributed the problem in large part to the failure of instructors in the course to require students to write essays that would manifest those competencies. Accordingly, it has set upon an ambitious program to standardize its curriculum and monitor and improve teaching in the course, appointing a course lead person to work with faculty to ensure consistency of instruction. A series of course FAQs has been written and distributed as part of the development of course handbook for instructors. The discipline plans to another assessment of the course in spring 2012 to determine whether these methods of improvement have worked.

- The Chemistry discipline, focusing on Chemistry 2A, embedded common questions in a final exam. They report that the "outcomes are preliminary; we have been assessing the comprehension of a particular set of information (the concept of ions / electrolytes in ionic compounds as compared to covalent compounds.) In general the assessment clearly shows that the students do not distinguish between these two types of compounds, which is an important part of their introductory and general chemistry education. This lack of understanding was expected, based on regular testing methods. Students generally fail to distinguish between these two types of compounds." Having confirmed their impression that this is a problem that needs to be addressed, the discipline proposes to add more homework exercises or more in-class worksheets to help students better distinguish between the two compounds, noting that the more points that are attached to a particular topic, the more likely students are to learn it.

- The Political Science discipline did a collaborative assessment project focusing on seven sections of PS 1. They focused on critical thinking in the class and broke students into two groups to see whether a particular teaching method led to greater learning or not. They report, "an in-class activity did improve the probability that a student would score a 3 or 4 on the assessment. This indicates that in-class activities dealing with the concepts and processes related to researching promotes learning and better prepares the students to accomplish the goal of researching and analyzing. Using the direct embedded graded assignment in the 7 courses, the findings showed continued significant success when in-class activities were used before assessing students in a written assignment requiring critical thinking and data evaluation and analysis." The discipline plans to use these particular in-class activities in all sections of the course from now on.

Interested readers will find additional examples of direct, collaborative assessment techniques being used for improvement by a number of other NC disciplines, including ESL, Humanities, Marketing, Physics, and World Languages.

Student Services[2]

Background: All 16 Student Services areas are required to complete annual program reviews. Student Services Program Reviews contain three sections: (1) Area Overview; (2) Assessing Outcomes; and (3) Needs Assessment. The *Area Overview* includes the area's mission, philosophy statement, summary, strengths, and students served. The *Assessing Outcomes* section includes: (1) a snapshot of the prior year's objectives and assessment plan along with a description of how the area used their outcome data for programmatic modifications; (2) the current year's objectives and assessment plan; and (3) a detailed description of the assessment plan findings, data analysis, and

---

[2] Provided by Dr. Monica Green, Interim Vice President, Student Services

improvement recommendations. The *Needs Assessment* section includes current staffing levels, a 5-year staffing profile with projected staffing needs, improvement areas, and staffing and resource needs tables. As the documents are finalized, the program reviews are posted on the intranet (http://intranet.rccd.net) on the Norco Student Services Planning Council webpage within the 10-11 Program Review Documents folder.

2010-2011 Outcomes Assessment Summary: Out of 16 student services areas, there were 71 outcomes measured this last year. All of our Student Services areas (100%) achieved the goal of measuring at least three outcomes in 2010-2011. Fifteen of our 16 areas, or 94%, had one or more Student/Staff Learning Outcome (SLO). Overall, among our 16 service areas, there were 19 general Service Area Outcomes (SAO's), 11 satisfaction surveys (SAO's), 16 SLO's using direct learning measurement, 11 SLO's using indirect learning measurements, and 14 SLO's using student success measures (retention/persistence/ gpa/good academic standing/etc.). The following is breakdown by service area:

	SAO		SLO			
NSSV Department	**General**	**Satisfaction Survey**	**Indirect**	**Direct**	**Student Success Measure**	**SLO Y/N**
Admissions & Records	2		2	1		Y
Assessment Center		3	1	1		Y
CalWORKs	1	2			1	Y
Career/Transfer/Job Placement	2	2		1		Y
Counseling	2				1	Y
DRC	1	1	1	2		Y
EOPS/CARE		1	1	2	2	Y
Health Services			1	2		Y
Matriculation	1			2		Y
Outreach	2	1	1			Y
Puente Program			1		5	Y
Student Activities			1	3		Y
Student Employment	3					N
Student Financial Services	3		1			Y
TRiO Programs (UB/SSS)	1			2	5	Y
Veterans	1	1	1			Y
TOTALS-71outcomes/16areas	19	11	11	16	14	94%

Primary 2011-2012 Assessment Goals: Our two primary assessment objectives this year will be to achieve proficiency and/or sustainable continuous quality improvement in all areas and, where appropriate, change our indirect learning outcomes to direct learning outcomes. Indirect learning measures are applicable in driving programmatic decisions for some areas of student services programs as students' perceptions of their learning and/or understanding of a process or service are important.

Additional goals for outcomes assessment will be determined in early fall as a result of upcoming Student Services Planning Council dialogue. In the meantime, each service area should be working on formulating their assessment plans and instruments.

Administrative Outcomes Assessment[3]

The Administrative Program Review process has historically focused on linking outcomes assessment to planning and resource allocation. Led by district administrators, administrators at each college completed a uniform administrative program review document which was submitted to the district, but used by the college for local planning. With the accreditation of all three colleges and the vacancies left unfilled by retirements in 2010, the process has transitioned to a more college-driven endeavor.

In 2011 the Norco College (NC) executive cabinet reviewed its past program review documents and determined that several changes were necessary. Though administrators were assessing areas of their unit, the assessments needed to be refocused to be in line with the mission of the college. Also, the executive cabinet recognized that more time and training was needed in order to help NC administrators understand meaningful assessment, and how to link it to planning. Lastly, the cabinet recognized that a collaborative approach to the entire process would facilitate more meaningful planning. To that end, the program review template was revised to reflect an approach to assessment that mirrored that of the NC faculty, and the executive team designed a workshop/training for the administrative team. Following this workshop, administrators within each unit met with their respective vice presidents to collaborate on their assessment projects and to further discuss the process. Since the administrative team completes their program reviews in October, this term should reflect a robust administrative program review and assessment process.

Institution-level Outcomes Assessment[4]

Assessment has been conducted at an institutional level regarding student learning outcomes and institutional effectiveness measures. Per Strategic Planning Policy 2010-01, annual progress is assessed and "dashboard indicators" are reported each academic year to the Strategic Planning Meeting. Dashboard indicators are color coded-graphs which indicate progress toward goals as stated in the Educational Master Plan 2008-2012. Outcomes that were analyzed and reported as dashboard indicators included: overall student retention, persistence, and success; quality of student life, and student access. While gathering data for the student access area, it was observed that previous demographic data for Norco College were compared against demographics for the entire RCCD service area. This region includes areas that Norco College does not serve and thereby created some doubt about whether our access data were accurate. As a result, an unofficial Norco service area was constructed which better reflected the communities the college served. Steps are being taken at present to create an official Norco College service area.

Quality of student life is assessed through the bi-annual administration of the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE). As noted earlier in this report, this instrument is the community college version of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). The actual instrument of the CCSSE, called the Community College Student Report (CCSR), is a six-page instrument comprised of 38 questions and takes approximately 35-45 minutes to complete. The

---

[3] Provided by Dr. Diane Dieckmeyer, Interim Vice President of Academic Affairs

[4] Provided by Dr. Greg Aycock, Dean of Student Success

survey contains questions about student behaviors, course activities, and college services that have been shown to impact student learning and retention. The CCSSE was given during spring 2010 and spring 2011 (and forward will be administered biannually). CCSSE data center around five benchmarks: educational effective practices that have been correlated with outcomes like GPA, persistence, and degree/certificate completion. The benchmarks are Active and Collaborative Learning, Student Effort, Academic Challenge, Student-Faculty Interaction, and Support for Learners. In all benchmarks, Norco scored below the average for the CCSSE cohort in 2011. The results of the CCSSE were reported to faculty in a flex session for professional development, and to administrators in the executive cabinet.

Summary of Major 2010 – 11 Accomplishments

- Created new Norco College assessment committee (NAC), a subcommittee of the Norco College Academic Senate. NAC met monthly to formulate and implement assessment policy for the college.
- Created new Norco College assessment website.
- Developed and began to implement a plan to fully assess general education outcomes. Worked with sister colleges to begin modification of existing GE outcomes and the GE program itself.
- Developed and began to implement a plan to assess NC programs, with particular emphasis on CTE programs.
- Held workshops, retreats, and meetings to explain assessment techniques and aid in the development of assessment plans.
- Continued vigorous efforts to assess Student Services and Administrative Units.
- Assisted in the implementation of a CurricUNET module that will enable faculty to report assessment activities.
- Assisted in the effort to complete assessment loops by holding workshops on targeted pedagogical issues: critical thinking, written expression, etc.

Major 2011 – 12 Challenges

- How best to assess non-CTE programs, when the roster of NC programs is in a state of significant flux?
- How to ensure that course-based assessment continues, but authentic (collaborative, direct) assessment is the norm? How to assess hundreds of NC courses regularly while still having time to do meaningful assessment of programs and GE?
- How to overcome continuing pockets of faculty resistance (mostly passive, some active) to assessment and lingering confusion about the nature and purpose of assessment?
- How to make better data-driven decisions when the college has no full-time researcher?
- How to better integrate assessment results into all phases of strategic planning?
- How to budget our collective time efficiently enough to permit completion of assessment cycles in 250 separate courses taught each semester, nearly 100 programs, and general education?